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*"Each epoch not only dreams the next, but also, in dreaming, strives toward the moment of waking." Walter Benjamin*

Following in the footsteps of our Surrealist forefathers and mothers, we are again poised to look upon the city romantically as "new mythology ... viewing the constantly changing new nature of the urban-industrial landscape as itself marvellous and mythic"<sup>1</sup>, and subsequently advancing architectures that reinforce such myths. Reflecting on Benjamin's view of modernity, and positioned at a moment of waking similarly as in our recent pasts, we are in the process of dissolving these myths "into the space of history"<sup>2</sup>, where the city whose history as physical unity and congruence stands in question, and future identity remains eroded as a course of pursuit. In jeopardy is an image of a past urbanity preserved within our collective memories, and with it dreaming of the city as some visionary future. Confronted with the task of clinging to either the traces of a theoretical past, or a reconstitution of present and future potentials, we are confronted with negotiating a vacuous leap of faith regarding the potential of architecture, and its contemporary discourses to generate an urban project. Still attached to a sense of urbanity which exists only as memory, and a "past" Jean Baudrillard describes as one which "cannot represent itself, it cannot be reflected upon unless it prods us in another sense, i.e., with respect to some sort of future or other."<sup>2</sup>

*"La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent..."*

It is within a traditional modernist approach that contemporary projects for the city have been fixated on "the myth of the periphery", which has in its process invented a project in order then to apply a discourse. This process often denies the intention of creating an object, while ultimately being unable to avoid the obsession with creating alternative monumentalities. In the end the city still remains the iconic figure of modernity, despite attempts otherwise to reduce its gravity in contemporary discourses. Within the strategy of the "new" project, there has been reluctance, or at best partial understanding of the contemporary city or "periphery" as liminal space which has been constituent to the city since time immemorial.

Considering Baudelaire's concept of modernity as "the fleeting, the transitory, and the arbitrary" applied to the city, we understand that there can be no fixed, secure object of study and no project which approaches a historical understanding of site; there can be no locus for a project to begin. The city is transformed to a collection of fragments assembled without reference. Having once projected the city as what Alberto Perez-Gomez has described as "paradigm of symbolic order"<sup>3</sup>, it is now popular to define the city as in a state of permanent functional disorder, incessant hybridisation encompassing both its measure and meaning. Contained within this is the question of whether the city retains a memory of its past, or has become purely a *landscape of dyslexia*; a composite mediascape where broken codes of signification have all but dislocated present and future projects of urbanism from those of the past. All that remains of the "historical" city are museum-like traces to its value as a sign. However one might consider the sign (itself) has no physical character, existing purely as a psycho-social construct where structure is added to "things", and meaning is applied. This continues to be expressed in urban projects which still retain the monumentality of the last century, and early part of this one. Urban projects become reduced to objectifying textual appropriations with limited source understanding. Architecture in an attempt to revalidate "newness" is habitually appropriating from greater distances in which claims are made of "opening new territories"<sup>4</sup>, approaching a figural line or limit of distance from that which is desired. Architecture has



René Magritte, "The Human Condition I"

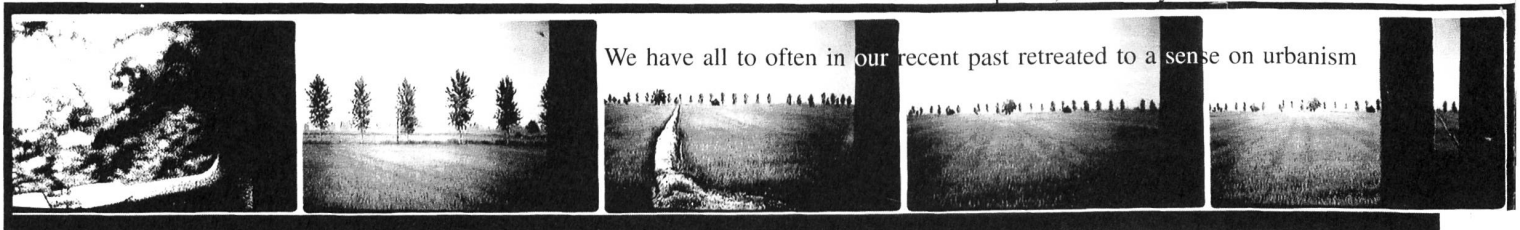
- 1 Buck-Morss, Susan, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 256
- 2 Baudrillard, Jean, „Rise of the Void Towards the Periphery“, orig. pub. as part of *L'illusion de la Fin: ou greve des evenements* (Paris: Galilee, 1992)
- 3 Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, fifth edition, (G. & C. Merriam Co: Springfield, MA 1943)
- 4 quoted in Rowe, C. and Koetter, F., *Collage City*, (MIT Press: Cambridge, MA), p. 50
- 5 Nijenhuis, Wim, „City Frontiers and Their Disappearance“, *Architectural Design: The Periphery*, no. 108 (Academy Group Ltd: London, 1994), p. 15
- 6 Van Winkle, Camille, „The Boundary and the Boundless: On Fragments of Cultural History“, *Art and Design Marking the City Boundries*, vol. 7, no. 1/2 (Academy Group Ltd: London, 1992), p. 87
- 7 Simmel, Georg, „The Metropolis and Mental Life“, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, 1960, p. 419
- 8 Zukin, Sharon, *Landscapes of Power*, (University of California Press: Los Angeles and Berkeley, 1991), p. 16
- 9 Kraus, Rosalind, „The Originality of the Avant-Garde“, in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, p. 163
- 10 op.cit. p. 164
- 11 Zukin, Sharon, op. cit.
- 12 Zukin, Sharon, op. cit. p. 22

always existed at the intersection of disciplines, and similarly is itself a hybrid. With this concept filtering in to certain discursive practices, it has become common that the focus of urban projects in the region termed “periphery“, the idea of type has given way to that of hybrid. In tracing the term hybrid back to it's origins, we discover not only a metaphor for our now common use term periphery, but for landscape. The Latin term *hybrida* was given to the progeny of a tame sow and a wild boar<sup>3</sup>, in which to breed desirable elements of both – the strength and resiliency of the wild variety, while retaining the temperament of the domesticated. The physical attributes endure, while the manner or “intellect” evolve. One nature is replaced by another, whereby the process of domestication is equivalent to becoming rational. While modernism is the continual process of domestication, modernity is in the continual procession away from domesticity, and towards fragmentation, towards randomness, towards entropy. This brings to question whether our “new urbanism” is still utilising a process of domestication.

We are still however caught within a net of history whereby we relate any notion of a future city, less to a physical past, but rather with a theoretical one, and subsequently any discussion of city is burdened with the historical notion of city as having limit and boundary, as existing in contrast to some “other”, and in the ability to distinguish itself from the other. In other words “from the beginning” human beings have searched for difference. As José Ortega y Gasset reminded us “... since the earth is one huge unbounded field, to mark off a portion by means of walls, which set up an enclosed finite space over against amorphous, limitless space ...”<sup>4</sup> We somehow have confused this desire of *re*-cognition with the what Nijenhuis has described as an illusion of “*stabilitas loci*”, or the inert fixation to place where the sign of the city has not been its wall, but its gate, where the city “is nothing more than inhabited circulation”<sup>5</sup>. Similarly Georg Simmel extends this notion of passage.

*“It (the door) connects the finite unit into which we have separated off a determinate part of infinite space with that space; it is by means of the door that the bounded and the boundless border on one another, not in the lifeless geometry form of a simple partition, but in the possibility of continuous exchange....the boundless only acquires meaning and value through which is symbolised by the fact that the door can be set in motion: the possibility of stepping out of the delimitating into freedom at any moment.”*<sup>6</sup>

A door is thereby an image of a point at which the infinite borders on the finite(meta)physical infinite. Human beings have to separate in order to connect and to connect in order to separate, and are by nature nomadic.



We have all too often in our recent past retreated to a sense of urbanism

which focuses on historical notions of the city as an entity based on containment. However it is within this notion of the finite and infinite that we locate the city, not only in a historical past, but in the contemporary; at a moment when we are confronting the boundless as city, and the other as ourselves. Rather than associating this with some paradigm shift or break, but as continuum. At the beginning of this century Simmel informed that

*“Man does not end with the limits of his body or the area comprising his immediate activity. Rather is the range of the person constituted by the sum of effects emanating from him temporarily and spatially. In the same way, a city consists of its total effects which extend beyond its immediate confines. Only this range is the city's actual extent in which existence is expressed ... Every gain in dynamic extension becomes a step, not an equal, but for a new and larger extension. For every thread spinning out of the city, ever new threads*

*grow as if by themselves ... The most significant characteristic of the metropolis is this functional extension beyond its physical boundaries.*"<sup>7</sup>

As product of the modern world it is through the relationship of the infinite we have established our relation to landscape as the domestication of the boundless becoming the extension of the city. It is a realm in which the domesticated or finite world both begins and ends where any contemporary notion of city is intimately tied to that of landscape. It is the relation of that which was once considered "peripheral", as now assembled into the larger body of city. What was once understood as antithesis has moved towards incorporation. Historically, the term landscape refers to "both a piece of rural scenery and the conceptual prism through which it is viewed."<sup>8</sup> This prism was dictated first by 18th century picturesque narration of how to "read" and appreciate landscape, in which the picturesque was defined as "affording a good subject for landscape" and "proper to take landscape from."<sup>9</sup> The enlightenment concept of landscape interpretation was composed through domesticated representation; to view the "real" through the copy. Landscape was something that existed through both figural and literal "framing", which Rosalind Kraus has described as "not something which a bit of topography does or does not possess; it is rather a function of the images it figures forth at any moment in time and the way these pictures register in the imagination. That landscape is not static but constantly recomposing itself into different, separate, or singular pictures..."<sup>10</sup> This term no longer refers to only its picturesque tradition, but has expanded to encompass material culture, text, and social process. Landscape both imposes and represents visual order, which Sharon Zukin describes as "a contentious, compromised product of society. ... It embodies a point of view. As opposition to the vernacular implies, powerful institutions have the preeminent capacity to impose their view on the landscape-weakening, reshaping, and displacing the view from the vernacular."<sup>11</sup> That spatial consequences of combined social and economic power suggest that landscape is the major cultural product of our time. "Our cognitive maps, aesthetic forms, and ideologies reflect the multiple shifts and contrasting patterns of growth and decline that shape the landscape ...it is at once a panorama, a palimpsest, and a microcosm."<sup>12</sup>

The city no longer equates institutional power and control with centrality. As the intention of siege of a walled city in the Middle ages to break open a system that was self-contained and isolated so that the concentration of wealth and political power would flow out to the fill the vacuum of the no-man's land surrounding it, what was once the contents of city have become continuous with landscape. The periphery is the understanding of



Video stills "A Journey to Verduno"

city as landscape. Subsequently, the relationship of city and landscape has been significantly altered, if not substituted, to where the intellectual dimension of this relationship opens to reflect the corporeal. It is both the field in which elements are contained and its contents. At once landscape becomes both a field of operation, and a process of intervention, the city transformed into collection of geographies in which every future which has existed as a calculable extension of the past, collects the potential force of constant transformation. An alternative view of landscape refers to a situation of multiple position and an overlaying of place: it is an assemblage of geographies which constitute the root of its understanding. Architects at present re-evaluate certain roles as not designers of buildings and cities *per se* but creators of geographic assemblies; the operational field is found within, or rather constituent of the landscape. The architect becomes then a professional transgressor of boundaries.