War, Trade and Desire: Urban Design and the Counter Public Spheres of Bangkok

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This paper analyses an emergent public sphere in Bangkok in order to reveal the gap between ideals of public space as representation of power, nationhood, and modernity, versus its social production in everyday political struggles. The setting for recent political demonstrations in Bangkok dramatically shifted from royalist and nationalist Ratchadamnoen Avenue to Ratchaprasong intersection, the symbolic heart of Thailand's embrace of globalization and the home of Bangkok's spectacular central shopping district.[1] While Ratchadamnoen remains mostly empty except as a traffic corridor and a stage set for royalist and nationalist pomp, it has been continuously occupied as a stage for political uprisings – often with tragic consequences. In contrast, as the political base of protest in Thailand widened, the glittering shopping malls at Ratchaprasong became a new site of protest, fuelled by online social networks and in 2010 dramatically occupied by the urban and rural working poor, who sensed they could not afford to partake in Bangkok's phantasmagorical splendours.[2]

Introduction

The paper argues that in following Bangkok's historical cycles of blood and massacre in the street lies the possibility of finding new forms of urban design and a public sphere not yet imagined in the West. It analyses Bangkok through the lens of political theorist Nancy Fraser's critique of Jürgen Habermas's use of the term 'the public sphere'. Fraser agrees with Habermas's important definition of the public spheres as a space for public discourse separate from state influence and market relations. However, for her, the moral authority of the public sphere depends on 'who participates and on what terms'.[3] She therefore calls for 'multiple publics' and 'insurgent citizenship' – certainly public spheres in the plural as conceived by the editors of this volume. Fraser calls for a public sphere comprising 'actual existing democracy' rather than Habermas's more restricted ideal of the modern European bourgeois liberal public.

Urban theorist Margaret Crawford has employed Fraser's critique to counter the 'narrative of loss' by urbanists such as Richard Sennett, Mike Davis, and Michael Sorkin. For Crawford:

> […] the meaning of concepts such as public, space, democracy, and citizenship are continually being redefined in practice through lived experience. By eliminating the insistence on unity, the desire for fixed categories of time and space, and the rigid concepts of public and private that underlie these narratives, we can begin to recognize a multiplicity of simultaneous public interactions that are restructuring urban space, producing new forms of insurgent citizenship, and revealing new political arenas for democratic action.[4]

Although written in Los Angeles during the 1990s, Crawford's call resonates with both the contemporary trajectory of public space in Bangkok and the political expression of the counter publics that have emerged within these spaces over the past decade.

In my book *Digital Modelling for Urban Design,* I illustrated contrasting studies of civic actors shaping Rome, New York, and Bangkok. The book analysed the successive transformation of the Roman Forum as an urban design model of the triumphal space of empire (War), the emergence of the two central business districts in New York as an urban design model of the modern capitalist city (Trade), and the rapid reconfiguration of the central shopping district of Bangkok as an urban design model for the global city of leisure and consumption (Desire).[5] In this essay 'War, Trade and Desire' I identify three concurrent models of public space in Bangkok: the monumental and triumphal symbols of absolute monarchy, nationhood, military power, and moral authority as symbols of modernity and civilization; the display of capital accumulation in the city's bustling commercial entrepôts; and, finally, the actual existing activities of social life evident in democratic protest, consumerism, leisure, and social media. This essay presents these three models, not as a sequence of historical progression, but as currently present and at play in the public space of the city.

The tripartite structure of this essay aligns with Thongchai Winichakul's three overlapping historical series with which he frames the struggle for democracy in Thailand. He writes: 'An overlapping moment or period means one in which more than one historical process converged and was unfolding, thus one event may impact on those processes at the same time.'[6] Thongchai takes issue with the usual historical narrative of the Kingdom's march from absolute monarchy to democracy as a linear process towards an ideal polity. Instead he outlines the democratic movement in Thailand as a series of popular uprisings, continually set back by military coups, money politics, and most importantly, the interventions of the Thai monarchy as a figure of moral authority 'above and beyond' everyday politics. Thongchai's overlapping historical series intersect with my own three urban design models,

where successive urban design actors inherit the space constructed by the previous polity to occupy, remake, or destroy.

'War' describes the remaking of feudal Bangkok into a European-style capital city by Kings Rama V, VI, and VII, who assumed the bureaucratic power of modern monarchs between 1870 and 1932. Following the People's Party revolution of 1932, many of Bangkok's new public spaces were transformed to represent heroic military nationalism in the years leading up to the Second World War. Thongchai's first historical series (1870-1951) describes this political transition of the Kingdom of Siam into a constitutional monarchy dominated by the military. Other than brief periods of Parliamentary rule, after 1932 Field Marshall Phibun Songkram, a military strongman whose self-chosen last name means 'war', dominated the post-Revolutionary period. Coup d'états in 1947 and 1951 put an end to the People's Party and established the military as the dominant political player. The ruling generals had no democratic agenda and the role of the monarchy was removed to a position above and beyond politics.

'Trade' describes the emergence of speculative developments that began to compete with the monumental urban spaces in Bangkok constructed by the monarchy and military. Both commercial real estate and informal vending are forms of trade that reshaped the city during the post-war industrial and tourist commercial booms. Thongchai's second overlapping series (1938-1992) pivots around the struggle that emerged after 1973 between military and parliament systems due to the rise of popular democracy. Popular uprisings went hand in hand with the rapid economic development following Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat's (1957-1963) 'gift economy', which was a result of Thailand's alliance with America's war with Vietnam. Popular uprisings in 1973 and 1992 bracketed military coups in 1976, 1977, 1981, 1986 and 1991. After each coup, the

generals had to contend with a newly empowered and activist citizenry, and quickly promised a return to parliamentary rule.

'Desire' describes my own experience in Bangkok since 1997, when I witnessed the rise in populism and consumerism in Bangkok that led to the uprising of media-mogul Sondhi Limthongkul's Yellow Shirt supporters in 2005, and telecommunications tycoon Thaksin Shinawatra's Red Shirt supporters in 2010. Thongchai's third series (1973-2006) is marked by the entangled power relationships between money, the people, and the monarchy. The central issue is the 'shaping of electoral politics under the influence of conflicts, contests, negotiations and alliances among these political forces'.[7] The 1973 and 1992 uprisings were followed by new constitutions, but it was the East Asian economic crisis of 1997 that more widely empowered local democratic participation while strengthening the position of the Prime Minister. Thaksin Shinawatra led the country with three unprecedented electoral mandates until the surprising return of the military in the 2006 coup.

In examining the relationship between different urban design models and the emergence of counter publics in Bangkok, this paper benefits from firsthand reports from the city's streets. These reports document popular struggles to create a public sphere within public spaces constructed by powerful political and economic actors. In the section titled 'War', architectural historian Pirasri Povatong's deep archival research provides eyewitness accounts of the 'semi-colonial' hybrid transformations of Bangkok during the reign of King Rama V (1868-1910).[8] In the second section, 'Trade', anthropologist Alan Klima's ethnographic descriptions of the 'Black May' episodes at Ratchadamoen Avenue in 1992 provide mediations on a public sphere that for him took the form of a funeral, a casino, or an informal black marketplace.[9] In the final section, 'Desire', anthropologist Claudio Sporanzetti reads the 2010 'Red Shirt' occupation of Ratchaprasong Intersection through the lens of mobility and mobilization as the capitalist space of flows was seized by taxi and motorcycle-taxi drivers and mobile vendors, his ethnographic subjects and the new 'owners of the map' of Bangkok.[10]

My own time in Bangkok spans 15 years as a teacher and researcher at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Architecture. The campus is a green oasis far from the old sites of popular unrests that circulated around the old campus of Thammasat University. This temporal and spatial vantage point gave me a front-row seat to the transformation of the city following the economic crisis of 1997, as well as the emergence of a new public sphere within the central shopping district that came to surround Chulalongkorn University.[11] This new space that came to symbolize Thaksin's consumerist, globalized Thailand, turned into a political arena starting in 2005. This period also saw the rise of the pervasive use of cell phones, the Internet, and mobile social networking, technologies that have shaped both the design of public space and the virtual realm in which a new public sphere is now emerging. [fig. 1]

War
In his essay 'Toppling Democracy', Thongchai Winichakul displays a distrust of the historiography of Thailand that presents a progressive chronology from absolute monarchy to the 1932 People's Party Revolution, to popular uprisings in 1973 and 1992. Instead, Thongchai suggests a history of three overlapping series within the same chronological frame. This schema effectively disrupts the nationalist narrative of a progressive path towards democracy in Thailand. Thongchai's first overlapping historical series (1870-1951) describes the modernizing kings who remade Bangkok into a bureaucratic capital city, the creation of a constitutional monarchy following the 'palace revolt', and the military generals who seized power from the People's Party. Below, I describe the remaking of

Bangkok as a triumphal modern royal capital by the European-influenced monarchs from 1870 to 1932, and the transformation of those modern spaces by the military dictators up until 1951.

I call this section 'War', following the origins and development of the 'triumphal' urban design model that can be traced to the Roman Forum.[12] Triumphalism as an urban design model has remained present at the heart of modern liberal capitalism. This legacy can be seen, for example, in Edmund Bacon's discursive alignment of his work as Chief Planner in Philadelphia following in the steps of Baron Haussmann in Paris and Sixtus V in Rome, via the historiography of his teacher at Harvard, Sigfried Gideon. In the book *Digital Modelling for Urban Design,* I analyse the 'actual existing' space of the Roman Forum during the Middle Ages through Napoleon III's archaeological project to unearth and measure the Arch of Septimus Servius and Trajan's Column. The subsequent erection of his own victory column in Place Vendome and the Arc de Triumph at l'Etoile in Paris legitimized his authority and substantiated his claim that Paris was the second Rome.

King Rama I, founder of the present Chakri dynasty, moved the Siamese capital to Bangkok and also revived the role of the god-king that Ayutthaya has assumed from the Khmer Kings at Angkor. As a god-like figure, the King resided hidden behind the high walls of the Grand Palace. What might be called public space was in fact sacred ground reserved for royal and religious ceremonies, with only the royal entourage occupying the centre of the city, a symbolic representation of the hierarchical Indic cosmos with common people far removed to the periphery. According to architectural historian Pirasri Povatong: '[s]ince ancient times, architecture and urban design were always a key media through which the Siamese aristocrats projected their self-image, political legitimacy, and consummate control over the hierarchical social structure.'[13] It is only

with modernizing King Rama V (1868-1910) that the self-image of an absolute monarch as a public figure and the authoritative head of a bureaucratic nation state was born.

As Pirasri has demonstrated, Rama V was greatly impressed by the monumental architecture, broad avenues, and scenic views he viewed in Paris and other European capitals during his two tours in 1897 and 1907.[14] In Europe he saw the importance of creating a public promenade for the open display of a modern king.[15] Rama V's main instrument of making himself visible as a public figure was the construction of Ratchadamnoen Avenue – the royal walk connecting the walled enclave of the Grand Palace, crossing the three concentric moats of the old city, to the new garden district and royal palace at Dusit Park. Ratchadamnoen Klang, the middle part of the avenue, was a Hausmannian-like cut crossing east to west across Rama I's old island city. The Palace of the Front was partially demolished, and the royal cremation ground was extended as a broad elliptical lawn to receive the new avenue outside the wall of the Grand Palace. Upper Ratchadamnoen, running south to north, leads to the Royal Plaza, where an equestrian statue of the king was placed in front of a grand new throne hall, the centrepiece of Dusit Park, a new 'green field' development of modern sanitary infrastructure and lit streets. [fig. 2]

According to Pirasri, 'Rama V made it clear that the design precedent of his new avenue was the Mall, the major arterial approach to Buckingham Palace in London. The name Ratchadamnoen, 'King's Walk', however, was inspired by the name of the Queen's Walk, a pedestrian street in Green Park, London, which the king found pleasant during his 1897 journey'.[16] Pirasri details eyewitness accounts of three great events that displayed this new public figure of the king along the royal avenue. The first marked the completion of the construction of the avenue in 1903, the second the foundation of the
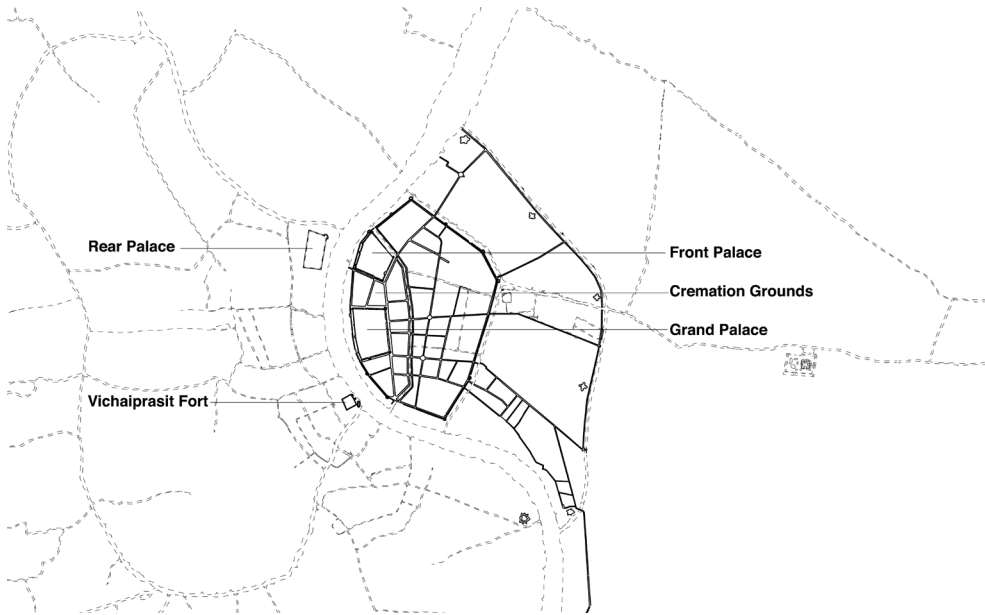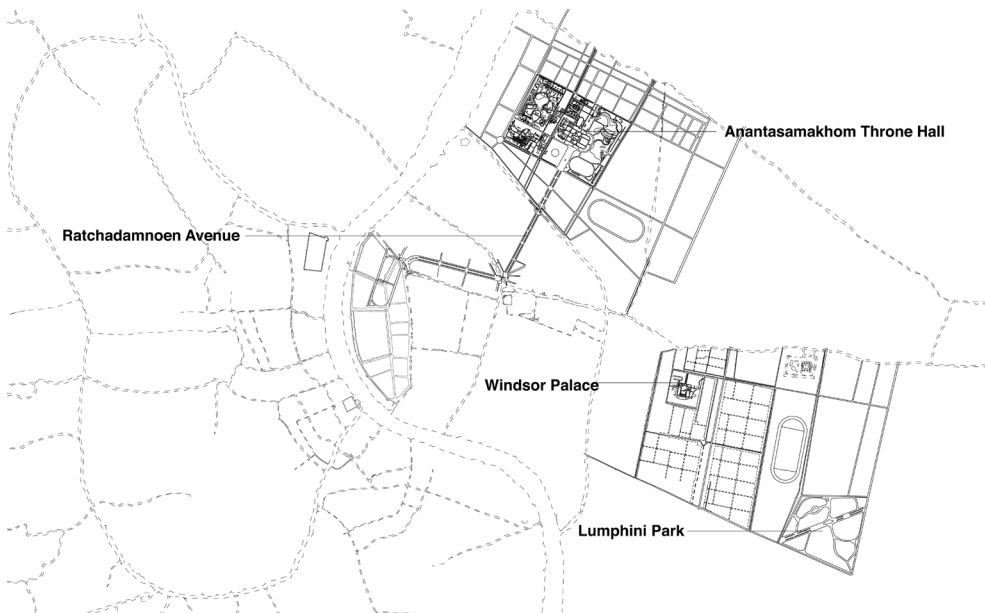
Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 1: Plan of Bangkok, 1868. The walled enclave of the Grand Palace is the inner sanctum of the triple-moated and walled royal city. The second moat runs outside the defensive city wall, and the third moat is lined with defensive fortresses.

Fig. 2: Modern extensions of Bangkok during the reign of Rama V consisted of two new road-based residential districts extended to the north for the King (Dusit Park) and the east for the Crown Prince (Pathumwan District).

new Anantasamakhom Throne Hall at the northern terminal in 1907, and the third in 1908 the unveiling of the bronze equestrian portrait of the king himself, in European military dress. The avenue's royal events brought city residents momentarily together, including common people and foreigners, as well as the elite, and presented the king as a modern public figure. However, Europeans criticized the incomplete appearance of the avenue, with its lack of commercial and apartment buildings lining its great breadth. Without residents and businesses, the street remained unpopulated outside of the staging of royal pomp, and the avenue failed to catalyse a European-like modern bourgeois public sphere of newsstands, cafés, clubs, bars, and the discussions they engender.

While the triumphal model of Ratchadamoen Avenue has its deepest roots in the imperial spaces of Rome and Paris, Rama V's accomplishment was not in the battlefields like his ancestors. Instead, according to Ka F. Wong, Rama V's triumph was one of politics and state theatre through creating a new form of national enthusiasm for the role of the king as the leader of a modern state, rather than a supernatural god-king of a feudal kingdom.[17] In Pirasri's vivid description, Rama V's funeral procession in 1910 reversed the modernizing narrative from feudal to modern kingdom, as the king's body was ceremonially brought back to the Grand Palace, where it was laid in state in the ancient throne hall built by his great-great-grandfather, King Rama I, while awaiting the erection of the elaborate cremation pavilion in Sanam Luang.[18]

King Rama V's urban design ambitions are also evident east of the old moated city in the Pathumwan district. His father had built a suburban villa a short boat ride along the San Saeb Canal, named Srapathum for the water lotus gardens that surrounded the island villa and the meditation temple Wat Pathumwanaram. Rama V acquired a huge parcel of land south of San Saeb Canal as the

planned residence of the Crown Prince. Windsor Palace, as it became known, was designed and built by Italian architect Joachim Grassi from 1881 to 1884. The great palace was never occupied, as the next in line tragically died as a youth, and his brother, Rama VI, later donated this land as the endowment for the first university in Thailand, named for his father, Chulalongkorn.

The pivotal moment of Thongchai's first historical series is the People's Party revolt of 1932, when a small group of revolutionaries removed King Rama VII from the position of absolute monarch. One of the first acts of the new government was the founding of Thammasat University in 1934 by Pridi Phanomyong, as The University of Moral and Political Sciences. An open enrolment university, the campus was located within the grounds of the old Front Palace. Facing Sanam Luang. The new government gave spatial prominence to the new institution dedicated to political science and to the idea of educating the leaders of the new democracy. However, according to Thongchai, the progress to democracy was diverted as '[…] the rise to power of Phibun Songkhram (1938-44) and the military wing of the 1932 revolutionaries […] (protected) the revolution against the monarchists. The regime became authoritarian, nationalist and pro-Japanese marginalizing the liberal wing'.[19]

As the strongman Phibum Songkhram consolidated power, the new government soon made its mark on the monuments and public spaces most closely tied to the representation of the absolute power of the monarchy. Royal property was transferred to the constitutional government, and the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall became the meeting place of the National Assembly of Thailand. Windsor Palace was demolished to make way for the National Stadium in 1937, an arena that held mass rallies to celebrate new collective expressions of nationalism. In 1939, Phibum Songkhram commissioned the remaking of middle Ratchadamnoen along more

modern lines. The original double row of mahogany trees was cut down, and uniform concrete blocks were built lining the avenue. Democracy Monument, a sculpture in which the constitution sits atop gold offering bowls surrounded by four towering Art Deco concrete wings, was constructed as the centrepiece of the renewed avenue. [fig. 3]

In December 1940, after the French bombed the Northeast province of Nakhon Phanom, the two nations entered into battle. On 3 February 1941, Japan stepped in and an agreement was signed in Tokyo on 9 May 1941. Field Marshall Phibum Songkhram built Victory Monument to honour the Thai casualties as well as the '[…] triumph over the colonial oppressor France'.[20] Also in 1941, the wartime regime commissioned a monument to King Rama VI, to be built in front of the former King's gift of public space to the city – Lumphini Park. The King is represented standing in full European military dress, legitimizing Phibum Songkhram's inheritance of the modernizing military nationalist project.[21]

In summary, Bangkok was remade into a modern crypto-colonial capital city based on European precedents at the beginning of the twentieth century through the construction of the royal walk connecting the historical city to Dusit Park to the north.[22] Following the People's Party Revolution of 1932, military strongmen took control of the government and created monuments of a heroic military nationalism similar to those in Germany, Italy, Japan, and Turkey during the same period. I classify both of these triumphal modernization projects as urban design models of war. In the next section, I will move to the more recent history of struggles for democratic space in the city in Bangkok following the Second World War, as both commercial development and broad popular appropriation of the city come to dominate urban spatial politics.

Trade

In Chapter 4 of *Digital Modelling for Urban Design,* I switch from an archaeological analysis in Rome, to a genealogy of the evolution of urban design guidelines and real estate speculation that shaped Manhattan's two central business districts. The chapter mapped the booms and busts in New York's real estate economy, and how within a consistent grid of blocks, regulations concerning the bulk and shape of skyscrapers evolved in relation to new technologies in construction, business, and finance, as well as civic activism. If the chapter on 'War' focused on the role of authoritarian rulers in constructing monumental urban space, the chapter on 'Trade' focuses on the checks and balances between real estate developers, city planners, and activist citizens in shaping the city through rule-based urban design models within a discursive public sphere. The approach examines the emergence of new urban forms outside of a planning system with a singular authoritative power.

While Thongchai's first historical series depicted a struggle between the monarchy and the military, the struggle between military and parliamentary systems in the face of a rising middle class dominates his second overlapping series (1938-1992). Phibum Songkhram was followed by Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), who consummated Thailand's alliance with America's war with Vietnam and its 'gift economy'. Popular uprisings in 1973 and 1992 bracketed military coups in 1976, 1977, 1981, 1986, and 1991. But the generals now had to contend with popular democracy and a newly empowered activist citizenry. Every successful coup was soon followed by a promised return to parliamentary rule. By the 1970s a broader democratic public sphere was emerging in Bangkok, fuelled by both educational and economic development. Commercial real estate and informal vending both competed with Bangkok's monumental urban realm constructed by the monarchy and military.

When King Rama IV changed the name of the royal cremation grounds from *Thung Phra Men* to *Thong Sanam Luang*, he was acknowledging the broader use the royal space had assumed. His predecessor, King Rama III, had begun the practice of cultivating rice there as a display of the productivity of the Kingdom. Rama IV ritualized the practice in the Royal Ploughing Ceremony, which still takes places in May, the beginning of the rainy season. During the reign of Rama VI, foreigners played golf and held races along its elliptical exterior path. However, it was the interventions of Pridi and Phibum Songkhram that seeded the future of Sanam Luang as an important space in the history of public protest in Bangkok. In addition to Pridi's creation of Thammasat University on the west front of Sanam Luang, Phibum Songkhram opened up the large ellipse to vendors as part of a national programme of weekend flea markets in every city in Thailand.[23] Public speeches and political debates at Sanam Luang were also briefly encouraged, inspired by what Phibun Songkhram saw at the Speakers' Corner at Hyde Park during his trip to London.[24]

On 13 October 1973, a crowd of over 400,000 demonstrators gathered in Sanam Luang, fed by both students gathering at Thammasat and the huge crowd of vendors and shoppers at the weekend market. The protestors moved from Sanam Luang through the new heroic public space Phibum Songkhram created around the Democracy Monument. By the afternoon, more than 100 students were dead after the army opened fire. The surviving protesters carried the bodies of the slain up the royal walk to appeal to King Rama IX, residing at Chitralada Palace in Dusit Park, reversing the route of Rama V's funeral cortege.

According to Thongchai, himself a participant in the protests:

> The uprising in 1973 is regarded as the beginning of true democracy in Thailand both in terms of popular democracy and the parliamentary system. The period of 1973-76 was the most liberal and radical one in which popular movements and radical ideologies were influential in politics. The general tendency has been the extension of open democracy that allows people to organize and voice their demands through politicians, civic organizations and the media.[25]

Phibum Songkhram's Democracy Monument was sanctified by the blood of the protestors, and became a true symbol of democracy. As anthropologist Alan Klima, notes:

> Finally, in 1973 the public sphere was coming into its own, carried on utterances that vibrated across the marketplace; it was, finally, 'mass politics,' with its battle of images, its displays of bodies, its occupation of public space and of visual spheres in which power is contested, and is linked to the market.[26] [fig. 4]

On 6 October 1976, a rightwing rally in Sanam Luang turned, this time, against the Thammasat students trapped on campus. The day ended with the massacre of hundreds of students, their bodies hung in public display in Sunam Luang. Klima describes the event as 'the dawn of a new public culture, it was at the same time, *inseparably,* the dawn of the new public cadaver […] and a new public sphere – a politics of the corpse'.[27] Shortly following 'Bloody October', a monument to King Rama VII was erected in front of the new National Assembly built north of the Anantasamakhom Throne Hall. In contrast to Phibum Songkhram's modern militaristic figure of Rama VI, Rama VII is presented seated in full traditional Siamese god-king regalia. Wong writes that Thanin's rightwing regime erected the monument because it 'desperately needed positive publicity to clean up its undesirable image after the
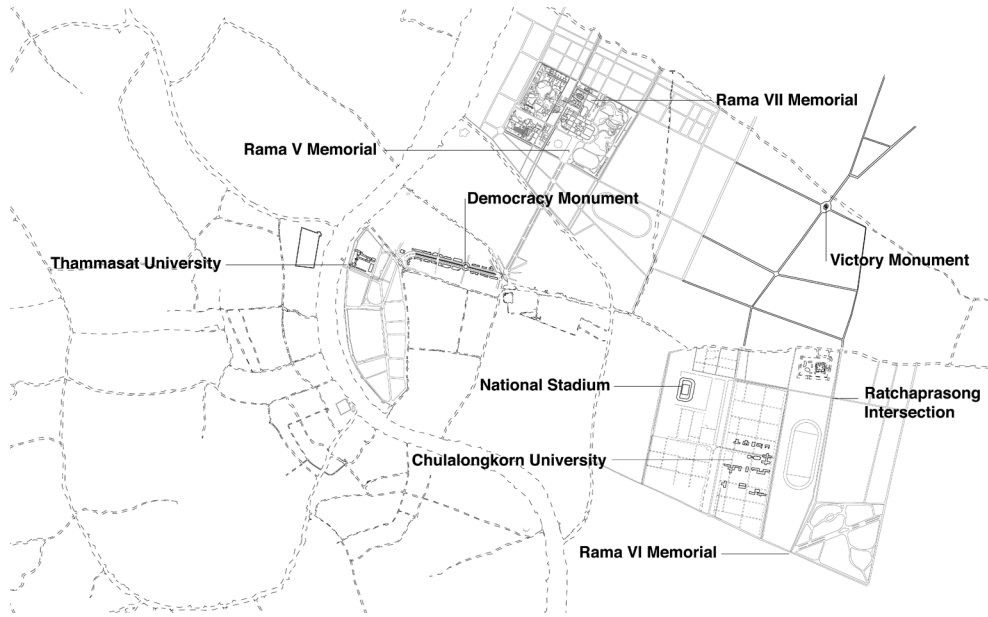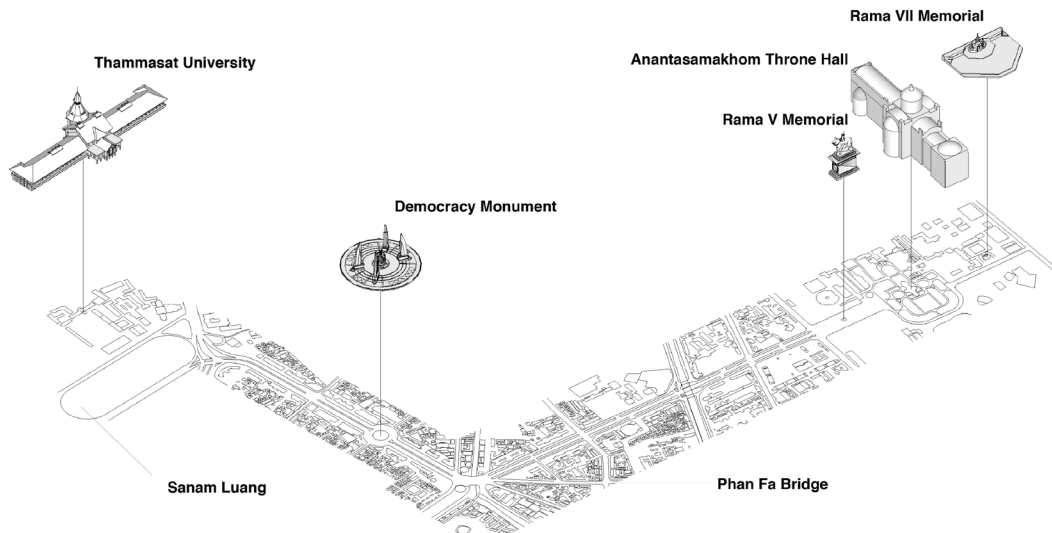
Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 3: Nationalist monuments in the city after the 1932 revolution transformed the royal walk into a rallying spot to celebrate nationalism. Victory Monument is constructed at the pivot between Dusit and Pathumwan Districts.
Fig. 4: Ratchadamnoen Avenue became the site of public protest following the establishment of Thammasat University, the opening of Sanam Luang to secular public events, a week-end flea market, a speakers corner, and the construction of Democracy Monument.

October 1976 incident'.[28] Not unveiled until 1980, under the royalist government of Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988), the monument's intent was to depict Rama VII as giving democracy to the nation. For Thongchai this period also began a new role for the monarchy within democracy as moral and political arbitrators.

Another military coup in 1988 brought a triumvirate of strongmen and a crackdown on democracy that was finally broken in April and May of 1992. Beginning with a hunger strike in front of the National Assembly, the crowd soon took over Royal Plaza. When the numbers grew even larger, hundreds of thousands gathered and marched along Ratchadamnoen Avenue south to Sanam Luang, reversing the trajectory of the 1973 uprising. Klima describes this as a 'movable feast', an army of enterprising street vendors following the mediated spectacle of death by starvation. The events occurred during the summer semester break, so the movement was no longer in student hands. Depicted as a middle-class rebellion equipped with new forms of communication technology, this uprising comprised the formation of a new telecommunicated public sphere comprising the 'actual existing democracy' of Thailand. 'Bypassing censorship, protestors could be seen everywhere calling in information to the home, office, business, and their provincial hometowns, reporting events on a minute-to-minute basis.'[29]

On Sunday, 17 May 1992, the largest crowd since the 1970s gathered in Sanam Luang. When the crowd marched to the Democracy Monument, the police confronted them at Phan Fa Bridge, where the army stepped in and opened fire directly at the protestors. This 'Black May' massacre did not occur in the 'Bloody October' era of newspaper reporting, but included shocking video images broadcast through global media networks. The bad publicity threatened tourism and brought the risk of economic isolation for the booming Thai economy.

Klima describes the need for the financial elite of Thailand to find a quick solution to the political turmoil in light of 'the fluorescence of international media images'.[30]

Klima ends the story of Black May with the conclusion that trade had triumphed over violence. In the future, Thai political struggles could no longer be settled in the streets, but only in the boardrooms. Two scales of markets converged in 1976: the informal black market of video imagery and the movable feast of street vending on the one hand; and the global exchange of capital and media images on the other. In the fallout over the slaughter, the Parliament quickly disbanded, new elections were held, pro-democracy opposition parties finally took control, and the Thai mass media were released from censorship. As Klima concludes: 'The new world replaces the old. The military gift economy of the Cold War is exchanged for the neoliberal market of a new world order […] battlefields are indeed turned into marketplaces.'[31]

Desire

In the final chapter of *Digital Modelling for Urban Design,* I move my analytical focus to the emergence of a Central Shopping District (CSD) in Bangkok following the Asian economic crisis of 1997.[32] While the anticipated bourgeois public sphere never occupied Ratchadamnoen Avenue, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Rama I Road and the Pathumwan District developed into a spectacular new cosmopolitan space for leisure and consumption. In this chapter, I analyse social conflicts not only as the result of historical class struggles, but through the lens of desire.[33] While 'War' uncovered the transfer of triumphal urban design models from Rome to Paris to Bangkok, 'Trade' examined financial fluctuations and power sharing in New York as a determinant of urban space. 'Desire' switches to an examination of the multivalent globalized space of rapid transit, mass consumption, popular culture, media spectacle, social networking, and ultimately

the shifting locus for political protest to Bangkok's CSD.

The third overlapping historical series proposed by Thongchai (1973-2006) is marked by relations among the power of money, people's power, and royal power. The central issue for him is the 'shaping of electoral politics under the influence of conflicts, contests, negotiations and alliances among these political forces'.[34] The 1973 and 1992 uprisings were followed by new constitutions, but it was the East Asian economic crisis of 1997 that resulted in a more widely empowered local participation and strengthened the position of the Prime Minister. Populist Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra led the country with unprecedented electoral mandates in 2001 and 2005, until he was toppled in the surprising return of the military in the coup of 2006. The third section of this paper, 'Desire', describes my own experience in Bangkok since 1997, and documentation of the urban design expressions of the rise in populism and consumerism in Bangkok.

Bangkok's CSD, lining Rama 1 Road, just north of the campus of Chulalongkorn University, became a physical manifestation of the nation's economic restructuring to a globalized neoliberal consumer society following the 1997 economic crisis. The properties lining Rama I Road from the National Stadium and Ratchaprasong Intersection comprise large lots owned by the public university, crown property, the Buddhist monastery Wat Phatumwanaram, and the Royal Thai Police. While this public, religious, and royal property benefitted from Rama V's original endowment through rice cultivation, beginning in the 1960s, hotel and shopping complexes were built by private developers with 15 to 30 year leases. Fed by both the growth in tourism and the captive youth population of the nearby university, Rama I Road became a shopping, hotel, and leisure suburban garden district. The completion of the elevated Bangkok Transit System's Skytrain in December 1999 quickly escalated the value and

accessibility of the commercial properties, catalysing the construction of massive new shopping, leisure, hotel, and office complexes, connected by a new system of exterior elevated platforms, creating the first truly cosmopolitan public space in the city.

Pasuk Phongphaichit and Chris Baker have documented Thaksin's rise from the ranks of the Royal Thai Police to an early dalliance in politics just long enough to secure state concessions of satellite and microwave bands, transforming his traditional Sino-Thai family trade business into a global telecommunications giant.[35] Following the 1997 economic crises, Thaksin returned to politics and bankrolled a new populist political party 'Thai Love Thai', which received unprecedented electoral mandates in 2001 and 2005. After several corruption scandals and the sale of his telecommunications empire to a company owned by the Singapore government, the Yellow Shirt People's Alliance for Democracy challenged Thaksin with large organized protests, including the takeover of the CSD and the city's two international airports. In 2006, a military coup, carefully executed not to disturb the new global finance and mediascapes, removed Thaksin from power. In the subsequent reshuffling of the Parliament, the Democratic Party assumed power, with Abhisit Vejjajiva sitting as Prime Minister without election. This avoidance of the electoral process gave rise to the Red Shirt movement, the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, led by Thaksin in exile telecommuting to political rallies through video conferencing technologies and Twitter.

Anthropologist Claudio Sporanzetti, like Alan Klima in 1992, was an eyewitness to the culmination of the events that once again unfolded along Ratchadamnoen Avenue. According to his accounts, on 26 March 2009, the Red Shirts set up a protest camp in front of the Government House, demanding Abhisit Vejjajiva's resignation. On 8 April, more than a 100,000 people rallied there, spreading to

the Royal Plaza. This protest was able to expand to new public places in the city as taxi and motorcycle-taxi drivers took over the traffic circle at Phibum Songkhram's Victory Monument. With his ethnographic focus on mobility and mobilization, Sporanzetti recognized that '[…] urban flows, the quintessential core of modern capitalism, were blocked by the very people who were supposed to facilitate them'.[36] As one motorcycle driver told him, the 200,000 motorcycle-taxi drivers who keep the megacity moving are the 'owners of the map' of the city.[37]

The Red Shirts organization went deep upcountry after the army cleared them from the streets, holding protests in big regional cities across the kingdom. Nearly one year after the first protest, the Red Shirts started a 'Million Man March' to Bangkok, staging the largest popular protest in Thai history. The centre stage was erected at Phan Fa Bridge, an elbow along Ratchadamnoen Avenue, taking over the army's position during the 1976 and 1992 uprisings. According to Sporanzetti, they mixed urban design, taste, and protest strategies.[38] In the end it is the mobility and knowledge of the 'map' of Bangkok that led protesters in early April to strategically move the protest to the CSD. [fig. 5]

A self-sufficient urban encampment, complete with food, sanitation, transportation, communication, sleeping, and policing systems was established at the pivotal intersection in front of the enormous palaces of consumption at Ratchaprasong intersection. The old symbolic political arenas of Sanam Luang and the Democracy Monument were abandoned in favour of the new space of global consumption and desire. According to Sporanzetti the spaces 'from which many protesters felt excluded, were appropriated and became places of discussion and dwelling'.[39] In other words, the streets in front of the malls became the site for the emergence of a counter-public sphere in Bangkok.

Clearly, with their mobile urban design knowledge, the Red Shirts could understand the spatial correspondences between the two armatures: Ratchadamnoen, pivoting at Phan Fa Bridge, and Rama 1 Road and Ratchaprasong intersection, at the critical position of where the Skytrain forks above the shopping district to the business district at Silom Road to the south. Not able to control Ratchaprasong intersection, the army mobilized to prevent protesters from entering the business area at Silom Road. The army faced the occupiers in front of the Rama VI Monument, where the protestors erected a bamboo and motor tire barricade, mixing the material tectonics of the farm and motorcycle. It was only with great difficulty that the army finally was able to storm their barricaded encampment, resulting in scores of deaths. Some from the retreating mob set fire to Central World Plaza, Siam Square, and a string of selected banks and shops in their retreat, while others sought sanctuary in Wat Pathumwanaram.

Conclusion

Retracing the paths of urban design models and democratic public spheres in Bangkok last year, I found Thammasat University still haunted by the gallows of 1976. Commemorative plaques and monuments mark the old campus, but most of the students have been relocated to a new campus far from the city centre. The bodhi tree, where students first gathered in 1973, has a proper commemorative plaque, and leads you to the large sports field where students gathered first to protest, and later to be rounded up and killed by the police and militant mobs. The cremation grounds of Sanam Luang are now fenced off as the last traces of the monumental buildings for the cremation ceremonies for King Rama VI's only child, HRH Princess Bejaratana Rajasuda, were being dismantled.

The grand monuments and commemorative memorials to democracy along Ratchadamnoen Avenue are mostly unacknowledged. Outside the

Red-shirt shelter

Red-shirt bus stop toilet

Red-shirt barricade

National Stadium

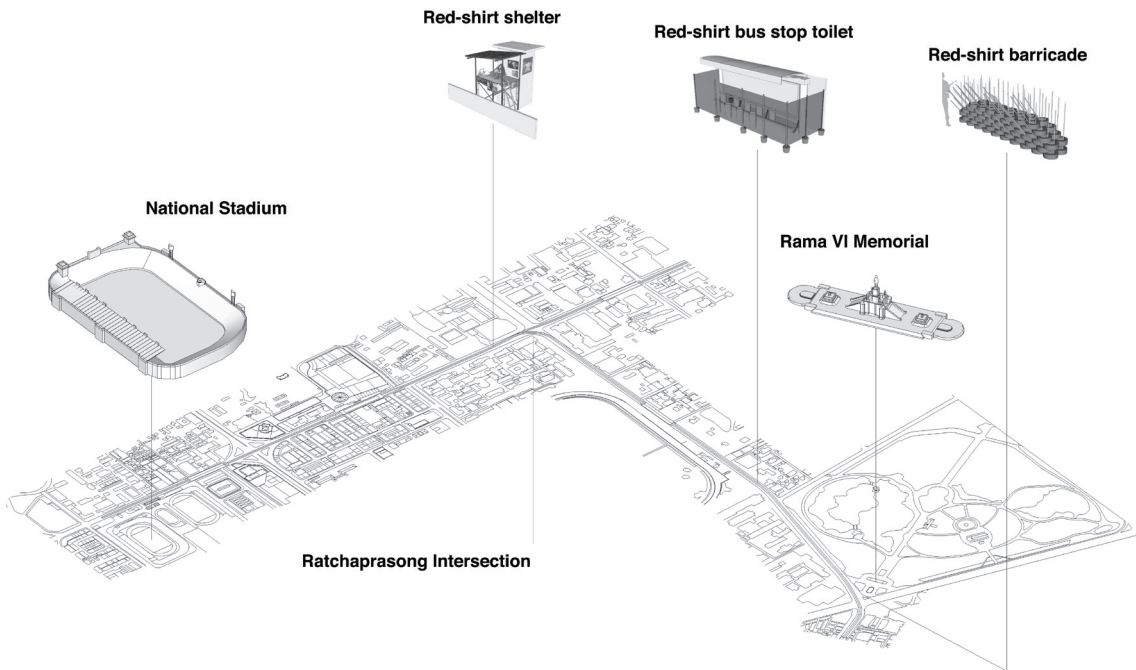**Rama VI Memorial**

Ratchaprasong Intersection

Fig. 5: Ratchaprasong intersection sits at the heart of Bangkok's Central Shopping District. Drawings of the Red Shirt encampment constructions by students at the Faculty of Architecture, Chulalongkorn University. Pote Laddaphan, Puttikit Suvarnapunya, Nattapat Paiboonvarakit, Purich Leechankul, Instructor Rachaporn Choochuey.

State Lottery Commission offices, lottery vendors prepared their folios of tickets to distribute by hand around the city. Those with legal problems to be heard at the nearby Ministry of Justice queued in line for public advocate offices along the avenue. The grand buildings of Phibum Songkram's era have been mostly emptied for a tourist-led redevelopment plan to finally fulfil the dream of the 'Champs-Élysées of Asia', complete with a massive underground parking structure. The only visitors to the Democracy Monument were freshmen in Thammasat's Bachelors of Business Administration Programme. Wearing logo printed t-shirts, they participated in an orientation game initiating them in Thammasat's radical heritage before starting their business degrees.

Beyond the elbow of Phan Fa Bridge, the double row of trees is struggling with the heat and vehicle exhaust along the empty upper stretch of the royal walk. The equestrian statue of Rama V sits isolated within a giant sea of melting asphalt and speeding traffic, but for a lone couple offering a prayer with incense joss sticks. Unable to walk another step in the unbearable heat, I hail a taxi to MBK centre, the nearest mall on Rama 1 Road. Bangkok's CSD again glitters two years after the fiery end of the Red Shirt occupation. Central World has been fully renovated, and a new, more easily defended shopping complex rises at the old Siam Cinema at Siam Central Station. With the loss of so much commercial space after the arson of 2010, Siam Square has constructed lines of temporary 'emergency shopping shelters' in every available space in the Chulalongkorn University owned complex. The police struggle to keep the sidewalks clear of the growing army of small entrepreneurs. Royal and elite conservation projects, such as the magnificent restoration of Wat Pathumwanaram, are sandwiched between the again busy shopping malls on Rama I Road.

This essay has shown how physical space is Bangkok has been continually reshaped by the political geographies involving an ever-widening range of urban actors. 'War', 'Trade', and 'Desire' reflect the military, market, and populist forces in shaping the city, with the monarchy playing a major role as moral agents remaining 'above politics'. In addition to seeing the Bangkok public sphere as staged in symbolic spaces of the city constructed by others, we can also see insurgent citizenry creating alternate urban publics and even sometimes acting as urban designers. Thongchai's overlapping historical series matches Nancy Fraser's formulation of multiple publics and insurgent citizenry in describing the struggle for social inclusion and the emergence of an actual and existing public sphere in Bangkok, but contained within a highly complex and unique urban form. What can be an expanded role of urban design within the mass consumerist spectacle of Bangkok's new public space now that it contains contrarian politics, counter publics, and resurgent citizenship?

To answer this question we need to go beyond disciplinary blind spots that separate our practices both in time and in space. Thongchai and Pirasri have given us vivid examples of historical scholarship that shed light on the present. Anthropologists Klima and Sporanzetti offer not only thick descriptions of the social present, but have articulated the embeddedness of social actors in urban design contexts and legacies. Political theorist Nancy Fraser also shows us how to be more conscious of the 'actual existing' present, but with a keen eye towards exclusionary tendencies of ideal concepts such as the public sphere. Only with a critical understanding of historical cycles and an inclusive engagement with the multiple publics of the social present can urban designs and public spheres unfold beyond the adversarial models of war, trade and desire.

Notes

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Biography

Brian McGrath (MArch, Princeton University) is Associate Professor of Urban Design at Parsons The New School for Design and the founder and principal of Urban-Interface, LLC, an urban design practice that fuses architecture, ecology, and media. The firm combines new research in urban ecosystems and digital technologies to provide urban design models that engage local participants in flexible, innovative approaches to urban design. Current projects include partnerships with governmental agencies, private developers, and cultural institutions. McGrath is also a Co-Principal Investigator in the National Science Foundation's Long Term Ecological Research study in Baltimore, Maryland, where he leads the Urban Design Working Group.