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THE PASSION FOR THE HIATUS

Artefacts: artificial structures or phenomena encountering and dealing with natural phenomena, all feeling reduced here to an optical illusion.
Paul Virilio, *Aesthetics of Disappearance*

Architecture and film are vision machines. Before the invention of rapid modes of transport such as the train and before the invention of the dynamic prostheses of memory such as film, the most important instrument with which a society could express its cosmology was architecture. This was true for cities such as Babylon, Niniveh and Thebes in ancient times, as well as for the Renaissance and baroque eras. The value, meaning and splendour of the *locus* were expressed in the age-old phenomenon of the fortified city, which derived its form and its restriction from the embodiment of the boundary in a system of walls, towers and gateways. Ranked above the interminable journey of nomadism, it celebrated an order in which the sojourn and the delay prevailed, an order wherein the intramural was also equated with safety, certainty and rationality.

In its restrictive form the city offered its inhabitants a system for spatial and mental orientation that established the meaning of the here and the there, the inner and the outer, the near and the far, and the familiar and the foreign. Because the city was geographically fixed and had fixed dimensions, its boundaries produced the *mundus imaginalis* of infinity, a world that was unfamiliar with nomadism. Fixedness and permanence also implied a special relationship with time, contained in the theme of duration and continuity. These qualities of the space-time vector made it possible to establish a society on the basis of solid forms, and thus instituted a perception of the world that was static. From the nineteenth century, under the influence of the train and cinematography, this static world traversed by moving bodies was starting to be replaced at an alarming rate by a dynamic world that spins around a static body. Looking out from the train or watching a film, our field of vision is filled with a fast-moving, flowing world.

Although our tradition attributes more reality to the fixed than to the fluid, and even equates the fixed with the evident, the static forms of the city, just like the flowing forms of dynamic perception, are 'arte-facts', artificial structures or manifestations perceived through the man-made structures of architecture and the artificial manifestations of film. In both cases the world appears as a phenomenon mediated by these arte-facts, which is made manifest through the order of perceptibility, but which also disappears into or behind this order. The world is a relative phenomenon, relative to the order of our perception. However, the world that appears and disappears through architecture is different to that of film and that which is held up to us from our rapid forms of transport. Architecture and (communication) media enter into a discordant relationship at the moment the (mental) worlds that emanate from the respective modes of perception start to interfere with one another.

SPEED AND DISAPPEARANCE
'No more delay!' was not only the adage of the founders of the nation-state in the nineteenth century, bringing us the standardization of weights and measures, the abolition of tolls and dissolution of guilds, and the introduction of national time; we find a similar idolatry of flow among the engineers who introduced the train. 'No more delay!' expresses an attitude that equates the rapid flow with survival. The territory is put into perspective and the physical environs are marginalized in favour of a unidirectional movement that is fixated on its goal or terminus. In its form and direction the train re-enacts the offensive column of the penetration strategy known from the art of warfare that, under Carnot and Napoleon around 1800, definitively replaced the besiegement and encircling of the fortified city.

'No more delay!' means above all: the emptying of the route and its immediate surroundings. Anything that does not sustain the goal-oriented movement is a potential hindrance and a source of danger. The railway is cleared and declared off-limits to man and beast; the dissidents are intercepted with cowcatchers and kept at bay by means of barriers and gates. Delay has acquired all the characteristics of a contentious and combated adversary force. The battle against delay turns into a battle against the earth's surface, which disappears beneath the levelling projects of civil engineering, such as bridges, railway embankments and tunnels. The levelling of the route, of which the Gotthard Tunnel and the Moerdijk Bridge are a case in point, shifts the manifestations of the earth's surface with its obstacles and objects to the *fond* of perception. This fosters the desertification of space, which finds its psychological counterpart in the 'panoramic gaze',[1] the dreamy and mentally retreated orientation towards the distant horizon. The material and mental-visual desert-form of space is the necessary complement to speed. That the train, as it put the territory into perspective, would come to represent an assault on and liquidation of the city and the urban community, was astutely presaged in 1873, by Victor de Stuers, the founder of the Dutch Historic Building Council,[2] when he protested against the demolition of Maastricht's city ramparts and gateways for the sake of the railway line.

Once the violence of penetration has superseded the traditional encircling of the fortress, the speed of transport demands further excavations and tunnelling. The breakthrough, levelling and clearance will soon be followed by penetrations into the subterranean, because it not only necessitates the absence of obstacles, but also the guarantee of the inaccessibility of the track. Because speed requires emptiness *it shifts underground*, as foretold by Jules Verne in his story, 'An Express of the Future':[3]

'No doubt you are asking yourself who I am?' said my guide:
'Colonel Pierce, at your service. Where are you? In America,
at Boston – in a station.'
'A station?'
'Yes, the starting-point of the "Boston to Liverpool Pneumatic
Tubes Company".'
And, with an explanatory gesture, the Colonel pointed out to
me two long iron cylinders, about a metre and a half in diameter,
lying upon the ground a few paces off.

Colonel Pierce had linked up Europe and America by means of a 'pea-shooter of interminable length' for passengers. The 'inventor' has laid two long, steel cylinders with a length of more than 3,000 miles and a total weight of over 13,000,000 tons. An extremely powerful current of air propels Pierce's carriages through the cylinders at a speed of 1,800 km an hour 'in the same way that despatches are conveyed pneumatically round Paris'. In 1989 this idea was revived with the 'High-Speed Tunnel Route',

1
Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise. Zur Industrialisierung von Raum und Zeit im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Munich/Vienna, 1977), translated by Anselm Hollo as *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley, 1987).
2
Victor de Stuers, 'Holland op z'n smalst', *De Gids* 1873, 320-403.
3
Jules Verne, 'An express of the future', *The Strand Magazine* 1895.

which envisions a system of tunnels under Europe that will interconnect its population centres by means of vacuum transport. Here, speed will be coupled with radical emptiness.

The subway gives us a glimpse of what the empirical world will become under the regime of speed. In the tunnels of the underground tram, the world of urban objects had already become a desert, dotted with a few oasis-like stations. In the subway tunnel we experience the eclipse of urban forms, which reappear in memory like a *fata morgana*. Thanks to the evocative power of the names of stations, the old world once again becomes a *mundus imaginalis*; however, no longer a world of the imagination, but of memory.[4]

THE AESTHETICS OF DISAPPEARANCE AND THE PASSION FOR THE VOID

The Greek word *aisthesis* does not so much signify the rule or theory of beauty, as: perceptible with the senses. In this sense the metro and the train provide us with an experience of the aesthetics of disappearance.[5] This aesthetics, which is closely connected to the performance of the rapid vehicle, carries a logic of abduction. Deep down, it suggests something of the forced separation and melancholy of such an abduction. The moment one frees oneself from the geographical and territorial body to board a form of transport is also the start of a process of de-socialization, which has evolved steadily from the warrior-horseman of ancient times to the present. Whereas in the past, when people still lived in neighbourhood communities, the other was both identified and familiar in the everyday recurrence of the encounter, now, in step with the revolution of the means of transport, this neighbour will swiftly fade into a 'shadow' that is only re-encountered by chance. Eventually, the stranger will reside among us in secret . . . The liquidation of the delay by the power of transport will not only facilitate better communication between groups and improve trade, but it will also bring about this fleeting presence of the other. Many a passer-by will then disappear for good. The kinetic habituation to the sudden disappearance of fellow humans will assume the tragic character of a social divorce; the physical presence of fellow man will become less real. Both as passer-by and as passenger, the Other will soon be identified with its cinematic image. Hence the supremacy of fashion and looks. The same retinal retention that enables us to watch a film must grasp the transience of fellow humans. Yet in the improbability of the cinema, the physical probability of the corporeal will be banished in favour of a terrifying persistence of the signs.

Just like a camera, rapid vehicles are machines for taking 'shots'. Their relationship with film lies in the 'linearization' of the observed surroundings. The mental image they produce is the 'strip'. Rapid vehicles allow us to see the geographic planes and reliefs of the areas traversed as they pass by, as we might at a parade. Unfortunately, this speed-induced optical illusion produces a double-edged phenomenon: in the frenzy of accelerated movement the passenger sees things as if they were moving, whereas in reality they are standing still and it is the passenger who is passing them. Conversely, in modern-day urban life those who surround us create the impression they will stay, whereas they will actually disappear forever.

We have, strangely and tragically, become accustomed to these phenomena that belong to the meta-stability of the cities we inhabit. This

4
Henri-Pierre Jeudy, 'Metro-beelden', *OASE* 23 1989, 44-48.

5
Aesthetics: from *aisthesis*: perceptible by the senses.

meta-stability is not so much a product of the journey as a romantic voyage of discovery, but of the disintegrating and destabilizing forces of a wind: the wind generated by the speed of a transport system that accompanies the pneumatic breaths of the commuter city. This wind deports the inhabitants and turns them into 'displaced persons'. It is remarkable that nobody notices this wind and that nobody is concerned about the fact he is always interacting with spectres. Paradoxically, the eradication of delay does not result in an 'arrival' or 'home-coming', but drags us down into an interminable 'departure' or 'leave-taking', while at the same time all sense evaporates. The experience of this in the desert-form of space and the desert-form of the social moulds our passion for the aesthetics of disappearance.[6]

However, something of the temporal desert-form already resides in the eclipse of the subway, and this would eventually be made explicit in the *special effect* in film. The wonder of the special effect is a supplementary phenomenon, extracted from reality by the speed of the film camera. Around 1900 the French film maker Méliès claimed that the cleverly deployed trick would make it possible to show the supernatural, the imaginary, indeed even the impossible. Méliès thus freed film from realism, which had ceased to captivate the audience, and saved the medium. This is what he had to say about the film-trick:

> One day, when I was prosaically filming the Place de l'Opéra, an obstruction of the apparatus that I was using produced an unexpected effect. I had to stop a minute to free the film and started up the machine again. During this time passersby, omnibuses, cars, had all changed places, of course. When I later projected the reattached film, I suddenly saw the Madeleine-Bastille Bus changed into a hearse, and men changed into women. The trick-by-substitution, soon called the stop trick, had been invented, and two days later I performed the first metamorphosis of men into women.
>
> Paul Virilio, *The aesthetics of disappearance* (translated by Philip Beitchman), 15-16, quoted from: Georges Sadoul, *Georges Méliès/presentation et bio-filmographie. Choix de textes, correspondence et propos de Méliès* (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1961)

The miracle stems from a technical coincidence, which causes the de-synchronisation of film-time and real-time. Although the film appears to represent an identifiable unity of life, the trick interruption evokes a sense of the hallucinatory. The film thus creates an improbable world of special effects, analogous to the traffic illusions of the meta-stable commuter town and the subway eclipse.

We can explore the passions stirred by the de-synchronisation of real time and film time using psychological phenomena. At breakfast, the cup is suddenly dropped and its contents spilled across the table. The absence lasts several seconds and its beginning and end are abrupt. Although the senses remain alert, they are not susceptible to external impressions. But as immediate as the absence, so immediate is the subject's return from the accident of the absence. Speech and gesture are resumed where they were left off. The two ends of conscious time are automatically joined together to form continuous time without obvious gaps. These absences can be quite numerous, several hundred a day, and generally go unnoticed by those around us. For people who go through this, nothing has happened. The absent time never existed. Children who have many of these episodes

6
Jean Baudrillard, 'Transparenz, Probleme des Nihilismus', *Berliner Hefte* 17, 1981, 35.

have a tendency, when asked, to add what they did not see. They draw on other memories to fill in the gaps. If such a child is placed in front of a bunch of flowers and asked to draw them, it will draw not just the flowers but also the person who put them in the vase and even the meadow where they were picked. Having grown secretly apprehensive and insecure about the truth of the world that surrounds him, the child must time and again penetrate the frontiers of his memory in search of the missing information. The described over-totalization is an indication of our habit to join together the sequences, harmonise their contours and match what we see and what we failed to see, what we remember and fail to remember. The fusion-confusion of reality and imagination, the real and the imaginary, must be invented and constructed by the interrogated consciousness in order to lend its 'discourse', [from discursus: to run to and fro/haste and division], a 'verisimilitude' [from *veri similis* = like the truth] vis-à-vis social intercourse. If perception means accepting as true that which has the appearance of truth, then this 'acceptance of truth' is impossible without an artificial addition. It makes probable that which is *conceivable*.

The technical coincidences of Méliès' camera reproduced the same desynchronised conditions as the child that joins flower girl and meadow. Méliès, who lets the machine interrupt the systematic sequence of film takes, is doing the same as the child that joins together the two experiential sequences from before and after the crisis, thus undoing any conspicuous temporal disruption. Both play a game with the hiatus, or the time-gap. They work with a disappearance of time. The child, however, deploys its imagination to achieve probability, whereas Méliès' 'gap' has become so substantial that the 'reality effect' is utterly transformed into a 'supernatu-

Deserted FIAT factory Lingotto in Turin

ral phenomenon', an improbability that challenges the 'conceivable' aspect of perception.

Through the constant recurrence of the time hiatus, the film reveals a world that has never been seen before. In other words, it reveals a world that is independent of the memory as the subconscious storeroom of traces of experience. By creating a world without memory and with unfixed dimensions of space and time, the film shows configurations that ordinarily appear to us in dreams and memories: fleeting and phantasmagorical. The trick interruption reveals that part of our true nature that never ceases to respond to events that are, in fact, in the past and absent. It is the omitted 'in-between', the *hiatus* that challenges our memory and our expectations, as a result of which we see the configurations as marvellous and improbable. The jolt of the hiatus is nothing but a ploy. A ploy directed at the 'conceivable' aspect of perception by suddenly interrupting our habituation to the continuous time typical of a routine reality, thus generating certain mental processes and their associated passions.

According to Dostoevsky, a powerful eclipse of consciousness, such as it occurs during an epileptic seizure, is presaged by an aesthetic perception or an aesthetic awareness. The crisis reveals itself, like a bolt from the blue, by the beauty of this shade. The epileptic, such as Dostoevsky, does not welcome the seizure as a moment of lust, rather he dreads it. Yet he is informed of its arrival by a state of bliss, by a youthful exhilaration.[7] The epileptic is imbued with the divine muse, in the true sense of the word, and at the same time enraptured, transported . . . until he regains consciousness. In his book *Annäherungen*[8] Ernst Jünger writes that this exhilaration should be seen as the effect of a *mortgage on time*, which must be paid on the due date. It is a claim that is cruelly confirmed by the epileptic seizure itself. Nevertheless, the accident of consciousness, the hiatus of time, is preceded by an inexplicable exhilaration.

An exceptional and intense phenomenon, which turns out to be the infra-normal, manifests itself through the hiatus. An interval in time leads us to the difference. In the difference we experience a transience, a liquidated reality. This is what poets such as Hölderlin and authors such as Nietzsche, Rilke and Robert Musil took as the subject of a heroic, anticipatory battle against the metaphysical 'fixedness' of reality, in an effort to liberate the oppressed exhilarating forces. Perhaps it is this *power of the difference* that we encounter on a daily basis in traffic and through the media. At any rate, the difference offers a way of to eradicate the fixedness of reality and to put the metaphysical proof of perception into stark perspective.

'I can no longer think my own thoughts, the moving pictures have replaced my thoughts,' a writer remarked in 1930 regarding the introduction of big cinema buildings. His words are a conscious or subconscious allusion to the warlike onslaught of images outlined in Paul Virilio's *Guerre et Cinéma*.[9] The military power lies less in brute force than it does in the psychological deterrence that is exercised through an impressive display. Just as the warrior of old used to deter by the sudden appearance of his person and by sabre rattling – think, for instance, of the terrifying appearance of the samurai in Kurosawa's films, causing mortal fear that cancels out all thought and sense of reality – any strategy of the appearances is nothing more than sabre rattling. The ubiquitous information is reminiscent of the sudden appearance of the warrior, but having grown accustomed to the accompanying shock we have become desensitized.

7
Plato: So the Muse herself inspires men (*enthéous*), and the inspiration passes from them to others, till we have a whole chain of men possessed (*entheousiadzontoon)*.

8
Ernst Jünger, *Annäherungen, Drogen und Rausch* (Frankfurt am Main, 1980).

9
Paul Virilio, *Guerre et Cinéma I. Logistique de la Perception* (Paris, 1984), translated by Patrick Camiller as *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception,* (London, 1989).

As a result the primary perceptions are not converted into individual perceptions, because the 'conceivable' is constantly interrupted by the obtrusive presence of the media, which have created a mass consciousness. They provide the masses with a store of information and programme their memories. Walter Benjamin, in his account of the demise of the story, deeply regretted this state of affairs.[10] An a priori occupation and hyperactive defence mechanism of our consciousness prevent the penetration of daily stimuli and impoverish our experiences. Thus storytelling is deprived of its basis and source of inspiration.

The informative address and the striking image, which the artistic avant-gardes intended to be educational tools, now achieve the exact opposite. A dense network of stimuli and signs forms a continuous interruption of the potential aesthetic surprise and the budding insight. The stab at independent observation is overwhelmed by the speed of information. Nowadays this no longer applies solely to memory and experience which, as inner illuminations of reality, are expelled by the glare of the shock, but applies mainly to the gaze. The gaze is captured by the dynamic play of light of the vehicles and the media, which takes us by surprise by means of rapid changes. We have grown accustomed to this surprise, so much so that we now only experience these stimuli from the *nothingness* of the transition, from the hiatus. It explains why Alexander Kluge can present us with a blind film director in his film *Der Angriff der Gegenwart auf die übrige Zeit* (The Assault of the Present on the Rest of Time, 1985). The director focuses exclusively on what, in the near future, will become film's essence: the eclipse of the image. The blind film director limits himself to the black of the interruption, which accompanies the exposed image 24 times per

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second. The fact that for most of the time he aims his camera at something other than the dramatic film action is of marginal importance here. The blind director is a master of the art of 'overlooking' and 'looking askance'. The strategy of the appearances, which is based on the hiatus and change, uses de-synchronisation to generate the desert-form of time. By making the consciousness hasty it creates insensitivity and insecurity as correlatives of an image of the world that now exists only in the mind. The strategy of the appearances liquidates the material realm of activities and experience in order to create a world in which seeing precedes being.

THE LIQUIDATION OF ARCHITECTURE
The great(er) vehicle through time and space – the vehicle of traffic and the visual media – fosters the disinterest in the perceived world. Architect Jean Nouvel estimates that 85 per cent of people perceive architecture subconsciously. The crisis of the object, and hence that of the city and architecture, is well-nigh inevitable. The power of the obstacle as an intersection of sightlines, a multiplicity of detail and a combination of textures, whose form and materiality are highlighted by the light of the sun, is steadily being displaced by the machines of dynamic perception. The static carriers of memory, such as architecture and the city, pay their daily toll to the active prostheses of memory, such as film and television.

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer celebrates the static nature of architecture for its ability to embody gravity, cohesion, rigidity and solidity. In his view, architecture is countered by the tragedy, which affords us a glimpse of chaos and transience. For George Bataille[11] architecture is the embodiment of an ideal state of society, because it blocks the moving elements that remain out of sight behind the façades. Both viewed architecture as an aesthetics of appearance that was, generally speaking, an aesthetics of the material carriers of objects and works. The aesthetics of appearance revolved around materiality, the interaction of form and *fond*, the emergence of a painting on the canvas, the materialization of a sculpture from stone, and around an architecture that took pride in its brotherhood with the stone, that was tied to its foundation and yet sought to defy gravity, an architecture that set itself the task of creating the city as an entity against the backdrop of the sky, the fields, the forests and the roads. Ultimately, society as a whole was based on the fact that these material carriers arose as something solid, as something valuable and meaningful, as expressed in the principle and form of the fortified city.

The advent of film, or more precisely cinematography, the take and the technique of sequencing did not herald the era of the tragedy or the inner experience, but that of the aesthetics of disappearance. Things no longer touch our hearts through their presence and solidity, but through the fact that they are closer and more solid the more they fade. The aesthetics of disappearance intensifies (mental) presence through the relative removal of the world of objects from perception in space and time. Things exist because they disappear. The fact that they owe their impact on memory to retreat, blur and transience actually signifies the revolution of the monument, or rather, the monumental. The monument presents what is absent with the help of a solid carrier. Conversely, the monumentality of the aesthetics of disappearance rests on the fleetingness and flight of the sign. It monumentalises the moment.

With the dynamic camera position, the combination of the camera with vehicles, the cinematographic technique of the disappearance joins the set of train, subway, car and airplane, which has launched its assault on mental distance in name of the remote. It reduces the time-distance to a moment and shrinks space into a kind of ubiquitous proximity. Film, television and forms of transport bring everything closer, so we appear to acquire an overview of the world. Whereas in the past ubiquity, or omnipresence, was the reserve of God, now it lies at the feet of man. However, what is awaiting us is no panoptic ubiquity, no omnipresent omni-vision. Foucault's panopticism[12] is betrayed by synopticism, which arises out of the technique of the 'hiatus' in space and time. As a result we develop, within our individual field of perception, a fragmentary, broken and contracted, constantly changing, fluid, liquid worldview, complemented by uncontrolled reminiscences that infect the image of the true world with the imaginary.

But how does the world's liquidation impact on the experience of and approach to space and time? The media's inherent destruction of time-distance creates effects of iconological distortion, causing the rapid disappearance of the most elementary landmarks. Our traditional topology and morphology, which were dominated by the size of an area, our traditional conception of geographical expanse as mapped in cadastral plots of land, are fading in favour of a view of the world in which the notion of physical dimension loses its significance and analytical value. We are witnessing the co-production of an empirical reality in which *direct* and media-driven observations merge to produce an instantaneous and momentary representation of space. The difference in scale between the actual distance in time and space and the size of the representations that used to guarantee the readability of the map, the design drawing, the model, etcetera, ceases to exist. Direct observation of empirical facts makes way for a tele-observation, which leaves the observer without any direct contact with empirical reality. The absence of any mediation of *scale*, and the chance to see planes that in reality cannot be seen with the naked eye, renders the images *accidental*. They no longer have a referent, which produces a serious imbalance between what is perceptible by the senses and what is intelligible. This forms the first disruption of our familiar topology and morphology.

A second disruption derives from the fact that the visual angle is displaced by the projection time. The time depth of the media projections replaces the field depth of the Renaissance perspective. The vantage point, the omni-present axis of a perspectivist point of reference, makes way for the fleeting, remote view (tele-vision) of an observation aiming at transparency and penetration. In other words, an observation that penetrates the biggest and most remote appearances, establishing a gaze without horizon. An event that will lead us to God, if we are to believe the portrayal of this theme in the film *The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*. Radical transparency and penetration will enlighten us and bring us closer to the light, which will be the last thing we see. Initially, the man with the X-ray eyes is thrilled with his newly-acquired faculty, bestowed on him by a chemical solution. He sees through people's clothes, displaying a special interest in women. Yearning for his faculty to be improved, their skeletons are revealed to him. Ultimately, even the mass of the earth and planets no longer obstruct his view. What remains is pure visibility, light, which extends from his retina to the remotest vistas.

The eye of the camera, our technical prosthesis of transparency and penetration and remote vision that operates just like the X-ray eye, therefore heralds less of a reversal of matter or the revelation of a kind of extra-reality that until then had been buried within the things and is now projected in the 'distance'. This was Walter Benjamin's view.[13] Rather, this 'eye' opens up an *open field* of perception, whose objective frontiers will never be known, an integral dispersal and fragmentation, a broken morphology/topology of immeasurable magnitude. Such a tele-capture of the world by the eye of the camera and the simultaneous aesthetics of disappearance corrode the old geometric and architectural configurations and thus overthrow the way of seeing of the Renaissance, which was based on the monumental arts.

The dissolution of scale, distortion and perversion of forms and sites, elimination of intervals in space and time, compression of images and data – the mediatized précis of the world brings us face to face with a *trompe-l'oeil* effect, with a representative order that is reminiscent of anamorphosis and which has been emptied of its points of reference. Whereas the baroque had relied on architecture and plaster for the distortion of forms, these have now been superseded by the immateriality of light and electronics, the true baroque architecture of our time.

Although a foot remains a foot and the east the east, today's model of the city is no longer determined solely by squares, rivers, high-rise blocks, a succession of streets and a patchwork of plots of land. This gaze on the city's architecture is harassed by a lucid doppelganger. A technological time-space, a tele-time-space of the hiatus, is interfering with the city's materiality. As a material foundation of our collective perception and as a set of volumes under the sun, made visible by the light and caught up in the cycle of day and night, the city is besieged by the technical temporality of the length of the transmission, the false day of the screen without depth and the exposure time of rapid vehicles. A construction consisting of a set of temporal-spatial mutations now positions itself opposite the solid stasis of structural engineering. It creates an invisible and improbable order, an order of change and renewal, fragmentation of the whole and dispersal of the constituent parts *ad infinitum*. This is an order that disturbs the senses and grips us in a vertiginous fascination for the unreal and the unstable. If we take the cadastral mapping of the land and the creation of monuments and landmarks as the foundations of urban monumentalisation, its intended effects are continuously dissolved and reconstituted by the systems of transfer and their aesthetics of disappearance. The construction of 'an image of the city', as fantasized by Kevin Lynch in the previous century,[14] has become a troublesome assignment in as far as it aimed to produce psychic stability and territorial identity. As both essence and recollection, the geographical site no longer functions as the basis of human experience. Our modern monumental city, our *metropolis*, is rapidly morphing into an invisible and vertiginous *omnipolis*.

Architectonic counter-movements of postmodernism and those who want to compete with the fascination of the media constructions often forget that architecture was originally a discipline of measures and stasis. It consisted of a body of knowledge and a practice, which enabled us to harmonise a society with a natural environment and thus manage its time and space. Well, this ability based on geodesy to establish a unit of time and place for social activities has now come into open conflict with the (de)constructive forces of the mass media and means of mass communication.

12
Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir. Naissance de la prison* (Paris, 1975), 251-295, translated by Alan Sheridan as *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of Prison* (New York, 1995).

13
Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), 34.

14
Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA/London, 1960).

We now have two opposing orders:
- A material one, which is formed by physical elements such as walls, thresholds, floors and exact dimensions and settings. It is an architectonic and urbanistic order, which relies on land surveying and perspectival insight into a situation. It organises and constructs geographical space in a relatively sustainable way. Thanks to its solidity of time and space, this order is slow and exploratory.
- An immaterial one, whose representations, images and messages allow no localisation. As the result of a momentary expression, they are not familiar with solidity, stasis and fixedness. This order sets up an incoherent space-time, which is subsequently disrupted again. Analogous with the tools of our memory, it establishes a de-realised world, a world with a receding reality.

TRANSFINITY

Would it be fair to say that the efforts of architecture and urbanism, which are aimed at the output of and control over the urban dweller's mental pictures and thus try to bring about a stable order in the domain of the imaginary, are based on an obsolete theory of space, perception and orientation? Is our relationship with the city in fact the relationship with a relic, which we view through nineteenth-century eyes? Most probably, since the liquidation of architecture suggests that our society gravitates towards a de-territorialized state, in which the city will lose its obvious functional and cultural centrality. So far, the challenge of the 'greater vehicle' facing the complacency of the urban form has remained concealed behind the masque of history and hidden from view by a naïve trust in the certainty of the geographical place.

Today's impossibility to arrive at a consistent and persistent city concept and urban design has its roots in a rationality which has itself become accidental. The changing theoretical perspectives and 'conceivable' references, that derive from the fact that theories too are subject to fashion, bring us face to face with the disappearance of duration and continuity. The development of thought about the city thus assumes the character of an accident, that is, an incident that escapes the clutches of reason and human initiative through the infinitesimal small time span in which it initiates its disruptive development. The city reclaims in a parodic way the actuality it possessed before the era of planning. Actuality here means: at the mercy of the vicissitudes of fate. From this we learn how the accident of time finally impacts on the condition of space and how the fragmentation of space correlates with the fragmentation of time.

The state of affairs in architecture theory shows how our time implies an endless *commutation* or change. Commutation lacks an objective dimension and therefore rules out reflection. Permanent innovation is steeped in a potent illusion of progress, but in reality it boils down to an accelerated cycle of principles and configurations. So time, too, has become a kind of salt desert, whose surface allows all great speeds, both deceleration and acceleration. The decline of *duration* within *commutation* does *not* mean a transition to eternity, but a transition to the eternity of speed.

Thanks to the absence of frontiers and obstacles within the networks, space and the social can be traversed like a desert. *Transfinity* means we have reached the frontiers of time and space and that no further transgres-

sion, or transcendence, is possible.[15] We are no longer faced with a natural limitation, such as the finite nature of space or time, which envelops and encloses us and which afforded metaphysicians of earlier generations a glimpse of infinity. We are instead facing an artificial finiteness, the outcome of the depletion of the time-space horizon that once inspired history and progress. Familiar with all frontiers, we have transgressed them, without this affording us a glimpse of infinity. The upshot of transfinity is that we dispose of all time, of all kinds of time, and therefore have suddenly no more time ahead of us or behind us. It dissolves in its contemporary effect. Accelerating, we have used up our reserves of time and space. In and through acceleration, time and space become mass, or a kind of fluidity, similar to the kind that builds in front of the nose of a projectile. Compressed and condensed, they ultimately form an obstacle to development or progress. They become an unassailable wall: the horizon-negative. The process is similar for the artificial build-up of communication and data, as they ultimately form a mass that thwarts and destroys the development of the social itself. Our present time is an assault on all other times: past, future and eternity.

FRAGMENTATION AND BROKEN MORPHOLOGY

This condition of time has an unmistakable effect on the condition of space. We might say that the fragmentation of space is a direct result of the fragmentation of time. In architectural discourse, the whole problematic of fragmented space and the fragmented city is governed by the memory of the image of the complete. However, the problem of fragmentation is not so much the loss of totality, as it is the loss of a restrictive totality that was still governed by the boundary. What emerges in the desert of time-space is not so much the fragment, but the unlimited, sprawling, extensive totality of a *broken morphology*.

The broken morphology is above all a mental configuration that can be identified through memory. It is triggered by the momentary and instantaneous character of the images and concepts generated by the rapid means of transport and the media. The key feature of the broken morphology is the crisis of the concept of dimension. This crisis manifests itself to us as the crisis of a whole, or a totality, as the crisis of a substantive, continuous and homogenous space. Through a process of rupture and dispersion, the continuous and homogenous time-space of archaic geometry appears to turn into the relativity of an accidental time-space. A discontinuous space in which elements and particles, scattered points and fragments become essential again in the context of the instantaneous.

Nevertheless, the media, the view from the car, train, subway, and so forth, as well as the perspectives afforded by the constantly changing frameworks provided by theory (the commutations), never cease to project an image of a city forming or representing a totality. Be it a totality that is now composed of fragments scattered in time and space and of heterogeneous speeds, that is, accelerations and decelerations. The totality they present us with is truly a totality without dimension. The problem of space is therefore not so much its fragmentation as the loss of its dimension generated in the mental picture. As a universe of fragmented spaces, a broken morphology is a totality that lacks dimension because . . . it lacks duration.
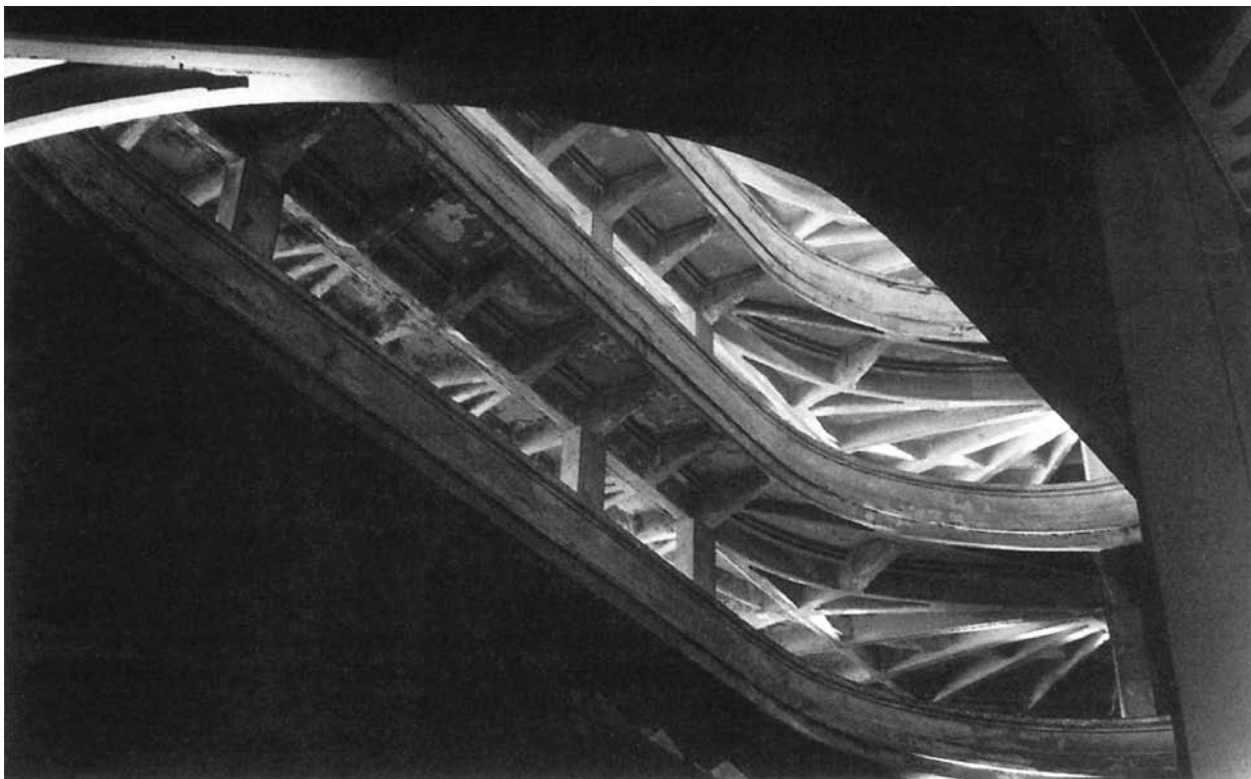
Deserted FIAT factory Lingotto in Turin

For this kind of space I would like to propose the concept of *tele-topology*: a topology that is distinct from the classic notion of time-space, which was measured in terms of expanse and duration.

Topology is essentially the geometry of the form, whereby distance and size are eliminated from mathematical formulae. Although in a topological prescription distance and size may vary from zero to infinity, the formulae nevertheless describe a specific set of manifestations. The topological formulae know how to capture the distanceless mathematically in a series of systematic variations. But, topology cannot deal with absence or lack. This is where tele-topology enters the game, because it considers phenomena such as the elimination of the interval in time and that of the gap in space. – everyday phenomena in transport and the media. Although tele-topology cannot measure what is lacking, it does helpfully suggest we conceive of the *hiatus*. What happens in this 'nothingness', in this 'absence', in this 'omission', in this 'something' that no longer matters?

Perhaps the eliminated interval or the vanished gap is a desert-form, a kind of absolute and empty sign, which has no presence of its own and is determined by its context, and thus resists recognition and unambiguous decoding. In his essay on Carlo Scarpa's fragments, Manfredo Tafuri defines the desert-form as the *topos* of the imagination.[16] In doing so, he follows Maurice Blanchot's theory of the *incomplete*.[17] The fragment need not only be seen as the residual part of a whole, which has been lost, but could also be considered as something demanding completion in the viewer's imagination. The fragment thus serves as a stimulus for 'thought'.

In addition, or in contrast, it is clear that the desert of time is caused by change and acceleration. Deserts emerge out of the comprehensive explo-

ration of earthly phenomena and the subsequent process of contraction, as has been explained by David Harvey.[18] His word has become canonical in postmodern discourse in the 1980s and '90s. This contraction consigns to desolation all non-privileged zones that are outside the scope of a general economy of attention. Following Baudrillard, we might call this desolation, which also includes the forgotten things and devaluated people, the *fourth world*. The fourth world is not robbed and plundered by a kind of European expansionism, as experienced by the third world. Rather, the fourth world is simply abandoned to nothingness. It is abandoned to nothingness by the motion of contraction. The over-concentration of the exchange of images, goods and information abandons the fourth world to its non-existence, to its disappearance. Excluded from the circuits of this world, it is condemned to an erasure, akin to the erasure of the Atlantic Ocean by the Concorde. The fourth world is the real desert. It is created by the desertification of time, bodies and territory. This fourth world is now the *repoussoir* of the social as network.

The deconstruction of space is not carried out by the Deconstructivists, but is instead provoked by the development of transport and the media. Or, to put it in broader terms, by speed and acceleration, including those of the commutation of architectural fashions and theories. Although the fragment and the broken morphology exert a powerful allure, one cannot avoid the impression that we are dealing with a kind of act of war, a 'traumatising' strategy of appearances playing a disappointing game with us – a game that is not too dissimilar to the primitive and shamanistic strategies that draw on the 'wound' and the 'cut' to breed 'a nation of thinkers'.[19]

MACHINES OF GRAVITY

Today all output, architectural and otherwise, takes place on the basis of de-realisation and disappearance. The predicament of architecture is that it is forced to operate on a foundation that is being deconstructed. What is being deconstructed is the homogenous, perspectivist time-space of the Renaissance. Architecture and the city are facing forces that initiate a propensity for pure circulation and pure dissipation. This propensity for formlessness and emptiness is born of speed, while speed in turn springs from the accelerated output and circulation of signs. We, the agitated producers in the field of culture, art and science, produce the acceleration ourselves. What if we decided not to plunge into the wake of the disappearance, but instead attempted to defer the desertification and disappearance or even have our own way with it?

This brings us to the machines of delay.[20] Both within and out of disappearance and transparency, these machines generate a minimum degree of gravity, that is, some degree of gravity, and thus enable us to recover ourselves, at least for a time. The key issue is the paradoxical will to not be an accident, to postpone the accident that in the end will, inevitably, be provoked by the context. Perhaps this gravity may be seen as the stake that lends the game its intensity and hence its passion.

The machines of gravity seek to affirm gravity against the propensity for pure circulation, against the propensity for pure commutation, against the brutality of the confrontation, against transience. Without a doubt, many are in operation already, while many more may be invented. I would like to highlight one possibility here. Gravity is displayed by post-modern

16
Manfredo Tafuri, 'Carlo Scarpa and Italian Architecture', in: Dalco et al. (eds.), *Carlo Scarpa: The Complete Works* (New York, 1985), 77.
17
Maurice Blanchot, *L'espace littéraire* (Paris, 1955), translated by A. Smock as *The Space of Literature* (Lincoln, NE, 1990); *L'entrétien infini* (Paris, 1969), translated by Susan Hanson as *The Infinite Conversation* (Minneapolis, 1993). See also: Emmanuel Levinas,

Sur Maurice Blanchot (Montpellier, 1975), translated by Garth Gillan as 'About Blanchot: An Interview', *Sub-Stance* 14, 1976, 54-57.
18
David Harvey, 'The Experience of Space and Time', in: *The Condition of Postmodernity, An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1980).

19
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford, 1996), 59.

20
Jean Baudrillard, 'Jean Nouvel en het franse denken', *OASE* 25, 1989, 48.

melancholy and perhaps also by Paul Virilio's *humility in thought*. In the case of melancholy and humility the central place is occupied by the body that has become heavy as a result of the circulation speed of the signs. Enough strength is drawn from this heavy body to withstand the pressure to accelerate of the social networking deserts. Its gravity delays the thought process and the thought process is capable of slowing down even more by focusing on a single point: the empty space of the possible future event. Thinking the unthought can be one of them. The thought process has to be slow, because if it accelerates, the tools of knowledge it produces turn into weapons once more and once more they enter into an alliance with the panic that is the basis of the circulation speed of the signs, and thus insist on their deployment in society. To counteract the repetition of the thought patterns in the accelerated circulation, the machine of gravity tries to mould the circulating material in both thinking the accident and developing thoughts by accident. These will bring us into contact with an exterior that could erase the too significant tracks of the life path cleared through speed.

To avoid speed (which is not the speed of writing or drawing), these machines of gravity advocate a special thought pattern. When one focuses on a single point on the artificial frontier of transfinity, at the perimeter of the end without confirming the end as End, imperceptible distortions and minor semantic changes will come into effect. The machine of gravity, of which Paul Virilio's *The Negative Horizon* is a striking example, steers clear of the depression for which our modernity is heading. It does so with the help of a thought process that harks back to its predecessors: melancholy and *acedia* (weariness of the heart), which may be sources of a *poiesis*, providing they remain incomplete and disorganised. These forms resist the departure of the body and the territory and stand by the notion that imagination and territory go together just like fantasy and body do. The thought processes of the machines of gravity constitute a game with secret rules; it takes place against a backdrop of uncertainty. Certainty perverts the game and transforms the stake into a power struggle revolving around the rules. The introduction of gravity in a manner that is not perverse has to echo symbolically what happens in reality. The difference with reality must be kept alive via linguistic symbols.

The end that this machine of gravity inhabits with its melancholic effects is the transfinite. This end has two manifestations: the eschatological acceleration, which projects us onto the wall of time, and the post-historic era with its tedium and listlessness. However, the *apocalypse without transcendence* and the *expansiveness of the post-historic* are only superficially at odds with one another. Ultimately, both contribute to speed. To counter this we must take advantage of the chance to talk about the Apocalypse, yet without being prophets of doom. We must contemplate the post-historic, without contributing to its expansion.

Fundamental perception, producing gravity in the sense outlined above, is alert to negativity and is always open to the recurrence of the primordial fear (in a Kantian sense) that can break the compulsion to produce concepts and understanding quickly. This respite and perhaps the complete loss of conceptual certainty is not immediately compensated for with a ready image, while individuation is not cancelled out by a sense of the universal or the whole. The relativity of the moment of perception leaves matters undecided.

Dyed-in-the-wool melancholy means: being convinced of the end. A fixation on the end cannot be accompanied by the opposite of melancholy. Even the stimulation machines of utopian urbanism or the gigantic effort of space exploration, and also the heroic self-affirmation of Nietzsche ultimately failed to provide a solution. In other words, although a machine of gravity cannot escape the end and the 'weighty' mechanisms it produces, it can lend them a new destiny, by using stylistic expressions which are not averse to irony and bear witness to and show some distrust of themselves.

A protest against the desert-forms, against the fourth world of bodies and territories is appropriate, although perhaps one thing is even more important: the game that revolves around thinking, which itself wants to be the end. The game that revolves around thinking, which itself wants to be finality and which locks itself into definition and terminology. Thinking directed at itself will render itself superfluous. It ultimately boils down to the fact that thinking is itself time, received into a grammar that creates future, past and present. Time, stripped of direction and dimensions, like Virilio's trans-historic time, has no end.

Translated by Laura Vroomen