

The normalcy of the  
happy ending to everything,  
in spite of all evidence  
to the contrary.

Klein

jeune

56

20

12

cet enfant terrible, le

veil  
temple

from  
the

Why would I want that to be  
a Jewish space,

or a Catholic space,

or a

Muslim space?

34

**Of**

**the Sacred**

**and  
the**

**Divine :**

**Subway**

**Sukkah**

Austin+Mergold

Believ  
man a  
his wo  
only, a  
act of  
ture sh  
prohib  
ration  
suprem  
see wit  
tend to  
ural rig

1  
"Messrs.  
Dodge, E  
and Stepl  
A Commi  
Danbury  
tion, in th  
Connectic  
January 1  
The writin  
Jefferson  
Thomas Je  
associatio  
States, 19



Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties.

—Thomas Jefferson, 1802<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson, Thomas.  
"Messrs. Nehemiah  
Dodge, Ephraim Robbins,  
and Stephen S. Nelson,  
A Committee of the  
Danbury Baptist Association,  
in the State of  
Connecticut. Washington,  
January 1, 1802,"  
*The writings of Thomas  
Jefferson* (Washington:  
Thomas Jefferson memorial  
association of the United  
States, 1903), 182.

In 2010, author Joshua Foer hosted an architectural design-build competition "Sukkah City: New York City." Austin+Mergold (A+M) was invited by Foer to enter the competition that called for twelve "radically temporary, experimental pavilions."<sup>2</sup> Their entry, *Subway Sukkah*, was noted by Natalie Jerimijenko in the *New York Times* as provoking a discussion "about whether or not you could turn a public space into a religious one."<sup>3</sup>

The competition required rediscovering the ancient Jewish practice of constructing a liminal realm between enclosure and nature for the festival of Sukkot. The Union Square competition site provoked A+M to consider the overlap between New York City zoning codes and sukkah design prescriptions outlined in the Talmoud.

According to Jewish tradition, the sukkah is a structure meant to acknowledge power of the Higher Authority and to commemorate a nomadic past through abstinence from various comforts. It is also an acknowledgment of the connection and interface between the mundane and the divine. The architecture of a sukkah is described in sacred Hebrew texts in ways that are not dissimilar to how New York City Zoning and Building Codes regulate construction. Zoning informs one where to build and building codes regulate materials, structure and methods of assembly. Everything else (in sukkah or NYC construction) is open to interpretation, as long as the design remains "as of right."

<sup>2</sup> In an e-mail to A+M on Wednesday, June 09, 2010 at 12:32 PM Joshua Foer wrote: "Dear Austin+Mergold, As an admirer of your work, it is my pleasure to invite you to enter 'Sukkah City: New York City,' an international design competition that will result in 12 radically temporary, experimental pavilions being constructed in Union Square Park, NYC this fall. The sukkah, as you may know, is an ancient, ephemeral arche-

type traditionally erected for one week each fall by Jews to celebrate the autumn harvest. Our competition aims to re-imagine and reinvent the structure within its traditional design constraints. Jurors include Ron Arad, Michael Arad, Adam Yarinsky, Thom Mayne, Ada Tolla, Natalie Jeremijenko, Rick Bell, and Paul Goldberger. This is a design/build competition. All 12 winning structures will be fully funded by a financial award. The registration deadline is

July 1, and entry deadline is August 1. I hope you'll consider entering the competition: [www.sukkahcity.com](http://www.sukkahcity.com)."

N  
sukkah spa  
Building C  
or exit acc  
Considering  
station, the  
discerning

In 2013, fi  
included d  
Arad, Ron  
Thom May

T  
imately 60  
twelve win  
August 8,  
eleven fin  
entry, focu

T  
film SUKK  
of Oxbow

<sup>3</sup> Bern  
"A Harvest o  
Shelters," N  
Sep 17, 201

New York City Subway entrances are ideal pre-made sukkah spaces, convertible with minimal effort. The 2008 NYC Building Code further stipulates in Section BC 1014 that "two exits or exit access doorways from any space shall be provided [...]"<sup>4</sup> Considering that there are at least two ways out of each subway station, the "wall of separation" can still be maintained providing a discerning citizen a choice of a "secular" or "religious" exit.

In 2013, filmmaker Joshua Hutt released the film *SUKKAH CITY* which included documentation of the jury deliberations between Michael Arad, Ron Arad, Rick Bell, Paul Goldberger, Natalie Jeremijenko, Thom Mayne, Ada Tolla, and Adam Yarinsky, among others.

The Sukkah City design-build competition received approximately 600 entries. A twelve-person jury was tasked with selecting twelve winners that would be built and exhibited, meeting on Sunday August 8, 2010 at the Center for Architecture in Manhattan. After eleven finalists had been selected the jury needed to choose a final entry, focusing on the A+M proposal *Subway Sukkah*.

The following transcript is an excerpt from the documentary film *SUKKAH CITY*, directed by Jason Hutt, and appears courtesy of Oxbow Lake Films.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, Fred A. "A Harvest of Temporary Shelters," *New York Times*, Sep 17, 2010, C32.

<sup>4</sup> NYC 2008 Building Code, [http://publicecodes.cyberregs.com/st/ny/ci-nyc/b200v08/st\\_ny\\_ci-nyc\\_b200v08\\_10\\_sec014.htm](http://publicecodes.cyberregs.com/st/ny/ci-nyc/b200v08/st_ny_ci-nyc_b200v08_10_sec014.htm). Accessed May 15, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> *Sukkah City*, Dir. Jason Hutt, Oxbow Lake Films, 2013, Film. For more information about SUKKAH CITY, or to inquire about booking or acquiring the film, visit [www.oxbowlakefilms.com](http://www.oxbowlakefilms.com).



Beginning at 17:01:

**Offscreen voice** One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight...  
nine, ten, eleven...

**Ada Tolla** So who would vote for  
the subway? Come on. Let's do  
a show of hands.

**Thomas de Monchaux** Can I  
just speak to the subway? Why  
I find it troubling is: you don't  
have a choice as to whether to  
be in it or not. If you want to  
get out of the subway in Union  
Square, which is a very...

**Paul Goldberger** There are a  
dozen different ways out of the  
Union Square station.

**Ada Tolla** There could be some-  
thing interesting in linking this  
off-site moment to the rest of the  
site which is far down south. So  
I do think that there is something  
to this entry.

**Maira Kalman** But how are you  
reconciling the religion part of  
it? Which is the most...

**Ada Tolla** I can't reconcile that.

**Maira Kalman** Which is the  
biggest part of it.

**Ada Tolla** I can't reconcile that.

eight...

**Maira Kalman** Using the structure in the city, which is clever and wonderful, and all of those things. But ultimately, what are you saying? The question becomes: is taking it into the religious aspect something that takes away from the...

**Michael Arad** Public realm.

**Ada Tolla** I cannot reconcile that.

**Maira Kalman** And that, that to me is a problem.

are a  
t of the

**Ron Arad** I can. I can. It's no different than any of the other structures that you're going to impose on Union Square.

**Maira Kalman** That's not true.  
[With the other structures,]  
you're not taking a public space  
and saying, "This is now a  
Jewish space."

**Ron Arad** But it's not. First  
of all, it's not built forever,  
and it's just...

**Maira Kalman** So what?

**Ron Arad** It's just like,  
Christmas decoration.



**Thom Mayne** For me, it does not  
have any transformative power,  
to move from a contingent infra-  
structural space to one of ritual.

**Ada Tolla** I think it has the potential to be  
so surprising to go into this space.

**Multiple voices** [Inaudible / talking over each other]

**Adam Yarinsky** But the fact that  
it causes this argument, I think  
makes it interesting to put there.  
Because there will be people  
who say, "This doesn't do enough."  
And that's a very legitimate  
criticism, and others who...

**Multiple voices** [Inaudible / talking at the same time]

**Maira Kalman** To create a con-  
trovery about something that  
ultimately [is] more of an offense  
in a way than an interesting con-  
versation. Because how many  
public spaces would you want  
to be transformed into any-  
body's religion for any amount  
of time? And that goes back  
to the question for me. Why  
would I want that to be a Jewish  
space, or a Catholic space, or  
a Muslim space?

**Ada Tolla** This is this today,  
and it will be something else  
tomorrow. The idea that the  
spaces that we have around  
change, and have the flexibility  
to absorb that.

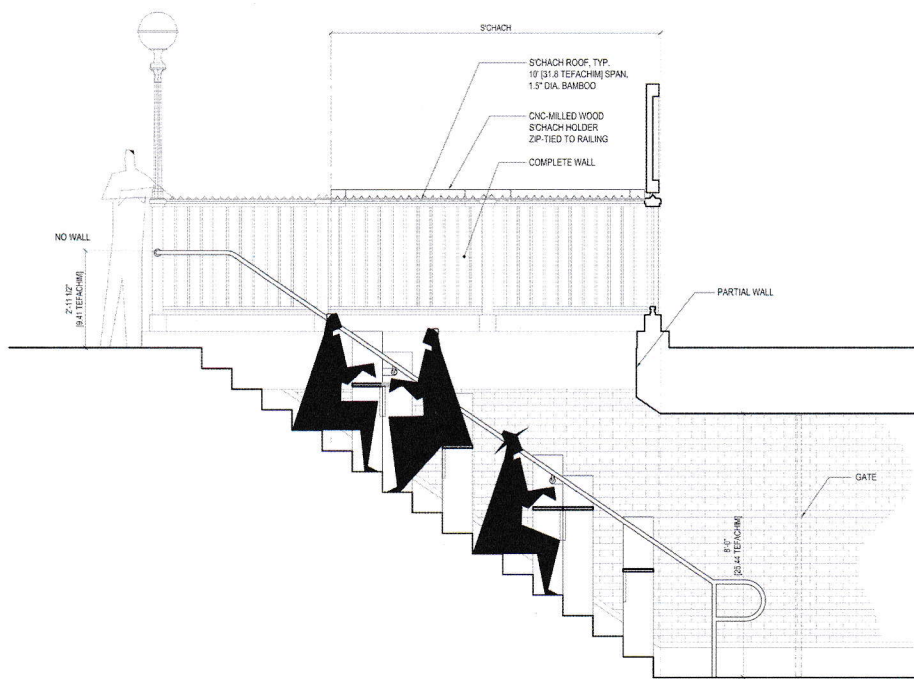
**Michael Arad** To speak on your side for a moment here, I think if something is offensive as it is to you, then, you know, the willful majority should not be imposed on [and] overrule a minority voice in this case, I think.

**Paul Goldberger** There is something extraordinary about the way in which this most ordinary of public spaces, of public circulation spaces, has such a strange resemblance to a space of ritual. And to point out that odd intersection is itself I think important. And worthy. But if it can't carry itself far enough to be a true space with meaning, is the question. I don't know.

**Thomas de Monchaux** I don't think there's any evidence that it does.

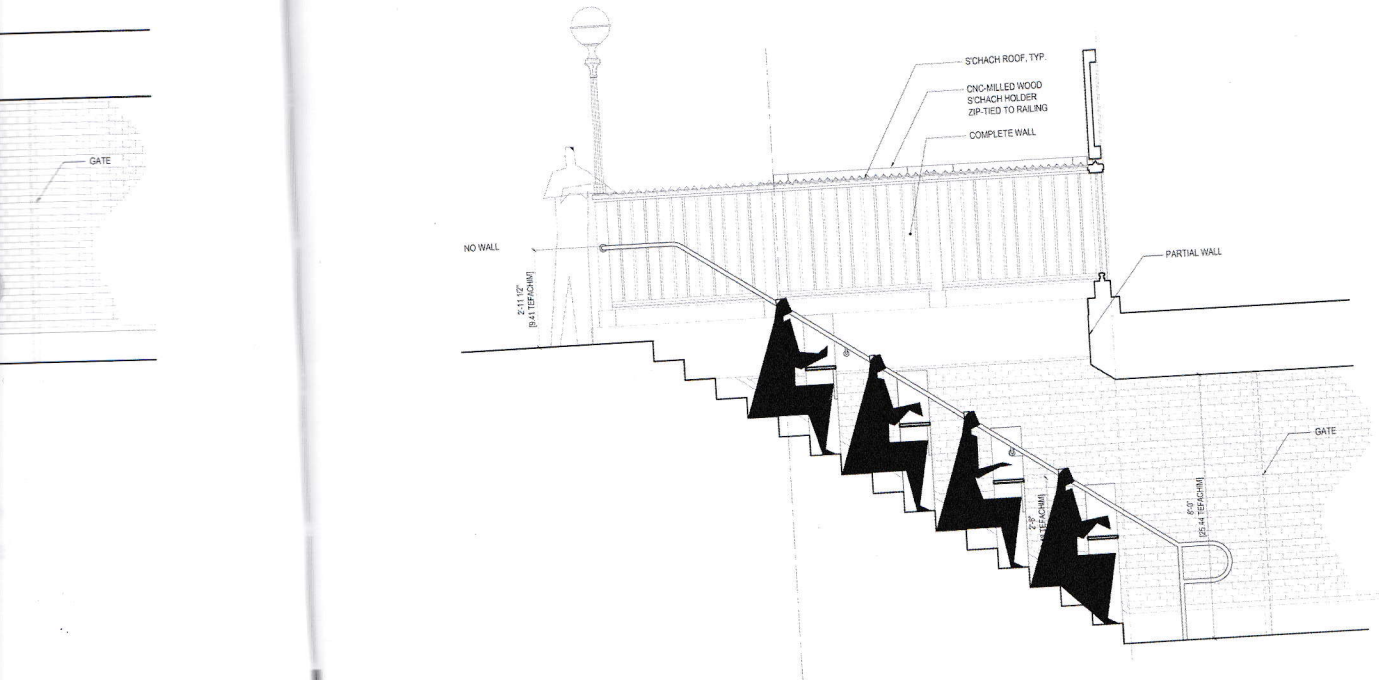
**Rick Bell** Since they are not sure that the subway is going to be permissible with the MTA, let's put it among the alternates. If we then have twelve, and one of them doesn't work, these people can't do it, the people who want to do the Wachsmann knots can't tie them, then we start to look at the alternatives. But we have twelve, plus eight runners up, and we're done.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, eleven out of twelve sukkahs were built on Union Square in September of 2010. Entrance to all pavilions was prohibited. After two days, they were removed.



Family style.





NYC style.



Above ground.





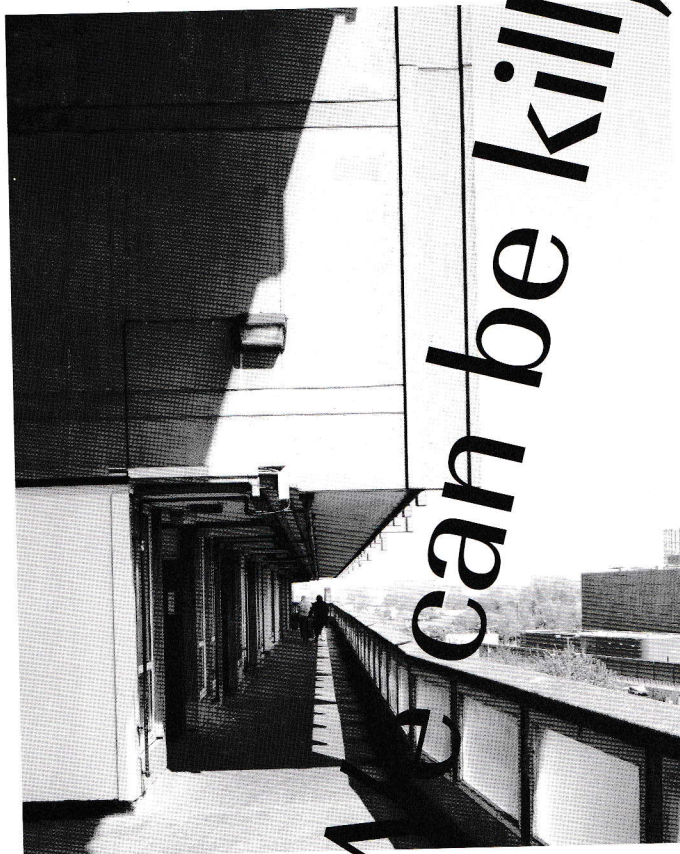


Below ground.





66



we can be killjoys

110

172

But art can.



Edited by  
Nathan Friedman and Ann Lui