THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRANSGRESSION
If you want to follow architecture’s first rule, break it.
THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRANSGRESSION

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THE ARCHITECTURE OF TRANSGRESSION

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The architecture of transgression is ‘an architecture that disrupts our expectations, that goes beyond, or slips between, visible, accepted norms.’ — Guest-Editors Jonathan Mosley and Rachel Sara
In 2013, ∆ opened the year with innovation. It now closes it with transgression. Though innovation and transgression are different by definition—innovation is focused on creativity and transgression is all about overstepping boundaries and conventions—they do share in common a lively and disruptive spirit: innovation relies on a certain level of playfulness just as transgression requires a daring naughtiness. Perhaps most significantly, innovation and transgression share the same desire to go beyond established limits and to question the given. It is this that makes them most potent for architecture, with the power to provoke and probe current conventions. To have a fertile design culture, architecture has to be a dynamic art that is constantly moving, so that the centre is relentlessly challenged and propelled forwards by those operating at the margins. The best design work never comes out of complacency; it is produced in a jostling atmosphere in which peers and young whippersnappers are constantly angling for position.

It is the way in which transgression stands apart from innovation that makes it most pertinent today, with its focus on crossing social and political boundaries. As described by Louis Rice in this issue, the Occupy Movement in 2011 realised the power of physical occupation of urban space even if it was temporary (see pp 70–5). Most aptly for practice, transgression helps us to test out the possible futures of architecture and design, as suggested by Alastair Parvin’s article on open-source architecture (pp 90–5). This can be through the activities of practices, working nimbly at a small scale, in a manner that can be paralleled with the incremental model of digital innovators who in the last decade have by iterative means explored the potential of a project or a product only through increments. High-risk design research that is prepared to transgress all known boundaries, given limits and conventions will become particularly necessary if architecture is to become fluid enough to reorganise and reshape itself in the shifting tides that new technologies bring.

Note
Sophie Warren and Jonathan Mosley, Spectator or Player?, 2012
Top left: One door, two doorways, one space beyond; an architectural intervention which brings into question different modes of spectatorship on the threshold to a gallery, forming here an entrance to Rogue Game at Spike Island, Bristol (see cover of this issue for an image of the playing arena).

Sophie Warren and Jonathan Mosley, Utopian talk-show line-up, 2013
Top right: A detail of the setting for the event series, constructed in each location by a graphic framework, a page from the Beyond Utopia book, rescaled and then occupied by readers and objects to create a live discursive territory.

Bottom: This exhibition and essay celebrate the role of carnivalesque events such as zombie walks, street parties, illegal raves, and even knit bombing and skateboarding as transgressive spatial practices that have the power to critique, deformalise and rejuvenate the formal city.

“...the situation is... designed to be lived by as conversion. The site played by a passive or moving agent playing public’s most common sense, which, if played by those who considered it real, but either, in case some of the one, ‘very’ must seriously mean.”

Urban acts of transgression, such as zombie walks, urban boxing, street parties, illegal raves, street interventions (traffic, fashion, etc) often occur from within the margins, but also, disorienting, disrupting, and at the boundaries of what is incipient, which is defined for they are not necessarily understood for serious purposes, nor explicitly understood as acts of resistance. Acts of transgression are equally physical acts, carnivalesque in their engagement of public revelry.

Events such as zombie walks and illegal raves pop-up another player with the intention of creating an end ‘belonging’ for those involved, as well as engaging consuming bystanders and passers-by. In these
Architecture and Transgression is an emerging research and practice-as-research group at the University of the West of England (UWE) in Bristol, UK. The guest-editors of this issue of Δ, along with other colleagues at this experimental Bristol school, are developing exploratory, cross-disciplinary and international projects, collaborations and publications. They are hosting the Architectural Humanities Research Association 10th International Conference on Transgression in November 2013, with associated publications to follow in 2014 (www1.uwe.ac.uk/et/research/transgression).

Jonathan Mosley is a practising artist/architect and holds a senior lectureship in architecture in which he leads Design Research and the final-year studio of the Master of Architecture programme. In practice, his collaborative studio, founded with artist Sophie Warren, produces trans-disciplinary projects and acts as a site of critical exchange between architects, artists and theorists. The projects create conceptual and spatial frameworks, employing participatory strategies to construct situations for collective encounter. The studio produces installations, events and publications. An immersive live installation, with Can Altay, that transgresses and displaces the logics of the multi-use sports hall, *Rogue Game* has been exhibited at Spike Island, Bristol (2012); Casco, Utrecht (2011); and The Showroom, London (2010). The game proposes in the same space the simultaneous play of three or more sports. The project *Beyond Utopia*, with Robin Wilson, created an imaginary architectural scheme for a vertical urban common for central London as a planning application. This playful provocation, documented as a screenplay entwining reality and fiction, forms the focus of the book *Beyond Utopia* (2012) published by Errant Bodies Press with responses to the work by Maria Fusco, Brandon LaBelle, Marie-Anne McQuay, Paul O’Neill, Elizabeth Price, Jane Rendell and Lee Stickells. The studio is currently developing an international series of live events of rapid-fire readings that explore how to play Utopia. Part speculative forum, part game show, the *Utopian talk-show line-up* (2013) opens a discursive space as a testimony to the collective desire to imagine difference. The events will take place at Eastside Projects Birmingham; The Showroom, London; Pro QM, Berlin; and the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo (www.warrenandmosley.com).

Dr Rachel Sara is Programme Leader for the Master of Architecture programme at UWE. She studied architecture to doctoral level at the University of Sheffield, and has contributed to a range of academic architectural journals, books and conferences. Her research work particularly explores ‘other’ forms of architecture; specifically examining architecture without architects through investigations of the performed architecture of the carnival and the transient architecture of the campsite. This influences her studio teaching, where she runs ‘live’ community-based projects, as well as exploring the relationship between architecture and dance. She is a director of the Design Research Group at UWE, is a PhD and masters supervisor, and teaches Design Research and Design Studio. She was co-curator of the ‘Transgression: Architecture without Architects’ exhibition at the Bristol Architecture Centre in 2012, and co-authored the associated book, *architecture + transgression*. Δ
Metavilla, French Pavilion for the Venice Architecture Biennale, Venice, 2006

Shown under construction, the scheme was conceived both as a collective building and living experience within the context of the exhibition and as an embassy for French design.
Didier Faustino/Bureau des Mésarchitectures

Alumnos 47 Foundation, Mexico City, due for completion 2014
The project creates two programmed areas with a more loosely programmed interstitial zone.
The environment of the McDonald’s is at times during the film partially familiar and partially exceptional, with the balance shifting towards the latter with a slow insistence.