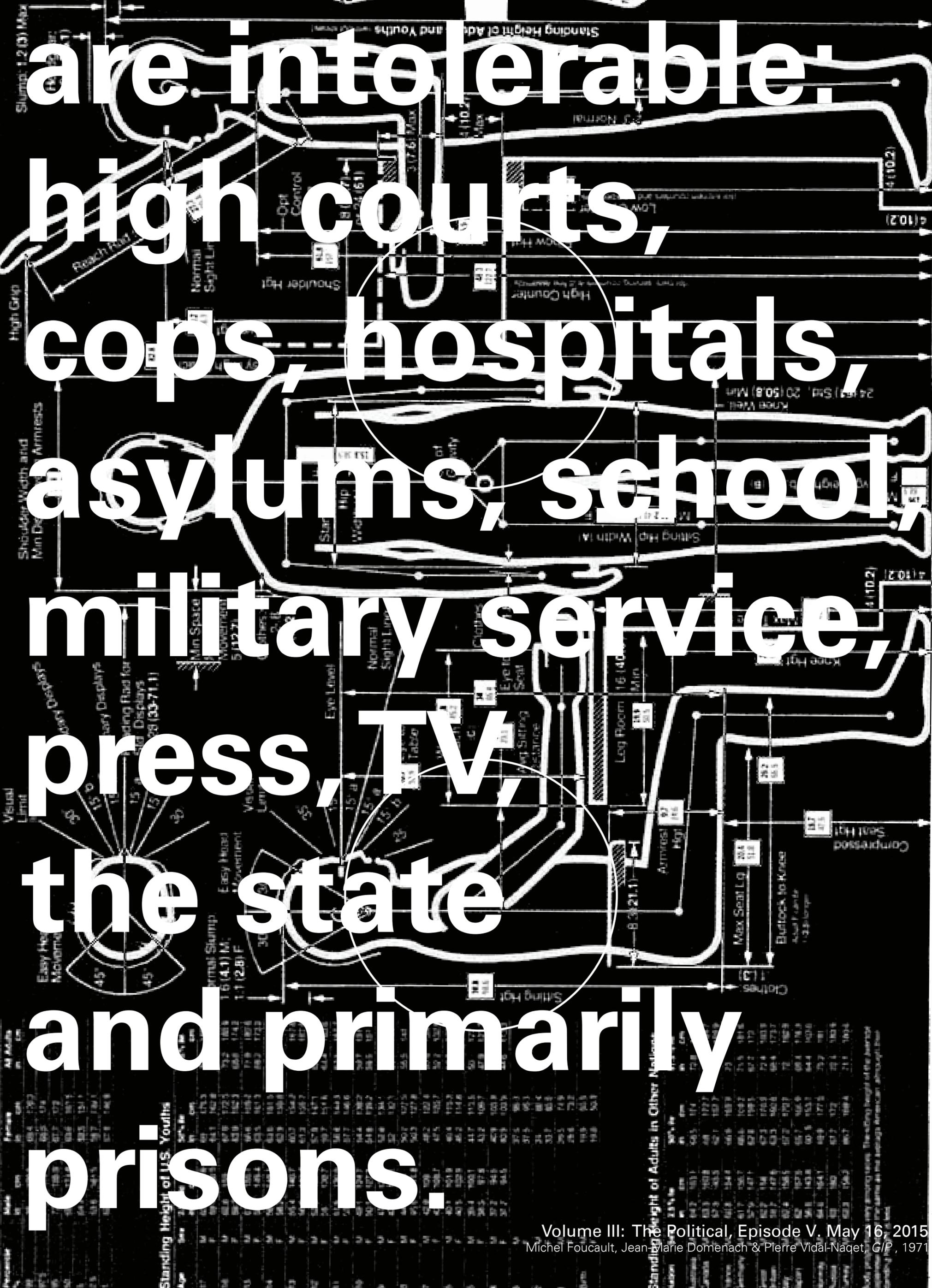


78 198.1  
77 195.6  
76 193  
75 190.5  
74 188  
73 185.4  
72 182.9



are intolerable:  
 high courts,  
 cops, hospitals,  
 asylums, schools,  
 military service,  
 press, TV,  
 the state  
 and primarily  
 prisons.

Percentile	Male	Female	All Adults
	in	in	in
95	74.5	68.5	71.5
90	73.5	67.5	70.5
85	72.5	66.5	69.5
80	71.5	65.5	68.5
75	70.5	64.5	67.5
70	69.5	63.5	66.5
65	68.5	62.5	65.5
60	67.5	61.5	64.5
55	66.5	60.5	63.5
50	65.5	59.5	62.5
45	64.5	58.5	61.5
40	63.5	57.5	60.5
35	62.5	56.5	59.5
30	61.5	55.5	58.5
25	60.5	54.5	57.5
20	59.5	53.5	56.5
15	58.5	52.5	55.5
10	57.5	51.5	54.5
5	56.5	50.5	53.5
0	55.5	49.5	52.5

Country	50%ile	90%ile
	in	in
Australia	70.5	74.5
Canada	69.5	73.5
France	68.5	72.5
Germany	67.5	71.5
Japan	66.5	70.5
Norway	65.5	69.5
Sweden	64.5	68.5
Switzerland	63.5	67.5
U.S.	62.5	66.5

Note A: Girls taller than 60 (182.8) have a smaller hip width than women, therefore subtract about 1.5-2.0 in. Boys taller than 58 (146.5) weigh less than men, therefore subtract about 30-40 lb. Note B: The horizontal reach of adults can be increased by 3-4 (7.6-10.2) extending the shoulder.

# to our readers...

We have witnessed a political agenda marked by consensus rather than conflict—a democracy more recognizable in stalemated than in action. Political subjectivity and difference has been stifled and “politics,” a set of practices and power relations that organize social order, has been relegated to the realm of mere management and administration. However, after the seemingly unchallenged triumph of neoliberalism, we find ourselves in the midst of global unrest and disillusionment. From Baltimore to Athens, diffused systems of power and control that underpin the everyday have become glaringly obvious.

We prioritize “the political” over “politics.” For us “the political” (*le politique*) is inherently conflictual. It is the space where power is challenged and reordered. In this third volume of *;*, we explore how architecture stands as a series of actions—how architecture itself acts politically. Architectural practice is a medium of dissent with the potential to occupy, resist, reject, topple, subvert, and criticize current hegemonic systems and ideologies. An alternative cannot exist without an existing, opposing

term, position, and possibility. As architects, we propose new forms and images, but also think about the tactics to achieve those ends. This volume is concerned with strategies that promote friction and provide space for the political.

Flesh alone is feeble against concrete or steel. Yet through the careful placement of these materials we construct our world—all too often reinforcing normative identities and sets of expected behaviors. Each wall, like each norm, enacts a certain violence: it is constructed around an imagined subject at the expense of another. In this way, all building is political. But its political intensity always varies in relation to the actual subjects and contexts it interacts with. If we accept that nobody is innocent, then the goal is no longer to avoid this violence completely, but rather to ask how much and for whom? Only once we acknowledge that we are all implicated, can we, as organizers of materials, reorient, if ever so slightly, standing power relations. In this episode we speak with Léopold Lambert about the violence of architecture.

## the political

## léopold lambert

# who welcomes this violence?

Léopold Lambert in conversation with C. Recorded April 2nd, 2015.

**C:** I'd like to talk about your emphasis on the word “corporeal” in your upcoming book *Topie Impitoyable: The Corporeal Politics of the Cloth, the Wall, and the Street*. In the book you describe the human body first as a material assemblage. Why do you see the need to emphasize this materiality?

**LL:** I always find it useful to go back to the most elementary way of looking at architecture and our bodies. In the case of bodies and architecture as material assemblages, it is necessary that they are situated somewhere, occupying a space. A wall may occupy a space for 300 years, while my body might occupy the space of this chair for maybe one hour. The essential difference we make out of it comes from an anthropocentric way of looking at things—we may not look at the space that the wall occupies and the space that my body occupies as similar. But if I stand up from my chair and try to occupy the space of the wall in front of me, there is going to be a fight between the material assemblage of my body and the wall. I am going to have to use force, but the wall will withstand my body. There is a violence in this encounter; in other words, both material assemblages are affected by it, although not equally. Violence always varies in degrees, never in essence. The violence I just mentioned is pre-political. Not chronologically, of course, but methodologically, we can see that there is a violence inherent to architecture, which is then necessarily instrumentalized politically: the way we normally build walls is to resist the energy of the body. We then invented devices like doors—a regulator of the wall porosity—and keys, which allow us to establish who can get past architecture's violence and who cannot. Now, who gets access to the instrument that can transform a regular house into a prison cell is political, but it is not architectural *per se* to say who gets the key.

**C:** Perhaps not, but architecture is setting up the scenario where one person has a key and the other does not.

**LL:** For me, architecture is the discipline that organizes bodies in space: we organize the occupation of matter. The title of my upcoming book comes from a sentence by Foucault, “*mon corps topie impitoyable*”<sup>1</sup> (I can only badly translate it into “there is no escape from my body”). The body occupies a place that is at the exception of every other place, and only this particular material assemblage can occupy this space at a particular moment. There is a vertigo in realizing that it is simultaneously a necessary decision (my body cannot be nowhere) and also a radical one (my body can only be here, and only my body can be here). By being confronted with this decision we can start to distinguish the notion of political intensity: obviously it's not the same thing to be sitting in my living room, or in the streets in a demonstration, or in a civil war...

**C:** You have suggested that the limit of one's body extends to include its environment. Could you talk about this relationship?

**LL:** By default, we tend to think that the body stops at the skin, but then how am I able to feel it when someone stands two inches behind me? If I need air to breathe, at what moment is the air part of my body and what moment is it not? If someone wraps me in plastic wrap then all of a sudden my living function will be greatly affected. Something we should continue to bring up is the notion of atmosphere. There are two thinkers who influence my thoughts on atmosphere: Peter Sloterdijk and Frantz Fanon. Sloterdijk for his concept of *atmospheer*,<sup>2</sup> and Fanon for the daily breathing of colonized bodies. In Fanon's book, *A Dying Colonialism*, he describes how it is not merely a territory that is colonized, but the very breathing of the colonized population is occupied. Decolonization thus consists in a “combat

breathing.”<sup>3</sup> In this sentence we go back to the notion of direct control over the immediate environment that echoes Eric Garner's final words, “I can't breathe,” when he was strangled by a white police officer, and which has become a slogan of the Black Lives Matter political movement.

**C:** The CIA handbook on “enhanced interrogation techniques” legally situates itself precisely in this ambiguous extension of the body. The handbook outlines the many ways to manipulate the immediate environment, in such extreme ways that its effects are directly felt on the body.<sup>4</sup> Solitary confinement is only one example. Another is the confinement of the body in a box so small that one cannot extend their limbs. Then there is of course water boarding. In each case the “sanctity” of the envelope of the body is preserved, it is the environment that is manipulated.

**LL:** What really struck me when I saw these methods was to see how architectural they were, both in their design and their effectuation. The precision and anticipation of the bodies behaviors and organization in space allows us to say that, this too is architecture.

**C:** In a statement by Foucault that you've refuted, he claims “after all, the architect has no power over me. If I want to tear down or change a house he built for me, put up new partitions, add a chimney, the architect has no control.”<sup>5</sup> This is a common argument against the oppression of architecture.

**LL:** I honestly do not think that this is Foucault at his best, and I wish that architects would not draw too much attention to it. This remark puts us in the legal position of a homeowner, something foreign to a majority of us. We can agree that there is no emancipatory architecture, that emancipation is necessarily a practice. But we go too quickly to the corollary of this sentence, that there is no oppressive architecture, only practices. The point I am trying to make is what if architecture in its very inherence is an instrument to what we tend to call oppression.

I am regularly asked about this Rousseauian argument of architecture—you know, the mountain shelter, something that protects us from the elements. “Is this really violent?” My answer is “yes very much so!” Of course we are always talking about degrees of violence, but this shelter provides protection to the bodies that have access to it, and there is a protocol to determine who gets access, even if it is as simple as “first here first serve.” Imagine it is snowing and people start coming to seek protection. They keep coming. There will be a moment when certain bodies are no longer granted access to this protection. Once the shelter exists, there is now the inside, but what is outside is no longer an untouched natural milieu. Each wall creates social conditions on both of its sides: the included and the excluded. One can only be homeless (“prisoner of the outside”) if there is something called home.

**C:** The location of an object is very important to its political intensity. In a previous episode we raised this question with Bernard Tschumi, and spoke about how a rock and a gun interact with their environment.<sup>6</sup> We can imagine the political potential of almost any object by relocating or reframing it. Likewise, we can always trace a lineage of decisions, which by nature are political, that led to the creation of an object—but that is not to say that everything is political. I argue that in order for an object to be political it needs to have a confrontation with a human actor that has an alternative intention. For example, I would say that the wall is not political unless it is in conflict with my desire to transverse it. I worry that when we say everything is political the word loses its meaning.

**LL:** I am not interested in the word intention or agenda. Somehow intention makes things easier to

understand because we can relate to the rational regime of the intention. But intention is only a small aspect of the way things unfold themselves politically. So that gets us to the thing about the word “political” losing its meaning. It relates to the fact that we always tend to think of the world in essences (“this thing is a body, this thing is a table, etc.”) and thus wonder if everything is political. Rather, we should be thinking in terms of degrees or intensity. Saying everything is political does not mean that things are equally political; it also means that everything varies in political intensity depending on its location: a soldier, and an army vehicle, do not develop the same political intensity when they are in their own country as when they are deployed at war.

All bodies, whether animate or inanimate necessarily occupy a space, and their political intensity varies depending on the space. It goes back to the first question, that only one material assemblage can occupy a space at one time. The example of the army vehicle is an obvious one, but we can just as well think of gentrification as a demonstrative instance of this, where occupation becomes a way of life that occupies space. We must not think in essences: that the army vehicle or gentrifier has a political essence, rather that they produce political situations.

**C:** You claim that all architecture is violent, but are there situations in which this violence can be viewed as beneficial? For example the wall that divides the men's bathroom from the women's bathroom. This architecture undeniably and violently separates genders, but in the populist mind of society it seems that this separation could be considered a “welcomed violence?”

**LL:** The question is who welcomes this violence? The violence bodies have to experience is proportional to their degree of separation from the norm. In these conditions, obviously cisgender bodies, by definition, welcome the violence of their categorization into two definitive types. But what about other bodies? Those who do not recognize such an essential categorization? The restroom is particular because of the enunciation of the norm—often represented by two stereotypical drawings on the doors—but the violence of the norm operates in all designed space, precisely because space is designed through a normative vision of the body.

**C:** The architect is always working within a subjectively constructed view of the world. The logics of the dominance of architecture over the human body can be used for “good” or “bad,” but that distinction is an essentially moralizing argument. Perhaps the most important thing to emphasize is that architecture actively replicates the architect's vision of the body on the bodies that move through it. How does shifting our world-view affect our architecture?

**LL:** Temple Grandin, a professor of animal sciences at Colorado State University, explains that her autism allows her to be more sensitive to the stress of cattle in slaughterhouses. She understood which aspects in the procession was increasing the cattle's level of stress, and thus designed elaborate corridors to lead the cattle to its death, so that the cattle will not realize what is about to happen to it. To bring cows to their death in a non-stressful way seems to be an ethical practice, and she is using architecture to achieve it. But at the end of the day, if we discuss if it's a good thing for animal rights, we might want to wonder if the animal does not deserve the right to fight the ultimate fight—even if it's a desperate hopeless fight against death. Architecture prevents this right to be fulfilled.

It's particularly delicate to draw on this example of the industry of death in order to compare animal bodies to human bodies. Without making a strict

comparison, but continuing to talk about the violence of architecture, we can draw a lot of connections from horrific historical occurrences to architecture. Without architecture, many political ambitions that have reached an incredible degree of violence could not have happened. We can think of the slave ship and the absolute horror experienced by hundreds of bodies packed into it—without the slave ship, the slave trade would simply not exist as we know it. We can think of so many more examples if we think about design in its totality—I mean, every weapon is a designed object. But again, the risk is to insist only on obvious occurrences of violence when the same logic also operates in more mundane conditions.

I understand that once this is all said, we can ask: “Everything we do will be violent—so why don't we quit? What can we do if we know that innocence is not a possibility?” Well it may be paradoxical, but that there is no innocence might be something of a liberation in thinking about our practice as designers. Sometimes it's the designers who want to be the least involved, the least interventionist, that end up with the most problematic designs—in so far that the “least active contribution” to this political process of creation means the more the output of this creation will contribute to the dominant relationship of power in a given society. Architecture will carry a certain violence on bodies, and when we realize that, we can start wondering which bodies. If you're not wondering which bodies, then the violence will be always applied to promote the normative bodies' society.

What I am saying becomes extremely obvious when the bodies experiencing space are in a wheelchair, or are blind—all of these names we invented to talk about non-normative bodies. The point I would like to make is that it is the same for *every* body. Some bodies are awfully close to the norm in the way they appear to others but every body has a certain degree of non-normativity. When you design architecture you can start to orient these political and problematic aspects of what you create with your own political agenda. We could say that architecture is a weapon, and once we have realized this, we are offered the possibility to use this weapon for what is important to us. And that's not to say that it will necessarily serve this agenda—there is a strong difference between what you intend to do and what the effect of your intent is. Once the effects exist your intent becomes irrelevant.

**C:** I think this statement, “the impossibility of innocence” is very empowering as an architect. You also say the renunciation of power is an illusion.

**LL:** It is an illusion, insofar that it is a full on embrace of the status quo.

Front image: Body Measurements by Henry Dreyfuss Associates. MIT Press, 1974

1. Michel Foucault. “The Utopian Body.” France-Culture, radio lecture. 1966.

2. Peter Sloterdijk. *Terror from the Air*. Semiotext(e), 2009.

3. Frantz Fanon. *A Dying Colonialism*. Grove Press, 1959.

4. U.S. Department of Justice Memo for interrogation techniques on al-Qaeda Operative (2002, released to the public in 2009)

5. Michel Foucault. “Space, Power, and Knowledge.” An interview with Paul Rabinow. Skyline, March 1982, trans. Christian Hubert

6. Bernard Tschumi. “Around the Mountain or Through the Mountain.” *;*, The Political, Episode I, Volume 3, January 2015.