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What if . . . we think about architecture as no longer being defined by permanence? If instead we see impermanence as a default condition of cities? Flexible architectural configurations are temporarily deployed around the globe, to provide medium-term shelter, often to enormous crowds. Such structures fulfill a range of functional tasks and are used in religious and cultural festivals or can take the form of markets, military camps, refugee camps, or even temporary mining towns.

This magazine is published on the occasion of the exhibition Does Permanence Matter? Ephemeral Urbanism, held in the Architekturmuseum of the Technical University of Munich at the Pinakothek der Moderne, based on a long-term study by Rahul Mehrotra and Felipe Vera. The research traces a global phenomenon that has become increasingly topical given today's current state of mass migration triggered by climate change, political strife, and natural disasters.

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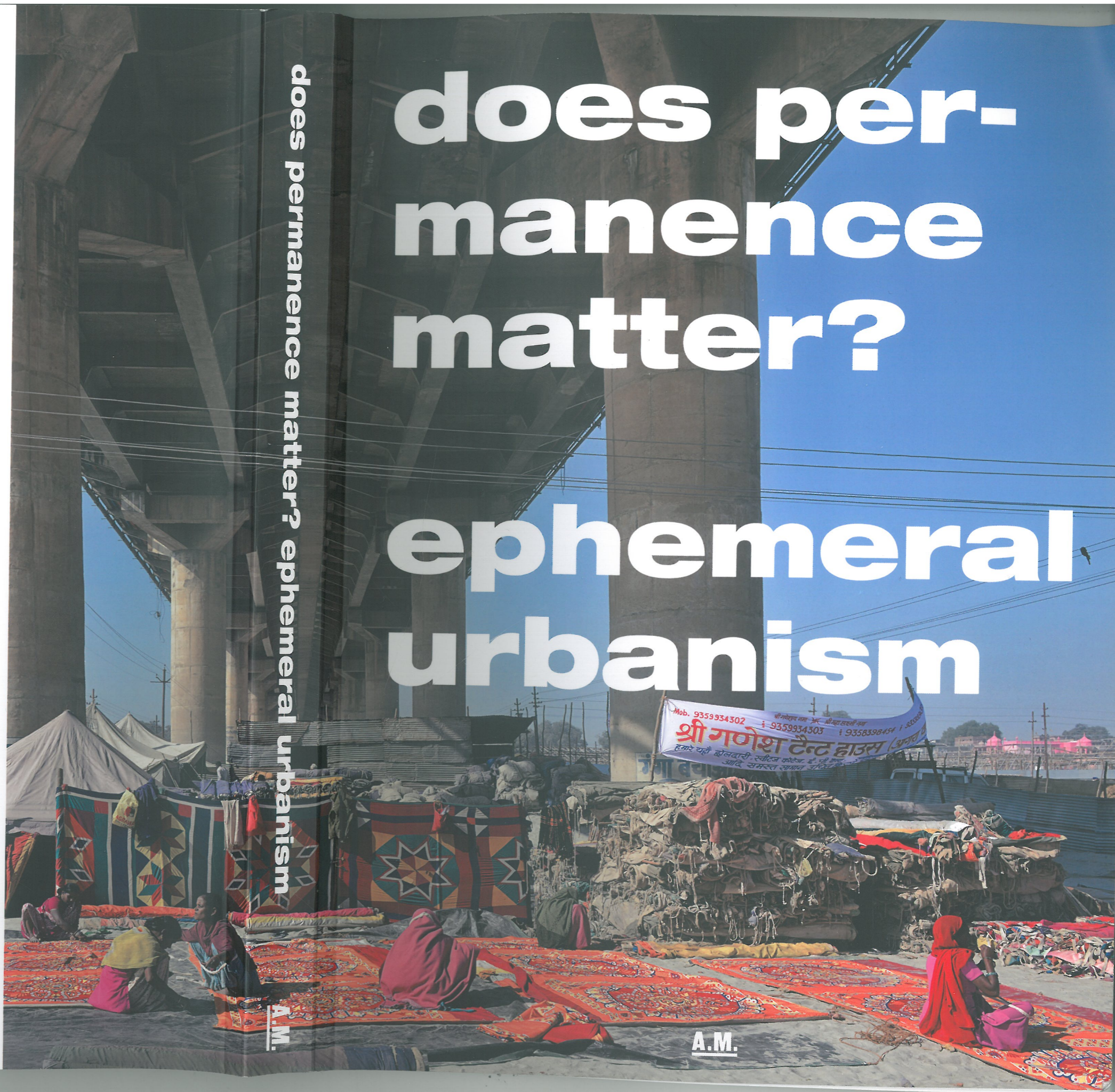
ISBN-978-3-9819240-0-8
does permanence matter? · ephemeral urbanism

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OTHER MARKETS: THE GLOBAL STRUGGLE OF INFORMAL TRADING PLACES
PETER MÖRTENBÖCK AND HELGE MOOSHAMMER

The market is one of humanity's most prevalent and varied sites of exchange. It is the meeting point for a fluctuating group of individuals who intersect economically, culturally, and socially. What holds the market together is that it's a locus of multiple forms of agreement. In ancient Greece, the agora—a centrally located city square—was a site for political, religious, and judicial assembly, as well as a marketplace. It was a place for deliberation among the citizens of the community (polis). It was where the public gathered and the character of the public sphere was negotiated. With the development of the modern state, however, the spaces in which politics are conducted were physically and symbolically separated from those in which markets operate and capital flows are regulated. This has in turn obscured the fundamentally shared public character of different forums of civil assembly, on the one hand, and of economic resource allocation, on the other. In the current phase of expansionist neoliberalism, this spatial separation belies the fact that political and economic forces—the state and capital—are increasingly operating outside their respective, purportedly distinct spheres of action in order to lay claim to market spaces and steer them in speculative terms.

The informal economy, representing about half of all economic activities worldwide, has become a key target of these interests. Informal markets—trading places operating outside the official reach of the authorities—and their struggle for survival are significant expressions and sites of the growing conjunction between state and cap-

ital operations. Studying the history and transformation of specific informal markets helps us to unravel some of the procedures and narratives that underpin the liaison between the state and the speculative paradigm in neoliberal governance. Later in this essay, we will examine how notions of “informality” have obtained a new political currency and are being instrumentalized to legitimate top-down interventions in the economic fabric of the Global South.

A critical moment of rupture often marks the genesis of informal markets; consequently, they are often located in territories marked by war, disaster, and migration, where distinct groups of people are regarded as different and undesirable. One well-known example is the Arizona Market near Brčko in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which emerged in 1995 at one of the most violently embattled intersections of ethnic frontlines during the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Other internationally entwined yet locally unfolding crises also triggered the temporary phenomenon of the Iranian Bazaar in the Turkish city of Gaziantep, which came into existence in the 1990s in response to detours taken by Iranian Shia pilgrims to circumnavigate the Middle East's many pockets of sectarian violence, and found an abrupt end when the Syrian crisis escalated in 2012. As spaces of exception, informal markets uphold economic systems while engendering encounters between otherwise incompatible realms of operation; established routines and relations are thus negated in a particular locale. Sites of alternative exchange—in dropout communities like Quartzsite in the Mojave Desert in southeastern California, as well as the new wave of creative entrepreneurship at hipster markets, where a young urban crowd surrounds



Arizona Market, Brčko, 2006. Photo: Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer.



International Trade City, Yiwu, 2012. Photo: Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer.

itself with lifestyle accessories in trendy settings—are places of both resistance and commodification.¹

In his posthumously published lecture “Of Other Spaces,” delivered in March 1967, Michel Foucault introduced the notion of “heterotopia” to describe conditions of this kind.² During the twentieth century, he explains, the relations between different sites—simultaneities, entanglements, and intersections—increasingly defined our experience of the world, and ultimately determined which forms of circulation, exchange, placement, and classification were perceived as suitable. Continuity and duration were replaced by connections between different fields of action, which, depending on how developed or decayed, offer different types or levels of opportunity. While not explicitly mentioned among his lineup of gardens, cemeteries, brothels, and ships, informal marketplaces are rich embodiments of such Foucauldian heterotopias, forming parallel spaces of real and mythical contestation—“heterotopias of crisis,” providing shelter for the excluded, as well as “deviant heterotopias,” harboring all kinds of nonconformity.

The role and function of these contemporary heterotopias are shaped by ongoing mutations from situated and extended spaces into sites of relations structured through proximity and distance, “simultaneity” and “juxtaposition.”³ “Other markets”—the title of this essay—is an explicit reference to the

1. For detailed descriptions and analyses of the markets mentioned in this essay, see Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer, eds., *Informal Market Worlds Atlas: The Architecture of Economic Pressure* (Rotterdam: nai010 Publishers, 2015).
2. Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” trans. Jay Miskowicz, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), pp. 22–27.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Preceding pages: The Guangshen Superhighway Market in China. Photo: Map Office – Gutierrez+Portefaix, 2003.

multiple economic and noneconomic events that are brought together and relayed through informal markets. This rise of informal sites and processes is enabled by a new intensity of spatial relations that are boosted by advances in technology and infrastructure. Laying the ground for recent decades of globalization and incessant economic integration, the accompanying boom in global wealth—worldwide GDP tripled from 25 to 75 trillion USD between 1993 and 2013—has not led to a corresponding demise of the informal economy, as anticipated by orthodox economists. On the contrary, in many regions of the world, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, informal employment numbers have been steadily rising and continue to involve the majority of the working population.⁴

Foucault's relational model of spatial production resonates with the dynamics of market transactions. Every exchange at a market is determined not only by the references of the particular site where it occurs but also by those of numerous others, near and far, involved in the intricate fabric of trade relations. Indeed, a key characteristic of market protocols is their capacity to enable contact and transmission between otherwise often incompatible spheres, either through regimes of externalization—excluding potential disturbances such as quality disputes and relegating them to other registers such as industrial standards and pricing—or the employment of

boundary objects that can move between different realms of meaning.⁵ For instance, in a seemingly paradoxical twist of economic logics, the relentless branding of consumer goods, which constitutes one of the key marketing strategies of big corporations, prepares the ground for one of the most successful kinds of boundary objects in informal market transactions: through the backdoor of counterfeit production and informal trade, the visual language of brands leverages the economic and social participation of a diverse set of actors on multiple levels. The heterotopia of the informal market fuses disparate times and spaces into a mutually sought-after climate of exchange by means of deception and compensation, from the migrant workers doing clandestine “night runs” in Chinese factories and selling spillovers at local street markets,⁶ to the African and Arab traders attending the big commodity fairs in newly emerging trade hubs such as Yiwu, in Zhejiang Province, to the shops in Dubai's Karama Centre selling counterfeit bags to foreign tourists, and the ostensibly vernacular artisan markets in Latin American cities.

“NOTORIOUS” MARKETS

Informal economies are multiplying in parallel to formal economic growth worldwide, creating an ever-denser network connecting individual marketplaces with commercial dynamics elsewhere. This development, however, cannot be equated with a direct expansion of fa-

miliar global economic actors, but shows how new spaces for trade are opened up by improved transportation and communication technologies. As a result, attempts are being made via numerous channels to bring these substantial future markets of informal trade into the sphere of influence of established trading blocks. The annually published list of “notorious markets”—a regular section of the Special 301 reports released by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR)—has developed into a particularly effective instrument in this respect. The Special 301 reports list physical marketplaces around the world that are deemed “notorious” for violating the intellectual-property rights of US companies and individuals.⁷ Be it mass-produced pirated DVDs in Mexico City's Tepito neighborhood, fake designer clothes in Dubai's Karama Centre, or counterfeit electronics in Bangkok's street markets—countless items could be listed that cast a shadow on these marketplaces.

But while trade relations can be subject to ethical standards, notoriety in this context has a more specific meaning and purpose. It is less an ethical category used to describe someone's reputation for wrongdoing than an epistemological and legal category referring to judicial certainties that do not require further evidence.

Notorium est quod omnes sciunt—a thing is notorious when it is known to all. With roots in Latin antiquity, and

introduced into medieval jurisprudence by the twelfth-century canon lawyer Gratian, this legal principle has now re-emerged as a political tool in the United States' assessment of the trade policies of other governments. The key implication of using the term “notoriety” lies in its eschewal of evidentiary standards, inasmuch as the mere definition of contested sites as notorious obviates the need for further evidence. The continuing influence of the Special 301 program is largely due to the separate “out-of-cycle review” of notorious markets begun in 2010, which involves the compilation of a short list of marketplaces around the world that purportedly exemplify concerns about global trademark counterfeiting and copyright piracy. Notoriety in these cases is not the result of judicial discretion within the framework of a fact-finding exercise. It is a suggestion of undisputable economic harm associated with the existence of “such sites.”

This name-and-shame tactic needs to be seen as part of the global struggle over newly emerging markets and growth-leading economies, especially those pertaining to knowledge-intensive production, which is highly localized in cities and represents a 70 percent share of world trade. In the accelerating shift of economic growth from developed countries to metropolitan areas of the Global South, informal markets have thus become a pawn in the fight for control over contested territories, networks, and alliances. Such contestation might not

4. See Leonardo Gasparini and Leopoldo Tornarolli, “Labor Informality in Latin America and the Caribbean: Patterns and Trends of Household Survey Microdata,” *Desarrollo y Sociedad* 63 (2009), pp. 13–80. Given the flexible and unregulated nature of the informal economy, clear-cut definitions of what counts as informal employment are impossible, and any accounts of the size of the informal sector can only

be an estimate. Combining a “productive” and “legalistic” perspective, most research today draws on the 2002 ILO resolution in which “the term ‘informal economy’ refers to all economic activities by workers and economic units that are—in law or in practice—not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements.” International Labour Organization, Resolution Concerning Decent Work and the Informal Economy

(Geneva: International Labour Office, 2002), pp. 25 and 53.

5. We are referring here to Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer's description of boundary objects as elements that embody a stable core meaning but that can be appropriated by different groups for very different ends. See Susan Leigh Star and James R. Griesemer, “Institutional Ecology, ‘Translations’ and Boundary Objects:

Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907–39,” *Social Studies of Science* 19, no. 3 (August 1989), pp. 387–420.

6. Night runs are unauthorized shifts to manufacture commissioned goods, the productivity of which is not counted toward the official order but siphoned off by the factories' employees.

7. The annual Special 301 reports deal with

the adequacy and effectiveness of US trading partners' protection and enforcement of intellectual-property rights, released by the USTR under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. These reports are one of the most powerful forms of unilateral leverage used to compel developing countries to comply with foreign trade policies favored by the United States. See Joe Karaganis and Sean Flynn, “Networked Governance and

the USTR,” in *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies*, ed. Joe Karaganis (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2011), pp. 75–98.



Karama Centre, Dubai, 2013. Photo: Peter Mörténböck & Helge Mooshammer.

always be immediately obvious from the everyday, business-as-usual atmosphere of targeted sites such as Shanghai's Qipu Lu malls, the thousands of stalls in Yiwu's International Trade City, or the Asian trade centers in Toronto's Golden Horseshoe area.

But with the stellar rise of higher education and high-tech industries in China—in 2012, the country took the top spot in worldwide patent filing with a global share of 28 percent—a changing knowledge landscape has begun to generate innovative homegrown products and attractive high-end domestic brands in Asia. A consolidation of higher living standards in developing countries could bring about a shift in trade relations, further accelerating the territorial redistribution of production, consumption, and profit-making. It could also instigate far-reaching changes in public attitudes toward cultural expression, rendering globally branded goods less desirable. In the meantime, the USTR's "notorious markets" lists—with their focus on Southeast Asia and the traditional US hinterland of Latin America, as well as their revealing blind spot when it comes

to Africa—are producing a finely tuned geography that lays bare the ambitions and anxieties of the so-called developed world with regard to potential economic woes and investment opportunities.

The development of vicarious diplomatic instruments, such as the USTR's annual notorious markets review, makes clear how informality has become a matter of definition. Only when its characteristics are defined can informal economies in specific areas be identified and, consequently, state action initiated to counteract their alleged threats. Informality is used as an umbrella term for all sorts of activities that could constitute a "drag on growth," in the words of a 2007 World Bank flagship report on Latin America and the Caribbean.⁸ Rather than a concept that encapsulates an inevitable byproduct or intrinsic component of the capitalist economy, informality elicits a set of actions aligned with particular hegemonic beliefs and strategic interests in market expansion. To define concrete processes as "informal" is part of a long-term strategy of opening up new markets, geographically as well as demographically. This is not to say that the situations addressed by the term do not entail adverse conditions of poverty, exploitation, and abuse; yet the way the concept of informality has been appropriated by international economic institutions since it emerged in the 1970s has transformed it into an instrument for orchestrating top-down change along specific lines of socioeconomic organization.

Capitalism relies on state intervention to prepare economies for wealth accumulation and safeguard investments. Consequently, developing and dividing up markets in accordance with intellectual-property rights and their enforcement has become a major structuring instrument in economies that are

increasingly knowledge-based. The accompanying interplay of political moves fueled by powerful economic lobbies conjures a nexus of the informal and the illegal, which becomes popularized in the media and in high-profile legal cases. In October 2011, for instance, Morocco signed the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, the only "developing" country to do so, which aims to streamline international intellectual-property rights enforcement. The process leading to this action was facilitated by diplomatic pressure based on reports, compiled by US Political and Economic Sections stationed abroad, on copyright infringement at Casablanca's infamous "black market" *Derb Ghallef*.⁹

The exercise of definitional sovereignty in determining the standards and procedures of Moroccan governmental offices brought the country in line with the requirements of "liberalized" markets. It demanded improved economic administration and enforcement as well as access for foreign investors and corporations to the new markets of the service sector and information technology. The correlation between growing state intervention and a rise of informal activities, as Alejandro Portes and William Haller have observed in their account of state control,¹⁰ becomes apparent in these governmental maneuvers, which apply measures to selected economic sectors on behalf of interested parties of influence.

INFORMAL MARKET WORLDS

Informality is a relational concept, which is to say that perspective plays a critical role in the politics of informality. The debate over framing and measuring informality ties into a logic whose aim is to steer particular developments within labor markets, capital flows, and trade relations. Indeed, differentiating multiple subcategories that address the situation of migrants, women, or selected economic activities, and the ways in which these are applied in regions such as developing countries, the former Eastern bloc, or migrant quarters in Western metropolises, highlight the increasing appetite of major economic powers for access to these areas. Capitalism produces informality—not merely by keeping part of the world's population in inferior conditions, but also by means of political definitions that render certain segments of economic life informal and subject to outside intervention.

The merger between formal and informal is played out through a phalanx of market liberalization, deregulation, and harmonization, which points to the prevailing rationale that underpins this race for economic supremacy. The primary aim of appropriating new frontiers is not integration on an equal level but accommodating externalized risks and costs associated with speculative markets. The role of informal markets (as the "other" market) is already indicated in the establishment of formal trading operations. In order to protect their

8. Guillermo E. Perry et al., *Informality: Exit and Exclusion* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2007).

9. US diplomatic cable from Casablanca, Morocco, to the Department of Commerce and the Secretary of State. "Piracy Still Thriving in Morocco," in "Public Library of US Diplomacy," WikiLeaks, July 8, 2009, http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09CASABLANCA132_a.html (all

URLs accessed in July 2017). See also Peter Mörténböck and Helge Mooshammer, "Derb Ghallef Valley," in Mörténböck and Mooshammer, *Informal Market Worlds Atlas*, pp. 62–67.

10. "The paradox of state control is that official efforts to obliterate unregulated activities through the proliferation of rules and controls often expand the very conditions that give rise to these activities."

Alejandro Portes and William Haller, "The Informal Economy," in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, 2nd ed., ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg (New York: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 409.



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investments, actors constantly seek to appoint and create subordinate sites to mitigate elements of crisis. Informal markets thus emerge at, and become attached to, a variety of critical points in the neoliberal market economy, beginning with leveraging the volatility of supply and demand, in the case of the gigantic intermediate markets with their shuttle traders and networks of small-scale sweatshops,¹¹ and ending with absorbing the wastefulness of throw-away consumerism and the crisis of environmental degradation in the global hubs of recycling markets.¹² Increasingly, too, this process is being controlled remotely: whether through diagnosing violations of commercial agreements, which are used by governments to apply political pressure, state surveillance of immigration hotspots and border regions using drones, or the current planning rhetoric of “urban acupuncture” in informally settled metropolitan areas.

This strategy of outsourcing, however, is not easily manageable and is marked by numerous contradictions and conflicts; in fact, it opens up space for deviation and resistance. Even if power, and the market economy for that matter, is prone to increasing abstraction, it still relies on its actual performance to be effective. Power, again taking a Foucauldian perspective, is not simply imposed on passive subjects, but has to be marshaled through the orchestration of their actions.¹³ Power has to pass through their bodies and be performed

accordingly; subjects relay the flows of power. Whether intentionally or not, each power-affirming act entails an element of divergence from prescribed protocols and norms. As sites of dense concentrations of people, informal markets contain particularly high risks of deviation—the most prevalent expression being the circulation of counterfeit goods. While offshore production and (increasingly) services are staples of postindustrial economies aiming to secure high profit margins for investors, this measure cannot simply be achieved by commanding supply networks; it requires a dispersal of production know-how as well. With the shift to higher-skilled lines of production and high-tech products, exposure to rights infringement increases (i.e., the redirection of power in the form of knowledge appropriation by hired workers).

Recognizing that informal economies are established through divisive politics, as pools of future options and theaters of global interest, the question arises as to how these marketplaces might be amenable to appropriating further resources, redirecting power relations, and allowing other interests to surface. Put differently, other market forms might be generated through the workings of the informal economy beyond the neoliberal paradigm of unfettered growth and wealth accumulation. If the potential for change is envisaged as a shift in power relations, then intervening in dominant systems of reference by establishing

alternatives to the top-down framing of formal/legal and informal/illegal become key. Sidestepping folkloric conceptions of an indigenous exchange economy, new technological capacities indicate emergent landscapes that redistribute creativity as well as the proliferation of novel forms of capital. More access to information, in particular, can fundamentally disempower the operational force of the paradigm of scarcity as an overriding market regulator. For instance, in Kenya, the widely adopted price-finding app M-Farm—founded by three Kenyan women, who were the recipients of Nairobi’s IPO48 tech start-up prize in 2010—enables users, mainly female market vendors, to check the availability of and demand for certain commodities, or compare prices at different markets via their mobile phones. This not only liberates them from a dependency on manipulative middlemen but also subverts conventional notions of center and periphery, and of whose capital counts or whose is deemed superfluous.¹⁴

The concomitant dissolution of control structures is contributing to a steady atomization of economic activities. Widely perceived through the lens of casualization, the intrusion of economic considerations into ever more aspects of life, facilitated by networked technologies and social media, brings with it a hitherto unknown ease in switching between different roles. The spread of apps advertising micro jobs and services in the so-called sharing economy—flex-

ible, quick tasks without further obligations or special equipment—form part of the wider crowdsourcing movement, whose consequences for conventional systems of capital circulation have yet to be fully comprehended. The question is whether this invasiveness of economic operations, as they break down into units for individual exchange, in effect causes the normative power of established economic forces to evaporate. Through the simultaneous engagement with multiple platforms of micro commerce, if one constantly switches between being a seller and a customer, the descriptive power of being confined to one role and position also diminishes.

What is at stake in these newly defined arrangements is thus the question of who and what bestow meaning on particular economic activities. Social ties, ethnic communities, and family relations are typically cited as essential for informal markets to operate.¹⁵ In the case of the recent phenomenon of hipster markets though, the logic of this relation is reversed. Rather than being a tool for conducting economic transactions, the creation and affirmation of social ties becomes an equally relevant reason for participating in these markets. Notwithstanding many other aspects involved in the promotion of hipster markets, such as their role in gentrification or reinforcing commodified and “accessorized” subject formation, the onset of economic decisions directed by social desires heralds a tipping point in the balance

Does Permanence Matter?

Ephemeral Urbanism

11. See the case studies on the Seventh Kilometer Market (Odessa) and the Cherkizovsky Market (Moscow) for the impact on Eastern Europe, or La Salada (Buenos Aires) and Feirinha da Madrugada (São Paulo) for Latin America, in Mörttenböck and Mooshammer, *Informal Market Worlds Atlas*, pp. 290–95, 302–7, 86–91, and 226–31.

12. See the case studies on the Alaba In-

ternational Market (Lagos) or the Nairobi markets in *ibid.*, pp. 330–35.

13. Michel Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended”: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976, trans. David Macey (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 29–30.

Preceding pages: Derb Ghallef, Casablanca, 2013. Photo: Peter Mörttenböck & Helge Mooshammer.

14. See Heike Baumüller, “Assessing the Role of Mobile Phones in Offering Price Information and Market Linkages: The Case of M-Farm in Kenya,” *Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries* 68, no. 6 (2015), pp. 1–16.

15. Portes and Haller, “The Informal Economy,” p. 408; see also Mark S. Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (1973), pp.

1360–80; Pascal Dey and Chris Steyaert, “The Politics of Narrating Social Entrepreneurship,” *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy* 4, no. 1 (2010), pp. 85–108; and Robert Neuwirth, *Stealth of Nations: The Global Rise of the Informal Economy* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2011).

of economic power. What makes these developments so decisive is their global spread, from Brooklyn to Bangkok, in the wake of new creative classes establishing their own centers of activity.

Decision-making atomized by technology becomes much more difficult to control and contains a potential for bottom-up value generation. When informality becomes a permanent condition, it can no longer be relegated by mechanisms of exclusion administered through agents of the formal state. Erecting networks of informal exchange facilitated by new technologies is a first step toward counteracting the deterritorialization effects of late capitalism. Not unlike the demands of many indigenous communities for the “right to antenna”—gaining access to the political discourse as well as marking a physical presence by setting up communication infrastructure, as they attempt to have their territories recognized—claiming space through informal markets becomes decisive in objecting to the ongoing privatization of the public sphere. Authorities commonly respond by displacing these markets to privately run facilities, which ties in with the corporate depoliticization of urban encounters that substitutes street life with the consumption of pre-scripted entertainment. In this context, the campaigns of street vendors against their criminalization and for their right to operate in public space foster crucial communities that form the vanguard of contemporary civic movements.¹⁶ Con-

testing the management of public space is a vital part of claiming one’s role in the political sphere, of reclaiming the *res publica*.

THE COMMONING OF MARKETS

Attributing a state of informality—describing something as “other”—has come to serve as a convenient vehicle for top-down intervention, and it is high time we engaged with these assemblages from the perspective of those who are implicated in them. Besides providing livelihoods for themselves, the biggest achievement of informal sellers lies in the creation of a unique common good—the establishment of a market environment. Informal markets are not a naturally given occurrence but only come into being through collective action and contribution. This scope and value of informal markets then becomes interesting as an economic resource to outside parties. Similar to the contestations around the control of, and profit extraction from, other commonly held or pooled resources, questions concerning the people involved in informal markets are overshadowed by struggles over how to best appropriate the capital flows generated by this trade.¹⁷ The fact that the main argument put forward to legitimate acts of intervention is one of improvement and better management highlights the value of what is produced in informal conditions. What is at stake in “improving” informal markets is the control over the market environment, and



Smorgasburg, Brooklyn, NY, 2014. Photo: Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer.



Talad Rot Fai, Bangkok, 2012. Photo: Peter Mörtenböck & Helge Mooshammer.

16. Most notably, policy campaigns by the globally active street-vendor organization StreetNet International, founded in 2002. 17. Much of the discussion about dealing with informal markets echoes the arguments around the best management of commons. See Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolutions of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Brett

M. Frischmann, *Infrastructure: The Social Value of Shared Resources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Heather Menzies, *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good: A Memoir & Manifesto* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2014).

its trade potential itself. One of the most important avenues of inquiry here has to do with how the question of managing the resources of markets can instead be understood as a question of commons. Whether it is young peers congregating around the exchange of lifestyle accessories at Bangkok's trendy Talad Rot Fai or street vendors joining forces in their legal battles against eviction, in the case of Bangkok's old street markets Klong Thom, Saphan Lek, Baan Mor, and Patpong—markets foster practices of commoning, a collective cultivation of mutually shared environments.

The main question that emerges in light of this problematic is whether recognizing informal markets as a form of commons can provide beneficial inspiration for future global coexistence. Investigating this issue requires an engagement with the capacities of informal markets beyond strictly economic categories. Rather than portraying informality as a "drag on growth," we could conceive of it as encouraging alternative moments of growth and vigor. Much in the way that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai or cultural theorist Paul Gilroy have described contemporary forms of social organization that depart from the dominant Western model of modernity as imagining and creating "alternative modernities,"¹⁸ we can think of informal marketplaces not as a force opposing prosperity but as an alternative social and spatial rendering of our contemporary condition—"marketscapes" that are

imbued with complex cultural meanings, spreading out in various directions in amorphous shapes and sizes. Indeed, recent years have seen numerous artistic projects that have lent visibility to the function of informal markets as spaces of encounter between different social interests. These include Joanna Warsza's project on Jarmark Europa in Warsaw, involving site-specific works and happenings (2006–09); Tadej Pogačar's Street Economy Archive, about street vending around the world (2001–07); Oliver Ressler's discursive video work *Alternative Economics – Alternative Societies* (2003–08); Jesús Palomino's installation of an informal market in Panama City (2003); and Kate Rich's artistic intervention in food cycles through the direct sale of food products via social networks in *Feral Trade* (2003–ongoing).

In contrast to the hegemonic understanding of growth, informal commerce does not necessarily entail unfettered expansion and augmented resource consumption. This alternative perspective rests partly on informal markets' micro-scale operations, which allow for variegated forms of economic exchange more attuned to the actual needs of populations, and partly on opportunities opening up through online trading platforms, which might allow for more complex circuits of usage and recycling. As materials and relations move along these trajectories, entering legal and illegal domains and being put to use in



Patpong, Bangkok, 2012. Photo: Peter Mörttenböck & Helge Mooshammer.

18. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

different ways, they increasingly bind economic and social values, which may ultimately undermine the dominance of power that is solely enforced economically. The capacity of informal markets to appropriate different realms enables an exchange of much more than goods and money.

This change is accompanied by decisive alterations in the workings of economic power. One of the most important experiences in this context is that relationships, on every level, are increasingly instrumentalized and negotiated economically. In this particular economy, everything is put into circulation: people, policies, principles. The quest for economic power furthers a kind of informal politics in which all market constituents are modified based on the situation: from political discourse, to flexible citizenship as a means of managing the mobility of people, to the fragmentation and commodification of life itself. Skillfully handling indeterminacy in these regimes means seizing opportunities momentarily up for grabs, adding to an ever-adaptable fabric of transient arrangements that influence the form, diffusion, and distribution of social interaction. Informal markets are an expression of these dynamics. Their everyday realities yield a plethora of creative ways to make use of whatever available resource is potentially tradable. Yet despite, or because of, their embrace of a market mentality, informal markets are often the center of fierce struggles

over their existence. From local issues to international diplomacy, a broad range of fronts link up to oppose and dissolve such bottom-up economic relationships.

Questions about shifting social values and how they affect consumer behavior and realign power structures in the spheres of production, trade, and consumption are at the heart of current economic disputes. The convergence of new technologies and generations forges new cultural convictions whose market implications are yet to be determined. In this context, hipster markets lead the way in establishing new market protocols in which experiential qualities become key for loyalty-building and brand identification. Endlessly posting updates and photos of their market experiences, customers turn into “friends” who actively contribute to the scripting of a cultural narrative around emergent economic opportunities. Rather than turnover volumes, the numbers of “likes” on Facebook (Talad Rot Fai has over a half million after five years in business¹⁹) index profitability expectations and denote a crucial compatibility with other emergent culturally defined trade environments such as peer-to-peer exchange, shared use, and crowdfunding. The success of hipster markets in so-called emerging economies suggests a shake-up of conventional assumptions about hierarchic market relations. These are no longer manifested in clear-cut geographic distributions that equate centers of power with knowledge acqui-

sition and creativity and areas of outsourced production with passive consumption and emulation.²⁰ The creativity of hipster markets in terms of transforming economic challenges into cultural assets marks the current frontline in the battle over economic power. The struggle for control over informal markets is thus not only based on disputes about copyright standards, the failure to pay taxes, or the threat to public order. What is at stake here is nothing less than control over changing market formations in a global knowledge society.

Does Permanence Matter?

Ephemeral Urbanism

19. Talad Rot Fai Facebook page, accessed on November 2, 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/taradrodifi>.

Preceding pages: Saphan Lek, Bangkok, 2012. Photo: Peter Mörttenböck & Helge Mooshammer.



View of the Alaba international market located in Ojo, Lagos State, Nigeria. Photo: Annie Chéneaux-Loquay.

20. While Bangkok's markets are consistently branded “notorious” by the USTR, the hype around Talad Rot Fai has also yielded stories of copyright theft in the opposite direction. Western textile chains are frequently said to scout this market in search of new designs that they allegedly copy for next season's line.

IMPRINT

This magazine was supported by
Förderverein Architekturmuseum der
TU München
and is published in conjunction with the
exhibition:

does permanence matter?
ephemeral urbanism

Architekturmuseum at the Technical
University of Munich (TUM)

September 14, 2017 to March 18, 2018

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with Marcelo della Giustina and
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Copyediting:
Dawn Michelle d'Atri

Graphic design:
m-a-u-s-e-r
(Asli Serbest and Mona Mahall)

Printing and binding:
Druckerei Joh. Walch GmbH & Co. KG,
Augsburg
Paper:
Profibulk 1.3, 115 g/m²

Typeface:
Maison Neue
Minion Pro
Helvetica Neue

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ISBN-978-3-9819240-0-8
does permanence matter? – ephemeral urbanism

Cover:
Kumbh Mehla festival, Allahabad, India
© 2013 Dinesh Mehta

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With the friendly support of:
PIN. Freunde der Pinakothek der
Moderne e.V. and
Förderverein Architekturmuseum der
TU München