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Miles Gertler

*Rehearsing the Parade*  
*Ephemeral Assemblies and Persuasion on the Move*

Processions, Convoys, Assemblies, and Parades are all about performance. They have order and itinerary. Parades affirm a here and a there, and often, a center. Parades are spatial, and animate. Parades are wholes made of many parts. They transmit messages, have audiences, and are themselves rehearsals of prospective worlds or realities to come. We could similarly attribute these conditions to architecture, and indeed, parades are designed and behave like so many artifacts shaped by design labor.

Parades, their related typologies—pageants, parties, rituals, riots, demonstrations, ceremonies, convoys, caravans—as well as their space-making strategies, take the focus in this studio. Students will engage in typological analysis of the ephemeral. We will learn from these kinds of events, and eventually re-route their formal, communicative, and organizational tactics toward new situations serving daily life as we progress from research to thesis.

Rehearsing the Parade— Ephemeral Assemblies and Persuasion on the Move, will interrogate architecture's entanglement with ideology, communication, economics, and representations of power through a sustained consideration of mobile gatherings, processions, ad hoc situations and assemblies as archetypal sites of design and under-acknowledged tools for city-building.

Processions of a commercial, funereal, religious, or military nature all share a concern for the technical, performative, geographic and spatial. They are highly designed situations and often rehearse or mobilize a formal or conceptual ideal through ritual, economic, and instrumental function. They have long served as a tool for the construction and animation of the urban and lived environment, and though still active as a category of cultural event, their utility and ubiquity has been adjusted and challenged as pageantry and ceremony contend with contemporaneity and the virtual and are instrumentalized to new purposes through new aesthetic and procedural logics.

Though mobile, parades and processions have always had a specific and often operative tether to site and environment. Massimo Leone, a professor of visual semiotics and communication, has pointed out that religious processions that venture out into the city “obliterate the frontier between the sacred environment of the place of worship and the profane environment of the space surrounding it.” He also points to the unintentional, subversive ability of the profane to influence the sacred through these same events.

And “in Egypt, where the Nile was the main thoroughfare of the country... inhabitants used barges to take their dead from the town to the necropolis,” observed Leopold Ettinger in 1940. In 2021, the Egyptian government staged another kind of funereal parade under the direction of its President, former military officer Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Under the creative direction of Mohamed Attia, twenty-two mummies, kings and queens from the New Kingdom period, were transported with great fanfare in modified, climate controlled semi-trailers in what was called The Pharaoh's Golden Parade from the Egyptian Museum, founded in 1902 near Tahrir Square, to the recently constructed National Museum of Egyptian Civilization, a centerpiece in a new financial and administrative district to the southeast of Cairo's historic center. Tahrir Square, essentially the departure point of the event, was the center of Egypt's 2011 revolution, which unseated former President Hosni Mubarak and led to the country's first ever open, democratic elections the following year.

The New Administrative Capital is a flagship project for the government of the current President, who assumed power following a military coup that toppled the elected government of Mohamed Morsi in 2013. The Pharaoh's Golden Parade performed the re-centering of power from the center of the democratic revolution in downtown Cairo to a new site of tabula rasa investment and development. As New York Times journalist Mona El-Naggar pointed out, banners and flags adorned the parade route and prevented most Cairo residents from actually viewing the event live. It was to be seen only on television, where the broadcast was edited, narrated, and controlled.

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Local urban planner Ahmed Zaazaa argued that the event sought to distract from the urgent needs of everyday, working class neighbourhoods. The official broadcast instead projected a flashier, mythic spectacle to aggrandize and legitimize the current chapter in the country's political history.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, architecture has a disciplinary history in the design of parades. Charles Robert Cockerell, architect of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, designed the environment to host the lying-in-state of the general and politician, the Duke of Wellington, after his death in Victorian London, whereas Richard Redgrave and Gottfried Semper, author of *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts*, designed his funeral carriage. The carriage, the center of a massive parade that drew millions into the streets of the Imperial capital, materially embodied his epithet, "The Iron Duke," in its re-casting of cannons seized from Napoleon's army after the British victory at the Battle of Waterloo. Cases like these substantiate the architect Hans Hollein's assertion that "there are mainly two fields of man's activity: to survive during life and to survive after life." The reason we engage design being, he claimed, "to live and to die and possibly to live beyond death."

This is a studio about strategic thinking, persuasive storytelling and the construction of discourse. This course will work to establish a vocabulary to describe and analyze ephemeral events that don't always conform to design's familiar typological genres and will endeavor to rigorously account for the worlds that parades, convoys, processions, parties, and their protocols produce. Beginning the semester in a documentary method of inquiry, students will unpack live, recent, or historical phenomena and extra-architectural situations through visual reports and discursive analysis, delivered in live presentations or videos of their findings that learn from the performative tactics uncovered in their research.

This first half of the semester will set up a second phase of work in which students will begin to speculate, simulate, and rehearse parades, processions, situations, and pageantry that instrumentalize procedure, logistics, and ceremony in

service of the improvement of daily life. To that end, students will identify frictions, failures, and ruptures in their own backyard that point to opportunities for productive intervention.

This course aims to establish a journalistic research methodology for architecture. In so doing, students will attempt to open the discipline to new material and situations that might not traditionally be considered architectural, or in which architects have not yet played a major role, yet in which design is nonetheless active. Students will develop a critical ability to sift through evidence, conduct first-hand research, organize and analyze findings, and situate ideas in a discursive context. In this course, students will expand the definition of "urbanism" and account for previously unidentified city-builders in the orbit of parades, processions, rituals, and logistics. Students will identify novel tactics for spatial construction and negotiation deployed toward instrumental ends. Further, students will develop representational skills as they contribute to their inquiry and documentation of the ephemeral, which will variously take the form of mapping, drawing, video, and live, performative presentation.

A key interest in this studio is not only to establish a comprehensive analytical method to unpack the complexities of the extra-architectural, but to also form a sophisticated argument around the presentation of that information. This means that students' inquiry and its visual artifacts are also projects of design that ought to critically consider questions of format, style, and information transmission.

This studio may be a good fit for you if you're interested in exploring live, unresolved events, are eager to situate your work in a broader theoretical discourse, or if you have an interest in applying strategic, design thinking to unfamiliar situations. This studio will also appeal to those with an interest in drawing and representation, and to those keen to harness various media and performative techniques in service of compelling storytelling.

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### *Schedule + Assignments*

The studio will advance in three parts. The results of each will be logged in a collectively produced, single-issue magazine.

#### Part One

Representation and Language / Weeks 1 and 2  
Output: Typological Survey (Lexicon, Archive, Diagrams, Magazine Framework, Ad Hoc Exhibition)

The first two weeks of the semester will be occupied by a two-pronged, group-wide effort to develop a) a discursive vocabulary for parades and ephemeral assemblies and b) to collect and analyze historical and contemporary representations of parades and spin-off typological events. This will culminate in the production of an ad hoc exhibition featuring a typological survey and a working guide to the representation of ephemeral assemblies which will form the first segment of a single-issue magazine that the studio will produce over the course of the semester.

#### Part Two

A Report / Weeks 3-6  
Output: Event Analysis (Illustrated Article, Guided Reading)

Over the following four weeks, students will work alone or in groups of two to examine a single ongoing, recent, or historical parade or processional event and develop a comprehensive visual report documenting its instrumental tactics and formal performance. Students will contribute their work as articles to the collective magazine that will serve as a discursive preamble to the work that they will present at the semester's close. In the article, each inquiry will articulate a key theoretical finding communicated through a text and the production of drawings of a given research event's form, breadth, and performative tactics, as well as a larger mapping that accounts for the complete expanse of the parade or processional event's duration. This assignment will culminate in a performative, guided reading of the collective document's contents.

#### Part Three

A Demonstration / Weeks 7-12

Output: Articulation of Tactics, Design of a Float Device and Ephemeral Situation, Schematic Outline for Thesis (Drawings, Live Presentation/Performance, or Video)

Over the final weeks of the semester, students will identify 1 to 2 useful tactics uncovered in their research and theorize them as pragmatic tools for city-building. Equipped with their strategic devices, students will then begin to speculate, simulate, and rehearse parades, protocols, situations, and other forms of ephemeral assemblies that instrumentalize procedure, logistics, and ceremony in service of the improvement of daily life. To that end, students will identify frictions, failures, and ruptures in their own backyard—wherever that may be in realms both material and digital—that point to opportunities for productive intervention. The semester will conclude with a first sketch of a float vehicle or device, an ephemeral situation that it belongs to, and a schematic outline for the thesis to come, which is where students may lean into the format of parades or depart from it entirely. Final assignments will add to the collective magazine begun earlier in the semester and be presented additionally through live presentations, performances, and videos.

### *Selected Precedents*

Wheat and Steak, and the Parades of Antoni Miralada, 1970+; Royal Progresses, Tudor England, 16th to 17th Century; The Dignified Transfer, The Department of Mortuary Affairs, Dover Air Force Base; The Pharaoh's Golden Parade, Cairo, 2021; Aalsmeer Flower Auction, North Holland; The Annual Hajj, Mecca; Starlink Satellite Orbit; King Khufu Solar Boat Relocation, Giza, 2021; Lockheed Aircraft Unveiling Ceremonies; The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade; Djibouti Independence Anniversary Military Parade; 2018 South China Sea Parade; The Duke of Wellington's Funeral Procession, 1852; 70th anniversary of the People's Republic of China; The Miss General Idea Pageant, 1970+; Contemporary Royal Funerary Parades; Ticker Tape Parades, New York City.