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# DESIGNING URBAN SECLUSION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The 2009 Roth-Symonds Lecture

Loïc Wacquant

It is an honor to have my work noted and engaged by scholars in architecture, and a pleasure to be invited to give this lecture.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is a *double pleasure* since I was raised in a European intellectual tradition with a very low disciplinary threshold, so I consider myself not so much a sociologist as a generic social scientist who happens to be employed in a sociology department. And I deem it a core component of my occupational duty to engage issues across disciplinary boundaries, as well as across the divide between scholarly and professional endeavors. Moreover, the topic of urban seclusion is one that lends itself well to these kinds of exchanges, from which both researchers and practitioners can benefit.

I propose to provide you with some intellectual stimulation by circling about an issue to which I have devoted over a decade of work, namely, changing forms of urban marginality in advanced societies – what I call *urban polarization from below*. I will do so by drawing on two of my recent books. The first, *Urban Outcasts*, dissects the devolution of the black American ghetto after the riots of the 1960s and compares it to the decline of the periphery of Western European cities in order to puzzle out the dynamics and experience of relegation in advanced society.<sup>2</sup> The second book, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, tracks the punitive policy, wedding restrictive “workfare” and expansive “prisonfare,” deployed by the state to impose insecure work and curb the disorders generated by the sudden implosion of the black ghetto on the U.S. side and the gradual decomposition of working-class territories on the European side and their supersession by a new regime of urban poverty I call “advanced marginality.”<sup>3</sup>

These two books are closely linked,<sup>4</sup> first, chronologically and topically (they form a sequel) and, second, conceptually: they both probe spatial confinement or *containment* [as *technique for managing problem categories and territories*, the topic of my lecture. I will approach it by first sketching a rudimentary framework for parsing out the use of space as a medium for social closure and control in the city. I will then apply this schema to present a compressed analysis of the divergent trajectories of the black American ghetto and the European working-class borough in the post-Fordist age anchored by the three spatially inflected concepts of ghetto, hyperghetto, and antighetto.

### Rudiments of Sociospatial Seclusion

To connect with the practice and concerns of architecture, let me first sketch a sort of *analytical tale*, a story of dimensions and mechanisms that will help us get a handle on the changing forms of urban inequality and marginality at century's dawn, and what they imply for the built environment and thus indirectly for your professional engagements and reflections. The deeper theoretical enigma that animates the empirical analysis of the concrete manifestations of marginality presented in *Urban Outcasts* and *Punishing the Poor* is *the deployment of space as a product and medium of power*. In this sense, ghetto, hyperghetto, and antighetto, as well as the prison, are four among many configurations of a generic process that we may call *sociospatial seclusion*. Let me first explicate this abstract concept and then locate ghettoization and its germane forms on the analytic grid that it anchors.

Sociospatial seclusion is the process whereby particular social categories and activities are corralled, hemmed in, and isolated in a reserved and restricted quadrant of physical and social space. The verb "to seclude," originating in 1451, comes from the Latin *secludere*, which means to shut off, to isolate, to confine.<sup>5</sup> Sociospatial seclusion can concern populations (e.g., bourgeois, migrants, religious sects), institutions (such as medical facilities, country clubs, sex shops), and activities (schooling, narcotics trafficking, or trash incineration), and it can be specified according to setting: *rural* sociospatial seclusion occurs in the countryside while *urban* sociospatial seclusion operates in and around the city – a milieu that I would characterize not so much by its "size, density, and heterogeneity," in classical Chicago school-style along with Louis Wirth,<sup>6</sup> as by the spatial accumulation and intense accretion of various forms of capital (economic, cultural, social, and symbolic) fostered by an administrative machinery – following the schemas of Pierre Bourdieu and Max Weber.<sup>7</sup>

In each of these settings, we can distribute forms of sociospatial seclusion along two basic dimensions. The first is the *level in the social hierarchy*, whether this hierarchy is based on class (market capacity), ethnicity (honor), or the prestige ranking of places – typically these are tightly correlated so that it does not fundamentally change the

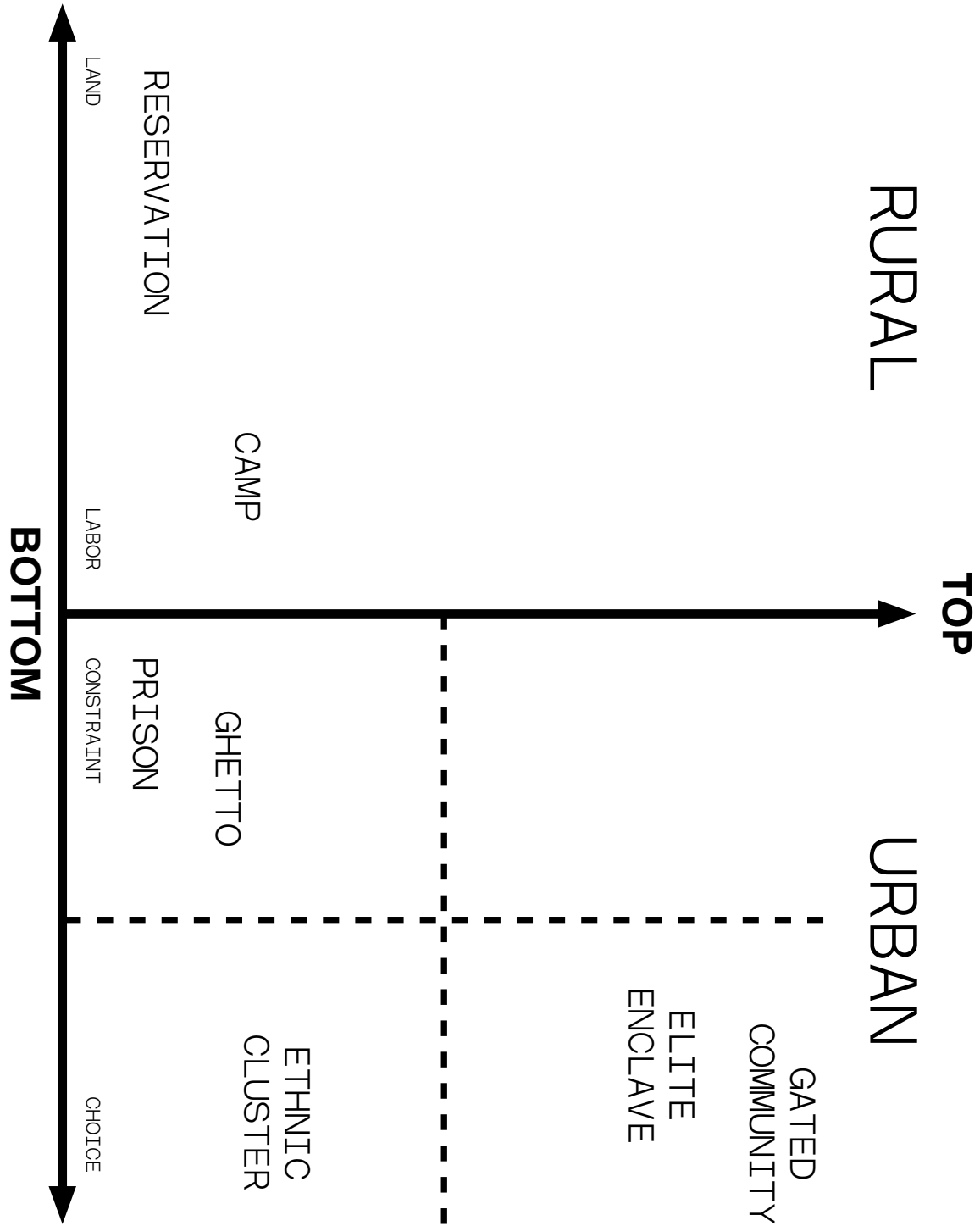
reasoning. We can treat this hierarchy as a continuum or, for clarity's sake here, dichotomize it into seclusion at the top and seclusion at the bottom of society. The second dimension is whether seclusion is *elective*, resulting from choice and a desire to participate in or to limit one's presence and peregrinations to a particular zone, or *imposed*, produced by constraint, as when people are forced by external powers to attach their activities, curtail their movement, or restrict their residence to a given location. In the first case sociospatial seclusion is driven and solidified by affinity from within, in the second case by hostility from without.

We can then distribute the ideal-typical forms of sociospatial seclusion in the two-dimensional space defined by those two axes (see Figure 1): elective versus forced, at the top or at the bottom. Looking at the top right-hand side quadrant, on the choice side and high in social and physical space, you find those people who choose isolation and seek privacy, who wish to be among the likes of themselves or to avoid debased populations and unsavory activities. This self-seclusion at the top fueled by in-group orientation is represented by elite enclaves or traditional upper-class districts in the city (such as those erected and fiercely defended by the Parisian higher bourgeoisie, as described by Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot)<sup>8</sup> and, in a hyperbolic form, by the "gated communities" that have mushroomed at the apex of the social and spatial hierarchy over the past two decades (where willful isolation is concretized by a physical boundary, a fence with a gate and guards providing surveillance and protection) to offer a haven of social homogeneity, safety from crime, and the comforts of membership in a privileged community and location.<sup>9</sup> So at the top you find noble activities exercised by powerful persons, endowed with the material and symbolic capital to exclude others and to self-seclude, while at the bottom are bunched up ignoble activities and tainted populations deprived of economic and cultural capital, the dispossessed and the dishonored.

The two major ethnoracial forms deployed to effect sociospatial seclusion at the foot of the urban hierarchy are the *ghetto* and the *ethnic cluster*, which must not be confounded as they are situated at the two ends of the continuum of constraint/choice and serve opposite functions. In his study of the "Fear of Touching" in sixteenth-century Venice

which retraces the invention of the first ghetto in history, Richard Sennett coins a beautiful expression that captures its purpose.<sup>10</sup> He calls the ghetto an *urban condom*, because its design allowed for the penetration of the Christian city by Jews (they were needed to supply a gamut of financial, trade, and cultural services pivotal to the success of the court) while isolating them to curtail intimate contact with them (the Jewish body was believed to be corrupt and corrupting, a vector of disease and sacrilege). The ghetto emerged as the sociospatial device permitting the joint economic exploitation and social ostracization of this outcast category: Jews fanned into the city to carry out their essential economic duties during the day, but returned at nightfall behind the locked gates of their reserved quarter under pain of severe punishment. When circulating outside the walls of their ghetto, they were required to wear a special garment (such as a yellow hat or a pointed cap) so that Christians could identify and avoid them. The same spatial device was reinvented and deployed four centuries later in the Northeast and Midwest of the United States when Southern blacks migrated into the expanding industrial cities that wanted their labor but did not wish them to mix with white residents, lest this bring about “social equality” between the so-called races and the odium of “miscegenation.”<sup>11</sup> In this case, skin color advertised membership in an inferior ethnoracial category to be shunned, and the sharply bounded Bronzeville served as both labor pool and prophylactic container of contaminating bodies.

During the interwar years, the Chicago school, which launched the sociological study of the city in the United States, made the cardinal mistake of lumping the residential and institutional clumps formed by recent waves of Irish, Italian, Polish, and German immigrants under an ill-defined notion of “ghetto” covering Jewish districts and the Black Belt. This is what I call *Wirth’s error*, after Louis Wirth, one of the founders of urban ecology, for two reasons. First, as Wirth himself unwittingly demonstrates in his classic book *The Ghetto*,<sup>12</sup> there never existed a Jewish ghetto in the United States, other than as a “state of mind,” that is, a subjective “we-feeling” and cultural orientation – which is very different from a concretized sociospatial contraption. Second and more crucially, contrary to the Black Belt, the

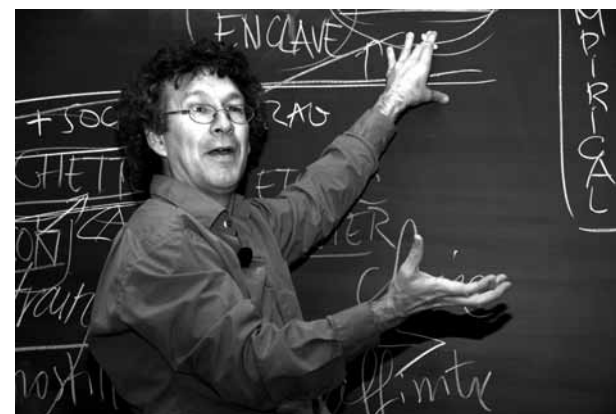


all-black enclave in which all African Americans regardless of class were forced to reside through a combination of legal suasion, street intimidation, and collective violence, these white *ethnic clusters* were mixed in composition, mobile in location, and contained only a minority of their respective migrant populations, who resided there mainly due to class constraint and cultural attraction.

In architectural terms, the (white) ethnic cluster can be represented by a *bridge*, whereas the (black) ghetto would be figured by a *wall*. One is a mechanism of flexible and temporary seclusion inside a porous perimeter that operates as an acclimation chamber and a way-station toward cultural assimilation and sociospatial integration into the broader society. The other is a means of inflexible and permanent seclusion inside an impermeable poke that works to isolate and dissimilate the population it harbors in perpetuity (that is, until it breaks down). In sum, the ethnic cluster and the ghetto have divergent structures and serve opposite functions; therefore it is a fundamental sociological error to lump them together. This is an error that continues to be routinely made by social scientists – peruse, for illustration, Zeitz’s historical account of “ethnic New York” after World War II.<sup>13</sup> A germane mistake is that which, substituting income deprivation for ethnoracial closure, assimilates the ghetto to “a neighborhood with a high concentration of poor people, regardless of their ethnic makeup.”<sup>14</sup> By this twisted definition, which became popular in policy-oriented research on urban poverty in the United States in the 1990s, poor rural counties and Native American reservations are gigantic ghettos, as would be the poorer districts of an all-white city; but the Venetian *gietto novo* and Chicago’s Bronzeville at its historic peak were not ghettos! This suffices to show the incoherence and incongruence of this definitional legerdemain.

To better understand the difference between ghetto and ethnic cluster, it is useful to plot into the diagram of forms of sociospatial seclusion at the bottom a third institution of *forced confinement: the prison*. The prison uses the physical restraint of walls and the force of guards to segregate convicts, that is, a discredited category whose rights and contacts with outsiders are amputated as sanction for violating societal standards of conduct. It is a kind

of *judicial ghetto* within which inmates develop a parallel society and culture of their own in response to forcible isolation and the deprivations it entails.<sup>15</sup> Conversely, we may think of the ghetto as an *ethnoracial prison* that confines a dishonored population into a special perimeter in which the latter is constrained to develop its separate life-sphere in reaction to spatial confinement and social banishment. As soon as we grasp the structural and functional kinship between ghetto and prison (indicated by their proximity on my analytic map of forms of sociospatial seclusion), we understand why the collapse of the former after the riots of the 1960s led to the growth of the latter as a substitute for corralling a population deemed dishonored, destitute, and dangerous.<sup>16</sup>



The ghetto is, by definition, an urban animal which emerges in the context of a dense settlement that thirsts for the economic value provided by the stigmatized category – otherwise the latter would simply be excluded or expelled, as Jews were periodically before the rise of urban principalities and black Americans were before the onset of Fordism. If the Roth-Symonds Lecture were a lecture series rather than a single address, I would spend a couple of sessions laying out forms of sociospatial seclusion in the rural environment, because there is much to learn also from that comparison. In the countryside, the major factor differentiating modalities of spatial enclosure is whether the subordinate population

must move to supply labor or be removed to release land they occupy. In cases where the dominant group does not wish to, or cannot, extract labor out of subalterns, but seeks to appropriate their territory, as in colonial encounters aimed at settlement, we often witness the emergence of a reservation, that is, a bounded and reserved tract, typically located in a remote and economically fallow area, governed through special legal and customary rules designed to regroup and immobilize that population. This is the story of Native Americans in this country: for a variety of demographic, cultural, and political reasons, they were not a suitable labor supply but they occupied precious land that was indispensable to the colonial project of agrarian expansion. Therefore sociospatial seclusion was wielded to remove them to restricted areas and neutralize the threats they presented.<sup>17</sup> As we move rightward along the axis land/labor, we find a range of intermediate constellations that arise to secure the labor power of subordinate populations while preventing them from coming into the city, because full urbanization would raise the cost of their reproduction and also generate pressures toward mixing (which, in turn, would undermine ethnoracial purity and hierarchy). In such scenarios, you get a *camp*, of which there are two major types: the *labor camp* for migrant workers (as well as criminal convicts and political prisoners) and the *refugee camp* for politically displaced people.<sup>18</sup>

In a nutshell, the virtue of the schema sketched here is that it allows us to bring the various forms of sociospatial seclusion into a single analytical framework and to theorize them together, instead of treating them separately, as if they belonged to different domains (rural studies, urban sociology, criminology, and the anthropology of class and ethnicity) and obeyed distinct logics. Much is lost by the conventional compartmentalization of research on the ways space is deployed to define and confine categories and activities. The normal urban sociologist pays no attention to the countryside communities from which city migrants come and loses the analytical mileage one gets by tracking similar sociospatial processes of concentration, separation, and assignation operating in different environments. Similarly, students of upper-class districts and gated communities are oblivious to ghettos and prisons; they construe the formation of enclaves of the privileged as a process unto

itself, disconnected from the fate of dispossessed and dishonored categories of people trapped at the bottom of social and physical space when in reality they are directly linked (the fall of the black ghetto, and the rampant racial fear it unleashed, is an indirect cause of the rise of the gated community).<sup>19</sup> Scholars who investigate migration focus on ethnic clusters – in the United States, that means students of European, Latino, and Asian migrant streams – and leave to historians of African American urbanization the study of the ghetto (there are signal exceptions, such as the study of the contrasted trajectories of blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh during the first half of the century by Bodnar et al. (1983) but they are far and few between).<sup>20</sup> Lastly, criminologists and penologists who investigate incarceration never relate the changing makeup and role of prison to the external forms of coerced spatial containment visited upon the primary clientele of carceral institutions, while social scientists who study the black ghetto do not scrutinize the prison, even though the breakup of the former is a major cause behind the booming expansion of the latter as they became coupled by a threefold relation of functional surrogacy, structural continuity, and cultural syncretism.<sup>21</sup>

The category of sociospatial seclusion can serve, not only to compare and contrast the spatial experiences of different populations at different levels in the social structure, but also to map how the same population can be corralled by a combination of spatial contraptions across time. For instance, you can plug South Africa into this diagram and connect the gamut of sociospatial forms flung to solidify racial domination and class exploitation across the lifespan of the South African Republic. At the left end of the spectrum, you would find the institutionalization of the reserves inherited from the colonial era under the regime of “Segregation” (1910-1948) and later the Bantustans, the puppet black republics invented by the white rulers in 1958 to “externalize” the citizenship of blacks. Closer to the middle of the diagram, you would locate the mining compounds, a variant of the labor camp that served to recruit and fix rotating migrant labor for the benefit of the extractive industries during and after the “mineral boom.” Together, reservation and mining camp were supposed to arrest urbanization but they failed, so that blacks settled en masse inside

cities where they were then relegated in townships (South Africa's version of the ghetto), in which they gradually mustered the resources to challenge and eventually overturn white rule. Meanwhile, at the top of the economic, racial, and urban structure, the fortified elite enclaves and assorted gated communities of the upper class prospered, which were exclusively white under apartheid before turning partly black after 1994.<sup>22</sup>

South Africa is a particularly rich terrain on which to tackle issues of sociospatial seclusion because it is a society that has pushed the *spatialization of domination* to its extreme. During the apartheid era in particular, the state created a vast bureaucratic machinery and intricate set of rules designed to enforce a tight correspondence between symbolic space (the rigid division of society into a hierarchy of mutually exclusive official ethnoracial categories), social space (the allocation of efficient resources to these categories), and physical space (the authoritative distribution of populations in both cities and rural areas). In that regard, it contrasts with Brazil, where blurring characterizes both ethnoracial division and its projection onto space. This points to the need for comparative studies investigating what combinations of forms of sociospatial seclusion develop in what kinds of society and why.

Structure, Functions,  
and Fate of America's Ghetto

Let us now consider the ghetto as a modality of sociospatial seclusion and the destiny of the black American ghetto after the ebbing of the Civil Rights Movement as a historical puzzle. To fabricate a ghetto requires assembling four structural elements. The first is *stigma*: a ghetto arises in the course of dealing with a population which is tarnished, that is, defiled and defiling in the eyes of the dominant category, such that intimate contact with it must be restricted if not forbidden. For Jews in the ghettos of Renaissance Europe, the stigma was ethnoreligious, linked to the widespread Christian belief that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ, carriers of contagious diseases, and vectors of immorality and heresy.<sup>23</sup> For African Americans in the

industrial metropolis during the Fordist age between 1910 and 1970, it was the taint associated with slavery, elaborated by everyday, religious, and pseudo-scientific creeds about the alleged inferiority and even bestiality of blacks.<sup>24</sup> The second building block of the ghetto is *constraint*: we have seen that populations can become spatially concentrated not only as a result of external imposition but also out of affinity, through elective self-seclusion based on class, culture, or lifestyle. We must not confound these two scenarios. To repeat, in early twentieth-century America the so-called white ethnics congregated loosely and temporarily in mixed ethnic clusters (Little Italy, Little Ireland, Germantown, etc.) born of a combination of immigrant experience, class position, and cultural sympathy; but they were never uniformly forced to reside in a fixed and reserved territory where only their co-ethnics lived, as urban African Americans were after the 1910s.<sup>25</sup>

The third constituent of the ghetto, precisely, is *spatial assignation*: a ghetto emerges when a stigmatized people comes to dwell in a bounded area to which it is assigned by force and which is in turn assigned to it, so that you have a two-way implication of category and territory leading to ethnic homogeneity and exclusivity. This points to the fourth and final ingredient making up the ghetto, namely, *institutional parallelism*. As the tainted population is pressured to reside exclusively in its assigned district, from which it cannot escape, it develops a web of institutions that duplicate and substitute for the institutions of the broader society from which it is rejected. Thus Jews in early modern Italy, being compelled to live in a reserved Jewish quarter (until then they had largely chosen to reside separately) elaborated a dense array of cultural, economic, and benevolent organizations as well as forged a common identity overriding their inherited differences of nationality, geography, and language. In effect, they created a self-contained "Jewish city within the Christian city,"<sup>26</sup> just as African Americans migrating from the rural south into the Fordist metropolis in the interwar years constructed a "black city within the white" to serve their collective needs left unmet due to hardening white exclusion. You will find a vivid portrait of the rise and consolidation of this *Black Metropolis*, complete with its own churches and media, lodges and places



of entertainment, professional services and political outfits, businesses and underground economy, in the master-book by that title published in 1945 by St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton – one of the top ten tomes of world social science and a must-read for any serious student of the city.<sup>27</sup>

This clues us to the two antinomic roles played by the ghetto at the two ends of the relationship of ethnoracial domination it materializes, which historians of the Jewish diaspora in Europe, anthropologists of caste regimes in Asia and Africa, and sociologists of the black experience in industrial America have documented but, paradoxically, failed to realize and thematize. One readily discerns that, from the standpoint of the ruling category, a ghetto is *an implement for domination* since it sharply curtails the life space and life chances of the secluded category. But, and this is just as important, grasped from below and within, the ghetto is a sturdy *sociospatial shield*, a protective buffer that creates a distinctive *Lebenswelt* within which the subordinate can breathe away from direct contact with the dominant.<sup>28</sup> Thus from the standpoint of Jews in the early modern European city, from the standpoint of African Americans in the Fordist metropolis, being ghettoized gave them a separate and protected sphere of their own that minimized face-to-face interaction and friction with the dominant, and it enabled them to accumulate economic capital, to evolve distinctive species of cultural capital, and to accrete the social capital needed to organize and eventually challenge the stigma they bore and the seclusion they suffered. The potency of the ghetto as a *scaffold of social cohesion and engine of cultural production* allows its residents to invert the valence of the negative symbolic capital attached to them as a collective – as manifested by the irruption of the slogan “Black is Beautiful,” concurrently with the wave of riots of the 1960s – and eventually to assail the very sociospatial contraption that defines and confines them.

In a book forthcoming in English as *The Two Faces of the Ghetto* (which those of you fluent in German can read under the more evocative title *Das Janusgesich des Ghettos*), I make the point that ghettos have been envisaged through a narrow moral prism summed up by the falsely self-evident equation: I study racial domination = I am against racism = the objects I study are bad.<sup>29</sup> As a modality of racial

domination, ghettos offend our moral sensibilities insofar as they violate the sacrosanct principles of individual equality and dignity for all. As a result, they are consistently pictured as nefarious constellations with negative import that you want to condemn, prevent from arising, or work to undermine. But the generous moral sentiment that fuels this indignation is a serious obstacle to sociological analysis. (This is a particular application of the general principle of social scientific reasoning that my mentor and friend Pierre Bourdieu was fond of stressing: “Good sentiments make for bad sociology.”)



The *prosecutorial approach* commonly adopted by social analysts has prevented them from recognizing that a ghetto is a two-faced contraption: it is *at once and inseparably* an instrument of subordination *and* a conduit for protection, unification, and cohesion. We must be alert to the *hidden and counterintuitive benefits of ghettoization*, which offers a subordinate ethnoracial category a vehicle for self-organization and mobilization and thence allows them to leverage their “power from below.” This is why ghettos are structurally unstable formations that have a limited shelf-life (outside of estate-based social formations): they plant and grow the seeds of their own destruction by strengthening the subordinate and anchoring salient and clearcut ethnoracial boundaries that can be attacked – whereas other configurations of ethnoracial domination, such as blurred

discrimination and dispersed segregation of the kind experienced by postcolonial migrants in Western Europe or dark-skinned Brazilians, for instance, make it harder for a dishonored and dispossessed population to come together as a group and to challenge their marginalization.

What happened to the black American ghetto after the upheavals of the 1960s? If you understand that a ghetto is not just a segregated place, a district of dilapidated housing and social dereliction, a “bad” neighborhood containing all manners of social pathologies, among them vice and violence (what it can become after it crashes); if you understand that it is a peculiar sociospatial contraption geared to effecting economic exploitation and social ostracization, then you can track the causes of the brutal implosion of America’s “Bronzeville” after the peaking of the Civil Rights Movement. The ghetto came apart and crumbled onto itself, as it were, under the press of three converging forces. The first is *economic*: it is the shift away from a Fordist industrial economy, anchored by factory production located inside the city and requiring large pools of unskilled labor, to a decentralized service-based economy in which automation, global relocation, and renewed lower-class immigration made urban black workers redundant. The second factor is *demographic and political*: it is what I call the Great white migration. Historians have produced excellent books on the Great black migration from the South to the northern city between the two World Wars,<sup>30</sup> but we are still awaiting a comprehensive account of the massive white exodus to the suburbs in reaction to black entry and its reverberating impact on American society, culture, and politics.<sup>31</sup>

In the 1960s and 1970s, whites fled by the millions to recreate in the suburbs the social and spatial distance with southern blacks streaming into the metropolis. This huge population transfer moved the electoral center of gravity of the country from the central cities to the suburbs, thereby reducing the political pull of an inner-city population already marginalized in the economic realm. It also caused the fiscal crisis of cities of the 1970s that was used by political elites as pretext to shrink programs for the poor and reorient urban policy toward the provision of corporate services and middle-class amenities. The third force that broke the ghetto apart is successful *black mobilization*

against white rule, in the form of the Civil Rights Movement and its radical offshoot, the Black Power Movement, which turned to challenging frontally sociospatial seclusion and economic disparity in the metropolis.

These three factors converged to cause the implosion of the ghetto, which gave way to a *dual constellation composed of the hyperghetto and satellite middle-class black neighborhoods*. The mass flight of whites to the suburbs created the vacancies that enabled the African-American middle class to migrate to, and grow in, segregated districts adjacent to the historic ghetto, separate from both whites and from the black lower class trapped in the collapsing Bronzeville. The 1970s thus initiated a coupled process of social differentiation and spatial separation of the black population, such that sociospatial seclusion of African Americans in the city continued, but through a bifurcated contraption articulating two distinct urban containers: the *hyperghetto* for the precarious factions of the working class and segregated neighborhoods physically and socially separate from the hyperghetto for the middle and upper classes.

Three properties distinguish the *fin de siècle* hyperghetto from the communal ghetto that rose in the 1910s, blossomed around 1950, and crashed in the late 1960s. First, the hyperghetto lacks an economic function inasmuch as the labor power it contains has been rendered supernumerary. Second, economic redundancy has led to social de-differentiation and the evaporation of the black bourgeoisie, such that the hyperghetto is doubly segregated by race and class. Third and consequently, it has been stripped of the suite of ingrown institutions that used to buffer against domination and supply the framework of everyday life. The communal institutions of the historic Bronzeville have been replaced by the social control bureaucracies of the state: welfare turned into workfare, public schools debased to the rank of custodial institutions, and aggressive police, punitive courts, and an intrusive carceral system and its extensions, such as parole agents.<sup>32</sup> In short, the hyperghetto is a sociospatial contraption geared to naked exclusion that splinters the black community along class lines and offers none of the collective protections and side-benefits of ghettoization.

European Seclusion:  
From Working-Class Borough to Antighetto

Let us now cross the Atlantic and track the trajectory of the declining periphery of the Western European city after the mid-1970s. To start with, these working-class territories have been commonly portrayed – and denigrated – as “immigrant ghettos” in the media and policy debate, when in reality they are mixed areas in terms of both occupation and ethnicity.<sup>33</sup> Aside from a few local exceptions, France’s lower-class *banlieues* contain populations that are majority French and blend residents coming from one dozen to five dozen nationalities. Historically, they have been anchored by factory employment and characterized by the tight integration of the world of wage work, municipal services, and blue-collar neighborhood and family life. But this tight fit between shopfloor, local state, and community came unglued under the press of deindustrialization and mass joblessness, the universalization of schooling as a mode of access to valued social positions, and changes in state policies.

Let me focus on state policy with regard to low-income housing, since this is a question of interest to architects and urban planners. Put schematically, over the past three decades, Western European governments have moved from financing the *building* of social housing destined for the working class to providing subsidies for individual *households* to help them move into and up the single-home market. This has enabled lower-middle-class families to exit the large estates of the public sector and migrate into individual houses in private tracts. This “creaming” of the materially stable households has left behind in the projects only working-class families just when these were being undermined by a dramatic rise in unemployment and the relentless spread of insecure jobs. The result has been the physical deterioration, economic pauperization, and public defamation of the urban periphery now universally perceived as urban hellholes in which only the rejects of society would tolerate living.<sup>34</sup>

The question then arises: are these impoverished and stigmatized working-class territories evolving in ways that make them ghettos or ghetto-like? Having forged a rigorous analytic characterization of what a ghetto is, we can provide a rigorous answer. If we had not specified conceptually what

we mean by the term, the question would be either meaningless or irresolvable. Relatedly, if you cling to the inchoate folk notion current in everyday life, the media, and large sectors of research, the woolly and constantly shifting ordinary perception of the ghetto as just a “bad neighborhood,” or a segregated, poor, violent, or decrepit district you would rather not enter and dwell in, then you can find ghettos almost anywhere. And ghettos disappear as quickly as they appear depending on a host of conjunctural factors like crime trends and the unemployment rate! But then, under any of these definitions, the two canonical cases of the ghetto, the ghettos of sixteenth-century Venice, Florence, or Rome, and the Bronzeville blossoming in mid-twentieth-century Chicago, Detroit, or New York were not ghettos! So has the working-class periphery of Western European cities drifted in the direction of the ghetto? My answer to this query is firmly and unequivocally *negative*. I will direct you to *Urban Outcasts* for the empirical details. Here I want to highlight four trends that show that the disparaged districts of the European metropolis have travelled in the opposite direction, so that we may say that they are turning into *antighettos* – if we want to keep that language, which I do not find apposite or useful.

First, ghettoization means that members of a bounded category are being forced to live in a separate space reserved for them, which translates mechanically into rising *ethnic homogeneity*. But the derelict districts of the Parisian Red Belt and kindred *banlieues* of France have become less homogeneous on this count over the past two decades. When I carried out fieldwork in the city of La Courneuve in 1991, not far from Charles de Gaulle airport, the population dwelling in its defamed housing project of Les Quatre mille came from twenty-six nationalities; when I went back to that *cit * to discuss my book with local activists in 2006, I found out that the estate now hosts some sixty-two nationalities.

A second indicator of ghettoization is *rising organizational density*: a stigmatized category assigned to a reserved enclave will fill it with institutions of its own, as recorded in the growth and increased differentiation of informal and formal organizations. But working-class territories across Western Europe, from the British Midlands to the German Ruhr to the *quartieri degradati* of northern Italian

cities, have witnessed the exact opposite: the decline and death of local organizations, particularly those serving for succor of the industrial working class in both the realms of work and neighboring. More often than not, the associations now present in these districts are direct or indirect offshoots of the state, namely, public bureaucracies and community agencies relying on state monies.

Thirdly, I pointed out earlier that the ghetto is a *cultural fusion machine* that fosters the emergence of a shared idiom of identification and claims-making that encompasses the various components of the stigmatized population. Thus ghettoization eroded the distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardic in the case of Jews, and it similarly melted the differences between Negroes and mulattos who had aspired to be recognized as a separate category until the 1920s in the case of African Americans. Again, the declining working-class territories of Western Europe diverge from this schema in their abject failure to secrete a unified identity for their residents. For thirty years now, politicians and journalists have announced that “the ghetto” has arrived in France and denounced, in fearful terms, the alleged “Americanization” of the city, but in reality the residents of the *banlieues* remain deeply divided along lines of class, nationality, ethnicity (inside of nationality), age, and generation. One illustration: in La Courneuve, three decades ago the tenants of Les Quatre mille were granted free use of a city plot to build a mosque. Yet the various population strands that practice the Muslim faith – Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, Turks, a sprinkling of Chinese, and growing numbers of migrants from eastern Africa – have proved incapable of reaching a minimal agreement to get the project off the ground because they each wish to run their separate place of worship. The fear that Islam would provide a common world-view and idiom capable of unifying postcolonial migrants in the French *banlieues*, the British “sink estates,” the German *Problemquartier*, etc., has turned out to be groundless. The only symbolic marker that residents of the French *banlieues* share is the stigma of residing in a district of dereliction.

A fourth characteristic of the ghetto is that its *boundaries are impassable*, as it aims to confine all the members of the targeted category, irrespective of their income

and social standing. The Jewish ghettos of pre-revolutionary Europe, such as those of Frankfurt and Prague, held rich and poor Jews together; Chicago’s Bronzeville locked within its perimeter all black classes, from the destitute to the wealthy, the criminal to the respectable, even as these gravitated toward separate tracts inside the Black Belt. Not so in the European urban periphery, where the families of post-colonial migrants who move up the class structure – through the school system, petty entrepreneurship, wage employment (often in the public sector), or marital unions – immediately move out of their dispossessed neighborhoods. And, as with Latinos and the so-called European ethnics in the United States, upward social mobility leads to spatial dispersion and social integration. Algerians used to dominate Les Quatre mille nord, the clump of the estate of La Courneuve I observed in 1991; twenty years later, they have nearly vanished from that project (to be replaced by families of East African and Asian origins). They and their children have migrated to similar projects in the Paris Red Belt or moved up the class structure and scattered across urban space, mixing with “white” French families of similar class level. There is a sizable petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie of North African origins in France – sometimes labeled *beurgeoisie* – but there exists nowhere any identifiable middle-class *beur* districts.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, the declining lower-class boroughs of the European metropolis are becoming more heterogeneous ethnically and less dense organizationally; their boundaries are porous and they have failed to forge a shared cultural identity. In all four respects, they are obeying a sociospatial dynamic exactly opposite to that producing a ghetto. This is why I call them *anti-ghettos*, by way of provocation directed at the advocates of the fashionable thesis of the “Americanization” of the European city. Upon close examination, the language of ghettoization turns out to be fundamentally inadequate to describe urban seclusion in Western Europe at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

\*

Let me now, by way of conclusion, come to the final element in the equation of urban seclusion. To understand the logic

of relegation in the American and the European metropolis, we must specify the criteria whereby populations are sorted out and thrust down to the bottom of the stratified system of places that compose the city. In the United States, relegation to the ghetto is determined by ethnicity – that is, by that peculiar variant of *denegated ethnicity* commonly called “race” – later modulated by class (with the emergence of the duet formed by the hyperghetto and the segregated black middle-class satellite), and distinctively intensified by the state through its economic, welfare, education, housing and health policies, all of which work to deepen urban disparities and entrench poverty. We can sum up this dynamic by the algebraic formula:  $(E > C) \times S$  which reads “socio-spatial seclusion is determined by a combination wherein ethnicity trumps class and is amplified by the state.” By contrast, in Western Europe, class precedes ethnicity in determining relegation, and marginalization is strongly cushioned and partly mitigated by the state, through a combination of universalist social protection and targeted interventions aimed at checking urban devolution, giving us the algebraic formula:  $(C > E) \div S$ .

This clarifies the first word in the title of my lecture: “Designing Urban Seclusion in the Twenty-First Century.” On both sides of the Atlantic, it turns out that the grand designer of urban marginality, by omission or commission, is the state. The state is the agency that sets the parameters according to which the distribution of people, resources, and activities is effected across the two-by-two space described by the diagram of socio-spatial seclusion. Through its various programs, from urban planning, economic regulation, fiscal policy, and infrastructural investment to the spatially differentiated provision of core public goods such as housing, education, health, welfare, and policing, the state determines the extent of the distance between the top and the bottom of the urban order; the vehicles, pathways, and ease with which that distance may be travelled; and what forms of socio-spatial seclusion take root and grow (whether deprived and defamed categories are hemmed in a ghetto, an ethnic cluster, or a slum; how big the prison system is; how closed and isolated upper-class districts are, etc.). Through its structure and policies, patterned actions and inactions, the Leviathan determines the scope, spread,

and intensity of marginality in the city. This implies that, insofar as they collaborate in shaping the built environment, urban planners and architects partake in the production of the space of socio-spatial relegation. And they will grow more implicated in the design of urban seclusion as advanced societies increasingly rely on spatial “solutions” to festering social problems in the dualizing metropolis.<sup>36</sup>

1  
This is an abridged and revised version of the sixth Roth-Symonds Lecture and keynote address to the Symposium on Spatial Illiteracies, delivered at the Yale School of Architecture on March 27, 2009. I have cut out many illustrative examples and analytic digressions, but preserved the oral cast of the talk. I would like to thank Iben Falconer and Olga Pantelidou for kindly serving as my sherpas during my brief trek in the land of Yale architecture, Jack Brough for his patient assistance in the preparation of this text, and Megan Comfort and Zach Levenson for late but astute comments that helped to clarify it.

2  
Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008).

3  
Loïc Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2009).

4  
For a discussion of the practical back-drop and theoretical aims of these two books, see the recapitulation of their analytic linkages in Loïc Wacquant, “The Body, the Ghetto and the Penal State,” *Qualitative Sociology* 32, no. 1 (March 2009): 101-29.

5  
*The Oxford English Dictionary* (second edition, 1989) attributes six meanings to the verb “to seclude”; the first two fit my purpose well: “To shut apart, to enclose or confine so as to prevent access or influence from without. Also, to enclose or confine (a material thing) in a separate place”; “In wider sense: To remove or guard from public view; to withdraw from opportunities of social intercourse.”

The semantic reach of the term extends to include banishment and expulsion. In medieval middle English, to seclude also meant to debar, to exclude from a privilege or dignity.

6  
Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology* 14 (1938): 1-24. Reprinted in Louis Wirth, *On Cities and Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 60-83.

7  
Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J.G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-58. Max Weber, *The City* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1958). Originally published in German in 1921.

8  
Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot, *Les Ghettoes du Goth: Comment la bourgeoisie défend ses espaces* (Paris: Seuil, 2007).

9  
Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1999); Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy, ed., *Gated Communities: International Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

10  
Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994).

11  
Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto – Negro New York, 1890-1930*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

Kimberley L. Phillips, *Alabama North: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class Activism in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

12

Louis Wirth, *The Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928).

13

Joshua M. Zeitz, *White Ethnic New York: Jews, Catholics, and the Shaping of Post-war Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

14

Mario Small, *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

15

The analogy rises to the level of homology when one recalls that the prison was invented at the end of the sixteenth century not as a device for fighting crime but as a tool to curb urban marginality and to instill the work ethic to the "sturdy beggars" threatening public order and work relations in the emerging capitalist city. See Pieter Spierenburg, *The Prison Experience: Disciplinary Institutions and their Inmates in Early Modern Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

16

Loïc Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis: When Ghetto and Prison Meet and Mesh," *Punishment & Society* 3, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 95-133; Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*, Chapter 6.

17

Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). This is the case also of the Kanak natives in New Caledonia, a French colony island in the South Pacific where I carried out my first sociological investigations in the 1980s, which is unique in the former French empire in that it developed a dual system of law and property materialized by reservations that exist to this day. See Claude Liauzu, ed., *Dictionnaire de la colonisation française* (Paris: Larousse, 2007).

18

There is much to learn on this front from the provocative inquiries of anthropolo-

gist Michel Agier who has pursued the dynamics of marginalization by studying the "undoing" of the city in situations ranging from declining lower-class districts to ghettos to camps of global refugees and internally displaced people on three continents. See Michel Agier, *L'Invention de la ville: Banlieues, townships, invasions et favelas* (Paris: Archives Contemporaines, 1999). Agier, *Gérer les indésirables: Des camps de réfugiés au gouvernement humanitaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2008).

19

In addition, most studies of gated communities have been undertaken by urban planners and anthropologists, two disciplines whose methodological proclivities cause them to isolate their objects from macrostructures of power.

20

John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983).

21

Wacquant, "Deadly Symbiosis."

22

Martin J. Murray, *Taming the Disorderly City: The Spatial Landscape of Johannesburg After Apartheid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); A.J. Christopher, *The Atlas of Changing South Africa* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

23

Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

24

Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

25

Thomas Lee Philpott, *The Slum and the Ghetto: Immigrants, Blacks, and Reformers in Chicago, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). Stanley Lieberman, *A Piece of the Pie: Blacks and White Immigrants Since 1880* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

26

Riccardo Calimani, *The Ghetto of Venice: A History* (New York: M. Evans and Co, 1987).

27

St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Originally published in 1945.

28

Loïc Wacquant, "Ghetto" in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (London: Pergamon Press, 2004).

29

Loïc Wacquant, *Das Janusgesichte des Ghettos und andere Essays*, "Baumwelt Fundamente" Series (Basel and Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag, 2006).

30

See, for instance, Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Alferdteen Harrison, ed., *Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South* (Indianola, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1992); James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

31

Key constituents of conservative politics after the 1970s in both suburb and city, such as the revolt against taxation, the thrust to privatize public services, and the demand for school vouchers, were fashioned in the crucible of "white flight" as a powerful sociospatial movement intent to counter and even reverse the gains of the Civil Rights Movement. See Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

32

Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor*.

33

See Jean-Marc Stébé, *La Crise des banlieues: Sociologie des quartiers sensibles*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007) for France, and Sako Musterd, Alan Murie, and Christian Kesteloot, eds., *Neighbourhoods of Poverty: Urban Social Exclusion and Integration in Comparison* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), for a European panorama.

34

Loïc Wacquant, "Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality," *Thesis Eleven* 91 (November 2007): 66-77.

35

Catherine Wihtol de Wenden and Rémy Leveau, *La Bourgeoisie* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2007). Derived from the inversion of the word *arabe* in street language, the term *beur* is often used in everyday life and in public debate to designate French people of Maghrebine origins (although many such persons find it offensive and reject it).

36

For a stimulative illustration, read Fairbanks's account of the workings of the informal economy of recovery houses for addicts and alcoholics in inner-city Philadelphia as a "new mode of containment that shuffles and churns the dispossessed in areas of spatially concentrated poverty" in the post-welfare era of neoliberal devolution. Robert P. Fairbanks, *How It Works: Recovering Citizens in Post-Welfare Philadelphia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 268.

002	<u>Letter from the Editors</u>	121	<u>NaJa &amp; deOstos: Nannette Jackowski and Ricardo de Ostos</u> Chaoplasmatic Infrastructure: Unpopular Sustainability
004	<u>Marcel Vellinga</u> Marked Off: On Taboos in Architecture		
016	<u>Greg Lynn</u> Interview	128	<u>Robert A.M. Stern</u> Interview
019	<u>Neri Oxman</u> Per Formative: Toward a Post-Formal Paradigm in Architecture	131	<u>Jorge Otero-Pailos</u> Ritual Cleaning
031	<u>Alicia Imperiale</u> Organic Italy? The Troubling Case of Rinaldo Semino	139	<u>Edward Eigen</u> <i>Instruire/Détruire</i> : Mary Stuart, Catholic Modernism, and the Breton Cult of Monuments
044	<u>Peter Eisenman</u> Interview	153	<u>Michelangelo Sabatino</u> Remoteness and Presentness: The Primitive in Modernist Architecture
047	<u>DOGMA: Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara</u> Stop City	160	<u>Sunil Bald</u> Interview
054	<u>Keith Krumwiede</u> [A]Typical Plan[s]	164	<u>Loïc Wacquant</u> Designing Urban Seclusion in the Twenty-First Century: The 2009 Roth-Symonds Lecture
062	<u>Peggy Deamer</u> Interview		
065	<u>Arindam Dutta</u> On the Way to the Thousand-Pillared Mandapam: Travelogue on the Monuments of an Agrarian Insurgency	176	<u>Glen Cummings</u> DON'Ts
081	<u>Taryn Simon</u> Selections from "An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar"	191	<u>Pamela Karimi</u> Westoxification
090	<u>Mario Gooden</u> _orm is a Four-Letter Word (That Starts with "F")	200	<u>Erika Naginski</u> Architecture at the Threshold
106	<u>Thomas H. Beeby</u> Interview	208	<u>Contributors &amp; Credits</u>
109	<u>Thomas de Monchaux</u> Sordid, Fashionable, Brutal, Poetic, Domestic, Sybaritic, Comfortable: Seven Notes on Style	210	<u>Acknowledgments</u>

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