

Evanescent Institutions
Capturing a Global Democratic Imaginary

By

Marina Otero Verzier

Based on
The BMW Guggenheim Lab

Advisor: Felicity D. Scott



1. HERE AND NOWHERE

EXT.MUSEUM.DAY

ME (VOICE OVER.)
I arrive by taxi.

ME
Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum?

ME (V.O.)
I follow the signs to the enclosed
area of the institution.

A sign reads: Free Entry All Welcome

ME (V.O.)
The metal control checkpoint is the
last threshold. Inside I find one
of the most quiet and comfortable
places in the city, where the city
transforms into any other known
city, where an outsider no longer
feels like an outsider.

ME
It is an oasis! Or, rather, a
mirage..

ME (V.O.)
Here it is. Its physical structure
occupies part of the Museum's plaza

ME
I've been following the Lab since
its opening in New York, in the
summer of 2011, when it was located
in a vacant lot on Houston Street.

ME (V.O.)
I go to the cafe.

CUT TO:

INT.CAFE.DAY

EMPLOYEE
"Would you like a chocolate
brownie?"



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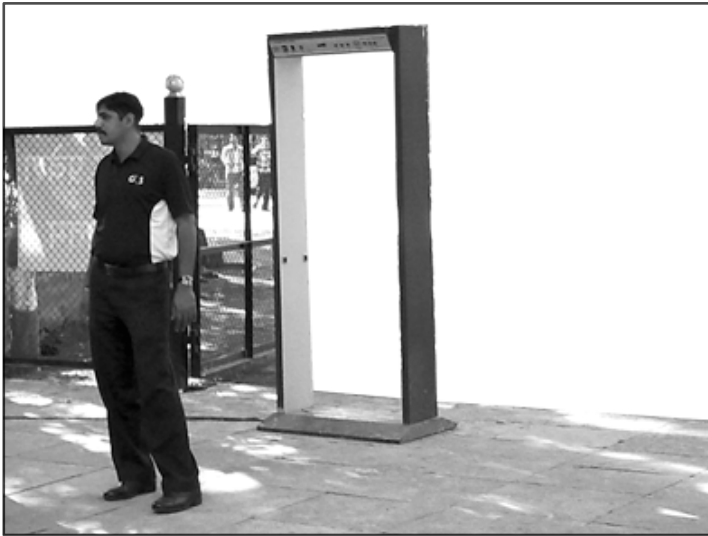
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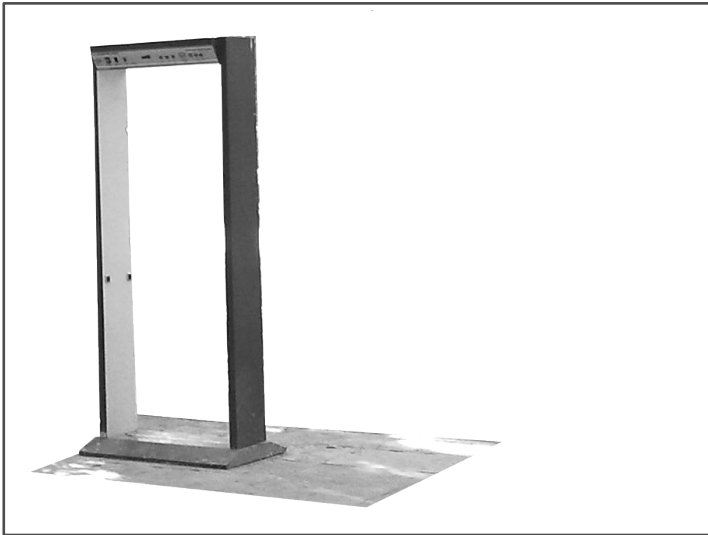
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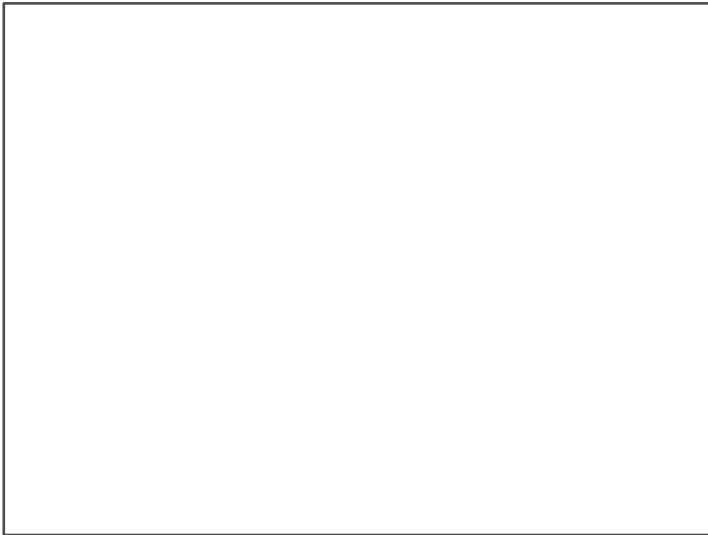
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ME (V.O.)
After the first one, I have several
bites of global sweetness, while
entering the L-shaped structure
made of bamboo.

BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB
Of course! "The architecture is
designed to be responsive to the
cities the Lab visits."

ME (V.O.)
The carbon fiber structure of the
Lab, which began in New York and
traveled to Berlin, never arrived
to its destination.

CARBONFIBERGEAR.COM
But..."The BMW Guggenheim Lab was
made from carbon fiber for easy
travel..."

ME (V.O.)
Now, that image of a
"forward-looking materiality" has
shifted towards one that attempts
to physically connect the Lab with
the local culture and means of
production.

ME
The bamboo structure won't make it
to New York either.

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It "will stay at the museum and be
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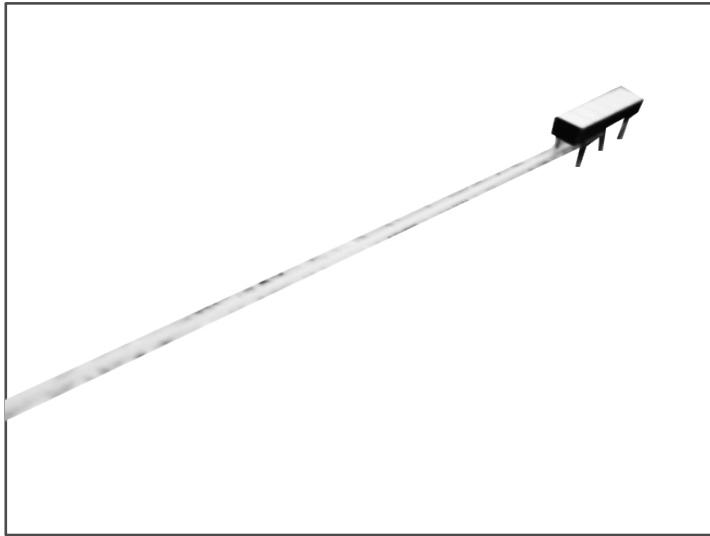
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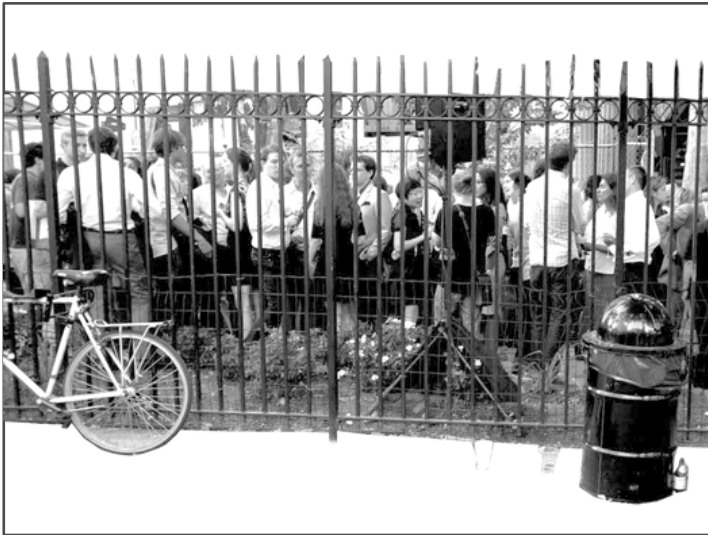
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2.CIRCULATING BORDERS

EXTERIOR.LAB.DAY

ME (V.O.)

I arrive by foot. I follow the signs to enter into the enclosed area of the institution. The Lab is placed between two existing buildings, which constitute its counterpart and the limits of two of its sides. It is surrounded by a metallic fence.

GUGGENHEIM.ORG

"The public is invited to attend free programs in each location."

Not far away from the Lab, the assembly and speech of the OWS protests reconfigure the materiality of public space and its procedures, making it evident that "Public Space" is not the same as "Open to Public." "Free" is not "Public."

CUT TO:

EXTERIOR.LAB.DAY

ME (V.O.)

I arrive by subway. I follow the signs to enter into the enclosed area, a complex of galleries, bars and artist studios, now protected by two police vans parked in the entrance.

CUT TO:

INTERIOR.PARLIAMENT.DAY

Following the protests against the Lab in Kreuzberg, Police President announced in Parliament that they would protect the Lab and work with the organizers for a common understanding. The bodies of the uninvited congregate, and the very public character of the space is being disputed.

POLICE PRESIDENT

MARGARETE KOPPERS

"Berlin had a reputation as a city of diversity and freedom that must be protected."



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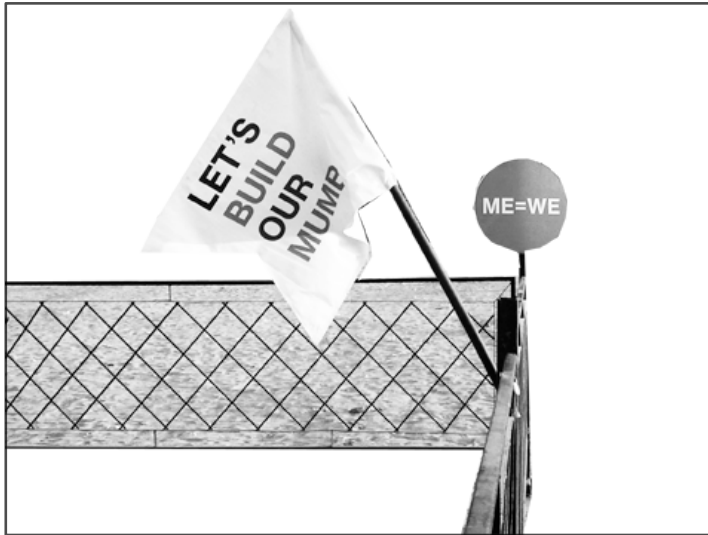
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CUT TO:

EXT.CITY.DAY

ME (V.O.)
I arrive by foot. There are no signs to follow. Finally I see it. Looking from the bridge, the satellite structure of the Lab looks like a fairground waiting for the entertainment to come.

LAB SECURITY OFFICER
"You should stay here...inside. Outside is dangerous. There are bad people out there. We cannot protect you there..."

BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB
"Please come in and take a seat. The show starts now!"

ME (V.O.)
The limits of the Lab mark the modern space of controlled and regulated entertainment.

CUT TO:

EXT.BEACH.DAY

Just in front of the bamboo structure there is another one, its counterpart. Inside the structure a computer poses questions.

PRIVACY PLEASE
"What is a public space?"

ANSWER: nonexistent

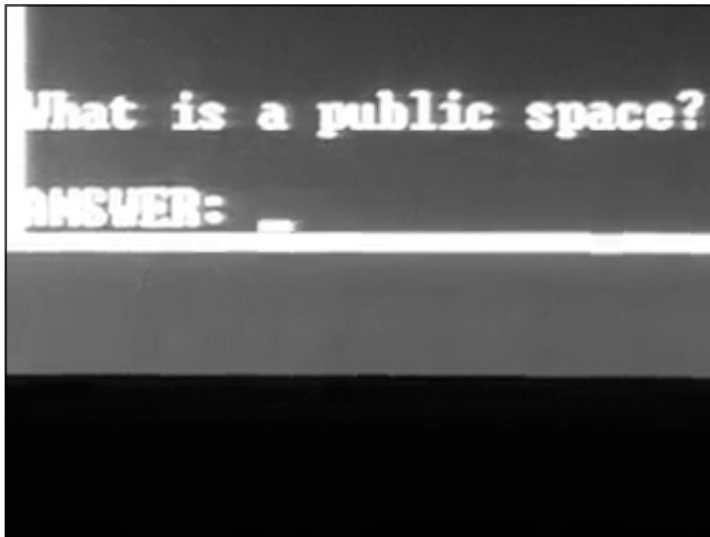
What is the relationship between public and private?

ANSWER: ambiguous

What is your idea of a public space?

ANSWER: no idea."

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3. DEMOCRATIC IMAGINARIES

EXT.CITY.DAY

ME (V.O.)

I take a seat in the back and look around. The structure does not have walls, doors or windows. It voluntarily renounces those features that generally define a traditional architectural interior space. In fact, It could be seen not as a piece of architecture but, rather, as a representation of a contemporary ideal principle for Architecture.

BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB

It is "part urban think tank, part community center and public gathering space."

ME (V.O.)

In the Lab nothing except architecture stays once everyone has left. There are not objects or artifacts for display, except a photo stream of people speaking, playing, smiling. What material conditions are necessary for public assembly and public speech?

CUT TO:

INT.LAB.DAY

The chairs stand, side-by-side, retaining an almost circular plan, as if we all could participate and have an equal say in the discussion.

OMAR FREILLA

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST, LAB TEAM MEMBER

"A prerequisite to a functioning democracy is a literal space where people voice their opinions and share ideas - that's what this is set up to be."



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Free and open on both sides, not even organizers have full control of the environment. Visitors and passersby join the activities. Lectures are interrupted by protesters.

DAVID VAN DER LEER

CURATOR, BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB

"Our hope for the programming of the BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai is to continue to expand participation beyond the traditional museum audience."

CUT TO:

INT.LAB.DAY

ME (V.O.)

I take a seat in the back and look around. Two policemen are standing in the entrance, right next to a chalkboard that reads, "Confronting Comfort." One week ago, they were here, impeding the entrance to a group of people protesting the Lab, transforming the political conditions that rendered speech and action intelligible.

CITIZEN

"We don't need New York to teach us how to talk."

CUT TO:

EXT.LAB.DAY

During a press conference Police President seems to embrace Radical Democracy.

POLICE PRESIDENT MARGARETE KOPPERS

"Criticism and demonstrations are part of our democracy."



2.

ME (V.O.)

Free and open on both sides, not even organizers have full control of the environment. Visitors and passersby join the activities. Lectures are interrupted by protesters.

DAVID VAN DER LEER

CURATOR, BMW GUGGENHEIM LAB

"Our hope for the programming of the BMW Guggenheim Lab Mumbai is to continue to expand participation beyond the traditional museum audience."

CUT TO:

INT.LAB.DAY

ME (V.O.)

I take a seat in the back and look around. Two policemen are standing in the entrance, right next to a chalkboard that reads, "Confronting Comfort." One week ago, they were here, impeding the entrance to a group of people protesting the Lab, transforming the political conditions that rendered speech and action intelligible.

CITIZEN

"We don't need New York to teach us how to talk."

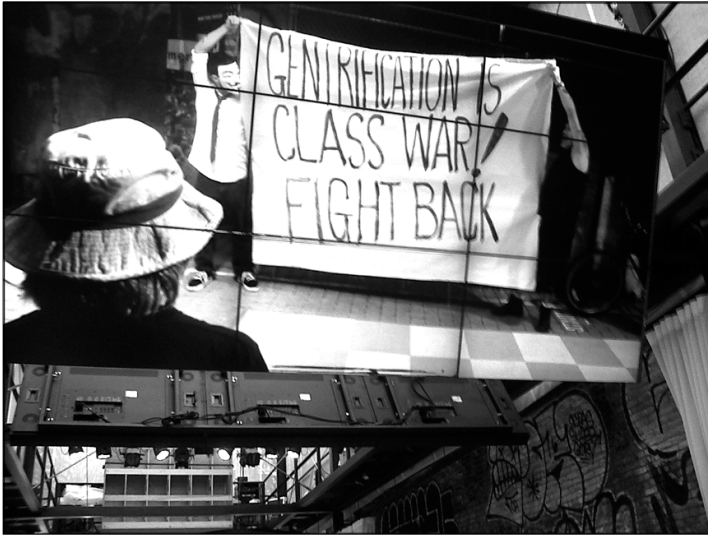
CUT TO:

EXT.LAB.DAY

During a press conference Police President seems to embrace Radical Democracy.

POLICE PRESIDENT MARGARETE KOPPERS

"Criticism and demonstrations are part of our democracy."



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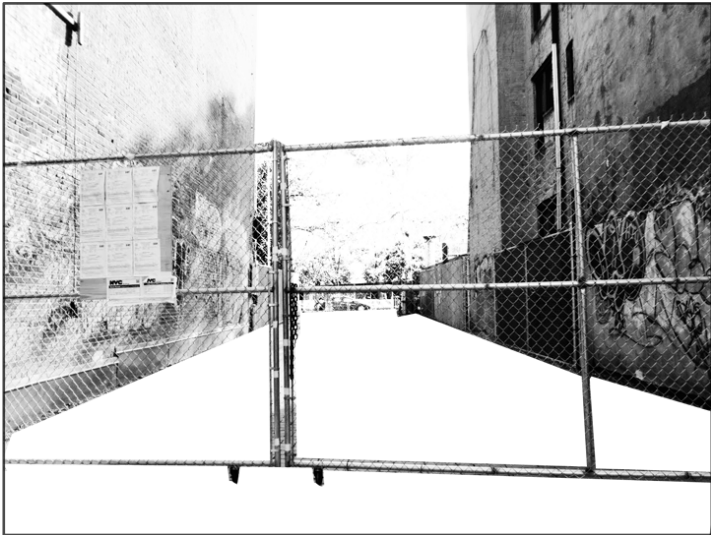
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3.

EXT. CITY. DAY

ME

I arrive. But the Lab has just vanished.