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Reappropriation as Resistance

According to several postmodern philosophers and other theoreticians of Architecture, from Foucault to Lyotard and Charles Jencks, modernity is said to have started with the Renaissance.

If I reach into my cinematographic memory and remember the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), I tend to believe otherwise. I say “tend to believe,” because it’s only cinema. But this scene, in which Man, barely *sapiens*, grabs a long, solid bone, and, with a gesture almost not hysterical enough to be true, starts beating his fellows, asserting his supremacy through his discovery of tool, bears, in my opinion, something very important. This fundamental discovery in Kubrick’s film finds its purpose in the amazing ellipse that leads the viewer to the spaceship floating in the immensity of space.

Even if you are not fooled by the fact that the primate’s discovery as it is shown is too easy and too quick, one can be moved (with assistance from the soundtrack) by what seems to be the starting point of modernity.

What has remained in my mind ever since the first time I saw the film is the space, both huge and empty, that is enclosed in the ellipse.

We know more or less what has happened between the discovery of tool and the spaceship, but that knowledge is irrelevant when viewing these images. Why? Because, in the end, nothing has changed. The paradox of this initially improbable analogy is that it shows that Man has pursued the same quest in perpetuity: power. How? By appropriating the space around him; a living space he tends to devitalize for his survival. It has always been like this, and Humanity has survived thus far.

“Man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea,”¹ Foucault stated.

But here we are, at the very beginning of the twenty-first century, and global order seems to convulse, questioned in its way of being to the benefit of other ideological spectrums. Democracy, a precarious balance between a free market economy and a free universal suffrage, seems unable to deal with the excesses of capitalism, which dehumanize our lives.

Space has always been a core stake for Power, because Man needs vital space to survive.

I believe that it is a constant fight, and that we have to reappropriate our space, beginning with public space. And that’s what has been taking place for months in the Arab world.

From New York to Bamako, through Algiers, Berlin, Mexico, Mumbai, etc., public space is dehumanized, a result of various strategies that lead to a physical control of people, starting from addressing a group but received individually.

¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [1966]), 387.

Reappropriation of public space by the people, and through the realization of alternative ideas, is the first step in a possible resistance against the totalitarianism of the excesses of capitalism.