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## From the Guest Editor: The Architecture of War and Peace

**T**HIS special issue of the *Journal of Urban Technology* intends to tackle a “socio-material” blind spot in studies on so-called contested territories. These can be cities, districts, or neighborhoods whose ethnic, ideological, religious, or linguistic diversity is not embraced as an asset but is a source of tensions, competing territorial claims, polarization, and seclusion. Much of the academic and practical engagement with these settings tends to come from scholars and professionals addressing their social nature: historians, psychologists, political scientists, and conflict resolution specialists, among others. Another angle frequently employed focuses on the ways urban conflict literally materializes in the form of all kinds of urban technologies (walls, fences, gates, etc.) that owe their existence to the agency of various actors: residents of the areas, grassroots organizations, the police, the military, or the state.

Both aspects, the social and the material, clearly are of crucial importance for the reality of living in and understanding contested territories. However, a merely additive account—whereby some specialize in the “soft” and others in the “hard” aspects of urban contestations—would miss the point. The social and the material are much more intimately linked than often acknowledged and reflected in conventional studies on urban conflict. To put it bluntly: We cannot simply preach neighborliness between warring social groups when a wall literally prevents visual and acoustic encounters. Likewise, we cannot simply knock down a fence and hope people will automatically start liking each other. With this special issue, we hope to bring these different perspectives closer together in an exercise of “stereoscopy” that is reflected in the programmatic expression “socio-materiality.”

The research tradition Science and Technology Studies (STS) seems a particularly suitable base for such an endeavor. However, many STS scholars would already object to the very ontological distinction between the social and the material—even as heuristic crutches. As laudable as such an effort for radical ontological consistency might be, I am not convinced how helpful it is for the purpose of stimulating a debate outside the confines of academic research seminars. Therefore, I suggest accepting the distinction between sociality and materiality—at least as an experimental tool-to-think-with—and to critically investigate what can be seen through this viewing device. The contributions to this special issue demonstrate the value of this approach, especially when the focus extends from the social and material *elements* of our world to the *dynamics* between these elements. And this is where STS has its real strengths: with concepts like the social shaping of artifacts and the social impact of artifacts.

As can be seen in cities like Belfast, Beirut, Mostar, Jerusalem, Nicosia, Kuala Lumpur, and many others—even including Paris, Chicago, and Manchester, U.K.—socio-political conditions can have massive spatial, architectural, and infrastructural implications in the form of clear-cut segregation, a patchwork of enclaves, an array of walls and fences, no-go areas, street blockades, the duplication of services and infrastructures, or—more subtly—painted curbstones as territorial markers. The material fabric of contested cities, therefore, is clearly socially shaped. Conversely, the material make-up of contested territories also exerts an intended and/or unintended gravitational pull upon social practices in the form of what Gibson would call affordances or what scholars of Science and Technology Studies (STS) refer to as scripts, agendas, or programs of action. For example, people's perception of safety, many of their daily rituals like their choice of shopping locations or their commuting routes, a child's preference for a particular playground or the likelihood of meeting "others" are structured, conditioned, and solidified by the existence of all kinds of urban artifacts.

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Attempts to capitalize on the possibility of influencing people's social practices through physical settings are quite frequent in contested cities and emanate from a broad range of actors for an equally broad range of purposes: The police might try to quell conflict, planners to provide infrastructures for daily survival, paramilitaries to provoke others, and grassroots organizers to bring people together. It is clear, then, that the designers of urban artifacts in the broadest possible sense can ameliorate

as well as (inadvertently) worsen the situation in such contexts. In order to reap the former and to avoid the latter effects, it is imperative to understand the socio-political mechanisms, motivations, and power games behind such phenomena. In other words, it is crucial to open the black box of the contested city as a given and to look into its socio-material engine room.

As alluded to before, what we will have to simultaneously focus on are not just the two *elements* (materiality and sociality) but also the *dynamics* between them. This task begins with an acknowledgment that the built environment in a contested city “*reflects and shapes* the struggle over identity, memory, and belonging” (emphasis added). Upon adoption of such a bidirectional and circular interpretation of the relationship between the artifactual and the social, both elements become visible as explanans and explanandum for each other; and neither of them is granted *a priori* explanatory power. Focusing on only one element or on one causal direction would be equivalent to “watching [only] half the court during a tennis game,” to borrow Latour’s analogy. Taken seriously, this exhortation should allow us to avoid the very real dangers of both physical determinism and naïve voluntarism.

These considerations inspired the idea of proposing to edit a special issue of the *Journal of Urban Technology* on *The Architecture of War and Peace*. We invited contributions that describe and analyze the social construction of all kinds of urban artifacts, buildings, and infrastructures in contested spaces. We also asked for papers on the processes and effects of the perception, appropriation, reproduction, or even subversion of such artifacts. Especially welcome were descriptive and analytical accounts of attempts to deliberately shape urban artifacts in order to ease tensions, facilitate friendly encounters, and move towards a more amicable future. We also encouraged papers about the role of institutions in the production of artifacts or for the definition of their meaning. In addition to such empirical studies, we invited papers that could conceptualize, theorize, and categorize the types of planned and unplanned physical interventions from an unrestricted array of disciplines.

We received fifteen very interesting abstracts and were faced with the challenge of selecting a coherent set of the best papers for the final round. At this occasion, we would like to thank the 24 anonymous reviewers who helped to make this task rigorous and transparent.

Sara Fregonese and Ralf Brand’s paper “Polarization as Socio-Material Phenomenon” sets the scene for this special issue by providing a critical overview of the related literature that is

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clustered into four groups. One covers the literature that focuses on urban aspects of (post-) conflict, focusing largely on the state of violence but, according to the authors, tending to overlook processes of escalation towards it. A second group, mainly socio-political studies of polarization processes, seems to underappreciate the non-human agency of material settings. Disciplines concerned with materiality are identified as a third main strand within the existing literature, but apparently are not always immune to the allure of *material fixes*. Finally, the authors assess the value of Science and Technology Studies to holistically grasp polarization as a socio-material phenomenon.

In his article “Urban Artifacts and Social Practices in a Contested City,” Ralf Brand analyzes the situation in Belfast as an empirical case of the interaction between the social and material in a contested city. Starting with a rather descriptive presentation of a wide range of conflict-related urban artifacts, Brand also demonstrates their effects on people’s social practices—from shopping routines to survival tactics. The author draws particular attention to urban technologies that were deliberately erected to influence or discipline Belfast’s residents and on the sometimes unpredictable meanings and effects these objects acquire. The latter observation highlights that designers must never underestimate people’s creativity, energy, and tenacity to circumvent, tamper with, or reinterpret artifacts with undesired “scripts.” Therefore, Brand concludes, design processes in contested cities should be highly participatory.

Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets’s paper “Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism” questions the very notion of conflict in relation to urban space. As alternative, they introduce the differentiation between *mediated* and *unmediated* conflicts. The former is a normal and civilized form of dealing with legitimate disputes arising from the close spatial proximity of different interests. The latter describes conditions where accepted mechanisms of mediation fail and where “architecture and urban planning are instrumentalized as a means to gain power over another group.” The authors apply this distinction in their empirical investigation of the Palestinian village Sur Bahir and the neighboring Jewish settlement Har Homa. They conclude that both mediated and unmediated conflicts are always present, that they can almost become indistinguishable, and that their material effects can be quite similar.

“Intervening in Politically Turbulent Cities: Spaces, Buildings, and Boundaries” is Scott A. Bollens’ contribution. He asks

two key questions 1) about the relationship between socio-political conditions and changes to urban materiality and space and 2) whether spatial and material urban interventions in ethnically contentious cities are capable of advancing or retarding inter-group tolerance. Bollen's pursuit of these questions rests, conceptually, on studies of urban technology, political transitions and uncertainty, urban malleability, and obduracy. Empirically, his paper is based on case studies of Barcelona, Bilbao, Sarajevo, and Mostar. The author examines the socio-political dynamics of various material interventions (e.g., the design of public space, revitalization of urban cores and historic structures, redrawing of local political and administrative boundaries) and their effect on the power of ethnicity, the degree of inclusiveness, etc. in these four cities.

The Colombian city of Medellín as a contested territory is Angela Stienen's research focus. Her paper "Urban Technology, Conflict Education, and Disputed Space" employs three key analytical concepts: Rabinow's notion of urban design as formative and controlling domination, Baumann's argument of Western civilization's obsession with purging order, and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic struggle. From this angle, Stienen discovers interesting aspects of Medellín's Metro which was a cornerstone of the city's efforts to physically regenerate, symbolically re-signify, in short, to pacify itself in a spirit not too distinct from social engineering. However, Stienen observes a repressive dark side of these benevolent interventions and concludes that the case of Medellín shows how modernity's destructive and reflexive potentials dispute each other and how this dispute is mediated by urban technology, architectural artifacts, and public space.

Maaïke Lauwaert's contribution, "Playing the City: Games and Playing in Contested Suburban Areas," draws our attention to a contested territory much closer to home. She describes a participatory, computer-mediated planning process for a small park in Slotervaart, a district of Amsterdam, with problems of cross-ethnic polarization. The computer software *Face Your World*, she argues, provided the opportunity for discussions about a shared future between residents from all age, gender, and ethnic groups. However, despite some success (e.g., involving younger stakeholders and immigrants), it failed to trigger genuine new encounters among social groups. Lauwaert argues that such projects are still top-down initiatives with limited buy-in of residents, especially when intended social or mental changes are not directly

synchronized with tangible material ones. Sustainable solutions require both to march lock-step.

Ralf Brand

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