Citizens line up to vote for
the first time in Soweto,
South Africa, 27 April 1994.
Photography by Denis Farrell/
Associated Press.

State Effects: An Introduction

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Despite the keen interest that architectural historians have taken in questions of politics and power for at least half a century now, they have not always fully articulated what they mean by that political entity known, in shorthand, as the state. Barbara Miller Lane's 1968 landmark study, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945*, has been rightfully given credit for complicating the relationship between political power and built form by showing that architectural production during National Socialism took many guises, publicly adopting neoclassical monumentality but also borrowing profusely from the vocabulary of vernacularisms and of the Modern Movement.[1] Even when tackling such subtleties as stylistic diversity and scalar differences in governmental organizations, however, Miller Lane's language was dominated by analogies of mechanical control. Whether emanating from Hitler's Chancellery or from the modest offices of local bureaucracies, state power regulated and structured artistic expression, which, in Miller Lane's telling, would otherwise have tended toward left-wing, utopian politics in interwar Germany. By this logic, the state expressed itself through varying degrees of control, but it remained at all times a distinct entity from which power emanated.

Miller Lane's example of National Socialism is an extreme case of a relationship between architecture and the state that pertains through physical force. In Max Weber's famous formulation, the state is "a form of human community that (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a particular territory."[2] All state power, by this logic, is backed by violence—actual and potential. And if the state is, legally speaking, that which has the right to violence, this presumes another distinct entity on which that violence is exercised: civil society. The dichotomy between the state and society has been crucial to facilitating the use of a language of mechanical control in a wide array of disciplines, as the state is said to intervene in, regulate, stimulate, or stifle all manner of activity.

Yet, by all accounts, the state in modernity has not always had a coherent, uniform existence, or practiced power through strong, predictable vectors of control. Rather the state has been a highly uncertain entity whose agency has splintered in many, often contradictory directions. As post-Weberian legal historians have pointed out, it is hard to distinguish

the organizational logic of early modern European states from that of early modern corporations such as the Catholic Church. States not only claimed *jurisdictional* powers (organizational and administrative authority) but also, like corporations, the rights of a *juridical person* (an artificial person that can own and contract in its own name).[3] This had vast consequences for states' economic viability. Granting states sempiternity—of the kind enjoyed by Jesus, angels, and corporations—made it possible to create the kind of public debt that could be deferred forever.[4]

It is onto this ghostlike sempiternal juridical person that the grandest illusions about the state have been projected: the state as the personification of the body politic, as the locus of imagined community, as defender of property, and as a guarantor of rights as well as the state as a sinister entity that sells away those rights and betrays the collective will. Yet the state is as much a concrete entity as it is an abstract one. After all, if the sempiternal juridical state is abstract and nowhere, the jurisdictional state is concrete and everywhere: in the sidewalk one walks on, the air that one breathes, and the food one eats. This is the state as it appears daily in administrative offices, schools, and courts, that, even when invisible, makes subjects engage in such practices as showing identification cards or ignoring traffic signs.[5] Without these routinized, mundane circumstances and practices, the grand illusion of the state as an abstract entity could not exist.

Studying this concrete history critically is more easily said than done. The modern state is conventionally historicized as a bourgeois invention dated to the French Revolution and linked with the rise of secular nationalism.[6] As Timothy Mitchell pointed out in the 1990s in a seminal essay, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," modern states as such, which organized themselves around "mass armies, bureaucracies and education systems" in the post-Enlightenment era, tended from the outset toward an institutional concentration of power in physical infrastructure and a literal focus on territorial borders, but this belied the "new effects of abstraction and subjectivity" through which they continued to assert sovereignty.[7] For example, during the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Scramble for Africa, European states borrowed legitimacy from preexisting religious institutions and customary laws as they chose tribal partners for indirect rule. Creating this "bifurcated state," as Mahmood Mamdani has called it, was as much a concrete jurisdictional exercise as it was an abstract juridical one: Elevating some native rulers as enforcers of state power also meant inventing new temporal abstractions to deny their subjects the privilege of citizenship.[8] (Notably, they invented ways of forever delaying the moment of independence.)

Locating architecture's agency in this concrete-abstract continuum is complicated by certain historical convergences. When the nation-

state became the universal unit of international legitimacy—that is, the only form through which rights of sovereignty could be achieved—it was during a wave of mid-twentieth-century decolonization that also motivated a global pattern of modernist capitol-building. As a result, political historians have seen these high-modernist cities as paradigmatic tools of control from above, making architecture an exemplary instrument for "seeing like a state."[11] Yet this is to overstate the exclusive importance of public architecture and of modernist manifestos which measured themselves against the state academicism of the *ancien régime*.[12] In fact, innumerable state agents named as such during colonial and postcolonial governance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries exercised their power in ways that were hardly visible at all, least of all through formal architecture. One of the enduring institutional legacies of colonialism is "the dialectic of state reform and popular resistance"; architecture's bulky presence is all too easily recruited to propagate the stalemate.[13]

To study the concreteness of the state while averting these pitfalls, many recent works of architectural history have focused on showing the capillary properties that allow the state to seep into every aspect of life. Under the influence of thinkers such as Foucault and Althusser, they have worried less about control than governance as a way to "statify" society through the exercise of decentered, heterogeneous, and polymorphous forms of micropower in everyday life.[14] The volume *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century*, for example, shows that the American single-family house, cold storage, and food markets, among other things, can be understood as instances of administering life through design.[15] "Governmentality works less by the application of raw state power," the editors wrote in the introduction of that volume, "than through a multiplicity of heterogeneous public and private agencies, standards, forms of knowledge, effects, outcomes, and consequences . . . [that are] 'mobile, changing, and contingent assemblages' continually 'constructed, assembled, contested, and transformed.'"[16] This approach has proved remarkably productive in the past two decades in unpacking all the intricate ways in which the built environment became the mediator of the relationship between state and society in the post-Enlightenment period—whether the built environment was cast in the role of projecting and reinforcing state power or resisting it.

This special issue of *Grey Room* builds on these important contributions in architectural history and beyond but hopes to offer a new perspective for understanding the relationship between architecture and politics by returning to the concept of "state effects" devised by Mitchell in his aforementioned study of the relation between state, society, and economy, specifically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[17] Reviewing the role played by the concept of the state in political sci-

ence literature, in an essay first published in 1991, Mitchell argued that it was as unproductive to dismiss the boundary between state and society as to try to sharpen it. (While he dated the origins of the modern state to the Enlightenment, Mitchell reconceptualized this conventional periodization by marking it as the moment when the social sciences disciplines started devising the concept of *society*. The later version of the essay also turned to the invention of the *economy*.) Thus, Mitchell argued, the simultaneous salience and elusiveness of the state should be taken seriously and the state-boundary problem historicized as constitutive of the modern nation-state. "The ability to have an internal distinction appear as though it were the external boundary between separate objects," he wrote, "is the distinctive technique of the modern political order."[18]

A "state effect," then, is the "abstract effect of agency" produced by this boundary-making operation; a "ghost-like effect" that nonetheless has "concrete consequences." Mitchell called this a "structural effect" not because the state is an "actual structure" but rather because it works as a "powerful metaphysical effect of practices that make such structures *appear* to exist."[19] He gave the organization of the modern army from the eighteenth century onward as an example of a "novel structural effect":

> This military apparatus appeared somehow greater than the sum of its parts, as though it were a structure with an existence independent of the men who composed it. In comparison with other armies, which now looked like amorphous gatherings of "idle and inactive men," the new army seemed something two dimensional. It appeared to consist on the one hand of individual soldiers and, on the other, of the "machine" they inhabited. Of course this apparatus has no independent existence. It is an effect produced by the organized partitioning of space, the regular distribution of bodies, exact timing, the coordination of movement, the combining of elements, and endless repetition, all of which are particular practices. There was nothing in the new power of the army except this distributing, arranging, and moving. But the order and precision of such processes created the effect of an apparatus apart from the men themselves, whose "structure" orders, contains, and controls them.[20]

If, as Mitchell argues, states owe their efficacy to representations that result from the arrangement, distribution, movement, and partitioning of things in the world, then the built environment is not simply an index of state power but can rather be analyzed as an instantiation of how the state-society boundary has been constructed and reconstructed historically.

These representations are crucial for another reason. Especially in the later versions of the essay, where he critiqued the gap between the

Foucauldian notion of discipline and the state, Mitchell suggested that such representations are precisely where the patterns of interference between the micropowers of everyday life and the macropowers of the state as a consolidated, institutionally structured, and territorially based force become evident. "A construct such as the state occurs not merely as a subjective belief, but as a *representation* reproduced in visible everyday forms, such as the language of legal practice, the architecture of public buildings, the wearing of military, or the marking and policing of frontiers."[21] This insight offers an important correction to recent media theoretical approaches that have tended to privilege the material over the immaterial at the risk of diminishing the dynamic relation between them. Bruno Latour's remark that "the 'rationalization' granted to bureaucracy since Hegel and Weber has been attributed by mistake to the 'mind' of (Prussian) bureaucrats. It is all in the files themselves" has given rise to innumerable studies of the state via its media technologies.[22] Attending to representations is one way of making sure that the media theorist does not leave behind the pageantry of Prussian state power for files and folders, but rather looks for the structural relationship between them.[23]

The six essays in this issue each discuss a state effect produced under particular historical circumstance in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—a period Mitchell sees as one of distribution and institutional concentration, a period when structural boundaries between state and society were designed.

In her essay on the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, Yara Saqfalhait describes how bureaucrats attempted to devise a new relationship between universals and particulars that applied as much to the seats in the newly inaugurated parliament building as to the organization of archaeological remains in the museum. The ingenuity of this arrangement was to change the logic of the relationship between the state and its citizens—all the while appearing not to change anything at all. Sophie Cras narrates the brief career of the commercial museum in the late nineteenth century, when the liberal fantasy of free trade could only be sustained through governmental support. The boundary between public and private interest needed to be rigorously policed in such museums for what Cras dubs the "liberalism effect." Sheila Crane's essay on colonial Casablanca offers a portrait of urbanism in North Africa that departs from the conventional wisdom about the heavy-handedness of French colonial intervention: the French colonial state, in her telling, had to rely on and ultimately slightly modify already existing religious and legal structures in order to achieve control and spatial penetration in the colonial city. Daniel M. Abramson demonstrates the great lengths to which designers of U.S. government centers in the second half of the twentieth century went in order to

undermine the image of a coherent, monolithic U.S. government—with the result that such affectations of civic publicness penetrated the citizenry more effectively. Sonali Dhanpal looks at "welfare architecture" in postwar Britain through the lens of migration from the former colonies. This architecture has occasionally been romanticized by critics of neoliberalism, but by paying close attention to the boundary that the welfare state drew between those who were and were not entitled to welfare benefits as well as market risks, Dhanpal shows the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the 1950s to be the first true neoliberal theory in Britain. And, finally, Cole Roskam studies the representational interference between two nation-states in the 1970s: China and Zaire. It turns out that the instantiation of these two states, both in need of legitimacy, relied heavily on the invention of images that circulated globally and constituted an intimately lived imaginary across radically different places and societies. The issue concludes with an afterword by Rosalind C. Morris, who offers a critical summary of the essays and situates the question of state effects temporally: first, by going back to the moment when Mitchell's essay was published to identify its intellectual conditions of possibility, and, then, by turning to our present moment, when statism and antistatism seem to have taken on new valencies.

These essays demonstrate that studying the built environment helps further probe state effects in two ways. Some authors take an item supposedly antithetical to the state (such as informality for Crane, ancestrality for Saqfalhait, or commodities for Cras) and show they are in fact constituted through the state's own acts of drawing boundaries.[24] Others demonstrate that something which is supposed to be a mere tool, wielded occasionally by the state (such as retail bureaucracy for Abramson, housing policy for Dhanpal, and "feelings of citizenship" for Roskam), in fact structures the state's existence by establishing boundaries. Throughout the issue, cultural production appears as neither pure instrument nor as pure marginalia. (It is not that "even architecture" is implicated in the deep reach of the state.) Rather, culture and architecture appear over and over again as the categories through which this structuring effect operates.

Many other questions remain unanswered in this issue, questions one might hope will be taken up in future scholarship: How has publicness been structured as an effect of the built environment in architectural discourses? Is public space the only imaginable outlet of the political? What to make of the historical overlaps between the rise of high modernism in architecture and the emergence of architects as state-sanctioned actors for a brief moment in the twentieth century? How should new discoveries in the weeds of the archives of public-private enterprises be addressed? How do we theorize the relationship between legal rule-making and architectural production? And how can we arrive at fine-grained histories while the abstraction of the state looms so large?

Notes

This special issue is based in part on a conference that was held at the Temple Hoyne Buell Center for the Study of American Architecture at Columbia University on September 27, 2024. We thank all the participants, including those whose papers are not in this issue, as well as colleagues and students who attended the event.

1. Barbara Miller Lane, *Architecture and Politics in Germany, 1918–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1968] 1985). Miller Lane, writing at a moment of institutional upheaval, exposed the cracks between politics at the level of the national government (Hitler as architect) and politics at the level of local governments (whose patronage had made housing programs possible during the Weimar years). The importance of Miller Lane's study has been recently acknowledged, among other publications, in Reinhold Martin and Claire Zimmerman, eds. *Architecture against Democracy: Histories of the Nationalist International* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 3–8.

2. Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation" (1919), in *The Vocation Lectures*, ed. David Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004), 33. Weber arrived at this definition after World War I whereas in his earlier comparative work, the normative definition of the state did not include violence as such. See, for instance, Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, Routledge Classics edition (London: Routledge, [1905] 2001).

3. See F.W. Maitland, "The Crown as Corporation" (1901), in *State, Trust, and Corporation*, ed. David Runciman and Magnus Ryan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32–51; David Runciman, "Is the State a Corporation?" *Government and Opposition* 35, no. 1 (2000): 90–104. Later historians have tended to extend this historical analysis to generalizations about the modern state. See David Ciepley, "The Juridical Person of the State: Origins and Implications," in *States, Firms, and Their Legal Fictions: Attributing Identity and Responsibility to Artificial Entities*, ed. Melissa J. Durkee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 237–260.

4. Quentin Skinner, "On the Person of the State," in *State Formations: Global Histories and Cultures of Statehood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 25–44. Also see David Graeber, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011).

5. For a recent example of this approach closer to architectural history, see Bernardo Zacka, *When the State Meets the Street: Public Service and Moral Agency* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

6. This genealogy has been especially important for authors writing in the Marxian tradition, where the state is one phase in the long march toward revolution, an intermediate stage between medieval feudal formations and communist society. The trajectory can be found throughout Marx's writings including in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "The Communist Manifesto" (1848), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1972), 335–362.

7. Timothy Mitchell, "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, ed. George Steinmetz (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 76–97. This is a later version of the review essay mentioned below.

8. Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

9. As Frederick Cooper points out in the case of France, the trajectory from empire to nation was far from assured; "France" did not become a nation-state until 1967. See

Frederick Cooper, "States, Empire and the Political Imagination," in *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 153–203. See also Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

10. A survey of such projects is given for example in Lawrence J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

11. James C. Scott, "The High Modernist City," in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 87–102.

12. Perry Anderson, "Modernity and Revolution," *New Left Review* no. 144 (1984), 105. Anderson articulated this in the case of modern art: "Briefly, I think, the following: the persistence of the 'anciens régimes,' and the academicism concomitant with them, provided a critical range of cultural values against which insurgent forms of art could measure themselves, but also in terms of which they could partly articulate themselves."

13. "By locating both the language of rights and that of culture in their historical and institutional context, I hope to underline that part of our institutional legacy that continues to be reproduced through the dialectic of state reform and popular resistance." Mamdani, 29.

14. The term "statification" comes from Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France*, 1978–1979 (New York: Palgrave, 2010), 191. Architectural history has borrowed the concepts of discipline, biopower, and governmentality from Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1977), and Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), as well. Also important for the discipline has been Althusser's theorization of "ideological state apparatuses," whereby the state exercised its monopoly of violence through such institutions as schools, church, family, and even through language. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127–186.

15. Aggregate, *Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012). "Governmentality," a term Foucault derived from his studies of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, has recently been most frequently applied to architecture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

16. Aggregate, "Introduction," in *Governing by Design,* viii.

17. There are several versions of Mitchell's essay. The earliest was a review essay published as Mitchell, "Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics," *American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 77–96. The essay was then reprinted in 1999, with important addenda and modifications, as "Society, Economy, and the State Effect," in *State/Culture* and in other later volumes, such as *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, ed. Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 169–186. This introduction will be using primarily (but not exclusively) the 1999 version of the essay here. All further citations are to the 1999 version.

18. Mitchell, 77.

19. Mitchell, 89.

20. Mitchell, 89.

21. Mitchell, 89. Emphasis ours.

22. Bruno Latour, "Visualization and Cognition: Thinking with Eyes and Hands," in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present: A Research Annual, Volume 6*, ed. Henrika Kuklick (Greenwich, CT: Jai, 1986), 28. For the most prominent example, see Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

23. A good example of media theory that pays attention to this dialectic is Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

24. Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 312. Fischer's was crucial to our understanding of informality. In her work on shantytowns in Rio de Janeiro, Fischer has shown that "urban informality may have been the antithesis of citizenship, but it was also often its prerequisite." State power, by this account, does not reside on the formal side of the divide but in policing and maintaining the boundary between the formal and the informal. Similar literature has been produced on corruption: see Akhil Gupta, *Red Tape: Bureaucracy, Structural Violence, and Poverty in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 75–110.