

Zeitschrift: Trans : Publikationsreihe des Fachvereins der Studierenden am
Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Herausgeber: Departement Architektur der ETH Zürich

Band: - (2019)

Heft: 35

Artikel: Demolition as resistance : a conversation with Léopold Lambert

Autor: Lambert, Léopold / Wäckerlin, Julian / Walter, Jakob

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-919393>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 05.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Rich Datum sortieren	
erik.wegerhoff@gt.aarch.ethz.ch Trans destruction Liebe trans-redaktion, gute fragen. siehe unten. best grüsse, und ich bin gespannt auf die anderen ideen! erik 1. Which building would you like to destroy? (max. 5 words) The German Autobahn 2. Which process would you choose to do so? (max. 20 words) No upkeep. Drive it to death! See grass shoot up, and German woods. Give those SUVs something to do!	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
lacaton@arch.ethz.ch Demolition Symposium 2019 1. Which building would you like to destroy? (max. 5 words) NO ONE 2. Which process would you choose to do so? (max. 20 words) DEMOLITION IS AN ABSOLUTE MISTAKE. TO DEMOLISH A BUILDING IS NEVER JUSTIFIED. TOTALLY UNSUSTAINABLE. REUSE AND TRANSFORMATION ARE ALWAYS POSSIBLE. Anne Lacaton Professor für Architektur und Entwurf ETH Zürich.	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
uzun@student.ethz.ch Bruch Hi, I would like to demolish Dom-Ino House by Le Corbusier by cutting all of its columns with the Sword of Damocles. Mit Gruss, Ali Uzun	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
lagenmann@arch.ethz.ch Which Building, which Process Many commercial sites, built greenfield. A reasonable amount of explosives, then let nature take back what's left.	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
gripaul@student.ethz.ch questions The HIL Building at ETH Höggerberg. Deconstruction a la Matta-Clark, split, cut out, etc.	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
bjurek@student.ethz.ch Which Building? Which Process? (Abbruch Symposium 2019) 1. None 2. None	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
gesievi@student.ethz.ch Demolition Greetings to the Demolition Berliner Schloss Berlin (still in Konstruktion) Burn it down, since it will not collapse, leave it burned for 30 year (the lifespan of the „Palast der Republik“) unsealed. Then knock it down and pile the rest up in front of the german Parliament and the supporting Foundation as a reminder. Nobody Needs a new Building there, let alone the restitution of a monarchs Castle. Greetings Geron Sivi	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
lukasstadelmann@student.ethz.ch Demolition 1. Villa Além by Olgia! 2. Smashed into tiny pieces for architectural tourists to buy, like the Berlin wall... Or Jesus' Cross! So the books become even more sought after	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
angel@arch.ethz.ch answer 1 Dear Trans, Here are my answers: 1. DO NOT DESTROY! 2: Rather than demolition, which always comprises acts of aggression, I would like to argue for gradual processes of transformation – avoiding eviction of populations, the waste of material resources, and, as important, the erasure of history.	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
angel@arch.ethz.ch answer 2 That said, and political correctness notwithstanding, if I was forced to demolish one particular building, it would be: 1. The reconstructed Berliner Stadtschloss ... 2. I would dismantel the structure, piece by piece, have the components stored as historical artifacts, and reassemble the dismantled Palast der Republik in its place – a reversal of a reversal of history. Best regards and greetings from California, Marc	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
ebonhote@student.ethz.ch Bruch The "Looshaus" in Vienna by applying shit-tons of ornament	15.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
fahmimo@student.ethz.ch demolition_symposium 1. I would like to destroy the Hexagon. 2. I would just losen the screws of the monumental beams which hold up the cantilever extension from the outside of the building. I hereby also state that I refrain from illegal actions.	16.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
leopoldstrol@gmail.com abreisen Das idiotische neue Boltshauser Haus an der Europa Allee. Ich weiss nicht... vielleicht die fragmante in gleiten... arstreuen	17.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
katjana.blaser@icloud.com (Kein Betreff) notre dame - by reconstruct it - that I would really like to do Von meinem iPhone gesendet	17.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
fonteyne@arch.ethz.ch Which Building ? Dear Trans Please find my answer enclosed. Wish you a nice summer An Fonteyne, Which building would you like to destroy? Trump Tower 5th Avenue NYC, Which process would you choose to do so? The tower is brought into a state of intense sexual excitement, leading to a tremendous self-destructive eruption.	17.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
trovlien@student.ethz.ch (Kein Betreff) Waldorf Astoria Hotel Berlin I want to peel of its facade and leave a naked structure to become a part of the street	17.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
mediciv@student.ethz.ch destroy 1. The walls between Mexico and the United States 2) Everyone do have to go and take by itself a piece of the wall and bring it at home.	18.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
shenrfs@student.ethz.ch Which Building? Which Process? (Abbruch Symposium 2019) Reit: Terraces (Herzog & de Meuron), Ultimate symbol of gentrification, Give the building back to the people. Make the huge size of the building exposed to the sky, make it dirty and save.	18.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
egsell@student.ethz.ch demolition 19 1. The Trotte should become a Grotte 2. Dig up the garden. The block slides down. Trotte turns into a Grotte/grotto. Room for a more suitable new construction! https://www.enzmännischer.ch/?project_id=24 ps: liebe grüsse ans trans team und sorry an enzmännischer	18.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
leopold.funambulist@gmail.com Emails about Destruction Which building would you like to destroy? The Israeli apartheid wall in Palestine 2. Which process would you choose to do so? I've been literally dreaming about getting a bulldozer and destroying this wall with it	18.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
thierry@student.ethz.ch Bruch Wohnsiedlung BDZ, Zürich, Pool Architekten 2. Sprengung	19.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
rich.schaell.eth@hotmail.com (Kein Betreff) Einkaufszentrum Mall of Switzerland Geplantes Abbrechen	19.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
spiro@arch.ethz.ch remolition Dear organizers, what a great topic! What I would like to destroy: the Shopville under the „Bahnhofplatz“, so that pedestrians have to cross the square again. Which process would I choose to do so: I would fill it with bike parking lots. Have a nice summertime, Annette Spiro Annette Spiro Professor für Architektur und Konstruktion	19.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
jonatan.egli@gmx.ch destroy Escher Terraces High-Rise Apartments / E2A to destroy: Escher Terraces High-Rise Apartments / E2A Methode: Wir stapeln weitere Terrassenhäuser auf dem Turm bis kurz vor dem Kollaps. Eine alte Escher Wyss Dampflock rast dann mit vollem Karacho ins Haus und löst den Einsturz aus. Jonatan Egli und Ruben Bernegger	20.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
shguiness@gmail.com remolition Berliner Schloss 2. Critical re-destruction: Sculpting through time collapse, a robotic chisel subtracts the volume of the Palast der Republik from the Schloss.	21.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
milena@student.ethz.ch fragen über fragen wanna destroy the walkie talkie building in London through Implosion.	21.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
stvdillo@gmail.com Bruch Building: Lago di Lei Dam removal: Notch and release approach Name: Pedro Esteban Astudillo Sacoto	22.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
buehner@student.ethz.ch remolition 1. Demolish Restaurant Kunsthaus. With big hammers to break the glass. thank you kai	22.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
richa.ringger@gmail.com nswer hey 1.Polizei und Justizzentrum Zürich 2.Zwischennutzung Elefanten Haus Zoo Zürich ciao Von meinem iPhone gesendet	22.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
frtitz@student.ethz.ch sorry for being late, but... I just remembered your mail. I think its an amazing proposal for a symposium as well as an interesting part for the trans 35. As far as it is still possible I would like to propose. 1. Buildings of "The Europa Allee" 2. Constructive destruction by expropriation and appropriation. I hope it will still work. Best, Max	24.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
onrichthofen@arch.ethz.ch trans magazine titled "Bruch" Which building would you like to destroy? (max. 5 words) The "Jewel" in Singapore by Moshe Safdie (2019) https://www.safdiearchitects.com/projects/jewel-changi-airport 2. Which process would you choose to do so? (max. 20 words) Demolition by Godzilla king of the monsters (2019)	26.07.19 Eingang - ti07476
eburena@student.ethz.ch trans Bruch Answers from the faculty of architecture to the questions: «Which building would you like to destroy?» and «Which process would you choose to do so?»	06.08.19 Eingang - ti07476

DEMOLITION AS RESISTANCE

A conversation with Léopold Lambert

Julian Wäckerlin Jakob Walter

On 18th September 2019, we organized a symposium on demolition, since we noticed that architects at ETH learn how to construct, but not how to deconstruct. In the following interview we wanted to understand the political potential of destroying architecture as an act of resistance. We had the pleasure to talk with Léopold Lambert, founder and editor of «The Funambulist» magazine.

JJ Is demolition the opposite of construction? If we disagree with the construction of a certain architecture, is its demolition the logical response?

You said «architecture is inherently violent» so we are wondering if the destruction of something that is inherently violent is inherently non-violent?

LL When I say architecture is inherently violent, the first thing I mean is non-political. I mean it in the most physical way and only in its built form. We don't actually need to go become philosophical to understand how something physical and solid like a wall or a fence works. Any sort of typology of architecture consists of material that organizes our bodies in space. Architecture is the discipline that organizes bodies in space. We can see that all the walls that surround us have been built in such a way that with our bare hands we cannot destroy them. If you build a simple roof, some people will be under the roof and some will be excluded, simply because at some point there might not be enough space left.

Thereby architecture is inherently violent, it includes and excludes bodies, it prevents them from accessing a place, it controls their movements. I haven't talked of the political dimension of it yet: this violence is neither good nor bad at this point.

JJ So, architecture is objectively violent, but: how do we assess whether it is good or bad in a political sense? How do we know if it is worth considering the demolition of a building?

LL It is easy to see how incredibly politically the violence of architecture is used. Obvious examples are border walls, apartheid walls, prisons and military bases, which architecture is perfectly capable of enforcing spatially. But even the realm of the home depends on the violence of architecture. Most of the homes we know exist through the legal regime of private property, which requires processes of inclusion and exclusion to function. Architecture is used to enforce just that. To have a home

means everybody has to be excluded of it, to have walls around you.

To answer your question: to be able to decide whether the architecture is good or bad requires to position yourself politically. Having understood the power relation inscribed in architecture, that private property, for example, excludes people, you can decide whether you have a problem with it or not. If it is not a problem for you, I guess you could call it good architecture in a political sense. I will fight you in that case, but I will respect your position since your way of reading and judging architecture is consistent. You are not denying reality and you are embracing a position. There is nothing morally wrong about it. There is just something politically wrong from my point of view. After evaluating whether you agree with how the violence of this particular architecture works, you can think of demolishing it.

JJ The destruction of the Bastille can be seen as an example of a political demolition. What effects did the act of total demolition have on the political reality?

LL If you destroy a prison you have freed the prisoners. But you have not destroyed the regime that allowed a political program like the prison to exist. You also have not deleted what the prison did to the former prisoners, for example traumas.

There is something I really want to say before we get to that sort of glorious examples of demolished architecture. I actually wrote a book called «Bulldozer Politics» and it looked at the way the Israeli army have been using bulldozers for over 70 years to destroy Palestinian homes. I think we have to be really cautious about who gets to demolish what. The dominant power has no problem taking a bulldozer and destroying what goes against its ways. But to execute the demolition of something like the Bastille as a revolutionary practice takes much more energy and strategy.

We should also see that the same power relationships that constructed architecture are at

work demolishing it. Demolition is as violent as architecture. Destruction can serve the dominant power that uses violence to operate on a daily basis.

JJ Nobody, of course, would say the demolition of the Palast der Republik was a revolutionary act. But if it had been destroyed in the 1980s under the socialist regime, there would be a monument by now remembering the brave form of resistance. There would be no castle remake.

LL They destroyed the whole palace and nothing remains. It is important to think about what stays when you demolish something. Something needs to attest what used to be there. You can do it in a touristic way, like the Berlin Wall, or in a more profound way. Unfortunately, today's regimes destroy buildings of past regimes usually in a total *tabula rasa*, leaving no trace of what used to be there.

For this reason, I really like the destruction of the statue of Josephine in Fort-de-France in Martinique. She was the daughter of a plantation owner in Martinique island, where the French sovereignty used to have a very large enslaved work force. She married Napoléon Bonaparte in 1796 and is suspected to have influenced him to reestablish slavery in 1802. The mayor of Fort-de-France, the poet and political thinker Aimé Césaire, consistently refused to take the statue down from 1946 to 2002, stating that you need to live with the past and that you need to remember the history of it. This is a problematic approach since Martinique is still a colonized country. In 1991 activists from Martinique, instead of totally destroying it, «guillotined» the statue. They literally beheaded the statue and then dropped red paint on her neck. The statue still exists in this condition today, the head remains missing. I think this was a great destruction since the destroyed statue now represents not only the history of slavery, but also the resistance against it.

JJ As you know we asked the members of our faculty to tell us what they would like to demolish and how. Anne Lacaton, for example, answered our question by proposing to transform rather than demolish: «Demolition is an absolute mistake. To demolish a building is never justified. Totally unsustainable. Reuse and transformation are always possible.»

LL Yes. This is why I said it is important to think about what is left. We should not destroy everything. Someone like Anne Lacaton is maybe thinking: «Let us not destroy things too much.» And I think they did a very good job with the transformation of the Tour Bois le

Prêtre here in Paris. How much you need to destroy in order to change what architecture enforces ultimately depends on how much you oppose the architecture you intend to change.

JJ If we want to change how architecture enforces the power relations of private property, we could, instead of demolishing the protective walls, just give copies of the key to millions of people. The exclusivity of the domestic sphere would be destroyed. It would be an immaterial way of demolition.

LL Yes, it would be «kind of destroyed». I hesitate to say it is «destroyed» because the wall would still exist physically. But what's remarkable with the key is that it literally is the sort of physical manifestation of who gets to be included and who gets to be excluded by architecture. The key is a tremendously consequential piece of architecture. Distributing millions of copies of a key can be another way of dismantling what architecture does: organizing bodies in space.

JJ We also liked what Vasco Medici sent us. He wants to destroy the border walls between Mexico and the United States with a form of collective demolition where everybody brings home a piece of the wall. Through this process, the wall is being dismantled. It is a democratic process of destruction. What is left of the demolition becomes an artifact and proves your participation in the demolition.

LL Absolutely. Something people don't realize is that the U.S.—and every nation-state in the Americas—are settler colonies built on the systematic dispossession of indigenous lands and genocide. The truth is: this wall is a settler colonial project. The people who are right now in the concentration camps at the border are indigenous people from the south of «Turtle Island» (the indigenous name for North America). On top of the violent program, the wall is built with steal panels that used to be the ground on which helicopters landed in Vietnam. It is a relic of the imperial history of the U.S.—a manifestation of the Vietnam War. I think it's particularly interesting if you were to take a piece home, because you would have an artifact of the history of U.S. settler colonialism as well as of U.S. imperialism.

JJ A two in one artifact.

LL Double fucked up—yes.

JJ Your answer to our question was that you dreamed of destroying the Israeli wall in Palestine. What effect would this have? Would

you not run into the same problem you described earlier? You most likely would not dismantle the power relation behind the wall by demolishing it with a bulldozer.

LL I answered this way because, as I said, I literally have dreams about it. It's a bit fuzzy in my head but I remember dreaming of it. And, similar to the violence of the wall between the U.S. and Mexico, it is less about the nationalistic dimension of it than rather the fact that it is a settler colonial project. For me it's not about Mexicans and people from the U.S. making peace together, that's obviously not the issue here. For me, similarly, destroying the wall in

Palestine is not about wanting peace or wanting that Israelis and Palestinians come together and «be friends». Palestine is on the west side and on the east side of the wall. This wall is just another settler colonial invention that separates Palestinians from each other, it is excluding Palestinians from large parts of Palestine.

To decolonize, you obviously need to do more than just destroy the wall with a bulldozer. You need to be part of a decolonizing project. But still, there is no doubt that the day we destroy this wall will be an extremely powerful moment for the decolonization project.

Trained architect, writer, and the founding editor of *The Funambulist*. He is the author of three books examining the politics of the built environment: «Weaponized Architecture: The Impossibility of Innocence» (dpr-barcelona 2012), «Topie impitoyable: The Corporeal Politics of the Cloth, the Wall, and the Street» (punctum books 2015) and «La politique du bulldozer: La ruine palestinienne comme projet israélien» (B2 2016). His next book is tentatively called «États d'urgence: Une histoire spatiale du continuum colonial français» (forthcoming 2019).

Architecture students at ETH Zurich. Together they organized the Demolition Symposium in 2019.