

Time, Dereliction and Beauty: an Argument for 'Landscapes of Contempt'.

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abstract

In growing cities, contemporary urban landscapes are fast becoming uniform landscapes of consumption punched through by conduit landscapes of infrastructure.

Urban designers seek to achieve attractive cities where 'landscape' means green space for recreation and nature—in the main, Photoshop images made real. There is also the intention to lure the so-called affluent 'Creative Class' by marketing a pseudo sense of place with few real memories. Instead 'memory' is just another commodity, this time manufactured by the Heritage Industry. Even those shrinking vestiges of land dedicated as nature reserves are too frequently heavily over-interpreted commodities for the Tourism Industry.

The most regrettable loss for growing cities, however, is the loss of the voids. As recently as the mid 1990s, Ignasi de Sola-Morales called for those involved in urban design to respect existing urban voids or Terrains Vagues. While his eloquent arguments have been heeded in shrinking cities, in growing cities they have been ignored, unrelenting development occupying these spaces with the urban form of Late Capitalism.

No-one would argue against making cities denser, but one can ask planners and urban and landscape designers why there was no concerted effort to find more complex answers to such an important aspect of the urban fabric.

This paper will explore the temporal value of the fast disappearing urban voids and other indeterminate landscapes often seen as 'landscapes of contempt'.

Introduction

Time, dereliction and beauty are woven together in ways that add depth to our lived experience of urban landscapes.

This paper looks at how urban voids and wastelands embody time as a space where past, present and future shimmer, mirage-like, making uncanny and seamless connections. Together these spaces make up an elusive, indeterminate landscape hovering over, under and between bulky contemporary urban developments.

Most often people see these landscapes as ugly and unpleasant—empty spaces waiting for a better use. As the French landscape architect, Christophe Girot (2004), describes them, they are 'landscapes of contempt'. But should we be so contemptuous of these time-laden landscapes? They present time in penetrating ways, providing an awareness that could never emerge from the thin landscapes of the Spectacle City or the ersatz 'placeness' carefully orchestrated for the so-called Creative Class. As the revered landscape writer J.B. Jackson (1980) wrote so convincingly, there is a '*Necessity for Ruins*'.

Equally important, layers of time in urban voids and wastelands have tendrils that insinuate into the future, probing and clinging like vines on old walls. Voids and wastelands are indeterminate spaces that allow for innovative temporary uses, absorbing nomadic experiments designed for a future beyond the Late Capitalist-Neo-liberal urban form.

But in what form does *TIME* resonate in these landscapes? What are these moments between past, present and future?

Rethinking Landscape Time: from Schama to Virilio

Simon Schama, in his book, *Landscape and Memory* (1995), notes that historic time in the

landscape has been the focus of artists and landscape designers for eons. He suggests, however, that we look again at landscapes with a contemporary gaze. He entices us into ways of rediscovering layers of time in familiar landscapes; places we already know but somehow have eluded deeper appreciation. His book is not a dirge about lost landscapes but rather an exploration of what we are yet to find.

Voids and wastelands are latent with such possibilities, but their prevailing qualities are of recent time, containing uncomfortable memories of ultimately flawed dreams and visions. Vast derelict industrial landscapes resonate with messages of failure. That such huge landscapes, the visions of merely fifty years ago, should now be in ruins is frightening, possibly explaining why they are being erased so quickly in growing cities.

Such dereliction is even more alarming if we consider Virilio's concept of the collapse of the time between events. He alerts us to the fact that because technology is rapidly accelerating time, the '*time allotted to decision-making is now insufficient*' (Virilio, 2000:96). Virilio, like Schama, urges us to look again, to take a second glance at the recent past with more time for reflection, even if discomfiting, rather than merely mining the past for new commodification themes. Given the space/time collapse, one could ask how short will the time be before optimistic urban gestures of today—say Darling Harbour or Melbourne Docklands etc—become the wastelands of Detroit?

In this paper I hope to show that the voids, wastelands and derelict spaces in our cities are not merely contemptuous places—places of blight, heavy with memories of human exploitation and environmental negligence—they are also places of great beauty, rich in opportunities for time to reflect on our recent past, the present and also future landscapes that can be experimental and innovative. In these

wastelands we can commune with 'place' as a layered landscape—complex and disturbing as much as reassuring. Here we can regain the ability to accept the 'ugly' and learn from its strange and resonating qualities.

Latent Time: Revisiting Terrains Vagues

It was more than fifteen years ago when the Barcelonan urbanist, Ignasi De Sola-Morales, first alerted us to the value of urban voids in the early 1990s. He argued that urban planners needed to revisit the concept of *Terrains Vagues*—those strange and undefined empty spaces that tell of former times and uses (De Sola-Morales, 1996).

Terrains Vagues were initially observed by photographers in the 1960–70s, their photographs conveying the beauty of abandoned spaces, describing them with the French term 'terrains vagues'. In French, 'vague' has etymological roots in oscillations, instability, or fluctuations. 'Vague' also means vacant, empty, or unoccupied. In English, 'vague' means indeterminate, blurred, or uncertain. Derelict urban sites embody all these qualities.

De Sola-Morales suggested empty places are fundamental to the evocative potential of the city. They are latent places where the absence of use can create a sense of freedom and expectancy—the space of the possible. Nevertheless the numerous large post-industrial voids are challenging, particularly in the vast derelict landscapes and shrinking cities of Eastern Europe and Detroit. In the early 1990s, De Sola-Morales suggested that the special qualities of vacant urban space should be understood and respected and he warned against doing predictable designs for such places. By 2006, growing cities have lost most of these interesting voids, often under just such predictable designs.

Artists and film-makers have long recognised the value of urban voids. As the film-maker Wim Wenders (1988:44) observed, "*I don't believe anyone will ever be able to make any city council understand that from an urbanistic point of view, the most attractive parts of the city are precisely those areas where nobody has ever done anything.*" The Greek architectural theorist, Yorgos Simeoforidis, echoed these sentiments, pointing out '*the urge to do something, to fill these voids with architecture, and the need to do nothing—ultimately, this is the paradox of our metropolitan 'uncanny' condition*' (Simeoforidis, 1997:6).

The artist, Gordon Matta-Clark, also sought to articulate this problem with his cuts through buildings. His works engaged with the negative spaces of architecture and the city. Through his urban excisions, he explored, in disconcerting ways, the elusive space between architecture, language, time and ideas (Lefevre, 2003).

He focused on architectural decay and social changes within urban space of the 1970s, however it was the strange gaps that Matta-Clark was most interested in. In his work, *Conical Intersect* (1975) in Paris, he bored a 45° hole through two adjacent 17th century buildings which were to be demolished near the Centre Georges Pompidou. As a criticism against urban gentrification, this spiral-shaped void echoed the affront caused by random erasure in the urban fabric. Today such historic buildings would be respected, but how do we argue for the urban voids in growing cities when they are seen as ugly and offensive?

Such ambivalent feelings about post-industrial voids have been explored by Tim Edensor through a series of photographic exhibitions. His website (2002) and recent book, *Industrial Ruins* (2005), state '*... industrial ruins are largely understood—especially by bureaucrats, city promoters and planners—as offensive to the character and aesthetics of the city*' (2002:1).

He notes that their prevailing attitude is that *'... The sooner these scars on the landscape are demolished and swept away, effaced in the name of civic order, the better. ... Imagined as sites of urban disorder, dens into which deviant characters—drug-users, gang-members, vandals and the homeless—are drawn, the imperative is to extinguish their decaying features from the urban backdrop'* (2002:1)

To counteract these attitudes, Edensor suggests *'... ruins can be explored for effects that talk back ... to the extensive over-commodification of places, to middle-class aesthetics, and to broader tendencies to fix meanings in the service of power.'* http://www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/humanities_and_soc_sciences/te1

In our current space of smooth and striated time (Deleuze & Guattari, 2003) where we glide over the surface of over-designed urban places which, in the main, are limited to pleasure and spectacle, we are easily seduced into forgetting about the recent past. The landscapes of our cities are so pervasively programmed that there are few places where one can withdraw to linger and reflect.

Standing in contrast to these aesthetically and socially regulated spaces, neglected sites can accommodate reflective meditations where marginal places provide a different beauty in the city. They evoke an aesthetic of disorder, surprise and sensuality, offering ghostly glimpses into the past and tactile encounters with a forgotten materiality. Edensor (2005) highlights the danger of eradicating such evocative urban sites through policies that privilege large-scale new developments because it is precisely the fragmentary nature and lack of fixed meaning that render ruins and wastelands deeply meaningful.

Quiet Time: Dérive through Landscapes of Contempt.

In the current homogenous world, some designers and artists are seeking alternative

solutions for urban landscapes by revisiting the concepts of the 1960s Situationists and their revolutionary politics related to urban space, particularly the idea of 'détournement' or the destabilizing of presumed spatial order. The Situationists argued that by creating a state of indeterminacy, thus confronting the regulated spatiality imposed by pervasive modernist urbanism, there was the potential for innovation. The Situationists were also concerned about the way the exchange value of urban space had become far more important than its social and cultural value. Today this is clearly apparent in the way Australian Local Government switched to accrual accounting under Late Capitalist economics. Previously non-prescribed open space, the left over spaces, easements etc, were simply public space. Now every roadside strip, patch or service easement has an exchange value, no longer allowing for wastelands to persist.

It was forty years ago when these French activists alerted us to such issues. Today we see the full impact of the hegemonic control of late-capitalism on urban space—a uniform space of consumption. Wastelands and voids offer quiet relief from the urban chatter of the café culture, but it is not the tranquility of nature. It is something else that is equally important. These places both ground us and disturb us. They are the spaces for Guy Debord's (1998) 'dérive', where one can wander through the left-over spaces of everyday life, randomly and often playfully drifting, even risking encounters with the unpleasant, in contrast to the re-assuring promenades created by planners and designers. Unlike Walter Benjamin's (1999) flâneur who drifts through crowded city places, the voids and wastelands are quiet places, often with uncanny resonances, where one encounters the stranger within oneself.

Uncanny Time in Urban Spaces

Both hauntingly familiar and unfamiliar, these uncanny spaces allow for reflective engagement with time but also with the problems of identity, self and other, the psyche and dwelling, the individual and metropolis.

Anthony Vidler, the architectural theorist, explores the way certain metropolitan spaces resonate with the uncanny. In *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992) and *Warped Space* (2000) he sees the uncanny as a trope for imaging the lost home of post-industrial society, where the unsettling urbanity of late modernity generates a feeling of powerlessness embodied in new public spaces of designed control (Vidler, 2000). In this context, existing urban voids act as a counter narrative conveying a sense of transgressive freedom.

Such transgressive qualities are also explored by Dylan Trigg (2004) in his essay, *Uncanny Space of Decay*. He suggests that we are drawn to these sites by a particular intricacy—*an embroidery of decay*—so unlike the uniform pastel housing and commercial developments that now occupy urban space.

Trigg writes about the seductive melancholy associated with the uncanny spaces of dereliction. He reiterates Freud's argument that the power of the uncanny is that it ought to remain hidden but keeps coming to light. It is the age and corrosion in wastelands that challenges the apparent safety of redevelopments where the uncanny does not remain repressed. It continues to haunt and question the complacency of the new. As Trigg suggests, decaying sites conflate the past with the present and presence with absence and in this state, they challenge our linear understanding of space and time.

Reflective Time: Dereliction and Beauty

One can also argue for the poetics embedded in voids and wastelands. Photographers, poets,

artists, and writers, exploring the fragmentary human experience of the 21st century world, are similarly concerned that wastelands are disappearing and with them the powerful connection between dereliction and beauty (AGNSW, 2005).

The wastelands at the edge of cities as much as the urban voids in the centre have inspired the Australian artist, Bill Henson, whose evocative photographs capture ambiguous urban spaces. He conveys the haunting beauty of the 'no-man's land' in our cities where images of troubled couples awake an uneasy familiarity with these sites. In his photographs we can almost smell the dereliction. Wastelands can jolt us with strange aromas, often emanating from dumped rubbish along tracks that seem to lead nowhere where an old pink fabric, twisted and soiled, strewn near a log, hints at something sinister. A broken washing machine, rust etching into its white surface, leans abused and abject; metal cans, discarded car parts—strange disconnected objects—also reveal an abstract beauty.

DBC Pierre evokes such landscapes in his novel, *Vernon God Little* (2003). The wastelands on the edge of American towns are captured by the keen observations of a young adolescent on a bicycle.

Bushes on Keeter's trail are bizarre, all spiky and gnarled, with just enough clearing between them so the unknown is never more than fifteen yards away...

Old man Keeter owns this empty slab of land, miles of it probably, outside town. He puts a wrecking shop by the ole Johnson road, Keeter's Spares and Repairs—just a mess of junk in the dirt, really. ...mostly just bleached beer cans and shit. ... Martirio boys get their first taste of guns, girls and beer out here. You never forget the blade of wind that cuts across Keeter's. (2003:97)

It is not only the wind and the smell, there are also sounds in derelict sites which tell of the

recently working landscape far more palpably than the token relics reworked into new landscape designs. As Edensor (2002) states

Opened roofs and windows allow drips and eddies of winds to resound around buildings. Desolate pieces of machinery clank and doors creak, and the rustling of unseen animals, and the flurries and coos of the ubiquitous pigeons suffuse the soundscape, while noise from outside is muffled and sounds far away. This low-key atmosphere conjures up another that is no longer present: the whistling, shouts, talk and laughter, the singing, the whirr of machinery and the babble of the radio.

www.staffs.ac.uk/schools/humanities_and_soc_sciences/te1/stages

In the recent art project *Western Front: Art as Social Space* (2005), a number of artists explored evocative ways of showing human engagement with the urban landscape of Western Sydney. Through a series of penetrating photographs and captions about edge wastelands, Chris Cairns reveals his identification with such places. One caption states

I grew up across the border. Past outer Western Sydney where freeways, shopping malls, and petrol fast food strips start to break down...

Somewhere along one of those late night homeward-bound drives you find the core that connects the mobile space with wood-smoke arcadia. You couldn't see it at first because it is only visible at night, late, deserted. You need to look at the margins, near the half-constructed freeways, the abandoned drive-ins and boarded shops.

Then it is there and if you slow yourself down enough, you can feel it.
Cairns, 2005

Experiencing beauty in derelict sites is challenging. It requires overcoming discomfort to see the poetics that writers and artists seek to show us.

In growing cities, there may well be a certain impatience with the idea that wastelands have cultural value. It could be argued that heritage sites satisfy such needs. Sadly, heritage sites are similarly victims of commodification and thus trivialization for the tourist industry.

Given these different attitudes, do the new landscapes in our cities evoke similar lyrical descriptions? In February 2005, the reopening of New York's Museum of Modern Art was marked by an exhibition, "Groundswell," which showed landscape designs that have given new uses to derelict urban land. While these designs are significant contributions to urban public space, aesthetically resolved and functionally satisfying, their industrial past exists only as frozen set-pieces. Meanwhile, there are other designers who are using time as a factor to work with wastelands and derelict sites in open-ended and experimental ways.

Slow Time: Rediscovering the Sublime in Vast Wastelands

Not all wastelands are subject to development pressure. In some cases, such as the wastelands of Detroit and Eastern Germany, they are so vast that they almost defy redevelopment. Numerous books have been devoted to the poetic work of Peter Latz in the industrial wastelands of the Ruhr Valley, but of a vaster scale and possibly more challenging is the Fürst-Pückler-Land in the south of Brandenburg where from 2000 through to 2010 a new concept of "landscape" is emerging.

With relatively little publicity, what is billed as "the biggest landscape project in Europe" is well underway with 2005 marking the mid-point of the 10-year Internationale Bauausstellung Fürst-Pückler-Land (IBA) program. Here large

projects at 24 sites in the Lausitz, a 100 x 50 km region of open-cast lignite mines between Berlin and Dresden, are taking shape. Low-grade coal from these pits was the prime fuel source for the German Democratic Republic, but with changed priorities about energy sources after reunification in 1989, the majority of them closed abruptly. As a result at least a quarter of the population has left and there is high unemployment among those who remain.

The Lausitz IBA aims to give the region a new economic stability while dealing with the aftermath of mining, in what must be one of the most extreme post-industrial landscapes in Europe today. The emphasis is primarily on landscape because the shrinking population makes building secondary so the area is now Europe's largest landscape construction site where mountains of overburden are remodeled and new lakes created.

One can ask will the projects be similar to the Latz designs in Duisburg Nord or will this mining region be a source of genuinely new landscapes? The director of Lausitz IBA, Dr Rolf Kuhn, saw three options for future landscapes. One was an extension of the existing remedial work where the biggest coal pits have been turned into lakes, waste heaps re-vegetated, and remaining industrial structures demolished. However by erasing the region's recent history, the sites while less confronting, are also bland and monotonous. The second option, which appealed to Kuhn, was to do nothing; to leave the landscape to its own devices as a kind of wilderness. But this ignored dangers of subsidence as water in the pits gradually rose and there was a risk of contaminating nearby waterways. So the IBA is exercising restraint, a third option, initially focusing on educational tourism and water recreation, it is allowing time for ephemeral landscapes to appear while, as yet unknown uses can evolve in the future. (<http://www.iba-see.de/>)

In contrast to the fast time of growing cities, in these vast wastelands one can experience slow time as the pits gradually fill. Watching the inexorable submergence of the dune-like remnants of the mining process and the plants that colonise these spoil heaps will be engrossing. This indeterminate landscape where vanishing dunes become odd-shaped islets fringed by drowning plants and saplings, ultimately lost beneath huge spans of water, evokes the qualities of the Sublime, so recently lost to us with the impact of tourism on over-used wilderness.

While almost all the pits in the Lausitz have closed, the one at Welzow is still in action and should continue for decades to come. It is intended to be the setting for a new landscape called Desert/Oasis. This scheme by two Berlin-based firms, Becker Giseke Mohren Richard (BGMR) and archiscape, will exploit the fact that this is still a working pit by creating a new landscape from the mining process where formerly the spoil was simply dumped behind the excavators and leveled. The designers plan to redirect this disposal of waste to create a "desert" of hills and valleys with a dense green "oasis" hidden in the middle (<http://www.iba-see.de/>).

'Energy Gardens' are also proposed for a number of Lausitz IBA sites, to be ready for the Year of Energy in 2007. In the main they are concentrating on generating new biomass through plantations, but there are also wind and solar parks where research focuses on the concept of the 'landscape picture' to address the negative perception of the visual impact of wind farms and solar fields (<http://www.rekula.net/>).

Ephemeral Time: the Indeterminate Landscapes of Shrinking Cities

In contrast to the vastness of these mining wastelands, micro-tactics are emerging in the waste spaces of shrinking cities in Europe.

The Arizona Markets, one of the largest black markets in the Balkans, providing work for 30,000 people in over 2000 businesses, was an example of a self-planned city on wastelands (Aksamija,2005). When the market grew to a size where problems of sanitation and fire risks needed to be addressed, the district government prepared a master plan that turned the market into a conventional shopping mall. As a result the vital and innovative market disappeared and the shopping mall is empty. The failure of planners and designers to grasp the significance of spontaneous, flexible and innovative development in public space highlights how much can be learnt from informal activities in wastelands.

Some architects and artists, recognizing this potential, have started to study urban wastelands through the act of walking, for example, Boris Sieverts, the German architect/artist, who founded the Büro für Städtereisen in Cologne. This studio is essentially a city travel agency from which Sieverts organizes walks in city outskirts, focusing on areas of wasteland and empty lots. He analyses the sensations brought about by such walks and tries to formulate the complexity of the underlying territory as “poetic densification”, thus transforming the usual way wastelands are perceived.

As a member of the committee organising the “e2” international competition on the urban condition, exhibited at the Pavillon de l’Arsenal in Paris In 2002, he suggested that urban wastelands are one of the last urban adventures. Intrigued by this concept, in 2004 Archilab invited him to undertake such walks in association with their exhibition ‘The Naked City to Smart Mob’.

The ArchiLab 2004 exhibition was particularly interested the way globalization caused some metropolitan concentrations to grow while it also caused many cities to shrink, particularly in Europe. As Bart Lootsma (2004) points out this phenomenon is resulting in ‘Parts of the “Third World” folding into the first’ www.archilab.org .

ArchiLab 2004 thus focused on strategies for public space in ‘Shrinking Cities’. Some strategies continued the tradition started by Situationists like Guy Debord and Constant Nieuwenhuys and artists like Gordon Matta Clark, while others explored large scale indeterminacy, such as the work of Rem Koolhaas.

Intriguing strategies were proposed by *Stalker*—an Italian collective of activist architects/artists—who undertake numerous projects in abandoned urban spaces, often employing the act of *dérive*. Their various walks through “urban voids” have criss-crossed Rennes, Milan, Miami and Berlin. Similar to the Situationists, in each city their walks result in an abstract map based on drifting through residual spaces. Using these maps, they propose a reverse reading of the city where the urban mass turns into an amorphous background in contrast to the vitality of the city’s marginal zones.

They adhere to their Manifesto (<http://digilander.libero.it/stalkerlab/tarkowsky/manifesto/manifest.htm>) where they are committed to actions within forgotten and abandoned urban spaces. The Manifesto states that

Stalker is together custodian, guide and artist for these sites. In the multiple roles we are disposed to confront at once the apparently unsolvable contradictions of salvaging through abandonment, of representation through sensorial perception, of intervening within the unstable and mutable conditions of these areas.

They seek to achieve continuity and penetration into abandoned areas in the belief that such actions will enrich and give life to the city through the continuous and diffused confrontation with the unknown. In this way it will be possible to recover within the profound heart of the city, the wild, the non-planned, the nomadic.

In a recent project in Miami (2002), they created a public space in a non-place where cars were queued, waiting for a bridge to open. Through performance, including serving coffee to the waiting motorists, they transformed a transit space into a social space as a catalyst for new ways to design the waterfront. The most long-term project has been their work in a disused abattoir, Campo Boario, on the banks of the Tiber near Rome where there are several migrant communities, a gypsy camp and an alternative cultural and political centre. Here in association with an international design competition, they created an installation called 'Transborderline' (2001). The resulting proposals and publicity convinced the Rome municipality to reconsider its plans for the site.

In collaboration with the Kurdish community of Campo Boario, the themes of nomadism and cultural diversity led to the 'Flying Carpet' project (2002), which was installed in the public space of several Mediterranean cities. Suspended over spontaneous social gatherings, the 'Flying Carpet' was the catalyst for *Stalker* to develop a nomadic university.

Stalker argues that the most effective 'cure' for abandoned urban spaces is to leave them alone to be overtaken by nature and to be appropriated by those people who have nowhere else to go; then the spaces are fully in use. This approach may be anarchic and extreme to many designers, nevertheless it is interesting to hear the European architect, Florian Beigel, who has undertaken numerous projects on post-industrial sites. Reinforcing *Stalker's* position, he conveys the dilemma of designing with abandoned sites, suggesting

... the key issue is to do with designing emptiness, to decide where nothing will go. This word emptiness is enigmatic, has a sense of wonder and an almost inbuilt potential for getting one's imagination going I feel such 'emptiness' is inherent to certain landscapes. It can also be found in cracks, or holes in

the city, where there cease to be rules, leaving the spaces to grow wild. Such places spark not only my imagination but also the imaginations of people who come to inhabit them. Nonetheless, designing in these situations is a very delicate thing because such wildness is so fragile and can all too easily be destroyed.... The key is to do 'almost nothing' as Mies said once. I find this a very provocative statement and a good starting point.

Florian Beigel (1997)

Nevertheless, many may feel leaving derelict sites free of development ignores the emancipatory potential of design. The new 'Landscape Urbanists' are exploring designs for a surreal urbanism in post-industrial areas as a new form of urban ecology. For example, using the vast dystopian wastelands of Detroit as sites for conjecture for the project, *Stalking Detroit*, landscape architects Charles Waldheim and James Corner developed proposals for urban voids that contain a new hybrid urbanism of dense clusters of innovative urban activity co-existing within a remediation-in-process and reconstituted ecology (Shane, 2004). The *Highline Project* on a disused elevated railway through Manhattan is another innovative and emancipatory project on a derelict site. Scheduled to be open by Spring 2006, *High Line* is conceived as an organic and flexible park that will change with innovative use of plants and the spontaneous ways the public use the site (Highline,2006).

Landscape Urbanism (Mostafavi & Najle,2003) is also exploring indeterminacy in the form of urban landscapes of focussed intensities within wide-spread forces, revealed through abstract mapping techniques. Landscape urbanists are interested in how permanent and temporary landscapes can restore the dynamism in post-industrial cities. They are exploring duration and time in innovative ways, including transitional landscapes of both community action and environmental flows.

Because of the huge scale of increasingly derelict landscapes in post-soviet Europe and large post-industrial cities like Detroit, another movement, closely aligned with Landscape Urbanism, has developed micro-tactics for shrinking cities (Park, 2005). Under the EU funded '*Shrinking Cities Project*', these urbanists see the vast derelict landscapes as open laboratories for experiments attracting self-reliant pioneers, including urban farming, guerrilla gardening, ad hoc co-operatives, and vigorous art and music installations. Pivotal to the innovations is the International Centre for Urban Ecology, iCUE, founded by the architect, Kyong Park. Seen as a nomadic laboratory for future cities, iCUE was part of a recent travelling exhibition, *Project Shrinking Cities* (2003–4), which included Ivanovo (Russia), Liverpool, Manchester (UK), Halle and Leipzig (Germany), Detroit (USA).

The Halle project in East Germany focussed on Halle-Neustadt. Originally seen as a visionary 1970s Soviet new town, by 2003 it had lost half the inhabitants. The Halle-Neustadt project, involving numerous artists and designers, explored new forms of urbanity using four abandoned highrise blocks. One was turned into a temporary hotel, planned and installed by a youth group. Using clever designs for temporary occupation, they ran the hotel over the three month project, accommodating more than 3000 overnight stays. Another project, called SLIDE, introduced a continuous transparent tube, pale blue, that descended though 18 floors. Visitors are able to ride through the abandoned building passing through walls, floors, ceilings and even outside the building. Being playful with such derelict buildings is an attempt to ameliorate the despair associated with the loss of jobs and people. In fact, the project has attracted such interest that people are beginning to return to the city (Rick,2005).

The *Shrinking Cities* movement focuses on a new form of urban ecology, both people and systems, suggesting that 'in the fault lines of

the Modernist city, fresh and rebellious ideas and designs are emerging as an "architecture of resistance" ' (Park, 2005:176).

Project Shrinking Cities (2002–6), directed by Philipp Oswald and Klaus Overmeyer, founders of *Urban Catalyst*(2003), actively encourages new ideas for temporary land-uses for urban wasteland. In parallel, the group *Multiplicity*, led by Stephano Boeri, like urban detectives, are searching out innovative activities in wasteland sites. As Boeri points out, '*It is in these sites, at the periphery of geopolitical imagery, that Europe is changing most rapidly. It is here that innovations emerge and it is possible to imagine the future...*' USE,2005:154

Rapid Time: Playful Transitions in Voids and Wastelands

While socially concerned artists and designers are developing imaginative proposals for distressed cities, there is also a new form of urban landscape where technology and rapid time are used to create fleeting places for ephemeral play. Nomadic techno-discos and other temporary activities are transforming leftover urban spaces in a few hours, creating extraordinary impact with minimum permanent change. This process can result in urban experiments requiring little financial investment, often with impressive effectiveness which occasionally act as catalysts for more permanent use.

In Europe this phenomenon is referred to as *Post-It City* (La Varra,2001:116). Leftover spaces absorb the surplus energy of 'hip' people in the metropolis as temporary activities, flexible and changeable in their flickering lightness (Garrett,2004). *Post-It* spaces have no predominant identity; they are vacant lots and residual spaces the planner's gaze has left untouched. The *Post-It* phenomena are temporary, characterized by anonymous, unanticipated spaces, "no-man's lands" which are ingeniously available for collective activities.

As La Varra (2001:117) points out, *Post-It Cities* are like 'threads or invisible watermarks that run through the contemporary city... In this constellation of spaces, which continually "light up" and "go dark," the public life of the European city seems to find the energy of regeneration'.

Conclusion

Time works in urban voids and wastelands in fascinating and varied ways, yet bureaucrats and planners tend to ignore the importance of these places. Since the early 1990s, designers have been exhorted to understand and respect the qualities of such left-over spaces. In Europe sensitivity to terrains vagues continues. In growing cities, however, they have been transformed into globalized, homogenous developments associated with landscapes of consumption and spectacle. The shallow brittleness of the new spaces, allows us to glide with amnesia over the recent past, contemptuous of those spaces which uncannily remind us to engage more deeply with the issues of contemporary cities.

It is in shrinking cities where urban voids and wastelands are writ large that we see new micro-tactics associated with the return of social concerns along with innovative approaches to future landscapes. Yet nowhere does the sense of time, dereliction and beauty reveal itself more powerfully than in the vast industrial wastelands in former soviet Europe. It is ironic that through dereliction we can again experience the concept of the Sublime, so recently lost to us through the taming and commodification of wilderness.

So how do responsible landscape designers take on the challenge of urban voids and wastelands in growing cities? Perhaps designers and planners need to heed Virilio and take time to look again at landscapes of contempt in order to find more complex solutions for such an important aspect of the urban fabric. °

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