



Visions of New City Places

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Background Image: Forward, by
A. Mason, Birmingham

Artist as a visionary

Things are not as they seem. We live in a multilayered construction of TIME & SPACE. The ENVIRONMENT - the place where things happen. "EVENT-UALITY" Everything moves-shifts-drifts-changes, transforms, emerges, decays. MOST OF WHAT WE SEE IS, TO USE DUCHAMP'S TERM - (IN DELAY) - our lives - the time span of objects in coherency - even (Sartre's) TREE - placed in Nausea before ROQUETIN

The Artist in this, is faced with a playground - the geography of her/his imagination. We do not all have to be Blakes to read our position, to know our places - to see the SIGNS, to understand the living forces of the COMPOST heap - re-composing. Those involved in PUBLIC ART as Artists are, if commissioned, paid to have VISION, to build, oppose, comment upon, this terrifying realm of urbes - the conurbation. The artist acts, makes, lives her dreams out on the field of Enna - "The Oracle of Delphus" - (now engulfed by industrial sites near Athens). Make no mistake: if we, (and we all will) live here in these exciting, pulsating, choking, terrifying places, we can see if given a chance, visions of how it can be other than it is. We must be in delay - dwelling, and gently with love weave our past into the coming destiny if that is not to be all clamour, commerce and pain of loneliness. As Sartre said (of the visionary) *Placing an institution in a framework of judgement it becomes a PHENOMENON.



Coal Power Plant at Sant Adrià de Besòs

Environment- A life Space

That which is around us - THE 'IS' within which we 'live' our lives - the water to our goldfishness - a place for action, happening and happenstance - our surroundings. psychological and physical the cultural and the economic the parameters of love and hate fear and security shelter and abandonment society and solitude

All artists are involved in 'environment' Why ART at all? Million dollar question To refuse (in Beckett's phrase) The refusal of the Universe' To scratch our significance on the glassy granite of time passing To record our humanness, in terms of the imaginary - that 'it' should be other - our desires our yearning and our pain to return home - our nostalgia. "When I consider life, I am appalled to find it a shapeless mass.....the landscape of my days appear to be composed, like mountainous regions, of varied materials heaped up pell-mell. There I see my nature, itself composite, made up of equal parts of instinct and training. Here and there protrude the granite peaks of the inevitable, but all about is rubble from the landslips of chance" - *Memoirs of Hadrian: M>Yourcenaar. "Most artists in the Western World, inherit the late 19th Century tradition of Romantic and Realist protest".*

Public art - private thoughts

The Problem is: The relation between private thoughts and public art in places ouvertes - open for all. When art



Parc del Clot. Barcelona

Frank Gehry's,
Guggenheim Museum.
Bilbao



- the 'will and wish child' of the maker, is placed, given, commissioned - there arise in all those individual hearts and minds which throng in endless carousel around the "city - body - the audience - the consumers, those who appropriate, dispose to meaning" - a thousand debates. In simpler times - a simpler more formal structure - the artist/craftsman in his time, knew and had his place - all was as it should be and all was said and done and known to be - 'other' was inconceivable. NOW - it is the GLOBAL TOWN in which we all live - "Communications City". Transported as the hymns would say - instantly by the time warp machine - the car/the place, the antigravity machine - the floor, the lift. Everything is debatable - and complex.



Birmingham's Canals

Sophisticated, loving care must be taken to 'do the right thing'. What is right? Whose rights - the viewer? the artists? the commissioner? the payer? the passer-by? of those who stay, of those who go? Art in Public Places has a sad blandness record - (the Commissioning Committees of butchers and bakers on chairs) **Compromise - Public Ornamental Design, Mawkish Mythic Municipal Symbols.** Commissioned in 1981 then in 1985 - removed from the plaza in front of Jacob K. Javits Building in Foley Square, Lower Manhattan. For Serra the prime attraction was "the very difficulty the site offered him", for the public who used the square, it represented a monstrosity. "the world is in an inadequate state - the individual 'acts' and brings via language the construction (a world) into being".



Passeig de Colom. Barcelona

Art is a phenomenon - part of human activity (all art is public). Art is a necessity for health, a vital product of the human mind, heart & sensibility. Art exists - yes as part of European heritage - exported like democracy to the world - part of human freedom - it does confront habitude & order. Plato wished to ban the artists to the margins - to be in fact expelled from the Ideal Republic.

Artists challenge, do not fit - are dangerous - have a role to challenge cultural conformity, banality and boredom. They have in history, led the opposition to oppression - Czech artists, German artists, Spanish and Catalan artists. Art is a private activity engaged in by consenting adults - with a patron, public or private, as the active agent between the parties. Such activity in Public as we have discussed is another matter likely to cause offence, in a society, frozen in banality and mediocrity. for art in Galleries so for prayer in chapels so for football in football pitches and stadia I have some sympathy with the notion that open spaces/spaces/odd spaces are often best left alone. Art & Pleasure. Art about lightness

The city

Reality- Kinesis

The City as a Reality - *"A huge novel we live in"* A.C. Ballard - *"in a drugged state, needing sensation; and violence"* provides it .fictional lives sus-

pended by technology. The City of power and politics - of control and surveillance. The City of Kafka and the alienation of self from self. Joyce, who lived his life suspended in the Cities of Europe - fled from the Dublin of his Ulysses, acknowledged his debt to the writings of Eduard Dujardin - particularly his filmic direction compounding time and space to the virtual reality of his book "The Bays are Sere". In the opening pages, we are drawn into the city of Paris viewed as a place of a million separate incidents played out in the arena called 'Paris'. Dujardin's text runs like a viewing camera, tracing the weave of incident like moves in a film. We become the inhabitants of the scene. It becomes 'Kinematographic'. Later in his poetry - Joyce explores the sense of being in the city - particularly the walker in the city.

The City has changed its rhythm, since these early 20th Century tracts. The automobile has deepened the crisis. Speed, the essence of the Futurist vision of the city as megapolis, now dominates our urban lives. We still live largely in cities laid out from the Middle Ages as to road pattern. The time - mechanism, the car individually transporting us in from home to business, in and out of the city, compounds its restless, poisonous clamour. Ridley Scott's apocalyptic vision of a city state in the film 'Blade Runner' - a supra Los Angelean construction of the future super city extending outwards to encompass the 'paysage' and upwards into a stinking, dripping entanglement of decaying town, creaking antique technology and multinational economic political consumerism shot with legiti-



Helsinki Bay



Joan Salvat-Papasseit, 1919
Facsimile

DRAMA EN EL PORT

GLOP D'OCEÀ
EN LA NIT

(ABILITAT AMB LA CLAROR DELS HOMES

ARC-VOLTAIC)

ALS MEUS PEUS
LLUMS BLANQUES

VERDES

ROGES

EL MASCLE

TRANSATLÀNTIC

UDOLANT

LES SIRENES NO HO SABEN

PERÒ XISCLEN

ELS EMIGRANTS S'EMPENYEN

PASSO RAN DE

DRAGA

QUE ÉS FOSCA I CREIX

LA BOIA INQUIETA

T À G L
R N O

ARA LES ONES CANTEN EL DESIG D'ENGOLIR

EL TRO AL LLUNY

SOSPIR DE LES TENEBRES

JO HEM VEIG EN L'HORITZÓ

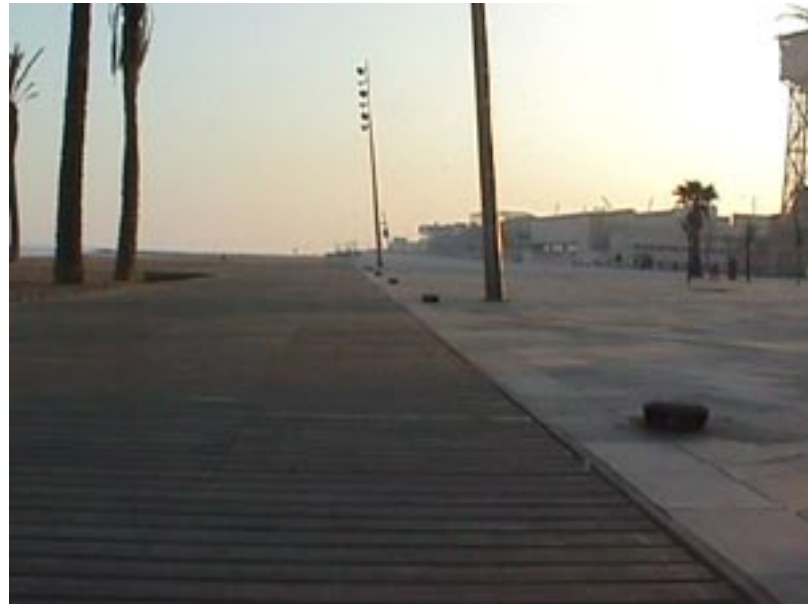
FORA EL PORT LES GAVINES REPOSEN

mised 'state' violence. We lie somewhere in between this, not yet totally economically driven, held in some way by a notion of the city virtues that the Greeks & Romans held to personify the city. We still have City Councils - to whom an increasingly smaller role is given for 'virtuous' enactments - education, drains, leisure and planning.

The city

From Renaissance times, the European city developed fundamentally to provide order - order in which trade, exchange and communication could function within a realm of protection. All relations, in architectural terms specifically were seen as "real relations - a world of visible or intelligible traces of harmony (giving) access to the cosmic order". The city and its objects (buildings, sculptures, monuments) were there to "sensitize the subject to knowledge, to create paths for the connection between spirit, intellect and experience" - an object lesson. In some sense the modern notion of art - as public art in the city - has subscribed to this neo-platonic episteme - donated largely by public bodies - usually quangos seeking to 'elevate' the public - largely ignoring the Cartesian/ Lockean notions of relativity of perception and displacement of an individuated comprehension of meaning.

There is still much of Rome in miniature in the 'City' of Cardiff - but it was started in 1890 and completed in 1932!. At this moment a 'new' Cardiff is being built - a commer-



Passeig de Mar. Barcelona



Barceloneta with L'estel ferit by R. Horn

cial regeneration as in so many European Cities. Here, an economic company, Cardiff Bay Development Corporation is re-structuring the Bay Docks area, with a modern mix of leisure complexes, up-market housing 'condominiums', shopping malls and a new Opera House, with a heavy dose of public art commissions - all done for the public good. It involves difficult environmental issues - a destruction of a mudflat wild bird breeding area to create a lagoon behind a barrage involving delicate water table problems. A similar exercise is planned for Croydon, South of London. This motorway sliced conurbation almost buries the remnants of the former market town. It is viewed now as an Alphaville waiting for Godard - an empty landscape of psychosis. Envisaged are 'parking blocks' to take the mordant cars - and a dramatic sinking of the central divisive motorway underground, to be roofed over like a great valley. 'We will have Manhattan' they cry - a place of 'dreadful grim spaces - disconnected from ground'. To offset this, a great tower - a spire of light is planned to mark the city of new technology - a city jazz in Warehouseville. It seems that architects are deeply conservative. Cities are not machines - but dynamic heaps needing fundamental re-structuring.

Walking in the city

All cities generate a constant cycle of spatial practice - walks - walking creates our experience as citizens. Each family, each individual comes out of essential solitude and the privacy of room, flat or house to go somewhere,

to connect or merely to 'be outside' - to glide anonymously in the presence of 'others' - and to sense presence within engagement - a kind of mute togetherness - 'being' alone with the 'rest'. In his book 'Practice of Everyday Life' Michael de Certeau speaks of two kinds of City - the Concept City of urban planners and administrators - a 'panorama city - theoretical, simulacral', which misunderstands spatial practice. He speaks of the 'official discourse' which is up there, aloof in office tower whilst 'down below' live ordinary practitioners of the city - who walk, "Wanders manner" whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" (which) they write without being able to read it. Certeau suggests that the artist - both Medieval and of the Renaissance 'provided' the way of seeing the city in a God-like way long before the World Trade Centre provided the means to stand above the city to 'see it' as a god would. They created predictively the perspective city in painted fictions 'pictures' - and literally paved the way for the concept two-dimensionally maintained by the city authorities - in an all seeing - all pervading system of authority, subjecting the turmoil of bustling individual and subversive life practices with its opaque projections. *"A migrational or metaphorical city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city.....they (the city authorities) augurate the transformation of the urban fact into the concept of a city. Long before the concept of self gives rise to a particular figure of history, it assumes that this fact can be dealt with as a unity determined by an urbanistic ratio linking the city to the concept never makes them identical but is plays on their progressive symbio-*



Pei's and Ass. New WTC, Barcelona

sis: to plan a city is both to think the very physicality of the real and to make that way of thinking the plural effective; it is to know how to articulate it and to be able to do it".

Artists, and those who design (plan), take their place in the power pronouncement and struggle of the city organism. Artists as producers of 'public art', place their objects - sculptures, cultural transformations etc., in the framework of the concept city. Art is conceptual - and city artworks stand outside the unlegislated 'ordinary lives' to walk the ideologised discourse of the dominant power - the patrons - be they economic or legislative. This accounts for so much art which is attacked (rejected as in the case of Serra's work or graffitied - they and their objects have to submit to the Dis-ease of those outside 'the Panoptic power' - the disaffected people. It is salutary, that at the end of each year, we see in TV reviews of past annual events, newsreel shots of citizens smashing the "art objects" and monuments of previous overthrown powers - political figures who have their theatre of power play in the city. Artists and designers have to find a way to fill the gap which Certeau describes between the concept and power regulated city of order (the local authority) and the individuated 'walking city of people - a discourse unsubjugated to the system, yet within it. All local power - the techno-economic structure - reduces the mythic qualities which the populace seeks and creates - the dream space. Certeau quotes the woman from Rouen who stated "here" there isn't any place special except for my home,



Rambla de Mar and Pei's and Ass. New WTC, Barcelona



Cardiff

that's all there isn't anything "Nothing" special", nothing that is marked, opened up by memory or a story, signed by something or someone else. Only the cave of home remains believable, still open for a certain time to legends, still full of shadows. Except for that, according to another city dweller, there are only "places in which we can no longer believe in anything" - the artist - and I'm a working artist - must enhance, rescue 'make-believe' spaces in the city which allow of appropriation to the dream-time of the traveller, the walker of the streets - to act as a shaman to the obscurity of myth and 'old-time' within which all seek to be comfortable. *"Here there used to be a bakery"* - *"That's where old lady Dupuis used to live"*. *"Memories tie us to place"*. We must insert in the modern erasure of place and its shadows "a childhood experience that determines spatial poetics and later develops its effects, proliferates, floods private and public spaces, and under their readable surfaces creates within the planned city a "metaphorical" or mobile city, like the one Kandinsky dreamed of 'a great city built according to all the rules of architecture and then suddenly shaken by a force which defies all calculation. In the Hague, there is a group called Storm, operating as *"a cooperative for imbalanced feasibility"*, in France, a call in L'Orient for *'Paysages-les nouveaux territoires - un social-paysagisme'* - the Ruhr in Germany, a vast conurbation declares itself after *'independent study'* Nr 1 in Europe for Quality of Life - with high standards of living, excellent health care, a clean environment and efficient infrastructure, life and business.



Richard's Serra The Wall, Barcelona

New groupings are emerging - designers, artists, planners and thinkers, seeking to place a new thesis of sensitive interaction within the beast of the city - a new 'Jurassic Park' of perhaps possibility. If life is to be sustainable at all, a society in city - then high imagination, sustained investment and poetic vision must go hand in hand.

"In time the truth is not that the artist requires a document of licence from the householders entitling him to proceed in this or that fashion but that every age must look for its sanction to its poets and philosophers. The poet is the intense centre of the life of his age to which he stands in a relation than which none can be more vital. He alone is capable of absorbing in himself the life that surrounds him and of flinging it abroad again amid planetary music.....it is time for them (the critics) to verify their calculations in accordance with it. It is time for them to acknowledge that here the imagination has contemplated intensely the truth of the being of the visible world and that beauty, the splendour of truth, has been born. The age, though it bury itself fathoms deep in formulas and machinery, has need of these realities which alone give and sustain life and it must await from those chosen centres of vivification the force to live, the security for life which can come to it only from them. Thus the spirit of man makes a continual affirmation' - James Joyce - Stephen Hero - The Role of the Poet.

