Making Things International 2

Catalysts and Reactions

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University of Minnesota Press
Minneapolis • London

An earlier version of "Barbed Wire" was published in Alexander D. Barder, *Empire Within: International Hierarchy and Its Imperial Laboratories of Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Published by the University of Minnesota Press
111 Third Avenue South, Suite 290
Minneapolis, MN 55401–2520
http://www.upress.umn.edu

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

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23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Salter, Mark B., editor.
Title: Making things international, 2. Catalysts and reactions / edited by Mark B. Salter.
Other titles: Catalysts and reactions
Description: Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015044918 | ISBN 978-0-8166-9629-1 (hc) | ISBN 978-0-8166-9630-7 (pb)
Subjects: LCSH: International relations—Philosophy. | Globalization—Political aspects. | World politics—21st century. | BISAC: POLITICAL SCIENCE / International Relations / General. | SOCIAL SCIENCE / Human Services. | POLITICAL SCIENCE / Globalization.
Classification: LCC JZ1319 .M372 2016 | DDC 327.101—dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015044918

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Part II. Deterritorialization

Tent

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The tent is a nomadic thing. When folded, it is versatile and ready to move at any time; in its unfolded form, the tent gathers people and materials and creates a transient dwelling. As such, the tent has served both nomadic peoples and important parts of sedentary societies throughout history. But recently the tent has become truly international as a contested political technology and as a thing that shapes the global. In military interventions and in emergency responses by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), tents serve a worldwide humanitarian regime as a standardized item of equipment to provide shelter for the exposed lives of refugees, soldiers, or people affected by natural disasters. The tent is a material element and paradigmatic spatial form of the contemporary ambulant biopolitics of crisis and emergency. At the same time, in the recent waves of social struggle from Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park, from Rothschild Boulevard to Puerta del Sol, the tent also acts as a mobile resistance technology that challenges inadequate crisis management. The tent is the thing that connects different social movements and transgresses diverse aims and locational specificities; it is both a shared symbol and a shared strategic tool.

In this contribution, we propose to follow the tent as a way of understanding how the global is made, to highlight the tent's relation to world politics, its position in global assemblages of crisis management, and its role in creating networks of resistance. We propose to follow the tent rather than define it, because we are more interested in its trajectory than in its properties. This perspective is inspired by Arjun Appadurai's notion of following things: "we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories [implying] in part a corrective to the tendency to excessively sociologize transactions in things."[1] Rather than simply placing the tent in the framework of the international, be it global humanitarian interventions or new forms of social struggle, we propose to look at the spaces that are made up by the tent. Drawing on the assumption that things enable and articulate forms of sociality, we discuss the vital qualities realized

in tent design and follow the tent to those locations where it has recently organized different kinds of social experiment.

In the first section, we will meditate on the ontology and topology of the tent. We argue that the tent-thing has the capacity to make spaces. This capacity cannot be reduced to the uses we make of the tent, but stems from the material elegance of tensile structures that spur unique tent designs and enable the tent's current internationalization. In the second section, we take a look at the social and architectural history of the tent. This genealogy of the tent will serve as a backdrop to elucidate the significance of contemporary uses of the tent as an element in spatial technologies of exception. In the third section, we follow the tent as an international thing used to manage exceptions—ranging from events of spectacle to natural, humanitarian, or economic catastrophes—on a global scale. In recent years, protesters around the world have assembled their resistance to the governing of and through crises in and around tents. We will turn to these springs of protest in 2011 that also globalized the tent as an item of resistance equipment.

Ontology and Topology of the Tent

What is a tent, and what is the thingness of it? The tent is first and foremost an ordinary thing. The social needs delegated to tent design are simple ones. Most of the time, a tent gathers people and materials not because it introduces something unfamiliar and critical that creates a public problem but simply by opening up a location for dwelling, a space for profane needs and everyday practices. The tent is so ordinary that it has ceased to be noticed; it is not a "matter of concern" but a matter of habit.[2] The tent needs a tent dweller who acquires specific skills in making a home in and with the tent. There is a tent-habitus as much as the tent itself is a habitat. But this habitus/habitat is not just the property of an individual. Perhaps you don't want to assemble a tent on your own or sleep in it alone. When the tent is assembled collaboratively and when a campsite is constructed, tents work as operators of collectives and intimate relations. The tent is both a center of gravity and a little world that connects and divides the people who live at the campsite and carry out their daily activities in and around it. Tents not only gather people, they set up places. Tents are spatial things. Once they are set up, they enclose both their inner sphere and their surroundings in a double movement without rigidly decomposing inside and outside. Tents constitute their proximate environment as much as they enclose a more or less cozy inside; they are not simply located at a campsite and occupy a given space but open up the very location every time they are set up.

The places that tents enclose are ontologically prior to the empty space at the campsite. We need a "wild camping ontology" to understand the tent's ability to make up spaces; we can find this in Heidegger's phenomenology of building and dwelling, where he emphasizes the virtue of certain things to "gather locations."[3] To follow the tent does not mean to simply follow an object through space as it travels on preordained paths in and out of different social contexts, but rather to acknowledge the tent as a thing-in-motion that has the ability to create spaces. As a thing that creates spaces, the tent must be considered an operational force in its own right. It is not only an international thing or a thing that has been made international recently; it is capable of making the international.

The tent not only opens up spaces and assembles its dwellers, it also assembles its own materials, rules of architecture, technological knowledge, and craftsmanship. Tent design embodies transiency, it enables and reflects movement—not only the movement of people, but of the materials themselves. As a prototype of membrane design, the tent is closely related to the umbrella and the sail, two other things that also incorporate the vital qualities of protection and movement—or rather: protection through movement—allowed for by ephemeral design constructions.[4] The tent is able to achieve these qualities through a minimal use of resources; it produces the most with the least. The low weight and flexible behavior of tensile structures and membrane fabrics is what makes the tent light and fragile, but also more practical and resilient to external forces. The tent's economic use of materials and the construction's ability to bend in the wind are precisely what constitute its "material elegance."[5] Ease of transport and operation have been the qualities defining tent building from the outset, making the tent one of the most efficient forms of shelter and at the same time a remarkable answer to the need for mobility. This unmatched ability of tent design to quickly open up and rearrange spaces of refuge feeds into the global distribution of tents to the many sites of crisis we are witnessing today.

Despite their many differences in appearance, size, and use, tents conform to only a few fundamental types of structures, consisting either of rigid or braced frameworks covered in fabric, tensioned structures with load-bearing membranes supported by masts, or hybrid structures combining these features.[6] Although tent construction types have barely changed for centuries, the development of new technofabrics and innovations in computerized structural engineering now allow for novel form-finding approaches and have increased the popularity of membrane architecture and design.[7] Tent constructions have become ever more lightweight and at the same time more robust and durable.

Tent aesthetics exhibit possibilities of shape and curvature and a degree of translucency and airiness that are unmatched by any other construction technique. The membrane, in an increasingly sophisticated way, selects what can pass (air, noise) and what has to stay outside (water, mosquitoes). At the same time, it is definitely more permeable than any wall could ever be and therefore more open, without even needing a window. The sound of the world outside can transgress the membrane structures without hindrance.

Tent Genealogy

The existential usefulness of tents, the way they serve as shelters and transient dwellings, points to their significance as one of the oldest forms of abode in human history. Archaeological remains of stones and animal bones used as anchorage for nomadic settlements in Siberia date from prehistoric times more than forty thousand years ago. Unlike the cave, the tent is a genuinely human design for dwelling—the first such design, in fact. As a cultural form of living, the tent and tent symbolism are associated with nomadism. However, the use and spread of tents and the mobile modes of life made possible by them are not restricted to nomadic societies. The art of membrane construction expressed in the tent has had its own historical phases of artistic sophistication and technological advancement in both nomadic and sedentary societies. When we "follow the tent" through history, what comes to the fore is that even within sedentary cultures, important parts of society continued to lead mobile lives made possible by the tent. What following the tent makes visible is that tents do not just perform a designated function within a holistic society or culture. Rather, the tent is a specific sociomaterial technology that operates differently according to the wider social assemblages it is part of. And yet, the tent is not reducible to these assemblages. It can also make up new forms of sociality.

The tent moves. It is not supposed to stay in one place. Sooner or later, it crosses a border. As a thing-in-motion, the tent has always been part of political projects. Its built-in tendency to transgress the local has made it an operator of many political projects of de- and reterritorialization that can be considered processes of internationalization *avant la lettre*. The military equipment of the ancient Egyptians, the Assyrians, and the Romans all included tents.[8] Tent genealogy shows that tents have been put to use as a political technology for a long time, but it also shows that tent meanings have changed. From antiquity down to the nineteenth century, tents were used for courtly purposes. Medieval epic poetry praises the tent and documents how tents served as mobile castles for courtly societies during military campaigns, on pilgrimages,

for tournaments and great assemblies of the princes.[9] Tent builders strove for structural elegance and ornamental richness, making tent construction an art form. The sophistication of tent artistry is said to have reached its peak in the Ottoman Empire from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.[10] This history of the tent as a thing of beauty and luxury stands in sharp contrast to the current use and understanding of the tent as a makeshift solution to cover basic needs.

Together with the industrial revolution, the discharge of labor, and the creation of floating populations in the context of primitive accumulation in Europe, phenomena of mobility, migration, and homelessness became major governmental problems. The spatial (re)fixing of populations advanced as a political project, and was achieved through the "great confinement" as well as through a number of welfare measures.[11] To the extent to which sedentarism became a political norm, the tent now represented a form of living that encountered increasing skepticism. The tent's flexibility and provisional character, the promise of independence emanating from its qualities of lightness, portability, and foldability, became suspect. The tent, a form of dwelling not congealed into property, addresses, and home ownership, did not fit into the modern biopolitical project; it baffled the separate localization of the individual at his or her home and complicated attempts to transform the targets of governmental intervention into countable objects and to register the population's regularities. The political triumph of confinement and the biopolitical governing of circulations thus brought forth new assessments of the tent and its legitimate uses. Nomadic lifestyles—in the European context often already an effect of exclusion from mainstream society—now became the target of additional educational and disciplinary measures, with Traveller communities facing criminalization, containment, and even persecution and genocide, as in the case of the Roma under National Socialism.

Some architectural theorists even speak of a "distrust of tents in the West" and argue that this distrust also meant that the substantial history of membrane architecture fell into obscurity.[12] For a long time, the discipline even chose to regard the tent as a form of "anti-architecture" without beauty, answering only to the most basic human needs that do not lend themselves to further aestheticization.[13] Only in the second half of the twentieth century did membrane architecture pioneers such as Frei Otto famously reintroduce tent constructions. Authors in the field of architectural theory argue that Otto's membrane designs were so well received in postwar Germany because National Socialism had rendered the aesthetics of architectural monumentalism deeply suspect. Against this background, Otto's lightweight constructions provided a

welcome input in the then prominent search for "democratic aesthetics." This popularity of tent design persists, even though a "democratic aesthetic" is not necessarily being pursued today. Architects building with membranes now mostly assert that membrane structures are a sustainable and fitting answer to the emerging cultures of mobility. But even today, the art of building with membranes is taught at only a few universities. Architectural theory still wrestles with the question of whether tents can be considered as architecture at all.

Tents as Spatial Technologies of Exception

The tent is no longer considered a legitimate form of living, but it has advanced all the more as a temporary space of exception. It is not altogether excluded from modern societies; rather, it serves as a tool to include the excluded. The tent has become a vehicle to organize and contain the unusual, be it as a space of emergency or for more mundane forms of the extraordinary. One of the most popular examples of the tent as an exceptional space of difference is the circus. Everything alien, spectacular, and grotesque is allowed to be at home in the mobile building of the circus, clearly separated from normal space, attracting attention only for a short while and always ready to move on. Throughout modernity, the tent slowly became something for the extra-ordinary—a space for the spectacle, for the freak shows of the early culture industry as much as for the more contemporary forms of event-culture. Camping holidays, a manageable and more or less adventurous break from normalcy realized in designated areas, also proved to be a popular use for tents. In the common habitat of the bourgeois nuclear family, a miniature tent can sometimes be found in the children's room. In one of his essays on heterotopias, Foucault mentions these children's tents and suggests that they can be read as spaces of otherness, heterotopias that juxtapose their surroundings.[14] They serve as a microcosm, a "small reservoir of imagination" within the modern space of sedentarism.[15] But the tent as heterotopia, as a space of the exceptional, is not only a place of dreams and desires, it is also a place of nightmares and despair. As a tool to govern and cope with emergencies, the tent serves in a variety of contexts around the world, from natural disasters to equally catastrophic economic housing crises. It is in this sense that the tent has advanced as a truly global thing, a universal tool of transnational emergency response. Tents appear all around the globe as a form of temporary accommodation in cases of emergency, and as such they embody contemporary strategies to cope with man-made and natural postdisaster homelessness. These strategies entail both the reflected techniques of global humanitarian regimes and charitable orga-

nizations and the mundane and improvised strategies of the poor and dispossessed in desperate need of shelter.

Since the end of the Cold War, an ambulant biopolitics of intervening in complex humanitarian emergencies has emerged as a major part of international politics. An array of inter- and transnational organizations such as the United Nations, NGOs, and globally operating military forces take part in this new kind of catastrophe response politics made intelligible by a new "emergency imaginary."[16] In and through this explicitly global form of politics, the tent shapes the global spaces of emergency governance. Because homelessness is such a widespread effect of all kinds of conflict and disaster, the provision of shelter (together with medical aid) has become the most immediate task of relief efforts in postdisaster situations. International organizations have to come up with provisional housing solutions for large numbers of people, and they have to act quickly. People urgently need help immediately after the disaster and cannot wait days or weeks for the aid organizations to arrive. Because it is imperative to respond quickly to emergencies, relief organizations have to be prepared for an array of different situations that nevertheless pose similar technical difficulties. Certain materials and aid devices have to be in the right place at the right time, so that these organizations can react effectively when disaster strikes. Efficient logistics that can increase the speed of interventions are therefore a major concern in humanitarian reasoning.[17] One of the most important innovations addressing these problems is a simple device that has its historical origins in military logistical planning: the kit. In global relief organizations, kits are boxes filled with standardized emergency equipment stockpiled at well-connected logistical nodes. These emergency kits are an important element in the preparedness infrastructures of "vital mobility."[18] Here the tent is not so much an object as a "standing reserve" that can be moved at short notice. The tent as "standing-reserve no longer stands over against us as object . . . [rather] it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation. For this it must be in its whole structure and in every one of its constituent parts, on call for duty, i.e., ready for takeoff."[19]

Aside from kits that focus primarily on medical supplies, the "humanitarian kit" is often assembled around the tent.[20] One of these tent kits, the ShelterBox, provides an apt example of how tents are being distributed globally and how the tent has become part of the global assemblage of crisis management. Founded in 2000, the ShelterBox organization provides life-saving equipment in the wake of disasters. The organization, closely connected to the Rotary Club, aims at immediately providing shelter by distributing tool kits during the critical period following a disaster that precedes the rebuilding of proper

homes. Each ShelterBox contains a ten-person tent and supporting materials such as blankets and camping stoves. The boxes are centrally stored in the UK and packed without reference to a specific catastrophic event so that they can be transported to places all around the world as quickly as possible. Before being distributed, the generic contents of the box are supplemented with additional equipment depending on the nature and location of the disaster. Since 2000, ShelterBoxes have been distributed to seventy-five countries in the wake of earthquakes, floods, tropical storms, hurricanes, and landslides, and also in response to industrial accidents and all kinds of political conflicts. Countries receiving aid are not solely located in the global South. Victims of Hurricane Katrina in the United States in 2005, of Italy's 2012 earthquake, and of Fukushima's nuclear catastrophe in 2011 also received ShelterBox tents. The funding, production, and distribution of the emergency kit assembles a variety of actors and locations, ranging from industrial producers and international charity organizations, commercial airlines, and national militaries to local groups and individual donors. Donors can track their box to see where it is employed and follow their contribution to the relief of "distant suffering" on the organization's Web site in real time.[21] The ShelterBox infrastructure thus facilitates not only the material economies of relief organizations but also the moral economies of compassion, a crucial element of contemporary "humanitarian reason."[22] The ShelterBox tent can now be seen around the world, often next to other, equally standardized tents of globally operating organizations such as the Red Cross, the United National High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR), or the UN. These tents all look quite similar. Often they are white to reflect the sunlight and can only be distinguished by the different organizational brands printed on their walls.

But the tent is not only global in the sense that it is distributed around the globe and assembles a variety of international actors along the logistical chain of humanitarian infrastructures. When it is employed in humanitarian interventions, it also discloses a distinctly transnational spatial form. This spatial form organizing the rapid deployment of temporary accommodation for displaced persons in emergency tents is the camp. As the philosopher Giorgio Agamben famously argues, the camp is a crucial spatial form of modernity because it figures as the spatial exception to the principle of nationhood.[23] As Charlie Hailey remarks, "defining the camp is a central problem of our contemporary moment."[24] The camp has advanced as a characteristic spatial form of the present that epitomizes the crisis of the national state. Refugee camps for the victims of wars, displacement, and genocide, in particular, cannot easily be integrated into the grid of modern national sovereignty. The first large-scale

refugee camps emerged during and after World War II to house between six and twelve million displaced persons in Europe. Nowadays there are extra-territorial camps outside the European Union (EU) in Ukraine and in Libya that are designed to prevent refugees from entering Europe, again establishing a strange a-national territory within nation-states, governed by supranational organizations such as the EU.[25] These camp spaces disclosed by tents not only try to process the exceptional circumstances of catastrophic events but must be considered as spaces of exception in themselves. The tent is a thing that is mobile on an international scale because it is distributed around the globe in cases of emergency, but it is also a thing that contributes to the creation of a global condition as it discloses the trans- or postnational spaces that provisionally respond to the crisis of national sovereignty.

Although the tent is only supposed to function as a short-term emergency shelter, often this temporary exception turns into a long-term rule. In the problematizations of product designs for humanitarian kits, this is a well-established fact. And even though organizations like ShelterBox understand themselves as short-term emergency response for the victims of disaster, at the same time they know that people will often have to stay in their tents for a long time, sometimes even years. Product development thus tries to engineer more robust tensile structures and to winterize tents to make them more comfortable and warm enough for longer periods. Although they are distributed as a form of short-term shelter, tents are often temporary solutions for an indefinite transition toward normalcy. They are part of an interventionist regime that cannot properly address the issues that caused the emergency in the first place. The fact that more often than not, emergency tents turn into a more long-term form of living clearly highlights the limits of humanitarianism. This governmentality of emergency must be considered a form of biopolitics in its own right, one that stands in contrast to the long-established biopolitics of (Western) welfare states. Whereas the latter tried to increase the well-being of a national population, the former is preoccupied with ensuring the mere survival of populations at risk on a global scale. Tents are important for this form of emergency politics because they effectively address the very basic physiological needs of human beings. The governmentality of emergency we see at work today is not a politics of the good life but a "minimal biopolitics."[26] While the paradigmatic spatial form of welfarist biopolitics was the homestead, the emerging spatial form of a biopolitics of precarious lives is the tent.

It is thus no coincidence that with the devastation of the politics of home ownership in the United States by the subprime crisis in 2007 and the following years, tents emerged again as a technique to deal with this exceptional

event. As the economic crisis worsened through 2008 and 2009 with more and more homes foreclosed and people forced out of the housing market, tent cities began to appear in the outskirts of many American cities. The tent cities that sprang up like mushrooms in the wake of the financial crisis show not only how the global financial crisis is also a crisis of housing, but that the tent is not only an emergency technology in the global South but is also employed in the industrialized heartlands. Often these tent cities are referred to as "modern-day Hoovervilles," comparing the contemporary rise of tent encampments to the hundreds of shantytowns that emerged during the Great Depression to give shelter to the homeless and unemployed. Then as now, living in tents and makeshift shacks is a last resort for many who are trying to cope with catastrophic events. The tent is not only part of humanitarian actions carried out by transnational organizations, it also works as an improvised form of self-help where all other kinds of public services and infrastructures fail. But either way, whether it is the ShelterBox tents in Turkey and Lebanon giving shelter to thousands of Syrians or the new "Hoovervilles" in American cities inhabited by people with little prospect of reentering the housing market in the near future, tents have become spaces of despair: the loss of a home is also the loss of a whole way of life, a mode of being-in-the-world.

Tents as Spatial Technologies of Resistance

The tent is a crucial technology of global governmentality of crisis and emergency, but it also has advanced as a technology of questioning and contesting the very same politics of crisis management. In July 2011, Israeli filmmaker Daphni Leef asked her Facebook friends to bring tents and camp out on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv in order to protest rising rents and the failure of social policies to solve the housing shortage. During July and August, the tent encampments on Rothschild Boulevard grew and finally extended for almost two kilometers. The protests soon became known as of one of Israel's biggest social justice movements ever. Leef later explained that the idea to use tents as a technology of protest and to put them up in Tel Aviv's public green space was inspired by what she had read about New York's Central Park Hooverville during the Great Depression.[27]

Protesters in Tel Aviv were neither the only nor the first people who pitched tents in city centers that year. From January 2011 on, the Egyptian uprising occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo with an impressive tent city that soon developed its own sophisticated socioeconomic and political infrastructure and withstood all attempts by police and military forces to remove it. Tents were

erected on the roundabout in the middle of Tahrir Square and on the surrounding pavements. The tent city consisted of unique constructions that included smaller tents suitable for people to stay overnight and larger tent structures for different kinds of joint use: makeshift street clinics, a kindergarten, speakers' corners, newsstands, and so on. Sun-shield canopy constructions built of ropes, discarded umbrellas, and plastic canvases gave shelter to all kinds of logistical requirements. Pictures of occupied Tahrir Square soon traveled the world. The tent city lasted for several weeks until the Mubarak administration stepped down and inspired the further spread of upheavals against repressive regimes in other North African states.

In May 2011, with the tent occupation of Tahrir Square as background, the Spanish protest movement moved into the public squares of Spain's major cities with tens of thousands appropriating urban space with tent encampments. In Madrid's Puerta del Sol, the tent city took over the whole square. Like Tahrir Square's encampment structures, the Puerta del Sol's tent city stayed dynamic once established and constantly adjusted its form to the shifting needs of the movement: "Sometimes it took on the dense morphology of a kasbah, while on other occasions it swiftly folded in on itself to make space for big demonstrations."[28] Again, the tent city's flexibility impressively highlighted the potential of membrane designs to simultaneously answer to the needs of protection and movement, even within one location.

By September 2011, when the occupation of Wall Street in New York started, the use of tents to occupy representative metropolitan squares was already an established strategy of struggle, a model of protest traveling the world. Occupy Wall Street relied heavily on the imagery produced by the other occupations earlier in the same year. The initial twitter call to action read "Are you ready for a Tahrir Moment?" A poster calling for participation consisted simply of the request "Bring tent." But, although pitching tents in Zuccotti Park was a practice informed by the other tent cities that had emerged throughout 2011, it was—like the other cases—also a very practical move. Whereas the tent structures in Tahrir Square, Puerta del Sol, and Rothschild Boulevard had worked as canopies protecting the protesters from the sun, in New York the tents were a practical solution to shelter the protesters from the cold and rainy autumn weather.

Tent encampments had been part of social protests before, but 2011 introduced the tent as a fast-moving resistance technology that linked a diversity of urban movements with different goals and backgrounds to a shared form of expression, connected metropolises throughout the globe, and transgressed national borders and North–South divides. The ways in which these struggles

spoke to one another clearly highlighted the potentialities of a global inter-urban connection. Discussions about what links these new forms of protest have stressed the importance of virtual networks and information technologies. While these technologies are certainly of major importance for the large-scale organization of dissent, the physical occupations of city squares also relied heavily on the tent as a political technology. The ephemeral tent cities that emerged in 2011 show that what was mobilized during the protests was not a political idea or program, but a specific organizational form.

In a way, the tent also became a protest meme. Tents were frequently used in unusual ways during the occupations. They became projection screens for political demands and were held high like banners during demonstrations. When Occupy Wall Street joined with a Brooklyn community to squat a foreclosed home in December 2011, a tent was hoisted like a flag on the reoccupied building. When Occupy protesters at UC Berkeley were prevented from setting up tents, they attached them to balloons, letting them float through the sky. During the Blockupy demonstrations against European austerity policies in Frankfurt in May 2012, protesters who were prevented from squatting public spaces pitched their tents in trees like bird nests or let them float like little sailing vessels on the river. At the main station, the police searched arriving protesters for tents and confiscated them like weapons. But, unlike the shoe held aloft to show the loss of respect for political elites—another symbol of protest that quickly traveled from the sites of the Arab Spring into other contexts—tents possess a concrete social value in use that cannot be separated from the political expressions they give shelter to. Even if in many instances the tent has risen to the heights of symbolic politics, its basic message has always remained attached to the vital qualities of shelter and movement. Together with the tent cities, an organizational form of protest has emerged that is global and "down to earth" at the same time, making a practice out of visiting the many local network sites of interwoven global economic power. Occupy Wall Street's tents have brought the crisis back to a major hub from which it spread, even if this was not its only source. Unlike the more nomadic antiglobalization protests of the past few decades, which often migrated from one peripheral and highly protected summit meeting site to the next, the recent protests no longer follow political elites like that. They rather choose to pitch tents in the hearts of global cities and thereby challenge the idea of a "placeless" globalization.[29]

In a speech at the Occupy camp in New York discussing what it means to claim the public, Judith Butler noted with regard to the Egyptian uprising that "revolution happened because everyone refused to go home."[30] What made it possible for people to persistently claim the public and challenge the authori-

ties, instead of being forced to go home after demonstrating, is the tent. Tent structures enabled the movements to withstand any temporary disappearance. They provided an intensified around-the-clock presence and, as it turned out, a resilient material expression of protest. Tent cities allowed for the establishment of permanence and visibility without institutionalizing the protest movements. The vital qualities of tent design genuinely reflected the calls for social justice as they responded to existential needs and created spaces for living and assembling where all other options had become unaffordable.

The 2011 protest movements challenged the limits of representative democracy and subverted the usual divide between public and private. Politics did not take place in the confined space of parliament but in the transitional yet resilient spaces disclosed by the tent. The tent functioned in that way because, as we have argued, it is a spatial thing, a thing that is not just in space as water is in a glass but that makes up or discloses spaces, ways of being-in-the-world and of being political. The tent thus became an important means to disrupt the usual process of political representation as it assembled a public around its woven walls.

Seeing the tent in this way allows for an interesting contribution to (or even a slight reorientation of) what Bruno Latour has called "object-oriented democracy" or *Dingpolitik*.[31] Pointing out the limits and deficiencies of traditional parliaments and the architects' dream of gathering "the people" under a common dome in iconic buildings such as London's Westminster Abbey or the Berlin Reichstag, Latour asks: "What would a truly contemporary style of assembly look like?" He goes on to argue "that parliaments are only a few of the machineries of representations among many others, and not necessarily the most relevant or the best equipped."[32] While he aptly depicts the limits of political representation, he does not question the notion of representation in politics per se and instead argues for an extension of the arenas of representation. But, as many commentators have pointed out, what is most remarkable about the new protest movements is their refusal to be represented and to articulate political demands in a traditional fashion. According to Isabell Lorey, the new movements must be considered "non-representationist forms of democracy."[33] Of course, there are also dangers in this kind of political iconoclasm and the phantasm of democratic immediacy. Occupy's claim to speak for the 99 percent runs the risk of turning into an all-too-Rousseauian critique of political representation in the name of a unified *volonté générale*. But beyond such unifying claims, which risk reverting to the most naive forms of representation, the protesters performed a way of life that was a unique answer to the politics of exception and dispossession they were protesting against. They enacted a

nonrepresentationist *Dingpolitik* that not only produced new public "matters of concern" but also constituted an alternative way of life with objects of use that answer to basic needs.[34] The tent served here as a shelter and as a mediator and connector between different people. It enabled new political and social *assembleas* that did not unify its participants because "a tent," as Vilém Flusser reminds us, "is a place where people assemble and disperse."[35] Finally, the tent walls were even able to serve as a screen for political demands. This *Dingpolitik* does not revert to the old materialist realpolitik of taken-for-granted facts and undisputed ways of representation. Rather, it shares some of the features of historical materialism in that it—in its best moments—establishes what Marx called *wirkliche Demokratie*, real democracy—a democracy lived and enacted in the material practices of everyday life rather than being delegated to a separate sphere of social action. Of course, this is not to say that the tent is the new telos of democracy. It is still a minimal infrastructure that, even when reappropriated by protest movements, carries with it the load of a painful history and present of dispossession. The tent is not the end of politics—but it is a beginning.

Notes

1. Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

2. Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 225.

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4. Vilém Flusser, "Shelters, Screens and Tents," in *The Shape of Things* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 55–57.

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