

A new urban culture is in the process of gestating and this great city's paradigm. The challenge for those involved in cultural administration is to understand the great potential existing in the city's people – people from rural areas who came here with a will to succeed and make a better life for their families.

3rd Reflection –What is Public Space?

Public space is the point of convergence of human beings every public activity. It is the sum political, socioeconomic, religious and social structures, manifested through the structure of the environment, of physical space and form, its contents including architecture, roads, outdoor structures and fixtures, flora, monuments and urban art in general. Sometimes this space is very rich and sometimes very poor. Public space nowadays is greatly neglected and has been displaced to shopping centers, largely due to a lack of interest in terms of cultural policies that preciously operated in this same public space. Our challenge for the twenty-first century is to find to recover public space so that it can be used intensively by the majority of the population.

4th Reflection – What Are the great City's Paradigms?

As far as this issue is concerned, the main aspect that needs to be defined is the type of city we desire for the future, and how civil society may participate in its development, what kind of aesthetic we desire for the city, in which way artists will participate in the city's art, and how we can make the city constantly pleasurable. A city is the sum of many complex circumstances, full of surprises and fascinating aspects that make the population incapable of leaving it. However, we must define a common platform that goes beyond ideologies and political or economic interest, one that allows the city to be influential and that gives its inhabitants a multiplicity of options and possibilities.

ART AND THE CITY IN THE AGE OF THE REPRODUCIBILITY OF ADVERTISING* **Nestor Garcia Canceling****

Why do we need art in cities? Looking back at history allows us to assert that we need art and, in more general terms, anything of an aesthetic nature for the purposes of decoration but also for more pressing reasons. It seems to me that art, literature and mass media have been introduced and continue to be introduced into urban spaces, to celebrate them, to make a spectacular display of them and to at least four different reasons: to establish or reestablish urban spaces, to celebrate them, to make a spectacular display of them and to either manifest or conceal their disappearance.

Until the mid-twentieth century, literature was the medium of choice fulfilling the aesthetic facet of these functions. Though cities have obviously always been visual experiences, given the predominance of the written word in our culture it was literary texts that establish with a city what it was and what it meant. Balzac's and Proust's writing, to the Buenos Aires of Borges and tango, to Kafka's Prague and Carlos Fuentes, Mexico City, and also to cities built as daring, magnificent inventions: Odette's Santa Maria; Garcia Marquez's Macondo; Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities.

One thing these real or imaginary cities have in common is that they are defined in relation to boundaries – as universes in and of themselves differentiated from the indeterminacy of nature. Even though borders may not be as sharply outlined as ramparts, the imaginary texts that create them clearly distinguish the inside from the outside.

However, cities in the age of video culture are relocated within both physical and mental networks and flows. Indeed, we should ask ourselves how identities take shape in these cities that do not contrast as

sharply with nature as delimited city of the past- -the provider of identity, protection and meaning according to Campra.

Nowadays, cities are conceived by the discourses of the press, radio and television rather than that of literature. These are the main agencies contracting the city's meaning. They allow certain individuals to participate in the discussion about what the city I soar a can be, and propose their opinions to others as keys to what they man undertake or express as citizens.

The transition from "lettered city", as Angel Rama called it: the city that literature founded and interpreted, to the audiovisual city, to urban video culture of the loss of the urban context's boundaries and meaning. This is particularly clear in the mega polis, where the founding structure of cities breaks down or becomes more diffuse. Celebrating or restoring dilapidated spaces or resorting to the spectacle of advertising or art then become more common tendencies.

We should briefly recall how megalopolitan sprawl led to the decrease, in the past, of attempts by visual artists to take part in the foundation or celebration commemorate the events and individuals who founded cities and countries, or the express the ambitions of revolutionary or imperialist historical events? Ten years ago, a book about Mexican monuments edited by Helen Escobedo and Paolo Gory showed how the didactic many murals and sculptures had been eclipsed by corporate towers and billboards that either smothered the country's heroes or altered their original meaning.

Here I would like to broach the topic of two ventures from the last few years that propose other tactics of visual intervention in Mexico City. One of these is the series of enormous billboards that has turned the Periférico (the city's main beltway) and other large thoroughfares into strange promotional "art" galleries. The other ins the ABC DF

exhibition and the 1500 "page book accompanying it, widely distributed both in Mexico and abroad, offering a visual repertoire of Mexican capital's -most beloved aspects".

1.- Monuments to advertising. How can one negotiate the incredible glut of offers-goods, messages, promises of Access, information and pleasure – that is a megalopolis? It is the great stage of modern opulence, here everything (the local, the national and the global, the private and the public) is offered in profusion and supposedly available to everyone, to the big city's natives well as to the millions of migrants who made it so huge in their desire to encounter both work and leisure- to be in the place where averting can be found. Mexico City, like Sao Paulo, New York and London, Berlin and Tokyo, is the meeting place of legions who expect to meet whit every face of modernity in these megacities. At the same time, we know that his glut of offers leads to a wide range of experiences given entertainment, the excess of information. Easy access to various means of transportation comes along with bottlenecks, the broad diversity of live entertainment, newspapers mad television channels. Clothes and food seems limited by their cost, forcing people to be selective and make do with what they can afford. This ambivalent aspect of the megalopolis shapes both the public and private sphere and also differentiate ourselves, calling upon us to participate and also to accept exclusions.

These ambiguities appear every day when we drive or ride day Mexico City's Periférico, surrounded by the advertising posted along its edges. The sixty-two-kilometer beltway was built to speed up circulation and allow motorists to easily cross the city from one end to the other. If one could drive at an average of eighty kilometers per hour, one could complete a circuit around the city in less than an hour. However, on a regular day from 7 to 10 am, 1 to 4 pm and 6 to 9 pm

one may take an hour to cover a distance of ten kilometers along many sections of the ring road.

The density of cars on the Periferico finds a visual echo in the excessive amount of advertising along its edges. The boom in billboards on the rooftops of house speedway began in 1987, businesses taking advantage of a lack of regulations. Tough several bylaws governing signage have been drafted since 1988, the main companies involved in the venture (televise, Vendor and Outdoor Systems Inc.) continue to erect more and bigger billboards. New bylaws and successive administrations have not been able to stop the explosion, indeed, a census in May 2001 gave a total count of 7503 billboards, over a thousand of them along the Periferico, most of them illegal, violating basic safety codes and guidelines regarding visual pollution such as law requiring a minimum distance between signs, it has also happened that billboards have fallen down during storms, damaging roofs and leading to complaints from neighborhood organizations.

To the mega-city's profusion of *mélanges*-juxtaposing traditional dances, both modern and colonial architecture, commercial and political imagery- we must add these huge billboards, twenty to eighty meters wide, that obstruct the view while promising to improve communication. -in terms of communications, we are the solution states an ad for cell phones. While one is stuck in a traffic jam, one can behold, the sexy female model for pornographic magazine ad who says -don't go home. Buy me now!. Several ads refer to basic needs, ranging from digestion(-Say goodbye to heartburn!) to education (-To be bilingual and highly qualified, but first and foremost human!) Urbanites' insecurities are also addressed: -Do you feel totally safe? And -Ultimate Control: driving school.!

Billboards' have become the new method for monumentalizing things in the city.

Sometimes, they still extol common values and still celebrate social memory, thus playing the same role as monuments erected in strategic spots in the city in the past. In a like manner, billboards nowadays sometimes function as markers, indicating which part of the city we are referring to.

Wow ever, the fact that these ads contently change makes it difficult to say "I'll meet you under the Coca. Cola sign", like we used to say "I'll meet you at the cafeteria across from the Caballito".

However, we know that the *Caballito* and several other monuments have been moved while, many others remaining in their original sites have become insignificant, dwarfed by corporate buildings or the billboards that crown the latter. These billboards that block each other and whose ads are moved every few weeks exacerbate the sense of instability, precariousness and diminishing significance of old monuments and other manifestations of collective memory and urban sociability. Instead of celebrating or consecrating a figure or event in a lasting manner, they proclaim the fleetingness of the social, reconceived in terms of consumer-market logic as an endless flow of new events that do not follow any recognizable cause from a social point of view.

What is this glut of messages and its communicational jumble, its repetitive obsolescence actually saying? It says that instead of processes, we now simply have events; instead of history, we have movements, or simply market's bustle: instead of news advertising fads and faster computers, spectacular movie premiers and goods on sale stores. Grimed together as an unclassified jumble, these messages announce the death throes of meaningful series, of cities ordered as commercial and residential neighborhoods, entertainment and leisure areas, university campuses and financial districts. All these messages and

offers, all the ways and communicating with each other are sprawled the city and compete against each other in every space. The visual chaos makes it hard for us to get bearings and figure out which clothing store or internet-service provider best suits our needs: it connotes uncertainty and a confusion of the sense. It might be proposing a kind of short-lived decorativeness- an aesthetic that impels us to enjoy the event while forgetting about the city's underlying long-term formative processes.

2. Light celebrations. The exhibition entitled ABC DF- that opened at the museum of the Palacio de Belles Arts in March 2001- and the "Dictionary" that accompanied it as a catalogue and that is still sold as a book. It presents as attempts to turn a city which "given its size", defies "definition" into something legible; the author of the prologue wonders: how can the Mexican capital's "endless medley of stimuli" and its "great quality of fortuitous and random information" be ordered?

Given that the Dictionary follows an alphabetical order of 515 words defined or commented upon in a glossary at the end of the book, we could suppose that this project's attempt at understanding the megalopolis is based on language. However, the book's first 1296 pages (of a total of 1502) mainly feature pictures -a visual discourse interspersed with forty five texts dealing (in an evocative rather than informative manner) with an equal conceptual glossary itself follows a visual and emotional order to depict "the various forms attachment" that the city inspires, "its most beloved aspects" its inhabitants' personal, emotional links to it" in effect, the forty five texts printed in very large lettering that they appear interspersed among the pictures speak of the emotions that the city arouses, and above all of love. The Word that, made into a large neon sign, was the first pike one saw as one entered the

exhibition space at the Palacio de Belles Arts.

Though it can easily go unnoticed, the glossary bears well-reasoned explanations of certain terms, unlike the texts inserted among the pictures on four occasions. They do not include any specific details about air pollution, the proliferation of advertising or about many other issues that require substantial explanation in order to be understood. The project's strategy is to display lavishness, an abundance of brilliant color, its photographs celebrating everything; hangovers and hygiene, churches and paranoia about muggings, zoos and Zapatistas.

The few factual references there are seem to have been selected for playful rather than informative reasons. Apparently, in order to surprise readers. For instance the text about street names mentions that there are "over 100" streets called Benito Juarez and "over 200" named after Venustiano Carranza. So that we may sense "the magic" and "the coincidences", it specifies that over twenty-one streets are called Peace and that eighteen are named High Tension, while it also points out that "100 Meter Avenue runs nearly a mile". The last paragraph in this text concludes that this "mind bending complexity can contain beautiful simplicity" (pp.1373-1374).

This was the "aesthetic" criterion for selecting most of the words though these might not only refer to Mexico City, as in the case of dentures, elegance, kiss limousine, lips, patents leather, perfume, pigeon, polarized, staircase, taxidermy and Winnie the Pooh. However, the project's ethnographic inclination seems worthy in its attempt to document a great variety of scenes from people's everyday lives without making value judgments about object every use. Instead of monumentalizing official history or falling into the kind of politically moralistic discourse that cicatrices

consumerism, the pictures celebrate the here and now.

However, it is worth examining the formal process that ABC DF uses to celebrate the private and the public, high and low culture and the media. Scenes and objects from the city were chosen for their potential something spectacular, and this intention – discernible throughout the projects to the point of monotony is exacerbated by the images huge size. Pictures of the Azteca Stadium and parties, a gold fret motif on cake, patches, fake eyelashes, sings and homogeneous continuity is created that keeps one from thinking about the inherent discontinuities, gaps and inconsistencies of urban experiences. The book deft and often ironic selections, its timely photographs astutely condensing eloquent contrast it establishes between pictures on facing pages all end up diluted in an arbitrary, excessive accumulation of fragments.

Of course, a fragmentary view of a megalopolis may be more credible than a totalizing narrative. By selecting fragments on the basis of impressionistic criteria and image association, the authors/curators may allow Reading that are alternatives to the explanations of sociologists and city planners. The problem lies in that the project's visual grandiloquence and profusion of color allude to the creation of a new narrative that many easily assimilate those things that are the "pride and joy" of a city: "light nationalism" as Cuauhtemoc Medina called it, adapted commercial, globalist trends. Indeed, we are no longer dealing with state-sponsored nationalism, rather, it is funded by Televisa and J.P. Morgan – ABC DF's main sponsors, while the CONACULTA (the National Council for the Culture and the Arts) logo appears in smaller typeface along with those Telmex, Sushii, Kodak and Apple. One can wonder whether this kind of sponsorship had anything to do with the fact that the most pictures focus on personal tastes, depicting picturesque or pleasant, inoffensive situations. One could

Also wonder how both the exhibition's and the book's discourse might have taken another form if terms had been included alluding to other agencies such as social or urban movements or graffiti – words that do not indeed form part of this projects in the background of certain pictures dealing with other things, but it is prominently featured only one photograph that is part of the Muralism series; like wise, there are only two photographers Zapatistas (under this heading) and another of a large-scale event that took place in Ciudad Universitaria (the national public university's main campus) to welcome the Zapatista Liberation Army upon its arrival in Mexico City, diluted in the formless concept of "gentio" (crowd).

3. Distraction or attempts to console us?

When I handed in the abstract of this essay to this symposium's organizers, I had entitled it Spectacular attempts at Consolation in a Megalopolis. As I fleshed out the article, I realized I had to qualify this statement. The concept of consolation presupposes a dramatic view of the megalopolis that sociologists and the city planners still held not too long ago, at a time when they warned that urban growth had to be regulated and believed that planners could take part in this task. When neo-liberal privatization did away with planning- whose purpose was to articulate manner- its ceased to matter that the modern city was breaking up or that private- sector speculation was contributing to its decay. Postmodern and postindustrial thinking applied itself to celebrating what it called the post-urban. Not only was this school of thought unconcerned about the uncontrolled growth of many areas of the megalopolis and the ensuing social chaos, it also began celebrating the disorder of hyper-urbanized space as it allowed one to spend one's time enjoying technological development and ephemeral flows and sings.

The disproportionate amount of ads on the Periférico and the uncritical visual grandiloquence of the ABC DF show and

book correspond to the high-tech. Pop stylization of a particular vein of post-modern urbanism. From their perspective, we are not facing a structural crisis in need of a remedy but rather free-acting stimuli that we should value. They strung of any concept of public space as setting for communicative interaction that could benefit everyone. They are only interested in celebrating "fortuitous, random information" –with other individuals who can afford to do so– as stated in the book's prologue or in Francisco Goldman's text, because one can love the city for its "fantastic negatives" such as pollution, crime, urban sprawl and ugliness, in -your – face poverty that exert such an irresistible, charismatic pull on myself and so many others! (p.1366)

From the point of view of attempts made at understanding the urban, we must thank postmodern thinking for having valued the city as text, as a network of signs and associated multicultural narratives. It was semiotics rather than postmodernism that introduced this tendency, and also certain individuals in the fields of philosophy, urban sociology and culture (e.g. Walter Benjamin, Kevin Lynch) as well as writers critical of various postmodern premises, from Frederic Jameson to Richard Sennet. These specialized domains of knowledge have begun influencing the general public's consciousness with the help of the media, certain journalists' novel outlooks and the aesthetic of several emerging artists.

It seems to me that this discourse based on fragmentary experiences, this discontinuous ethnography of the urban has different meaning and functions in first –world countries than it does in Latin-American nations. Post-urbanism, having more to do with architecture than with city planning has played a role in controversial restorations of Barcelona, Bilbao, Paris and Berlin. Whatever we may think of the aesthetic and macro social value of these ventures, Frank GHERY S, RICHARD Meier and Daniel Libeskind's museums, Rem Koolhaas and

Ricardo Bofill's public and private projects as well as hundreds of other buildings have added to the aforesaid cities international appeal, reestablished their importance in terms of the history of art and architecture, created sources of employment and fostered valuable cultural discussions.

Cities in Mexico and in Latin America in general -unlike cities in Europe- were built when birth rates were extremely high and huge migrations were taking place, and their infrastructure failed to respond adequately to the needs generated by these phenomena in terms of housing education and services. On the contrary, it was accepted fact that the land, water and air would be despoiled in the process. In this setting where conditions have grown even worse over the last twenty years as a result of predatory economic practices and a slump in industrialization – it is not easy to look sympathetically upon the fragmentation and disregard for planning that Postmodernists like to extol. The ethical problem of urbanism's indifference towards the structural problems of urban development is further compounded by the fact that architecture in recent years has created very few memorable buildings. Instead of farsighted solutions we have ostentatious displays: Mexico City's twenty-seven shopping centers, the Santa Fe neighborhood's 800 hectares of globalized property, or clumsy anti-functional improvisations featuring a mish – mash of aesthetics like the *Centro Nacional de las Artes* (National Center for the Arts). Since the last few decades have not given us much to flaunt besides these by products of architecture, some people might believe that hanging billboards over the Periferico's traffic jams or turning the most everyday events into dazzling mythology are indeed interesting undertakings.

Other attempts have been made at acknowledging and discussing the tragic facet of our megalopolis, with the most noteworthy results achieved -in terms of the visual arts- in the field of photography. The

huge ads overhanging the Periférico's traffic jams and complacent exhibitions. Could perhaps be seen or read as attempts to console us. And yet, what measure of consolation can we find in an aesthetic that does not acknowledge and re-acquaint us with the critical situation at hand?

INTRODUCTION URBAN AESTHETICS Marcela Quiroz Luna

And my stubbornness returned when it became obvious that the game was lost, that the Earth's crust had become a mass of different shapes, and yet I did not want to resign myself, and at every discontinuity in the porphyry that Vug gladly points out to me, at every brittle outcrop in the basalt, I wanted to convince myself that these were just apparent irregularities, that they formed part of a much larger regular structure, in which each asymmetry we thought we saw in fact corresponded to a network of symmetries so complex that we could not perceive them, and I tried to calculate
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How many billions of sides and dihedral angles this labyrinthine crystal had to have, this hyper-crystal that consisted of crystals and non-crystals.

-Italo Calvino, "The crystals" in T Zero.

Let us start off with the idea that places (in this case, cities) AND Their aesthetics can potentially be read as indicators of their circumscribing contexts social conditions, considering that space rather than time is the primary receptacle of collective memories.

Henri Lefebvre defined the city as the place where a society's material and immaterial wealth is stockpiled (among other characteristic) I wonder when the scales started tipping to one side. Leading to the belief that immaterial wealth is all the most, a necessary byproduct of material wealth (without implying that we make it necessary) at least in terms of the word of ideas an unconcerned individuals in terms of the day-

to day fate of people who have not yet shut their eyes. The city's immaterial wealth might be something that still lies hidden among the strategies that the city designs to keep up appearances. In this respect, to speak of the city and its aesthetics is to speak of survival.

But what can urban aesthetics be?

Pittfalls, comforts, resistance, cloaks reflections, attempts, screens, crystals, non-crystals, Do they belong to sight? Do they belong to time? Do they belong to the soul or to the body's movements? Are the awkwardly justified premises, territorial limits, symbolic foundations, bridled differences, pen-up anger or aftertastes of history?

What the should be (before, while and after being any of the above) is processes that go beyond sight, the daily crossing of paths, passengers inertia, fragmentation Because the aesthetic of an urban space which, by definition, should be read as public-precisely refers or should refer to the public character of space. "Public" understood as a social construction, and its aesthetic understood as evidence of its achievement or failure. Foucault already said so: -Our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites.

But what can one do so that...

What covers and cloaks the city in a supposed attempt to illuminate it make it more beautiful, recall its past or modernize it generally within its hidden core- will no end up being either vertical, elitist imposition on the horizontal, or land over fertilized by advertising, or extension of the white cube? How can we stop the global from ensnaring the local in a guise of homogeneity, turning the city into a prisoner of its own reflection-less image?