CITTA' INFORME
INFORMAL CITY

Collana: **Paesaggi**
5

Claudio Zanirato, architetto, è ricercatore e docente presso la Scuola di Architettura di Firenze. Ha condotto e conduce indagini fotografiche territorialii. Ha presentato le proprie opere, progetti e realizzazioni, in mostre, convegni e sedi accademiche, oltre che in numerose pubblicazioni.

In quest'opera s'indaga sulle trasformazioni recenti delle città italiane ed europee, dei primi decenni del nuovo millennio. Alla perdita della forma urbana oramai assodata si contrappongono ancora tendenze contrastanti di disgregazione e diffusione insediativa ma anche di ricerca di nuove centralità. Tutti i fenomeni in corso coinvolgono inevitabilmente le periferie della città, interne ed esterne, come scenario privilegiato di confronto.
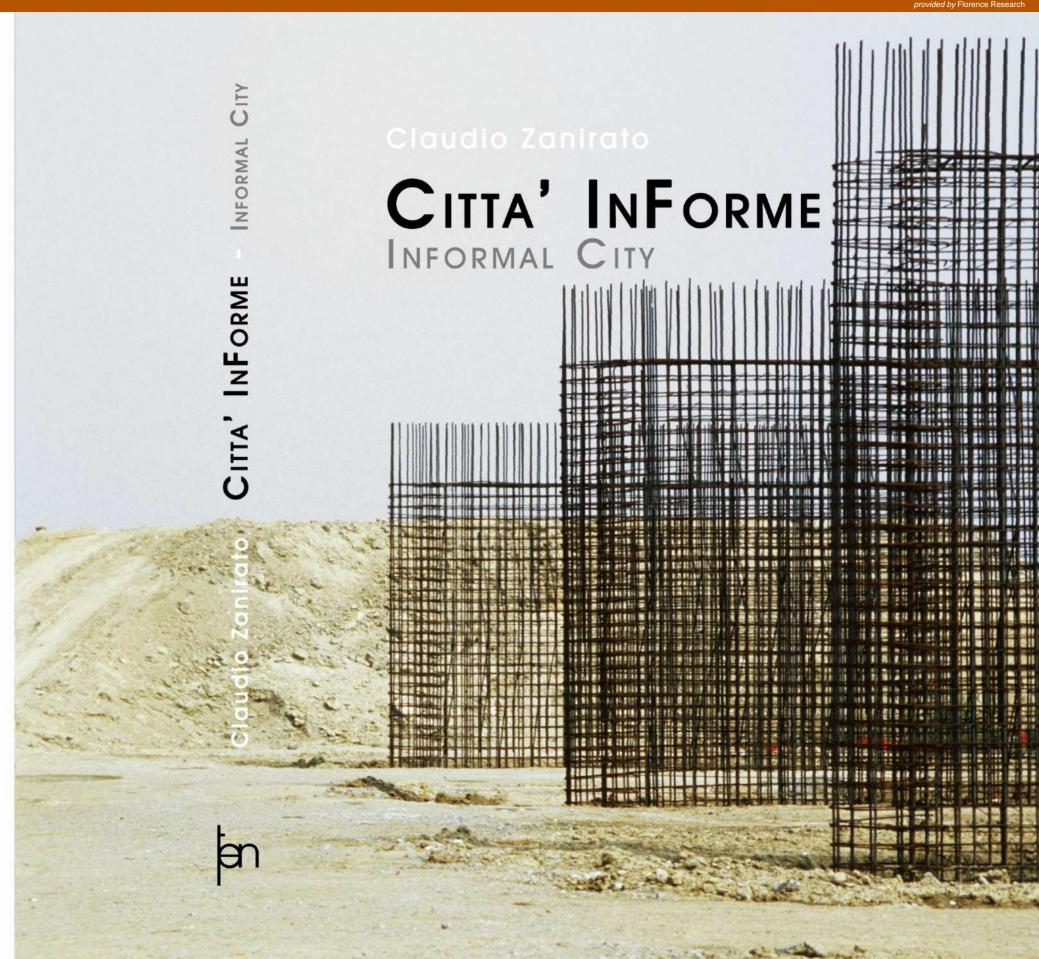
Claudio Zanirato, architect, is researcher and lecturer in Architectural and Urban Planning at the Florence School of Architecture. He has conducted territorial photographic research. He has presented his works, projects and creations in exhibitions, conferences and academic occasions, as well as in various journals and publications.

In this work he investigates the recent transformations of Italian and European cities, of the first decades of the new millennium. The loss of the now established urban form is still contrasted by contrasting tendencies of disgragging and settlement spread, but also of the search for new centralities. All the phenomena in progress inevitably involve the outskirts of the city, both internal and external, as a privileged scenario of confrontation.

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Città InForme - **InFormal City**
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Già pubblicati: 1_Sostituzioni di paesaggi
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Translations by Jane Simpson

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AMSTERDAM, '06

INFORMAL CITY

IMPULSES AND TRANSFORMATION_The transformations which have had the greatest impact on cities and their surroundings have played a role in the evolution of human civilization. Every one of these modifications is the consequence of precise cultural values which means they can be configured and they have the potential to generate further transformations. Cities are the fruit of our past and an instrument for building our future: they display the history and culture of a community, they reveal the conditions for economic and social development and they accept, sometimes unwittingly, the seeds of change that become evident over time.

Many cities developed, or were founded, as trading centres; trade is vitally important for these cities, hence their need to remain open organisms accepting change over time and space, to avoid an otherwise inevitabile decline.

When cities are expanding and dilating their boundaries they are less likely to prosper than when they attempt to imagine themselves within their perimeters. This recreation of the city within its boundaries is a common characteristic of present-day European cities which are passing through a period of transition. The history of cities should not be seen as a succession of unrelated episodes, despite instances of apparent discontinuity, but rather as a continuous dynamic process, the complex outcome of a stratification of events in which the urban organism is living proof of its constant, existential capacity for re-inventing itself, for re-proposing itself with a radically different format. Cities have never been totally defined objects in themselves and only rarely have they expressed the principle of a formal, voluntary order.

Modern cities have seen an inversion of their spatial relationships: the open spaces in the closely-knit fabric of nineteenth century cities have been replaced by buildings erected in open countryside and connected to networks. The modern industrial city follows the same development pattern where homogeneous urban areas are identified as distinct parts of a mechanism and are assigned specific roles to ensure they function correctly and nothing more.

The current urban crisis is in large part due to the ever-increasing lack of attention given to form, and to the unstoppable flight from the classic model which focussed on the centre. This crisis is responsible for the decline of the modern city, and it may usher in the era of the post-modern city, where the sense of centre is distributed along the many nodes of an unpredictable network. A rigid definition of boundaries is inimical to modern cities; nor do these cities embrace open-ended linear development, but rather indefinite development which depends on the initiative of individual entrepreneurs, where dimensions, dictated by productivity requirements, and profitability, are defined before the formal design is even considered.

For some time cities have been manipulated in ways that are alien to architectural practice; comprehensive urban plans are no longer adopted. Indeed nowadays the exception, continually confirmed, has become the norm, the custom, the design guide-line: urban design has disintegrated.

The city has long ceased to exist as a cohesive entity derived from a gradual accu-

mulation over time; rather it seems to be the fruit of its temporal disarticulation, made up of continual discontinuity. Today's city is no longer a city, it is no longer a stratification but a summation; it is no longer made of places but simply of spaces; it is no longer a place of community but a haphazard intermingling of inhabitants. Furthermore the lack of recurring elements in urban areas makes it inevitable that project designs are isolated and unrelated; it is impossible to conceive an urban project in modern cities.

Phenomena such as diffused cities and urbanized countryside are an indication of the urban design crisis; this crisis is reflected in the crisis of the traditional opposing pairs, an ordered set of relationships, upon which cities were founded: urban-natural, city-countryside, centre-periphery. "Nature" ceased to exist some time ago, the countryside around cities has vanished, and the periphery is disappearing.

FORMS/SHAPES/DESIGN, DIMENSIONS, CENTRALITY AND PERIPHERIES_Perhaps the city of today is not only unlimited, but is also seeking its own new limits: one can then ask whether these limits will be dimensional, or an unprecedented limitation imposed by ecological sustainability, and finally, will this process begin in the centre or in the periphery?

Contemporary cities seem to dissolve into space, growing beyond what the eye can perceive, despite their demographic stability having long since defined possible limits. Demolishing physical and symbolic walls, smoothing out harsh morphological and territorial features and resolving geographical communication problems have all rendered the traditional parameters of urban definition and quantitative planning useless. These tools have not been replaced by others. It seems that both industrial and post-industrial cities, closely linked to the productive economy, can be compared to company balance-sheets, with both striving to demonstrate a continuous capacity for profitable growth. But this economistic vision no longer represents the high point of development, indeed in Europe it has been decidedly in contrast with the prevailing trend for some time.

Thus, while the populations in metropolitan cities expand, their density steadily decreases, causing them to lose their constituent verve and to be transformed from a formal space into urban phenomena, a mere accumulation of spaces. These are the limits of the bourgeois city, where increased urbanization lowers the ratio of city dwellers to country dwellers.

Such growth manifests itself only as a quantitative dilatation of inhabited areas, an expansion that causes a progressive loss of structural connections between the parts as cohesion and intensity of use decline: in practice, growth without expansion or expansion without development.

In the past the importance of a city was measured in terms of its size or political importance (for instance being the capital of a nation) but in the present-day context the prominence of a city is to a large extent measured by the importance and vigour of its economic life and the extent to which it serves as a centre of command and control for global capitalism (so the more important urban settlements tend to become de-territorialized).

The urban tradition of form being circumscribed to a specific place, differentia-

Oslo, '13
Barcellona, '09

tion, has given way to an informal model where the city is everywhere and no-where and, like the economic model that traditionally sustained it, does not toler-ate dimensional boundaries, or any other definitive limits, to ensure it will always be able to adapt to changes. The periphery, the urban fringe, thus becomes a space for urban disintegration: from being a place it becomes a process of expansion with dynamic, changeable figures in constant movement.

The very different component parts of historical cities are easily identified, but can still be amalgamated in a unitary whole; in contemporary cities, where the various parts are very similar, the overall view is so chaotic that it makes urban contexts confusing, with the sole exception of their historic centres which re-main easily recognizable.

Contemporary cities are incoherent conglomerates of functions without struc-tures, the fortuitous result of a myriad of isolated decisions, rather than urban organizations.

One of the traditional ways of interpreting the modern city is the dialectic be-tween centre and periphery, the relationship between a dominant place with a rich history, the urban paradigm, and an exterior expressed as a negation of the centre itself, whose unlikely aspiration would seem to be emulating the historic city.

All development is banned from historic centres which means that new cities can only develop on the edge of their historic centres, so contemporary cities undergo a process of multiplying their centres. At the same time requests for ser-vices in the old urban centre continue to increase, stimulated by the uncontrolled growth of residential and productive suburbs. This results in the expulsion of the few remaining residents and increased congestion due to the difficulties tourists and others experience in gaining access.

The suburbs suffer from a lack of services and, more importantly, from there being no continuity of use of the services that do exist, which would eliminate the need for many journeys to the centre and, in so doing, would subvert the inhabitants' peripheralization. But in fragmented and segregated cities, where residency and work are far apart, the social disintegration resulting from diffusion implies the end of a community identity linked to the urban place, so residents of the periph-ery also pour into the centre because the periphery has no identity of its own.

The process of forming metropolitan areas began with urbanization which in re-cent decades became sub-urbanization; today this process has become dis-urban-ization, characterized by a decline of the centre, which results in counter-urbani-zation, with its intense research of non-urban areas to settle.

The vision of a dual city, divided between a centre and a periphery is in crisis and the present-day phenomena of urban change emphasize the neighborhood scale, so the city is no longer lived as a single container, but as a set of different neigh-borhoods, each with its own functions, architecture, attractions and accessibility, advantages and disadvantages for different residents and city users.

Paradoxically, the identity and the contents of the traditional, partly subverted, forms of the city are blurred and dissolved on the urban fringe. The decline of urban forms, which results when the production of communication activities is ousted from public spaces, means social interaction no longer necessarily takes

PARIGI, '01
COPENAGHEN, '13

place in a physical space, but can be organized on immaterial networks instead: this gives an entirely new meaning to both centres and peripheries.

The temporary, uncertain nature of these vast marginal areas, defined as periphery, tends to make one think that the city lies elsewhere; it would be more appropriate to consider these areas as part of the city in its initial state, or even as visions of the contemporary city in the making. The periphery is where novel ideas irrupt, a sort of limit state in which constituent processes are modified before they are even known. This makes the periphery, an urban region of momentary transformations, a modern issue par excellence, a new conception of the unresolved city. The value of the peripheries as frontiers of urban dynamism and as metaphors of an ongoing evolutionary model should be kept in mind: consider the peripheries as new design spaces where the current challenges of sustainability and the new paradigms of re-cycling and reducing land consumption are tackled. In other words, there is no need to dwell excessively on the negative aspects of the peripheries - the irreconcilable tension, alienation and conflict - but rather see them as an opportunity, a space of freedom, as a willingness to consciously make original ground-breaking choices and to adopt innovative methods and different interpretations of everyday life, to rethink the city as a whole and to see the peripheries as real laboratories of urban innovation.

COMMUNICATIONS AND THE GLOBAL VILLAGE_From a historical perspective, any communication innovation has coincided with a drastic change in spatial organization, which has always led to new urban configurations. So the impact of the new intercommunication networks on cities, and the extent to which they reshape cities, needs to be studied.

Urban settlement follows in the tracks of the prevailing communication system: the accumulation of immaterial documents, information and contacts favoured by telematic systems paradoxically encourages a random accumulation of built-up spaces, that exceed real needs, and needlessly consume territory.

The on-going telematic-tertiary revolution encourages home tele-working and production decentralization: this has increased indiscriminate land use and heightened the tendency to adopt an "urban hermit" lifestyle. The emerging "intelligent city" model, the precursor of the "smart city", resembles an urban system made up of many small, complex pieces, similar to an electronic circuit.

Recent data highlight the consolidation of transport and communication systems, increasingly via ether rather than on land. This may lead to a change in land use (freeing up land?) as well as spatial condensation. These new forms of transport and communication will tend to progressively free people from the need to concentrate in limited spaces - a clear counter-trend to high-density urban living.

Physical proximity is increasingly irrelevant for accessing, consuming and participating; this detracts meaning from the city which is no longer seen as a palimpsest of the rationalization and overall manifestation of social relations. This means that network and dedicated interconnections tend to have the upper hand over local interdependencies as factors driving urban development, to the point where the city, considered as a community with a limited territorial base, loses cohesion. Metropolitan areas are therefore increasingly inhabited by people who tend to

dialogue with the outside world, rather than with fellow citizens (there may be dialogue with fellow citizens but without meeting them in person) and this results in groups of people being segregated in smaller and smaller fragments of territory. So the idea of the city as a cultural accumulation able to infuse its physical nucleus with the power to organize a large portion of subordinate territory, enters into crisis, since the overall cultural structure is no longer physically identified with the city, but with de-materialized information, the new symbol of power. A power that no longer requires a physical location, albeit elsewhere, because it has no need for a physical centre in which to settle and present itself.

The immaterial, post-industrial city therefore spreads further and further as the information world progressively shrinks. Communication systems are designed to expand space and to reduce time, tending to reduce space to zero as a function of real time. "Short-term", "constant renewal" are synonyms of modernity, in comparison with conservation.

Cars and computer screens both induce urban spatial explosion, particularly in the form of chaotic connections of increasingly confined and isolated synthetic environments. Global communication, facilitated by telematics, inevitably makes places, and the architectural styles that characterize them, seem irrelevant because physical sites are no longer needed for communicating, whereas in the past, cities originated as places for meeting and exchanging goods. The contemporary frenetic obsession with time leads to the breaking up of territory, considered to be a field of collective relations, and with it urban identity.

INHABITED LANDSCAPES AND THE SPRAWLING CITY_The post-modern city is unfinished and therefore has to be judged while its transformation is still in progress. Its outline appears undefined, its form hidden, an architecture of external additions that leaves a vague fluidity between interstitial and internal spaces, a casual rather than intentional relationship with nature. This is the panorama of the diffused city, where the entire landscape is inhabited and, like the architecture, destined to disappear. Landscape is the natural background for architecture, the plan which defines the city, the space which allows for the comparisons required for architecture to be both an interior and an exterior at the same time.

The original city-country relationship is replaced by that of the city-metropolis, where residential buildings, recreational and tertiary activities, are located in the extensive peri-urban area; these activities have no constructive relationship with the natural environment or with the urban context. Projections suggest this trend will lead to sub-urbanization and ruralization, that is, the fusion between city and countryside, the progressive cancellation of their differences, like a pseudo-territory.

In modern cities the urban continuum forms islands within the emptiness of the dispersed nature-countryside: green areas have become the symbol of a lost relationship. Similarly, in the yet-to-be-urbanized countryside, complex buildings of all kinds are emerging, like scattered islands, fenced-in and introverted. There are also holiday houses scattered everywhere which require adequate infrastructure, the provision of which makes these houses less original and less recognizable, but does nothing to repopulate the area to its former level.

For many modern urban theorists, the ideal city is the "city-territory", inspired by the garden city, populated by single-family houses surrounded by parks and gardens. Both models are based on non-intensive growth and urban ruralization. This means that urban-territorial spaces are no longer defined by the continuity of built-up areas but by the continuity and neutrality of their infrastructure networks. In this scenario, "nodal" replaces "central" in a generalized eccentricity of endless suburbs and centres without "boundaries", reduced to mere pin points. As we have seen, spatial disintegration prevents urban identification because the indistinct and discontinuous weave of the building fabric is ripped to shreds when it encounters extended territory, and the built-up areas are unable to relate to the un-edified areas with any clarity. This ends up preventing the distinct emergence of an urban model. The extraordinary building expansion in recent years has led to an irregular and seemingly random choice of building sites and this makes it hard to identify the different parts of the urban landscape and to recognize their hierarchy.

As the need for focal points for installing urban functions declines, these functions have been dispersed throughout the territory; it seems that everything can be located anywhere. Thus the multifaceted accumulation of buildings, constructed on the margins of an irregular road network, is not bound by any traditional figurative identity, which could link urban form and building typology, so the rise of such buildings, and their future, are both uncontrolled. The concept of proximity, on which cities were founded, is no longer based on the concept of physical distance, but on accessibility, considered to be a localizing factor that acts in time rather than in space, and on the development of polarities, that organize the new settlement systems, that overlap with traditional polarities: the proximity to network nodes, therefore, as they become the principal strategic factors for transformation.

It is probable that contemporary cities should no longer be considered expanding spaces but rather should be seen as a system of services with almost unlimited potential. In a short time, we have moved away from closed, circular. public spaces to the rectilinear dimension of movement and now we are moving towards hybrid, multi-purpose spaces which will result in cities progressively losing their materiality.

DRIFTS AND POSTINDUSTRIAL CITIES_The temporal dimension, not the spatial dimension, determine how large cities are constructed: the prevalent unit of measurement is the time required to reach a destination,which means the distance-time binomial prevails over spatial identity. So daily commuter movements which bypass the city nucleus prevail. In so doing they eliminate every centripetal hierarchy and redistribute the main service functions along the boundaries. This creates a fringe city that surrounds an increasingly weak centre: the older established city centre continues to atrophy and is gradually transformed into a pedestrian-only area dedicated to shopping and entertainment with limited vehicle access.

The central and most esteemed parts of urban systems tend to perform the function of consumption absorption, almost always induced by external factors. This

increases the geographical distance between production sites and places supplying/consuming products and services - a territorial displacement between direct economic interests and local society. The unforeseen success of individual mobility and of telecommunications systems, together with a decline in production and the internationalization of distribution, have facilitated the disintegration of the strategic role of cities, based on concepts of accessibility, proximity and variety.

Information is essentially raw material manipulated by post-industrial society, and as such it possesses a symbolic, immaterial capacity that replaces the vital importance of manual activities in the industrial city. This change reconfigures the cities materially. Local identities and urban characteristics tend to be levelled, to promote a vision of the territory that acts as a support for functional systems and as energy to be consumed; the territory as a space for exchange and generalized consumption, where mobility and displacement are exacerbated and the consumer-citizen, socially isolated, is transformed into a competitor.

The territorial fragmentation caused by low-density scattered settlements also implies a pulverization of the service systems that, together with a marked specialization and differentiation of the parts, further stimulate all the communication systems. Being close to the centre still provides a competitive advantage for transport, so a series of activities for which transport remains crucial will still be concentrated around the centre, as will residents who greatly value their time. It follows that ease of access and transportation times still affect settlements and effective poly-centrism is only possible when these two factors are carefully managed.

The post-industrial city is thus inhabited by isolated communities in which individuals build their sociality through many "communities of interests", participating simultaneously in multiple communities and activities in which spatial proximity plays no role.

IDENTITIES AND EVIDENCE, EMPTINESS AND ABSENCE_Recognizability is linked to difference, to the non-homologation of all places. So urban identity is determined by the correlation between differences, from which derives an unrepeatable originality. The relational space of the contemporary city is a sort of flexible territory, devoid of figurative recognition, but full of potential for service. This means that contemporary social complexity generates the proliferation of a multitude of identities. These identities generate an enormous number of specific interest groups, a typological "explosion", that increasingly evades classification, configuring cities as the sum of independent and often conflicting elements.

But contemporary cities also see the search for their identity in continuous and ever more rapid change, provisional in nature, which represents a sort of "programmed chaos". Cities express the culture of those who live there and those who lived there in the past: it cannot be denied that globalization homologizes, but it also pushes to accentuate diversity and identity. The ties binding business and cities have become weaker: the city's role is now limited to providing simple managerial and infrastructural assistance for activities that are largely based elsewhere and which can be re-located to distant places very easily.

The establishment of a network system implies that the intensity of the interac-

tions between cities within the system varies only slightly as a function of the distances between them, but is very dependent on their respective specializations. This means a city can enter into many functional relationships which will require an equal number of identities; this fragmentation results in the different spatial and relational areas of the urban fabric being increasingly separated. On the other hand, the increased need for cities to establish themselves as poles of attraction, for both capital and individuals, should lead to the accentuation of their specific characteristics: the image of the city being promoted becomes more important than its reality.

In modern open cities, the spaces between buildings have become mere distancing mechanisms with no character. The ever-increasing amount of urban space and free land required for vehicles to circulate and park makes it difficult to properly formalize the essence of these spaces, protagonists despite everything, which simply remain empty. This de-qualification of open spaces stridently signals the loss of a principle of city construction: cities are increasingly divided into voids; this symbolizes the waste of existing resources and also highlights the absence of content. While cities implode in their heterotopias, in the non-places of their peripheries, myriads of isolated, individual enclosures, technologically advanced quasi fortifications, enigmatic containers, proliferate (in accordance with economic liberalism). The resulting model is for a diffuse, fragmented and segregated city, where even urban planning and building regulations tend to divide and distance and to produce isolated fragments, rather than to mix and produce coherent landscapes.

Contemporary cities have been transformed from unitary and well-defined places into banal and disordered piles of discontinuous fragments, even though they are connected online; collective places par excellence have been reduced to the algebraic sum of individual places. This explains the spread of increasingly rigid, less accommodating spaces: pieces of an indifferent landscape, with characters that do not live there, but just pass through, barely touching them.

The provision of urban services is concentrated in huge mono-functional enclaves which are scattered around the suburban fabric. These enclaves produce a functional segmentation that is the basis for suburban fragmentation. Their atopic characteristics can be deduced from their land use, their environmental eradication and the dominance of large infrastructure and buildings, built on an over-sized territorial scale: dimensional gigantism but also content and functional gigantism.

DISINTEGRATION, SPONTANEITY, INDIFFERENCE_When buildings become independent and the space between them becomes ever larger, a conflict arises between the overall sense, the city of belonging, and the sense of the single artifact. Fragments highlight a lack of unity and demonstrate the contemporary trend to the interrupted, the unfinished, the discontinuous, from which an image of the city as a whole made up of large, incomplete components emerges. The concepts of discontinuity, fracture and fragmentation are enhanced once cities are no longer perceived as homogeneous territories.

The contemporary city is therefore seen as a constantly changing open work, the result of a myriad of isolated decisions, whose transformation is stimulated by the habits and lifestyles of those who live there. For centuries sensitivity has been

refined around the appearance of a stable image but sensitivity now tends towards unstable, de-constructed images.

In contemporary projects, form no longer structures relationships but dissolves into frenetic, intermittent appearances of disordered images. The cities that are emerging are nothing like the historic city, but they are still "coexisting cities", with their intertwining diversity and contrasting visions.

These simultaneous - and unstable - coexistences support the hypothesis of the city as an event, given the difficulties of defining its form. The ungovernability generated by the constant transformation processes within the built-up area, is such that the only possible resource for redefining the image of the city is a vacuum.

The city is so frenetic that it also eludes urban planners who seem unable to think of it as coherent whole. In their efforts to control city development, they restrict planning to portions of territory. The city has experienced its most recent expansion by inventing itself, without any precise planning directives, or sometimes in spite of these planning directives; urban sprawl starts exactly where increasingly inadequate urban planning ends. The saturation of the centre corresponds to the apparent trivialization of locations within the diffused city, because inter-relational information systems undermine every concept of centrality. Functional zoning and sectorial planning are being replaced by new organizational procedures based on overlap, immediacy and hybridization. Diffusion is associated with hybridization and a mingling of uses. Horizontal hybridization, favoured by high technology and tele-work, is characterized by transformations of varying intensity, the result of a myriad of small projects. Vertical hybridization, (which more closely resembles historical cities), is not used.

Urban places, therefore, are not identified by individual spaces but are articulated in a series of relationships between spaces, which are proposed as shreds of city whose usefulness to urban life is available for individual interpretation. So the city can be seen as a great hybrid landscape, where the heterogeneity and diversity of each of its component islands, distinct parts or fragments that provide a solution for the most varied lifestyles, making it possible for all citizens to have their own city.

The concentration, continuity and closure typical of places, today echo with the rarefaction, discontinuity and opening of non-places: this is changing the destiny of cities.

The concept of urban "centre" is also gradually disappearing: cities that have extended beyond their historic limits now have several centres, forced as they are to continuously invent new attractions so as not to collapse dimensionally. If there is no strong centre, then a weak periphery area, from which the centre will try to stand out, may not survive. The impossibility of distinguishing between built and unbuilt implies uncertainty in defining city boundaries, the traditional relationship between urban areas and the areas surrounding them.

Today's cities are far more impacted by internal margins such as disused industrial areas, obsolete prison and military areas, railway areas than cities were in the past. These margins are static and can be surmounted using systems with considerable articulation within the surrounding city. Internal margins are not only physically empty but are often devoid of content and have no interaction with the city.

Western cities of the new millennium are now facing a pause in their cyclical growth process, which until now has been the most frenetic and uncontrolled development of the modern era. The notion of development no longer coincides with physical expansion: historical cities transform, re-qualify and/or de-commission their built environment (especially badly in recent decades) rather than attempting to "conquer" new territories. This is one of the effects of role involution and spatial contraction in many cities brought about by widespread de-industrialization.

Declining population growth allows cities to redefine their boundaries and to re-direct their construction efforts towards transforming the existing urban fabric, which is increasingly seen as cultural heritage that deserves to be valorized. An awareness that cities cannot extend ad infinitum also tends to make people aware of the value of the existing urban fabric. This generally means that peripheries seek an identity by becoming more organic parts of cities to which thus far they have not succeeded in belonging.

A new urban structure, defined by a minimally hierarchical network of centres and integrated points, dynamic poly-centrism, replaces the traditional notion of centrality and deals with reclaiming and strengthening external areas to facilitate the proper functioning of the urban complex

A possible response to undifferentiated, informal development in fringe areas, and to reclaiming unity and quality for cities, might be to once again consider these peripheral areas as a distinct part of the territory, thereby reversing their dispersion. Blocking expansion along urban fringes creates similar conditions to those that allowed the positive, value-laden development of pre-industrial consolidated cities: reduced peripheralization and increased urban value with its own functional dimension and specificity.

DENSIFY AND MARGINALIZE, TEMPORARY PERIPHERAL PROJECTS_Densifying the urban fringes that exist within large open spaces, would make it possible to re-establish reciprocal relations between fullness and emptiness. Cities are also places of contrasts and attractions which need to be stimulated to provide opportunities for improvement: the contrast between fullness and emptiness is one of the most direct; another contrast is reacquiring the experience of arriving. Defining the limits of the diffused city makes it possible to evaluate and understand its various parts, by reconfiguring the architectural places of identification. Reacquiring identity within the periphery is the only way to restore value to the historical centre and to re-establish their dialectical relationship which was broken off some time ago.

The confusion found in marginal areas is likewise both a risk and a planning opportunity: continuous modification generates instability, the destiny of these areas oscillates between the homologation of an indeterminate suburban sprawl and the problematic strengthening of small local identities which increases awareness of their differences.

Cities are no longer expanding so there is no pressing need to shape and control their expansion process, but rather to reorganize their extended territories: to impress an urban form upon these territories using orientation signs and paths, so

as to reconfigure the emptiness of the territory that is not yet a city.

Endowing prominent architectural features with diffusive characteristics transforms them into differentially recognizable signals, from which a spatial inter-polarity of variable intensity can be obtained; this inter-polarity enhances the independence of the values of the relational grid, and balances grid flow as far as possible.

It is not possible to rehabilitate the periphery without blocking expansion (which is happening for other reasons): densification, margining and thinning out are used for this recovery process, along with concentrations of capital and attention. Working on the city fringe does not only mean consolidating the city, but also contributing to disruptive actions: where a succession of boundaries has marked the growth of urban formations, defining new limits can lead to new forms as a strategy for dealing with this change. The city fringes have always defined the overall design of the city, revitalizing its architectural role, to give new shape to the enlarged city. Thus, the search and construction of the fringe areas should be a priority for the incoherent city of the present. The new limits of urban systems however, can no longer be referred to the usual conformations (concentric, radio-centric, reticular, linear) but to their resistant residue, which can be reinter-preted. The rigid, formal coherence of these interventions in border areas seems necessary to distinguish them from the informal relationship condition. These interventions do not involve the countryside, which is perceived as incomprehensible, and they also reject the old and new periphery.

The definition of new limits should be accompanied by the removal of others: internal city borders, overcoming functional islands, reversing de-socialization   in the direction of urban continuity.

No recent projects have tackled the subject of urban configuration in existing cities: it is virtually impossible to imagine a well defined contemporary city, indeed contemporary cities seem to rebel against the very idea. Nor is our ability to understand the contemporary city equal to the task.

Faced with increasingly complex contemporary cities, with extremely complex communication systems, architectural spaces tend to level out to a single "a-type". The trend towards abandoning typologies, witnessed in recent years, can be seen as a crisis of models, which have been given precedence over architecture, or as the birth of new models, possibly using hybridization. Model production occurs when hybridization is consolidated after frequent repetitions in different contextual conditions. Hybridization arises from the coexistence of different functions and typologies. In consolidated cities these produce a stratified complexity; in more recent cities they give rise to horizontal sequences of combinations.

In the past, when the concept of "place" was studied, research focused on identity and uniqueness and highlighted differences. Today, an identity is always sought for non-places, but it is no longer unique, because non-places are designed by analogy and similarities. Their architecture has an undefined outline, a vague, random shape and an extreme fluidity of internal-external space. The non-place has an architecture of additions that extends outwards; a communion with nature takes place on its external boundaries in flexible, elastic, transition spaces, neglected conformations that determine the contemporary landscape.

Some contemporary atopies are indifferent to their site. This generates detachment: detachment from the ground, uprooting and alienation from the place. The undifferentiated dispersion of the built-up parts results in the dis-identification of undeveloped areas.

It should be noted however that uniform, repetitive building types also correspond to the homogeneity of how and when space is used, so we can deduce that the identity of these places is to be attributed to the uniqueness of the contained behaviors, in a tendency towards spontaneous self-exclusion. On an urban scale, these attitudes take shape in the poetics of the object: this explains why we understand the construction of the city as a set of objects, why we underline the symbolism of the building and the inter-relationships between the buildings. The city is seen as a nebula in which to insert poetic objects. It is characterized by disorientation, change of scale and de-contextualization but also by superimpositions, a search for the aesthetic character of the common object.

Instability is an inherent part of the contemporary world and the shattering of architectural organisms mirrors that of the entire periphery. The progressive and problematic shattering of the landscape, and of architectural languages, implies the coexistence in the urban visual framework of different languages, of juxtapositions between nature and built-up area and between interiors and exteriors, of concatenated spatial sightings, of stratifications of different elements in the same place, and of a continual perceptions of voids ... works that are distinguished by the use of a complex vocabulary of architectural elements - protrusions, edges, planar tensions, vibrations - within a well balanced general design, in which structural elements and multiple surfaces, which sometimes seem mobile and light, can give life to objects with precarious settings.

In the past architecture confronted the heroic intentions of representation and of political projects, but today it has to confront the banality of everyday life: architecture has passed from the need to represent, to the constraint of metamorphosis. As is the case with the suburbs there is frequently no evidence of context, though sometimes it is induced by the need to reduce environmental impact. Architecture that renounces forming a city, in order to be a witness to itself, has generated a massive quantity of recent construction that overwhelms the few existing quality projects. Architectural projects, evermore dramatically related to cities that no longer have rules, can no longer relate to cities in a structured fashion.

As was the norm in historic cities, buildings symbolizing urban life have sprung up in contemporary cities: hypermarkets, malls and multiplexes. These complexes are like small cities, inward-looking with compact, anonymous facades; portals similar to the city gates of historic cities mark the entrances and stand out like fortresses above the flat expanse of the parking lots in which they are immersed. Inside, the metaphor of the city continues: there are streets, galleries, squares and all kinds of activities; there are traditional urban spaces for walking and for meeting people. These enormous containers (hospitals, shopping centres, sporting venues, factories, discotheques), scattered around the territory, are gigantically oversized and disarmingly introverted: they create estrangement, do not generate relationships and seem to float in the urbanized territory.

Private-scattered seems to correspond to public-dense, in circumscribed disposi-

tions of volumes that stand out as noteworthy within the new, rather than the old, building fabric. These volumes are a figurative representation of closed, covered public space that contrasts with the complexity of urban functions. Often their isolated location, in areas with low levels of urbanization, is simply due to vehicle access and availability of parking spaces.

Relational voids dominate consolidated cities but diffused cities seem to be dominated by the volumes of large polarizing containers. Closer inspection reveals that these centres have a similar settlement logic to ancient cities: they settle along main roads and close to junctions. Nowadays, though, settlement is in proximity to highways, metropolitan railways and junctions which dot and cross anthropized territory rather than roads, rivers, intersections and bridges in the natural environment.

Taken together, these infrastructural non-places represent the connective tissue of contemporary cities, the authentic cohesive factor of the urban landscape ... determined by mechanical circulation rather than by human movement. This makes the "peripheral" category a key element for the whole city, and for understanding it, and reveals it to be the symbolic form of the current interpretation of path, fabric and buildings ...

Sometimes these complex, introverted containers seem to want to hide the problems of the external space under a covering constructed in an approved architectural style. The conception of covering is consistent with the idea that these internal spaces are an enclave, an interstitial space, defining an internal spatial condition with no outside.

The sense of otherness that characterizes these architectures refers in part to concepts elaborated by Loos, where the design codes for interior and exterior spaces express distinct values: interior design codes are linked to the particularity and specificity of the functions contained, external ones to the need for decorum and representation essential for an urban facade. This means that it is becoming increasingly common for architectural attention to not go much beyond the façade and to no longer be interested in internal spatiality: external surfaces, more than other architectural elements, register the new linguistic structures of the buildings and make them emerge with a strong identity.

A careful externality, expressed through the covering of the building, rather than through context-related values, essentially reflecting the image that the architectural object gives of itself, as a striking fact, able to impose itself in the architectural panorama for its novelty and exceptionality of event: pushed towards architectural representativeness, unable to combine the complexity of the architectural fact, giving it back only reductive and partial values.

In this way cities will only be able to reacquire the urban functionality that comes from self-representation: sometimes it will be necessary to differentiate between internal and external spaces, without expecting them to exactly coincide. The new spatiality of the city signals an attempt to overcome modernity: the language of new architectures is outlined as the result of contaminations and mixing different codes.

COPENAGHEN, '13

AMSTERDAM, '06