

HETEROTOPIAS OF DELUSION: PERIMETER CENTERS AND VIRTUAL SPACES

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I have also thought of a model city from which I can deduce all the others. It is a city made only of exceptions, incongruities, contradictions, exclusions.... But I cannot force my operation beyond a certain limit: I would achieve cities too probable to be real.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

In as much as the modern city reflects and embodies our fragmented and frenetic society, it also represents a *heterotopia of dislocation*. Perimeter centers and edge cities, the ubiquitous by-products of the freeway interchange, have transformed society and the city from a coherent, albeit heterogeneous, infrastructure of individual artifacts and assemblies sharing a collective memory and history into a series of disparate substructures, each forming an autonomous relationship with the other.

This paper presents Perimeter Centers and Edge Cities as heterotopic environments which are fundamentally based on social and economic class. These "virtual spaces" represent heterotopias which are at once closed yet penetrable. Time, space, and architecture have been carefully structured in the virtual community of the perimeter center to suspend belief in the "other" reality outside its boundaries and to establish a "quasi-utopian" condition which simulates a "new" reality while discrediting historical allusions and justifying present exigencies. In essence, the neo-modern community of the perimeter center or edge city, like Calvino's imaginary cities, is "too probable to be real."

THE CONCEPT OF HETEROTOPIA

Michel Foucault describes heterotopias as "real and effective spaces which are outlined in the institution of societies, but constitute a counter-arrangement of attractively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements that are typically found within society are simultaneously represented, challenged, and overturned."¹ Heterotopia, therefore, is a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet can actually be localized. Cemeteries, prisons, museums, libraries, and even shopping malls are examples of institutionalized heterotopias.

Bachelard and the phenomenologists point out that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but in a space that is saturated with qualities. These analyses of contemporary space, however, focus primarily on *inner* space—the space of individual perception, dreams, and passions. Foucault's discussion centers on *external* space as the space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves. It is in this heterogeneous space that individuals and things can be located, but in a "set of relationships that cannot be equated or in any way superimposed."²

Utopias are arrangements that have no real space and, as such, have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They are spaces that by their very essence are unreal (literally no place) which represent society brought to perfection, or its reverse. Heterotopias, on the other hand, are in rapport with all other spaces, and yet contradict them.³

In primitive societies, Foucault identifies heterotopias of crisis which comprise sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for the individual in a state of crisis with society or the environment. These traditional places of sanctuary have been replaced in modern society by rest-homes, psychiatric clinics, and prisons and are often associated with deviant behavior. Existing heterotopias, such as cemeteries, may be made to function in entirely new ways. Cemeteries have traditionally been a part of the city, yet constitute an "other" place with respect to ordinary cultural spaces. In almost a literal sense, the city of the living was synchronous with the city of the dead. The collective and central experience of death, as exemplified by the central location of the cemetery up until the 19th century, has shifted to individual entombment and locating the cemetery to the periphery of the community.

Heterotopias have the "power of juxtaposing in a single real space different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other."⁴ The theater or cinema alternates a series of places (through stage sets for the projection of images upon a screen) that are alien to each other. Heterotopias are linked to bits and pieces of time. Foucault states that they open up through a "pure symmetry of heterochronisms"⁵—that is, when we find ourselves in a total breach of traditional time. For example, the cemetery as a highly heterotopian place begins with that strange heterochronism, the loss of life and a quasi-eternity between dissolution and erasure. Museums and libraries—heterotopias of time—represent places in our society in which heterotopia and heterochronism are arranged in a relatively complex fashion. In a sense, the museum and the library represent our desire to accumulate objects and knowledge in universal archives, within a single place, outside the limits of time.

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that simultaneously isolates them and makes them penetrable. Usually, one does not get into a heterotopian location by volition. In the case of barracks or prison, one is forced into the condition, or one must go through some rite of purification in order to be admitted, as in the case of a cloister or monastery.

Perhaps the most important principle of heterotopias relative to this discussion is that they have, in relation to the rest of space, a function that takes place between two opposite poles.

On the one hand they perform the task of creating a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory, all the locations within which life is fragmented. On the other, they have the function of forming another real space as perfect and well-arranged as the space which we inhabit is disordered and ill-conceived. Foucault points out that some of the Puritan colonies founded by the English in America in the 17th century were absolutely perfect places in which village organization and the lives of the individuals were regulated by space as well as time.

THE CITY OF MEMORY

Contemporary critical discussions of the modern city generally take two tracks: The historicists believe that precedent must serve as the determinant of good city form, whereas the modern interventionists believe that architects and planners are capable of only acting upon highly localized conditions. The historical perspective of urban development may be likened to Oswald Mathias Ungers' description of Hadrian's Villa as a "collection of places." It is neither a purist statement nor a homogeneous system, but is the first evidence of an architecture of memory; collecting set pieces from history. Like Hadrian's Villa, the historical city is a *monumentum memoriae* that is the point of departure from metric space to the visionary space of coherent systems, from the concept of homology (simplicity) to the concept of morphology (complexity).⁶

Hadrian's villa-ideal, realized in his ideal villa, represents a model of formations and transformations of thoughts, facts, objects, or conditions as they present themselves in a continuum of time. Reality is seen in a morphological sense in which physical phenomenon are perceived like *Gestalten* in their metamorphosis. This process of thinking, according to Ungers, is fundamentally an imaginative process of conceptualizing an unrelated, diverse reality through the employment of images, analogies, symbols, and metaphors.⁷

Rossi writes that the city is a "repository of history."⁸ From the initial constitution of any architectural artifact a series of other artifacts begins. The architectural artifact not only embodies the structure of individuality, but it is precisely this structure that affirms the autonomous logic of the compositional process and its importance. According to Rossi, the city may be seen from two points of view.⁹ First, as a material artifact, a man-made object built over time and retaining traces of time. Cities become historical texts which yield important information and documentation. Second, he views the city morphologically, as a study of the actual formation and structure of urban artifacts. This point of view concerns the real structure of the city, as well as the idea that the city is synthesis of values.

In one sense, Hadrian's Villa represents Foucault's pure symmetry of heterochronisms. Poised between ruin and artifact, the villa mediates between present and past, consciousness and memory. Like the heterotopia of the museum, it is linked to bits and pieces of time. In Hadrian's own time, the villa was, in fact, a museum of sorts replete with archaeological artifacts. At its center was a library, Hadrian's retreat, a place filled with the "knowledge of antiquity."¹⁰ The villa resembles the idea of an ideal city, a humanist city, a miniaturized universe where humanist ideals are gathered in a "classical" environment. The villa is not a purist or homogeneous system, but is a heterotopia filled with memories of the collective—a place that relates to events of the past as well as acting as a model for the

future.

The city can be understood as the locus of collective memory of its people. The "soul of the city," memory becomes the city's history and is associated with objects and places.¹¹ "The collective memory participates in the actual transformation of space in the works of the collective, a transformation that is always conditioned by whatever material realities oppose it."¹² Thus, architecture and, by extension the city itself, is both a product of its context as well as a provider of context. The individual artifact plays a complicit role as a determinant of the collective experience of the city. From Rossi's point of view, the value of history as collective memory is that it helps to define the significance of the urban structure, its individuality, and its architecture. "Thus, architecture implies the city; but this city may be an ideal city, of perfect and harmonious relationships, where the architecture develops and constructs its own frames of reference."¹³

The city of memory, like Hadrian's concept of the city, is a recollection of places. As in the cities recollected in Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, it is model city from which all others can be deduced.¹⁴ It is a city made only of exceptions, incongruities, and contradictions. The city of memory is a city locked in time in which all the abnormal elements are reduced; in which all exceptions are subtracted from the model. In the city of memory, our own past changes from the real or hypothetical past, from which we have become excluded, to a possible future and someone else's present.

THE CITY OF DISLOCATION

Norberg-Schulz writes that following the Second World War, the historical city has been subjected to profound changes. The qualities which traditionally distinguished human settlements have been corrupted or have become irreparably lost. The spatial attributes which characterized the traditional city, enclosure and density, have been replaced by free-standing buildings placed either within park-like settings or, even worse, surrounded by parking lots. Streets and squares, which formed the locus of social gathering as well as providing a sense of coherence and order to the historical city, are no longer found. The traditional figure-ground of the city, the relationship of buildings to space and landscape, has been replaced by a discontinuous "assembly of units."¹⁵

The Cité Industrielle and the Voisin Plan, although consistent with monumental city-design principles, were stripped of all historical references. The erasure of the *tabula rasa*, coupled with a homogeneous, "universal" architectural style, subverts the concept of collective memory and, therefore, relegates the traditional city to history. Partly a response to a utilitarian, industrialized city, Garnier and Le Corbusier were creating statements about the nature of cities in a modern world. According to Norberg-Schulz: "Most modern buildings exist in a 'nowhere;' they are not related to a landscape and not to a coherent, urban whole, but live their abstract life in a kind of mathematical-technological space..."¹⁷ The modern office building, anonymous and abstract, as well as the infinite strip of the freeway, create the perfect heterochronis environments forming illusory, quasi-utopian spaces within the fragmentary space of the contexts they create.

In another sense, the modern city has become a city of interventions, each place with its own character and identity competing with the place next to it, contradicting, but also

mutually enriching. It is a pluralist concept with every building placed, conceived, designed, and built following its own rules and orders. In the modern city, every part of the city is designed as a unique location, "an assembly of events, of pieces and fragments, conflicting, interacting, complementing, and hence condensing the urban context."¹⁸

This view of the modern city is quite different from the antiseptic and autocratic view of the early modernists.¹⁹ Kevin Lynch's concepts of concrete space—node, landmark, path, edge, and district—have been transformed by recent architectural interventions in cities that consciously subvert their intended meanings of orientation to augment a sense of disorientation within both the architecture itself as well as the context which it reflects. This "architecture of dislocation" emulates the fragmentary, and random character of the modern city (most notably Los Angeles) as a heterogeneous sequence of spatial events collapsed in time by the mobius strip of the freeway. While architects such as Morphosis recognize the importance of history in urban contexts, they also reject its literal interpretation:

Buildings become interventions into an existing fabric as a means of experiencing the collision of the contemporary world while maintaining a consciousness of the past. Tradition and history are used as the groundwork for new organizational and conceptual ideas in a time when much of architecture is preoccupied with accomplishments of the past and their literal interpretations.²⁰

This new, dislocated concept of the city does not seek to reconstitute the city as holistic organism in any traditional sense. Typological inventories of existing cities are useful to some architects only in determining exceptions within the city as opposed to normative conditions which can be transformed into new modes of thinking. In contrast to the city of memory, the dislocated city is the city of amnesia. Strung together as a sequence of unrecalled "events," the dislocated city, framed by the windshield of the automobile, unfolds in cinematic fashion more in the manner of a montage of filmic images rather than narrative.²¹

PERIMETER CENTERS AND EDGE CITIES

Localized space of the medieval city evolved into extended space of Renaissance and Baroque cities. Today arrangement has taken over extension. Perimeter Centers and Edge Cities are defined by relationships between points and elements, which can be described formally as series, trees, and networks. Within this heterogeneous space, in which individuals and things cannot be located, occurs a set of relationships which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed.

Unlike the historical city which is ordered by memory, the contemporary city is ordered by the highway interchange into "perimeter centers." Perimeter centers, according to Kieran and Timberlake, cannot be understood in terms of conventional building-to-building or building-to-road relationships, but as abstract circuitries of roadway each isolated from the next by an insulating "green veil connecting unseen structures in gardens of commerce and living."²² Kieran and Timberlake base their analysis of perimeter centers on Venturi, Brown, and Izenhour's 1968 analysis of the Las Vegas Strip as the "dematerialization of Main Street." The strip has transformed Main Street's slow moving

pedestrian enclosure into a mid-speed array of information which, in turn, has been further dematerialized by the highway network into an "a spatial, but ordered, contemporary City in the Garden."²³ The graphic iconography of the high-speed perimeter center is neither figural space nor information display, but most closely resembles electronic or hydraulic circuitry. The only self-contained spaces in the new perimeter center, according to Kieran and Timberlake, are internalized and privatized automobile and building interiors.²⁴ Within this context of the "asphalt circuitry" of a *tapis vert* architecture is rendered nearly meaningless.

Joel Garreau observes that every urban area across America is growing with multiple urban cores that can be called "edge cities."²⁵ These new urban "centers" look nothing like traditional downtowns with buildings rising shoulder to shoulder. Instead, buildings stand isolated amidst a tapestry of green. According to Garreau, there will be more than 200 of these edge cities in America. Each is or will be larger than downtown Memphis, Tennessee. Two-thirds of all American office facilities are already in edge cities, and 80 percent of them have materialized in only the past 20 years. By the mid-1980s, there was far more office space around metropolitan New York than there was in midtown Manhattan.²⁶

Edge cities are the culmination of a generation of individual American value decisions about the best ways to work, shop, and play. Edge cities are difficult to define and since they are not homogeneous entities, they take on a variety of forms. Garreau classifies three types of edge cities: "Uptowns," "Boomers," and "Greenfields."²⁷ Uptowns are edge cities built on top of settlements that existed before the automobile. Boomers are the "classic" edge city type, usually located at freeway intersections and almost always centered on a mall. Greenfields are state-of-the-art responses to the perceived chaos of the Boomers. They are typically based on grand scale masterplans, mixed use building types, and strict aesthetic controls.

The land bay, according to Kieran and Timberlake, is the codification of the basic unit of the perimeter center. "The land bay is a ready-for-development parcel, complete with looping access road, utility infrastructure, and planning permits."²⁸ Its area may vary in size from a circumference of more than 1 mile to less than 500 feet, and it usually houses a single use with attendant parking. The zoning regulations that govern perimeter centers, particularly setbacks and floor-to-area ratios, have been criticized as progenitors of antiurban form. However, Kieran and Timberlake argue that these regulations are as consistent with perimeter centers as traditional urban zoning regulations, such as height and setback, are with the form of the conventional city. Perimeter centers, therefore, can be interpreted as deliberate collections of individual land bays docked against one another in a "new form that is a garden with buildings subservient to the garden."²⁹

Rem Koolhaas has described Atlanta as a "creative experiment, but it is not intellectual or critical."³⁰ Atlanta is but one of many examples, as such, it represents current conditions without any imposition of program, manifesto, or ideology—a heterotopian environment of "fragments floating in trees." Atlanta is a "centerless city," or a city with a potentially infinite number of centers. According to Koolhaas, Atlanta has a kind of reverse zoning, zoning as an instrument of indetermination, making anything possible anywhere.³¹ Thus, Atlanta reflects the most critical shift of urbanism of the past 15 years, from the

center to the periphery. Perhaps the most ubiquitous heterotopian environment of the 20th century is the atrium. Since the Romans, the atrium had been a hole in the house or a building that let in light and air from the outside into the center. In the modern building, the atrium has become a container of artificiality that hermetically encloses its occupants against the real. In the modern city populated by atrium buildings, each its own heterotopian organism, downtown becomes an “accumulation of voided panopticons inviting their own voluntary prisoners...”³² With atriums as their private mini-centers, buildings no longer depend on specific locations. They can be anywhere.

At another level, Koolhaas’s observations of Atlanta present us with his own subversive reading of Calvino’s model of an ideal city as a: complete inversion of the metropolis as we know it—not the systematic assembly of a critical mass but its systematic dismantlement, a seemingly absurd dispersion of concentration. Alarming, it suggested that the elements that had once made the city would now cease to work if they got too close together. Spaced out, far apart, they needed the neutral medium of nature or (at most) the single-family house to ensure further their noninterference.³³

EURAILLIE AND THE NEO-MODERNIST CITY

Our strategy equips Lille for its role as headquarters of the theoretical community generated by the new infrastructure. What is important about this place is not where it is, but where it leads and how quickly. Rem Koolhaas³⁴

Peter Buchanan writes that in masterplanning Euralille the Office of Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) had to position or realign an extraordinary amount of infrastructure, including both new and existing tracks and stations, highways, and subterranean parking garages. These structures, along with a series of tall office and apartment blocks, create a new edge to the expanded city core.³⁵

After the closure of its mines and attendant industries in the 1980s, the northern French city of Lille took advantage of its strategic location between Paris, London, and Brussels as a key juncture in the high-speed rail network now gradually linking western Europe’s major cities.³⁶ The new TGV (*train à grand vitesse*) station is located on the city’s eastern edge, on a former defense site. Rem Koolhaas views Lille as the center of a “virtual community,” estimated at nearly 100 million people, and a major commercial center that ostensibly not only serves and employs Lille’s citizens, but also will attract multi-national corporations in search of a convenient European base.

In his 1978 book *Delirious New York*, Koolhaas laid out the ideological premise for Euralille as layered, interlocking buildings that would create the “culture of congestion”³⁷ generated by the ever-proliferating, unpredictable interactions that inevitably occur among the many uses jammed together in the modern metropolis. Koolhaas’s firm OMA was selected in 1988 from among eight firms to develop the masterplan for the new development known as Euralille. OMA conceived the 300-acre site as a combination of functions rich enough to create a distinctly modern environment that would also be an integral part of the existing city core.

The TGV track runs in a north-south trench just west of an existing highway skirting the city’s edge. Several new

signature towers designed by leading European architects straddle the station and the tracks, including the Crédit-Lyonnais by Christian de Portzamparc and the World Trade Center by Claude Visconi. A hotel by local architects is presently under construction. A number of public spaces have been designed within this new edge which also serve the city’s core. These include a park, the Euralille center, a mixed use complex by Jean Nouvel; and the Grand Palais, a convention center and concert hall by OMA. The rue Le Corbusier, under which is Euralille’s central piazza, links the Lille-Flanders station in the historical urban core with the TGV station. Clearly, Koolhaas sees Euralille in contradistinction to the historical city. “This synthetic new city is and isn’t part of the old town,” explains Koolhaas. “It has not been spawned by Lille—it has landed there.”³⁸

Buchanan concedes that critical assessment of Euralille is premature since no key urban space is built or sufficiently defined, and none of the buildings is complete. “To be successful,” he writes, “urban design must create a network of public spaces that give an area a distinct character and coherence throughout the vicissitudes of change, including constant re-building. Euralille’s layered, interlocking buildings seem designed to defy such change, contradicting Koolhaas’s claims to be more interested in urbanism than in architecture.”³⁹

Simulacra and the Virtual City In an entirely different, but somewhat related vein, Jean Baudrillard writes of yet another heterotopia that is uniquely American:

*The objective profile of America...may be traced throughout Disneyland.... All its values are exalted here, in miniature and comic strip form. Embalmed and pacified... Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the “real” country, all of “real” America, which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, which is carceral). Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of...the America surrounding it is no longer real, but of the order of the hyper-real and of Simulacra.*⁴⁰

Ironically, examples of the “neo modernism” which derive most of their inspiration from modernist models, such as the Cité Industrielle, intentionally confuse the distinction between the city of memory and the city of isolation. Hadrian’s “architecture of collective memories” is fundamentally an imaginative process of conceptualizing an unrelated, diverse reality through the employment of images, analogies, symbols, and metaphors. As such, it *reassembles the idea* of an ideal city. Heterotopia, on the other hand, presupposes a system of opening and closing that isolates it and makes it penetrable at the same time. Even when we think we have entered into heterotopia, we are somehow yet excluded.

In the neo-modernist city, for example, we may visit and even spend time, yet we are excluded socially as well as economically. “Neo-urbanist” experiments such as Euralille create the illusion of mutual relationships through morphology, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves. They are, in fact, heterotopias which become a sort of “negative mirror” in which a *highly selective* reality is reflected as the desired future.

ENDNOTES

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3. *ibid.*, pp.11-12
4. *ibid.*, p.14
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8. Rossi, Aldo, *The Architecture of the City*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Opposition Books, The MIT Press, 1982), p.127
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14. Calvino, Italo, *Invisible Cities*. From Ungers, pp.5-7
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16. Barnett, Jonathan, *The Elusive City: Five Centuries of Design, Ambition, and Miscalculation*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1986), pp.111-115
17. Norberg-Schulz, p.190
18. Ungers, p.7
19. Barnett, p.115
20. Mayne, Thom and Michael Rotundi, "Foreword," *Morphosis: Buildings and Projects*, (Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), p.7
21. Thomas Schumacher parallels the urban interventions of certain Post-Modern architects (i.e., Deconstructivists) with the Zeitgeist of the Futurists of the 1920s. However, he is critical of architects who extol the virtues of early modernism without understanding its deficiencies: In the 60's Archigram, Archizoom Superstudio and other neo-futurist movements stood for a technological Zeitgeist, but these architects were not simply interpreters of the status quo. Their schemes and dreams were not merely reflections of the apparent technological/social/cultural conditions. They were rather statements about what ought to be, how people ought to live. Today the squalor of "Blade Runner" becomes a paradigm for a "new urbanism." Schumacher, Thomas, "Invasion of the Building Snatchers: A Contemporary Architectural Avant Garde and Its Heritage," *Reflections 10*, (Champaign, Illinois: School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Spring 1995), p.27
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25. Garreau, Joel, "Cities on the Edge," *Architecture*, Vol. 80, No. 12, (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects, December, 1991), p.45
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