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The Urban Imaginary:

An Exploration of the Possible or of the Originary?

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Does the city lend itself to reverie or to the dream? At first sight the city as a monumental built space does not trigger the equivalent of the rustic or bucolic reverie appropriate to natural landscapes. The perception of a composition of rural or mountainous forms, embellished with the symbolic power of the elements (earth, water, air, fire), reinforced by the colours of the seasons, stirs the imagination, delights the sensibility of the spectator and encourages in the draughtsman or painter variations of style belonging to Classicism or to landscape Romanticism, for instance. In short, naturalist landscape iconography has encouraged the development of a painting redolent with affects, reveries and ideal elaborations intended to implement the taste for landscape (as the Chinese painting of nature shows). The city scarcely lends itself, it seems, to this visual elaboration and esthetic overvaluing of the mere fact of the massive use of homogeneous materials (stone, iron), of the attenuation of the presence of symbolic elements (water, air, etc.), of the rare spaces permitting synoptic or panoramic views, the dearth of events which trigger pathos (the lack of a calm and bucolic atmosphere or, conversely, a lack of violence analogous to that of the meteorological phenomena which overwhelm nature). We may be struck at most by the monumental character of certain buildings considered as autonomous units or by particularly intense social atmospheres (whence the frequency of representations of markets, feast days, scenes of rebellions or of revolutions, etc.) in which the inhabitants triumph over their habitat (as in Dutch painting).

And yet not only does the city let itself be represented, but this *mise en scène* fosters an art of the urban landscape which itself favours oneiric and fantastic variations, just as natural landscapes do. Without wishing to undertake a systematic comparison that would call for an overview of the very question of landscape, we would like to determine a few lines of force of this creation of an imaginary representation of the city, before seeing how these possible, or even impossible, variations return time and again to the real, empirical, historic and geographic city, enabling the spectator to see, in a sort of inverted mirror, urban forms in their initial emergence, their archetypal development, their primordial functionality.

The mythopoetic city

The city has secreted a rich and abundant imaginary, both literary and iconographic, because the system of its built forms and willfully empty spaces constitutes a matrix for developing paintings of great esthetic, oneiric and symbolic density. Whatever the material, economic and functional motives may be that have presided at the founding of a city, in almost all of the great traditions of civilization urban logic has secreted configurations of spaces, volumes, plays of inside and outside, of high and low, which have no equivalent in the experience of rural civilization. Building grand palaces and temples for princes and gods, endowing the great institutional entities (law, army, etc.) with monuments, planning economic businesses and private dwellings around a registered system of plots of land arranged according to the cardinal points, perforating spaces saturated by houses with huge empty squares, etc., constitute so many imaginative acts and unprecedented inventions that produce new objects to be perceived, conceptualized and imagined. Facades, streets, squares, monuments, towers, perspective views and panoramas, river banks, gardens and hills assembled into a single whole turn a city into an artificial contrivance that gives rise to emotions, visions, expectations and new dreams, compared with the environment of an agrarian world in which built artifacts are piecemeal, separate and on a human scale. The architects of the city, be they dabblers or State planners, may transform commissions into projects of an infinitely variable geometry. The city square, then, brings about the meeting of the profane and the sacred, the dry and the humid, the open and the closed, the high and the low, etc. In serving for circulation, exchange, providing air, bringing people together, etc., it also functions as a form-based scenario out of which we may experience a thousand potential combinations, in the same way a narrative scenario may result in a declination into an infinite combination of stories. Each unit of urban form may perform the role of a module that is more or less isolated or integrated, and in the case of the latter, may enter into an infinite variety of relations or oppositions with the

architectural environment. Like any oeuvre they will be more or less successful, esthetic, functional, rational or laden with parasitic elements, or even with mysteries that are useless at first sight.

As much or even more so than nature, the city is thus a mediator of images, since it stimulates the imagination, firstly of the builder, who may build such and such a part according to a diversity of possible models, and next of the inhabitant or the traveler, who extends the logic and balance of forms through sensations, perceptions and reveries which broaden his mind. The works of this imaginary, be they literary, poetic, graphic or pictorial, thus serve as archives or samples of this urbanistic imagination, of creation or of reception, illustrating the diversity of possible cities, as yet unrealized, or objectivizing inspired narrative or visual derivations of real urban landscapes.

There again, it is not without importance to ascertain how much the religious imagination has recognized the symbolic and oneiric function of urban landscapes, be this as a cursed city or a holy one. Religious myth has thus favored the development of a mystical geography of highly sophisticated urban architectures, by which certain holy cities may have been inspired, in fact. The myth of biblical Jerusalem is one such, a veritable spiritual city, with its esoteric symbolism, and of which earthly Jerusalem has often sought to be an analogue copy. The city of Jerusalem, a combination of real and mystical city, was to serve, then, as a model for numerous pictorial landscapes in the West, via its buildings, its local spots and its panoramic vista *à distance*, allowing a forest of rooftops and domes to emerge. Here, we have at our disposal a culturally overdetermined frame of reference whose always fantastic overall image was to serve as a model for numerous depictions of the city in painting.

A cognitive oneirism

Literary or iconographic representations of cities may only be capricious amusements, sub-products of an unbridled fantasy. But they may also be subtended, intentionally or otherwise, by a cognitive objective of experimentation and anticipation, of lateral combination that turns them into veritable laboratories of urbanism's imaginary. We may envisage two significant formal instances:

- One category depends on the genre of the utopian imagination. Firstly, in the sense employed by R. Ruyer, who deems it a mental procedure for exploring lateral possibilities. Next, in the sense of the historico-literary genre which flourished in Europe from the Renaissance onwards and which sought to create a model, in literary form, of an ideal social organization backed up by details concerning the habitat, family and even sexual life, economic and political organization, etc. The projection in utopian space/time enables us to liberate ourselves, in effect, from constraints specific to the history of the present and the past and to recombine, in complete freedom, the parameters of collective life based on norms laid down as non-empirical absolutes. This variable of creating a model of utopian texts permits the production of models that provide the occasion for visualizing, simulating, other organizations of buildings, whole areas and cities. It generally comes about that these utopian landscapes and urban models ignore the particularities of climate, geography and the history of place, of the psychosociology of the local inhabitants. In utopia we proceed that much easier to a reforming of morals and of institutions because we disregard banal, trivial life with its imperfections, dysfunctions, passions and desires. The space of the urban city is thus literally "u-topian" and "u-chronic"; that is, devoid of a spatio-temporal grounding, free of the constraints of the particular real. This exercise in dematerialization, disembodiment and literary de-animation, typical of utopias, can also be practiced pictorially. The same traits are therefore discovered within it: painted or drawn, the utopian city evolves in a sort of rarified air of transparent immateriality in which forms appear as if weightless. The stake of these iconographic exercises is precisely, at the cost of this loss of a sense of reality, to reveal pure forms freed of their perverse effects, their empirical comings and goings, etc. The utopian imaginary of the city becomes, then, a sort of purifier of forms which enables us to treat the city in its ideality, as it will never exist; it can therefore become a medium for the exploratory, anticipatory and simulatory intelligence, but also for the cognitive imagination which seeks to depict the unreal;

- A second category of the artistic exploration of the imaginary of the city consists, conversely, in restoring, via painting as well as via the novel, flesh and blood to other freely invented concrete forms within the sphere of fiction and simulation. The pictorial imagining of architectures, then, permits formal idealities to be re-embodied in an animated magical or fantastic landscape in order "to see how", to pretend. The visual oeuvre is thus imbued with materiality, with inhabitants, crowds, who enliven a model, root it in a here and now, albeit fictional. Just like the textual imagination, the visual imagination fictionalizes ideas, stages spaces

and forms with their processions of rites, events, incidents, anecdotes, which permit a "shrine" to be configured, one richly endowed with emotional, symbolic and mythic effects, be this in terms of wellbeing or misfortune. For the line of separation is often thin between "eutopia", which stages the city of happiness, and dystopia or counter-utopia, which unmasks the darkness, the misadventures, the terrors, even, of the city. The imagination explores its object, here the city, be it elegiacally, optimistically, or dramatically and pessimistically. To represent dark, anguishing, terrifying, catastrophic, apocalyptic spaces in particular permits scenarios of risk, of malaise, of the city's failure to be simulated. Just as today the engineer can simulate the catastrophe of a city's destruction (by nuclear war or following an earthquake), so a painter enables us to grasp the future of a city under extreme conditions. And the closer we get to the details, to the reconstitution of the critical conditions of each stone or each branch of a tree, the more the scenario will appear lifelike, veracious, credible. The urban imaginary of wellbeing or of fear serves here, then, not so much to elucidate an ideal disembodied prototype as to give rise to cities in extreme situations, with the precision of the miniaturist or the *bricoleur*.

The inverted mirror of urban life

Are these imaginary pictorial variations naught but amusement, caprice, reverie, delirium, obsession and phobia? Are they merely sketches, unrealized plans or disinterested reveries? Or do these works, above all visual ones, teach us about the order of urban forms, the vices and the virtues of the habitat and the habitation of cities? In these paintings may we not see mirror images that refer us to our own experience of the reality of the city, as inhabitants and also as architects? Do not the alterity, the sense of possibility and the simulated tell us something about our urbanized world, its structurations, its constraints, but also its lacunae, its shortfalls, its deficiencies? Looking at these paintings, don't we thereby have greater insight into our own aspirations, our need for architectural forms and locations? In that sense the pictorial imaginary would be really useful for isolating, extending and valorizing the essential features and contrivances of living in the city, contrivances that refer us to what is originary.

A primary cognitive value may result from the invariants of the imagination inasmuch as they are the indicator of problems and solutions basic to architecture. The evidence of redundancies, of recurrences in any field of representations may of course merely indicate influences and borrowings that account for the permanence of a motif. But we may also attribute this invariance to the action of profound, irreducible factors, as depth psychology has done by attributing similarities between dreams and myths to the existence of psychic archetypes, which are universal matrixes intended to orientate and frame different image productions in a like manner. Are we not present, via the conscious reveries of painters of architecture, at the reappearance of reference systems of this sort, systems which would signal the existence of a psychic, then anthropological, necessity in the architect's formal and functional arrangements and combinations? Seen from this angle, wouldn't fiction validate, legitimate, the position of certain architectural referents?

For the imaginary enables us to approach, in a sentient, non-rational, non-argued manner, the anthropological necessity of certain architectural forms. Hence the city square is not simply a non-built space, but a void which lets the sunlight in, opens up panoramic vistas, creates radiating centers for sanctioning the gathering of city-dwellers scattered in their planned neighborhoods, to recreate being-togetherness in a coenesthetic way. Conversely, a city without nooks, niches and dark spaces cannot satisfy the need for solitude which goes hand in hand with the social need to see and be seen. Ideal urban architecture valorizes, then, spaces of separation, of unexpected isolation (dead-ends, passages, benches beneath a tree, etc.) that lay themselves open to intimacy, to the secret, to the microscopic. The imagery of arcades and galleries does not only bear witness to the ingenuity of architects who have encountered the solution to sheltering strollers and buyers from inclement weather, but also to the mysterious attraction for mixed architectural forms that give shape to the continuity between inside and out, the exposed and the protected, to the intersection of square and cavern. Galleries opening onto the street (like those in Bologna) thus constitute spaces in which the art of the house (through its facades) and that of monumental arcades are combined into a new whole in which the sedentary and the nomadic, the resident and the traveler, rub shoulders. Painting also reminds us just how much elevation in cities is not just a utilitarian response for gaining room, but a stylistic and symbolic way of opening the horizontality of the human crowd onto a transcendent force, that of human power (a campanile, belfry, watchtower) or of an all-powerful divine power (a cathedral, mosque). For the city, which condenses the multifarious, must also bear the marks of its unity, which comes from on high. Replete with columns, towers and spires, urban landscapes thus constitute the image of a hierarchy in which the trivial functions of subsistence and coexistence are in fact

subordinated to superior instances, those of the authorities, of a twofold royal and priestly sovereignty, to use G. Dumézil's words, currently relayed by skyscrapers, images of the new forces in mercantile society. In the end, due to the embedding of solids and voids, to the overhang of sophisticated cornices, the ornamental esthetic of facades suggests that architectural forms cannot be reduced to surfaces and angles, but that stone gains from being carved, sculpted, accentuated and patterned to form geometric compositions which fractalize and somehow recapitulate the complex order of the city as a whole. Visual close-ups of the decorative details of colonnades and pediments, which often form paintings in their own right, recall how much the city has need of esthetic order, because the gratuitous games of stone ornament function for the eye and the mind as a symbol of the complex perfection of everything and of the victory of ambition, work and reason over the spontaneous disorder of things.

Another cognitive value would derive, on the contrary, from the singularity of certain imaginary explorations which reveal the esthetico-symbolic potential of a number of layouts little-used, in fact, in the real history of cities. Art thus becomes a laboratory for exploring innovations and oneiric valorizations of architectural realities that have only rarely been pursued, but which might fulfil archaic needs and expectations. Thus, many of the rare or marginal, atypical arrangements that have seduced urban painters might alert us to urbanistic solutions with a strong surplus value, might perhaps revolutionize the art of living together in a city. The imaginary fascination for cities like Bruges or Venice, realized utopias of a sort, suggests, for example, just how much aquatic streets might create a sense of urban wellbeing by marrying stone and water, by substituting the boat for the automobile. Skirting a canal of houses or having a house give onto a canal would represent technical options, with strong technical and economic constraints, to be sure, yet productive of another "being-in-the-world" for the city-dweller. Likewise, the artistic frequency of buildings with copula and dome does not only indicate the weight of religious tradition, but might suggest that these rounded, all-embracing, literally vaulting forms establish a sense of the sublime in everyday life by incurving and softening forms which intersect with the underside of the high (a ceiling, roof). In familiar terms, the omnipresence of fountains and gardens recalls the extent to which urban architecture, due to its confinement within the artificial, cannot cut us off from our vital adherence to nature. For a long time art has thus anticipated, succored and legitimated the creation of planted spaces in the very heart of the city. The intertwining of the vegetal and the built gives rise to many of the compositional experiments in new cities, yet with these only rarely getting the better of the landscape meaning of gardens that artists have projected and valorized in their paintings.

Thus, far from being a merely fantastic exercise, the free exploration of partial or global images of cities may oblige us to enter into a new urban phenomenology and hermeneutic. The image enables us to break with actual givens, in fact, to resist would-be historical necessities, to transgress habits and norms. Far from being mimetic, the landscape image of the city enables us to enter a part-objective, part-subjective space in a relation of non-separation between subject and object, that's to say, between human beings and their urban environment. The first image is the one resulting from a phenomenology of "being-in-the-world" that seizes and concentrates the needs and desires of inhabiting, in the sense of deep-rootedness in an artificial world. Next, it answers to a hermeneutic approach that is conducive to taking the image—which is often unrealistic, absurd, even—metaphorically rather than literally. To really read and reread, to really see and re-see the fantastic image reveals another understanding to us of places, forms, spaces and volumes, which might enable us to regard our own art of living in the city differently. We might even see in this a sort of visionary science, less of ideal cities, too given over to drives and irrationalities, than of the ideal of a city; that is, of the most accomplished form possible from the human angle of what the space built to suit our topological needs might be. The imaginary thus performs a sort of return to the originary, the archaic, to those elementary needs of "being-in-the-world" and of inhabiting, which acts like a mental pabulum, a reserve set of possibilities for building or rebuilding, and finally as an aid to decision-making for all those responsible for our art of living in space. Cities are points of arrival, then, for technical projects, but also points of depart for the imaginary. The city, past or future, becomes a reception area for frustrations and dreams against a background of nostalgia for something irreversibly lost. The city, an object of contradictory drives towards lost origins and towards an inaccessible future horizon, indeed constitutes a transitional world between the real and the unreal.

The chapter discusses the challenges of reconstructing cityscapes featuring heritage of multiple groups after conflict and urbicide. The two cities discussed are Beirut and Sarajevo, which share the urban imaginary of a cosmopolitan past more. The chapter discusses the challenges of reconstructing cityscapes featuring heritage of multiple groups after conflict and urbicide. The two cities discussed are Beirut and Sarajevo, which share the urban imaginary of a cosmopolitan past with Christian, Muslim and Jewish communities living side by side (the latter now largely gone), followed by long years of urban warfare and segregation, and then by contested processes of post-war architectural and political reconstruction. I find ordinariness fascinating and in this 1950s novel, Dorothy Whipple explores the everyday tragedy of the breakdown of a marriage with a deft pen. Exploration. In 1950s England, there lives a happily married woman named Ellen North. It's a period of post-war rationing and drabness, the scars of war still vivid. Against this background, the life Ellen leads is extraordinarily privileged – she and her husband Avery have a large house, a happy marriage, two children and want for very little. Looking at it another way, there are thousands of contemporary women who, despite their material advantages live, like Ellen, as comely domestic ghosts, expending their life-force invisibly. - A second category of the artistic exploration of the imaginary of the city consists, conversely, in restoring, via painting as well as via the novel, flesh and blood to other freely invented concrete forms within the sphere of fiction and simulation. The pictorial imagining of architectures, then, permits formal idealities to be re-embodied in an animated magical or fantastic landscape in order – to see how – to pretend. The urban imaginary of wellbeing or of fear serves here, then, not so much to elucidate an ideal disembodied prototype as to give rise to cities in extreme situations, with the precision of the miniaturist or the bricoleur. The inverted mirror of urban life. Are these imaginary pictorial variations naught but amusement, caprice, reverie, delirium, obsession and phobia?