

## **Designing Ethos: Political Lessons from our Toilette Bowls and Doors.**

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Toilets in modern water closets rise up from the floor like water lilies. The architect does all he can to make the body forget how paltry it is, and to make man ignore what happens to his intestinal wastes after the water from the tank flushes them down the drain. Even though the sewer pipelines reach far into our houses with their tentacles, they are carefully hidden from view, and we are happily ignorant of the invisible Venice of shit underlying our bathrooms, bedrooms, dance halls, and parliaments.

Milan Kundera in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

### *All is designed*

A cursory look at our surroundings should suffice to show that our lives are carried out in the depth of a designed environment. So prevalent is the presence of design in our experience that the fact that our environment is designed has become transparent and in this transparency, invisible. Sheltered in the inconspicuousness and normalcy of daily use, the normative might of the rules that issue from the objects of our use determining our *customary* doings becomes lost from view. Virtually all our doings—both voluntary and, more remarkably, involuntary actions—are framed, determined, oriented and guided by our interactions with objects of human invention and manufacture. Nature, our own and around us, has been counterfeited. This, however, is not necessarily a bad thing.

The park, the animal, the field, the sky and the mountain, all those things that we insist in calling ‘nature’ are little more than impostors. By design, nature has receded out of sight and the often-heard political summon of its proverbial purity expressing naturalist appeals to biological authenticity are politically suspect. We are not in nature and the traces of nature that remain with us are the product of our invention. By design,

the natural order has been submitted to the orderly organization of our needs and promissory satisfactions. In our toilette bowls, our drainage pipes, our retention walls, our flood gates, against our skylights and inside our hospices, mausoleums and caskets, nature tamely accepts the domestication of our deliberative will.

The grass, trees and flowers that adorn our cities belong to a grid of organic quadrants framed by the intersecting linearity of our roadways. These simulacra of 'nature' are contained in massive flowerpots—sometimes of the length of forty city blocks, as in New York's Central Park—bounded on the sides and bottom by cinder blocks, bricks and mortar, iron, aluminum and plastic tubing and by the sky above which in our cities is merely a ceiling of blue extending from the wall of one buildings to that of the next outlining the urban horizon. These skies and their geometry and, at times, even their shades and textures modified by massive expanses of glass or some semitransparent polymer, are also the product of our ever-intending will. These cutouts of blues and grays are sometimes the product of architectural chance and sometimes the product of deliberate urban planning.

The sea, the mountain and the fields multicolored and bright, belong to the spectacle that can easily and conveniently be found on the sides and at the end of our roads. These vignettes of nature, neatly ordered around the strips of asphalt, adorn the walls of our transit corridors for the delight and edification of the traveler. Sheltered by pavement, metal and fabric, man, woman, child and their dogs move across these stages with the impression of traversing nature in its pure authenticity and with the certainty of incurring none of its costs.

And as cars speed through strips of desert highways in search of the next public

restroom, we are also made aware that it is not merely the elements that have been domesticated but our own organic constitution has been confined by object and manner of use to certain administrative practices.

Our toilette bowls in the sanctum sanctorum of our restrooms have *naturalized* the concealment of abjection removing from the public sphere defecation and urination and in so doing denaturalizing dejection or—if one wills—determining a type of human nature which is exempt of accounting publicly for the result of its nutritional practices. Divorcing the public identity of the human from the aftermath of its digestive mechanisms by separating and hiding from view what according to Julia Kristeva are the expressions of the physical unfolding of decay towards death,<sup>1</sup> our designers and builders have developed technologies and conditions devised to restrict these expressions of our undoing to the space of the private. Though the private practices—if we may call them that—of defecation and urination may seem natural, they have indeed a rather short history. As recently as <sup>2</sup> Our bathrooms not only have become places of privacy<sup>3</sup> in which humans can excise from their bodies the excesses of nutrition in a form of solitary confinement, they have also been catered with a variety of tools designed to divorce the human form its own organic fate, from its needs and remains.

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<sup>1</sup> Kristeva writes: “These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver” (Kristeva, 3).

<sup>2</sup> See Lawrence Wright’s *Clean and Decent: The Fascinating History of the Bathroom and the Water-Closet* and Robin Evans’ “Figures, Doors and Passages” in *Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays*.

<sup>3</sup> Robin Evans, Simon Schama and Phillip Tabor take the 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch transformation of the home from a space of communal activity—even sleeping and bodily discharges—to a domain of private association as a point inception for the articulation of privacy in the domain of the private.

Much like a increasing arsenal of precise procedural norms, tools and methods for their utilization, which define the disposal of our trash—collection, elimination, segregation, transformation into new raw material through recycling, etc—the disposal of all that is unseemly has been determined by the production of tools and technologies. Just as other byproducts of our organic existence, the administration of the lifeless human body is also governed by the design of tools and methods for their utilization. The agglomeration of bodies in archival fields such as cemeteries and memorial parks as well as the disposal of bodies by way of transformation into materials more amenable to the efficient administration of space and economic resources, as in cremation or the brand new and apparently *environmentally responsible* alkaline hydrolysis where ashes are produced without the need of combustion conform our ever expanding repertoire of tools for the management of death. In addition to the administration of the dead, its also noteworthy the enormous amount of tools and technologies designed and produced for the administration of the process of dying.<sup>4</sup> Death—as the sworn antagonist of religion and medicine, where morality and science flirt with each other<sup>5</sup>—has been progressively deprived of its natural pangs. Not only have we developed and deployed great many instruments to predict and forestall its advance from the visible wound to the invisible molecule but we have also assured ourselves the possibility of determining the position, place and emotional circumstances and time of death. Little if anything is left of the purported natural fact of death and its unfolding.

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<sup>4</sup> See A. Kellehear's *A Social History of Dying*.

<sup>5</sup> The clinical ancestry of categories of biological **moralization is well known. The most substantial account of this relation can be found in**

*The Wall As An Expression of Normative Contingency*

Very few things hold and could flaunt their authority as much as walls. And yet, they remain silent and it is perhaps in the inconspicuous silence of their demands that resides their unparalleled authority. In fact, the notable force that walls can oppose to the will becomes glaringly visible in cases of involuntary confinement.<sup>6</sup> It is there where the tacit authority of walls becomes fully visible. The wall forbids. Imposing rules and guiding actions with notable efficiency, the wall remains—by and large—silent. From the position of the agent who inhabits the architectural object, the walls dwell in virtual invisibility and they do in some more and some less evident ways, the work of nature. In fact, to a great degree, the act of architectural projection concerns the dissection and apportionment of space by the reconfiguration of the material and while the force that the wall opposes is due to its material solidity and it is by virtue of this material solidity that the prisoner cannot move beyond the space allotted and that the stranger cannot venture into the space claimed by the owner, the substantive rules that guide the actions of the individual in transit in these spaces is determined by their willful configuration and constitution.

Just as the position of the wall forecloses the movement in space, doors, windows and other openings establish the points of access and regulate the actions that ought to be taken if the agent in question desires to transition between two adjacent spaces. Walls and doors not only rule over our use of space, they determine—for instance—the construction of our concepts of ‘the private’, ‘the public’ and, arguably, by extension concepts such

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<sup>6</sup> See Robin Evans’ history of the architectural development of the prison in *The Fabrication of Virtue: English Prison Architecture, 1750-1840*.

as autonomy and individuation that populate the political and the social as well as the dynamic of relation among them. The division and determination of space by way of the reconfiguration of the material is instrumental in the articulation of these categories and both serve to define them and to enforce them. Take for instance the emergence of the distributive corridor in 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherlands and a bit later in the same period in England.

The corridor not only is determinant in the development of the modern house but just as remarkable and perhaps more critically, it is essential in the development of socio-political accounts—and by this we also mean the valuation—of domesticity and privacy. As opposed to the medieval and renaissance house in which rooms had multiple points of entry and multiple uses, the reduction of the common space of transit to the corridor “enables a room to have a single use and a single entrance, defending privacy and discouraging entry to anyone without a specific purpose”. (Hill, 7) While the development of the seventeenth-century Dutch house was instrumental in determining the space of the modern home as the domain of the preservation and separation of the family space and the practices of domestic life, the distributive corridor offers a further way to parcel socio-political categories further segmenting the space of the private into the space of the personal, etc. Simon Schama suggests that “the home was of supreme importance in determining the moral fate, both of the individuals and of Dutch society as a whole” (Schama, 384) so that this new emerging house was understood as “both a microcosm, and a permitting condition, of the properly governed commonwealth”. (Schama, 386) In the context of the home, the corridor had a similar moral and political role that helped to resolve some of the shortcomings of the communal house, which made it “unfit for moral

dwelling”. (Hill, 7)<sup>7</sup> Such expression of might and power, all surreptitiously played out by the seemingly modest wall!

We would normally tend to operate under the impression that the principle of moral individuation is *naturally* grounded on the organic unity and biological autonomy of the particular human being. And we may consequently be tempted to suppose that the varied developments in our architectural designs were merely the belated attempt to accommodate the natural necessities of this autonomous rational animals. Yet, we have very strong reasons to suppose that the articulation of the autonomous modern human being with its basic toolbox of metaphysical justifications—happiness, freedom, etc—are to a good extent the results of spatial conditioning and of the determination of its mode of social performance within these spaces.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Guise of Nature*

The normative might of the wall forecloses the need of justifying the action imposed. Furthermore, the power of the silent wall to guide action makes the need of prescriptive assertions thoroughly unnecessary. As opposed to other objects of human design and manufacture, architectural objects can dispense with vademecums and user manuals. The *brute facticity* of wall, ceiling and floor as constraints to movement and of doors, passageways and windows as enabling devices for movement, forcefully but quietly guide the actions of agents without prescriptions. These constraining devices that

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<sup>7</sup> Following Evans “Rookeries and Model Drawings” p.102

<sup>8</sup> A more substantive articulation of the preeminence of practice to the construction of the conceptual or theoretical elucidation of the practices in concepts is best given by Bordieu in *Outlines of a Theory of Practice*. Of particular interest to the current discussion is chapter 2, “Structure and Habitus”. Pierre Bordieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1977.

guide movement by a combination of silent coercion and permission have the qualia<sup>9</sup> of *natural* constraints and *natural* possibility. And much like other natural constraints and possibilities—say, the constraint of gravity and the natural possibility of circumventing its force by way of the employment of the fluid force of air around an asymmetrical airfoil, as in aeronautics—these architectural devices have the force of guiding action tacitly.

It is true, however, that the constraining and enabling constitution of a building are often insufficient and this is seldom made as clear as with the employment of signage. But does not indeed signage in buildings indicate, in expressing the rules of the utilization of space prescriptively, the normative character of the architectural configuration? Isn't a sign of gender assignment on a restroom door or a 'do not enter' posting attempts at defining contingent limitation upon what seems like the natural possibility of utilizing that door or that restroom? In other words, isn't the prescriptive demand—often proscriptive in architectural objects—a way to constrain a 'natural possibility' such as using the 'wrong' restroom or opening the 'wrong' door? The wall allows no wrongs, the door, however, does.

Buildings are "fraught with oughts"<sup>10</sup> and much like nature and in opposition to moral rules who according to Locke 'not one can "be propos'd, whereof a man may not justly demand a reason"' (Locke, 68), the architectural device need not give reasons for the imposition of its norms and *regulae*. And yet, as I have suggested above, these rules—innocuous at first blush—are or seem to have robust and in retrospect glaring moral

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<sup>9</sup> That is, the *what-is-it-likeness* or as Dennett puts it "'an unfamiliar term for something that could not be more familiar to each of us: the ways things seem to us.'" (Goldman, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> This is Wilfred Sellars' turn of phrase. (Sellars, 1991)



characters:

The well-kept home was the place where the soiling world subjected to tireless exercise in moral as well as physical ablution. Once across its threshold the most hard-boiled, street-wise trader could expect to discover the moral equivalent of slippers. (Schama, 391)

Much like walls, other objects of design and manufacture—parks, sidewalks, doors, chairs, teakettles, toilette bowls, tampons, sunglasses—with their particular constellation of rules of utilization, guide the actions of users but with varying gradations of compelling force. While the satisfaction of the prohibition determined by a limiting wall does not require my voluntary acceptance, the satisfaction of, say, the rule that governs the proper use of the toothbrush—at least by the lights of Dr. Gamberg, my dentist<sup>11</sup>—demands that my will be recruited and mobilized in fairly specific ways. This dependency on the agent's will—my will in this case—means, that *prima facie*, these two rules not only show varying capacities to compel action but they present themselves under very different lights. The first one, which compels by the apparent brute force of the factic limit has the appearance of a *regula naturae*, that is, a rule of nature while the other one which while seeking to compel is liable to negation, is more akin to a *regula*

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<sup>11</sup> A toothbrush is never just a toothbrush and indeed a large body of literatures exists concerning the prescriptions and justifications of clinical propriety and the moral underpinnings of the 'clinical gaze'. Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, *Naissance de la clinique* and *Les mots et les choses* are not just seminal works but remains some of the most illuminating accounts of this furtive relation. The presence of Foucault is ubiquitous in this paper. See also, for example, Elizabeth Williams' *The Physical and The Moral*.

*ludi*, a game rule which calls upon the acceptance of reasons extrinsic to the putative demand.

### *Two Types of Rules*

The extent to which the norm is visible to the agent seems to determine its normative strength. In the face of a visible rule, one that is proposed in the form of a prescription, the justification that seems to give force to the demand is extrinsic to it and it is this justificatory distance that make the demand liable to Locke's proverbial demands of reasons. Yet, when the justificatory distance is reduced, the plausibility and function of pleading for reasons is progressively diminished. I want to suggest that from the point of view of the agent acting in accordance to the rules clothed in the solid limiting force of facts the rule and its justification are hard if not impossible to disentangled from the mere doing. To paraphrase an ancient attempt to account for the commanding force of beauty, facts are—or seem to be—'without why'. No rules of nature—or semblance thereof—can be *described* of which man may justly demand a justificatory reason. This semblance of natural rules, that is, rules that share with rules of nature the appearance of necessity and in that, the apparent negation of alternate possibility<sup>12</sup> we may call *regula naturae*.

As in *laws of nature*<sup>13</sup>, in the *regula naturae*, the least visible the rule and the more surreptitious its expression and enforcement, the more robust its normative force. When the rule is entirely invisible and can only be articulated through the *a posteriori*

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<sup>12</sup> Here we are very specifically referring to Harry Frankfurt's principle. His interest is in the question of responsibility. At this stage, we only are interested in showing that it is the *apparent* presence or absence of alternative possibility what makes the norm seem necessary or contingent, respectively. See Frankfurt in McKenna, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Not rules.

description of the performative regularities inscribed upon the doings of users—in some cases, the rule is undetectable to the point of effacing the performance as a form of use and of the agent as a user—the rule seems to acquire maximum normative power as what can be retrospectively accounted for in laws of nature.

Prescriptions and instructions, conversely, as they are issued and proposed in user manuals and buildings or city signage are indeed liable to the demand of reasons and in so being they show their liability to alternative possibilities of action. Arguably, with regard to rules that emerge and are expressed in the context of a web of alternative possible actions, the function of justificatory claims is to foreclose these alternatives and compel the one prescribed by way of the normative force extracted from reasons.<sup>14</sup> The visibility of alternative possibilities as the emergence of reasons also makes evident the contingent nature of this type of rules. In the context of the socio-cultural space of discourse in which this form of rules and demands are issued and exchanged, the justificatory claim establishes the contingent aim of the action and in some sense determines the condition of necessity of action *for a particular sake*. ‘If one is to have a healthy mouth and be able to ingest solid food until an advance age, one is to follow Dr. Gamberg’s advice in the brushing of one’s teeth’. The visibly contingent particularity of the purpose of the actions advised or demanded, helps us to see that the rule belongs to a fairly well determined teleological economy. This form of rule justification is visible and determined in user’s instructions of all sorts. The successful operation of the task for which the shaving machine or the coffee-maker have been acquired demands the acceptance of the norms of use. Needless to say, one may choose to use the coffee maker

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<sup>14</sup> We are here offering a socio-cultural reinterpretation of the Kantian prudential imperative.

as a rather exotic paper weight on one's desk or a pissoir as an ornamental piece, in which case one can dispense with the instructions provided by designer and manufacturer and furthermore, one may find variant and more effective ways to make coffee than with the new machine, but insofar as the intention is to make coffee with it, the game demands that these rules be followed, though not strictly. In fact, we may say that the most salient reason in this kind of prudential commitments to the rule, is the commitment to the instrumental function of the machine. In this sense, I am calling this type of rules, *regulae ludi*.

#### *Norms like to Hide*

*Regulae ludi* like to present themselves as *regulae naturae* and while they do this most effectively in architectural object, is not only there that they do so effectively. The homogenizing and normalizing consistency with which actions are performed in our socio-cultural environment determine the form of utilization of the objects and their norms of use. As Heidegger succinctly puts it:

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *people* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *people* see and judge... (Heidegger, 164. *My translation of Das Man*)

The prolonged uniformity—even if never absolute—of practices in a socio-cultural space, is especially efficient in establishing the guise of necessity—sometimes seen as social necessity sometimes not—just as much as an architectural object may. The contingency of many of the methods of utilization that define our

practices become—in the ubiquitous repetition of the norm and its application under socio-cultural compulsion—invisible. We do as others do and the force of normalcy permits us to dispense with justification and reasons. One does certain things because that is just ‘what people do’, which, of course, does not seem to amount to an admissible justificatory reason but rather to a descriptive reason. In fact, the apparent superficiality of questions about the use or reason for things and practices that are deeply rooted in our social ethoi expose precisely the fact that these practices have been accepted with a certain degree of naturalness. And in this guise of naturalness the rule—as those that are determined by corridors, doors and walls—become entirely transparent. We can see the world through the rule of use, but the rule of use can no longer be seen at all. In this form of action guidance, the dispensation of reasons beyond the compulsion of the practice that has been normalized by socio-cultural pressures does not entail rational deliberation. In our unreflected use of sidewalks, of telephones, of napkins, of helmets, of toilette bowls, of soap or toothpaste we allow for the disguise of contingent rules and demands in the guise of necessity and the contingency of our seemingly natural practices are allowed to remain hidden in their obviousness, hidden in plain sight. The practice and the rule behind it are *performatively transparent*. While in the architectural contraption, the solidity of the material fact did the bidding of ‘the natural’ force of compulsion, in this case, what does the bidding of the ‘natural’ is the social force of normalization.

In this dispensation of rational deliberation we also forsake alternate possibilities as the tacit norms that we accept unreflectively keep entirely out of sight the possibility of their subversion or negation. The qualia of necessity—socially determined or otherwise—makes the alternate possibility not merely hard to trace but, often, altogether

inconceivable. However, these rules that define the socio-cultural regularity of our communities are not impervious to challenge in the manner that the compelling force of true natural necessity are. The application of the norms of socio-cultural regularity are liable to misfits and performative failures and in these failures, the rule as well as the panoply of its alternate possibilities become visible.<sup>15</sup> A very short story of the political and socio-cultural attitudes expressed in the door as an egress mechanism may be of some use here.

The manner in which people operate doors—and one should be warned from supposing the word *operate* excessive—is socio-politically specific. In the United States, entry doors open in the direction of exit with fair consistency. In fact, the operation of doors which is an undertaking that most people in the western world assume daily—perhaps hourly—occurs by and large so seamlessly that in fact at most times it is hard even for the individual who has just made use of the contraption to account for his successful performance even in moderate detail. Yet, it is possible for us to offer the general outlines of what would be involved in the successful utilization of doors in commercial spaces. If the individual is going in, and in those cases in which the door is not automatic, a release mechanism must be activated—pulling, twisting or sometimes pushing the handle—and often from the very device used to activate the release mechanism the door is pulled in the direction of the body until sufficient space has been made between the solid surfaces to permit the individual to transit between the two spaces. When the intention is to exit, the same release mechanism must be activated but

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<sup>15</sup> Arguably the disruption of the principle of social fitness in the utilization of objects and technologies is constant. In fact, every application of a rule, I would want to argue, is the product of a previous disruption. However, this discussion belongs to another paper.

the door must be pushed. This action that seems unworthy of any further elucidation, let alone an extra paragraph in this chapter, is one which not only demands a notable amount of methodological knowledge, it also calls on a certain amount of cultural sensitivity. Such methodological aptitude and cultural sensitivity, however, do not demand the rational attention of the agent. Rather, it is the compelling limit of the application of the rule of use needed to get from the street to the cup of warm coffee inside the café that forces upon the subject such aptitude and cultural sensitivity—bare in mind that we are here referring to cultural sensitivity and not knowledge. In fact, even if the agent remains completely unaware of his aptitude and sensitivity, both become easily visible when the individual in question is displaced and made to deal with a similar object in socio-political spaces where doors don't often open in the direction of escape. It will take a couple of tries for the good American to find his way pass the door into a café in, say, Buenos Aires or Berlin, where more often than not doors to commercial spaces do not open in the direction of escape.

The disruption of the usual application of the rule for transitioning into spaces mutually segregated by doors will bring into light the door as a mechanism of segregation of spaces, which in more normal circumstances, offering very little opposition if any at all, remains invisible in the perfect concealment of the *performative transparency* of the rule. But in addition, it will also make visible the rule by the evidence of its failure. It is now that the alternative possibility not only becomes visible, it becomes indispensable for the attainment of the intended aim of the action. So our good American still standing on the sidewalk now pushes the door and with complete celerity and exhibiting notable problem-solving skills, rearticulates for himself the entire principle of utilization of doors

granting himself access to a warm cup of coffee. This of course, is a rather emphatic account of a process that itself is often imperceptible to the agent. But this disruption, however minimal does bring to light the relation between the apparent necessity and the emergent contingency of the rule of use of common objects such as doors. Yet this is not the end of the story.

If our man in Buenos Aires or Berlin were to hold his attention on the matters that just occupied him for a bit longer and were to wonder why is that the curious thing that just happened to him just happened to him, he could be promptly directed to the political and juridical history of the operation of doors. The episode that determined the manner of operations of doors to commercial spaces and from which its codification in statutes and ordinances resulted, took place on December the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1903 in Chicago's North Side.

The Iroquois Theater, which had been inaugurated barely a month before was showing a vaudeville act to a two-thousand-members strong audience mostly composed of mothers and her children on holiday recess. (Brandt, 2003) A fire broke on stage during the second act and fueled by drafts of cold air coming from the stage gates it spread rapidly sending a stampede of members of the audience toward doors that opened inwards. That day 605 people—one third of the audience—died in Chicago's North Side. As a result of this fire and the role played by doors ordinances progressively began to appear around the US establishing that doors in commercial buildings should open in the directions of egress. By 1908—in the aftermath of the Collingwood School Fire, which killed 172 students—the ordinance had become common around the country.<sup>16</sup> This

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<sup>16</sup> Even though the role of doors in the Collingwood fire was only mistakenly taken to be responsible for the high number of casualties.



determined the political and juridical faith of the modest door.<sup>17</sup>

In fact, the codification of the provision of this escape device and operation determined use and performance but not by direct prescription of the agent. Rather, the building code and its enforcement as prescriptive claims on architects and contractors, determine the ‘way of building’. But their incidence on the actual act of opening doors, that is, the way that they govern the utilization of doors and determine the normalcy of their use in accessing and exiting commercial spaces are indirect. Yet, in so doing, the law—the code—surreptitiously imposed a set of political and moral commitments and demands upon the user of the door. The individual, who with invisible automaticity enters a commercial building by pulling the door towards him, is—in this modest and usually undetectable act—unwittingly yet consistently following the law and deferring to its justificatory principles. This regular and automatic, that is, unreflected, acceptance of the law, tacitly—perhaps unknowingly—subscribes the agent of the performance to the socio-political, historical, cultural and moral commitments of the society that has defined the preservation of life, public safety, the use of certain construction material, the principles of prevention, etc as *goods*. In fact, the seamless application of the law in the mere act of opening the door in the way intended by law, designer and builders expresses the unreflected membership in an economy of norms and values.

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<sup>17</sup> A case of the same kind took place in Buenos Aires, Argentina in June 23, 1968. After a football game, a police unit decided to lock an exit to the stadium resulting in the death of 71 members of the public. The case was known as Gate 12 (*Puerta 12*)—in reference to the number of the gate in the stadium’s perimeter wall—happened under a repressive military dictatorship, which censured all sorts of criticisms that could be read as politically incriminating. This meant that no investigation—independent or otherwise—took place in the aftermath. Generally speaking, although the ordinance demanding that doors open in the direction of egress is part of the Argentine building code, it is hardly ever respected and its hardly ever enforced.

## Exposing Norms

The unreflected commitment to values implicit in performance of actions according to tacit statutes and regulations may be read in at least two ways and I would like to suggest that both of these ways might be of important consideration. The first one concerns the demand of self-understanding—political and socio-cultural—and the need and responsibility of determining the consistency of our declared values and the ones implicit in our practices. The second is the efficiency in the production and determination of socio-cultural practices that—I would venture to predict— will be more effective in application and performance, the less visible they are.

The demand to explore and unconceal the *regula ludi*—contingent rules—hidden in the guise of the *regula naturae*—social or natural necessity—is a matter of political responsibility and socio-cultural integrity and maturity. The constant and unrelenting reckoning of the fitness of our practices and of the commitments implied in them is also critical in the assessment of the coherence of our values and practices and perhaps more importantly, it is also critical in exposing the mutual coherence or incoherence of the panoply of values that we claim to hold and the ones we actually happen to hold.

Yet, the normative model that issues from our account of design also gives us the opportunity to define the manner of more effectively guiding actions across large demographic configurations with vastly divergent moral and political proclivities. The regularization of a practice capable of naturalizing a discourse or a category can best be achieved by avoiding prescriptive claims altogether by developing and instituting elements of design that force upon the subject—compel him—to perform in fairly

specific ways. This demands a very strong understanding on the part of the designer of the principles and values intended and of the way in which they would best be translatable in performance. Should go without saying that this is a predictive exercise of sorts that is liable to failure and miscalculation is to be expected. Yet, instituting patterns of use by design has the benefit of giving a rather considerable margin for correction. In a straight forward sense, what I am suggesting here is a form of social engineering and this comes with evident moral and political questions. In any case, the best way to undertake political agendas is non-prescriptively.

I venture to suggest that questions about the moral propriety of the surreptitious imposition of values by the design of practices will not to be easily solved but in light of the large historical catalogue of abuses of idiocy and intellectual ineptitude for political gain on the one hand, and the even more voluminous unwitting development of these same mechanisms in the unfolding of our cultural and political history, perhaps the active and thoughtful development of design strategies for the rearticulation of political practices ought not be altogether objectionable.

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