

**URBAN AESTHETICS**  
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Ladies and gentleman, I will talk not so much about my work. You know. I try to take it seriously that this is a Symposium about contemporary Art Theory so I will try it's a tentative. To arrive to a Contemporary art Theory about urban esthetics, which is not necessary my field, but I will comment the slides and I have to explain my technique if I have communication difficulties. I am doing little drawings, so these slides will be little drawings with some text, with a text, which is not necessarily in a good English. Originally I should speak French but it was changed, so you will excuse me for the eventual faults. And in each of the slides I am telling a very stupid banal statement and I will try to add up the banal statements to a tentative theory and for this I will go to the other microphone because I have to see the slides like you.

So the first idiotically simple statement: that the city scape is the result of a large number of individual acts. This has as well a corollary. I will tell that perhaps the role of the architect is less important than the architect is seeing it that doesn't mean that the architect is not important. (image 1) So this act might be that there is some order relating the act but this is not evident. (Image 2) The cityscape changes through small individual acts. I think in Mexico I don't need to accentuate it, it's enough that you are walking in the street (Image 3) individual city acts are some bit interconnected indeed, because you see them together, they are visually necessary interconnected and not only visually, evidently (Image 4) The cityscape is the result of the interconnection of this act. It's a fact because you cannot see one object except to a postcard in reality you see always as a whole. (Image 5) As the individual acts are changing continuously, so the cityscape changes continuously. (Image 6)

This is something you probably see in your city but I see it very much in Paris. But I will add here a little remark to explain about the importance of these individual acts. People walking in a street don't look at buildings they don't look at other things but shop windows; they look at people coming in from of them they look at cars. And I have the experience in Paris that many people don't, know how to look at a building from the first floor up, they know only the ground floor. And at the first floor level are these individual acts, which change the city. (Image 7)

Now a scene that I consider important. A city is a process, is a n ongoing process (Image 8) And it is not the final result that counts. It is a professional error of planners and architects that we think that the building finished is finished and here it is, it's a *chef d'oeuvre* that in reality continues to be changed and a building after a certain time doesn't look the way like its concept or imagined (image 9) Now, I indicated before that there is some order. There is some order but here are no clear rules about this order. So the urban landscape is an erratic process. (Image 11) You cannot detect the order. We all erratic any system we're in a given moment, when knowing its state in a given moment you don't know what will be its next state, after this given moment passes. (Image 11) So even where you don't see, I'm sorry it is a parody, it's not pretending it's the architecture we are living in, but there is no transparency of this order. If I am looking, walking in Mexico there are building of all kinds I have absolutely no feeling why they are that way I am accepting them as a sort of evidence (Image 12) Now a very important statement again. At process, we have no ways to describe a process mathematics is poor for describing process. I don't want to enter in this question but if you want when there will be the question time I can give more details. The only way we describe a process, very simply, a chronological description, by it's history (Imagine 13) So here, I think this drawing explains this individual act as a process and their history by identifying them with their authors. (Image 14) Now, again an

important thing. I am calling "complicated order" an order that exists with no clearly set rules. For example, the alphabet is of this kind. You know the alphabet is a, b, c. There is absolutely no rule why b comes after a except that you are trained to it and I think that for I was in China not a long time ago. For the Chinese it is not evident the reason why the b comes after the a. This is what I'm calling a complicated order where there is an order but you don't know the rules (Image 15) And in a complicated order for example each term has a position but you cannot explain the thing in formula (image 16). And there is no way to predict what will happen at the next step, which follows to the complicated order We begin to find out that the mechanical order we believed centuries in is not fitting to most fact.

Now I wanted to compare complexity and complicated. Complexity means that there is a relation between terms. Complicated means that there is a relation between terms but what relation it's not evident. (Imagine 17) For finite number of terms there is a finite number of complex figures possible. But there is an infinite number of complicated figures possible. (Image 18) Now the urban process is a complicated order. It follows a complicated order and it is not simply complexity as all the time we planners architects think it is different it's as complicated as history or economy (Image 19) So. What I am calling "hardware" for the cities is tree void that exists between the physical objects whatever they are, in our case buildings. (Image 20) Now this is a photo from Shanghai. You are looking at this street in Shanghai. Do you see the buildings? I don't see them. I see the advertisements, I see people. I see cars. This is the city. The building they can be architecture but you don't see them (Image 21). This is another street in Shanghai, at night. Where is the architecture? Where is the planning? It is only the individual unregulated acts. I don't know why this luminous sign is the way, and tomorrow the shop owner might change it and the street changes continuously. It is a

purpose that I am showing existing examples and most of my examples will be from Shanghai because I was myself surprised by the city (a) Another street (b) another street and for example in places in the street, during the time I was there -I was two weeks in shanghai, some of the luminous signs changed. There is a well one luminous sign, in shanghai, which changes every hour. Which is actually possible with the techniques of today. (C) This is again a so-called old part of Shanghai. You don't see the buildings not because of the trees; you are looking at the things at floor level the level of your eyes. (D)

This is a typical building also from Shanghai, but it could be from India, from anywhere you want. It is a building and everybody adds to it something you don't know anymore how the original building looked and with the next tenanted it will change again. It's a continuously changing process. (E) This gives you the idea between the architecture as it is seen in the best normally by us and between the reality (F) Again, you see this very banal modern building that disappeared by what the little changes each ten at was doing All of these changes are absolutely imprevisible . And I was not long time in there but I think that I could take photos' once every three months and it will be different (G) Again, the most important thing you see there are simply the people the fact how a street is used changes the cityscape. (H)

Now, I am talking a few drawings of some of my drawings and I was capturing out all kind of building parts from other buildings and pasting into it. It is a parody. But I wanted to show that the very small intervention changes completely the image. (I) Again (J) I am sorry, there are no proposals they are simply illustrations, the original architectural drawing into which its different elements are pasted, they are the same but each of them looks different and the changes are relatively small (K) the same thing (L) simply by

shop signs you change a street. This is for me the most important personal experience I had in Shanghai. Now I will start to take, rapidly, a next step. Architecture, I consider, is the art of shaping voids. (22) And a void is something you cannot see; it's meaningless (23). A void gets its signification through its boundaries it's evident. (24) And it gets as well a meaning through the things it contains. (25) You can't see a void I think that is as well evident. Next, please. What you can see are the surfaces, which limit it (27), and architects manipulate these surfaces, they don't really manipulate the void (28). The real raw material of architecture is exactly that void that architects cannot manipulate. They can't manipulate its boundaries (29). And there you will never see only one boundary in a three dimensional world that means the boundaries around the void are from all sides (30), and it is usual that these sides are not made by the same persons in the same time (31). The main feature, which gives the character of a void, are the people which are in this void I was trying to show it in the Shanghai photos and here again, (32) And an empty void gives an emotional context (33) which is very different from the same void when it's filled with people. This room when I came here earlier this morning, did look very different because you were not here (34). So again a void can look crowded with few people and it can be that it looks empty even if it is full (35) it is the people in the void that determines its scale. Architects know it very well, in all architectural drawing you draw some little persons to give it a scale (36). Does architecture as an art mean the interaction of voids, boundaries and people? (37) We could conceive a theory of architecture. The architect introduces it's a tentative order in an assembly of voids this order is not necessarily regular and the user of the architect's product introduces his disorder and this disorder is the cityscape.

I am giving now a few drawings of mine trying to show it. (M) This is the same drawing where the user introduces some of his own disorder (N) again some other disorder. At each step you would tell it is the same object (O), again a drawing (P). Again a user introduces steps of disorder (Q) add this drawing. And this disorder in on paper, in reality it is stronger (S) now. They are photos of Shanghai (T) this is the same photo, the same space not on a drawing but the reality (U). Another photo of Shanghai. It changed completely because instead of the cards there is a crowd. Nothing changes the building, the cityscape changed completely. (W) The kind of street you saw before. (A) The introduction of some new luminous elements independent from each other, changes again the cityscape. (Z) A street. Some additional advertisements. Ok so this means that I will stop now.

By any means what I was thinking the theory of art have loved urban aesthetics. First point: urban aesthetics is not the work of the architect. Second point: urban aesthetics is the result of the collective effect of small individual changes. Third point: the urban cityscape is a sort of a readymade in the sense of Duchamp with one difference: it's an ever changing readymade. Duchamp's *Readymade* was there and it was finished. So perhaps the city is artwork, readymade, an ever changing readymade on urban scale. This is a tentative theory and it can be simply presenting it as an initiation and I thank you very much for your patience. Thank you very much.