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Architectural Theory Review (23, No. 2): Architecture and Crowds

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Architecture and Crowds

A special issue of Architectural Theory Review edited by Cameron Logan and Janina Gosseye

In 1961, Elias Canetti published Crowds and Power. In this book, Canetti suggests that in essence there are two categories of crowds: the open and the closed crowd. The "open" crowd is a natural crowd: it gathers spontaneously, it exists as long as it grows, and it disintegrates as soon as it stops growing. On the other side of the spectrum is the "closed" crowd. This type renounces growth and emphasizes permanence. It has a boundary and creates a space for itself, which it fills. Canetti writes: "The building is waiting for them [the crowd]; it exists for their sake and, so long as it is there, they will be able to meet in the same manner. The space is theirs, even during the ebb, and in its emptiness it reminds them of the flood."

Although crowd historiography experienced a heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, concomitant research in architectural history, theory, urban planning and urban design remained largely absent. This is surprising given that the concept of the crowd is intricately bound to these disciplines. The organisation of space can both shape and obstruct the formation of crowds. The most celebrated examples of planning in the grand manner - think of Haussmann's Paris - are often interpreted as projections of state or imperial power, designed to suppress or control crowd formation. Yet architecture and urban design is not always utilised in the service of state power and some public projects have a radical or democratic intent. Lina Bo Bardi's MASP in São Paolo, for instance, is suspended from two massive portal frames, deliberately creating a large open area at street level to facilitate crowd formation along the Avenida Paulista, a longstanding site of protest.

Certain building types are specifically designed for the assembly of "closed" crowds. Their design not only determines the size and organisation of the crowd, as well as its flows and rhythms, but their spaces often also reveal (intangible) aspects of the organisation of society. Mapped over time, these building types can express evolving concepts of community and citizenship; they can offer insight into changing customs and mores, and they can reveal structures of inclusion and exclusion. The Roman amphitheatres, for instance, were a central staple of the ancient world; in the Middle Ages, cathedrals were the site and scene of great assemblies of people; and in recent times shopping centres, sport stadia and concert halls have accommodated modern crowds - from political rallies and riots, to sporting events, flash mobs and raves.

Yet beyond a few emblematic twentieth century projects, such as Albert Speer's Zeppelinfeld in Nuremberg and Mies van der Rohe's unbuilt Chicago Convention Centre, scholars of the built environment have only rarely touched upon the subject of architecture and the crowd. For this special issue of ATR, we invite submissions that investigate the relationship between architecture, urban design and the formation of crowds in two main ways: 1) through realised projects; and 2) by considering the way in which crowds have been depicted in architecture through various modes and media, including photomontage, drawings, computer generated imagery, etc.

Submissions may address one or more of the following themes: crowds, architecture and urban identity; crowds, architecture and security; representation of crowds, citizenship and social identity in architecture and urban design; social exclusion and inclusion in the architecture of mass gatherings, especially the racialised and gendered visions of the collective; atmosphere and environment in crowded buildings and places; architecture and its relationship to collective effervescence, intersubjectivity and collective memory; architecture, urban design and mechanisms of crowd dispersal.

Full papers may be submitted to the ATR Manuscript Central site by October 1, 2018.
Instructions for authors may be found here. Informal inquiries may be made to Cameron Logan (cameron.logan@sydney.edu.au) or Janina Gosseye (j.gosseye@uq.edu.au).

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