FROM MULTIPLE PUBLICS TO JUST PUBLIC: TACTICAL ART AND DESIGN INTERVENTIONS IN POST-REVOLUTION CAIRENE PUBLIC SPACE

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Text by Omar Nagati

Art in public space has been a very common theme of discussion in Cairo and the MENA region since the so-called Arab Spring. In the face of political upheaval against authoritarian rule, the line between 'artists' and 'activists' (those who are directly engaged in the pursuit of political change) has become almost invisible, with many forms of artistic expression – from poetry and music to graffiti and performing arts – being presented in public space as the primary mode of peaceful political protest, both during and after the 2011 revolutions.[1] As an urbanist, and certainly not as an expert on art, my interest and take on the subject is derived from a direct engagement with Cairene public space through urban and architectural design and practice over the past few years.[2] Urban design intervention is a form of artistic expression in public space that is arguably the one most rooted in the complexity of its context, offering valuable insights into the potential role and impact of art in Cairene public space. This essay explores the transformation of public space in Cairo that occurred during and following the urban revolutions that swept through the Arab region in 2011. Through tracing the effect of these key political periods on the nature of public space, its inherent politicisation, the behaviour of the public, and its relationship to the state, this paper highlights the different forms of exclusion from public space that coexist in Cairo, which were exacerbated by these extreme political conditions. Within this context, we can begin to understand the complex and inevitably political nature of art and design interventions in Cairene public space, whilst also examining the ways through which this medium is used by artists and activists to create a

democratic 'third space of moderate but progressive practice, in the face of increasing restrictions on arts and culture spaces and practices.

The discussion is organised into three sections. The first reviews the contrasting conditions of public space inherent to Cairo that were made explicit during the revolutionary period of 'city in flux' and the subsequent restoration of order in a period of 'securitisation'.[3] By demonstrating the risks of the suspension of normative order during the revolution, it attempts to problematise the 'multiple publics' exacerbated during the state of flux, highlighting the forms of exclusion from public space that members of the public enforced on their weaker counterparts. This contrasts with the direct exclusion through control, which the whole public was increasingly subjected to during the period of heightened securitisation at the hands of powerful top-down governmental forces, and as a product of gentrification spearheaded by large property developers. Today, both these conditions, which predated the revolution in milder forms, coexist to define the nature of Cairo's public space. The second section presents a case study of an urban design intervention whose duration spans the two contrasting political periods, highlighting the role of the creative process in mediating the different forms of exclusion produced during each phase. The third section concludes with a reflection on the wider role of art and culture as an advocate of the public good that tactically negotiates the priorities of multiple stakeholders, including an increasingly authoritarian government, and thus empowering the fragmented 'multiple publics' into *just* public.[4]

1. Exclusion through Fragmentation Vs. Exclusion through Control: Lessons from the Arab Spring

Following the momentous events of January 2011, Cairo and many other cities in Egypt experienced a sudden breakdown of security and a longer period of political vacuum, which have been referred to as a 'city in flux'.[5] The period signified a temporary suspension of formal order during which police forces were absent from the public realm and state institutions were at their most vulnerable. A weakened state combined with empowered citizens and communities, emboldened by their

successful revolt, both necessitated and enabled individuals and groups to quickly advance their claims to the city and to public space.[6] This period was then followed by one of increased securitisation measures that aimed to restrict public freedoms and the use of public space and to constrict the activities of art and cultural practices and civil society organisations. An understanding of these two extreme conditions is essential to comprehending, and critically analysing the seemingly omnipresent public and the different forms of exclusion rendered by each period.

The explicit reclamation of public space by the public that occurred during the 2011 revolution was first manifest following the defeat of security forces, when 'popular committees' spontaneously organised to defend their streets and neighbourhoods – a phenomenon that gradually morphed into local development initiatives in most neighbourhoods seeking to clean and beautify their vicinities. Later examples of this reclamation range from collective community endeavours to individual actions. A notable example of the former is the Mu'tamidiya exit ramps constructed and financed by local communities to link their previously disconnected neighbourhoods to the ring road and highway network.[7] Instances of the latter, despite comprising individual actions, had a stronger impact on public space when repeated by many. One such example is the street-vendor phenomenon that overtook Downtown's pavements and squares, turning places of mass protest into carnival-like sites, and eventually into informal open-air marketplaces.[8] These examples, amongst others, signify a new mode of urban citizenship, redefining the relationship between individuals and communities, cities and public spaces, whilst attesting to the broader structural urban and political conditions that allowed these modes of urban governance to flourish.

However, this 'reclamation of the city' is highly romanticised, risking a narrow perspective that focuses on an illusory democratic freedom suggested by the mass protests of 2011, whilst failing to acknowledge and address the serious risks associated with the collapse of formal order and the state's role in upholding public good. More often than not, the negotiation of competing claims to public space and conflicting interests is marked by struggle and localised violent confrontations, the extremes

of which are manifest in the cases of civil war in neighbouring countries.[9] The incongruent frames of reference, whereby these conflicts may be resolved, are even more telling of the complex and volatile situation than the conflicting claims and interests themselves. In the absence of traffic police and enforced formal regulations, to cite one example, people were left to constantly negotiate their right to the street. Multiple codes suddenly surfaced, such as neighbourly rights, religious law, thuggery and the rules of street mafia; each party claimed their frame of reference, and each tried – depending on the power of their actors – to reinforce their rule in pursuit of their exclusive interest. If a motorist tried to park their car on a street bearing no sign against parking, they would not necessarily have been able to; they may have needed informal permission, or concession, from the adjacent shop owner, the nearby neighbours, or the building guard (*bawwab*). There might also have been a system of informal valets (*suyyas*), or other 'invisible' codes ruling the street.[10]

These multiple codes, indicating the multiple publics, are far from being an alternative to the ideal Habermasian public.[11] The experience of Cairene public space between 2011 and 2013 reveals that, through these daily battles over and within public space, able young males dominated and became the guardians of public space, whilst the vulnerable and minorities were excluded from the street. The presence of women, the elderly, the disabled, and foreigners gradually diminished and, in some cases, completely disappeared. During the state of flux, informal orders manifested themselves in their extreme, and the romanticised self-rule of multiple publics quickly slipped into a very conservative order, whereby private actors pursued private interests. In the absence of the guardian of the public good of citizens – the state – the fragmentation of the public into multitudes resulted in the exclusion of the most vulnerable from public space, whilst the advantaged succeeded in advancing their exclusive claims.[12]

Almost two years after the 2011 revolution, the state regained political control and initiated systematic attempts to reinstate its authority, often under the guise of ensuring security. Laws prohibiting protest and large-scale gatherings, widespread censorship – including of

publications, websites, music, and film – and the heavy-handed control of civil society organisations have become everyday realities. Furthermore, many of the above-mentioned street-level manifestations of the city in flux that visibly attested to a degree of public agency, declined significantly: graffiti was painted over, and street vendors violently evicted or relocated (Fig. 1). In further attempts to restore state authority and control the use of public space, particularly in downtown Cairo, there has been significant investment in traffic regulation measures and renovation projects characterised by walls, fences, barricades and gates, in a pre-emption of potentially threatening protests and gatherings. Alongside these state-enforced measures, real-estate renovations that promote the government agenda of securitisation are often implemented in collaboration with

Figure 1: Graffiti promoting the former regime was painted over during the period of securitisation.
Photograph by Nadia Mounir

private developers, who pursue profitable gentrification with no regard for potential social displacement. Ultimately, the public is disenfranchised from public space through the authoritarian enforcement of securitisation measures and top-down development models, in a form of 'exclusion through control' that is perhaps more oppressive and powerful than the 'exclusion through fragmentation' of the multiple publics.

In the face of these conservative and powerful forces, the possibility of a middle ground of progressive, democratic urban governance seeking to uphold the public good, which once seemed within reach during the state of flux, is rendered impossible. Weakened by their own fragmentation into multitudes, and further by the period of securitisation, the public's ability to self-organise in order to reach a universally beneficial outcome is severely limited. It is at this juncture, between the weakened multiple publics, the top-down forces controlling public space, and their respective forms of exclusion, that the mediatory role of art in public space becomes apparent, and particularly worthwhile. The next section presents a case study of an art and design intervention in Cairene public space that has spanned both the period of flux and of securitisation. In its constant adaptation to the rapidly evolving political climate, the project avoids the reflective positions that many creative actors have been forced into, in pursuit of a critical and active space of practice, demonstrating the role that art and design interventions have in tackling the different forms of exclusion presented thus far.

2. Operating in the Interstices: Changing Scales, Shifting Tactics

In the Cairene context, where the public is increasingly disenfranchised from a highly politicised public space, artistic expression in public space is typically used as a form of resistance. It is thus framed here as an active, and inherently political, engagement, either as a critical reading of or a tactical intervention within public space. Today, artistic expressions often continue to seek social and political reform, but, at the height of restrictive securitisation measures, are forced to substitute revolutionary and confrontational strategies seeking overhaul political

change with reformist or subversive tactics, including self-censorship
and the reframing of their political positions. This adaptation has been
crucial to avoid either a forced withdrawal into spectatorial positions, or
the complete disappearance of the modes of public expression developed
throughout the period of revolution. Maintaining an active, albeit more
restricted, space of creative practice in public space has necessitated the
well-beaten track of a two-tier approach: strategic idealism and tactical
pragmatism. "Think radical and act in moderation!" as one colleague once
aptly put it. The Cairo Downtown Passages (CDP) project, presented here,
is a design intervention in downtown Cairo, epicentre of the revolution, that
exemplifies this strategy: the public intervention was able to mediate the
competing interests of different stakeholders, from the multiple publics
to private institutions and governmental authorities, ultimately generating
and operating in a sensitive 'third space' that advocates the public good
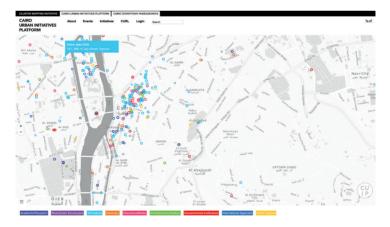through a negotiated common ground.

Figure 2: Cairo Urban Initiatives Platform, an online directory of creative initiatives in Cairo

CDP: background and vision

Initiated by CLUSTER in 2011, and spanning four years, the CDP project offers a lens into different stages whereby art and creative interventions in public space have evolved, in relation to the period of flux and the restoration of order. The project presents a broader vision for downtown Cairo and a framework for promoting more inclusive, democratic and accessible public space through a series of tangible and localised pilot projects. As a comprehensive case study, the scope of activities involved in the CDP project have included mapping and engaging stakeholders, collaboration with local and international design students, proposing a vision for development, promoting and fundraising, as well as the tangible implementation of small pilots to test the broader vision.[13]

Passageways as a framework for development

Cairo Downtown Passages refers to an urban typology that takes a variety of physical forms, including the designer commercial arcades of the early 20th century; setbacks and gaps between buildings; side or dead-end streets that have become de facto pedestrian thoroughfares; courtyards and terraces, as well as pedestrianised zones of downtown Cairo. Altogether they constitute a network of pedestrian movement away from the noise, pollution and heat of Downtown's main streets and boulevards. In addition to the commercial and service activities, they host a range of art, cultural and entertainment industries that are less visible from the main street.

Passageways are not merely a physical gap between two buildings, but are spaces of mediation and negotiation between binary conditions, public and private space, and formal and vernacular spatial expressions. Their obscurity within these binaries renders passageways a form of contested semi-public space, to which a range of owners, tenants, passers-by, and state-officials make claims to advance exclusive priorities. In this way they are representative of Cairo's wider condition, facing the challenges caused by a fragmented public and Downtown's particularly heightened securitisation efforts. As spaces of transition,

passages also imply a liminal space between two different orders, one that has collapsed and another in a state of becoming; a seductive metaphor for the current political environment. As such, Cairo Downtown Passages offer an alternative urban framework to reimagine the city from the inside out, highlighting new opportunities for the city's development whilst addressing Cairo's characteristic urban problems (Fig. 3). Replacing mains streets and squares as the urban armature, this framework operates within the cracks, the fissures and the interstices.

Figure 3: Downtown's formal street grid (left), and Downtown's network of passageways (right)

Pilot projects testing a broader vision

Recognising the potential of this urban typology, in the spring of 2011 a group of architecture students and tutors embarked on a mapping and design intervention exercise as part of an urban design studio at the Modern Sciences and Arts University, to the west of Cairo. The experiment aimed at taking the studio to the street and engaging the current political transformation on the ground, using physical models and conducting reviews and discussions with local communities at coffee shops in these passageways.

In 2012, CLUSTER picked up on the theme and produced a more systematic mapping of the typology, conducting surveys and stakeholder analyses of these passages. Over the course of two years, a robust database of uses, physical conditions, demographic and social analyses, as well as visual documentation and interviews with community members was developed. In addition, this study revealed spaces for potential intervention that would promote the upgrading and revitalisation of specific sites within the broader vision of the regeneration of Downtown. Parallel to the mapping and documentation efforts, CLUSTER proposed design interventions at the identified sites to test two larger hypotheses: a) passageways and in-between spaces as alternative sites for urban regeneration, promoting a more diverse, inclusive and accessible public space; and b) the role of artistic and cultural actors as urban catalysts addressing the risk of potential gentrification and high-end real-estate development.

CDP during the state of flux: tackling the exclusion of fragmentation by negotiation through implementation

Stakeholder engagement approach

With the support of the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute, the Kodak and Phillips passageways in the northern section of Downtown were selected as pilots to test the above hypotheses. Recognising the

absence of a functioning model of democratic urban governance, the first step to engage the local community and stakeholders relating to these passages and in Downtown at large. Over the course of three months, the CLUSTER team embarked on an extensive process of interviews, questionnaires and meetings, engaging residents, building owners, shopkeepers, street vendors, women's rights groups, developers and relevant authorities, and soliciting their input with regards to their aspirations and concerns for these passages (Fig.4). Each of the stakeholders represents a faction of the competing multiple publics, each with unresolved, contrasting priorities. The CDP project, and its particular focus on stakeholder engagement, provided an unbiased 'third space' in which these priorities could be identified and negotiated, ensuring the inclusion of all factions, not just those typically dominant. The list of dos and don'ts derived from the stakeholder engagement process, which included issues ranging from lighting to public benches, was translated into a design brief that was handed to a team of architects and artists during a short concept design competition.
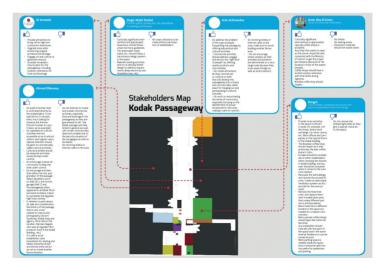

Figure 4: A thorough stakeholder analysis of Kodak Passageway

Negotiation through design

       The proposed design aimed at negotiating the blurred and contested public-private interface using simple layout alignments, paving and softscape features, wherein each element, including benches, lighting fixtures, trees and even tiles became both a tool to engage conflicting community interests and a small-scale site to negotiate them. For example, the bench became a highly contested feature since many of the residents and business owners feared that it would encourage 'undesirable activities', whilst the authorities wanted to enforce a design that would 'keep people in constant movement' for security reasons. However, the benches would also provide passers-by with places to rest in the safer and calmer environment of the passageway, promoting diverse usage of public space, as well as footfall for adjacent businesses. As such, the team had to devise a design that would be presented as a raised lighting feature rather than an explicit bench (Fig. 5), while committing the neighbours to a test period after which the benches would be removed if their concerns were realised. Similar conflicts emerged around shading devices that some community members objected to, as this increased possibility of the passage being used as a prayer area. Even elements as simple as the type of pavement tile had to be negotiated, with some shop owners insisting on flat tiles for easier cleaning, threatening to replace the grooved ones after the project was completed. Concessions were made through trade-offs, obtaining approval in exchange for the incorporation of another of their requests, such as an additional tree or an extra lamp post. Ultimately, what we have termed 'urban diplomacy' through design intervention managed to avoid the form of exclusion typically resultant of the fragmented multiple publics, where certain stakeholders enforce their desires, while others are completely disregarded in decision-making processes. Instead, the urban diplomacy approach used in the CDP project required each stakeholder to make some concessions, and accept 60-70 per cent of their wish-list, resulting in an intervention that mediated the competing needs and concerns of the multiple publics to the benefit of all. In this example, we see art and design promoting and operating as a form of local democracy, using creative interventions in public space as sites for negotiation.

CDP during the period of securitisation: tackling the exclusion of control through tactical subversion

In its adaptation to the increasing restriction of activity in the public realm in general, and of the arts and design sectors more specifically, the CDP project was able to carve a space of existence and progression despite the period of securitisation that forced the end of many other art initiatives. In order to survive, the project resorted to subversive tactics, adjusting its narrative to appease the authorities. An example of this tactical approach was the 'reframing' of design elements to address the authorities' concerns, such as the aforementioned light fixtures/benches, as well as making concessions to allow for the overall progress of the project; a design that accommodated public screenings was completely rejected and was subsequently edited. Furthermore, methods of visual communication were
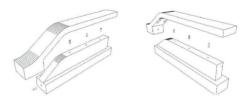

Figure 5: Design drawings and construction photographs of the benches designed, and presented as light fixtures

altered to best suit the intended audience. Simple drawings and models used to communicate with community members were replaced with more corporate-style 3D renderings to address the authorities (Fig. 6). The project narrative was also shifted, highlighting it as an attempt to cooperate with municipal authorities in their endeavour to restore and 'beautify' Downtown after the political turmoil. Questions of diversity and inclusiveness, let alone local democracy, had to be subdued if not completely edited out, whilst the support of a foreign donor (the Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute) had to be carefully framed as support for the local municipality, under their guidance and regulations.

As well as the careful reframing of the project, the design concept underwent a series of reviews, in order to obtain up to seven different approvals from the relevant authorities, including water, electricity and natural gas, underground, traffic, security, and heritage preservation authorities, to name but a few. Similar to the negotiation process between neighbouring communities, the design itself was reframed and re-presented multiple times to multiple authorities, not only to fulfil their technical requirements, but to also align with their narrative and preconceived visions for the redevelopment of Downtown.

Figure 6: A commercial-style rendering for presentation to the authorities

Sustainability and governance

In Cairo, buildings normally have tenant boards to oversee maintenance and upkeep, whereas public spaces become no-man's land, with no-one claiming the responsibility of maintenance. Even municipal services, such as rubbish collection, are limited and inadequate. Residents and shop owners clean their own premises, and sometimes the area immediately in front, while outside this area dirt piles up and broken light fixtures are left in disrepair for years. The CDP project attempted to counter this by proposing an inverse governance structure not for each building, but for the space between buildings. Towards the end of the construction process the CLUSTER team helped set up a 'passageway board', which included representatives of the building owners, tenants, and shopkeepers in the surrounding buildings. The passageway board was responsible for enforcing a maintenance plan – drafted by CLUSTER – for gardening, garbage collection, water and electricity bills, and so on. More than three years later, this plan remains considerably operational and the passageway is in a rather decent condition, highlighting the strategy as an alternative model for sustainable local governance.

Operating in the interstices: physically and institutionally

The Cairo Downtown Passages project offers an example of critical and creative intervention in public space that addresses the absence of local democratic governance through participatory engagement with public and governmental stakeholders. The project's specific typology of in-between space represents a metaphor for its political engagement; as revolutionary change is no longer possible in the near future, a reformist and more gradual approach seemed the only option for democratic progress. Through the strategic adaptation of this approach, the project was able to avoid the zero-sum approach of government interventions, made explicit in the treatment of Downtown's street vendors, who are either completely ignored or subject to widespread forceful eviction.[14] Instead, the project successfully promoted a form of public inclusivity that was otherwise incongruent with the trends of securitisation and exclusion through control that are becoming increasingly prevalent in Downtown.

The project thus presents a concrete example of art intervention in public space that, working through the geographical and political cracks of the system, uses design as a negotiating tool and subversive tactics to mediate the different forms of exclusion resultant from the periods of flux and of securitisation.

3. Conclusion: Art as a Third Space: Carving out a Critical Position, Towards a Just Public

Over the past few years, two consecutive political and urban conditions have conspired to dilute and constrict public space in Cairo, resulting in different forms of exclusion. Cairo Downtown Passages offers both a framework and partial resolution to this dilemma. During the period of flux, a collapse of the formal order disguised as liberation resulted in severe fragmentation of the publics, through their competing claims to public space and conflicting frames of reference. Since no single normative or civic order could be invoked, the public good became relativized and vulnerable members of the public became increasingly excluded. Once formal order was gradually restored, this multiplicity gave way to a singular narrative and an authoritarian public, intolerant of other voices. Public space became increasingly sanitised, with no trace of the competing forces once teeming the streets of Cairo, and exclusion was manifest through a combination of securitisation measures and gentrification policies. The diagram below (Fig. 7) summarises these two conditions, their resultant forms of exclusion and the mode of artistic practice, exemplified by the CDP project, that can be utilised to strive against these forms of exclusion, promoting an active role for art in public space.

Both forms of exclusion, which were manifest in their extreme during their respective political periods, continue to be characteristic of Cairene public space. Today, there is no clear temporal or spatial distinction between these conditions, but rather the two are simultaneously present, in constant dynamic interplay. As such, the CDP project dealt with different aspects of the forms of exclusion simultaneously, utilising different techniques to address different issues.

As the condition of flux revealed the multiplicity of the public and the tensions and fissures between them, artistic practices faced with the complexities of the multiple publics strived to promote a space of negotiation through design intervention at sites of contestation. Rather than approaching design elements in public space from an aesthetic point of view, they were used as tools to engage and negotiate concessions among the multiple publics. In the CDP project, the process of engaging stakeholders, mediating their interests and desires, aspirations and concerns, materialised through architectural and urban elements, such as the bench, the lighting fixtures, the tree and the pavement tiling (Fig. 8). In the absence of a single normative order, the CDP project sought to negotiate a middle ground, through trade-offs, concessions and rewards – an approach here termed 'urban diplomacy'.

Meanwhile, securitisation measures demanded the CDP project take alternative approaches. Operating within the interstices was not limited to the city's geography – through its passageways and back alleys – but is a modus operandi through institutional loopholes, as direct confrontation and overhaul political change became no longer possible. Approaching authorities for approvals and licensing required an alternative narrative, as the political landscape shifted towards restoration and as security became an utmost priority to reclaim the state's control over Downtown. International support was viewed as a financial asset at a time when authorities were ailing under the burden of reconstruction following the urban revolt, and the project was narrated more as upgrading and beatification than promoting inclusive public space. These conditions also necessitated that authorities were approached strategically, not only in terms of narrative but also regarding who should be approached and

Political Condition	The Public	Everyday Experience in Public Space	Form of Exclusion	Role of Art and Design in Public Space	
"City in Flux"	"Multiple Publics"	Competing claims and conflicting frames of reference	Exclusion through fragmentation	Negotiation through implementation	**JUST PUBLIC**
Restoration of Order	Public subject to authoritarian rule	Controlled/limited public through gentrification and securitisation	Exclusion through oppression/control	Tactical subversion	

Figure 7: A table comparing the effect of political conditions on public space, by the author

their position in governmental hierarchy, as well as the timing in relation to project progress. Security concerns also affected the design, resulting in the removal of the public screening infrastructure, and the redefining of benches as raised lighting features. Not only did these subversive tactics ensure the progress of a project that may have easily fallen victim to the increased policing of public space, but the methods of stakeholder engagement and local-scale urban governance were later adopted in government-led passageway renovation projects.[15] Through its engagement and collaboration with authorities, the CDP signifies a direct and perhaps long-term solution to exclusion through control.

It is through the methods discussed in this paper – negotiation through implementation and subversive tactics – that the CDP project was able to advocate a space of active, creative practice in public space, despite the changing and increasingly restrictive political landscape. Today the project is claimed by multiple stakeholders as their own success story, from the daily passageway users to the real estate company owning the property.[16] Concurrently, the government has redesigned other Downtown passageways, drawing on many design and managerial strategies of the CDP, as part of its wider urban development efforts in the area.[17] Most importantly, the CDP offers a successful model for how, through the use of these design and negotiation strategies, art interventions in public space can hope to tackle the ensuing forms of exclusion, negotiating multiple publics towards a cohesive, inclusive, and fair society; towards *just* public.

Figure 8: Kodak Passageway in use by a wide range of society members

Footnotes

1 Examples of art in public space in post-revolution Cairo include graffiti walls along Muhammad Mahmud Street (which are now painted over, or the walls demolished), and Al-Fann Maydan (Art is a Square) performing arts street festival in Abdin Square, which has been banned since 2013. Both sites are in downtown Cairo, close to Tahrir Square. For other examples, see Armbruster, Jörg (2014) *My Cairo, Stuttgart*: Edition Esefeld & Traub; Dal, Mikala Hyldig (2013) *Cairo: Images of Transition – Perspectives on Visuality in Egypt, 2011-2013*, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag; Gröndahl, Mia (2012) *Revolution Graffiti: Street Art of the New Egypt, Cairo*; New York: American University in Cairo Press; Hamdy, Basma (2014) *Walls of Freedom = Judrān al-Hurrīyah: Street Art of the Egyptian Revolution,* Berlin: From Here To Fame Publishing; Jensen, Michael Irving (2012) *Streets of Cairo: Art in Public Space*, Cairo: Danish Egyptian Dialogue Institute. For a comprehensive online directory of creative initiatives in Cairo, see *Cairo Urban Initiatives Platform* (CUIP), available at www.cuipcairo.org, Fig. 2

2 Omar Nagati is a co-principle of Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training, and Environmental Research (CLUSTER). For a review of CLUSTER's projects see www.clustercairo.org

3 'City in flux', see: Nagati, Omar and Stryker, Beth (2013) *Archiving the City in Flux: Cairo's Shifting Urban Landscape since the January 25th Revolution* [online] available from www.issuu.com/clustercairo/docs/archiving_the_city_in_flux; Nagati, Omar and Stryker, Beth (2017) *Street Vendors and the Contestation of Public Space*. Cairo: CLUSTER. 'Securitisation' here refers to a set of physical and legal measures, enforced by the government in response to security concerns regarding public space. These measures include walls, fences, and barricades, as well as laws limiting gatherings in public space.

4 See 'Producing Public space: Conversation with Omar Nagati' (2016), in *Public Space: Fights and Fiction*, An Editorial Project by The Funambulist and New South. Commissioned by The Akademie der Künste and The Goethe-Institut, 46-51

5 *Op cit.*, 6-11

6 *Ibid.*, 54

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, 34-63

9 Nagati and Stryker, *Street Vendors op cit.*, 29-113

10 *Ibid.*, 64

11 Habermas, Jurgen (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press; Calhoun, Craig (1992) ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press

12 CLUSTER, "The Danger of Romanticising Informality," in Angelil, Marc and Malterre-Bathes, Charlotte, eds. (2016) *Housing Cairo – The Informal Response*. Berlin: Ruby Press. Whilst the notion of the state as 'the guardian of the public good' may be idealistic and one must account for the particularities of the context, including corruption and institutional weakness, the fact remains that the state plays a crucial role in upholding civic order.

13 For a review of the Cairo Downtown Passages project, see Nagati, Omar and Stryker, Beth (2016) "Cairo Downtown Passages: A Framework for Urban Regeneration", in Stryker, Beth and Nagati, Omar, eds., *Creative Cities: Re-framing Downtown Cairo* [online] Available from www.issuu.com/clustercairo/docs/creative_cities_reframing_downtown_ , 176-187.

14 Nagati and Stryker, *Street Vendors op cit.*

15 The most notable example of this is the renovation of Al-Alfi Bey passageway in downtown Cairo, not far from the CDP interventions.

16 Kodak Passageway is widely celebrated across a range of media outlets, including the @DowntownCairo social media pages, which are affiliated to the Ismaelia for Real Estate Development company.

17 As well as Al-Alfi Bey passageway, these include Al-Shawarbi and Saray al-Azbakiya passageways, amongst others in progress.

Omar Nagati

Claire Doherty (Editor)

Omar Nagati is a practicing architect and urban planner, and the co-founder of CLUSTER, an urban design and research platform in downtown Cairo. He studied at UBC Vancouver and UC Berkeley, and adopts an interdisciplinary approach to urban history and design, focusing on empirical research and critical mapping of urban informality. He teaches part-time at the Urban Design Studio at the MSA University in Giza, and is currently a visiting professor at the University of Sheffield, UK. Nagati is co-author with Beth Stryker of *Archiving the City in Flux* (2013) and *Street Vendors and the Contestation of Public Space* (2017), and co-editor of *Learning from Cairo* (2013) and *Creative Cities: Reframing Downtown Cairo* (2016).

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Previously, Claire Doherty was Director at Arnolfini (2017-19) and was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering arts producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

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Where Strangers Meet

An international collection of essays on arts in the public realm.

The urbanist Richard Sennett has written that 'the public realm can simply be defined as a place where strangers meet'. As the number of us living in cities rises, the pressures on the shared spaces of a city will increase; the places in which our future relationships to one another are negotiated. This is particularly resonant for the British Council, an international organisation that brings people together from different cultures, countries and continents through arts, education, science and the English language. Building on its multifocal work in cities, the British Council commissioned a collection of essays to explore different perspectives on how artistic and cultural experiences affect individual and collective participation and action in the public realm.

For 80 years the British Council has worked in cities in over 100 countries worldwide. The British Council is now responding through research and programmes to the changing urban dynamics affecting citizens and institutions globally, including the impact of globalisation and technological and political change. Work in cities also forms part of our response to some of the world's current challenges including migration and security. This collection is intended to strengthen our global offer to collaborators and audiences by demonstrating how the power of the arts and creative exchange can be harnessed to make cities more open, dynamic, inclusive and fit for the future.

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