

The Contemporary Manifesto

Can we write a contemporary manifesto?

The intellectual in me tells the others in me that the manifesto is an artifact of modernity that is a doomed anachronism.¹

The artist in me can see that the intellectuals have been the authors of their own demise.

The architect in me offers to build a new space for the writing of the anachronistic manifesto or its actionable items.

The intellectual voices his fear of manifestos and their flattening of the world. He is worried that the reduction of things can lead to dangerous simplification.

The artist believes the manifesto will unite us. He asks what of the condition of the now, of this moment... where can we meet? Where can we be together to speak, to discuss, to agree, to disagree, to build words and worlds together?

The intellectual wonders about the now of the digital commons and our supposed interconnectedness.

All three brood suspiciously.

The artist asks can virtual public space only provide virtual interaction, and virtual dialogue, and virtual democracy? The intellectual responds that the virtual was once more associated with the virtuous and the essential before its association with something that only seems to be there.² They wonder silently about the difference between the semblance of a thing and the thing itself.

The architect breaks the silence and offers to imagine a new space. He also offers to lead the project.

The intellectual asks to define the project.

The artist suggests a simple definition: to build a new intellectual commons together.

The architect knows the manifesto is the tool to unite.

The intellectual asserts that a contemporary manifesto would be too self-aware to assert a recognizable proposition.

The artist claims that radical change can only come from radical assertions... are you not affected?

The intellectual points to the reality of pluralism, of relativity, of specificity... will these not be causalities of any manifesto?

The architect asks if they can all admit that certain universals are worth believing as true?

The artist suggests that the contemporary manifesto will inevitably disagree with half of its premise, and proposes that its internal contradictions can be its strength.

The intellectual asks again for definition. What do we mean by contemporary? He suggests they turn to the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben.³ The artist resists the need for footnotes in a manifesto. The intellectual pushes on, and proposes Agamben's idea that to be contemporary is to be outside of one's own time.

The artist argues there is no outside. It is a construction.

The architect asks if the artist has a problem with construction, and offers again to build. This time he proposes a division of some kind, one construction that will make two spaces, an inside and an outside, from which to look upon the inside. The manifesto is a wall then. It divides out a section of the world to unify its malcontents.

The intellectual bristles at this binary division, and questions the need for more walls.

The architect suggests that it is very difficult to build shelters without walls.

The artist reflects on the idea of a manifesto as a form of shelter from uncertainty.

The intellectual asks if we can build uncertain walls as protection from certainty.

The architect suggests that perhaps the intellectual is finally getting into the spirit of the manifesto.

The artist asks if we have demonstrated sufficient self-awareness, and wonders if we can begin with the contemporary manifesto.

The intellectual is uncomfortable with how comfortable this feels.

The architect is uncomfortable because we haven't begun to build yet.

And so we begin...

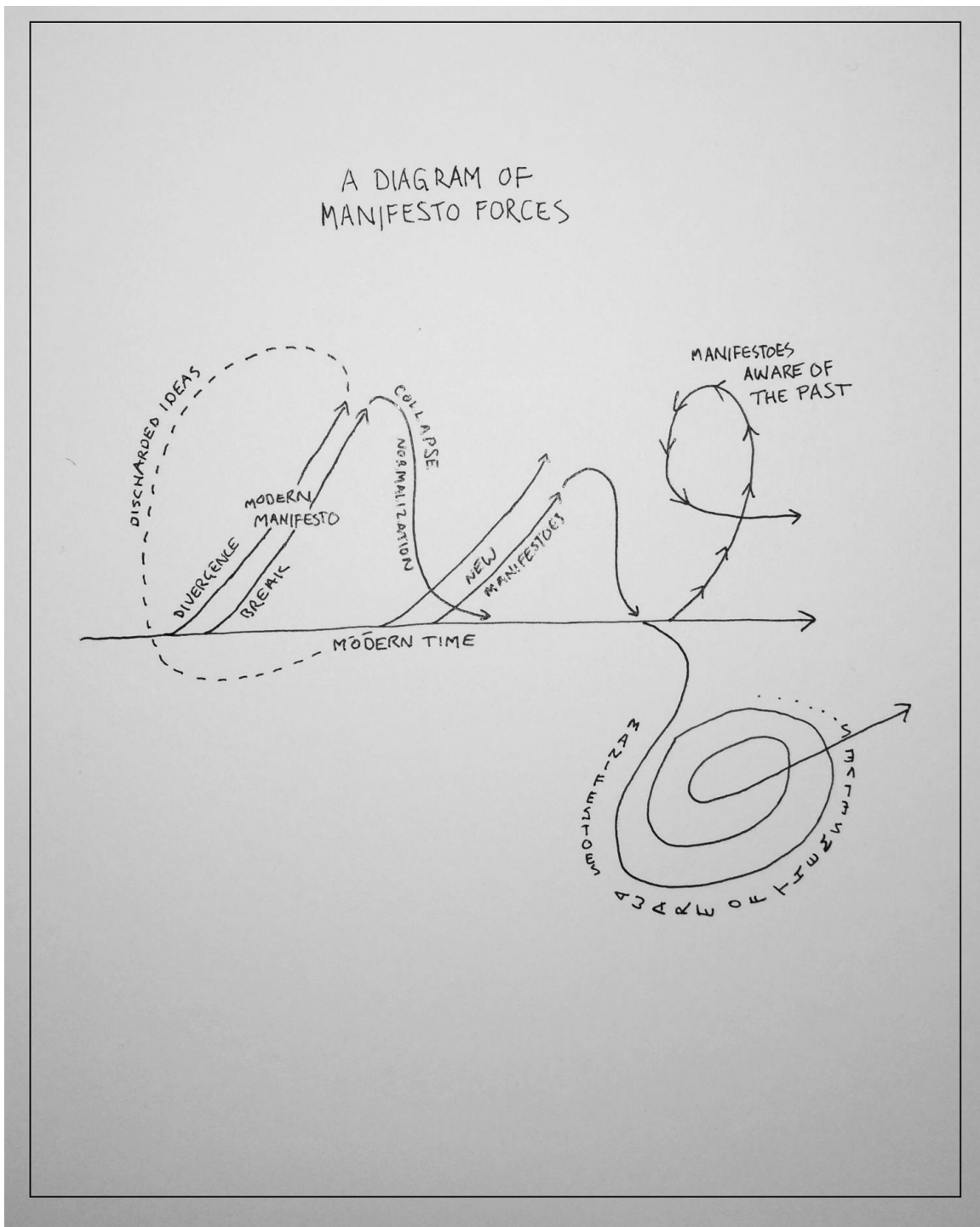


Figure 1 Diagram of manifesto forces, by Ryan Stec

We stake a claim on the condition of the present.⁴

Our most beloved manifestos define the present in a way that we can grasp. The powerful manifestos of modernism appear as short, sharp, passionate shouts. They reduce reality to a simpler structure that we can perceive as a whole. They appear in magazines and little printed books. They sum up the world to just the right size so that action can be itemized and pinned to its door. The 21st century intellectual, however, is not built for the construction of a good manifesto. We traffic in complexity, and rely on the belief that the world cannot be reduced to a form that could be handled by a public at large. We are the professional interpreters of the world through our instruments and technologies. From critical theory to quantum field theory, with the craft of language and the Large Hadron Collider, we believe that we reveal, if not truth, then at least truths in the plural. We have, in fact, multiplied truth and meaning. We fill books, libraries, server rooms, and now data centres with a multiplication so staggering it is impossible to see what is happening in the world let alone what matters. Data centres are filled with these overwhelming and unstable truths, much of which is proprietary, and armies of engineers seem unable to assess its structural integrity. It is not, however, the multiplication of truth which should be held responsible for its instability. Truth has always been unstable. The multiplicity of truth has been essential not for destabilization, but to reveal the inherent instability of truth. This is the primary tenant of our claim to the condition of now—that the truth is, and always was, unstable.

This, then, is the challenge of our manifesto—to build it on unstable ground.

The intellectual interrupts, and asks why we are using the word “truth” instead of knowledge?

The artist responds, because its more evocative or perhaps more seductive.

The architect asks if the intellectual has a problem with truth?

The intellectual asks if they think the two are interchangeable?

The artist avoids the question, and asks how interesting it would be to consider changing the task of knowledge production to the phrase “truth production”?

The intellectual feels an uneasy association with Orwellian language.

This contradictory association with the word “truth” delights the artist.

The intellectual feels uncomfortable with the ambiguity.

The architect is thrilled by it.

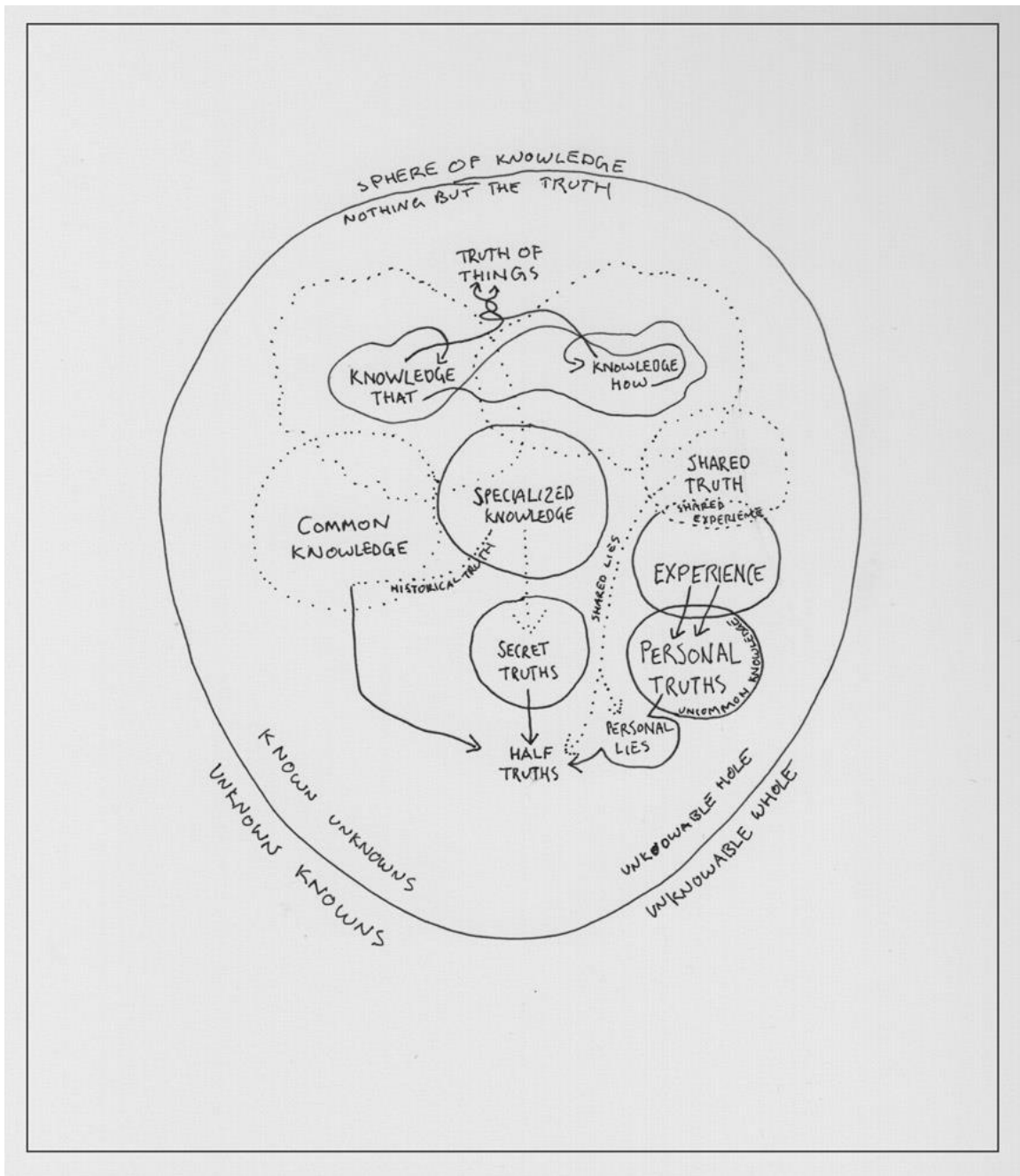


Figure 2 Diagram of the sphere of knowledge (excluding unknown knowns), by Ryan Stec

The artist diverts the discussion, and asks the intellectual about Agamben. The intellectual quotes Roland Barthes' paraphrasing of Nietzsche, which appears in Agamben, "[t]he contemporary is the untimely."⁵ He further suggests, acknowledging the artist's claim to a lack of an outside, that this impossibility describes instead a tension between the feeling of being both inside and outside of time, being both of a time and not...

The artist suggests this may open up a more interesting reading of the term contemporary artist, as being both of their time, and somehow beyond it.

The architect suggests that perhaps the artist should admit to reading something about this by Hans Ulrich Obrist.⁶

The artist admits that he did not want to indulge the intellectual's desire for a footnoted manifesto. The artist adds a footnote, and continues with his own consideration.⁷ He suggests that perhaps the experience of contemporary art can offer a creative instance of critical distance for a public. When a work of art is truly contemporary it creates a space that is somehow suspended out of its own time. In this way an artwork that is centuries old could continue to provide a contemporary space, but one made yesterday may fail in this same regard. The architect asks if this is not disorienting, recognizing he is envious of the willingness of the world to embrace the disorientation of art, but so quick to chastise architecture that is not perfectly legible.

The artist replies that it is an invitation to be disoriented, and that art that is truly contemporary is an open-ended, imaginary outside. It is an opening toward public reflection, although perhaps more of an offering of a multiplicity of openings. The artist suggests that while writing will always move along a line that we can follow through time, and will always construct arguments and build positions, these qualities alone cannot house the commons we need. We need the multiplicity of art.

The architect thinks about engineering and about gravity, and he asks about numbers and what role they have to play?

The intellectual suggests that numbers are another language we have made to describe the world, as we perceive it.

So they are essential then, the architect responds, and then asks about drawings—what do they do?

The intellectual suggests that drawings resist...

The architect interrupts... and yet, in their resistance they seem to open up.

The intellectual changes the direction of the conversation, and mentions Bruno Latour and the art exhibition he organized with artist Peter Weibel, called Making Things Public.⁸

The artist feels simultaneously validated and suspicious by Latour's entry into the white cube of the gallery.

The intellectual feels more comfortable knowing there is a precedent of some kind.

The architect asks if this new intellectual commons should look like an art gallery?

The intellectual asks if we are suggesting that art is a form of knowledge or a way to access knowledge? The artist asks if a book is knowledge or a way to access it?

The architect thought we were using the word “truth.”
The artist asks the question in a different way, where do we find knowledge... or rather, where do we find truth?
The intellectual asks if we find truth or make it?
The architect says he prefers to make things.
The artist asks what Bruno Latour was doing?
The intellectual admits he is not sure. Maybe it was providing a platform for others? Maybe it was collage? Maybe it was provocation?
The artist asks if we need more provocation?
The architect asks if we need more than provocation?
The intellectual is uncertain about proposing solutions.
The architect suggests that a platform is not a solution. It’s a place for people to stand.
The intellectual proposes that perhaps Latour would want to join us on the platform?
The artist reminds the intellectual that his type seem uncomfortable with the declarations of manifestos.⁹
The architect knows that manifestos need stars or heroes or both, but suggests that everyone will be welcomed. He knows, however, that the platform cannot hold the weight.
Together we formulate a radical opposition...¹⁰

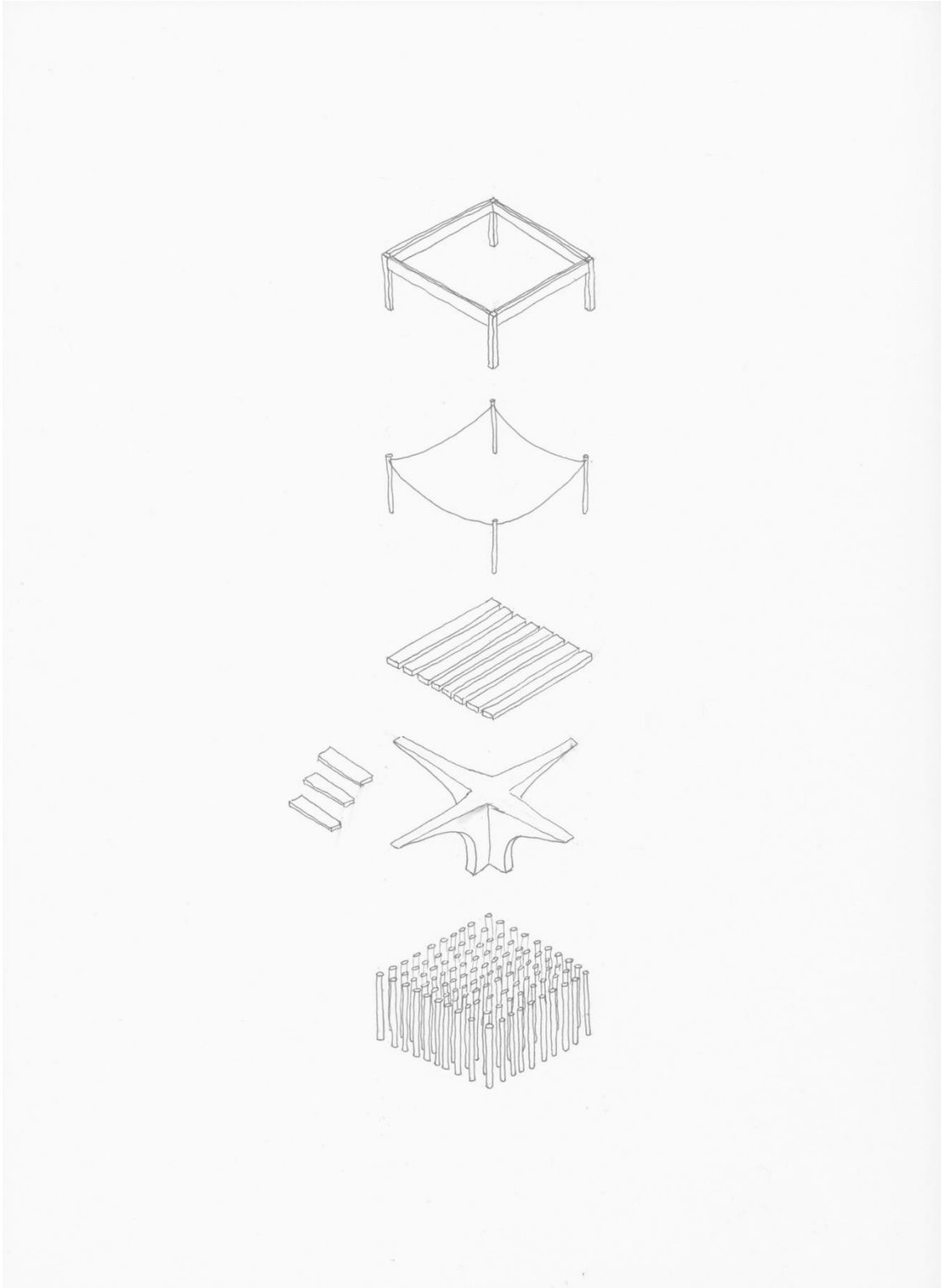


Figure 3 This is not an assembly: platforms for unstable ground, by Ryan Stec

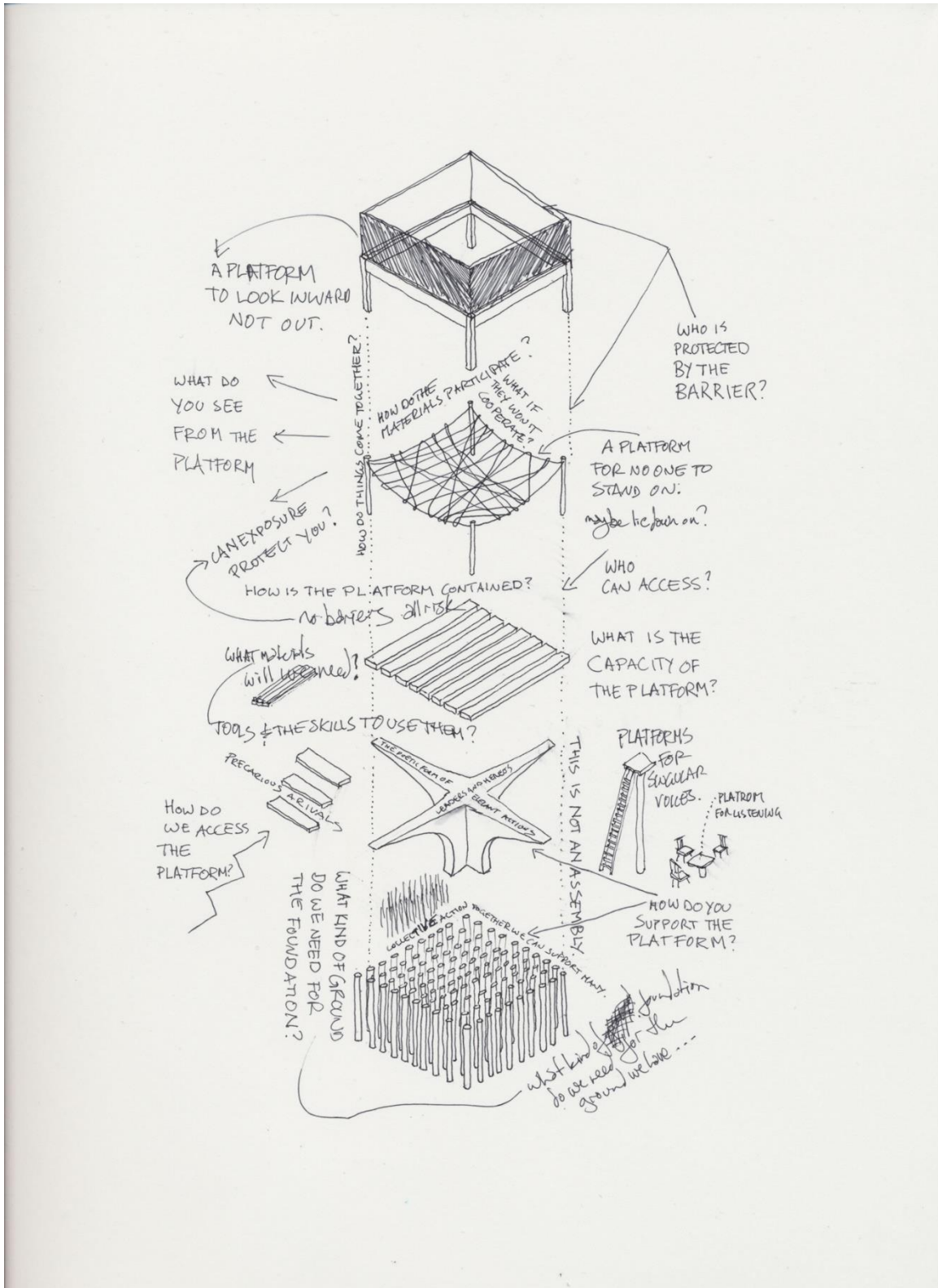


Figure 4 This is not an assembly: unstable diagrams for productive engagement by Ryan Stec

This is the manifesto for unstable ground.
This is the manifesto for uncertain times.
This is the manifesto for truths multiplicity.
This is the contemporary manifesto.

Our goal is not to tame the un-handleable, but to be open to the experience of what cannot be easily handled. Our goals are to set out the possible practice of simplicity without the reduction of complexity; to recognize the functional necessity of friction for both stasis and mobility; to recognize the role of tension and compression in structural balance; and to show that it is the combination of all forces that provides balance, and not their absence.

We see a litany of contradictions inhabiting our intellectual, artistic, and architectural histories. Each of us has emerged from the Enlightenment on the wings of a new society of reason that somehow rationalized colonization and slavery.¹¹ Modernity deepened a universal hole so profound it collapsed in on itself, but the questionable triumphs of science and capitalism are uncomfortably complicated. What can be done on this unstable ground? Deconstruction may reveal the structures, but the flesh is then also missing. Reconstruction leaves us with anachronistic structures not fit for the contemporary climate. We must build anew from the old, but through neither deconstruction nor reconstruction, neither critique nor nostalgia, or perhaps both can be used and reconfigured to constitute a new commons. Where we can be together, not as one, in a mass of singularity, and not as a collection of idealized individual rational beings either, but more like overlapping spheres of identity; like a collective non-linear narrative; like a John Cage symphony of silence; like an undulating pattern of humanity full of complicated contradictions.

Commons of all kinds, however, have been transformed. The physical commons once necessary for human interaction is now dominated by circulation.¹² The movement of people, or people in machines, and their corresponding infrastructure, is the defining component of our common space. We are together now in the private spaces of shopping centres and arenas. But even shopping centres and arenas are increasingly rarefied physical remains of modernity. The new definition of the virtual now contradicts its older definition. Virtual as essence has been replaced by virtual as dispersed. The dispersal is enabled by network technologies, and has deeply fragmented the social and cultural structure of our world. The physical commons is awash in the sonic isolation of personal headsets. Our mobile-networked devices enable us to spread our selves across the new digital landscape that is almost entirely privately owned. Was there ever a digital commons? Is the fragmented self any more unstable than the selves of previous generations? Like the unstable truths, is it only a question of revelation? Were we always unstable? Has our instability simply been laid bare or was it once a stable thing? Of course, we cannot know what came first, the revelation of the depths of truths' instability or the unstable self, fragmented and dispersed across time and space?

What we do know is that we must find the strength in our instability. Like a new Jackie Chan emerging from some intellectual version of *The Legend of Drunken*

Master.¹³ In our intoxication we find our freedom, we are loosened for increased flexibility, but only layered on top of our discipline. We know the illusion of cinema can only be built on the real talent of its players. We know that Chan's "drunken monkey" is only the appearance of blurriness. We know the choreographed fight is the beautiful manifestation of precise bodies in motion. We know the fight is an illusion built with the incredible material of the real. We didn't want this manifesto to invoke the tired metaphor of battle. What, after all, would we fight? Nothing is what it once was. Where is the square where we would gather? Where is the commons?

There is no doubt the commons has been transformed, but perhaps its transformation is only beyond recognition when you expect a reconstitution of its historical precedent? The temptation rises again to discard the old in search of the new, but here is another contradiction—to undertake another *tabula rasa* is to repeat the problematic erasures of modernity. The new commons cannot be built without the remains of the past. But what remains? What knowledge? What truths are strong enough to build a foundation, but are flexible enough to accommodate the diverse climate of the 21st century?

We may find some of our strongest members in their structures, like *spolia*,¹⁴ transported across time to reveal new meanings—not despite their contradictions but because of them. This is the place of the artist and the architect. We navigate complexity. We leave questions unanswered. We create experiences that encourage questions we seem unable to articulate. We can help build the new commons. Since passing the first post of modernity we must have collected enough posts to shore up any structure.¹⁵

We need more than intellectuals to help us sift through the fragments of the past. We cannot build new truths without understanding what is left, what remains, what is missing, and what has never been... The intellectuals will act like architects. The architects will reclaim their artistic selves. The artists will embrace language like never before.

This is what we will do to build a new intellectual commons. We will open doors to translate the work of the past. We will create experiences that capture the contradictions of the now. We will use the instability of the present to generate new forms. We will generate complexity, not as a tactic for obscurity, but as an irreducible representation of the real.

The intellectual interrupts, suddenly unsure. He asks my other selves if this is wandering too much, and is perhaps a little too vague? Don't we need to be more tangible... more specific?

The architect suggests that perhaps the intellectual is looking for a set of instructions or a manual.

The artist suggests that perhaps we should consider something like the manifestoes of Gilbert and George or Marina Abramović.¹⁶ They had very specific instructions, although he is trying to remember if they were actually concise rather than specific, and what the difference would be...

The intellectual is not sure we should trust the manifestos of the already famous. The artist replies that we shouldn't trust manifestos at all. We should believe in them.

The architect suggests what we want, then, is commitment.

*Each of me responds without thinking—Who's commitment?
I reply collectively, Ours.
Are we ready?
We cannot delay.
It is time then.
We must commit.* ¹⁷

WE WILL WELCOME ALL.
WE WILL NOT BE ONE.
WE WILL BE MANY.
WE WILL NOT UNIFY.
WE WILL MAKE SPACES FOR NEW DIALOGUE.
WE WILL NOT ONLY THINK AND ACT FOR OURSELVES.
WE WILL THINK AND ACT TO MAKE SPACE FOR OTHERS TO THINK AND ACT.
WE WILL NOT CONFUSE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.
WE WILL VALUE THEM EQUALLY.
WE WILL NOT VALUE THEM EQUALLY IN EVERY CONTEXT.
WE WILL EXPAND THEM BOTH THROUGH THE LEVERAGE OF THE OTHER.
WE WILL NOT ERODE THE PAST WITH IDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE.
WE WILL SORT THROUGH THE FRAGMENTS OF THE PAST.
WE WILL NOT CONFUSE AN EXAMINATION OF THE PAST WITH NOSTALGIA.
WE WILL BUILD IN THE NOW.
WE WILL NOT FORGET THAT THE NOW IS LONG, DISPERSED AND DIVERSE.
WE WILL TRANSFORM WHAT IT MEANS FOR AN ARCHITECT TO BUILD.
WE WILL NOT FORGET THE DISCIPLINE NECESSARY FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH.
WE WILL EMBRACE THE FREEDOM OFFERED TO THE ARTIST.
WE WILL NOT SEPARATE THE MAKING OF THE ARTIST AND THE THINKING OF THE RESEARCHER.
WE WILL BUILD HOUSES FOR THEIR COLLABORATION.
WE WILL NOT DESTROY WHAT HAS ALREADY BEEN BUILT.
WE WILL BE AN ADDITION, A PASSAGE, A CONDUIT, A CONNECTIVE TISSUE—AN ARRAY OF
CONSTANTLY SHIFTING METAPHORS FOR ANYTHING THAT BRIDGES WORLDS.
WE WILL NOT FORGET THE ROLE OF THINGS.
WE WILL MAKE THEM OURSELVES.
WE WILL NOT CONFUSE IDEAS WITH THINGS.
WE WILL RECOGNIZE THAT THEY ARE INSEPARABLE.
WE WELCOME YOU INTO THE NEW INTELLECTUAL COMMONS.
IT IS A NEW BALANCED SPACE FOR PUBLIC DISCOURSE.
IT IS DRAWN AND MADE AND AUTHORED BY THE INTELLECTUAL ARTIST,
THE ARTISTIC ARCHITECT AND THE ARCHITECTURAL INTELLECTUAL.
IT DOES NOT EXCLUDE YOUR HEART OR YOUR HEAD OR YOUR BODY.
ITS FOUNDATIONS ARE IN THE PLACES IN BETWEEN
IT STRETCHES FROM THE WHITE CUBE TO THE WHITE PAPER.
IT IS BETWEEN THE INSTITUTIONAL AND THE INTIMATE.
IT IS MADE WITH THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES OF THE ARTIST & ARCHITECT, GROUNDED IN THE MATERIAL WORLD.
IT IS MADE THROUGH THE PRODUCTIVE FORCES OF THE INTELLECTUAL DRIVEN BY UNDERSTANDING.
IT IS A HINGE IN THE SPACE BETWEEN.
IT IS A JOINT OF MANY KINDS
IT IS A COUPLING TO HOLD US TOGETHER SO WE CAN MOVE FREELY.

Figure 5 The Contemporary Manifesto or the making of a new intellectual commons by Ryan Stec

Notes:

¹ Martin Puchner argues in his book *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant Gardes* (2005) that the history of the manifesto is definitively framed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto*—that it is in that frame that the modern manifesto begins. He writes, however, that there is a pre-history of the manifesto, and identifies two key moments in the 17th century that may be considered antecedents in the development of the modern manifesto. (Puchner 2005, 12-18) The first was the Puritan Revolution, and in particular the “revolutionary theology” of Thomas Münzer. The second was The Levellers and Diggers, two overlapping political movements from 17th century Britain. The Diggers were radical groups living communally, and defending the notion of lands held in common for all people. The Diggers, and in particular Gerrard Winstanley, produced many significant and articulate tracts, proclamations, poems, and songs including “A New Engagement, or, Manifesto” from 1648. Puchner suggests, however, that despite the texts emerging from these two key moments being embraced retroactively as manifestos by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Ernst Bloch, and Georg Lukács, among others, the texts should be seen only as proto-manifestos.

Janet Lyon, however, in her book *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (1999) takes a more inclusive position. She connects texts dating back through to the 17th century as having continuity in form, style, content, and title to the modern manifesto of the 20th century. For her, *The Diggers' Song*, the most well known song among the Digger poems, manifests, and tracts, is one of the more significant, radical proclamations prior to the French Revolution. (Lyon 1999, 16-23) The Diggers argued and sang out against emerging enclosure laws, and the respective loss of the commons on the land, while also furthering the notion of the legitimacy and authority of a common people. For Lyon, the importance of the Diggers songs and texts is in the active incitement to collective resistance, but also in their efforts to “represent” a group to itself.

The Diggers' Song has a lively history winding its way through to 20th century punk and folk music in America and the U.K. The song was recorded by the popular anarchist pop-punk group Chumbawumba on their album *English Rebel Songs 1381–1984* (1988), while an imagined Digger Song was written in the 1970s under the title *World Turned Upside Down* by Leon Rosselson (recorded most prominently by Billy Bragg in 1984). It is within this lineage of the Diggers and their song, echoing over the centuries, that this creative effort to explore the role of the artist and architect in academia is undertaken. The author and his/her audience certainly stand in a much more privileged position than the Diggers and Levellers, but this, *The Contemporary Manifesto*, hopes to nonetheless resist the banal anachronism of something like *The Webinar Manifesto*. (Treion Muller 2013) It is with respect and admiration that it draws on this tradition of radical proclamations, and the attempt at a simultaneous call to action and a representation of ourselves to ourselves.

² In the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, earlier and obsolete definitions of “virtual” refer to the particular qualities of a thing with a clear etymological relationship to virtue. (Oxford University Press 2016) In it's second general category of definition, it is the term “essential” that is placed in opposition to the actual. The *OED* identifies its earliest use in relation to the computer in 1959 to describe virtual memory, a technique that allows

the secondary storage device to substitute for the physical memory. Its proliferation through computer science and into popular culture, perhaps most significantly through the term “virtual reality,” has created a fascinating tension between its roots as essence and its current use as simulation.

³ Giorgio Agamben outlines his thinking on contemporariness in his short essay “What is the contemporary?” (2009) He elaborates several defining points of someone who is contemporary as being outside of one’s time, but also able to fix their gaze on it while not being “blinded by the lights of the century.” (Agamben 2009, 45) Agamben suggests that it is one’s anachronistic condition, which provides the productive space from which one sees one’s own time. “The contemporary is one who holds his gaze firmly on his own time so as to perceive not its light, but rather its darkness. All eras, for those who experience contemporariness, are obscure. The contemporary is precisely the person who knows how to see this obscurity, who is able to write by dipping his pen in the obscurity of the present.” (Agamben 2009, 44)

⁴ In Janet Lyon’s *Manifestoes*, the chapter “Manifestoes and Public Spheres” offers a rhetorical consideration of the term “we” in the manifesto. (Lyon 1999, 23-26) She suggests that it is a division where a reader must choose to identify with the collective expression of the text, and be part of the “we,” or choose an opposition, in which they become a “you,” and thus apart—not “us” or “we.” The indeterminate or “... unspecified ‘we’ denotes and affords participation, on the part of its interpellated subject(s), in a provisional community whose power is located in a potentially infinite constituency.” (Lyon 1999, 26)

⁵ The nature of the contemporary as “untimely” as framed by Roland Barthes and Friedrich Nietzsche, and by extension Agamben, is not without its problems. It places a considerable value on those who can develop a critical distance. In the Agamben essay, to be contemporary is to not be truly immersed in one’s place or to be outside in a critical or objective space, but it is this uncomfortable opposition, that the real meaning of the contemporary is exactly what it is not, which raises significant questions. This arises in part from its oversimplification, after all, as Pedro Erber suggests, exactly “...who coincides perfectly with one’s own time? Who can adjust entirely to its demands?” (Erber 2013, 39) In Erber’s *Contemporaneity and its Discontents*, he criticizes Agamben’s text for its inability, along with a number of other western philosophical positions from Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, and Walter Benjamin, to abandon a framework so deeply influenced by the European fascination with the other. Ultimately, he suggests that this position “...forecloses any possibility of approaching the contemporary in its most novel, problematic, and thought-provoking aspect: in short, the fact that the same word names today the historical period in which we supposedly live and the very impossibility of historical periodization, insofar as the unity of its putative subject unravels itself in singularities irreducible to generalization.” (Erber 2013, 44)

⁶ This endnote is a place holder while we wait for the artist to add his reference, and comply with the standards of writing that will assist this text in being considered legitimate thinking.

⁷ In the research and review for this rhetorical project, I encountered Hans Ulrich Obrist's text in the *e-flux journal*, which also engaged with Agamben's notion of the contemporary. Obrist's text provides a critical frame for the Manifesto Marathon event which he co-curated at the Serpentine Gallery in 2008, suggesting that, "A 'contemporary' manifesto could perhaps be perceived as a naïvely optimistic call for collective action, as we live in a time that is more atomized and has far fewer cohesive artistic movements. And yet there seems to be an urgent desire for a radical change that may allow us to propose a new situation, to name the beginning of the next possibility rather than just look backwards." (Obrist 2010) While Obrist seems to embrace Agamben's notion of the contemporary, but expands on the Agamben dislocative or outsider aspect to suggest a plurality in the contemporary of the art world.

⁸ Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel curated the exhibition, *Making Things Public: An Atmospheres of Democracy*, at Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM), in Karlsruhe, in 2005. The exhibition focused on the "...problem of representation in politics" (Latour 2005), drawing from his 2002 collaboration with ZKM for the exhibition *Iconoclasm*. In the catalogue essay published in the 1072-page publication, Latour proposes a *Dingpolitik* over a *Realpolitik*, which is to say, to think of the political in terms that extend beyond the human, and include the realm of objects. Latour's political philosophy is driven by a shift away from what he calls "matters of fact," which is the world rendered into stable and durable representations, toward the notion of "matters of concern," which is a much more relational understanding of the world. (Latour 2005, 14) Through an incredible diversity of artists, intellectuals, researchers, texts, images, and objects, Latour and Weibel facilitate a consideration for the concept of an "object-oriented democracy," creating a fascinating example of an engagement that stretches across boundaries, and opens up new ways of thinking through these complex and pressing ideas.

⁹ There is an appropriately tense irony here in that this essay, its diagrams and manifesto, are inspired by Latour's work and the two exhibition projects with ZKM. One of Latour's most well known contributions to political philosophy is the book *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991), where he challenges the "purifying" tendencies in modern thought, which in the most general sense attempts to divide nature from culture. This engagement with Latour's ideas through a form so drenched in modernity is one of the many ironies that *The Contemporary Manifesto* embraces.

¹⁰ The manifesto form does not always require a forceful opposition, but many significant manifestoes take this rhetorical position. Consider some key examples drawn from Ulrich Conrad's collection, *Programs and Manifestoes of the 20th Century* *Architecture* (1971), *The Manifesto of Futurism* of 1914 defines a clear opposition with its first four points, beginning with "I oppose and despise." (Conrad 1971, 36) *The Suprematist Manifesto* of 1924 declares, "[I]f life must be purified of the clutter of the past, of parasitical eclecticism, so that it can be brought to its normal evolution." (Conrad 1971, 87) *The Mould Manifesto* proclaims a spectacular opposition against the angular lines of Vienna and its architecture, "Functional architecture has proven to be a wrong road, just like painting with a ruler. With giant strides we are approaching impractical, unusable, and finally uninhabitable architecture." (Conrad 1971, 158)

¹¹ Although many of the modern roots of the artist, architect, and intellectual lie firmly in the Renaissance, this note invokes the blossoming of our current understandings of “the public,” which emerged during the Enlightenment. In part, this text is wrestling with the interface between the public and the present condition of the artist/architect/intellectual. From a much more critical framework than the one presented here, Angie Sandhu grapples with the relationship between the intellectual to different publics, in her book, *Intellectuals and the People* (2007). She undertakes a detailed critique of a range of understandings of intellectual work, and its relationships to the cultures and publics within which it exists. In her chapter “The Habermasian Public Sphere,” she focuses on the Habermas defense of Enlightenment, “... principals of rationality, progress and eventual human emancipation.” The Habermas position, according to Sandhu, sees liberal democracy as an inevitable outcome of human history, and this includes the eventual triumph of rationality over other “pre-modern” conditions of human consciousness. Sandhu emphasizes the contradictions and conditions of Enlightenment ideals expressed by many who, before the later half of the 20th century, were not represented in western intellectual discourse, “[t]he ability of the noble ideals of the Enlightenment to coexist in tandem with slavery and the denigration of the rational capacities of women and the poor were for many not simply evidence of the unfinished potential of the Enlightenment, but rather pointed to a fundamental problem with the privileging of reason itself.” (Sandhu 2007, 39-40) Sandhu picks up the tools of reason and rationality to mount a detailed critical position on the role of the intellectual, however it remains surrounded by the very same space. *The Contemporary Manifesto* is not a critique however, but a proposition for ways to work and build from these detailed critical positions.

¹² This refers to the very general condition of the European and North American city since the industrial revolution. The effect of automotive transportation, its 20th century orientation to industrial manufacturing, and their expansive surface growth is profound. Architect and scholar Pier Vittorio Aureli identifies Ildefonso Cerdà’s work of 1860, *The General Theory of Urbanization*, as a significant hinge from where one can identify that the city has been transformed. Aureli identifies this transformation as a shift away from an understanding of “...human habitat as framed within the ideological and historical concept of the city as centrality, but as a potentially infinite space that extends beyond the centre of cities according to the technological and economic capabilities of a productive society.” (Aureli 2011) Throughout the 20th century, the city becomes increasingly instrumentalised as a space for the perpetual circulation of labour, goods, and capital.

¹³ In the film *The Legend of Drunken Master* (Edward Tang 2000), Jackie Chan’s character uses a style of fighting in which being intoxicated allows him to reach his full fighting potential. The rarely practiced style of Shoalin boxing, known as Zui Quan, draws on these same unpredictable movements. (Shoalin Federation 2012) However, Chan’s invocation is for both its creative style and its comic potential, and his incredible skill and discipline produce incredible cinematic illusions.

¹⁴ *Spolia* refers to the incorporation of existing architectural fragments into another built project. Although the study of *spolia* has a significant body of research, it is to my mentor, Federica Goffi, that I am indebted here. Her critical and creative reading of

architecture and conservation encourages a reconsideration of time and building (both as an act and as an object). The interplay between building a space as a material activity and as a metaphoric or symbolic one, is captured in her opening description of the “regeneration” of the Basilica of St. Peter’s in the Vatican, in her Ph.D. dissertation, “[a]rchitectural making is to be interpreted in this context as a re-making through changes to an existing building, providing a paradigmatic model for an hyphenated practice of architectural-conservation as a form of invention and imagination allowing for memory, always in the making.” (Goffi 2010, 18)

¹⁵ Post-modernity; post-structuralism; post-war; post-Cold War; post-Watergate; post-Internet; post-feminism; post-human; post-digital; post-theory; post-language; post-colonial; post-apartheid; post-independence; post-surrealist; post-symbolist; post-capitalist; post-gay; post-everything—there are hundreds of official examples of the post- prefix in the OED, most of which are from uses specifically emerging in the 21st century. (Oxford University Press 2016)

¹⁶ Gilbert and George and Marina Abramović presented manifestoes during The Serpentine Gallery Manifesto Marathon of 2009, and both appear in the publication. Abramović’s seems to be the premier of her work *An Artist’s Life Manifesto* that has been presented and performed in a variety of contexts since. The work is a series of 19 headings, with several clearly stated points under each one, starting with either “[t]he artist should...” or “[t]he artist has to...” (Lees 2009, 36-37) Gilbert and George presented four manifestoes at the event, one of which was a re-presentation of their very short and direct *The Laws of the Sculptor* from 1969. (The Serpentine Gallery 2008) Beyond these two cutting examples, the event and its publication includes many reflections and responses to the production of a manifesto, but many of them encounter the same misgivings about modernity and the manifesto that are found in this rhetorical project.

¹⁷ The “we” of the manifesto is a precarious, rhetorical device. As previously noted, it can create a metaphorical line for which the reader must choose to include oneself in the movement of the ideas or to stand apart from them. However, the “we” can also hide a singular voice or vision behind the appearance of an organized group. The early manifestoes of the 20th century Avant-Garde played in this space, but many of the manifestoes of the later half of the 20th century became more singular. The “we” of this text is specifically unfolded from the consciousness of its author. This “we” is an “I,” but like all manifestoes, it is in an invitation to be a “we...”

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