CITIES/INTERRUPTED

VISUAL CULTURE AND URBAN SPACE

EDITED BY

SHIRLEY JORDAN AND **CHRISTOPH LINDNER**

BLOOMSBURY

CITIES INTERRUPTED

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CONTENTS

PART TWO RESISTANCE AND RENEWAL

PART THREE BODIES AND SPACE

ILLUSTRATIONS

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FOREWORD: INTERRUPTING INTERRUPTION

Ackbar Abbas

One of the most immediately striking but ultimately misleading characterizations of globalization is to see it as 'time–space compression'. What is misleading is that the formulation suggests that the process has a clear directionality: time speeds up and space contracts. Such directionality does not take sufficiently into account the *volatility* of the global, and the way it has reshuffled the grids and coordinates of our world. Volatility produces something perhaps more accurately described as 'time–space *distortion*', where time turns anachronistic, and space anamorphic; a world that has lost its measure. Speed is no longer captured by Futurist images of bullet trains devouring space; it has greater affinities with the randomness of Brownian movement. As for global cities, they too have become so complex and dense that, like black holes, they are not directly perceptible. We can only speculate about what urban space has become through examining the visual and spatial *anomalie*s it produces and the *bizarre* affective response it elicits. In other words, we see the global city only through its interruptions.

The problem, as this seminal volume demonstrates, is that interruption is not a simple procedure; it is something more complicated than putting on the brakes. Any car designer would tell you that brakes are not just about slowing down. Rather a car's realizable speed depends on its brakes, so that good brakes are what *allow* a car to go fast. Or take the example of urban preservation in cities like Shanghai. Is preservation a way of slowing down Shanghai's relentlessly rapid development, or does it not rather *participate* in the logic of development, as 'historic' districts and landmarks can also function like theme parks to attract global tourism? Another complication is that slowness-as-interruption can mean different things in different cases. Walter Benjamin spoke of the brief vogue in nineteenth-century Paris of taking turtles for a walk as the *flâneur's* protest against the rapid pace of city life. In global cities today, we find a different kind of slowness, whose emblem might be the figure not of the *flâneur*, but the *funambulist* or tightrope walker. The funambulist moves slowly because a false move could prove fatal. What these examples show is that interruption can have different motivations and surprising outcomes; it can even *facilitate* what it purports to hinder. And all

this suggests that if we are to think of it as a critical practice, we will need above all to *interrupt interruption*; that is to say, to reflect on what it can and cannot do.

A case in point is visual culture. One of the main critical objectives of visual culture has always been to interrupt and resist the spectacle, understood as ideology that has taken on a visual form. But as Debord's final comments on the spectacle make clear, what we have to deal with today is a mutated and elusive version of the spectacle: the spectacle that appears and disappears as information. What requires and defies analysis is not the visual form of the spectacle, but the informational, invisible and secret form; namely, a spectacle that is no longer spectacular. We cannot fight spectacle-as-information with a critique of visual ideology, when everything can be integrated into information, including critique. And when cities themselves become essentially spaces of information, what happens to visual culture and interruption as practices of resistance? What must we do differently?

This is the crucially important question this volume poses, and there is no single answer. Instead, the various authors invite us to think along with them. Nonetheless, one point seems clear. It would be false optimism to assume that interruption can expose the lie and give us the truth. What it can do, however, is to create 'noise'. Noise can take the form of protest, but also of artworks, performances, spatial constructions or theories. And noise can disrupt and disturb the smooth operation of the system, but also try to take it elsewhere. 'In dreams begins responsibility', W.B. Yeats once wrote; could it also be that it is in interruption that dreams of a better world begin?

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1 VISUAL CULTURE AND INTERRUPTION IN GLOBAL CITIES

Shirley Jordan and Christoph Lindner

What is interruption?

Cities are constantly undergoing change, their fabric shifting in small or seismic ways, some planned and some unplanned. Discourses and theories of mobility, acceleration and flow are often used to account for this change, particularly in the era of globalization. Key critical paradigms that attempt to capture and account for late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century urban evolution have shaped our understanding and, to some degree, our perception. David Harvey (1989) and Doreen Massey (1994) have written on the time–space compression involved in globalization; Saskia Sassen (1991) has popularized the concept of the global city as a transnational space of rapidly circulating capital; while Edward Soja (2000) has emphasized the spatiality of urban transformation under intensified conditions of globalization. Numerous studies seek to account for new and often overwhelming combinations of speed and scale. Manuel Castells (1996) has developed the concept of the 'space of flows' to describe the fast-paced networks of communication and power dominating the global information society; Arjun Appadurai (1996) has called attention to the sense of acceleration that accompanies the global flow of people, goods, services and data; and John Urry (2007) and Tim Cresswell (2006) have stressed the new forms of mobility that globalization facilitates and often necessitates. Meanwhile, more alarmist accounts of globalization and urban change have emerged from provocative thinkers like Paul Virilio and Jonathan Crary who warn, respectively, against the atomizing, anonymous speed-space of the accelerated city (Virilio 1997; 2007), and against late capitalism's relentless war on rest and sleep (Crary 2013).

This volume traces urban phenomena that cut across and complicate such discourses on globalization and cities. Building on a series of workshops organized in Amsterdam, Edinburgh, London and New York, it completes a trilogy of interrelated studies developed by a group of international scholars whose work on the visual culture of global cities has given rise to new thinking on violence (Lindner 2009), inertia (Donald and Lindner 2014) and, in the case of the current volume, interruption. In particular, *Cities Interrupted* brings together researchers in architecture, geography, urban planning, photography and art to explore some of the ways in which visual culture responds to, intervenes in, decelerates and critiques global conditions of urban speed and mobility.

In this introductory chapter, we wish to set the frame for the discussions that follow by sketching some of the key debates about interruption and exploring some preliminary examples that bring into focus core issues at stake in the volume as a whole. We begin, therefore, by addressing the question 'what is interruption'? Interruption, commonly understood, entails breaking in upon an action, bringing about a temporal rupture, creating an interval that draws attention to itself precisely as deliberately 'counter'. Interruption, as we understand it in this volume, entails a wide range of such temporal interventions, while also addressing the idea of spatial interruption in the built environment that calls attention to issues of ongoing urban development and restructuring. To say that cities are sites of permanent interruption might seem like a truism, for it is clear that interruption is the very stuff of the urban condition, made up as it is of competing drives and currents, endlessly reinvented obstacles and avenues, unceasing reinvention. Indeed, 'flow' itself may be seen to consist of a rapid succession of interruptions. And, while 'interruption' has been harnessed as an analytic tool for thinking about, say, documentary photography (Roberts 1998), the concept has not yet received close attention in either urban studies or cultural studies.

One reason for this is that interruption is something of a slippery, capacious concept. It is that very slipperiness, however, that makes it both attractive and appropriate for our purposes as we set out to test its critical potential. As will become clear, the case studies in this volume all address the term, each asking, in their own way, pressing questions about the nature, effects and effectiveness of interruption. The latter is a key issue for all contributors. To what extent does a given interruption have 'teeth' as a means of stymying, in however small a way, the overwhelming tsunami of globalization? Does some of what we like to think of as interruption in fact contribute to the race towards an ever-accelerating global future? Does interruption resist or reinforce what it critiques? Who really wants interruption, and in what context?

Interruptions are often unpredictable and are brought about by a vast range of agents. Their most salient and immediately conspicuous forms are embodied, for example, by global terror, which has transformed the architectural map of many cities (think, for instance, of New York after 9/11) and found its way into visual

culture in innumerable fashions. One might also cite the economic interruptions in flows of capital as a result of the global financial crisis, or interruptions effected by provisional failures of systems and infrastructures, such as the blackout in Lower Manhattan following Hurricane Sandy in 2012 or the massive disruption of European air travel following the eruption of Iceland's Eyjafjallajökull volcano in 2010.

Interruptions can also result from carefully managed State-induced changes. One unusual, highly ironic and visually spectacular example was the recent clean-up of Beijing in readiness for the November 2014 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. Air pollution, a serious health hazard in Beijing, is part and parcel of its narrative of growth. Habitually at dangerous levels, the thick smog is a dominant feature of the city environment. As Beijing prepared to receive over twenty world leaders and geared up for the summit, the authorities orchestrated an interruption in the ongoing pollution of the city in order to improve air quality and avoid the embarrassment of foreign dignitaries having to wear face masks. The operation of factories, construction sites and even crematoriums was restricted in order to minimize emissions and 'interrupt' smog-producing activities. Factories within 200 kilometres of the city centre closed. It was forbidden to light fires. The use of cars was restricted. A six-day holiday was declared and attempts were made to lure city dwellers out of town by offering free entry to museums and other attractions so that the city centre would feel less populated. This short-lived but telling interruption in what is the ecological disaster of Beijing was all the more important given that APEC promotes green growth and environmental protection. How paradoxical that a global city – by definition characterized by the density of its production activities and priding itself on being a thrusting, throbbing hub – should, in order to showcase itself, grind to a halt. A remarkable visual phenomenon was brought about by the government's decision briefly to re-cast the city as clean. The smog-less sky was newly revealed, in a hue that was wryly referred to by city dwellers as 'APEC blue'.

Our emphasis in this volume is deliberately placed on less obvious and less explosive instances of interruption. We have sought out quieter 'pockets' of resistance, to use a metaphor coined by John Berger (2001), and smaller spaces of contestation associated with or brought about by visual culture. Looking at cities such as Amsterdam, Beijing, Doha, London, New York and Paris, chapters discuss variously how unruly bodies interrupt cityscapes; how everyday spaces may be transformed into sites of interruption; how street art seeks to push back against the homogenization of urban space and the flattening of cultural difference. We explore how new aesthetic and technical practices in urban photography self-consciously put the urban environment on hold; how installation art and performance may undermine or conversely reinforce the totalizing visions of architecture and urban planning; how post-industrial urban ruins are revivified in order to decelerate the global flows that produce them; as well as how visualizations

of urban redevelopment oscillate between smoothness and friction in their surface engagements with the city. To bring these sorts of concerns into sharper focus, we turn briefly to consider two examples of what we mean by interruption. Both are artistic responses to architecture and urban planning, and both demonstrate in key ways the kinds of thinking that interruption can generate and the challenges involved in its interpretation.

Anarchitekton

A solitary man runs through the streets holding aloft a cardboard maquette of a building mounted on a stick, like a placard. In Barcelona, Bucharest, Osaka and Brasilia he performs this puzzling urban ritual carrying scale models of real high-rise edifices, either already built or unfinished, that are emblematic of the city in question, or of its suburbs, and against which his performance is set like a miniature echo. This is the pseudonymously named Idroj Sanicne, a character who acts out street interventions devised by architect and visual artist Jordi Colomer and whose global architectural runs are captured on film, brought together and projected in galleries for Colomer's *Anarchitekton* project[1] (2002–2004; Figure 1.1).

Colomer's small architectural dramas stop traffic, turn heads, generate curiosity and questions, and induce a pause in everyday urban flow. They may be read – and are intended – as interruptions, disruptions, spaces of intervention. Colomer's gloss on our idea of interruption includes the notion of contagion: he speaks of

FIGURE 1.1 Jordi Colomer, *Anarchitekton Brasilia*, 2003. Courtesy of the artist.

'contaminating the streets' with a new kind of imagination and estrangement that prompts critical questions, inducing us to keep on seeing and interrogating architecture and urban planning. Released from their massive materiality, the buildings are rendered newly portable, strangely mobile and uncomfortably fragile. They are returned to the world of ideas from which they originated, and are made freshly available for attention and debate.

The interest of this example for our purposes is its ambiguity and the way in which it is snagged between competing interpretations. On the one hand, the performances have the energy and urgency of street demonstrations; the maquette or effigy brandished aloft on a wooden stick seems like a form of grass-roots protest against the violence that architecture can do – a cry against the contagion and creeping homogeneity of global modern and postmodern design. One wonders if, when the running stops, the model building might be symbolically destroyed, sacrificed, set on fire. On the other hand, these performances also have an almost self-avowed, self-deprecating futility that renders them absurd or even comical. Colomer's man is running hard – sometimes at full pelt – against the global tide, yet at the same time emulating globalization's flow and speed. He is alone. He is going nowhere in particular and, with such an unfocused, unformulated, ephemeral sense of protest, is doomed to failure. Worse perhaps – and this is deliberate – the performance even lays itself open to being interpreted as something of an advertisement for contemporary architecture and planning. Is Colomer's running man in fact, bizarrely, not struggling against but instead promoting to its inhabitants the built environment through which he runs? Is this a procession dedicated to something sacred rather than a demonstration against a negative force? One thinks of how, in early Soviet Russia, people carried architectural maquettes through the streets. The idiom provided by the maquette belongs to events characterized by both celebration and protest. Colomer's interruptive gestures, interminably re-played in the silent looped videos that were screened simultaneously in the multi-projection gallery exhibitions that took place in Brazil and France in 2003, seem uncomfortably caught between outrage and celebration. Perhaps the clue is in the title, an anagram that draws together 'architecture', 'anarchy' and 'marathon', unpicking the cityscape but with no apparent programme in mind.

This spectacle is emblematic of the way in which several of the interruptions brought about via visual art in the current volume, although springing from a desire to protest, may become difficult to read *as* protest and instead get dragged along in, and ultimately serve to bolster, the hurtling forces of neo-liberal globalization. Think of the pop-up shops that turn bourgeois (Ferreri, Chapter 9); graffiti absorbed into the mainstream global art world (Jein, Chapter 6); or the street photography that mingles with other images in the street to become confused with advertisements (Jordan, Chapter 12). Interruption has only temporary force and may dissolve into or be co-opted by the very conditions it seeks to resist. Some

of the case studies in this volume disconcertingly suggest the emergence of a deceptive form of interruption, one that appears to spring up in order to work 'against the grain' of globalization and its forces, but that is in fact complicit with those forces – an interruption that is cooperative rather than subversive.

Colomer's running projects seem to exemplify the inevitable exhaustion of small protests, deeply and energetically felt but poor in resources, deprived of clear direction, and ultimately ineffectual. Their upshot seems to be a confirmation that it is not possible to find effective ways to undercut, interrupt and contest major urban development projects. The most that such interruptive pockets can achieve is, like this volume, to ask us to think again, harder, perhaps differently about the urban environment that surrounds us.

Digital favela

A further perspective on our paradigm of interruption is provided by architect and photographer Dionisio González, who grafts the materials and the idiom of the global city onto Brazil's favela structures in sharply clever and ambitious digitally manipulated images (Figure 1.2). Threading before us like frozen, frontal travelling shots, his large-scale panoramic images of the favela's façade have a disconcerting density. The habitual heterogeneity of favela building material and the haphazard, organic growth of the overall structure by irregular accretions are surreally interwoven with high-end architectural designs and materials, so that modules using smoked glass, sculpted concrete and beautiful wood are grafted on to and meld with the crude and makeshift breeze block, corrugated iron and slipshod cement. González thus provokes a mutual interruption of two worlds and a reflection on the speed and nature of development and planning in each built environment. Like Jordi Colomer's work, that of González is spectacular and surprising, inviting fictions full of humour, irony and social critique. These environments have stairs that seem to go nowhere, and a dream-like quality.

Favelas, some of the global city's defining spaces, are in themselves seen as potentially interruptive parallel environments, peripheries whose messy

FIGURE 1.2 Dionisio González, *Novaacqua-Gasosa II*, 2004. Courtesy of the artist.

horizontality rivals the obsessively sleek verticality of the global centre. There is in these images a concentrated allusion to the socio-spatial inequalities inherent in the centre/periphery relations of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, and to the range of problems that this relationship involves. Affluence is sutured in; the wrong materials are used; the wrong shapes, angles and properties. The conjunction of the labyrinthine favela structure and the sleek and desirable matter of the postmodern global city seems to blend the hauntings, desires and antagonisms that construct the favelas conceptually (and comparatively) from both the outside in, and the inside out.

González's treatment of the favela, taking sharp account of its relationship to the vertical architecture of affluence, stands in contradistinction to the dominant image of the global megalopolis as a divided city characterized by extreme spatial segregations between the urban rich and the urban poor. Such an image of the city has been reinforced in recent studies of the global slum and the phenomenon of megacities by thinkers like Mike Davis (2006) and Lucia Sá (2007). In the Brazilian context, that image of division is perhaps best illustrated by Tuca Vieira's widely reproduced photograph of the Paraisópolis favela in São Paulo (Figure 1.3). Showing the razor-sharp edge dividing the low-rise sprawl of the favela and the high-rise clustering of fortified luxury living, the photo comments powerfully on the severity of urban separation. González's digital favelas emerge from, and respond to, the same divided world. Rather than accentuating such a condition of

FIGURE 1.3 Tuca Vieira, *Paraisópolis*, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

separation, however, his work experiments in aesthetic and spatial terms with intermixing those two worlds and dissolving their constructed boundaries.

From the outside, the favela can be seen as incoherent, threatening, amorphous and un-navigable. As such, it serves as a metaphor for the mass of its inhabitants, who almost seem to secrete this habitat organically like a carapace. González's photographs thus bring into mutual interruption two perspectives: one that is comfortable with the favela and one that finds it psychically disturbing, rather in the manner of Jameson's (1991) and Baudrillard's (2010) seminal records of dizziness and disorientation in response to the architectural spaces of Los Angeles' famous Bonaventure hotel. Jameson's description of hyperspace as 'transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world' (Jameson 1991: 44) resonates with outsider responses to this structure.

Grafting sleek and orderly elements onto the favela is a good visual joke for two reasons. First, there *is* no master plan for the favela, at least conventionally speaking. Second, the favela expands and reshapes precisely through the accretion of second-hand materials and heterogeneous scraps that are cast-offs from the affluent centre. Interruption is inherent too in the characteristics of the image itself, which is an unstable conjunction of competing categories. Here, art photography, documentary photography and the crisp fictional idealism of architectural design cut across and interrogate each other. The images look by turns like realist records of teeming favela structures, and by turns like confident architectural plans, typically focusing on built structure and not on signs or experiences of dwelling. Indeed, people in these images are uncannily evacuated in favour of an emphasis on design, producing an almost surreal interruption in the flow of the lived environment. This interruption is deliberately effected by González as part of his critique of centralized planning for favela-dwellers.

In terms of this critique, González's project interrupts with a very specific purpose, as opposed to that of Colomer described above. His work is intended as an intervention in debates about slum clearing and redevelopment projects on the one hand, versus in situ upgrading on the other, and stems from a deep concern for living conditions on the periphery of global cities. González points the finger at a real interruption of the favela, the now infamous Cingapura low-cost housing project in São Paulo, an example of corrupt and failed urban planning that was singled out for especially damning treatment in a recent report on global slum upgrading and human rights (Un-Habitat 2013). Here, the São Paulo favelas – notably those visible from the city's highways – were demolished to make way for high-rise blocks whose visual language was consistent with the vertical aspirations of the centre, but that disrupted the community networks and social structures of the favela and that nobody wished to inhabit. The towers now languish in a state of decay.

One of the most fascinating aspects of these photographs is that they are in fact authentic designs for in situ upgrading, as became clear in the exhibition of González's work at the *Interdictory Spaces* exhibition in Paris in 2008, where some of the photographs were accompanied by 3D plans to reveal the coherence of their structure and inner arrangements. González's interruptive experiments stand in opposition to a global vocabulary of verticality and homogeneity, and seek to further the explicit Millennium Development Goal of improvement rather than clearance of global slums.

Visualizing interruption

The above examples of interruption effected by the intersection of architecture and art in globalized urban space illustrate our interest in unruly practices that deflect, divert, decelerate or put on hold, and thus create the conditions for considering not only the object of interruption (what has been interrupted) but also the agent of interruption (who or what is causing the interruption). Reflecting this interest, we have divided our case studies in this volume into three interrelated categories: 'Crisis and Ruin'; 'Resistance and Renewal'; 'Bodies and Space'. These are not hermetic categories but rather tendencies and centres of interest. The examples of Colomer and González outlined above suggest a certain fluidity whereby works of interruption can cut across the various categories in telling ways. This fluidity extends not only to the organization of the current volume, but also to the individual chapters and case studies, each of which, as we elaborate next, privileges in various ways the idea of visualizing interruption.

Just as video and photographic art are integral to the mixed-media and mixed-mode creations of street running and favela design explored above, so several contributors to this volume consider the interruptive value of lens-based art. In the chapters that follow, specialists in film and photography examine how speed and flow are explicitly foregrounded in these media, and how a range of techniques are harnessed as ways of defamiliarizing or commenting on the urban. In particular, the chapters by Hugh Campbell and Shirley Jordan are specifically attentive to the medium of photography – so closely associated since its inception with recording cities – as inherently interruptive and stilling of flow; '*arresting*' as Barthes has it (Barthes 2000: 91). In Chapter 10, Campbell focuses on the urban environment stripped of its inhabitants; and in Chapter 12, Jordan addresses images of city dwellers excised from, and then woven back into, urban environments in innovative forms of display. Both chapters push beyond the most obvious instance of photographic interruption – the idea of the shutter click producing a frozen moment – to explore how recent practice with both analogue and digital images interrupts differently, creating expanded interruptions, temporal pockets, telling iterations of interiority that mark departures from more familiar instances of urban photography.