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The Independent Group
MSc3

Architecture and Protest

decolonising the city

Terms
Tessa Koenig Gimeno

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Contents

4	Coming to Terms
9	I. Architecture and Violence Pre-histories of Projective Powers in Urban Design
37	II. The Urban Revolution The Right to the City
55	III. The Protest Route Santiago, Chile
83	IV. Permanence and Monuments Expressions of Collective Memory in the City
97	V. The Event Architecture + Disjunction
116	Bibliography

Coming to Terms

On the 18th of October, 2019, the city of Santiago erupted into protest. Ignited due to a rise in metro fares, the streets chanted “it’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years,” in response to the consequences of an austere neo-liberalist system that has commanded the country since its military dictatorship in 1973. In the context of Latin America, these frustrations have been muted over the course of many centuries, throughout the exploitative ruling of both external and internal hegemonic powers. In Santiago, ruins litter public spaces, monuments of a colonial past pronouncing the continent’s stolen identities.

Translated into an architectural object, protest can serve a re-defined monumentalism, a pendant of collective organisation: a machine of memory. The collective power which has re-charged the representational significance of Plaza Italia (now Plaza de la Dignidad), holds the potential to materialise into a cultural artefact, an archive providing accessibility to information and advocating the common right to the city. The potential for protest to survive as a programme within an urban framework, necessitates the possession of an empty space to act as a form of public agency, whilst simultaneously being itself, that it may exist and be part of the quotidian scenery. The power of this paradox is rooted in its ability to recognise an urban territory and subvert it, essentially queering the original purpose of a space, and making it provocative. This subtle antagonism is almost theatrical, existing without, but in anticipation for the event.

This book is a collection of the theoretical and historical thought surrounding the phenomena of protest and its relationship to the city, by means of the Santiago 2019 protests as a case-study. The following chapters structure the research in a way to illustrate the narrative and in-depth investigation that has informed the terms of my project proposal.



1.00. *Architecture and Protest,*
Plaza Dignidad, Santiago 2019



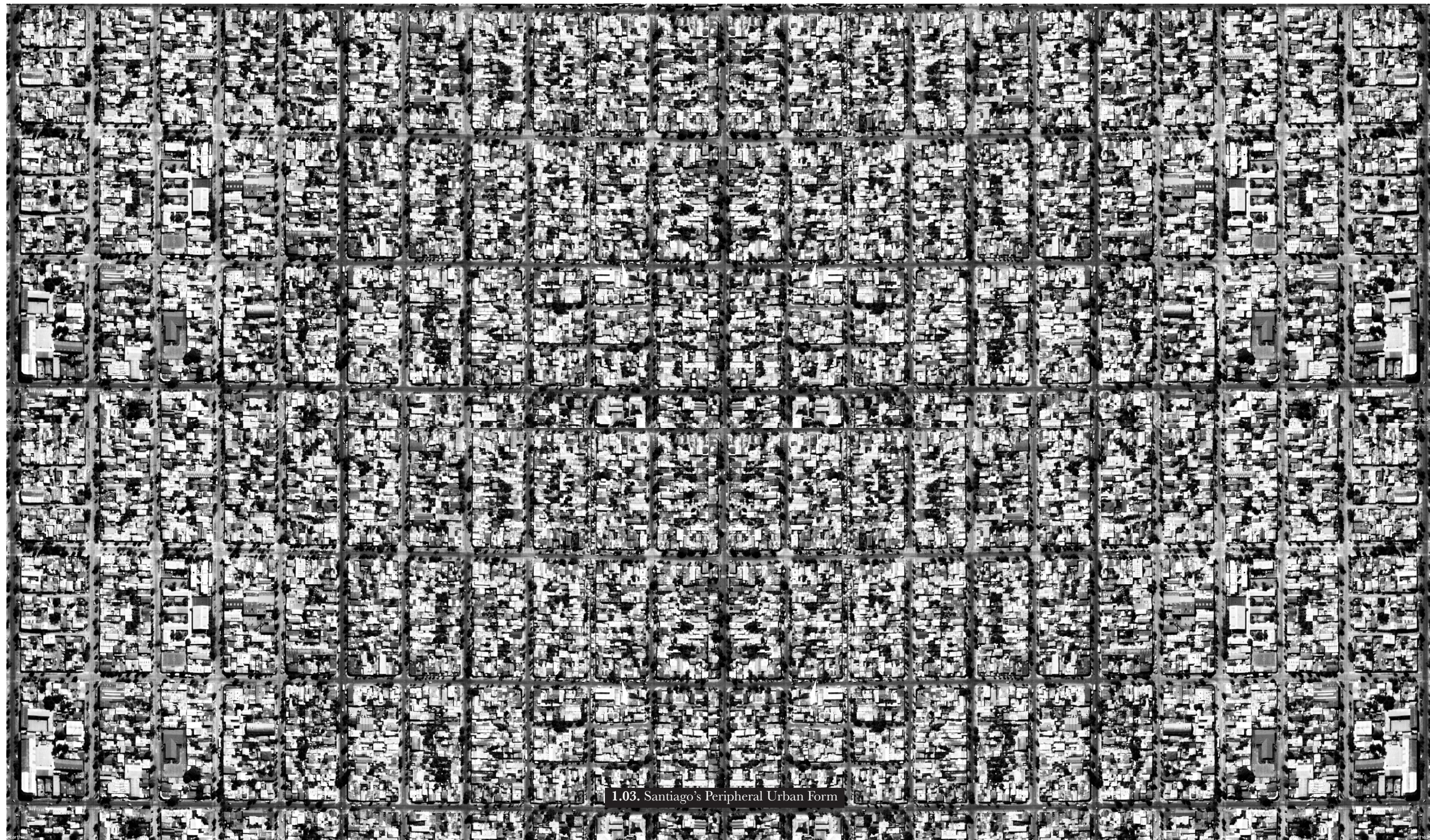
1.01. *Plaza Italia*
Santiago



1.02. *Plaza de la Dignidad*,
Santiago

I. Architecture & Violence

Pre-histories of Projective Powers
in Urban Design



1.03. Santiago's Peripheral Urban Form

II. Architecture and Violence

Pre-histories of Projective Powers over Urban Design

“(Social) space is a (social) product ...the space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action ...in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power...it is in this everyday, utilised space, power relations become visible”¹

The Production of Space, Henri Lefebvre

Spatial agency is the occupation of space instrumented as a *tool of thought and action*. In order to understand protest as a pure manifestation of spatial agency, the structures which condition urban space as a product of society, offer a complete insight into the impetus of insurgency. Throughout history, projective systems of power have demonstrated the strategic use of urban design engendering a notion of architectural violence, in which design parameters have been determined by political ideology and economic exploitation, often venturing a form of ‘social engineering.’

“A whole history remains to be written of spaces-which would at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms in the plural)-from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat, institutional architecture from the classroom to the design of hospitals, passing via economic and political installations. It is surprising how long the problem of space took to emerge as a historico-political problem.”²

Power/Knowledge, Michel Foucault

Foucault places the **history of powers** parallel to the **history of spaces**, abstracting the built environment as an embodiment of the power structures that regulate and limit quotidian life.³ When looking closely, Santiago conceals the process of a capitalist urbanisation, encompassing a muted spatial violence that materialises into a city troubled with extreme socio-economic segregation, vertical ghettos, and urban slums. If space is a product of society, the actions which take place within space are understood as consequence; a product of physical and abstract milieu. Protest is a product; a performance of the collective conscience, an artefact of the urban condition. Furthermore, in order to understand how architecture can exercise spatial agency and engender the democratisation of space, it is first important to analyse the spatial conditions that have set the stage for protest.



1.04. ‘Until it’s worth living’
Santiago, October 2019

The First Dictatorship of Globalisation

The unitary authoritarian military dictatorship lead by Augusto Pinochet, was enforced through a military coup in on Salvador Allende's government in 1973, and continued as a repressive operation until 1990. Towards the Cold War's culmination, the CIA was supporting military coups in order to destabilise communist governments present in Latin America.⁴ This was in line with the Truman Doctrine⁵ which sought to prevent Soviet geo-political expansion. Parallel to the 'shock' of the military coup, violence manifested throughout the city. The implementation of a year-long curfew, transformed public space into spaces of fear and terror, controlled by military tanks and weapons. It is in these very streets that Chileans would later occupy to reject and overthrow the regime.

The unexpected duration of Pinochet's dictatorship, revealed its purpose through the implementation of an economic revolution; Chile became the experiment for an economic model that would later command the economies of the majority of the developed world: neoliberalism.⁶ Facilitated by the 'Chicago Boys', a group of Chilean economists that studied at the University of Chicago's department of Economics, they returned to Chile with the ideas for a free market capitalist economy and were appointed as financial advisors in Pinochet's regime;⁷ hence the birth of neoliberalism.

The unprecedented neoliberal model gave shape to Santiago's urban form. Pinochet's regime was concerned with the total privatisation of state-owned industries, institutions, and natural resources such as water. The 1960 master plan of Santiago (see figure 1.09), an effort to reshape urban expansion by providing inter-communal agrarian and cultivate programmes, was absolved. Inner-city urban slums were destroyed and inhabitants were displaced to the periphery of Santiago and assigned land on a debt-financed property model (see figure 1.10).

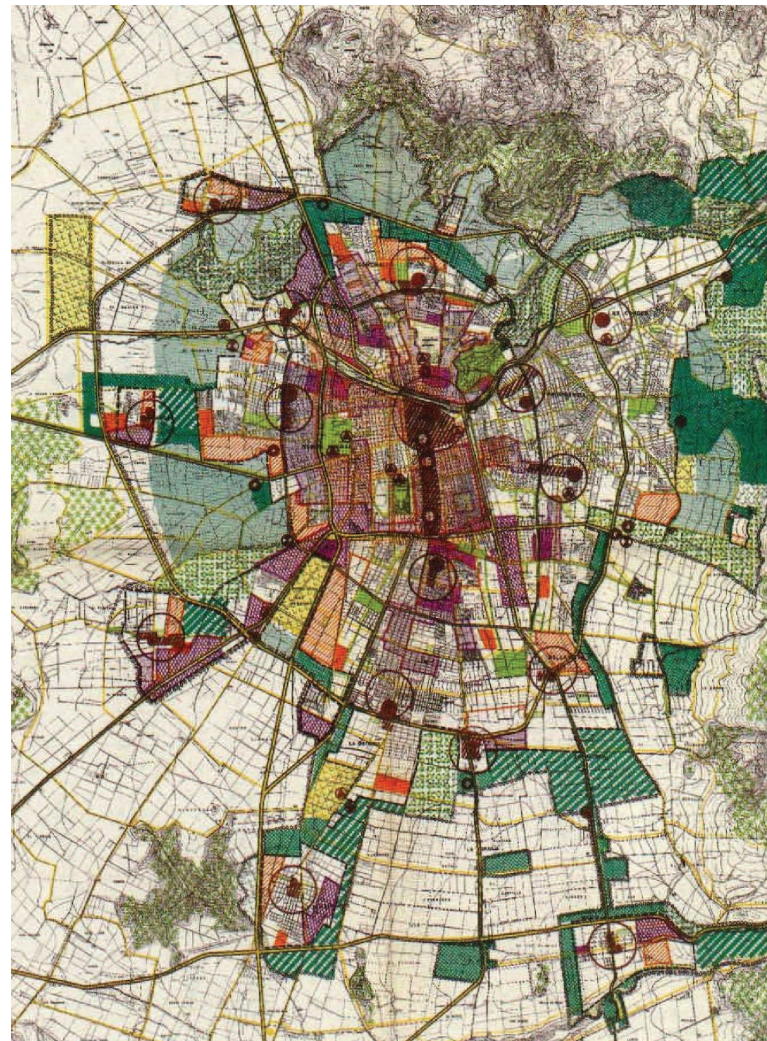
The dictatorship marks a dark and traumatic era in Chilean history, resulting in thousands of deaths, disappearances, political incarcerations and acts of torture. Since Chile's return to democracy, the country's denouncement of the regime's illegitimate and criminal nature, has been a struggle for truth and justice, also know as the 'Memory Battles'.⁸ This struggle for justice, alongside the continued operation of the dictatorship's constitution, has triggered many events of social uprising and protest; especially as a result of the surge in student mobilisations since the beginning of the 21st century.



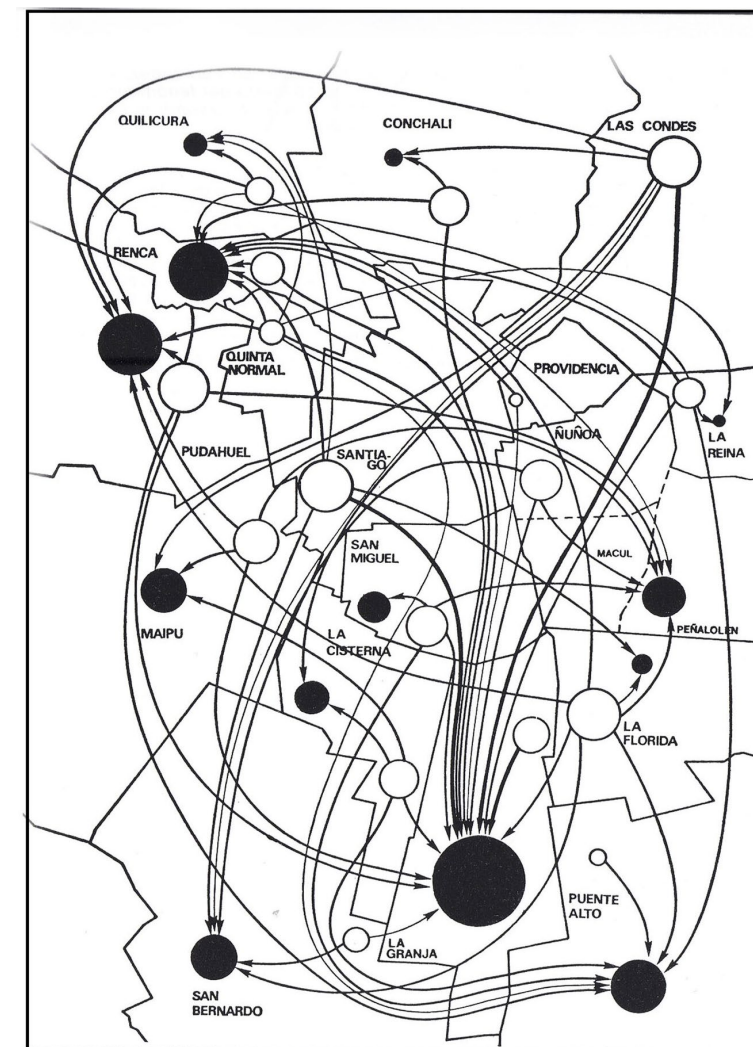
1.07. Military Coup: Bombardment of Presidential Palace, *Santiago, 1973*



1.08. Military Coup Arrests: The Street under the Dictatorship, *Santiago, 1970s*



1.09. Plan Regulador 1960: Inter-Comunal Masterplan for Santiago,
University of Chile, 1960



1.10. Displacement of Urban Slums under Dictatorship,
Santiago, 1979-85



3.06. Districts of Santiago according to 1988 Plebiscite
Source: Astudillo, 2018



Average Monthly Salaries According to Districts
(Dec, 2017)



3.07. Distribution of Wealth
North/South Socio-economic Fracture (Source: Author)



1.05. Vertical Ghettos,
Estacion Central, Santiago



1.06. Protesting Vertical Ghetto Housing Unit: 17m²
Plaza Dignidad, Santiago October 2019

Neocolonialism in Latin America

“In the context of Latin America today, a new form of colonialism has impacted society, whereby developed countries use free market economies to maintain a form of dependency.⁹ In Chile, this reliance is facilitated through the implementation of neo-liberalism, a free market capitalism associated with privatisation, free trade, austerity, de-regulation, and exploitation of natural resources, in order to endorse the private sector. This has led to the commodification of cities, and subsequently influenced the production and conditions of urban life. Inequality, social segregation and social stasis are examples of the consequential infringements of civic rights engendered by this form of capitalism. The resurgence of these 19th century ideas of economic liberalisation, came into (re-)fruition as neo-liberalism in the 1980s under the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet in Chile. However, since Chile’s return to democracy starting in 1988, the neo-liberal model still governs the country’s constitution, and continues to dominate daily life.”¹⁰

Extract from Research Methods Paper

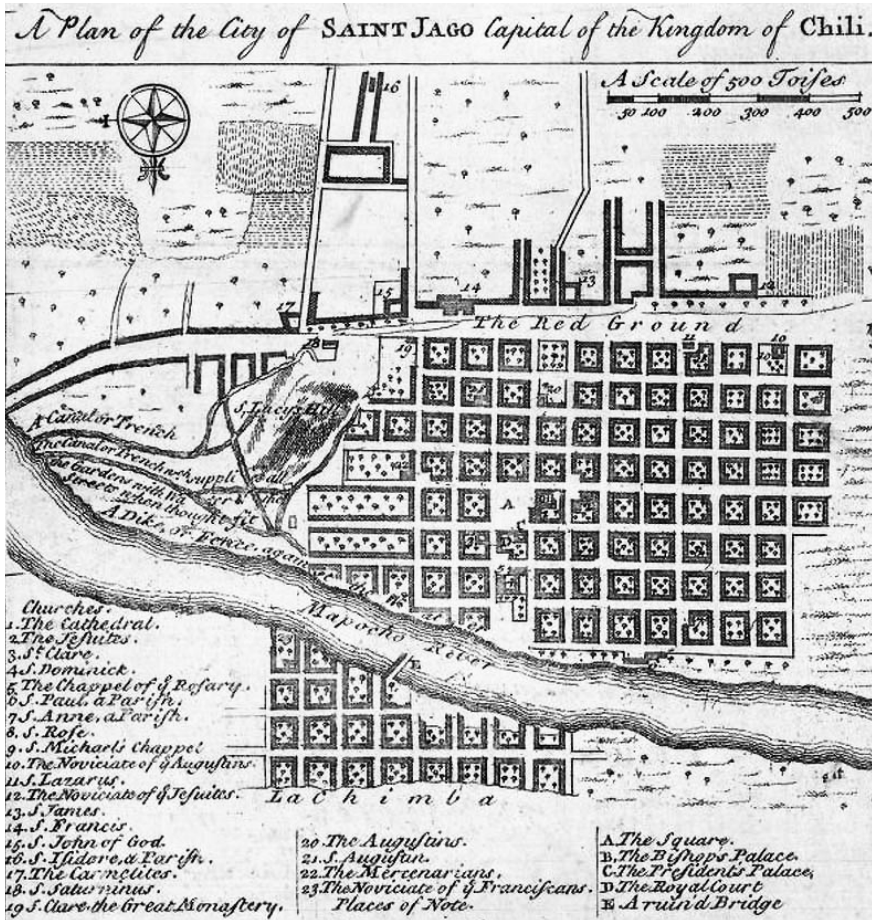
In Spain’s campaign to evangelize and subjugate native cultures in the Americas during the 16th Century, projections of power successfully imposed their social, cultural and political ideologies onto native societies. Colonisation was enforced by methods of occupation in the form of establishing cities as a model to civilise and reduce indigenous populations and provide a common political and social structure. Today the built environment engenders an architectural violence that draws parallels to the pre-histories of colonial efforts. The monopolization of cities is a global scenario. Leaving little room for people who cannot or will not adhere to the conventions of capitalism, this process of urbanisation, exploited by the affluent political elite, commands policies such as housing and land-use in order to endorse private development. It seems difficult to imagine a process of decolonisation in such a concrete, established urban structure. A capacity for change commences with the awareness of the societal production of space. The violence of protest, or revolt, must be acknowledged as a product of the architectural violence which silently infringes the lives of many citizens everyday.



1.11. Sanhattan,
Los Condes, Santiago



1.12. Colonial Santiago,
Alonso de Ovalle, 1646



1.13. The Indian City: To Conquer is to Populate
Santiago, Chile

Colonising the New World : The Power of the Void

In their ventures to the new world, conquering by populating was the colonial strategy of Spanish missionaries. The architectural violence that characterised this collision of cultures, was through the establishment of a void: Plaza de Armas, a public space which marked the genesis of civilisation. Void thus was a strategic element which allowed colonisers to occupy territories and commence the process of evangelism, utilising the open space for the spectacle of ceremonial conversions.

*“The site where the pueblo is to be established shall be marked out, on land slightly elevated, exposed to the north and south winds. Measures shall be taken to avoid the dangers of floods; the most immediate vicinity to the river shall be preferred, taking care that from the pueblo the whole or great portion of the planting lands shall be seen. **The Plaza** ought to be **two hundred feet wide by three hundred feet long**, from said plaza four main streets shall extend, two on each side and besides these two other streets shall run by each other... For the purpose of buildings there shall be marked out as many building lots as there may be agricultural plots susceptible of irrigation. Also, a tract of land six hundred feet wide between the planting lands and the pueblo shall be left vacant. Every building lot shall measure sixty feet wide by one hundred and twenty long ... The front of the plaza looking towards the east shall be reserved to erect at the proper time the church and government buildings and other public offices, and the adjoining lots shall be allotted to settlers.”²¹¹*

Spanish urban colonization for the Indian City, *The founding of Los Angeles, 1781*
(Benevolo, L. The Architecture of the Renaissance: Vol. 2. Routledge, 2002.)

The urban definition of the Indian city is based on the void: a formal strategy of streets and plazas. The Plaza was treated as the great genesis of the city, void being the element from which the city parted and organised itself around, uniting political, civil and religious powers in one place. This generative element allowed the city to extend, adapting to the geographical forms of the surrounding environment. The urban grid structured as a pattern of straight streets, which abandon the rectangular proportion suggested in the ordinances. Parting from the plaza, the street was the structural element of urban space, kept clear for performances of power by Spanish and catholic missionaries. This network of void was designed to be for everyone and simultaneously for no one. The plaza was indeed a public space, a meeting point for citizens, but also significantly served the needs of generals and military hence the name ‘Plaza de Armas’ (Plaza of Arms). Here, the role of the void existed to impose and exert power and control over populations, with the objective to dominate and ‘civilise’ indigenous communities; public space existed only to be possessed by authoritarian powers.



1.14. Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, *EUR Rome*



1.15. Mussolini saluting from podium, *Arengario Roma*

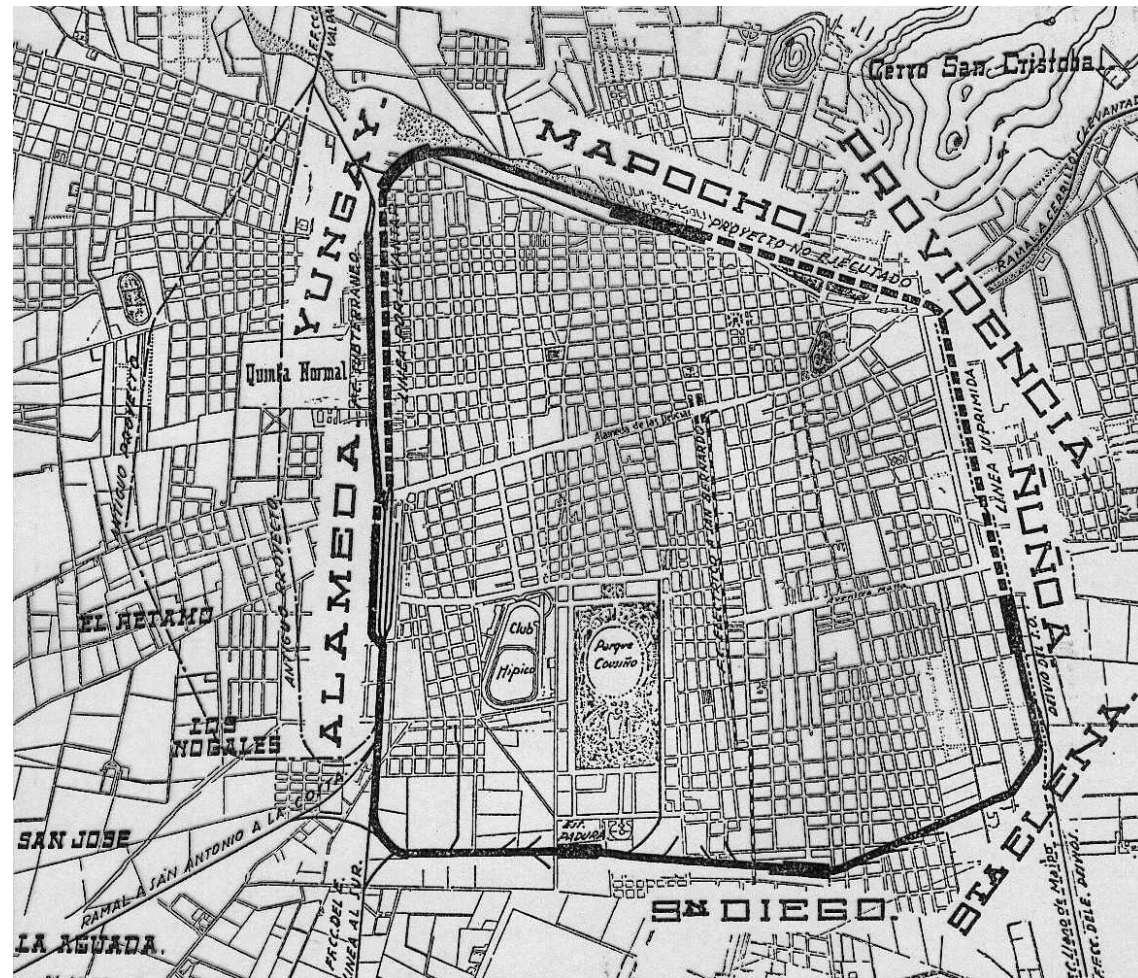


1.16. Volkshalle Nazi Germania, *Albert Speer*

The Performative Void: Controlling the Masses

In urban design, the void has become a particular architectural element to spatially express power and ideology. The architectural concepts implemented by various dictatorial regimes throughout the 20th century, sought to condition public spaces in order to communicate their ideologies to the masses. In examples of Italian rationalism, ceremonial spaces were characterised by large voids between buildings, in anticipation for the crowds of people to arrive and hear Mussolini speak. The EUR 42 (Esposizione Universale Roma) exhibition in Rome, which sought to create a new ideal city and reveal the core monuments of Italian fascism, manages to spatially express the hierarchical and dominating relationship between the state and the people that was central to fascism.

The use of void in German fascist architecture draws parallels. Nazi architecture was ultimately not about the building itself, but rather about enormous, austere and alienating scale. Here, the void existed to be filled entirely with the ideology and mindlessly subsumed mass of the folk, which was much more important than the building could ever be. The podium, from which would Hitler would address large crowds, was the contiguous element, connecting the void to the building on which existed as a background of literal sinister symbols. This performative act, repeatedly seen throughout history, exploits a spatial violence by allowing the speaker to impose a sense of superiority and hierarchy onto the masses.



1.17. Camino de Cintura,
Vicuña Mackenna's Transformation for Santiago, 1879

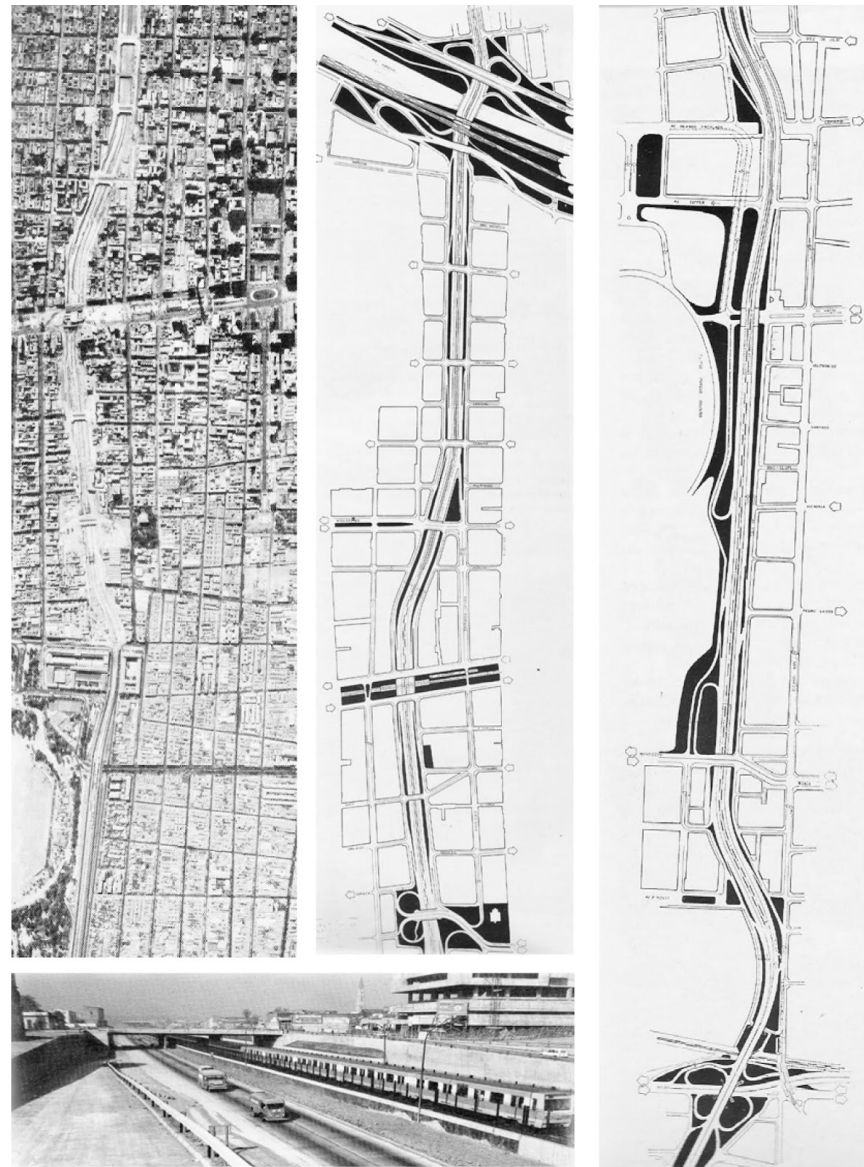
Infrastructural Boundaries

From city walls to railroads to highways, tyrannical urbanism has often used infrastructure to perform fantastic gestures of state power and articulate key aims of a regime through the architectural resolution of designs. The street as a mechanism to control and organise society has been central throughout the history of urban development. The advancements of modernism, prioritised mobility and vehicular circulation in cities; these ideals have often lead to the exploitation of the street as an inaccessible border, dividing and segregating neighbourhoods. In totalitarian regimes, large and wide streets expropriate the street's role as a public space of appropriation and social interaction. The street is used as a space for performative violence; parading nuclear weapons, military troops, or war tanks, the glorification of force and hierarchy aims to intimidate and emphasise the superiority of state.

The power of infrastructure was instrumental in the transformation of industrial Santiago. Towards the end of the 19th century, Chile's unprecedented economic development was changing the rural image of Santiago. Central Santiago saw an increasing number of palaces, emphasising the north-south clear-cut social fracture which divided the 'civilised' city and 'poor' periphery since colonial times.¹² The north and south areas were concentrations of poverty, a socio-spatial segregation which has influenced city's urbanisation up to today. In 1875, urban manager Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna was appointed to resolve these unfavourable conditions. Vicuña's solution was a series of urban projects outlined in the document 'La Transformación de Santiago' that would transform the city into a modern metropolis. Of these projects, the 'Camino de Cintura' was the implementation of infrastructure by the means of a sanitary belt that would define the civilised city's limits, forming a barrier between the formal city and the periphery.¹³

"And also underneath, towards the peripheral and blurred limits, the slums and outskirts crowded with the plebs arriving from the countryside, or with the hustle and bustle of the marginal population of this booming yet still drowsy village. Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna, the urban manager, had the opinion that it was necessary to create a cordon, a 'Camino de Cintura' to fence off both worlds: the civilized and the barbarian"¹⁴ ... An order that would demarcate and control the citizens' domain of civility and would represent the political and social architecture of the emerging republic... The Camino de Cintura can therefore be seen as an instrument conceived to establish an order that somehow formalized the social and spatial segregation already present in the capital and would even become its most vivid expression."¹⁵

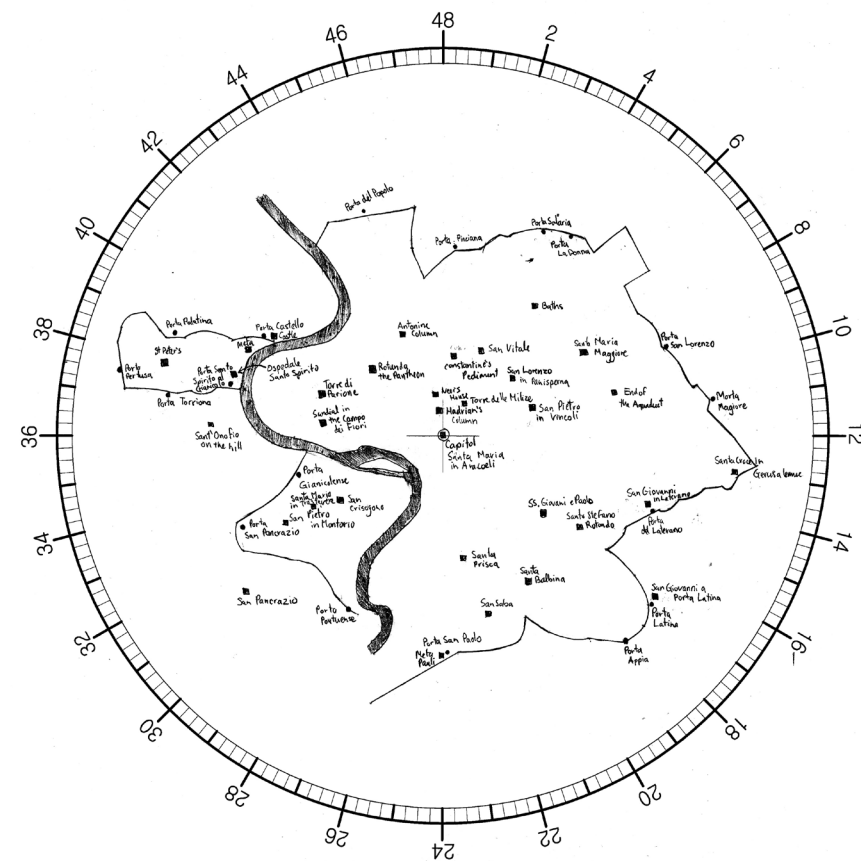
Panoramic View and National Identity, Germán Hidalgo Hermosilla



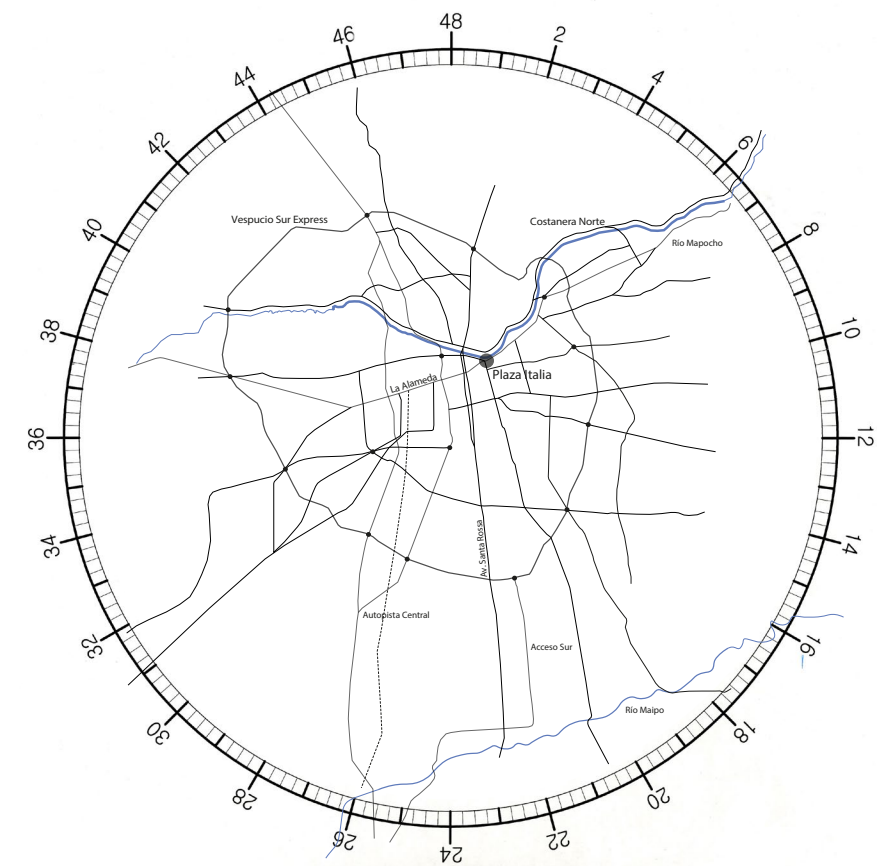
1.18. Infrastructural Borders: North-South Road Central Junction, Santiago
Source: PARROCHIA B., Juan. 1980



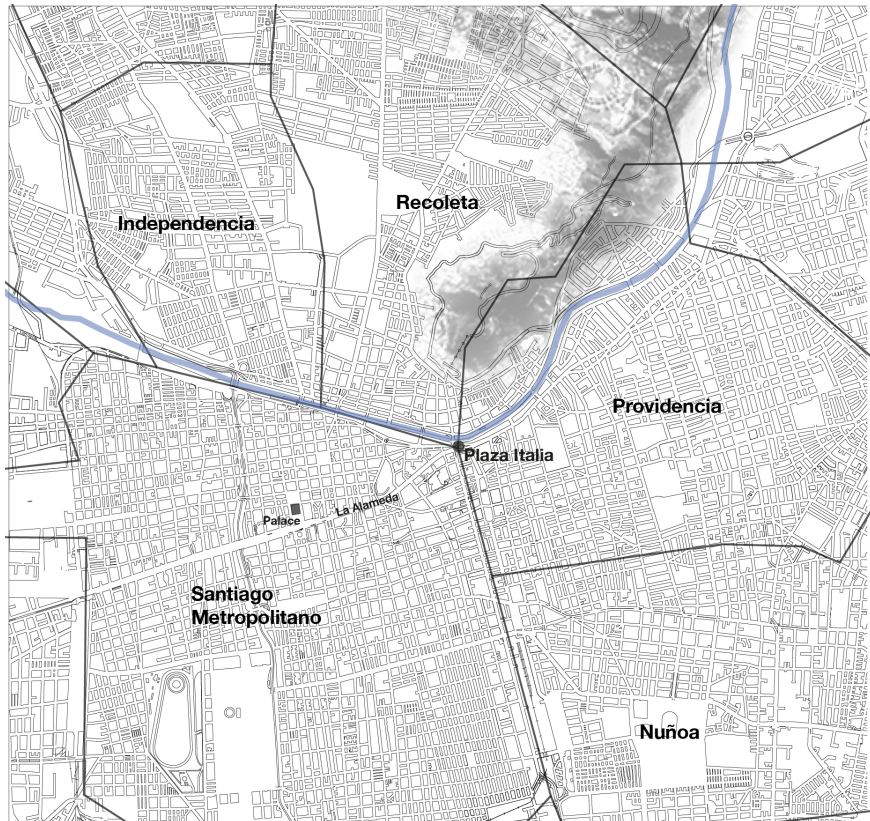
1.19. Organising Society
Brazilia: The New Capital



3.02. Monuments and City Walls, Rome
Leon Battista Alberti



3.03. Infrastructure as City Walls, Santiago
Source: Author



3.08. Colliding Identities
Fusion of Urban and Natural Infrastructure (Source: Author)

commercialized the Agora without producing any of the politics of democratic space in it.

How do we get more associative democracy? And how can we build that architecturally? How can we focus in a way that breaks free of this Greek model of the multifunctional center? At the London School of Economics we are looking at edge conditions between communities. We are trying to understand the ways to achieve associative democracy by looking at what the edges between different kinds of places in the city mean. What is an edge? We can think about an edge as having been of two sorts. In one, it is a border. In the other, it is a boundary. A border is a zone of interaction where things meet and intersect. A boundary is much more like a national frontier, a place where something ends. You can understand what this difference is like by thinking about natural ecologies. How do borders function? The sociologist Steven Gold makes a distinction between boundary and border as follows. If you look in the natural worlds – at the territory that a lion or a leopard will layout by spraying – it is a very serious no-go zone where other animals smell the urine and know they don't belong there. The boundary lays out an absolute zone of prohibition – this is my territory – whereas a border is an ecological intersection like that between where land and water meet. What Gold found was that in those kinds of border conditions you have a concentration of biological activity. It is where organisms feed off of each other, they don't feed randomly, but they feed in these layers. Also, this was the place where variation and natural selection most likely would occur because there is the most ecological interaction in the complexity. So, that natural paradigm is the one in which the boundary is a place where the energy of a natural territory gives out, whereas the border is that kind of edge in which energy is concentrated and intensified by a difference, by the meeting of different species.

What is the urban analogue to this kind of natural ecology? It won't surprise you that in cities like London or New York, one is much more likely to find boundaries than borders. That is, you would find legally defined territories in which as you

3.09. Boundaries and Borders
Democratic Spaces, Richard Sennett



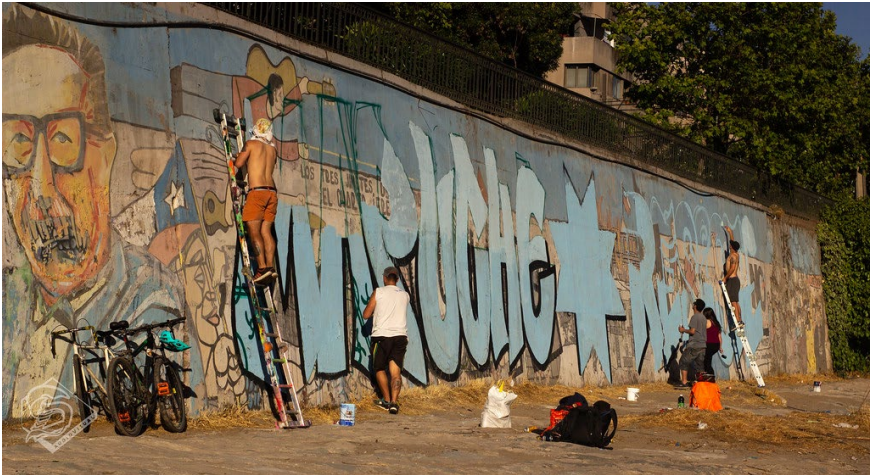
3.04. Highway Intersection as Border
Puente Manuel Rodríguez, Source: GoogleEarth



3.05. Plaza Italia: Urban Intersection
Source: GoogleEarth



3.04. Rio Mapocho Today
Source: GoogleEarth



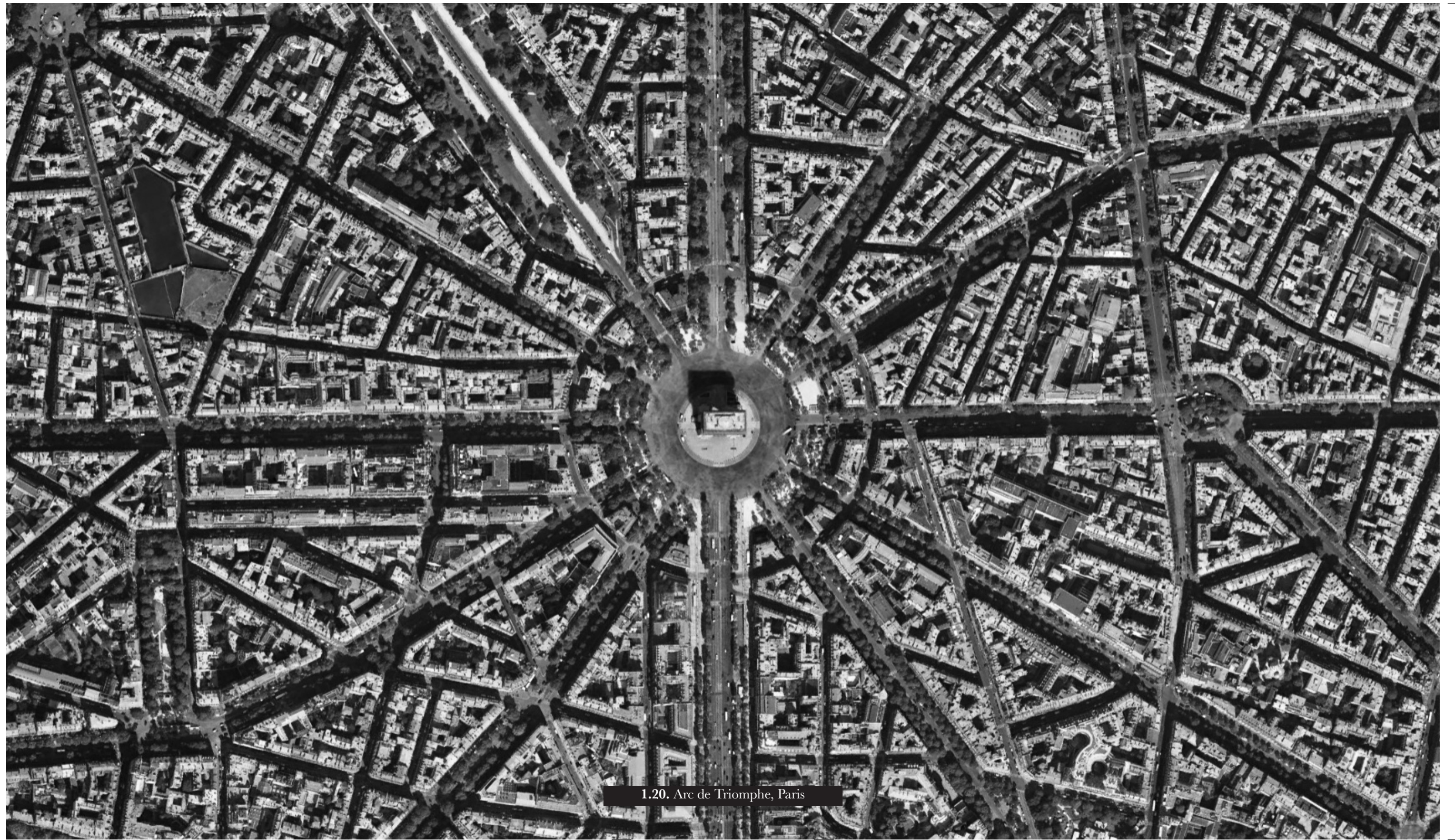
3.05. Rio Mapocho Today
Source: Unknown



3.04. Riberas del Mapocho
Alberto Valenzuela Llanos, 1910



3.05. Los Tajamares del Mapocho
Giovatto Molinelli, 1855



1.20. Arc de Triomphe, Paris

Haussmann's Paris in Santiago

Vicuña's vision for the transformation of Santiago was heavily influenced by Georges-Eugène Haussmann's renewal of Paris. The Parisian boulevard as an intervention obtruded the informal city, restoring the ancient walls of the historic centre. This notion of a defensive rampart was central to Vicuña's plan in establishing Santiago as a modern capital.¹⁶

*"Nonetheless, the circumstances for Santiago's transformation were very different: the city never had **defensive walls like those of Paris** and Vienna, so Vicuña could not rely on a historic contour in order to trace the Camino de Cintura. Therefore, the Mayor had to figure which were the limits of the city to be transformed, what prompted him to previously define an envisaged image, one of whose purposes was, as it has been mentioned, **to differentiate Santiago's two worlds and ways of life.**"*¹⁷ Germán Hidalgo Hermosilla

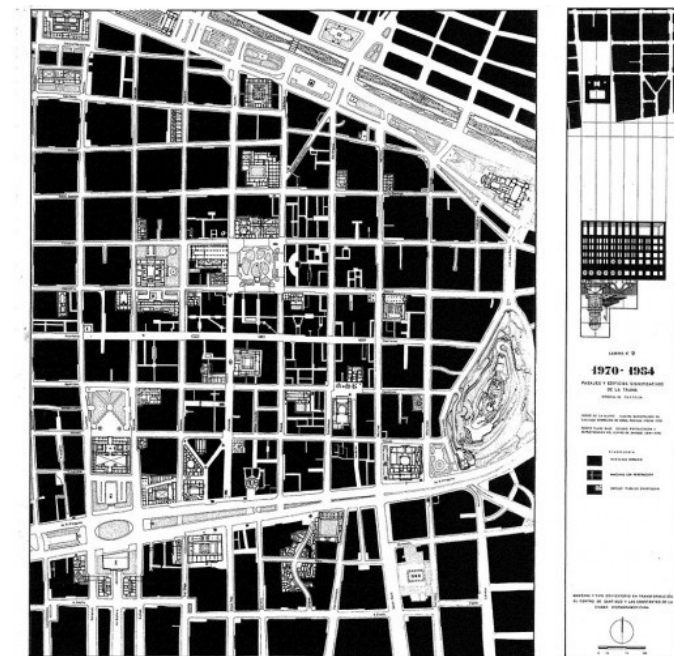
The parallels between Haussmann's destruction of informal Paris, and Vicuña's excretion of the poor, engineer a sort of urban 'cleansing.' Haussmann's dominating approach celebrated grand avenues, boulevards, and public arcades for the enjoyment of the bourgeoisie and elite, segregating the city into districts depending on class. *The Passagen* exhibited the wonders of the industrialised world and commerce, eventually made their way to Latin America, and ironically influenced the re-invention of post-colonial identities. However, the incentive behind this network of generous voids, goes beyond the desire to provide generous spaces for public life.

*"He is annihilating the crooked streets and building in their stead noble **boulevards as straight as an arrow** – avenues which a cannonball could traverse from end to end without meeting an obstruction more irresistible than the flesh and bones of men – boulevards whose stately edifices will never afford **refuges and plotting places** for starving, **discontented revolution breeders.**"*¹⁸ Mark Twain's critique on Haussmann's Paris

Again, we see the authoritative conditioning of public space as a strategic element designed to repress, segregate and control society; encompassing the very notion of architectural violence. It would seem evident that for a space to be democratic, it must serve the needs of the **entirety** of public life; be it spaces for interaction, discussion or integration. This chapter has sought to illustrate examples of hegemonic motives that still permeate the built environment today, through the misappropriation of public and civic space, carefully designed to ensure control and order, and prevent insurgency. There is no room to question or contemplate. It is only then, that one can begin to understand the violence of protest, and its physical deconstruction of the city, as the product of an architectural violence which has silently and continuously exerted itself on society.



1.21. Galería of Commerce/Arcade Bulnes, Santiago Chile



1.22. Gallery and Arcade Spaces in Santiago, Rosas, 1883-1984



1.23. Santiago Protests

II. The Urban Revolution

The Right to the City



2.00. Santiago, Chile

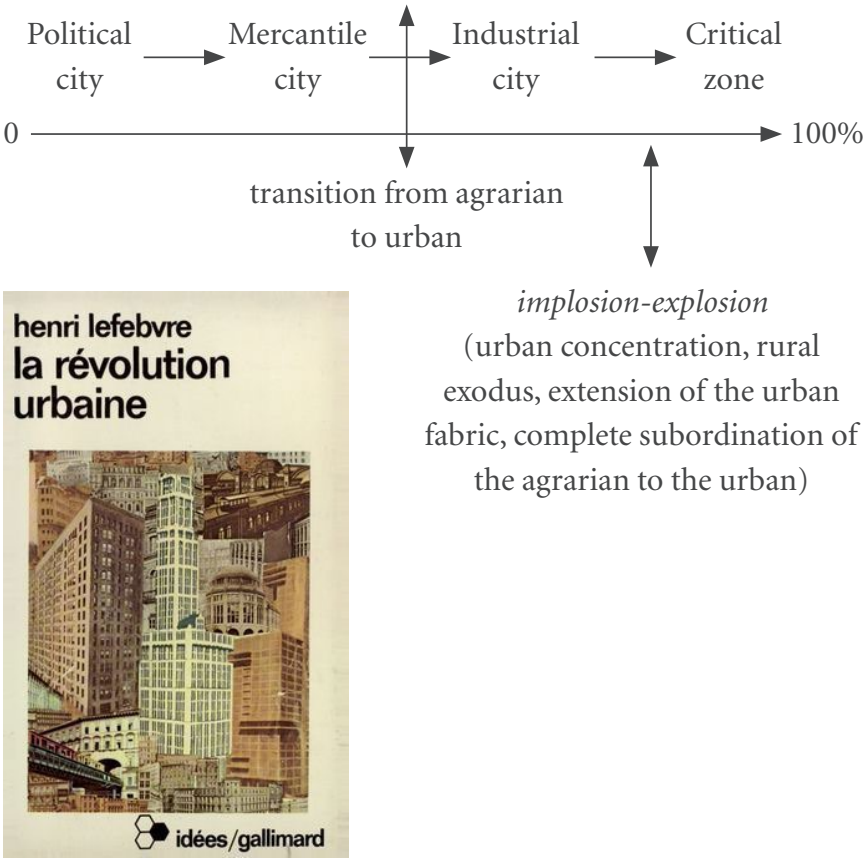
II. The Urban Revolution
The Right to the City

‘El Pueblo Unido Jamás Será Vencido!’ (The United People Will Never be Defeated!). The anthem originally composed for Salvador Allende’s popular unity government in 1970, echoed throughout the streets of Chile once again during the 2019 demonstrations. The power of the collective became the movement’s manifesto, as people all over the country occupied streets in protest against the systematic violence and abuse generated by Chile’s neoliberal model. **El Derecho de Vivir en Paz** (the right to live in peace) and **Dignidad** (dignity) manifested as exigencies for fundamental human rights. Defined by Chile’s urban trajectory, the conditions which produced these demands expose the failures of an extremely unequal and classicist society, to ensure the common right to the city; hence the 2019 demonstrations can be considered an *Urban Revolution*.

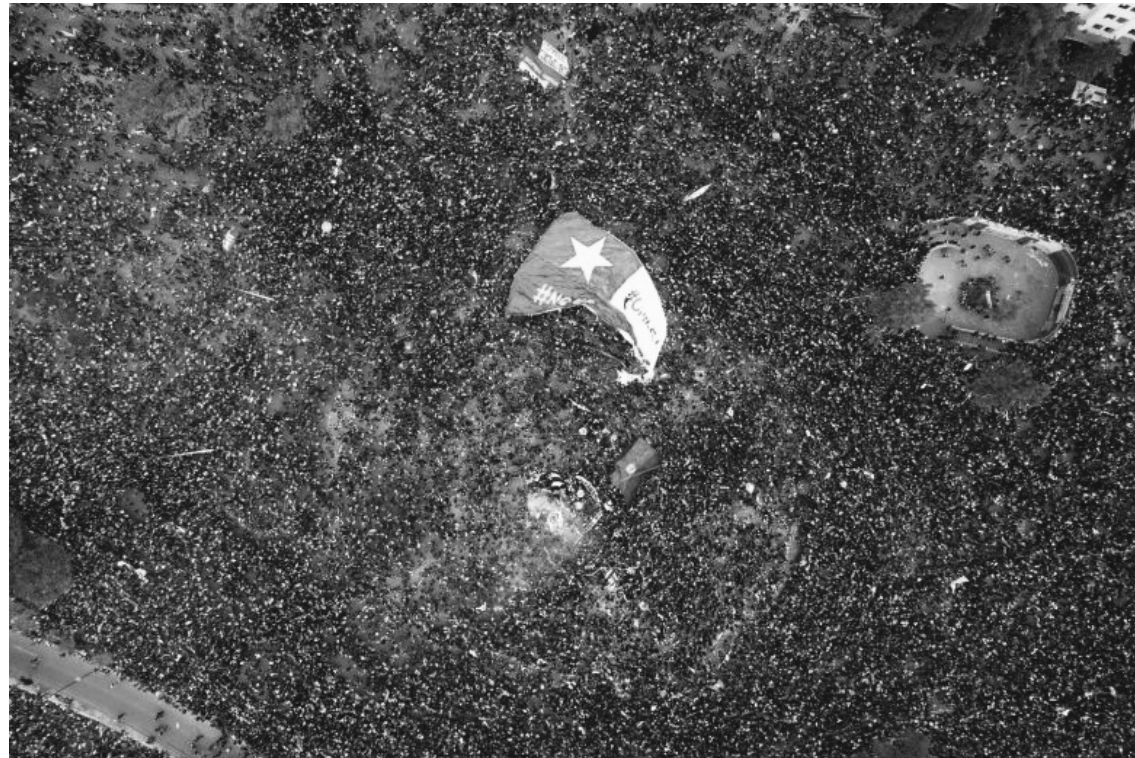
“The words “**urban revolution**” do not in themselves refer to actions that are violent. Nor do they exclude them. But how do we discriminate between the outcome of violent action and the product of rational action before their occurrence? **Isn’t violence characterized by its ability to spin out of control?** Isn’t thought characterized by the effort to reduce violence, beginning with the effort to destroy the chains that bind our thought?”¹⁹
The Urban Revolution, Henri Lefebvre

The exploitative nature that binds capitalism and urbanisation, is illustrated in the opening hypothesis of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Urban Revolution*: “**Society has been completely urbanized.**”²⁰ Considering society as a product of urban condition, this process becomes a critical anchor of political and class struggle, whilst subordinating the rural to the urban. In order to provide public agency within this rigid, established system, the right to the city concerns itself with the right to command the whole urban process; engendering a participative democracy.

“The right to the city is far more than the individual right to access urban resources: **it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.** It is, moreover, a **common right** rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a **collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation** ... From their inception, cities have arisen through geographical and social concentrations of a surplus product. **Urbanization has always been, therefore, a class phenomenon,** since surpluses are extracted from somewhere and from somebody, while the control over their disbursement typically lies in a few hands. **This general situation persists under capitalism,** of course; but since urbanization depends on the mobilization of a surplus product, an **intimate connection** emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization”²¹
The Right to the City, David Harvey



2.01. *The Urban Revolution*, Henri Lefebvre, 1970



2.02. Plaza de la Dignidad,
Santiago, October 2019

The Democratic Paradox

*“Modern democratic society is a society in which power, law and knowledge experience a radical indeterminacy. This is the consequence of the ‘**democratic revolution**’, which led to the disappearance of a power that was embodied in the person of the prince and tied to a **transcendental authority**....A new kind of institution of the social was thereby inaugurated in which power became **an empty place**.”²²*

The Democratic Paradox, Chantal Mouffe

The ‘empty place’ that exists as a result of the democratic revolution mentioned by Chouffe, is interesting when considered as an urban space. A space is not necessarily dedicated for protest, but something which exists as part of the city. The notion of the empty place provokes comparisons between spaces which are literally a void, and spaces which are unoccupied but have the potential to be appropriated and used as a form of public agency. One can also consider this emptiness as an absence of power, a vacuum as a result of the democratic revolution, in which hierarchy doesn’t exploit the space, or otherwise it can also be read as a prominence of collective power and sovereignty.

*“However, instead of simply identifying the modern form of democracy with **the empty place of power**, I would also want to put emphasis on the distinction between two aspects: on one side, democracy as a form of rule, that is, **the principle of the sovereignty of the people**; and on the other side, the symbolic framework within which this democratic rule is exercised. The novelty of modern democracy, what makes it properly ‘modern’, is that, with the advent of the ‘democratic revolution’, the old democratic principle that ‘power should be exercised by the people’ emerges again, but this time within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its strong emphasis on the value of individual liberty and on human rights.”²³*

The Democratic Paradox, Chantal Mouffe

The paradox of the democratic empty space presents a series of opposites, in which Mouffe identifies the dangers of a potential ‘pseudo democracy’ arising in the modern context. It has often occurred that the ideals of modern democracy are celebrated when in fact this ‘empty place’ is being controlled and manoeuvred by hegemonic powers. Here, the manipulation of an ‘institutional void’ can again be a tool for the corruption of public life.



02. Dignidad Social
Santiago, October 2019



Protest Culture: La Generación sin Miedo (The Generation without fear)

The political and economic systems which have founded Chilean society, have directly contributed to the production of a protest culture considered to be a pivotal part of public life. Mass protests have been immensely effective and an instrumental part of Chilean society. Notably the mass protests which united citizens to overthrow the dictatorial regime in the 1980s and the demonstrations marking the inauguration of electoral democracy in March 1990.²⁴ Since the dissolution of Pinochet's military dictatorship, Chile return to democracy has been tainted with political turbulence and systemic corruption, whereby extreme social inequality persists to be a large problem. Furthermore, since the mid-2000s the intensity of student mobilisations have been the driving of social movements. In 21st century Chile, mass protests have become increasingly frequent, witnessing four revolutions in the past two decades: the *Penguin Revolution* in 2006; the *Chilean Education Conflict* spanning from 2011-13; the *Chilean Feminist Revolution* in 2018; and the most recent protests the *Revolution of the 30 Pesos* starting in October 2019.²⁵ In Chile it seems that protest is not merely an ephemeral event, but a continuous manifestation of the collective conscious, an integral part of urban life. The exceptional abnormality of protest is not so apparent, and has been attributed to the generational shift of Chileans born post-dictatorship, uniting students under a collective identity 'la generación sin miedo' (the generation without fear), characterised by a motivated activism and fearlessness of destabilising democracy.²⁶



2.04. Monumental Chilean Revolution

Source

Revolution as festival

After a lengthy stay abroad, filmmaker Louis Malle returned home and encountered the revolution. His immediate impression was a **sense of celebration**, an overwhelming feeling that the city had been taken over by a **new kind of festival**. Malle recalls:

I came back to Paris on 3 May 1968, after six months in India—which put me in a frame of mind of not being surprised by anything. In fact, I was expecting a difficult return into French life. Instead, I fell into a gigantic wonderful festival: **a rebellion of a whole generation against what society had in store for them**. I was staying in Odeon and that very night, as I was strolling around the Place Saint Michel with my brother, I got beaten into a pulp by five cops who wanted me “to move on.” Of course it immediately secured my position on the side of the students.

(Caron 1993: 13)

At the beginning of that spring, those who participated in university occupations felt a **sense of intense and joyful liberation** which they experienced as a celebration. In the words of one student:

we lived the festival, a time of miracles, the liberating power of speech. After we pushed away the night and conquered “the force,” we were going to change life, **live free at last, equal, brotherly, happy . . . Utopia grew** like wild oats between the cobblestones. A soft crazy imagination . . . an **interior explosion but also a fabulous liberation**.

The performative aspects of the revolution

The strategists of the student revolution found a way to confront police and governmental repression through humor, a festive spirit and a desire to express pleasure. It is no accident that one of the most reproduced images was of student leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit smiling directly at a helmeted and uniformed riot policeman.

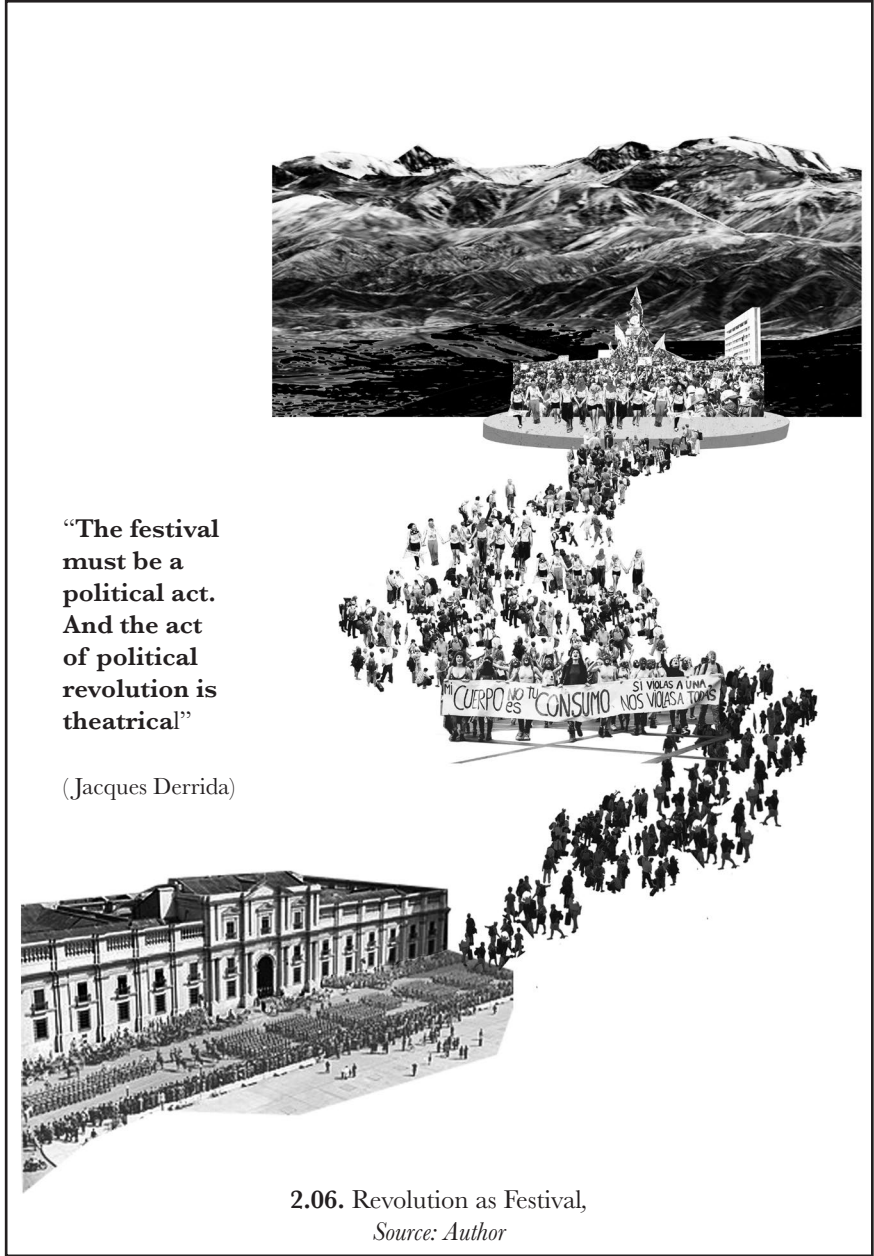
Theater reviewer Guy Dumur reflects on the powerful interplay between contemporary theater and the drama imbedded in the demonstrations:

Modern theater is the only kind of theater that excites passion in our young generation, who **in May 68 transformed the streets of Paris into a huge theater**, where the police force—dressed in black and moving up Boulevard Saint Michel through the smoke of tear gas—played their role in a staged drama from the extreme avant-garde. But life, we all know, copies art, and May 68 would not have been what it was if we were not in the era of “happenings,” of the Living Theater and **all the exploded forms of theater** that no longer allowed themselves to be **confined by the gilded balconies of the playhouse**.

(Dumur 1971: 44)

To conceive of **demonstrations** as festivals or, as Dumur does, **as avant-garde performances**, one must keep in mind that most of the participants in May 68 were familiar with historical accounts of nineteenth-century revolutions (such as the ones of 1830, 1848 and the Commune of 1871), as well as earlier commemorations of the 1789 revolution with their well-known floats designed by Jacques-Louis David. For example, a student said, “*on a pris la parole comme on avait pris la Bastille*” (**we seized control of the word like we seized the Bastille**) (Dansette 1971: 149). Such awareness of historical precedents shows the importance of past revolutions in May 68’s **re-investment of the street**. In other words, the organizers of the demonstrations and **the behavior of the “performers”** in and around the barricades both consciously (and sometimes unconsciously) referred to revolutionary events. Paintings also influenced the way students moved on top of their barricades, holding up red or black flags.

2.05. Taking Back the Street
Paris 1968-78,
Sarah Bonnemaison



“The festival must be a political act. And the act of political revolution is theatrical”

(Jacques Derrida)

2.06. Revolution as Festival,
Source: Author

Decolonising the City: Public Space as an act of Cultural Resistance

An act of protest can be understood as the decolonisation of an urban territory. In *The Right to the City*, David Harvey describes a neoliberal colonisation of modern cities and the types of urban spaces produced by this process of capitalist urbanisation. Sites of protest across the city of Santiago are therefore identified as an urban territory in which neoliberal ideologies have been actively challenged. Typically, social manifestations in Santiago commence with the occupation of Plaza Italia, a rotonda in the centre of the city. During the 2019 uprising, protesters managed to change the name of this space to ‘Plaza de la Dignidad’ (Plaza of Dignity). This powerful action encompasses the capacity of public space, and its possession, as an act of cultural resistance.

Giorgio Agamben proposes the concept of *profanation* as a productive process of decolonisation by “restoring things to their common use.”²⁷ The ruination of Plaza Italia as a result of protest and the rejection of its original name, can be understood as a destructive process of decolonisation by removing things, to their common use. Protest is thus an instrument of public agency, in which profanity becomes the strategy to take over and subvert an urban territory, and use it for something other than it is supposed to; essentially to queer a space.

Applying Agamben’s concept of *profanity* to modern-day contexts of colonialism, the traditional etymology of decolonisation is re-established, referring to ‘the action or process of withdrawing from an existing (as opposed to former) colony,’²⁸ leaving it independent, in which the term *colony* refers to current hegemonic, authoritarian powers. Concepts such as agency, collective conscience, memory, ruination and temporality are significant in understanding this process as a type of ‘urban revolution’ and the democratisation of space.

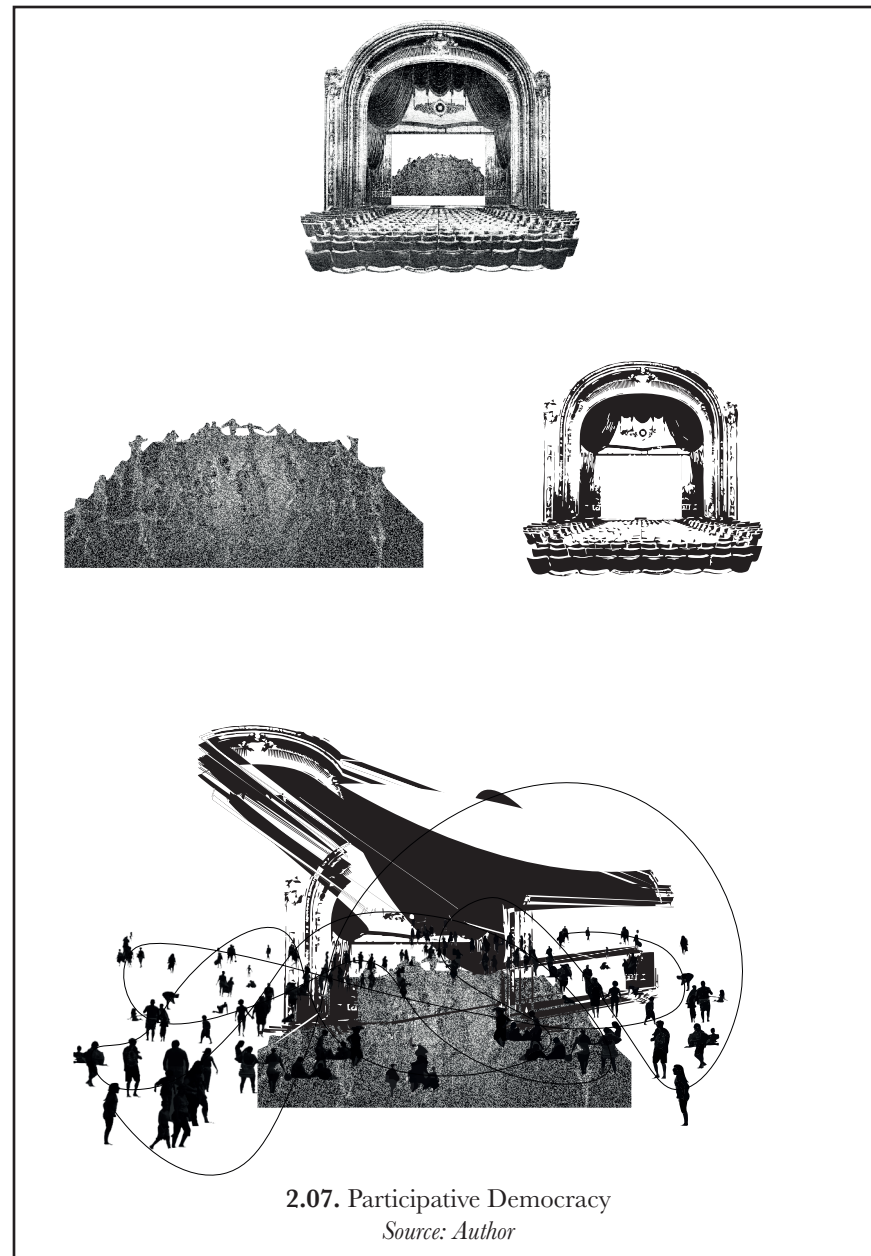
Extract from Research Methods Paper



2.08. Plaza Italia
Santiago



2.09. Plaza de la Dignidad,
Santiago



A Stage for Democracy

‘The Empty Space’ is defined by Peter Brook as “*Any space in which theatre takes place. I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.*”²⁹ The ‘act’ of protest can be understood as a theatrical act, appropriating the empty spaces as reaction to the muted architectural violence which direct its urban environments.

“As a dimensionless space of “**invisible fullness**” that “consecrates” and “concentrates,” it offered an empty space to be filled within which to **construct an architectonic scene** but held at bay the sublime and annihilating expanse of limitless space. Isolated and veiled by its black drapes, the stage is traditionally seen as a separate zone standing in for **the void out of which forms are materialized** and de-materialized. This obscure, silent and formless “**empty space**” - where objects and bodies appear suspended - constitutes a generic place within which **events could be endlessly produced and reproduced.**”³⁰

Towards an “Architecture of Cruelty”, Dorita Hannah



2.10. The Urban Revolution
Plaza Italia, Santiago October 2019
(Illustration: Thomas Batzenschlager Source: 'Por un Habitar Digno')

III. The Protest
Route

Decolonising an Urban Territory



3.00. Santiago, Chile

III. The Protest Route
Santiago, Chile

Place

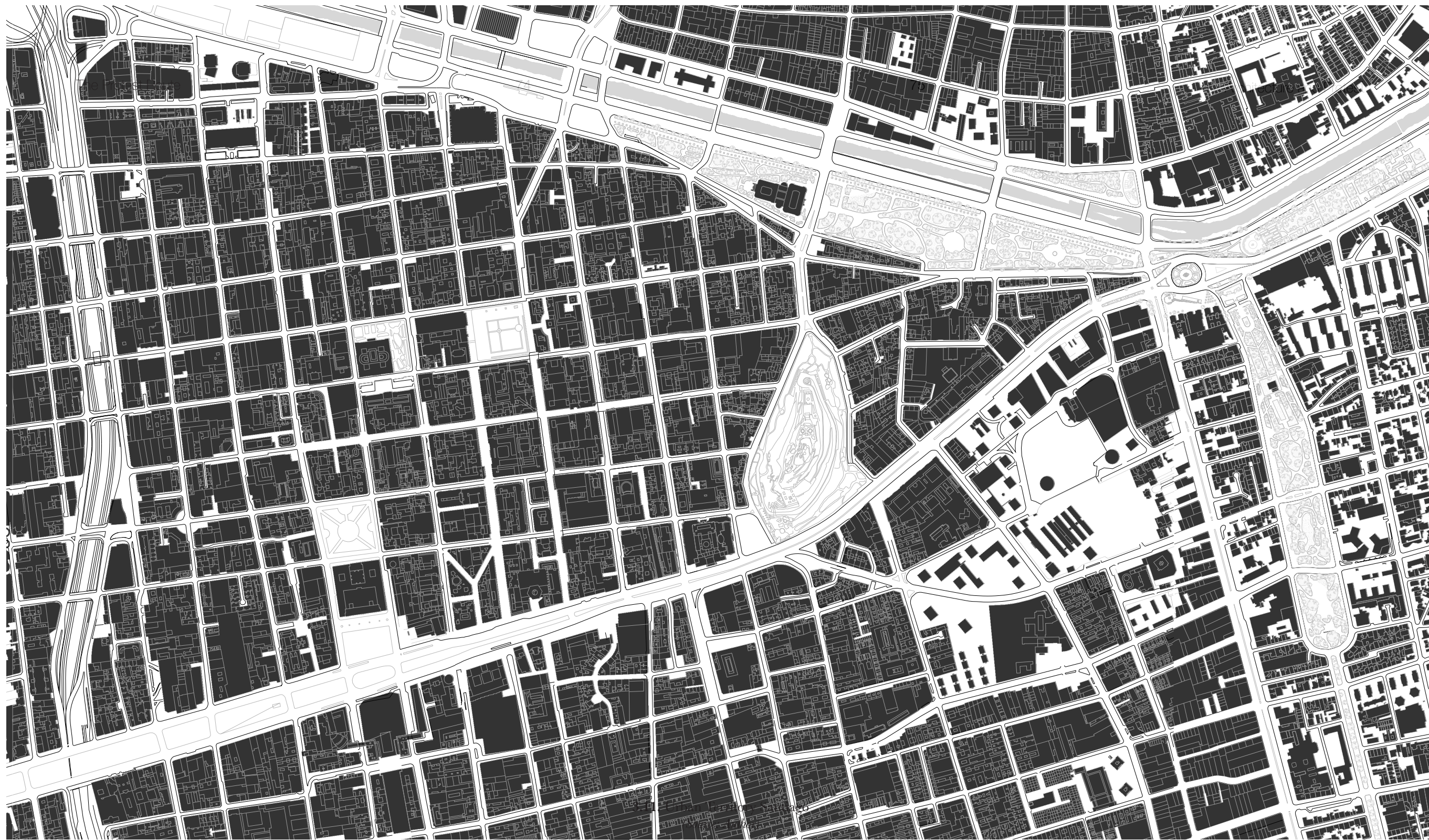
Founded on a plateau in the Andes mountains, Santiago encounters unique geographical and topographical conditions. The San Ramon fault line runs through the eastern border of the city, a reminder of the extreme environmental and natural powers that characterise this place. The agrarian essence that once filled the valley, has been replaced by a concrete landscape. Urban segregation is imposed through the horizontal sprawl of the city; infrastructural arteries act as walls that cut off peripheral areas. Plaza Italia, a point where boundaries meet, where the urban and natural converge; the mountain creeps into the city, and the river meets the road.

On the 18th of October, 2019, the city of Santiago erupted into protest. Ignited due to a rise in metro fares, the streets chanted “it’s not 30 pesos, it’s 30 years,” in response to the consequences of an austere neo-liberalist system that has commanded the country since its military dictatorship in 1973. In the context of Latin America, these frustrations have been muted over the course of many centuries, throughout the exploitative ruling of both external and internal hegemonic powers.

The protests generated spaces and moments in which Santiago appeared to be something that it has rarely been before: A city for the People. It is in these places or at these moments where you will hear protesters chanting songs, and always referring to themselves as ‘El Pueblo’. This translates as ‘The village’ however in the context of protest, it means ‘The people’. The reference to a ‘united people,’ is part of the everyday dialogue in which the Chilean people refer to themselves. This collective consciousness, a common movement, is the driving force for the genesis of an act of protest. Their demands for ‘dignidad’ (dignity) is essentially the Chilean people demanding the right back to their city.



3.01. Santiago, Chile
Source: Author



The Protest Promenade

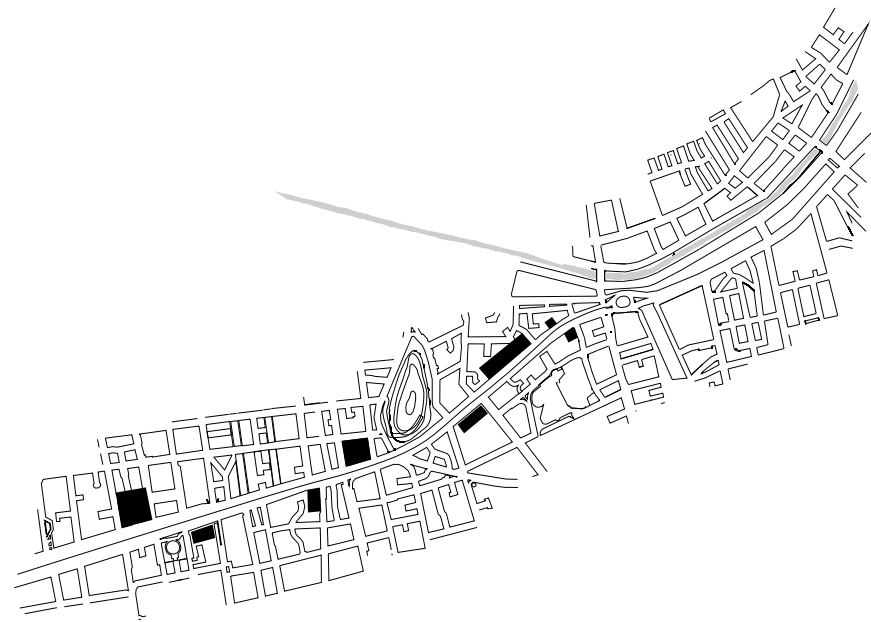
In the event of protest, the centre of Santiago surrenders its quotidian order to the marching of its people. Commencing in Plaza Italia, and culminating at the presidential palace, the mass of people occupy this urban territory by filling the empty spaces of the city, in which movement is guided by the city's urban morphology. The protest route is composed of three elements: the plaza, the street and the palace. The Plaza and the Palace prevail as opposites, connected by Santiago's main avenue 'La Alameda.' The boulevard traces the former branch of the 'Rio Mapocho,' which was transformed into a street during the 19th Century, after the river bed dried up. Considered one of the most symbolic streets in Santiago, and Chile, the Avenue Alameda engenders great historical significance, infrastructural prominence and a dense cultural programme.

In many ways, the protest route is a symbolic landscape embodying the memory of Santiago's urban and political transition. As symbolic monuments, the urban tensions that characterise the Plaza and the Palace, draw parallels to the relationship between the Bastille and the Place De La République. Although in tension, these elements operate as part of the same system. A sequence of voids that host the social infrastructure of the City. The capacity to appropriate this infrastructure deems it a space of the people; in the everyday, La Alameda is populated with informal markets, street vendors and spontaneous performers. In the event of protest, the route is appropriated in an almost theatrical manner, translating the city into a series of scenographic elements. The plaza: a stage for democracy. The street: a ceremonial parade. The palace: a symbol of opposition.



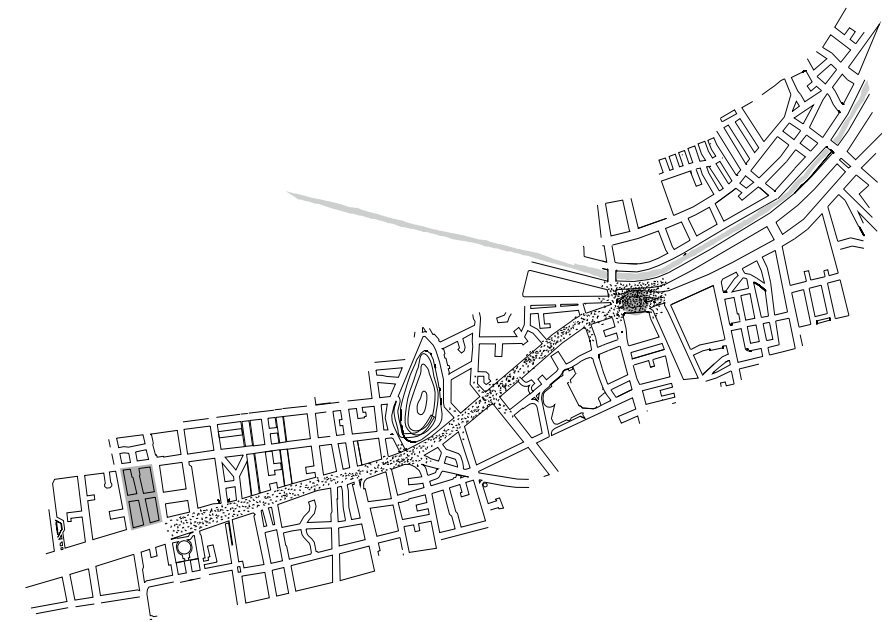
3.12. Symbolic Landscape as Urban Territory
(Source: Author)

Avenue Alameda



Typical

5.04. Cultural Axis
(Source: Author)



Atypical

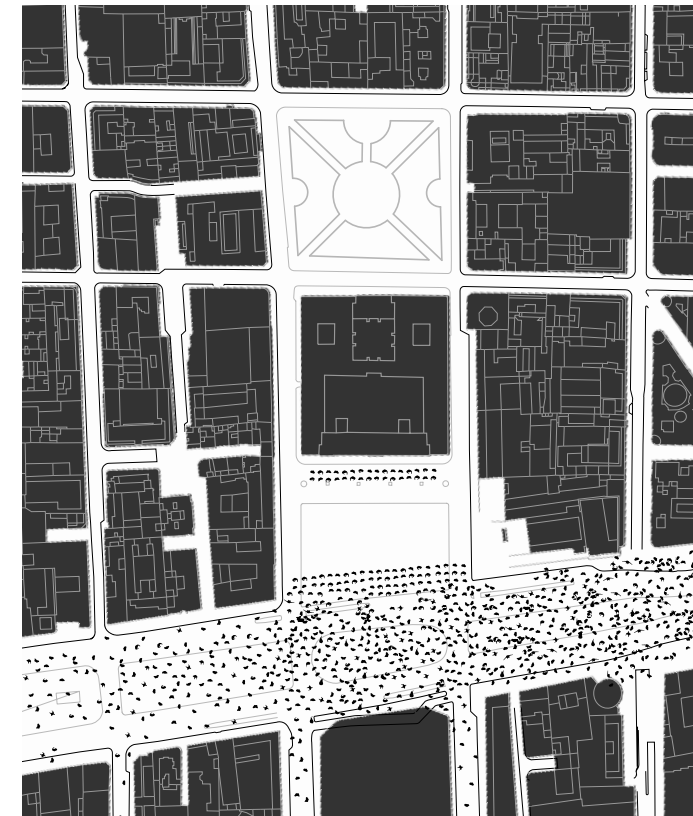
5.05. Protest Route
(Source: Author)

Presidential Palace



Typical

5.06. Locus of Power
(Source: Author)



Atypical

5.07. Symbol of Opposition
(Source: Author)

Plaza Italia



Typical

5.08. Public Space
(Source: Author)



Atypical

5.09. Political Space
(Source: Author)

The Plaza

During the everyday, Plaza Italia can be considered as the central node of the city; defined as an urban juxtaposition, in which the main infrastructural arteries of Santiago converge with the Mapocho river, forming a large rotunda. It is at this point that three very different districts meet: Recoleta, Providencia and Santiago Metropolitan, creating the potential for an interesting collision of identities in one place. Considering its central location and geographical significance, this site is a widely accessible point of reference on a metropolitan scale. However, Plaza Italia’s spatial definition fails to serve its urban importance. Without any integrated civic programme, this space is prioritised for mobility and vehicular traffic, used by pedestrians mainly to commute from one end to the other.

*“In this case the key element, typical of the “genius loci”, is in the tremendous historical-spatial force of the east-west axis of the city. The intensity of life in the place is that of the dense intersection knot of circulation routes and mobilization lines, superficial or underground, that pass through the place and will continue to do so in the future. This crossroads that receives walkers, passers-by from all directions, must vibrate with its multiple concerns and interests.”*³¹
Montealegre Beach Arquitectos on Plaza Italia

In the event of protests, this territory is taken over by citizens and transformed into a place of collective demonstration. Regardless of the socio-spatial borders which usually segregate and divide the city, this point of gathering welcomes the arrival of every ‘ciudadano’ (citizen) to form a collective entity. Plaza Italia is the meeting point for any mass social manifestation, and marks the beginning of the protest route.

*“Nodes are the strategic foci into which the observer can enter, typically either junctions of paths, or concentrations of some characteristic. But although conceptually they are small points in the city image, they may in reality be large squares, or somewhat extended linear shapes, or even entire central districts when the city is being considered at a large enough level. Indeed, when conceiving the environment at a national or international level, then the whole city itself may become a node. The junction, or place of a break in transportation, has compelling importance for the city observer. Because decisions must be made at junctions, people heighten their attention at such places and perceive nearby elements with more than normal clarity. This tendency was confirmed so repeatedly that elements located at junctions may automatically be assumed to derive special prominence from their location.”*³²
The Image of the City, Kevin Lynch



3.10. Plaza Italia as ‘Genius Loci’
Vehicular Rotonda (Source: ...)

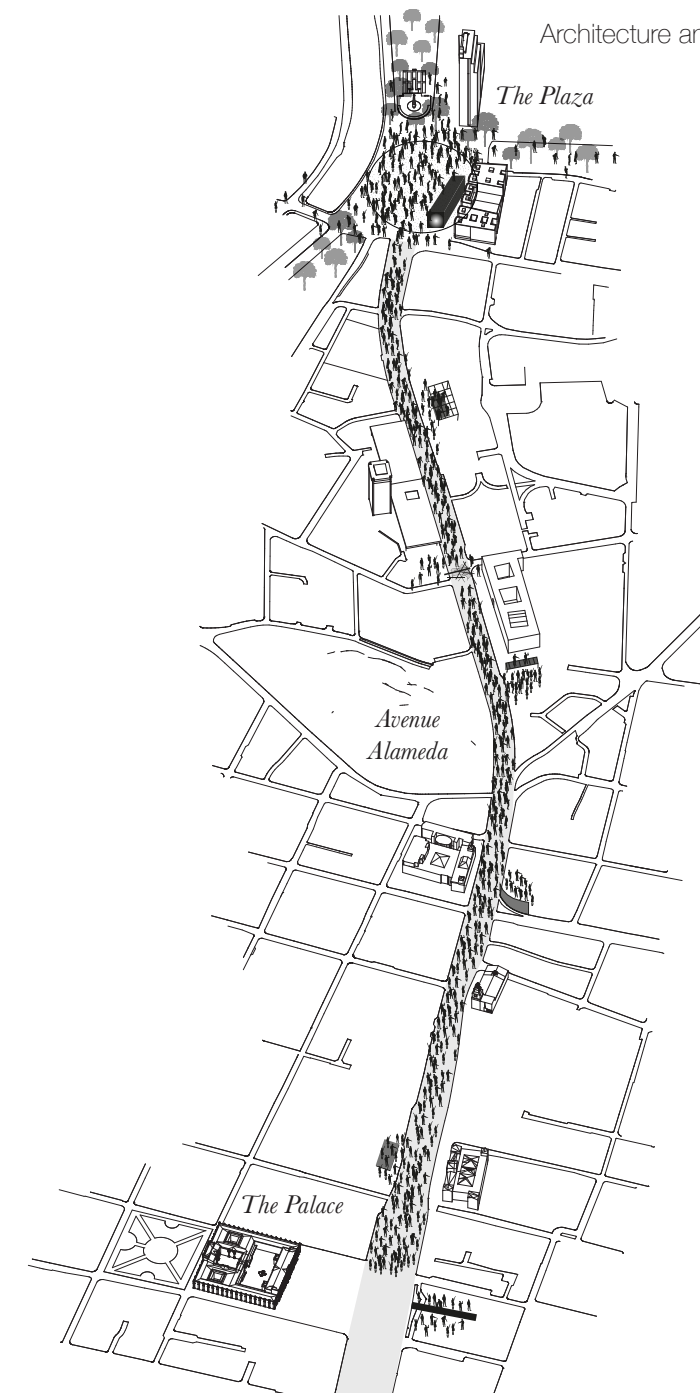


Palace_Street_Plaza

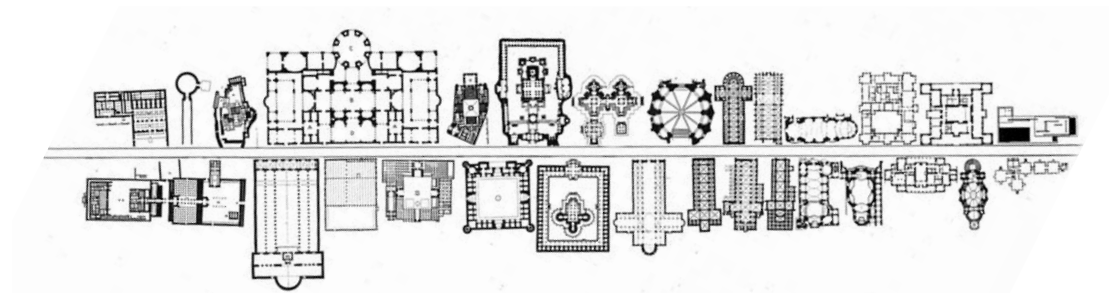
3.13. Elements of the Protest Route (Source: Author)

*“Workers of my country, I have faith in Chile and its destiny. Other men will overcome this dark and bitter moment when treason seeks to prevail. Keep in mind that, much sooner than later, **great avenues will again open**, through which will pass the free man, to construct a better society.”³³*

President Salvador Allende’s Final Words to Chile
September 11, 1973



3.14. The Protest Route (Source: Author)

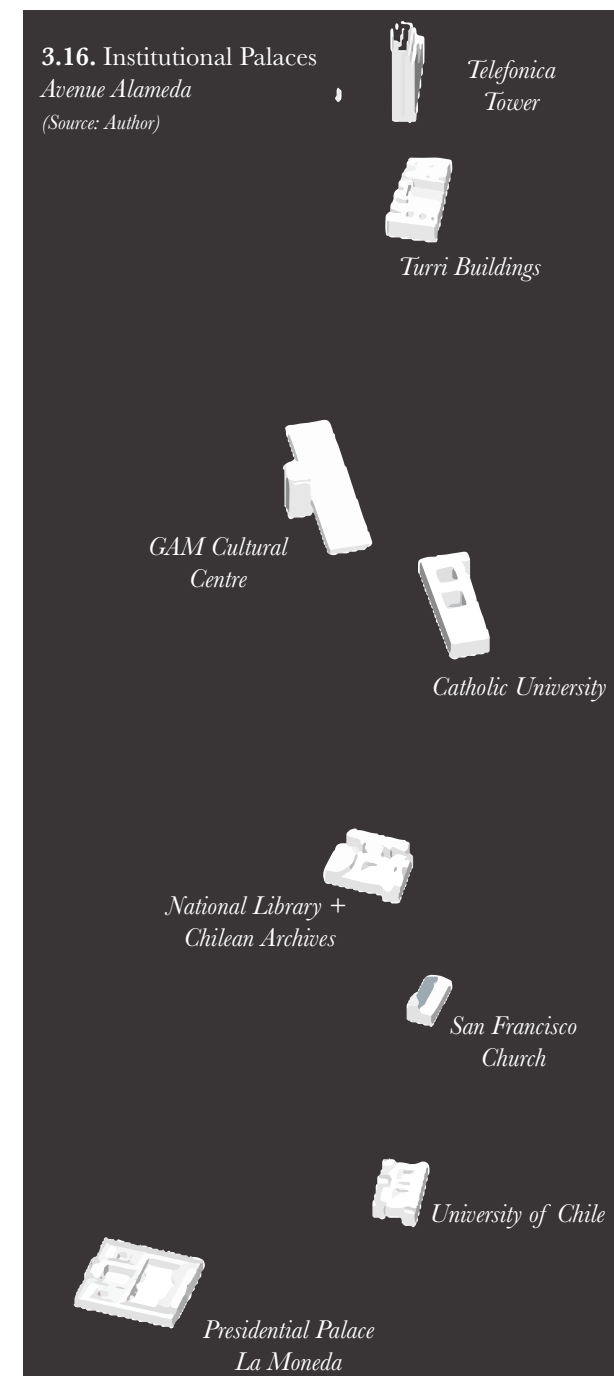


3.15. Cultural Artery,
Hans Dieter Schaal, 1943

The Palaces of the City

“In almost all European cities there are large palaces, building complexes, or agglomerations that constitute whole pieces of the city and whose function now is no longer the original one. When one visits a monument of this type, for example the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, one is always surprised by a series of questions intimately associated with it. In particular, one is struck by the **multiplicity of functions that a building of this type can contain over time and how these functions are entirely independent of the form.** At the same time, it is precisely the form that impresses us; we live it and experience it, and in turn it structures the city.”³⁴

The Architecture of the City, Aldo Rossi

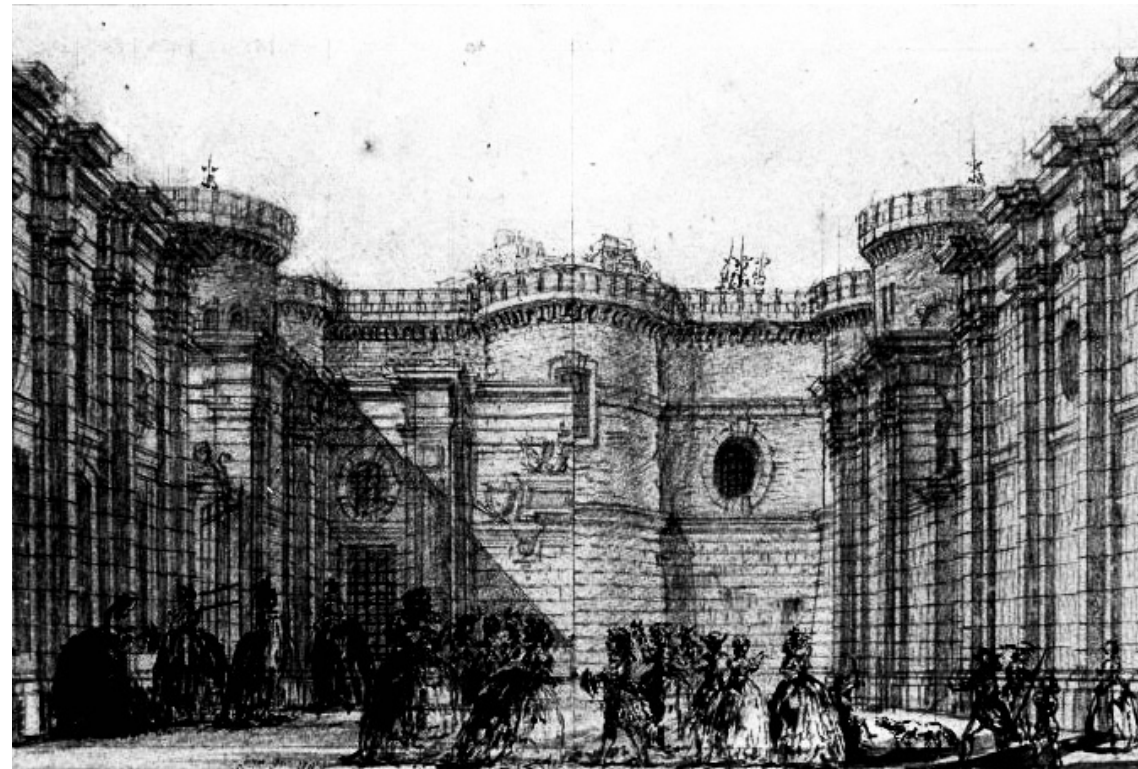




3.17. Palacio La Moneda,
Presidential Palace



3.18. Plaza de la Dignidad,
The Plaza



3.19. The Bastille, Courtyard,
Paris



3.20. Storming of the Bastille,
Paris, 1789

IV. Permanence & Monuments

Expressions of Collective Memory in the City

IV. Permanence and Monuments

Expressions of Collective Memory in the City

In Chile, monuments of a colonial past litter the streets, pronouncing the continent's stolen identities. In the centre of Plaza Italia stands the statue of Manuel Baquedano, a Chilean general representing victories in the Pacific War and battles against indigenous populations. In a collective effort, this monument and many others around the country, were repeatedly damaged during the protests. Chilean protesters decided to reject the stone testaments of a history built on occulted lies, failing to account for the hostility of its past.

*“...it is in substance a historical theory centred on the phenomenon of “persistences.” These persistences are revealed through monuments, the physical signs of the past, as well as through the persistence of a city's basic layout and plans...This theory (**theory of permanences**) is in some respects related to my initial hypothesis of the city as a man-made object. One must remember that the difference between past and future, from the point of view of the theory of knowledge, in large measure reflects the fact that the past is partly being experienced now, and this may be the meaning to give permanences: **they are a past that we are still experiencing.**”*³⁵

The Architecture of the City, Aldo Rossi

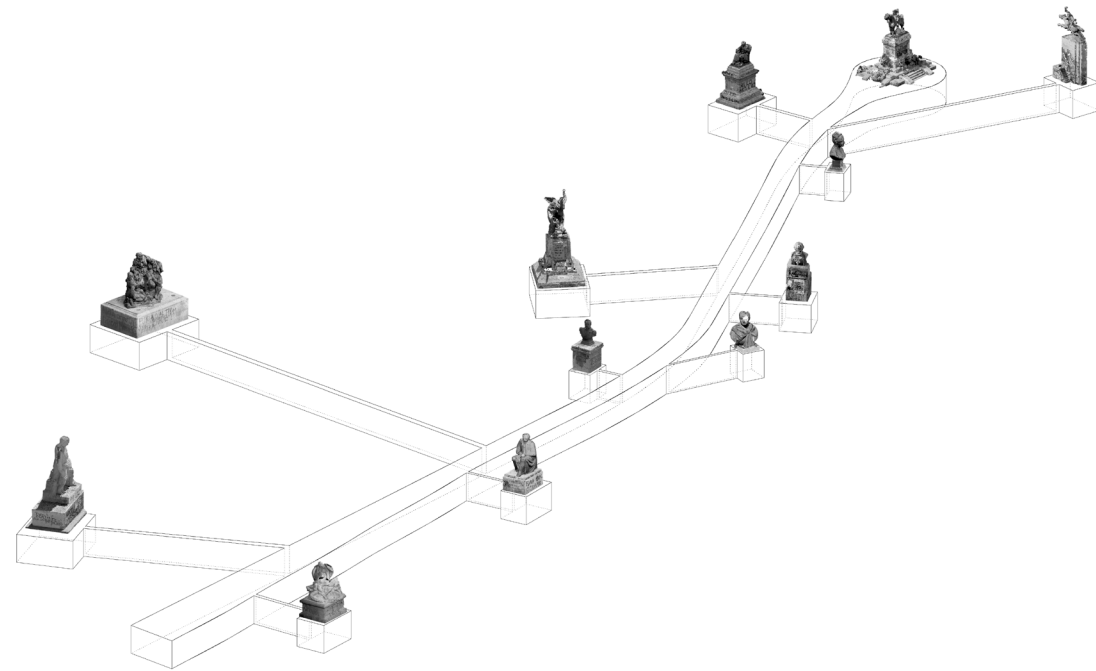
In relation to Rossi's theory of permanences, it is true that when considering the city and all of its artefacts as 'man-made' objects, one must be conscious of the difference between past and present, and the evolution of social values. However, due to the everyday interaction with permanences, such as monuments, this experience of memory provokes a certain responsibility. Expressions of memory are effectively pedagogic artefacts that inform, educate and influence cultural identities. Therefore, the value and conservation of memory must engage in a sensitive and inclusive conversation with the city and its inhabitants; a participative democracy. When this is not the case, the collective consciousness has the capacity to reject the persistences that they wish to not to be permanent anymore. As witnessed in the Santiago protests, this manifested into the defacing and removal of colonial, military and political monuments.



4.00. *Monument of General Baquedano,*
Plaza Italia



4.01. *Monument of General Baquedano,*
Plaza de la Dignidad



4.02. Monuments as Permanences,
The Protest Route, Santiago (Source: Author)

Iconographic Inventory

The encounter of monuments presents a dialectic between past and present; its petrification of memory offers a moment of contemplation. Rossi writes of the importance of monuments as expressions of the collective memory of the city, and the idea of place as an expression of both physical reality and history. However, traditionally the embodied memory of monuments has not prioritised the ‘collective’ so much as the ‘dominant’, whose permanence is quietly still colonising the cityscape.

*“Georges Bataille echoing Artraud’s insistence on “no more masterpieces,” wished to eradicate architectural monument, which (as **static, dominant, regulated and authoritarian forms**) “impose silence on the multitudes” and “inspire socially acceptable behaviour, and often a very real fear.”*³⁶

Towards an “Architecture of Cruelty”, Dorita Hannah

The imposition of monuments in public space, imply a muted hierarchy, or acceptance, of hegemonic accounts of history; thus encountering the iconographic glorification of colonial and confederate monuments, can be experienced as a violent intrusion of the public, collective sphere. Throughout Chile, the many monuments that were destroyed during protest possessed a common denominator: figures of Spanish colonization or the Chilean military. The vast misrepresentation of indigenous communities versus the predominance of authoritarian regimes has created an urban minefield of iconographic inventory, whereby the violence, discrimination and abuse of preceding powers, are heralded on plinths elevated above citizens, spatially enforcing hierarchies that claim to belong in the past.

The Collective Conscious

‘The destruction of Chilean monuments has shown to be a movement of astute consciousness. The majority of the country’s structural problems stem from an oligarchy of political elite through their exploitation and oppression of the middle and lower classes throughout history. The 2019 social uprising refused to accept this continuous trajectory of history, which translated into a clear pattern of de-valuing relative monuments. When the statues were demolished, oligarchic and military authoritarianism was challenged. It is a movement with historical consciousness, which understands its oppressors and identifies itself with its Chilean origins: mestizos and the indigenous cultures, notably Mapuches. The mestizo people (a person from Latin America of mixed race, especially having Spanish and indigenous descent), were systematically repressed by the violence of the Chilean elite in the 19th and 20th centuries. This has lead to an accumulation of inter-generational rage, perpetuated by the lack of support and solidarity from current governments. Hence, during marches the only flags that appear amongst the crowds are the Chilean and Mapuche flags; rarely is the support for political parties flaunted during protests. The mestizo people do not identify with the western cultural traditions of modern Chile, nor with Spanish-colonial history. They simply do not feel represented by these monuments.’³⁷

Interview with Gabriel Salazar (Chilean Historian)



4.03. Monument of Christopher Columbus, Arica, Chile



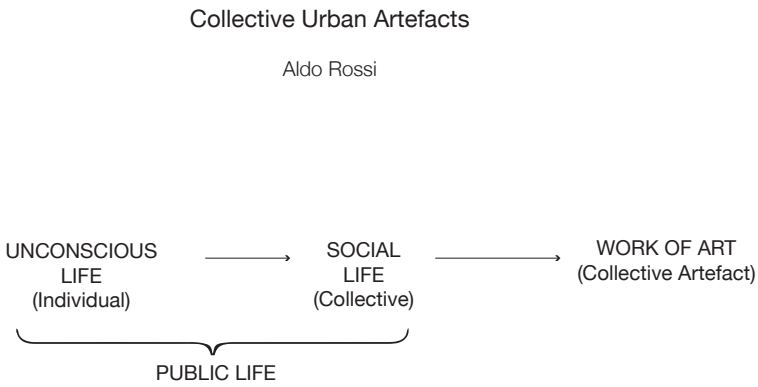
4.03. *Monument of Manuel Montt and Antonio Varas*
Santiago, Chile

Monumento popular



Manuel Montt y Antonio Varas encarnaron fielmente el modelo portaliano. Su gobierno se inició con una contienda política sangrienta: junto al río Loncomilla quedaron más de dos mil muertos del bando opositor.
El Jeneral Pililo, N° 203, 11 de noviembre de 1897.

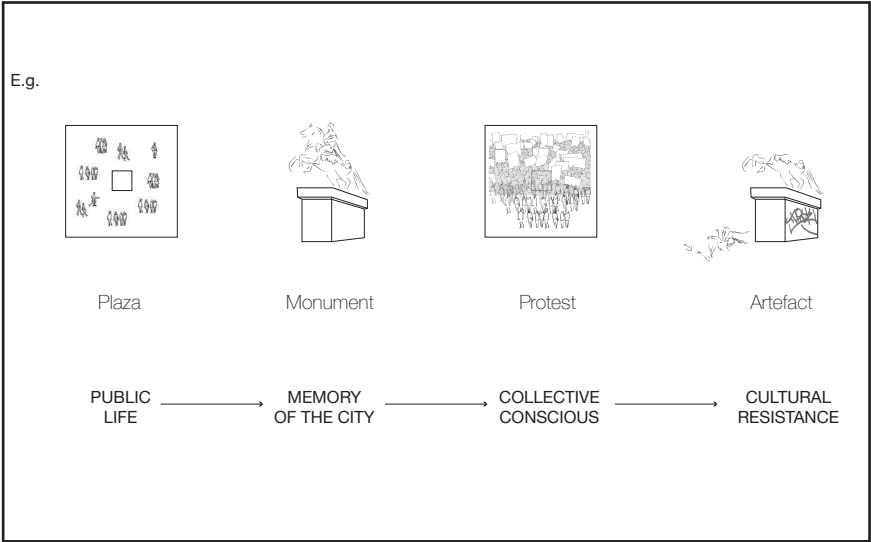
4.03. *Manuel Montt and Antonio Varas*
El Jeneral pililo, N23, November 11, 1897



The Collective Unconscious

Ultimately, *The Architecture of the City*, notwithstanding its attempt to place itself within a certain tradition of “scientific” writing about the city, is a very private and personal text. It is the written analogue of yet another analogous process: the **unconscious revelation of a potential new relationship of man to object**. It anticipates the **psychological subject—homo civilis—of the collective unconscious**; but at the same time, it also nostalgically evokes the individual subject, the mythic hero-architect of humanism, the inventor of the house.

Peter Eisenmann on Aldo Rossi,
The Architecture and the City (pg 11)



4.03. *Collective Urban Artefacts, Aldo Rossi*
Source: Author



4.04. New Monuments
Defaced Monuments during 2019 Protests



4.05. Defaced Monument
Parque Forestal, Santiago



4.06. Defaced Monument Baquedano
Plaza Dignidad, Santiago

The Ruin as Memory

*“In his personal vision of time, the same dialectic applies as in the city: history provides the material for biography but memory provides the material for autobiography; **as in the city, memory begins when history ends.** It encompasses both future time and past time: a project that has to be done and one that is already completed. **The images of ruin activate this unconscious memory, linking the discarded and the fragmentary with new beginnings.** Here again, the apparently coherent orderliness of logic is biographical, but fragments are autobiographical. **Abandonment and death**—the attributes of the skeleton—are through this dialectic now seen as **parts of a process of transformation; death is a new beginning associated with some unknown hope.**”³⁸*

Peter Eisenmann on Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture and the City*

The protests in Chile witnessed many powerful manifestations of collective action. The destruction of monuments initiated a process of ruination; a deconstruction of historical oppression. As a result, much debate has surrounded the legitimacy behind the removal of controversial statues. The Modern Cult of Monuments by Alois Riegl, explores the value of monuments, considering the notion that every historical event is irreplaceable, therefore should be left to the natural processes of decay.

*“According to modern understanding, all human activity and all human fate of which we have evidence or knowledge may claim historical value: **in principle we consider every historical event to be irreplaceable.**”³⁹*

The Modern Cult of Monuments, Alois Riegl

It is provocative to consider the defacing of monuments as an act to re-write history, as opposed to a criminal offense. Could the very defacing of the statues be valued as monuments in themselves? The total appropriation of the Chilean statues yielded a new purpose for monuments. The ‘vandalism’ captures a pivotal moment in Chilean history, and holds value as an object of cultural and social expression. These artefacts are products of a historical event, in which the power of protest translates the ruin into the monument of a new beginning, instigating an interesting dialectic between the city, the citizen, and memory.



4.07. Destruction of Religious Monument, Santiago, 2019



4.08. Monument of Christopher Columbus, Arica, Chile

v. The Event

Architecture + Disjunction

V. The Event

Architecture + Disjunction

In phenomenological terms, an act of protest can be explained as the following: an **observable event**, in consciousness or the object of direct experience.⁴⁰ During an event of protest, the limits which enclose its phenomena become ephemeral and inefable. Furthermore, the chaotic nature of a protest can often produce a physical and psychological dissociation with the quotidian order of the city; whereby the intensity of dissociation, is relative to the subject's perception of 'chaos.' These surreal conditions reveal the disjunction between space and the direct experience of its use.

"Everyone has observed the sonic phenomena of a political crowd of dozens or hundreds of thousands of people. The human river shouts a slogan in a uniform rhythm. Then another slogan springs from the head of the demonstration; it spreads towards the tail replacing the first. A wave of transition thus passes from the head to the tail. The clamour fills the city, and the inhibiting force of voice and rhythm reaches a climax. It is an event of great power and beauty in its ferocity. Then the impact between the demonstrators and the enemy occurs. The perfect rhythm of the last slogan breaks up in a huge cluster of chaotic shouts, which also spreads to the tail. Imagine, in addition the reports of dozens of machine guns and the whistle of bullets adding their punctuations to this total disorder. The crowd is then rapidly dispersed, and after sonic and visual hell follows a detonating calm, full of despair, dust and death. The statistical laws of these events, separated from their political or moral context... are the laws of the passage from complete order to total disorder in a continuous or explosive manner. They are stochastic laws."⁴¹

Iannis Xenakis, Formalized Music

When engaging with environments characterised by violence or conflict, it is important to consider their profound effects on the human experience. Reflecting on my personal experience, throughout the Santiago protests I was often reminded of Xenakis' explanation regarding 'sonic events.' These events have the power to distort and influence one's perception of reality, and essentially of the city: the material and immaterial; the tangible and the obscure; the right and wrong.



5.00. Santiago Protests

Drawing Disjunction

everyday/event
typical/atypical
quotidian/abnormal
permanent/ephemeral
harmony/chaos

For Bernard Tschumi, space is essentially created by the event, which is the necessary precursor to the architecture, which responds to the notion of the event, but never imagines itself without it. The fragmented realities illustrated in Tschumi's *The Manhattan Transcripts*, allude to an architecture that responds to the polarity of spatial experience.

*“(The transcript’s) explicit purpose is to transcribe things normally removed from conventional architectural representation, namely the **complex relationship between spaces and their use**; between the set and the script; between ‘type’ and ‘program’; between objects and events. Their implicit purpose has to do with the twentieth-century city.”⁴²*

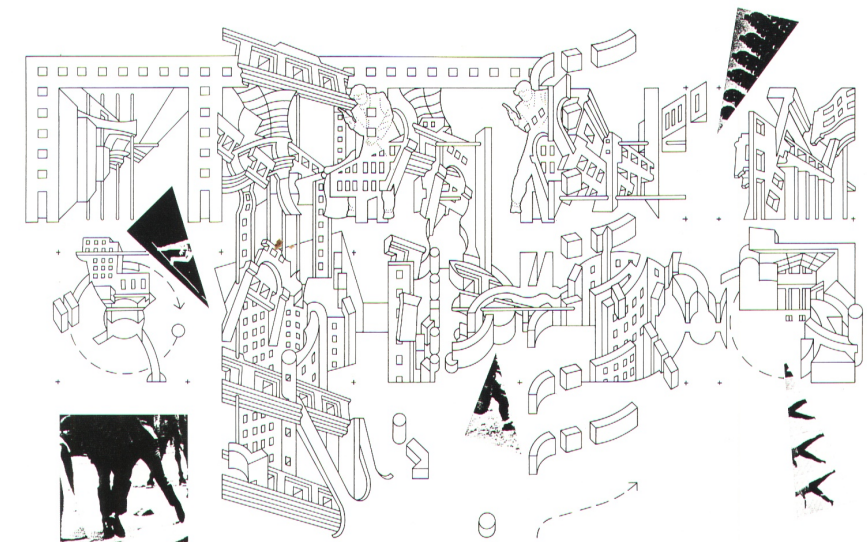
The Manhattan Transcripts, Bernard Tschumi

Tschumi's polemic that space cannot exist without programme presents an interesting relationship of opposites between space and programme. On one hand, space is an infrastructure that allows many programmes, therefore presenting a tension in Tschumi's statement that programme is the paramount thing, in defining what a place is. In order for programme to engage with the impetus of protest, an architectural intervention should be designed with the event in mind; not necessarily at the mercy of the event, but in its anticipation, by providing the spatial infrastructure for collective agency to manifest.

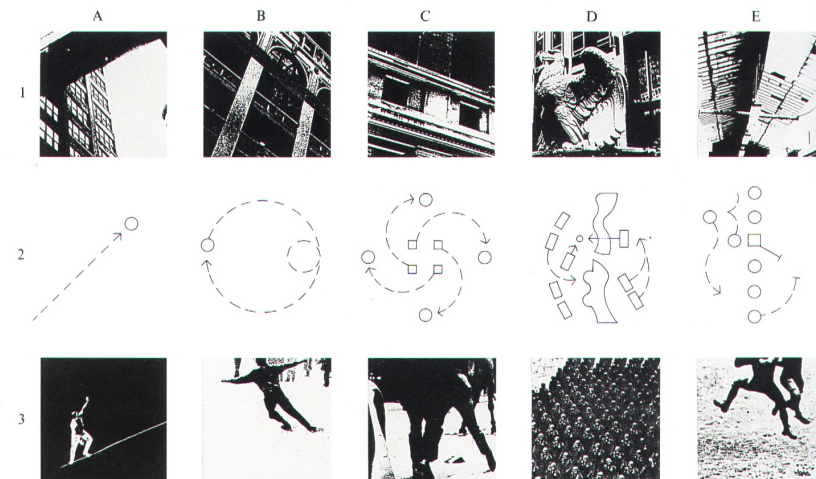
IX. Deconstruction (from): Reality

*“Such a departure from primary forms as generators does not mean a return to historicism and eclecticism. Instead, it attempts to play with the **fragments of a given reality at the same time as the rational structure of abstract concepts**, while constantly questioning the nature of **architectural signs**. Those fragments of reality unavoidably introduce ideological and cultural concerns. But, far from constituting learned allusions to the past, these fragments are to be seen merely as part of the material of architecture - as neutral, objective, indifferent.”⁴³*

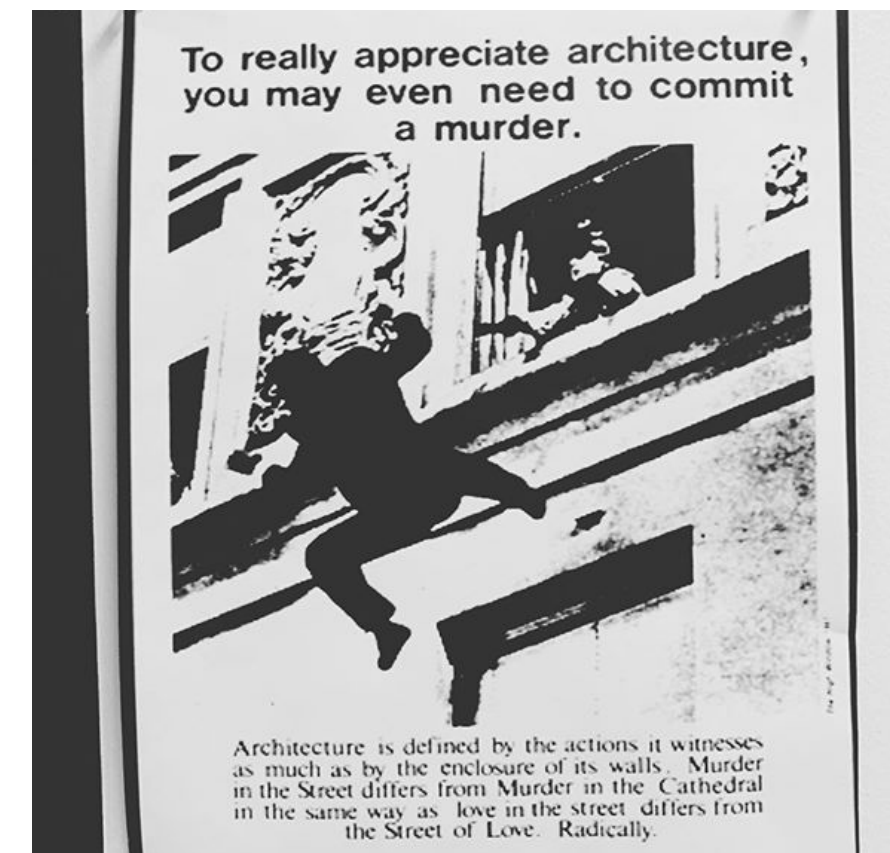
The Manhattan Transcripts, Bernard Tschumi



5.01. The Manhattan Transcripts
Bernard Tschumi, 1981



5.02. The Manhattan Transcripts
Bernard Tschumi, 1981



5.03. The Manhattan Transcripts
Bernard Tschumi, 1981

Conclusion: Architecture as Cultural Resistance

Protest often necessitates the subverting of a space in order to facilitate a territorial occupation, allowing a space to become ‘other than’ its original purpose. In order to design for protest, or to imagine an architecture that participates in protest, it has been vital to understand its phenomena, and relative conditions, in their dynamic and ever-changing form. After almost five months of continuous protest, the revolution in Chile came to a halt in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. The place left behind, is not Plaza Italia, nor is it Plaza Dignidad anymore, but an empty space in condition of symbolic decay. Considering the significance of protest in Chilean culture, the impetus for collective action that possessed the country throughout the months of revolution will re-surface again. However, as the government attempts to recoup the ‘normality’ that existed prior to the protests, the question regarding the future of Plaza Italia/Plaza de la Dignidad remains unanswered. The powerful decolonisation of Plaza Italia, subverted a prominent road junction into an interactive public space: Plaza de la Dignidad. This profanation of space, suggests a moment in which architecture can radically transform from an object of contemplation, to a perverse instrument of use.⁴⁴

*“...building an object collectively is a factor in unity and a good political school for the participants that allows links with the local population; that the existence of a **free place**, even if only **temporary**, is an important factor in the **development of the revolutionary struggle**; and that the **self-defence of buildings endangered by police violence** allows experimentation and reinforcement of the means of struggle.”⁴⁵*

Architecture + Disjunction, Bernard Tschumi

Tschumi refers to the concept of ‘Counter Design’ as a “strategy to denounce evil effects of planning practices imposed by conservative city boards and governments.”⁴⁶ The perceptions of alienation and isolation that engender capitalism, are also visible in the production of spaces in cities. Throughout the history of urban development, the authoritative conditioning through urban design is apparent in the design and procurement of its public spaces. That is why public space can become a strategic element in the decolonisation of cities; a space for civic agency, active reflection, collective pedagogy and cultural resistance. Thus, protest becomes the programme, the essential and necessary event to activate the space. For architecture to engage with processes of decolonisation in the city, it must provoke the individual and collective consciousness, and subtly antagonise the city’s quotidian order, whilst simultaneously being able to exist within it.



5.10. Common Ground
(Source: Author)

Notes

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