

LOVING BAD CITIES: A SURVIVAL RULE

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Abstract

Ambitious urban projects for the cities of the future, or local projects for better democratic communities within the metropolitan dystopias, personal concrete utopias found in cities, and urban communities searching their freedom and identity in the metropolis : is any of them possible without loving the cities and what they represent ?

Bad cities are a fact. If the urban projects are sometimes uninspired or slow, or too far away, we don't have the choice: we must learn to survive in them, trying to make them better if not architecturally, at least humanely.

Keywords: fragmented cities, urban values, -topias

1. INTRODUCTION

The cities and their multidimensional organization, were concerning architects, urbanists and philosophers since Antiquity. The discussion about bad cities and the urgency to do something about them, is nothing new. In every new era of the human civilization, the cities had to respond to new challenges which they were incapable to afford, because of the violence of these phenomena which we were incapable to foresee but which were requiring immediate solutions. Cities became the great evidence and cradle of the whole human civilization, the natural live space of civilized man and at the same time a nightmare gotten out of control. Urbanists and philosophers, but even the citizens, confused with these new urban forces due to historical circumstances or technological evolution, could not anticipate the changes. The question just as topical as ever is : what can we do for our bad cities ?

In this article we will graze opinions regarding the fragmented cities, as well as projects and theories of different « scales » proposed by architects but also by philosophers. We will start with Constantinos Doxiadis' *entopia*, a good place that can exist, between real dystopias-the bad cities where we live, and utopias, the perfect cities of our dreams, a worldwide project that Doxiadis imagined for 2100. We will then see Alberto Magnaghi's *Local Project*, a sort of local utopia much more concrete than *entopia*. Aiming self-sustainable development, based on local identity and heritage, the *local project* is not a localism, but a mondialization founded on « interlocal solidarities ». Finally, we will examine theories as Raban's *Soft City* and Foucault's *Heterotopias*, which are more like real utopian fragments in the city. The city offers great opportunities to escape reality, like museums, churches, gardens or libraries. Exploiting its plasticity, its liberty and its fragmented character, we could find our identity or the fragment which is suitable for everyone of us.

The purpose of this article not being the promotion of a project we found best, we will only see the basic principles of these propositions, each one of them necessitating more than an article by themselves.

The intertextuality of all these projects and theories, besides the scale and conceptual differences, relies on the proposition of « realistic utopias », of « compromises » between real dystopias and fantastic or unfeasible utopias. Unlike utopias they are open projects. None of them is possible if we are indifferent about our cities, nor if we are indifferent about the values whose the city should be the cradle : the civility and the urbanity, the civic rights, the respect of the different and the respect of the city itself ; if we don't love the city and what it represents.

2. FRAGMENTED CITIES

Trying to see why cities are fragmented is very complicated. Cities have their lives made of various circumstances and these lives have left marks in each one of them. We will concentrate on the 20th century and the changes this century signified for the city.

Constantinos Doxiadis, architect, city-planner and theorist was claiming in *Between Dystopia and Utopia* (1966) that we live in bad places: in dystopias. He was wondering what is wrong with the architects who are supposed to combine our reality and our dreams in order to ameliorate the cities, and instead, they create worse places. Doxiadis attributes this bad situation and the fragmented cities to the uncontrollable invasion of the machine and the technology in the cities

and the absence of a real plan. He points out that during this period of crisis and in the same time witnessing the greatest population increase in human history, man has lost the ability to build new cities. Man's response to this crisis, was to create garden-cities, shrinking into the dimensions of the past, or to add new means and new techniques of transportation, of cars and highways. The grave mistake was that architects and town-planners separated such phenomena from the existing city-total. In order to reduce traffic in city centres, man added wider roads, which brought more cars in the city centre and this situation became a vicious circle.

Doxiadis considers that instead of defining human goals and building the city to achieve these goals, we let it happen almost by chance without considering the results of our interventions in the city which are most of the time limited in some networks for the best flow of sewage or of trucks. He claims that great technological progress often means disaster for man and the city as a whole : the human scale is lost, the time consumed in commuting has increased, communities are split by high-speed lines, and the traffic congestion becomes worse. Doxiadis, desperate from these new phenomena remarks that man suffers and suffocates in the cities because of the intrusion of the machine and that for the first time in his history man is deprived of a basic freedom-the freedom to walk in his streets and to sit in his squares. At the same time, greater distances means greater effort for the daily contacts between people. These, however, are according to Doxiadis, the contacts which create the city and civilization. While our cities grow, the distance between man and man increases and consequently, social relations atrophy too.

In both responses to the crisis, man lacked the imagination to see urban renewal not only as an end by itself for small projects, garden-cities or new highways and means of transportation, but as a process which can be successful only as a part of a really overall, comprehensive effort to build the proper city of man. Jonathan Raban in *Soft Cities*, remarks that bits and pieces of ideal cities have been incorporated into real ones ; traffic projects and rehousing schemes are habitually introduced by their sponsors as at least preliminary steps to paradise. The ideal city gives us the authority to castigate the real one ; while the sore itch of real cities goads us into creating ideal ones. The result is a fragmented city, a controllable option between heaven and hell, and great inequality between citizens who don't have the same opportunities.

Alberto Magnaghi, architect and urbanist, gives in *The local project*, a more political and economical aspect to fragmented cities. For Magnaghi, the metropolization has as consequence the geographical and social uprooting of the « resident » who replaces henceforth the « inhabitant ». The continuous peripherization of the contemporary metropolis, makes denser, deteriorates and finally destroys the quality of « living » the territory. With the expansion of the city, the development of the mobility causes marginalization and even elimination of public space. The territory deterioration, doesn't imply only the environmental or architectural decay, but also a social degradation. Urban space, with the hypertrophy of the trade relationships and transfer, leads to the degradation of social relations because of the increasing time consumed related to the specialization of the space and the expansion of distances. Therefore, « we have to become aware of the anthropological consequences of the contemporary deterritorialization, which is also a decontextualization of all our activities » (Magnaghi, 2003).

The city is not the rational, order-imposed « hard » city perceived by the logical mind of town planner or traffic engineer, cartographer or demographer. The city's territory has been only seen as a technical support for economical activities and functions, whose localization was determined by a rationality more and more independent of any relation with the place, and

which didn't consider its environmental, cultural and identity characteristics.

The city is perceived as a bad place that architects might convert into a good place; it is a dangerous place to be made safe and a black place to be coloured green. As Raban says, the answer to the terraced two-up, two-down house is a grey skyscraper; to the crowded street, a stretch of unbroken grass big enough to fight a war on; to the corner grocer's, a yawning shopping plaza.

3. SAVING CITIES ?

Cities are a patchwork of architectural, political, historical, economical and social parameters. Is it possible to save our bad cities? If yes, from which point of view?

Doxiadis' *entopia* is a huge project that should change the cities as we know them. It is a proposition of how cities should be in the future so that nature, man and the city itself would be able to survive. Even if *entopia* is a compromise, as Doxiadis refuse the perfection of utopias, the realization of this project implies an immense general agreement between, architects, politicians, sociologists and citizens. Nevertheless, Doxiadis applied his theory to urban projects he realized for several cities in the world. On the other hand, Magnaghi's *local project*, is more what Karl Popper calls a "system of limited interventions", whose objective is immediate action especially for the people and communities which suffers from the metropolitanization.

3.1. Entopia : 2100

Doxiadis believed that we can change our cities, and conceived the project of *entopia* and the *science of ekistiks*. The *entopia* that will be achievable for 2100, is a good place that can exist : « We have now to conceive and build entopia : from reality, from topia, even from dystopia, we have to take facts and dimensions ; from the utopia, the desire to dream ; from eptopia, the contents of the dream ; from cosmopolis, the frame, and from ideal cities, the shells of the organism that we want to create » (Doxiadis, 1966). The *entopia* will take into consideration the five elements of the human settlements : man, nature, society, shells, networks and their synthesis. It is a system of natural, social, and man-made elements which can be seen in many ways - economic, social, political, technological, and cultural. Its goal is to measure man's needs and interpreting them in organization of society and dimensions and quality of space.

According to Doxiadis, the cities of the future will be inevitably ecumenopolis (world-cities) ; the cities can't stop growing, they just have to grow dynamically. Technology will always progress and no matter what the reasons are (wars, technological evolution, population increase, immigration etc.), the cities will continue to grow and change. And according to Doxiadis, even if we can measure some phenomena, we cannot expect our predictions to become reality, for the simple reason that we are still limited to thinking in straight lines while evolution takes place in curves. Nevertheless, technological progress is not exclusively responsible for fragmented cities. Political or historical circumstances can disturb the cities' balance. *Entopia* has to provide for dynamic cities consisting of static shells in human scale, everyone of which corresponds to the ideal city of man, the whole corresponding to the dynamic settlements of the present. So, Doxiadis talks about static fragments in a city that grows as a whole. According to Doxiadis, it is within such static shells that we can save man from the city that will crush him ; it is within them that community can have complete freedom for its expressions, and man for his life. Nevertheless, as Doxiadis considered the invasion of cars in the cities and everything this

invasion implied for the image of the city and its function, as one of the most important reasons for metropolitan dystopias, the centre of his *entopia* is free from cars : “Someday, if people should bring their cars into the human part of such a community, we will laugh at them, as we do now at people who have entered a drawing room wearing their muddy boots” (Doxiadis, 1966).

Unlike utopias, the *entopia* project is not a solution, but a frame that must be revised continuously. Entopia has to provide for man's welfare and happiness and Doxiadis is convinced that if we can develop a science of human settlements and, through it, recognize the guiding principles, laws, and procedures of man's action regarding terrestrial space, we can build much better human settlements in the future : « Cities where the guiding principle of real freedom of choice for everyone, not for certain classes only, can be implemented for the benefit of every person » (Doxiadis, 1970).

3.2. The local project

Magnaghi with his *local project*, seems like he found a solution to create these static shells, that are local communities, within the fragmented city and its suburbs. A project much more political than architectural, especially more concrete, proposing an alternative urbanism for a local participative democracy. The metropolis, promoting no more the local action, the success of this project depends on the re-foundation of municipalities. In the perspective of a local self-sustainable development (environmental, territorial, social, economical and political), founded on the promotion of territorial heritage and local culture, the municipality becomes again the real siege of the self-governance of the local municipality. The inhabitants take the control of their community, especially those who are today «without a voice », in minority or marginalized, so that these communities can live again, and not suffocate because of the featureless, homogeneous and standardized contemporary globalization.

The planetary geography proposed by Magnaghi is closer to a patchwork, a multiplicity of styles of development that takes into consideration, all the cultural fragments available. Magnaghi remarks that by promoting social and cultural diversity, we will be able to save the territory of man. The reappropriation of the living and production space shouldn't be mistaken with a regressive type of utopian communities. It is more about promoting the experiences which announce the advent of a “possible community”, open, formed by different identities, jointly liable by a common project and the will to rebuild a new public space respecting diversity.

Architecturally, this project will be a conceptual inversion of traditional urbanism, where empty, open spaces, residual and abandoned, will become the generating figures of a new territorial and urban order. An important role will be given within these spaces, to the new farmers and producers. Every “urban village” will have a centre. The limits of every village will be defined by historical lines and pedestrian itineraries. Cars will stay outside the villages, leaving the heart of the villages free for pedestrian zones and different means of transport.

With this new municipality that Magnaghi proposes, local governance assumes at the same time the political, cultural and economical functions. But his project is not a localism. The cities now “included” in the metropolis, could affirm their identities, while many small cities located on the same territory could associate and connect, preserving at the same time their autonomy and difference.

4. HETEROTOPIAS AND SOFT CITY: LOVING FRAGMENTED CITIES' EXPERIENCE

Some theorists and philosophers, tried to say that beyond urban projects, beyond a system of metro lines, buildings, monuments and highways, traffic problems, insufficient, or not, housing or social theories, cities are what we want them to be. In our bad fragmented cities, we can find good fragments, or at least, fragments that help us survive in our metropolitan dystopias. The city is its citizens who can change it architecturally and humanely; but the city can also change us, our styles of life, of thinking and feeling.

4.1. Foucault's *heterotopias*

Michel Foucault, in his *Heterotopias* makes the difference between the utopias which are no-places in no-time, which don't appear in maps, and the real utopias, that we can find in every society, and that have a real determined time and space. In every day life we live in spaces like metros, trains, roads, cafés, cinemas, beaches, hotels. Heterotopias are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about: these are places which are in contradiction with all the others, which are supposed to erase, neutralize, purify all the others. They are somehow *counter-places*. *Heterotopias* are usually linked up with particular temporal "cutting-ups" like museums, libraries or even cemeteries. Like utopias, they always have a system of locking and opening, isolating them from the surrounding space, like hammams. But unlike utopias, we are free choosing our *heterotopia*, in relation to our culture, preferences or mood. These alternative utopias, we can find them in every city, even in bad cities. They can even save us from bad cities if we are interested in finding them, if we love the cities and we amuse discovering their secret faces.

Generally, the heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other. Thus on the rectangle of its stage, the theatre alternates as a series of places that are alien to each other; thus the cinema appears as a very curious rectangular hall, at the back of which a three-dimensional space is projected onto two-dimensional screen. Perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias in the form of contradictory locations is the garden. Cities, are consequently *heterotopias* themselves, having to juxtapose, not only spaces that would be normally incompatible but also people, cultures, religions, architectural styles etc. Several cities, offer as well temporal cutting-ups within their monuments or their historical centres.

4.2. Raban's *soft city*

Jonathan Raban's *soft city*, is even more abstract than *heterotopias* but even so, it could not be closer to our urban reality and experience. Soft city speaks of the essence of the city, away from its function or mobility. According to Raban, the city, our great modern form, is soft, amenable to a dazzling and libidinous variety of lives, dreams and interpretations. The very plastic qualities make the city the great liberator of human identity. It is almost choking to think how different cities are to different people. Cities invite us to comprehend the whole of human life in all its variety, the contemplation of which is inexhaustible.

Besides the concrete utopias that city can offer to us (theatres, museums, libraries, gardens, even cemeteries and hammams) the cities are also what we dream of them. Trying to imagine and live the Paris, or London of literature is free. Walking in Paris and being surprised by panels

informing that Picasso drew Guernica in this building, or that the house we walk by is Balzac's, is more than citizenship, being sensible to human culture and civilization, whose the city is a paradigm. Magnaghi's local communities become, in *soft city*, urban communities: artistic, social, religious, political, sexual. Every one of them takes over a space of the city, these spaces being sometimes like separate planets, so little do their individual routes cross one another. Perhaps this freedom to live out a dream of an exclusive community is, according to Raban, the most important freedom that the city offers. Pierce Egan wrote in 1821's *Life in London*, that the Metropolis is a complete cyclopedia where every man, may find something to please his palate, regulate his taste, suit his pocket, enlarge his mind and make himself happy and comfortable. This opinion is a little optimistic for our contemporary metropolis, the city being capable of offering everything to every one of its citizens, the latter not being capable of accepting this cultural heterogeneity. Without the necessary tolerance, which should be besides art, music or politics part of the human culture and civilization, the freedom of choosing our "fragment", our way of living, our community, our little personal utopia will be lost. A city is a place where everyone can choose its society, but where society can also "drop" people like the immigrants, the poor, the minorities, because the size and the anonymity of the metropolis permit a misery that can easily be hidden. Nevertheless, as Raban says, finding the city irredeemable is only the other side of the coin expecting it to be paradise: utopias and dystopias go, of necessity, hand in hand.

Raban remarks in *Soft city* that we live in cities badly. That "we need – more urgently than architectural utopias, ingenious traffic disposal systems, or ecological programmes – to comprehend the nature of citizenship, to make a serious imaginative assessment of that special relationship between the self and the city; its unique plasticity, its privacy and freedom" (Raban, 2008).

5. CONCLUSIONS

All these theories are related because they refuse utopias; Doxiadis' *entopia*, is a compromise between dystopia and utopia, a good place for the future, but not a perfect one. The *local project's* goal is not to save the world, but to ameliorate every day life today. *Heterotopias*, are concrete utopias in dystopian cities, and the *soft city*, can be at the same time hard, violent and cruel. Compromises aren't though a way to say that man should be adaptive to these bad living conditions. As Doxiadis says, this is as true as saying that man is prepared to adapt himself to a dictatorship. Anyhow, utopias are not the work of optimists; a better future can only be built with compromises. In front of great technological progress, in a world more and more complicated and incomprehensible, man have always had the tendency to dream going back to the eternal structures of the traditional city-state. Nevertheless, Plato's city-state was not a democracy and the medieval villages had nothing idyllic. The balance, urban, regional or personal, that Doxiadis, Magnaghi, Foucault and Raban were looking for, is more difficult than a utopian authoritarian organization of life because it requires an effort from everyone of us. We don't have the choice: we must learn to survive in our bad cities, trying to make them better, if not architecturally, at least humanely. We cannot wait everything from the citizens; the utopian ideal man does not exist. Laws and policies are important and we can find more real examples of urban renewal projects that work and ameliorate the life in the city. According to Mirella Newman, in *Sustain* journal, within the global concept, the Netherlands, for example, with its deeply rooted urban culture and highly sophisticated urban planning policy, has been leading the

world in its effort to create new, more sustainable urban places that could approximate our “ideal city” image and expectations (Newman, 2010). Urban policy, efforts from the state, architects, town-planners, are very important to the organization of the city life. But the real “makers” of these projects, those who can make them work are the citizens.

It is counter-intuitive to see that in all these propositions, architectural renewal is less important than the real eternal values of the city. The “living together” is the essential part of living in the city. However, a good city is a city where we can choose the sharing or the privacy at any time and where everybody can find its place. The city should look like Hannah Arendt’s table: which at once relates and separates humans. Architecture has a role in that and small interventions in the cities like the new *Place de la République* in Paris are examples of “urban tables”: children playing, dogs running, old people talking, political refugees claiming their rights, people eating and shopping. Urban space should be the chance for the different communities to meet.

Octavio Paz, couldn't better describe the essence of the city; not only Mexico city, but all the cities as complex entities of coexistence and various textures and stories : “I speak of the City/, a novelty today, tomorrow a ruin from the past, buried and/ resurrected every day,/ lived together in streets, plazas, taxis, movie houses, theatres, bars/, hotels, pigeon coops and catacombs,/.../ the city that dreams us all, that all of us build and unbuild and/ unbuild and rebuild as we dream/.../ I speak of the immense city, that daily composed of two words:/ *the others*/.../ I speak of the buildings of stone and marble, of cement, glass and/ steel, of the people in the lobbies and doorways,/.../ I speak of our public history, and of our secret history, yours and/ mine/.../ I speak of the city shepherd of the centuries, mother that gives birth to us and devours us, that creates us and forgets” (Paz, 1087).

The cities will never become pure, because this is not compatible with their nature. They will always be made of fragments, colours and different cultures and that's where relies their interest and particularity that we need to embrace. The city means symbiosis with contradiction and if the city was supposed to be the cradle of many democratic values since antiquity, it is because the city is supposed to receive and accept diversity. We have to love cities so that we can enhance them and not wait that they become better in order to love them.

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