

Making Do

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URBAN DIALOGUES

The Venice Architecture Biennale, with its plethora of national pavilions dotted around the Giardini and the city of Venice, is often claimed to function as a global showcase that brings together advances in the design of the built environment and critical debate. This claim can be substantiated with reference to numerous examples from past biennales, from the first exhibitions curated by Vittorio Gregotti in the 1970s to the more recent engagements with what Aaron Betsky in 2008 termed ›building-free architecture‹ as a way of dealing with important societal issues. The very setting of the Venice Architecture Biennale, with its changing themes, individual curatorial interpretations and delightful scattering of shows in lush gardens and a city steeped in history, seems to evoke a sort of walk-in dialogue between the city of Venice, the directors, the curators and the global audience. But what kind of dialogue can be achieved by staging or provoking responses to a finished object?

Or are there other ways to engage in dialogical situations in the urban realm, to extend—in Deleuzian terms—the co-existence of polyphonic, multi-vocal compounds (Deleuze/Guattari 1991: 178)? In Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *dialogism* words constitute subjectivity by generating a social space that is fundamentally interpersonal and thus facilitates a constant appropriation and transformation of the voice of the other (Bakhtin 1984). What emerges in such dialogues is not merely a reproduction of self-contained worlds but a complex map of intensities whose distribution, rather than according with a predetermined logic, develops out of reciprocal points of contact: singular encounters, movements, gestures and spontaneously coordinated actions. None of the links appearing between the encounters is required to be part of an overarching plan, part of the grammar of a common project. Dialogues evolve in the acts of speaking and hearing, in processes of interruption and sedimentation and not in the planning of a common outcome.

Figure 9.1: Re:Orient – Migrating Architectures, Hungarian Pavilion, 10th International Architecture Biennale Venice, 2006

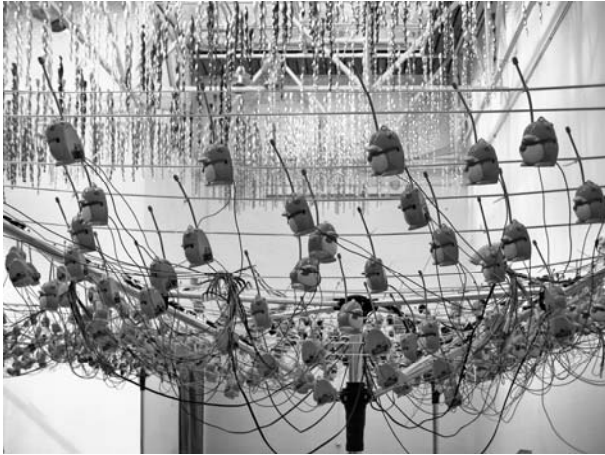


Photo: authors

Approaching the Hungarian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale in 2006, visitors were treated to a cacophony of sounds—a twittering and hissing, chirping and clucking, all seeping out from what looked like a brightly coloured ›Garden of Eden‹ tucked away in the courtyard of the pavilion. As one drew closer, however, it became apparent that these sounds were not being produced by birds or other happy creatures and that the garden was not composed of trees and plants but of strange, artificial structures that looked like a landscape of rotary clotheslines that were loaded and interconnected with thousands of little Chinese toys the mechanics of which were producing this ragtag soundscape. The installation by Usman Haque and Adam Szaboles Somlai-Fischer took its inspiration from the spread of Chinese markets into the everyday life of even the smallest villages in Hungary. What, the work seemed to ask, would happen if the Chinese mass production of disposable commodities did not just flood these spaces with cheap toys and textiles but also provided an excess of cheap, basic building material that could be shipped around the globe from China? What would become of the European cityscape and its aura of longevity and cultural rootedness if it were transformed into a commodity of global capitalism? What impact would this have not only on the physiognomy of the built environment but also on cultural identifications geared towards a concurrence of the notion of place and vernacular ways of making oneself at home.

These items do not just flood the European market by themselves. They are transported, handled and distributed by an army of nomadic Far Eastern workers. A particular accumulation of this presence and a reference point for Haque and Somlai-Fischer's project is the Four Tigers Market in Buda-

pest's Józsefváros district, a mile-long stretch of containers stacked on the sidings of a disused freight terminal. The Four Tigers Market is a major node of the Far Eastern migrant economy. It is *the* place in Budapest to buy smuggled cigarettes and bootleg versions of brand-name goods; imitation Adidas tracksuits, fake fragrances, fashionable sunglasses, car accessories and counterfeit CDs can all be purchased quickly here. Built around simple forms of economic exchange with an anonymous externality, the market offers visible traces of the immigrants' presence in Budapest as does the associated network of transient commercial establishments that fill the abandoned spaces of the city. But although the makeshift structures of the market—metal containers, tent-like constructions, cardboard stalls and other improvised sales areas—are the most obvious manifestations of the urban activities of Far Eastern immigrants in Budapest, they appear to have escaped the regulatory mechanisms of the state (Nemes 2006). The market has its own regulatory forces that thrive on a climate of murky deals, shadowy figures, dubious contacts, liabilities, debts and unregulated control. It is part of a globally dispersed network of informal marketplaces, whose European nodes manage to create transient eruptions in the ideational matrix of how the economy is supposed to link up with an idealized vision of civic society. From Józsefváros' Four Tigers Market and the ›Seventh Kilometre‹ container market near Odessa to the infamous Arizona Market near Brčko in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these major European hubs contain streams of human activity centred around ›spontaneous‹ economies, informal trade and dreams of a better life.

Figure 9.2: Four Tigers Market, Budapest, 2008



Photo: authors

The mobilization of Far Eastern cultures and the opportunities they find in European cities do not just combine to constitute the local presence of migrant subjectivities within a uniform global labour regime. Interacting with flexible technologies of governance and citizenship that push migrant work-

ers into illegality while benefiting from the availability of cheap labour, they produce conditions that change the rationalities of urban space and provide the grounds for an unexpected and unsolicited place-making in its most elementary form. Driven by new imperatives of social mobility and the expansion of transnational spaces brought about by the unequal movements of tourism, migration and flight, marketplaces have come into being that have created novel and extreme physical configurations from local opportunities. These spatial structures are intermediate zones that are being seized by diverse interest groups, irrespective of whether they are local or global, formal or informal, or have access to a great deal or very little capital. Their unstable positioning is allied to the ambivalent logics of mobility and circulation and to a range of unsolicited processes within the streams of global geopolitics.

Place-making practices are thus deeply intertwined with the organization of the world economy. In his book *Networking the World*, Armand Mattelart locates the struggle over territorial resources within a restructured organization of economic space in which the orientation of the world economy towards network organization is characterized by two distinct processes: the relocation of economic activities towards regions with low labour costs combined with liberal environmental regulations, and a highly flexible agglomeration of capital investments in ›innovative‹ world regions. The dynamics of this development are threatening to create a two-speed social geography made up of a network of megalopoli and deteriorating areas in between global nodal points (Mattelard 2000: 98–99).

COMMONS MARKETS

»What is common to the greatest number has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of its own, hardly at all of the common interest.«¹ In the introduction to her seminal 1990 book *Governing the Commons* Elinor Ostrom quotes Aristotle to underline how the so-called ›tragedy of the commons‹ has come to dominate Western thinking about the individual use of common-pool resources. For centuries the all-pervasive conclusion has been that »where a number of users have access to a common-pool resource, the total of resource units withdrawn from the resource will«—inevitably it appears—»be greater than the optimal economic level of withdrawal« (Ostrom 1990: 3). As Ostrom points out, the two most commonly recommended solutions to this problem are based on an intervention by an external agent that either puts the management of a common-pool resource into the hands of private enterprise or a centrally organized state authority. The latter solution is based on the reasoning that if »private interests cannot be expected to

1 Aristotle, *Politics*, Book II, ch. 3; quoted in Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom 1990: 2).

protect the public domain then external regulation by public agencies, governments, or international authorities is needed².

This view has become particularly prevalent and all-encompassing when it comes to the utilization of space as a key resource of ›society‹ itself—to issues of how to co-exist in space and how to interact spatially as a society. The presence of a monitoring and controlling authority, it is widely perceived, is crucial to ensure a, if not fair then at least safe, way of co-existing. The aim of planning with regard to common resources such as air or light is thus predominantly directed toward maintaining order vis-à-vis an otherwise chaotic and anarchic urban conduct. Hence, every spatial activity that falls outside the reach of the planning authority and evades its planning regulations, such as informal spatial arrangements, is considered to be a failure of planning, of its institutional mandate to ensure a safeguarded usage of space. In most cases these activities are regarded as signs of unsustainable and un-social exploitation, both of the people existing in that space and the resource of space itself.

However, as Ostrom has also pointed out, one of the main difficulties for any centrally controlled agency of resource management lies in the sheer impossibility of always having all relevant information at hand to substantiate its regulations and decisions in a way that is appropriate to the actual demands and situations on the ground. Particularly in a globalized world, where it is not only the case that local situations are becoming ever more implicated in global developments but where macro-constellations themselves are subject to rapid change, the sufficient development and successful application of up-to-date and appropriately adapted regulations seems to be becoming an insurmountable challenge.

In the light of this problematic, the last decades have increasingly seen hope placed in models of self-organization, and there is growing interest in both scholarly and artistic circles in investigating and exploring what settings might foster the capabilities of individuals to organize collective action for the general good. One notable work in this regard is Minze Tummescheit's documentary on *Jarmark Europa* (Europe Fair), a sprawling site for unregulated small trade that operated for some twenty years in and around Dziesięciolecia Stadium in Warsaw. Initially used as a major sports complex for mass events, the grounds of the stadium were transformed into a market filled with thousands of makeshift stalls that effectively connected the Polish capital with cities in the former Soviet Union, China and Vietnam (Bendyk 2006: 332–335). Tummescheit's film portrays the lives of several suitcase traders or *chelnoki* (meaning ›shuttles‹), as the traders from the former Soviet Union in this bazaar-like marketplace were known, and highlights the self-organized structures that made this market economy a social space for its participants. It features, amongst other things, a bazaar library

2 D.W. Ehrenfield 1972, *Conserving Life on Earth*, 322; quoted in Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (Ostrom 1990: 9).

run by one of the women traders that served the thousands of Russian-speaking *chelnoki* and created a focal point for cultural exchange. Another example of such investigations can be found in Ursula Biemann's ›video geographies‹: works that lay bare highly complex topological relations by exploring the tactics and disguises used by smugglers in the Spanish-Moroccan border region, by documenting the geo-strategic rivalries and representational politics around the trans-Caucasian oil pipelines, and by tracing the nomadic economies of sub-Saharan migration.³

These studies investigate geophysical conflicts not from a top-down view but from the perspective of creating social environments, foregrounding the spontaneity of social interaction and the ways in which it fashions a complex network of detours, back doors, ›underground relays‹, hiding places, tunnels and tricks that make up everyday life on the fringes. What emerges through such examinations is a horizontal and relational aspect of global economic, political and cultural processes, one that complicates the clear distinction between formality and informality, legality and illegality, inside and outside when it comes to dealing with material and symbolic goods. It also becomes clear that what are currently often referred to as ›peripheries‹ in fact constitute a highly mobile situation that permeates the disintegration of the old binary system of centre and periphery. Territorial distributions emerging from such mobilizations are both conditioned by a transformation of political economies through the optimizing technologies of neoliberalism as well as by an intuitive eco-logical praxis (Cooley 2008: 269)—diverse and contingent human activities, empirical attunements to local cultural sensibilities, trespassings and bottom-up explorations of possibilities and resolutions, all grounded in the ecologies of everyday life.

While most conceptualizations of an alternative response to the ›tragedy of the commons‹ promote the capacity for self-organization as one of the key ingredients to its success, almost all of them also point to the necessity of certain impulses or creative constellations in order for forms of such biopolitical reasoning to become effective. The architect and artist Azra Akšamija has proposed such a creative incentive for the Arizona Market in Bosnia, one of the largest of the informal marketplaces that have recently sprung up in south-eastern Europe, in order to intensify some of the creative potential of what she sees as urbanization from below. Stating that »a formal system cannot function without its informal counterpart, and vice-versa«, she advocates »urban planning [...] as a rhizomatic interweaving of actions and programmes that come from both, the formal and the informal systems.«⁴ Redefining the role of the architect as a sensor, a provocateur, and a guide through urban processes which do not result in a final order but are

3 See Ursula Biemann 2008, *Mission Reports. Artistic Practice in the Field: Video Works 1998–2008*.

4 Azra Akšamija, ›Arizona Road‹, <http://www.mit.edu/~azra/Arizona.htm> [accessed 1 March 2011].

left open-ended, she conceives of architectural intervention as accompanying and inspiring the ever-evolving process of sustainable urban development.

Questioning the efficiency of the master plan developed by the government that is threatening the further existence of the market people, she proposes so-called *Provocateur Poles*, infrastructural elements providing access to electricity, water, sewage systems, television and advertising. Here, the work/practice of the architect is understood as a method of informal provocation. It uses existing conditions to create new ones, which the next generation of users can continue, abandon or modify—a dialogical cycle that continuously reshapes urban conditions and communication processes.⁵ In advocating self-organization that uses existing conditions to create new ones, her method of informal provocation suggests an alternative to the ›normalization‹ of the market through privatization induced by an interaction of political, economic and military claims.

The strip of land occupied by the Arizona Market is a part of the war zone that was fiercely fought over by Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian Muslim units because of its strategic position after Bosnia-Herzegovina had left the federal state of Yugoslavia in 1991. In the Dayton Peace Accords of November 1995, the disputed territory around the town of Brčko was placed under the direct supervision of a special supervisor from the Office of the High Representative (OHR) of the international community of states in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the checkpoint set up at the interface between the three ethnic groupings had evolved into an informal meeting place where cigarettes and cattle were traded and coffee was served at the roadside, the local commander allegedly decided to encourage initial encounters between members of the different ethnic communities by proclaiming a ›free-trade zone‹, which was designed to consolidate peace.

In the years that followed, the convergence of economic activities at the site and the self-organization of this grey trade area were hailed as a model for promoting the sustained development of communications and community structures between former wartime enemies. Supplementing the simple market facilities and mobile sales outlets, the first buildings were soon constructed, presaging the emergence of a self-organized urbanisation process on the site. However, hopes that the Arizona Market might become a model for self-organized place-making were dashed when a kind of market arose whose existence and development were far more extensively tied to the presence of the international peace-keeping force than initially expected. Ever more bars and motels operating in the various huts and buildings started to accommodate a form of trade that made it increasingly difficult to sell the success story of peace based on establishing a free market economy. For at the Arizona Market, the real money was made through prostitution

5 Ibid.

and trafficking in human beings: women and girls being brought in from Eastern Europe.⁶

The most striking aspect of the ensuing attempts to regain control over the Arizona Market—which ultimately culminated in the ceremonial opening of a new shopping centre in 2004—was the way the international community, which exercised politico-territorial control, and an international investor co-operated in privatizing public space. In February 2001, the International Supervisor of Brčko District ordered the closure of the existing market. In December that year, ItalProject, an Italian-Bosnian-Serbian consortium, won a tender to establish and operate a new market. The consortium signed a twenty-year leasing agreement with the district administration that granted it the right to retain 100 per cent of the rental income for a period of seventeen years in return for developing the infrastructure. The project envisaged the development of a complexly structured trade base for the entire south European area that would include multiplex cinemas, hotels, casinos and a conference centre. Resistance by landowners and traders to this total takeover was met with compulsory dispossessions. This response was justified with the argument that it was in the public interest to ensure that the district administration of Brčko complied with the agreements concluded with Italproject. Demonstrations and road blockades staged to oppose the demolition of the old site were cleared by the police. As most of the landowners affected were Croatians who sought the support of nationalist groups to assert their cause, the maxim of achieving reconciliation by taking economic measures came dangerously close to fomenting an ethnic conflict as a result of what was seen as an arbitrary allocation of economic options.

In only ten years, the Arizona Market has been transformed from a space of bare survival into a centre of ubiquitous consumption. What was once a mere border guard post has now become a post-metropolitan territory. The convoluted flows of international money and goods at the Arizona Market may have now entered a new phase, yet the form of capitalism that prevails there is no less ›rampant‹ than it used to be. Its aggressiveness resides in an all-pervading motivation to gain some form of control—ranging from the need to survive at one end of the scale to international relations at the other—by seizing anything that is not yet subject to controls. All these different levels of exchange have created the countless trading situations that one finds at the Arizona Market, which promise everyone an opportunity to exploit the market to their own ends. What appears to be a random remaking of territorial, economic and cultural claims eventually comes to constitute a continuous displacement of boundaries that results from local interpretations, arrangements and deals. There is no specific logic shared by all participants but only a contingent operating mechanism—an economic fabric

6 The UNHCHR attributes the crisis to, among other things, the presence of over 30,000 peacekeepers in BiH. Bosnia was not so much a transit country as a destination for women victims of trafficking. See Rees 1999.

geared to situational opportunities, instead of being subject to established protocols of trade.

Figure 9.3: Arizona Market, Brčko, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2006



Photo: authors

EXTENDED CITIES

This brief history of the transformations that the Arizona Market has undergone during its short existence of ten to fifteen years may not necessarily be particularly supportive of an alternative model of self-organization and self-regulation, but it highlights the problematic aspects of the two dominant models of common resource management, one being privatization and the other being control by a centrally organized agent. It clearly indicates how, in most cases, both trajectories are intrinsically intertwined and that a state body—a supposedly independent agent—might itself be pursuing some rather ›private‹ interests such as cashing in on tax revenue, developing its own enterprises or endeavouring to accumulate the resource of control. Furthermore, it reflects the dual challenge we face when thinking and creating something we might understand as representing a global public sphere: firstly, the dispersion and fragmentation of the public realm in what Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff have defined as ›regimes of living‹ (Collier/Lakoff 2005), i.e. the production of unstable subject formations through ongoing segregations, both spatially and culturally, and, secondly, the formation of globally interacting networks whose sense of a ›public sphere‹ is not invested with the old logic of publicness.

Yet our point here is not just simply to illustrate the failures of informal systems or official planning protocols, but also to use the unfolding drama

of their applications as a basis for speculating about the spaces of informal markets as a kind of breeding ground for contemporary biopolitical reason, where collective actions can succeed in community-making that transgresses the boundaries set by either of the two concepts, be it the nation state and its sanctioning principle of citizenship or the privileging of private ownership and materialized entitlements. Rather than seeing informal markets as a victim of the failures of centralized governance we can understand the developments at the Arizona Market and many sprawling agglomerations of this kind as indicative of a new kind of urban system that has arisen from the multi-directional movements of transnational urban deregulations and realignments—the ›extended city‹ as a cluster of networked sites produced by political upheaval, migratory movements, regulatory bodies, laws, technologies, and other translocal forces that are acted out locally. This new urban form points toward a shift from a ›citizenship of borders and confines‹ (Balibar 2004: 6) to diverse forms of ›latitudinal citizenship‹ (Ong 2006: 123–125) associated with the exertion of lateral influence across social and political domains. It signals a complex entanglement of neoliberal technologies of government with forms of self-organization. In this environment, informal markets behave as performative frames that build increasingly complex webs of relationships linked to a redefinition of the urban system not purely as an effect of accelerated globalization but as a set of situated cultural practices and interactions between particular emergent assemblages.

In light of these mechanisms, it seems that an intensifying network of nodalized informality emerges where different cultures coincide locally and yield volatile, contradictory and contested space-time ecosystems. Informal markets incubate this ›globalization from below‹ fuelled by a deterritorialization of cultures. Their dialogical gestures constitute a common space beyond the mere agglomeration and exchange of fixed entities. Looking at the self-spun regimes of these ecologies, not with regard to what they are or what role they are supposed to fulfil but by asking what they make possible beyond themselves, allows us to reframe the present contestation of rationalities around rights and entitlements, participation and control. It opens up a space to think about markets in relation to processes of self-constitution and technologies of globalized political economies, such as the oblique worlds experienced and facilitated by black marketeers or the creation of distinctive ›ecosystems‹ through alignments of particular networks, labour conditions, citizenship arrangements and venture capital. Making their place within the porous nature of the extended and flexibilized city, the transnational subjects of the sprawling container markets maintain their quest for ›other markets‹ by intruding on and remaking the regimes of global exchange.

In order to imagine the possibilities, practicalities and difficulties of an emerging global public sphere requires us to take a closer look at the cultures of making do not merely as a contamination of institutional high culture but as a source of the actual fabric of its piecemeal morphological

transformation. Indeed, the subtle infiltration of spatial hegemonies, as imagined by the designers and curators of the Hungarian pavilion at the Venice Architecture Biennale of 2006, is already underway, as indicated by the fact that the chirping and clucking washing lines of the Hungarian installation that year found their way back into the main pavilion of the 2008 ›Out There—Architecture Beyond Building‹ exhibition. Recycled, mended and dolled up for a second run, they came to demonstrate what makes us feel at home in the world.⁷

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7 See: <http://www.labiennale.org/en/architecture/history/11.html> [accessed 1 April 2011]

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