In my March 2012 editorial, reflecting upon the founding ambitions of the *JSAH*, I wrote of the need to “revive” some of the inaugural goals of the journal, to envision change and rethink connections. This would mean expanding our intellectual compass to promote a global view of architectural history, consider theoretical and methodological approaches that build upon and create new interdisciplinary links, and situate our historical concerns in the critical present, thereby pushing our disciplinary comfort zone. This special issue on state, violence, and memory brings these concerns together by addressing some “necessary but unwritten” histories.1

In probing the relation between architecture and memory, the articles in this issue propose a conversation between two modes of thinking about the built environment: one adopted by the state with its will to dominance, and the other adopted by nonstate actors. The first mode is characterized by the readiness with which the state and its corporate surrogates resort to violence to assert control: as powerful agents, such entities aim to shape space in their own image by giving concrete manifestation to history and collective memory. Violence mediates between architecture and memory, often passing into the pages of architectural history as the monumental achievements of civilizations. The second mode comprises strategies used by nonstate actors to negotiate state domination through myriad acts of everyday life, and through rebellion, activism, and performance. Their modes of creative resistance are as varied as their constituencies. Their acts are, however, typically “small” and episodic: marked by the lack of material resources. Only rarely, by working together, do nonstate actors invoke a powerful antidote to claims of the state and state surrogates. Their battleground is the “weak” realm of the everyday. By focusing on the quotidian space in which states and state surrogates must battle for their legitimacy, the articles featured here, even if they are focusing on monumental remains of the past, alter the terms of engagement with the history of architecture to chart new spatial histories.

Amy Russell’s article on the shaping and reshaping of Rome’s Imperial Fora and Forum Romanum speaks of the reciprocity of movement and memory, and the tension between cultural heritage and traffic circulation as memory is practiced in city space. Violence is not Russell’s key analytic, but her discussion of monumental building programs illustrates the conscious attempt of emperors of antiquity and fascist rulers of the twentieth century to dictate how the power of the state is read and enacted every day. Using the distinction between long-term cultural memory that depends on the survival of monuments and objects, and the precarity of memory, often passing into the pages of architectural history as the monumental achievements of civilizations.

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of memory without such temporal and spatial anchors, she shows the stakes of competing claims upon the city’s history.

Deliberate manipulation of a city’s history, temporal foreshortening by dislocating buildings, and the selective elimination of past accretions that are deemed to have no value (or indeed convey dangerous values), all of which are central to Russell’s argument, are common refrains in architectural history. These issues are also central to Heghni Watenpaugh’s analysis of the strategic marginalization of the Armenian population by the Turkish state. Watenpaugh addresses the relation between historical preservation in the medieval city of Ani, under the aegis of the Turkish state and the World Monuments Fund, and the Turkish state’s continuing denial of the genocide of Anatolia’s Armenian population between 1915 and 1922. While Ani became the reminder of lost statehood for Armenians, the history of the Turkish state’s destruction/preservation policies reveals how deeply this cultural-political identification had been internalized by the Turkish state, fueling its ambivalence toward preserving Ani. Enduring fears of political legitimacy tug at the “post” of the postconflict landscape. Postwar reconstruction becomes a continuation of war by other means.

If the Armenian identification with Ani as the lost marker of statehood suggests that violence generates conditions that coalesce identity and identification, Andrew Herscher emphasizes this productive feature of violence. Herscher argues in his field note in this issue that the Bosnian War-era concentration camp of Omarska was not just a space of violence where hundreds of prisoners were killed; it was also a site of violent subalternization that produced ethnic communities. Cultural identity, as ethnicity, Herscher observes here, “was not only a social construction; it was also conjoined to the architectural reconstruction of a mine into a camp.” Herscher views the staging of countermemory by Omarska survivors at the ArcelorMittal Orbit Tower in London—their insistent foregrounding of the prehistory of the tower and their refusal to regard it as an Olympic monument—as a positive act of desubjugation. He thereby offers an opening in the debates about architecture, memory, and violence that is not premised on reconciliation.

The critique of violence as a temporally bound event finds resonance in the remaining articles in this issue that examine the spatial consequences when states resort to law-preserving violence and violence slips off its brackets as an event and becomes an everyday occurrence. Zeynep Kezer investigates the creation of the town of Elazığ in eastern Turkey as a border space, as the newly constituted Republic of Turkey attempted to pacify the region’s rebellious Kurdish tribes. She suggests that conceptualizing the border not as a thick line but as a surface allows us to understand how new social and political hierarchies are produced by being interpellated with the topography. The state’s interventions in turning this internal region within the nation into a border space, Kezer concludes, changed this region’s settlements, infrastructure, and its broader geography. It affected “how local populations and agents of the state engaged with and moved through it, ultimately changing how this landscape was imagined by all.”

The law-preserving violence of the state and state surrogates is also the subject of Sean Anderson and Jennifer Fern’s field note on detention centers for asylum seekers in Australia. They discuss the scale and violence of Australia’s anti-immigration policy in producing a new detention infrastructure that has emerged as a lucrative opportunity for multinational corporations. The network of detention complexes planned across Australasia takes a leaf from colonial-era practices of inequality and augments the borderscapes of the twenty-first century with new spaces where political rights may be held in abeyance with great impunity.

The scholarship on detention complexes and extermination camps, leitmotifs of twentieth- and twenty-first-century built landscapes, is fundamentally concerned with making visible what was designed to be invisible. Karen Bishop begins her study of detention and torture centers in the Southern Cone with a note about their utter ordinariness, ubiquity, and opacity. Thousands were imprisoned and tortured in repurposed school buildings, shops, and residences, and made to disappear—the evidence of their existence excised from government records under the military dictatorships in Argentina and Chile in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus this architectural history of disappearance, Bishop notes, does not begin “with construction writ large but with the careful cultivation of coincidence and invisibility within an urban fabric.” Bishop focuses on the function of memory work and the temporal and spatial horizons that are imagined in the absence of closure, and the attendant risk of separating past and present.

How to “perform” memory so as to keep it alive? And what role might architecture play in this performance, when it carries the risk of reifying violence? Ruth Hellier-Tinoco cites La Máquina de Teatro’s performance of countermemory in the symbolic reconstruction of the 1520 massacre at Tenochtitlan on stage as the performers speak of the 1968 massacre of students by the Mexican state at Tlatelolco ten days before the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. She points to the value of architectonics, and yet the temporal collapse signaled by the absence of representation of architectural styles (1520 Mexico and 1968 modernism) aids
the effectiveness of staging this memory work as a critique of current state policies.

As my term as editor concludes with this issue, I wish to thank the review editors, copyeditors, managing editors, and editorial assistants with whom I have had the pleasure of working. A special thanks to Mira Rai Waits, whose organizational skills have brought order to what could easily have devolved into chaos, and to Mary Byers for her meticulous attention to detail and her dedication to enhancing the quality of the JSAH.

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Notes
2. See Andrew Herscher, Violence Taking Place: The Architecture of the Kosovo Conflict (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2010).