

Columbia University GSAPP  
Spring 2014 – Advanced Studio VI  
M, W & F (2:00-6:00pm)  
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## TAHRIR AS BREAK

Between a City and a Square—Spaces of power.



*Can the new be inscribed without a seed in the past?*

Cairo Today: a state (military) that continues to send the same message since February 12, 2011: “Shut up!”

If the 25th of January is a “revolutionary destructive moment” in Egypt’s History, is it a total break? Is it a tabula rasa? Can the present be inscribed without a reference to the past? And can it move beyond a certain moment in time?

This research wishes to move beyond the square, to examine the larger context that led to the Tahrir square moment. It seeks to explore the urban realities that have informed the on-going battle of power and struggle between a state and its people.

Through the issue of the “right to the City” borrowing Henri Lefebvre’s term, this Design studio aims to take advantage of the current condition of fluidity and volatility in the city, investigating emerging patterns (of power) and how can it be translated into new possible futures.

## **Objective:**

*The studio research* explores 'sites of contestation' by inventing specific means of representation. The students will identify, take account and define urban manifestations of power and control—as the premise of where it all happens. And how the urban realities have informed the on-going Arab uprisings. The research will focus on the centrality of physical space, as the medium where debates, negotiations, conflicts and power struggles within a society are played out.

We will explore how these spatial activities reveal and camouflage pre-existing socio-political conditions. Furthermore, in order to further problematize the urban spaces and processes, the studio will engage the issue at two opposing (micro and macro) urban scales and study their roles in shaping the current and present moment: a city; Cairo and a square; Tahrir.

## **Macro Analysis: The City**

Comparative research will be explored across two cities—Cairo and Istanbul. Cairo is a city so massive in size and population that it had to turn itself inside out; it is divided between the center and periphery, between people and the state; both co-existing in proximity and distance. Conversely, Istanbul serves as an example of a city that is still negotiating its future under the overwhelming gaze of its past. The students will comparatively analyze the inherent commonalities and differences between sites of contestation in Cairo and Istanbul. In both cases, the study will trace the social, cultural and political conditions that led to the present moment, in order to devise strategies to move forward.

## **Micro Analysis: The Square**

Shifting from one place to the other, spaces of inclusion are being systematically converted into spaces of exclusion. We will analyze strategies—Organizational, Representational and Material—that are defining our contemporary understanding of boundaries within the city. Just as street culture, over the past three years, has helped us develop a new understanding of Cairo, massive urban renewal projects have threatened access to public space in Istanbul. This studio will investigate how the complexity behind construction and/or reconstruction of urban infrastructure facilitated hegemony and/or resistance.

## **Intervention: The Architecture**

Each group or student will use the discoveries from these two scales to develop site(s) of contestation in Cairo. The interventions will vary in scale and scope, based on the conflicts framed through their research. The sites will be carefully reconstructed based on their specific network of stakeholders. These interventions will bring to the fore, the

crucial sites where one gains or loses access to the city. The students will articulate their arguments by identifying ways through which their architecture will empower a particular set of actors.

### **Studio Travel:**

The studio will travel to Cairo and Istanbul for a week of seminars and panel discussions organized around the studio theme. An international panel of invited speakers will assemble in Istanbul in collaboration with Columbia University Studio X. The trip to Istanbul will occur March 8<sup>th</sup>—11<sup>th</sup>. Following the Istanbul seminars, all students will travel to Cairo, from March 11<sup>th</sup>—15<sup>th</sup>. The travel to Cairo will allow for the site visit as well as meetings with local officials, architects and activists. *To enroll in the studio, students must check with their embassy to determine their application process and schedule for traveling to Egypt and Turkey.*

### **Schedule: In addition to the Review dates listed below, pin-ups will be held every Monday from 2-6pm**

Project 01A: Micro/Macro Research (10%)

*(Review on February 17th; 3 weeks)*

Research of macro-urbanism and micro- networks will be conducted on a group basis. Working with a list of protest/demonstration events in urban spaces, a quick recount of some recent non-Arab revolutions that are inexorably tied with a physical urban locations/artifacts as well? The wall in Berlin, The square in Tiananmen square, The shipyard in Gdansk etc. each student will analyze how social networks navigated the public spaces of two spaces: the City and the Square.

Project 01B: Site Research (10%)

*(Review on February 24th; 1 week)*

Further development of the “micro/macro” research will enable groups to translate their conceptual arguments into a site argument, requiring an analysis and ambition about both the site and the group’s “Site” After this review, students will travel to Istanbul for a week of seminars and continue their travel research in Egypt. Presentation of their work will be made to local architects while the studio is in Egypt.

Project 02: Mid-review (30%)

*(Mid-review Date TBD)*

Each group or individual will present at the mid-review their “micro/macro” research and their processes.

Project 03 (10%)

*(Pre-final review on April 25th)*

Project 04 (40%)

*(Final review week of May 2nd, Date TBD)*

**Studio References:**

1. Harvey, David, 1997. Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form, in, Nick Jewson and Susanne MacGregor (eds.), *Transforming Cities*.
2. Harvey, David, 2003. Paris, Capital of Modernity.
3. Lefebvre, Henri. The production of space, 1991.
4. Latour, Bruno. 'Technology is Society Made Durable' 1991
5. Mitchell, Timothy (2000) 'The Stage of Modernity', in Timothy Mitchell (ed.) *Questions of Modernity*,. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
6. Nasser Rabat, Tahrir square: revolution framework, March 2011
7. Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *State of Exception*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
8. Nezzar El Sayad, Design and history of Tahrir square, dwell magazine, 2011.
9. Diane Singerman and Paul Amar (editors) 2006 American University press, Cairo  
Cosmopolitan: Politics,  
Culture, and UrbanSpace in the New Globalized Middle East
10. Alsayyad, Nezar, and Ananya Roy. 2006. "Medieval modernity: On citizenship and urbanism in a global era". *Space & Polity*. 10 (1). Bottom of Form