The Art of the Possible
The ArcelorMittal Orbit, collective memory, and ecological survival

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As the 2012 London Olympics have long since passed from anticipation through lived experience into history, or at least memory, I decided at last to 'experience' the ArcelorMittal Orbit in its physical setting. Emerging from Stratford tube station, I tried to reach the Olympic Park without passing through Westfield, Europe's largest shopping centre. But the pedestrian walkway petered out in a banal and featureless non-place; with no viable way forward, I had to concede, and return to the main concourse.

Surrounded by surveillance cameras, I felt self-conscious and began to suspect myself of having criminal thoughts. But with my field of vision dominated by a brilliant screen playing fragments of a disaster movie, interspersed with an advertisement for dairy milk chocolate, it was easy to be distracted. Framed by an avenue of retail façades, my first glimpse of the ArcelorMittal Orbit had the quality of a computer-generated image, a silhouette shimmering faintly in the polluted London air. Having found my bearings, I decided to relax and 'go with the flow', allowing my movement to be governed by the urban form. I wandered through the corporate branded environment, a 'forest of signs' enjoining me to "Explore, Discover, Experience, Share, Indulge, and Eat". I went into a stylish boutique café with a ceiling of beaten copper and a display counter of authentic-looking wooden fruit packing crates, where I was served an organic fairtrade coffee and a delicious *pain au chocolat,* heated and handed to me in a recycled paper bag by someone who seemed so bored or exhausted that they were almost gone.

I hurried away from the shopping centre, and was channeled from one branded space to another by construction site hoardings, their messages proclaiming, "The future is closer than you think." "The future is designed." "The future is tech." "The future is culture." Searching my memory for an antidote, I recalled a line from Terry Eagleton: "For culture is now palpably part of the problem rather than the solution; it is the very medium in which battle is engaged, rather than some Olympian terrain on which our differences can be recomposed."[1] As I crossed the bridge over the canal, I looked around for some trace of the homes, allotments and artists' studios that had made up the area. But nothing remains of these everyday commons and repositories of social memory: following their compulsory purchase and demolition, the varied spaces they once produced have been reconstituted as a bland and uniform commercial territory.

In this desolate tract of urban blight, which is still undergoing phased 'regeneration' long after the 2012 Olympics are over, the ArcelorMittal Orbit combines the fixity of a landmark with the mutability of a virus. Though its red paintwork is fading, the vast artwork, or 'visitor attraction', like the Queen Elizabeth Park in which it stands, still seem inchoate, in the sense of being provisional, and contingent on unpredictable forces. The arbitrary nature of those forces is celebrated in a propagated anecdote: that in 2009 Boris Johnson, who was then Mayor of London, met by chance with Lakshmi Mittal in the cloakrooms of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Mittal is the chairman and chief executive officer of ArcelorMittal, the world's largest integrated steel and mining company. (In 2017, Forbes ranked Mittal as the 56th richest person in the world with a net worth of US$16.4 billion). Johnson described an encounter that lasted less than a minute, in which he proposed building a landmark to rival the Eiffel Tower:

> Our conversation took about 45 seconds. I explained the idea, which took 40 seconds. "Great. I'll give you the steel," he said, and that was it.[2]

Despite the impulsive origin of its commission, and its apparently haphazard form, the ArcelorMittal Orbit is not so much the result of an aesthetic gamble than a calculation of how public art as public relations might serve private interests. Creating the impression of a lively debate, the Head of Brand at ArcelorMittal Worldwide generated and stage-managed polite controversy around the work by focusing media attention on its gargantuan scale, its complex structure, and the influences cited by the artist and engineer.

Here, I consider these aspects of the corporate brand management strategy in relation to the sculpture's commissioning, form and production. My discussion of the production leads to an examination of ArcelorMittal's activities as a company, whose business model is based on extreme social, cultural and ecological damage. I then look at two examples of politicized counteraction: a powerful *détournement* that has drawn attention to the ArcelorMittal Orbit's relationship to an actual historical trauma, and a tenacious popular resistance campaign to one area of ArcelorMittal's planned expansion. These indicate a surprising potential for taking control over the work's meaning, and even for shifting the underlying balance of power.

An oversight

Proclaimed as the largest piece of public art in Britain,[3] the ArcelorMittal Orbit has been repeatedly ranked by media commentators alongside other landmarks, including Frédéric Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, Antony Gormley's 'Angel of the North', and Gustave Eiffel's Tower. Such comparisons are not only banal but unfavourable: although the Olympic commission aimed to rival the Eiffel Tower, it fell short from the outset; when the budget became known to the designers of the ArcelorMittal Orbit, they further reduced its height in an act of expedient compromise.[4] Even so, the sculpture has an overbearing scale that reduces the viewer to an insignificant speck, perhaps in an 'acting out' of unconscious impulses of domination.

Structurally, the ArcelorMittal Orbit consists of two elements: the vertical tower which supports the viewing platform and houses the lifts and stairs, and the lattice of steel tubing that loops around the tower. The design is the result of an artistic collaboration between Cecil Balmond and Anish Kapoor. Cecil Balmond is a designer, artist, architect and writer, Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, and Deputy Chairman of Ove Arup Engineering, where he founded the Advanced Geometry Unit in

2000. In 2015 he was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire for his services to architecture. Anish Kapoor studied art at the Chelsea College of Arts in London. He represented Britain in 1990 at the 44th Venice Biennale. In 1991, he received the Turner Prize, was elected a Royal Academician in 1999, and in 2003 he was made a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. In 2017 Kapoor was included in The Sunday Times Rich List with a personal fortune valued at £134 million.[5]

Having undertaken a commission that exemplified the values and processes of exclusionary privilege, Kapoor and Balmond assert that they are, “interested in a place where architecture meets sculpture”.[6] Such an abstract conception of place might be innocuous enough, had it not been for the compulsory evacuation of people and removal of all traces of communities that had prepared the ground on which the sculpture would be built. But despite being international cultural practitioners with unrivalled access to information and resources, Kapoor and Balmond show a colonialist impairment of vision, describing the East London site as “a bit of virgin land where one can set the parameters again.”[7] Anyone working to critically engage with contemporary life will be familiar with the problem of visualizing ideology, which is often unseen not because it is invisible, but because it is overlooked. Conversely, the commission brief was to design a structure to offer a vantage point over a tract of urban land that had been erased and remade as a corporate image of urban regeneration. In relation to this commercially fabricated terrain, the structure invites the viewer to take up a position of oversight.

Transcending questions of social cost and value, Kapoor and Balmond declare a fascination with “the way that form and geometry give rise to structure.”[8] Yet even such ostensibly disinterested relationships as these are mediated by proprietary tools based on codes. As Douglas Murphy has written, “what we have is a doodle that has been turned into a digital shape which has then been translated into a buildable structure by some very advanced computer software.”[9] The parametric software Murphy refers to enables architects and engineers to develop virtual three-dimensional models that can be endlessly altered and viewed from any angle through a variety of simulated camera lenses to generate ‘realistic’ artists’ impressions for securing planning consent. More concretely, the software links to databases of materials and components to calculate the cost implications of formal decisions. By enabling a reflexive relationship between design choices, production costs and professional fees, parametric software erodes the distinction between financial and aesthetic considerations, which makes it a valuable tool for optimizing the profitability of constructing shopping centres, office spaces, and the ‘London vernacular’ style of shared-ownership apartments in regeneration schemes. The ArcelorMittal Orbit may be an icon of parametric design as much as an example of free artistic expression, but with the ground form levelled by the property developer and the construction material pre-determined by the sponsor, it seems the only remaining parameters were the professional fees and production budget.

Kapoor’s website displays an image of the painting ‘The Tower of Babel’ by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1563). Beneath the image, Kapoor quotes himself: “There is a kind of medieval sense to it of reaching up to the sky, building the impossible. A procession, if you like. It's a long winding spiral: a folly that aspires to go even above the clouds and has something mythic about it.”[10] The airy reference to myth may lift the mind’s eye away from the struggles of daily life and the troubles of history, but following the global financial crisis of

2008, extreme inequality could drag British society back to the class divisions of the nineteenth century; around the world, systemic inequality is increasing fast. As labour's loss is capital's gain, Kapoor's dreamy linking of aspiration and medievalism seems like a view from an elevated position of comfort and security. However, Kapoor asserts, "It is an object that cannot be perceived as having a singular image, from any one perspective. You need to journey round the object, and through it. Like a Tower of Babel, it requires real participation from the public." Public participation may be a requirement set by the artist, but even disregarding the sponsorship of the work by Britain's richest man, the essentially private nature of the structure is impossible to ignore: to journey round the object, the viewer has to enter a compound inside a steel security fence, coated with anti-climb paint, before paying an admission fee that for many people has either been prohibitively expensive, or simply unappealing.

Both Kapoor and Balmond cite Tatlin's Tower as a key reference for the ArcelorMittal Orbit. After the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Russian artist and architect Vladimir Tatlin designed a vast helix-shaped structure of iron, glass and steel as a Monument to the Third International, who held as their stated aim, "the struggle by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and the creation of the international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the state."[11] Whether the ArcelorMittal Orbit bears even a passing resemblance to the elegant geometry of Tatlin's tower is an open question, but the comparison is unfortunate: Tatlin's tower embodied the emancipatory and egalitarian vision of the early Russian Revolution; it also had the decisive advantage of being unrealized, allowing it to retain something of its ideal and imaginary potential. In sharp contrast, the ArcelorMittal Orbit is an emblem of compromise as both index and sign of an established order of private power, wielded in full knowledge of the social injustice and ecological destruction on which it is based.

A clear winner

Lakshmi Mittal built Mittal Steel through buying up old, highly polluting and dangerous steel mills around the world, and cutting costs by laying off workers and economizing on environmental, health and safety provisions.[12] In 2006, Mittal Steel conducted a highly controversial and aggressive takeover of Arcelor, the world's second largest steel producer. The takeover was "an object lesson in the force of international capital markets", in which the notorious investment banking firm Goldman Sachs "was a clear winner".[13] The result was ArcelorMittal, which now describes itself as "the world's leading integrated steel and mining company". ArcelorMittal is by far the largest steel company in the world; in 2009 it produced around eight per cent of global steel output and generated over US $65 billion. As well as being the CEO of ArcelorMittal, Lakshmi Mittal has been, since 2008, a director of Goldman Sachs, experts in financial sleight of hand who were heavily implicated in the 2007-8 global financial crisis, and in the 2010 European Sovereign Debt Crisis.

In 2008 a reputational risk analysis by Ecofact ranked ArcelorMittal among the top ten most environmentally and socially controversial companies in the world for its human rights abuses, corporate complicity and negative impact on communities and ecosystems. Summarizing their analysis, Ecofact states:

> ArcelorMittal was accused of pollution, intimidation, poor safety standards, forced evictions and acquisition of agricultural land, local participation issues, suppression of union activities and poor pay conditions. Repeated accidents and high death tolls at its mines in Kazakhstan resulted in the company having dozens of sites shut owing to safety violations. Its operations also came under fire with residents protesting that emissions levels from its steel mills had increased further, thus polluting local areas.[14]

Between 1999 and 2009, ArcelorMittal received low interest loans of around €562 million from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the International Finance Corporation.[15] In 2010 ArcelorMittal Finance and Services Belgium made profits of €1.4 billion, but paid no tax.[16] In 2011 the European Environment Agency[17] costed damage caused by ArcelorMittal's air pollution in Europe at between €421 million and €595 million. In 2017 the EBRD lent ArcelorMittal $350 million for "modernisation and environmental upgrades".[18] Despite receiving hundreds of millions in loans and subsidies for pollution abatement, ArcelorMittal has repeatedly attempted to obstruct and weaken EU climate policy,[19] and pushed for exemptions to the EU Emissions Trading System, so reaping 'windfall' profits of €2.5 billion in 2009.

ArcelorMittal has particularly poor relations with trade unions, including suppressing union activities.[20] In a 2009 shareholders' meeting at its headquarters in Luxembourg ArcelorMittal announced that it was halving production and offering 'voluntary redundancy' to 9,000 of its staff, while paying out a dividend of $1.1 billion to shareholders. When 1500 steel workers gathered to protest outside the company headquarters, special police units were called in, resulting in violent clashes.[21] Employees of Mittal have accused him of "slave labour" conditions after multiple fatalities in his mines,[22] and ArcelorMittal has a track record of repeated violations of health and safety, resulting in many injuries and deaths of its workers all around the world.[23]

With its influential relationship to state power in over 60 countries, its access to global private financial institutions, and its highly effective public relations and brand management operation, ArcelorMittal's position may appear unassailable. Yet two very different responses by citizens suggest that the scale and global reach of ArcelorMittal, which are key sources of its power, entail aspects of vulnerability. The first of these responses is a project conducted by the Forensic Architecture Research Centre at Goldsmiths.

A memorial in exile

Omarska, an iron ore mine and ore processing plant outside Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia, was used by Bosnian Serb military and police to imprison more than 5,000 Bosniaks in the summer of 1992.

> Among them were (to mention but some): the mayor; politicians from the SDA and the HDZ in Prijedor; an imam; judges and lawyers; employees from the military and civilian sectors; a veterinarian, a physiotherapist, a dentist, and a number of medical doctors; an engineer and some economists; headmasters and teachers from schools at different levels; journalists and an editor of Radio Prijedor and of Kozarski Vjesnik; an

> author and an actor; directors and members of the Rudnika Ljubija management board; directors and managers of Bosnamontaža, Kozaraturist, Celpak, and the biscuit factory Mira Cikota; the director and the secretary of the Prijedor Red Cross, the president of Merhamet (the Muslim charity organization) in Prijedor; restaurant owners, business men and entrepreneurs; leaders of sports clubs and football players.[24]

In 1992, Ed Vulliamy and fellow journalists Penny Marshall and Ian Williams visited the camp at Omarska.[25] Their reporting provoked an international outcry, following which a United Nations commission of experts collected evidence of rape, torture and killings of detainees at Omarska, leading to the establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the first international war crimes court since Nuremberg and Tokyo.[26]

Eyal Weizman, Professor of Forensic Architecture, and artist Milica Tomic of the Monument Group of Belgrade, visited the site in April 2012. During this visit, they met with Mladen Jelača, Director of ArcelorMittal Prijedor, who disclosed that the steel of the ArcelorMittal Orbit had been made using iron ore from the Omarska mine. This information allowed Forensic Architecture to identify the basis of their collective project as a "material link between London and Omarska—between a site where crimes against humanity were committed and another that celebrated that same universal humanity."[27]

On 20 April 2012, Refik Hodzic, a journalist, filmmaker and justice activist from Bosnia and Herzegovina published an article online setting out Mittal Steel's relationship to the situation, starting in 2004 when the company acquired a 51% stake in a complex of mines and facilities around Prijedor.[28] Hodzic describes how the complex included the site and buildings that had served as the concentration camp, and the locations of mass graves where Serb authorities had dumped the bodies of hundreds of people they had murdered in Omarska. In 2005, ArcelorMittal agreed to permit victims and their families to access the buildings where the crimes had been committed, and also pledged to finance and construct a memorial commemorating the atrocities. But Hodzic then observes how in 2006, ArcelorMittal shelved these plans, saying it did not want to take sides in a divisive dispute, and later denied access to the place, citing safety concerns.

Responding online to Hodzic's article, Mr M. Mukherjee, Chief Executive Officer of ArcelorMittal Prijedor, claimed that the company had only reluctantly cancelled the project of "finding an agreed solution to the question of a memorial at Omarska", but that it was "ready to support any solution that had the support of all sections of the community".[29] Yet as Susan Schuppli observes, "The desire to see a memorial and the desire to stop one are once again divided across ethnic lines."[30] Rather than engage with the intractable issues in which ArcelorMittal is implicated, Mukherjee reaffirmed the safety concerns, describing the Omarska site as "a busy working industrial area, with heavy machinery operating constantly". However, he did offer to cease operations on several days during 2012 to allow victims and their families access to the site.[31]

In July 2012, shortly before the start of the London Olympic Games, Forensic Architecture and the working group *Four Faces of Omarska* held a press conference in the Olympic Park, at which survivors of the camp laid claim to the ArcelorMittal Orbit as the 'Omarska Memorial in Exile'.[32] Throughout this time, and to the present day, ArcelorMittal has used the site, buildings and equipment of the Omarska camp to operate a profitable mine, while employing a workforce that — as a result of the ethnic cleansing — is almost exclusively Serb. In recognition that preventing commemoration of trauma is a form of denial that obstructs healing and reconciliation, Forensic Architecture designated the Omarska mine as a 'Living Death Camp', while calling for, "a project of commemoration that would remain responsive to the demands of ongoing life".[33]

In 2018, Anish Kapoor's website refers to the ArcelorMittal Orbit simply as 'Orbit', and makes no mention of the name ArcelorMittal.[34] If Kapoor wanted to fully dissociate his largest public work from the private sponsor who made it possible, he could face a costly legal dispute, as it appears that in return for sponsoring the project, ArcelorMittal secured naming rights over the sculpture in perpetuity.[35] Dissociating his own name from the sculpture might be easier, though that would probably mean returning the fee, and risking alienation from influential people who could provide future career opportunities. In contrast, Forensic Architecture's reclaiming of the sculpture as 'The Omarska Memorial in Exile' demonstrates that although singular meaning is often imposed by private interests, in certain situations it can be publicly contested with ethical precision, opening the way for just and emancipatory possibilities to emerge.

A bit of virgin land

> The Queen Elizabeth Park has a surface area of 560 acres (227 hectares) has 6.5km of waterways, 30 acres of woods, hedgerow and wildlife habitat and 4,300 new trees. There are 525 bird boxes and 150 bat boxes at the Park.[36]

In India, in 2005 and 2006 the Mittal Steel Company signed memoranda of understanding with the governments of the neighbouring states of Jharkhand and Orissa (now Odisha) for two vast industrial projects. The projects planned to take up a combined land surface of 16,656 acres (6,740 hectares), and would produce 24 million tonnes of steel a year.[37] In Odisha, the proposed project would require 7,800 acres (3,156 hectares) for facilities including coke smelting, steel making, steel rolling mills and a 750 megawatt power plant.[38] In Jharkhand, which means "land of forests", the proposed project would require 11,000 acres (4,451 hectares)[39] for a development including a steelworks, coal mine and associated township powered by a 2,500 megawatt power plant, all designated as a Special Economic Zone benefitting from tax concessions and exemption from environmental protection laws.[40] Dayamani Barla, a member of the indigenous Munda tribe, led opposition to ArcelorMittal's plans, on the grounds that the proposed development would destroy streams, rivers and forests that are ancestral community-owned natural resources, as well as sacred sites, that together are essential to the cultural identity of the indigenous peoples who live there.[41] This interlocking of legal, cultural and ecological arguments, which in itself is compelling, gains additional strength through its precise relevance to the lives of indigenous peoples.

> Indigenous peoples are the descendants of those who were there before others who now constitute the mainstream and dominant society. They are defined partly by descent, partly by the particular features that indicate their distinctiveness from those who arrived later, and partly by their own view of themselves.[42]

The indigenous peoples of the world's remaining forests have knowledge, customs and cultural practices that protect and sustain forest ecosystems. Yet, as the Forest Peoples' Alliance observes,

> forest policies commonly treat forests as empty lands controlled by the state and available for development, colonisation, logging, plantations, dams, mines, oil wells, gas pipelines and agribusinesses.[43]

The resistance movement led by Dayamani Barla combined two approaches: claiming human rights enshrined in India's national constitution and law,[44] and collective direct action by indigenous people, putting their bodies at risk to defend the land on which they depend for survival. For five years, while the indigenous people physically prevented ArcelorMittal from accessing their land, Barla used her skills as a journalist to engage with the bureaucratic processes of the Indian state, through which ArcelorMittal was seeking to gain ownership or control of the land.[45]

Frustrated by the resulting delays to his scheme, Laksmhi Mittal declared in an interview with *The Financial Times* that people in India "had to be 'educated' into supporting gradual industrialisation, including the need to build steel plants on agricultural land."[46] But after centuries of catastrophic damage caused by colonialism and extractive industries, the indigenous people reject such a view. The assimilation of indigenous peoples into the dominant paradigm of industrialism, along with the militarism and consumerism on which it depends, would be in itself a terrible cultural loss. Moreover, in the struggle to avoid precipitating global ecological collapse, the 'developed world' has much to learn from the indigenous worldview that enables people to live well, in harmony with ecosystems, through collective decision-making and community ownership of natural resources.

Barla summarizes the indigenous peoples' demands, and aims: "We would like the government to restore our mines, clean up our polluted rivers, and bring clean drinking water to our communities […] This fight is the fight to save humanity. We need a fundamental shift in the way we view development."[47] So far, the indigenous peoples' demands have not been met, and they are far from achieving their aims. Yet they won a decisive battle to protect their forests: in 2013, citing "delays in acquiring land, uncertainties over iron-ore supplies and deteriorating market conditions", ArcelorMittal scrapped its planned project in Odisha.[48]

In 2013, for her leadership of the resistance to ArcelorMittal, Dayamani Barla received the Ellen L. Lutz Indigenous Rights Award, given by campaign group Cultural Survival in honour of the memory of Ellen L. Lutz, a human rights lawyer dedicated to the rights of Indigenous Peoples. The respected award recognizes "outstanding human rights activism, dedicated leadership for Indigenous Peoples' rights, and a deep commitment to protecting, sustaining, and revitalizing Indigenous cultures, lands, and languages".[49] In making the award, Cultural Survival declared, "The movement's bold resistance stopped this megacorporation from displacing nearly 70,000 people from over 40 villages and seizing over 12,000 acres of land."[50]

The delays preventing ArcelorMittal from acquiring land are certainly attributable to the skill and tenacity of the resistance movement. But the movement's victory was partly due to the global economic downturn: in 2009 ArcelorMittal's sales decreased by 48%, and their net income decreased from $9.5 billion to $0.1 billion;[51] at a certain point, ArcelorMittal decided that in Odisha, the probable losses outweighed the possible profits.

Yet the company determined to press on with its project in Jharkhand. In 2013 ArcelorMittal applied for permission to cut over seven thousand trees and to extract five million tonnes of iron ore every year from the Saranda forest reserve, an area of rich biodiversity including an important migration route for elephants.[52] Although the application submitted by ArcelorMittal was incomplete and contradictory, and its consequences would be large scale destruction of priceless ecological heritage, the state government of Jharkhand granted permission. In 2016, the *Environmental Justice Atlas* reported that, despite a resistance campaign involving widespread mass mobilization of indigenous groups and traditional communities, and marked by a high intensity of conflict, including arrests, violence, and deaths, the mining companies including ArcelorMittal had laid waste to large areas of the Saranda forest:

> Streams which serve both domestic and agricultural purposes of the villagers now flow red with mining waste, polluting drinking water sources and resulting in loss of agricultural productivity (Priyadarshini, 2008). Forests, and mountains which are sacred to the adivasis lie degraded due to iron ore mining operations.[53]

In a further blow to indigenous tribespeople, in 2016 the State Government of Jharkhand diluted key laws protecting tribal lands, to allow government to take the land for industrial and commercial purposes, or even to sell it off.[54]

More enlightened decisions may be taken at the National level: in January 2017 the environment minister Anil Dave overruled the approval granted by Jharkhand state to ArcelorMittal, and rejected the company's application to expand its operation in the Saranda forest. Meanwhile, strategic work is progressing at the highest level. International lawyer Polly Higgins is campaigning for ecocide to be recognized as the fifth international crime against peace, alongside genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression. The *Eradicating Ecocide* campaign makes a crucial connection between the social and the ecological, the world and the earth:

> Ecocide is the extensive damage to, destruction of or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been or will be severely diminished.[55]

Establishing ecocide as a crime against peace would make governments and corporations accountable in a court of law, multiplying the legal, financial and reputational risks faced by the extractive industries, and helping indigenous peoples to defend their rights as part of the historical struggle towards decolonization.

A conclusion, forgone

It was Otto von Bismark, the reactionary authoritarian founder and first Chancellor of the German Empire in the nineteenth century, who said that politics is the art of the possible. Here, I have tried to reopen questions around the political possibilities of art.

Describing the aims of the Olympic sculpture commission, the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson wrote of his wish for "something to arouse the curiosity and wonder of Londoners and visitors."[56] If such curiosity and wonder were to be directed not only at the sculpture, but at the system that brought it into being, then the resulting understanding could lead to unruly processes of discovery, and possibly changes in behavior that might be exciting. Director of Tate and Chair of the ArcelorMittal Selection Panel, Sir Nicholas Serota predicted that the ArcelorMittal Orbit "will make people aware of their own bodies and their place in the world."[57] When the experience of art is confined within the frame of leisure and consumerism, to be aware of one's own body probably leads no further than a solipsism, while an awareness of one's place in the world likely means an acceptance of the prevailing social order. But when the critical potential of art is activated through the practices of reflective and emancipatory questioning, far greater possibilities emerge, the consequences of which stretch the powers of imagination.

An embodiment of the contradictions of neoliberalism, the ArcelorMittal Orbit is inchoate. ArcelorMittal has been closely associated with unlawful activities including severe breaches of health, safety and environmental legislation, and crimes against humanity; should the crime of ecocide become recognized, it is possible that ArcelorMittal could in future be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court. However, to describe the sculpture that bears the company name as inchoate in the legal sense that it anticipates, and is preparatory to, further criminal acts, would be going too far. What is certain, is that the ArcelorMittal Orbit is key to a brand management programme that aims to secure 'the social license to operate'[58] for a multinational corporation whose core business is socially unjust and ecologically destructive.

But undeterred by the ruthless exercise of corporate power, the Forensic Architecture research centre and the Adivasi indigenous peoples' resistance movement show that it is still possible to resist the symbolic and actual dominance of the public and commons by private capital. Such acts of resistance are vital in engaging with specific issues, but by enlarging the range of possibilities, they also open the way for other liberating struggles at the intersection of cultural practice and political action. As neoliberalism compounds extreme inequality, and accelerates ecological collapse, the idea that the eradication of historical memory, cultural difference and biological diversity is inevitable is a stupefying limitation of thought and action. Instead, by creatively inhabiting uncertainty as a condition of complex and dynamic relationships, we might live more fully, and reclaim the art of the possible.

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