

Eclectic Atlases

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Nowadays, many symptoms reveal us that we are in the middle of a transitional period in the disciplines of architecture and urbanism. Most of these symptoms are linguistic, as the weakness of our architectural vocabulary facing with the complexity of contemporary urban spaces: we still use generic, vague words, to name spatial issues; words that "slip" on to the things, unable to catch the real meaning of the new places which stand around us. But we don't only need a new vocabulary. Symptoms of a more profound disease stand in our visual culture, in the ways we usually represent and think the urban dimension. If we take care of these visual symptoms, usually overlooked, probably we may feel a more radical call: the call for a new paradigm in the conceptualization of the urban phenomenon.

Distance and Chaos

Satellites have pounded a profound belief into architecture and urbanism: to understand more about territory one must see more of it. Thanks to the proliferation of satellite readings we can now see vast reaches of space shrunk into small synthetic images. We can also see more time: "live" images, sequences, seasonal cycles, night shots. Thanks to infrared photography, we are now able to view certain vital phenomena that topography cannot capture: traffic flows, crowd densities, yearly migrations. Through these developments, our eyes have gained access to a viewpoint that aerial photography and thematic cartography had not been able to provide, except in simulations. Thus we could finally see the actual state of the great European metropolises, frozen into split-second representations. And suddenly, these cities became unrecognisable. Many of the great urbanised regions-the metropolitan areas of London, Zurich, Madrid, Milan, Athens, the conurbation of Amsterdam-The Hague-Rotterdam, etc.-appeared as strange, amorphous figures, without any clear division from the countryside, lacking any obvious centre or any sharp distinction among their different parts. No longer did we see the great, compact, bounded cities that live on in our imagination, but only indistinct borderless entities, dispersed across a territory. Faced with the transfigured image of the cities we live in, the technical conquest turned into an epistemological trauma. When we saw the disappearance of the borders of peripheral districts, all muddled in a scattering of built objects in what was formerly the countryside and coagulated unharmoniously along communication routes, when we looked down on the outer urban centres swallowed by the borderless sprawl, on the open spaces criss-crossed by an irregular web of constructed strips, we immediately realised that the images with which we continued to represent the geography of our territory had become useless, along with the rigid binary distinctions that we used to describe them (centre/periphery; city/country, inside/outside, and so forth). The democratisation of a powerful technology for the observation of territory has had the paradoxical effect of

spreading a sense of impotence among the disciplines that study inhabited space, to the point where even the most attentive researchers seeking to explain contemporary urban phenomena have often felt compelled to evoke the "chaotic" nature of territory and the impossibility of constructing any kind of overall representation. The rhetoric of chaos has been produced by innovations in visual technology, which have brought us face to face with images at once stupefying and disquieting, because they cannot be deciphered with the concepts from our encyclopaedia and the words in our vocabulary. "Megalopolis," "urban constellation," "diffuse city," "city of dispersal," "low-density habitat": these are some of the neologisms with which we sought to name the chaotic entity that we had finally succeeded in seeing, but not in explaining.

The Zenith of Arrogance

Yet a ride along any of the great thoroughways that enter or exit our cities should have been enough to make us realise that European territory- and in particular the territories of South European cities- has changed over the last fifteen years: quantitatively and above all qualitatively. The novelties encountered would not have been great buildings, districts, or infrastructures (roadways, viaducts, train tracks, arcades), but a multitude of solitary and agglutinated constructions: detached houses, hangars, shopping centres, small flats, parking garages, office buildings. A reduced range of manufactured objects that one comes across everywhere, often thrown together incongruously, one against the next. Modest constructions that are, however, quite concerned with distinguishing themselves from their surroundings. Scattered, heterogeneous constructions expressive of tiny fragments of our society (the family, the small business, the firm, the shop, the club, and so on), all deliberately "cut loose" from the ground and with disregard for any rules of interrelation. Over very few years, amid the general indifference of politicians and sophisticated architecture, a hail of isolated objects has literally disarranged our territories, scattering themselves along the streets and borders of the compact city, unifying distant urban centres, climbing up mountain slopes and rolling down to lap at the shores of beaches and riversides. The aesthetic chaos produced by this impetuous wave of uncoordinated individual tremors demanded an explanation, which we sought by attempting to describe the minimal units, origins, evolutionary patterns, and hidden laws of this new city composed of a multitude of solitary objects. But also when it gets close to the territory, the descriptive endeavour (which produced a few desultory sample-books of contemporary urban kitsch) has too often remained prisoner of an ancient order of discourse: zenithal morphology, the view from above, which only attributes meaning to figures that can be expressed in full forms with visible, two-dimensional outlines. A "noble" space conceptualization paradigm, which places its hopes in a critical "distance" between the observer and territory, as though this "taking of distance" were a necessary condition for the

knowledge of territorial phenomena, despite its reduction of the observing subjectivity to an impersonal entity, external to the field of observation. This ancient zenithal paradigm, which in the architectural fields has been re-founded during the sixties (strongly conditioned by the structuralistic *koynè*), has completely cancelled the dimension of real time evolution, reducing the evolution of spaces to the unique dimension of "history", where the changelement is only intended as a sequence of historical "cuts" represented in a sequence of synchronical maps. The fact is that the code of this all-embracing vision is an enduring and domineering paradigm, which tends to thrust aside the others and which interprets the irreducibility of local codes as chaos. But what is more, the zenithal paradigm is also misleading, because it induces the observer to distance himself from the territory and gives him the illusion of having the same impersonal and powerful angle of view as the technologies of representation which he employs. And it is hypocritical, because it shields the observer from his responsibilities; it shows us the surface of the earth from afar, while it continually tells us that the laws and rules of the phenomena appearing before us are elsewhere, behind or "beneath" visible space, in the economy, in society, in deeply underlying structures. Yet it is by no means certain that we can complete the zenithal view of the new "diffuse city" by simply adding on descriptions of society, of the territory's economic and institutional relations, until we finally succeed in escaping from the rhetoric of chaos. By piling aggregate representations of the territory one on top of the other, as though they were flat specialised layers, we will never attain any grasp of the essence of contemporary inhabited space: the vertical, mobile energies, and the physical and psychological landscapes winding through them. We will have thematic "maps" crammed with useless and highly ordered information, but they will be incapable of conveying the multidimensional, dynamic nature of urban phenomena. Busily seeking invisible, underlying structures capable of lending order to the visible phenomena on the surface of territory, we neglect any reflection of the fact that contemporary territory is shaped by multidimensional tensions that take form between space and society, and do not bother to express themselves within the code of zenithal morphology-configurations that are often exactly what they appear to be and do not claim to be anything different from their appearance. In short, to explain chaos, a paradigm that is powerful in visual tools yet poor in interpretative codes is not sufficient. We cannot ask it to resolve the very problem that it has created.

Lateral Thinking

Although the strength of this "zenithal" paradigm, we most consider the recent emergence of a sceptical minority attitude which moves in the wake of its great visual power. Convinced that the city is not only a stratification of "levels of reality" but also a collective mode of conceiving space, persuaded that every stage of the city's evolution implies and demands a new "leap" in

its representation, this attitude seeks to infiltrate the ranks of the enemy paradigm with small acts of sabotage. Standing on the shoulders of a giant, it continually casts pebbles in the giant's eyes. In some parts of Europe this attitude is producing "Eclectic Atlases" which propose new ways of examining correspondences between space and society. The texts are heterogeneous (reports, photographic surveys, geographic and literary descriptions, classifications, research reports, qualitative investigations, essays and articles, anthologies and monographs, collections of plans or projects...), but they are similar in their visual approach. They tend to take on the form of an "atlas" because they seek new logical correspondences between spatial things, the words we use to name them, and the mental images we project upon them. And they tend to be eclectic because the criteria on which these correspondences are based are often multidimensional, spurious and experimental. This variegated family of studies and inquiries does not believe that chaos is the reflection of external phenomena, but rather that it is the effect of worn-out ways of conceiving territory. Eclectic atlases usually try to construct representations with "multiple entries" and to counteract the dominant paradigm. They attack laterally, moving at once toward physical space and mental space, because they believe in the existence of profound connections between the forms of vision and the forms of things seen. They look at the inhabited territories of Europe in search of the individual, local, multiple codes that link the observer each time to the phenomena observed: the physical city, its inhabitants, and the "inner city" of the person observing. Perplexed by the linear progression of history, they prefer to use more "forms" to represent the flow of time in a territory. They produce provisional and inconsequential maps in which the territory is not represented as a continuous mineral substrate or as a layering of stable "states of things", but as the interweaving of sinuous and multiple configurations which are reversible and which never share the same time-frame. In sceptical confrontation with an impersonal and synoptic gaze, these atlases most often use several angles of view simultaneously to look at the territory: from above, but also through the eyes of those who live within the space, or from new, unprejudiced, experimental perspectives. They are particularly concerned to maintain the distinction between the subjectivity of the real observer (we who look at the landscape or observe its representations) and the simulacra of subjectivity incorporated in the technologies of representation. They display the conviction that our identity precedes vision, that it is "outside" the scene of the gaze. Deftly interweaving viewpoints, the eclectic atlases propose a multiple visual thinking which abandons the utopia of an all-embracing vision from an optimal angle of observation. The most interesting characteristic of these eclectic atlases is that they seem to be in sympathy with their field of observation: they use an eclectic gaze to look upon an eclectic territory. Eclectic atlases experiment unsystematically with "lateral" ways of looking at and representing the territory of the European city. These approaches converge to form some of the major thematic "shake-ups" in how we view territory. In particular these approaches converge to suggest four sidelong glances, four new ways of observing our urban environments.

Inside the Space, blinking. A Detective's Gaze.

"La Disparition" is an opera made by the Italian artist and photographer Paola Di Bello. It shows the map of Paris subway using a sort of puzzle composed by 350 pictures the artist got focusing the 350 points on the billboards of the 350 subway stations where the users put their finger thinking "Well, I'm here...". This paradoxical opera, where the daily life cancels the sites where it flows more frequently, suggests that is possible to have a global knowledge of an environment refusing to use only a topographic view. This opera shows the possibility of a first visual shake-up, which implies a considerable increase in the observer's physical proximity to his field of observation. It is the invitation to enter the inhabited space with our body in order to seek out the traces left by new lifestyles; to see more by seeing small. Wherever we go we find the same new buildings: shopping centres, drive-in restaurants, small flats, single family dwellings, and so on; but hidden behind the apparent standardisation of the different territories we pass through, there are many clues to ways of living which cling jealously to their local identity, tending to privatise space by nesting in its folds. In fact, the new social behaviours leave in the spaces labile traces, not yet completely absorbed by its physical dimension. Mobile and weak traces that acquire strength by their continuous reappearance and repetition in far apart spaces; shifting, provisional traces that can only be grasped by a sensitive, "rhizomatic" gaze. A detective's gaze, that produces local maps, punctual samplings, biographies of places; that produces the narrative of an individual itinerary through space, and does not use representation to "distance itself" from territory. Let us take the example of a group of houses, scattered in a suburban zone: a typical situation in South European territories. Its representation on a topographical map (whatever may the scale of the representation be) reveals only a few irregular, indecipherable geometric figures. Yet if we observe it from within, looking for clues to the relations that link the inhabitants to their place of residence, this will tell us much more. The inclusion of unusual objects and spaces inside the confines of the lot (the tavern, the office, the garden, the toys) indicates, for example, that the grandparents' living space, which is more complex than others, often becomes a "central" place for the other nuclei of an extended family, accustomed to living "separate, but nearby" in the "diffuse city". And this explains for the most part the "bunching" of the single-family homes around -that is, at a "calculated" distance from- the grandparents' home. Using a sort of detective's view we may explain to a large degree the distribution of single-family homes in "clusters". This because the tendency of families to localize themselves in a limited area, in all urban areas of Mediterranean Europe, is an indispensable precondition for the understanding of how the new landscapes of urban life organize themselves. The close-up, roaming eye of a detective's gaze may help us to discover a paradoxical phenomenon: a sphere potentially heading toward homologation, where new constructions

are beginning to overlap and cover up the ancient differences between the city's various parts, but where a different principle of variation in the new constructions has come into play; no longer an internal inflection of the units of a homogeneous geographical area (as in the past), but an inflection of the distinctive characteristics of a class of constructions haphazardly scattered across the territory. A new mechanism of variation which functions as an internal inflection for each typology of building, which accentuates and articulates the differences between the members of one family of buildings. Out of this emerges the image of a territory in which we encounter the same buildings and spaces everywhere, yet each time we see them we find them characterized by the locality and made unique by the geographical terrain, by the exposure to sunlight, by the customs of the use of open space, and by family traditions. The image of a society capable of using a "reduced" building vocabulary to represent, in surprisingly variegated forms, its rootedness in a specific place out of the many microcosmos of which is composed.

Looking at the Space while it is changing. An Oblique Gaze

A second visual shake-up promoted by Eclectic Atlases is related with the concept of change, and suggests that we concentrate on what moves between space and society, and is normally hidden by our maps: the flux of the physical territory. This family of Eclectic Atlases doesn't collect objects or spaces, but physical events, "fatti urbani" (a notion used by Aldo Rossi in *L'architettura della città*, Marsilio, Padova 1966). To see space while it changes, it is necessary to "deconstruct" the zenithal paradigm, yet without relinquishing its power. Instead, there is an attempt to personalise it by looking at the territory of the European cities from above, but obliquely, merging the codified angle of an axonometry with a poetically arbitrary perspective. In the early eighties, a small tourist-aircraft flew at length over the periphery of Copenhagen, at about two hundred meters in altitude. From the pilot's seat, Danish architect C.J. Christiansen shot sequences of photographs with the optical axis of the camera at a slightly oblique angle. In this unusual aerial encyclopaedia (published in 1985 under the title *Monument & Niche*), the quasi-axometric angle of the observer who scrutinised the age and three-dimensional consistency of the solid objects, made it possible for the spaces to take on a density which was also temporal. Thus they became "urban facts", spatio-temporal events that leave a wake in time and cast a shadow on society: signs and traces of the mode of habitation, of the buildings' wear, of their superfetation. In order to understand the different rhythms of evolution of the new urban nebula, we may use three approaches. First, we can read -as waves- the large scale movement on the ground of urban phenomena; a perspective which needs a zenithal view and suggests us to recognise the social structure of the local societies as if they be composed by great homogeneous groups. Using this

approach, which is directly related with the dominant visual paradigm, we may represent these waves as general tendencies towards the extension versus narrowing of land use processes. A second opposite approach permits us to observe the multitude of nebular and individual tremors which move the change in the urban territory; this point of view needs a sort of anthropological sight, able to recognise the fragmented decisional system (families, local enterprises, public decision makers...) which run over the local environments. But these two extreme approaches don't allow us to observe the "patterns" of change. The discovery of the principal devices which compose these tremors into the main evolutionary waves needs in fact a third approach: a visual approach which aims to compile a list of ways of changing of the material environment. A lateral, oblique gaze which may help us not only to see how individual tremors change the territory, but also to understand the strangely evolving assonance that binds these tremors together. In fact, from an oblique angle, the built territory shows its age and fragmentation. Finally, we see in action -in a collective action- the kaleidoscope of minoritarian social groups that compose our post-industrial societies, the small disjointed individual tremors that shape it and spread in their "wake". Urban phenomena no longer appear to us as stickers that can be peeled off, but as "complete" evolutionary processes that unfold between space and society according to principles which are quite indifferent to two-dimensional geometry, and therefore indecipherable by satellite images and topological maps. In a research on Milan metropolitan area (S.Boeri, A.Lanzani, E.Marini, *Il territorio che cambia, Abitare/Segesta, Milano 1993*), we hit upon six "developmental principles" determined by human behaviours and decisional procedures, to be named with the help of metaphors. In short, if we try to see "time in space", we will perhaps be able to understand that the urban contemporary territory brings together a multitude of individual, non-synchronous tremors within few regular movements -distinct in rhythm, duration and intensity- of material. Each of these regular movements is replicated in different and distant spaces and reveals a certain specific organization of the social relations and decision-making processes. Thus behind the aesthetic chaos produced by the apparently incongruous juxtaposition of monads attentive only to their own individual trajectories, we witness the appearance of an entirely different phenomenon: the excessive power of a few principle of order.

Intercepting the city. A Sampling Gaze.

A third family of Eclectic Atlases propose a sampling attitude. The question posed by this family of Eclectic Atlases is how to identify the new urban phenomenon. In fact, the effective dimensions of the city are no longer certain today; they are no longer measurable according to geometric presuppositions. The great mobility of individuals and the emergence of

many new central places outside the traditional city (just think of huge hotel-entertainment-shopping complexes) and the diffusion of the city toward the countryside, has exported the genetic code of the city out into areas of low architectural density: urbanity has become a potential quality of all places, not only due to the proximity of manufactured objects or to geographical contiguity. In order to represent this reversal of the relations between centre and periphery, we can no longer use the topographical maps, which recognize a city on the basis of a densification of constructed volumes within a clear perimeter. Rather than creating maps which risk imposing approximate limits on the area of a city on the basis of some historical or juridical simulacrum, it is preferable to discern the varying degrees of urbanity in a given territory by sweeping through it with a precise gaze determined by the parameters of an optical field, constructing longitudinal sections of the inhabited territory and then dealing with these different "strips" of space. For only by organising rigorous and comparable spot checks, or "sounding" operations, can we hope to intercept that which we can no longer see. Usually, Eclectic Atlases follow this attempt in two ways; they propose a method of sampling the complexity of the urban phenomenon and then, on these selected zones, they work as "sensors", intercepting the characteristics of each zone and trying to compare them. In this direction, what is needed is a gaze that operates through geological sectioning, rather than distinguishing surface areas; a gaze from above, but a mobile and itinerant gaze that gives the observer back his subjective responsibility. A gaze that is prepared to intercept the presence of urban relations, rather than to recognise existent categories-and this, even in zones outside the historical perimeter of the city, even in areas which are not densely constructed. The introductory gallery of the Italian Pavillon at the Venice Biennale, two years ago, contained a photographic reconnaissance on the state of the Italian territory (S.Boeri, G.Basilico, Italy, Cross Section of a Country, Scalo, Zurich 1998) . Gabriele Basilico's photographs showed everything that had changed in six segments of it each fifty kilometres long and twelve wide, cut out from the centres of certain major conurbations (Milan, Venice, Florence, Rimini/Riccione, Naples, Gioia Tauro), and turned outward along a major axis). Six sequences of 150 images showed us a territory filled by a wave of similar but solitary manufactured products, from which emerges an urban environment with completely new forms, invisible to an aggregative, synoptic gaze. These sections of inhabited territory were constructed by precisely establishing the co-ordinates of the optical field (framing, depth of field, , film speed, etc.) and then letting it sweep along the mineral substrate, like a sensor. Thanks to this method of scanning, it was possible to realize a sort of deconstruction of the old enduring representation of the main Italian metropolitan areas as a hierarchical and monocentric cities and to re-asses the degree of urbanization from within; to compare different typologies of inhabited spaces and to recognize different habitational environments. Most of them are environments with many of the features of urbanization, but which are not produced by growth around some new nucleus or by the spread of an urban area in successive bands, but rather by the apparently random aggregation of a multitude of solitary urban

facts inflected according to a principle of individual over-representation and arranged in space according to certain rules of "relationship at a distance" and constituted within certain recurrent modes of change. Strange new dust-cloud cities stretched across the terrain, invisible to topographic maps, enclosing and open cities, ruled by thousands of principles of order and deprived of a dominant central location, where a limited range of constructions, inflected according to certain recurrent modes, tests every possible combination.

Perceptual strips. A Mobile Gaze.

Finally, a fourth visual shake-up suggested by *Eclectic Atlases*, appeals directly to our identity as erratic citizens of this new urban dimension. Mobile citizens involved in the dimension of a "relationship at a distance" city: e.g., residences tens of kilometers away from their inhabitants' places of work or study, which are in turn sometimes tens of kilometers away from the integrated commercial district, where family members come back together on Saturday to shop and meet with friends. An urban space where proximity almost always proves to be (with certain significant exceptions, such as that of relationships between relatives) less important than accessibility, and where spatial distances are measured by how long it takes to travel them. A territory that was once geographically subdivided into whole, circumscribed parts, is now being rewritten -not erased or even simply retraced- by extremely mobile styles of life. What we have now are mobile groups of individuals who often cross the urban and suburban territories as temporary, selective inhabitants are redefining the meaning of these places. They use often historic centers like discothèques, outskirts like areas of a new "naturalness", suburban neighborhoods as "niches" of origin and destination for their day-to-day movements. Yet these new mobile lifestyles co-exist with the more traditional habits of the population which, in the daily spatial-temporal cycle, continues to move about in limited areas; a cohabitation which forms a sphere in which zones of ancient construction alternate and blend with areas occupied or colonized by a multitude of new buildings. In order to recognize and represent this new dimension, *Eclectic Atlases* don't simply try to represent the new perimeter of our cities, but they prefer to go deeper in the analysis of our identity as citizens; they work at a symbolic level, using two main approaches. The first one appeals the agility of our viewpoint as city dwellers: our habit of successively using over the course of one day the multiple identities that are lodged within us. In fact, with respect to one and the same space, we can alternately be distracted commuters, curious connoisseurs, passing tourists, or regular occupants. We often link together different and distant spaces -for example a shopping centre and tourist-oriented historical centre - only because we project the same signifying codes upon them (the "threshold" of a parking lot, the

artificial interior, the "bustle" of a commercial corridor); conversely, similar and neighbouring spaces (a group of detached houses and a cluster of tradesmen's workshops) sometimes appear incomparable to us, only because we reach them through very different perceptual sequences. But at the same time, (here is the second approach) we must understand how our perception of this new urban dimension has yet changed the identity of many urban places. Nowadays, many places in the contemporary city are only decipherable if one considers the sequences of urban landscapes along which they are deployed, placed in successions on the same "wavelength."

"Television, automobile, suburbs, parking lot, shopping centre, parking lot, suburbs, automobile, television". Let us reflect on the way we frequent the great commercial/entertainment buildings strewn across our cities. We arrive directly from our homes, travelling in automobiles along motorways through suburban territories. In the outdoor parking lot, a brief passage on foot represents the only "outside-outside" segment of the journey. Once we have left meteorological and chronological time behind us, we enter huge, climate-controlled artificial environments where we move among individuals carrying out actions similar to our own, in slightly different forms. When the subjective time of our visit has come to an end, the same sequence of experiences clicks off in reverse: the controlled exit, the total-outside of the parking lot, the automobile, the flux of landscapes behind the windshield, the threshold of the home... The capacity of these great containers to dilate the time allotted to their enjoyment (as though lasting longer than the time we spend inhabiting them) and to tune different places into the wavelength of a distracted perception of whatever flows alongside us (whether out the car window or along the aisles of the shopping centre) is only one example of the power of certain constantly recurring perceptual strips in contemporary urban life. In European cities, places acquire meaning more on the basis of their position in the temporal flux of life experiences than in relation to their position in geographical space. We inhabit the city by tuning into a limited number of these landscape sequences, as in the case of the symmetrical trajectory from our home to a shopping centre, or the "click" sequence (the continuous succession of "stop and go" short movements) that we go through when we take a train or an aeroplane. A few recurrent sequences take up ever larger portions of our time and or status as city-dwellers is often due to the frequency and the hierarchy whereby these strips repeat themselves in our daily life. Our identity is always more marked by the montage of places which composes our erratic, everyday experience of the territory, than by the geographic emplacement of our home.

Seeing us seeing places

In sum, it can be said that the maps produced by interweaving these four "lateral" gazes are attempts to observe the territory while it changes. Using a multiple visual thinking, these eclectic maps help us to recognize the physical change in its contemporary action. They spring from a belief that many of

the complex tensions uniting space and society, inhabitants and places, only take on form and "weight" within a vital flux. Therefore the new maps look to the surface of space to find traces and indications of ways of inhabiting which are often invisible, mutable, and provisional. They observe the different ways in which the territories of our extended cities are changing in order to find rules, or a framework, however weak and scarcely visible they may be, in the relationships between space and society. They try to understand these relationships and consider their different ways and rhythms of change, knowing that the space it isn't a metaphor of the society (it doesn't reflect directly the transformation of social behaviours), but often it shows -often belatedly- only signs, traces and clues of that change. These maps are programmatically incomplete and eclectic because they seek to accommodate a multiple interpretation of the contemporary European city-which, according to this reading, is not chaotic, but instead reflects two phenomena that make such an interpretation difficult. The first phenomenon is the invasion of a multitude of solitary and agglutinated built objects produced by individual social circumstances that occupy different time-frames, diffused throughout the entire inhabited space and nesting in its folds, constructing new landscapes and modifying the meaning of existing ones. These standardised "urban facts" often derive from an all-pervasive model-like the single-family house in the centre of the parcel, the shopping centre surrounded by its parking lots, the pedestrian historical centre-rather than from a given building tradition or from communicative practices rooted in local history. For this reason it has become increasingly difficult to subdivide the territory into parts which can be clearly distinguished by their form, by prevalent modes of habitation, or by symbolic values. The "grammar" of the new city is built up of many elementary phrases, rather than articulated statements of clearly distinguishable types. The second phenomenon that eclectic maps allow us to see is the repetition, inside and outside the compact city, of a limited number of compositional schemes for this multitude of solitary fragments: the suburban housing district, the enclosed industrial or artisanal zone, the tourist centre... These reflect the few and simple dynamics of interaction between subjects who participate in the construction of our territory and the organisation of our society into subsystems, by "minorities" which operate as microcosms of self-poiesis (the extended family, ethnic and professional clans, cultural communities, spare-time or consumer associations). Even when they are superimposed, these dynamics rarely enter into osmosis; rather, they reproduce themselves without mutual contamination, simply adding themselves on to a territory that is already full of traces and symbols of vanishing ancestral modes of habitation. In short, the "syntax" of the new cities consists of few rules of organisation and a multitude of phrases; it is an impoverished language making ever repeated use of only small parts of its rich vocabulary. While satellites incessantly send us two-dimensional images of the aesthetic chaos which reflects the cities of the twentieth century, from some points of inhabited space we are receiving images which are less presumptuous but much richer in information. Registering what happens between space and society, they reveal a territory where a few recurring rules organise a multitude of bulky buildings, and these almost never

constitute figures visible "from above". The kaleidoscope has become the best metaphor to represent a space shaped by a society organised through introverted, uncommunicating microcosms. Though it may be true that the arrogant viewing angle of the impersonal zenithal paradigm has fixed the coordinates for the conception of twentieth century urban space, the contemporary city seems to demand that we learn to see it anew-and that we begin by learning to see ourselves in it, as individuals and as groups.

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