Endless orange

Robert E. Somol

Endless Orange

The new city likewise eradicates genuine particularity in favor of a continuous urban field, a conceptual grid of boundless reach. . . . In this vast, virtually undifferentiated territory — stretching from Fairfax County, Virginia, to Orange County, California — homes, offices, factories, and shopping malls float in a culturing medium, a "non-place" urban realm.

Michael Sorkin

The center of gravity is . . . a curious doughnut-hole of maximum accessibility around which the subsystems pivot.
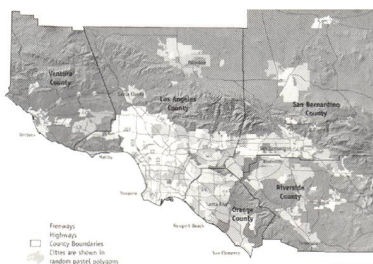
Edward Soja

A new form of settlement space — the fully urbanized, multinucleated, and independent county. . . . [T]he first such occurrence in five thousand years of urban history.

Mark Gottdiener and George Kephart

Distribution of holes in Orange County

Southern California Regional Topography

As there does not yet exist the terminology to account for the phenomena, they have been variously described as either posturban or postsuburban, collectively referred to as edge cities, perimeter cities, technopoles, or Ed Soja's exopolis, "the city without". While all of these terms are suggestive, they indicate that these still inchoate forms of collective organization are in some fundamental way defective relative to the traditional idea of a city that they at once solicit but finally deny. While designers dismiss them as ugly or boring, social critics and geographers condemn them as corrupt and wasteful. In the meantime, they continue to proliferate evidence at an amazing, even alarming, rate, ready for some future Copernicus to displace the city-centered universe and provide a polemic for their practice.

Compared to Irvine and its related nodes of Orange County, Los Angeles and Las Vegas are staid by comparison. LA and Vegas still maintain a center-periphery relation, even if the emphasis has been shifted to the latter term of the pair (whether as a function of the extension of the grid or the strip). It is no doubt this connection that allows those two cities to remain acceptable to architectural taste, to retain a degree of urban imagability, to figure difference as heterogeneous melting pot or fantastic escape. If LA is a representative microcosm and Vegas a spectacular exception, Orange County is a virus. While the rest of the world may be accommodated in and expressed through LA, or given temporary reprieve with Vegas, Orange County is in the process of becoming the world. From an *architectural* point of view, of course, it is hard to disagree with the fact that the built matter

of Orange County is an unrelenting abomination. Thus, in LA and Vegas one has architectural events of interest and significance generated within a relatively traditional urban morphology; in OC there is barely anything of "interest" in that way, though the matrix within which the masses emerge, and the systems through which they are produced, function as a radical break with any previous mode of urbanism. Orange County is a plane of consistency within which eddies of instant development emerge: huge islands (though somehow never big enough to generate any quality) of office parks, shopping complexes, university campuses, gated subdivisions, airports, theme parks, and retirement communities, connected indifferently via a network of freeways and spectacular landscape.

The scope and speed of development in Orange County is practically unprecedented. As fast as Los Angeles County has grown since 1960, Orange County has grown *six times* faster. This longer and slower period of growth has no doubt provided LA with its character and distinctiveness, against which OC appears like instant homogeneity. Yet the image of the bland and typical conceals paradoxical extremes: perhaps the most wealthy region in the country, Orange County filed for bankruptcy in 1994; ground zero for the "Reagan Revolution," it is also capital to the so-called "lifestyle" of swinging and swapping; image of manicured, family-oriented security, yet also the largest host to telemarketing scams ("boiler rooms") and financial fraud. The studio work has been undertaken with the premise that there exist innovations and possibilities within OC, that these inventions may not be fully understood or have been as yet under-utilized by those in OC itself, and that these latent tendencies can be extended and projected toward two ends: to unfold possible alternative OCs (there or elsewhere) by rearranging its existing genetic material; and to make available new material techniques and conceptual priorities within the disciplines of architecture and urbanism.

This projection of a perforated urbanism (perf city) from the evidence of OC begins with a "genealogy of the residual" within this postmetropolitan configuration. Rather than being simply understood (or, more typically, dismissed) as providing a homogenous landscape, OC is in fact divisible, like Gaul, into three parts: a slab of Neapolitan ice cream, a catalogue of diverse experiments in the residual. After establishing this framework, the project briefly elaborates the terms of this new organization founded on the residual or perforated: the archipelago of holes, accessibility, universal materialism, islands of extreme difference, the extra-normal, corporate socialism, PEE ("put everything everywhere"), uniform uncertainty, pooled thinness, and hyperdesign.