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Impure spaces

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Spazi impuri

*a cura di / dossier coordonné par / edited by
Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Francesco Gori & Cristina Mattiucci*

*Guest artist / artist présenté / artista ospite
Luca Staccioli*

Editoriale / Editorial

Francesco Gori

Il "Primitivo". Lo spazio impuro della cultura

Matteo Meschiari

Antispazi: Wilderness, Apocalisse, Utopia. (Costruire l'impuro, daffilarne)

Alastair Donald

SARS and the City. 21st century epidemics and the anti-Modern imagination

Thomas Mical

How formless processes and ultra-thin impurities activate transitive spaces

Andrea Pavoni

Seeds of impurity

Aide Esu

Hebron. Purity and the Impure in the Exclusionary City

Andrea Mubi Brighenti

The Impure and The Intense

EDITORIALE

In questo numero presentiamo una serie di esplorazioni intorno alla nozione di impuro e all'esistenza di spazi impuri. L'impurità ha una lunga tradizione che, probabilmente, è antica quanto la storia del sacro. Classicamente, l'impuro appare come terzo polo nella dicotomia tra sacro e profano. Nonostante i suoi fondamenti cosmologici stabiliti, però, l'impuro rimane una presenza inquietante, così come una presenza che viaggia. L'impuro minaccia i sistemi – siano essi sistemi simbolici, biologiche o sociali. Eppure, soprattutto, li costituisce.

Riflettendo sul concetto di "uomo primitivo", Francesco Gori recupera un approccio warburghiano all'analisi culturale, sottolineando che tutta la cultura umana è, e non può che essere, uno spazio impuro. La ragione è che ogni spazio sociale è necessariamente prodotto intorno a una tensione tra utopia e distopia. Di conseguenza, lo spazio sociale è uno spazio essenzialmente misto e impuro. Per catturare questa dinamica, Matteo Meschiari introduce, facendo eco alle eterotopie di Foucault, la nozione di "anti-spazio". Nella sua analisi, la *wilderness*, l'apocalisse e l'utopia funzionano come tre contro-discorsi contemporanei che, sebbene a un primo sguardo rivoluzionari o almeno liberatori, sono in effetti corollari del discorso capitalista dominante: "Dato uno spazio del pensiero – scrive Meschiari – è sempre il suo antispazio a dar gli consistenza e validazione, una falsa complessità e un'opprimente simmetria cognitiva".

Come fare, allora, per rendere più dinamico questo quadro per inserirvi il funzionamento instabile dell'impuro? Alastair Donald considera la paura contemporanea delle epidemie come un caso di "immaginazione antimoderna". Se il progetto moderno era concepito come un tentativo di dominare la vita sociale e l'ambiente, oggi registriamo un impatto sproporzionato, sull'immaginazione culturale, della paura del contagio epidemica. Le nostre ossessioni per la viralità e l'immunità pervadono anche l'immaginazione architettonica, dando forma a ciò che Donald chiama un "atteggiamento rinunciatario", dove le finalità positivi sono offuscate e paralizzate da paure ed ansie. Tuttavia, le impurità, special-

mente quelle "ultrasottili", possono anche acquisire nuovi significati. Nel suo contributo, Thomas Mical sostiene che la presenza dell'impuro – così come la mancanza di forme ben definite (l'informe) – potrebbero rivelare e liberare l'apertura intrinseca di cui lo spazio è portatore. Lo spazio infatti consente per sua stessa natura transizioni e sparizioni, molto prima l'architettura vi agisca. Se è così, la sfida per il pensiero spaziale contemporaneo rimbalza indietro alla domanda su come accettare i flussi che attivano la (impura) transitività dello spazio.

Una domanda non troppo dissimile è affrontata da Andrea Pavoni nel suo "Semi di impurità", che ricostruisce le vicissitudini della installazione artistica di Ai Weiwei, *Kui Hua Zi [Sunflower Seeds]* alla Tate Modern di Londra. Pavoni è particolarmente interessato a come, mentre la retorica della "interattività" era stata utilizzata ampiamente dalla Galleria nel presentare il lavoro, la stessa retorica è stata surrettiziamente revocata non appena il pubblico ha iniziato a interagire effettivamente con l'opera, e a farlo ovviamente nei modi più imprevisti. Pavoni scava così nelle strategie di purificazione messe in atto da istituzioni quali i musei, mettendo in evidenza il fatto che il lavoro di Weiwei "inquina l'atmosfera della galleria stessa, rendendo inoperose le sue operazioni di purificazione: la sicurezza, l'ordine, l'appropriatezza". Che l'impuro sia legato alla sicurezza è del resto evidenziato anche da Aide Esu nel suo studio su Hebron. Esu parla di una "reinvenzione conflittuale" degli spazi sacri della città, in particolare della Grotta di Machpelah e della adiacente moschea Ibrahim. Argomenti di purezza e impurità sono stati mobilitati dai coloni ebrei e dagli estremisti sionisti per disegnare uno spazio di esclusione, una città segregata in cui i residenti palestinesi hanno subito vessazioni prolungate. Paradossalmente, il caso di Hebron è divenuto visibile solo grazie a un atto di resistenza collettiva dei veterani dell'esercito israeliano, che si sono trasformati in voci critiche della strategia spaziale urbana implementata da Israele.

Nel pezzo finale, Mubi riassume alcune riflessioni sulla natura dell'impuro, proponendo di interpretare

EDITORIAL

In this issue, we present a series of explorations around the notion of the impure and the existence of impure spaces. Impurity has a long tradition indeed, which is perhaps as ancient as the history of the sacred. Classically understood, the impure appears as the third pole in the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane. Despite its established cosmological foundations, though, the impure remains a troubling presence, as well as a travelling one. The impure threatens systems – be they symbolic, biological or social systems. Yet, importantly, it also constitutes them.

Reflecting on the idea of ‘the primitive man’, Francesco Gori recovers a distinctively Warburghian approach to culture analysis, highlighting that all human culture is, and cannot fail to be, an impure space. The reason is that every social space cannot but be produced around the tension between utopia and dystopia. As a consequence, social space is an essentially mixed and impure space. To capture this very dynamic, Matteo Meschiari, echoing Foucault’s heterotopias, advances the notion of ‘anti-space’. In his analysis, wilderness, apocalypse and utopia function as three contemporary counter-discourses which, even though they might look revolutionary or liberating, are in fact corollaries of the dominant capitalist discourse: “Once we take a space of thought – Meschiari argues – it is always its anti-space which provides consistency and validation, a false complexity and an oppressive cognitive symmetry”.

How, then, to make the picture more dynamic so as to include the workings of the impure? Alastair Donald considers 21st century fear of epidemics as an instance of “anti-modern imagination”. Whereas the modern project was conceived as an attempt at mastering social life and the environment, today we record a disproportionate impact of the fear of epidemic contagion on cultural imagination. Our obsessions for immunity and virality also pervade architectural imagination, giving shape to what Donald calls a “defeatist attitude”, where positive purposes are overshadowed by paralysing fears and anxieties. However, ultra-thin impurities can also gain new meanings. In his contribution, Thomas Mical argues that the presence of the impure, as well as the lack of clearly defined forms (the formless), might reveal and liberate the intrinsic openness of space. Space inherently allows for transitions and transience long before any architectural intervention is envisaged. The challenge to contemporary spatial thinking thus bounces back to the question of how to accept the flows that activate the (impure) transitiveness of space.

A not-too-dissimilar question is also tackled by Andrea Pavoni in his “Seeds of impurity”, which reconstructs the vicissitudes of Ai Weiwei’s art installation *Kui Hua Zi [Sunflower Seeds]* at the Tate Modern in London. Pavoni is particularly interested in how, while the rhetoric of ‘interactivity’ had been deployed by the Gallery in presenting the work, the same rhetoric has been surreptitiously withdrawn as soon as real interaction of the audience with the work started. Pavoni thus excavates into the purifying strategies put in place by institutions such as museums, highlighting the fact that Weiwei’s work “pollutes the atmosphere of the gallery itself by making inoperose its purifying operations: security, order, property”. That the impure is related to security is also made clear by Aide Esu in her study on Hebron. Esu speaks of a “conflictual reinvention” of sacred spaces in the city – particularly, the Cave of Machpelah adjacent to the Ibrahim Mosque. Here, arguments of purity and impurity have been mobilised by Jewish settlers and extremists to draw the space of an exclusionary, segregated city where Palestinian residents have endured increasing hardships. Paradoxically, visibility has been brought on this case only by an act of collective resistance enacted by Israeli army veterans turned into outspoken critics of the spatial strategy inside the city.

In the final piece, Mubi wraps up some ruminations about the nature of the impure. He proposes to interpret the category of the impure in the light of the notion of intensity, which in turn calls into play considerations concerning affective contagion and mutual exposure of the *socii*. Once we understand the impure as a manifestation of the intensive nature of social life, it becomes easier to grasp the psychological stress associated with it.

questa categoria alla luce della nozione di intensità, che a sua volta mette in gioco considerazioni relative al contagio affettivo e alla situazione di mutua esposizione dei *socii*. Se analizziamo l'impuro come una manifestazione della natura *intensiva* della vita sociale, diventa più facile cogliere lo stress psicologico ad esso associato. L'impuro corrisponde a un *aliquid* inquietante che opera incessantemente attraverso tutta la vita sociale.

Luca Staccioli è l'artista ospite di questa edizione. Le immagini che accompagnano queste pagine provengono dai suoi progetti in corso sulla città mediterranea. Si tratta in particolare di piccoli dettagli coperti di polvere, reperti dalle vie del centro di Marsiglia e di Genova. Il Mediterraneo è uno spazio di confine e

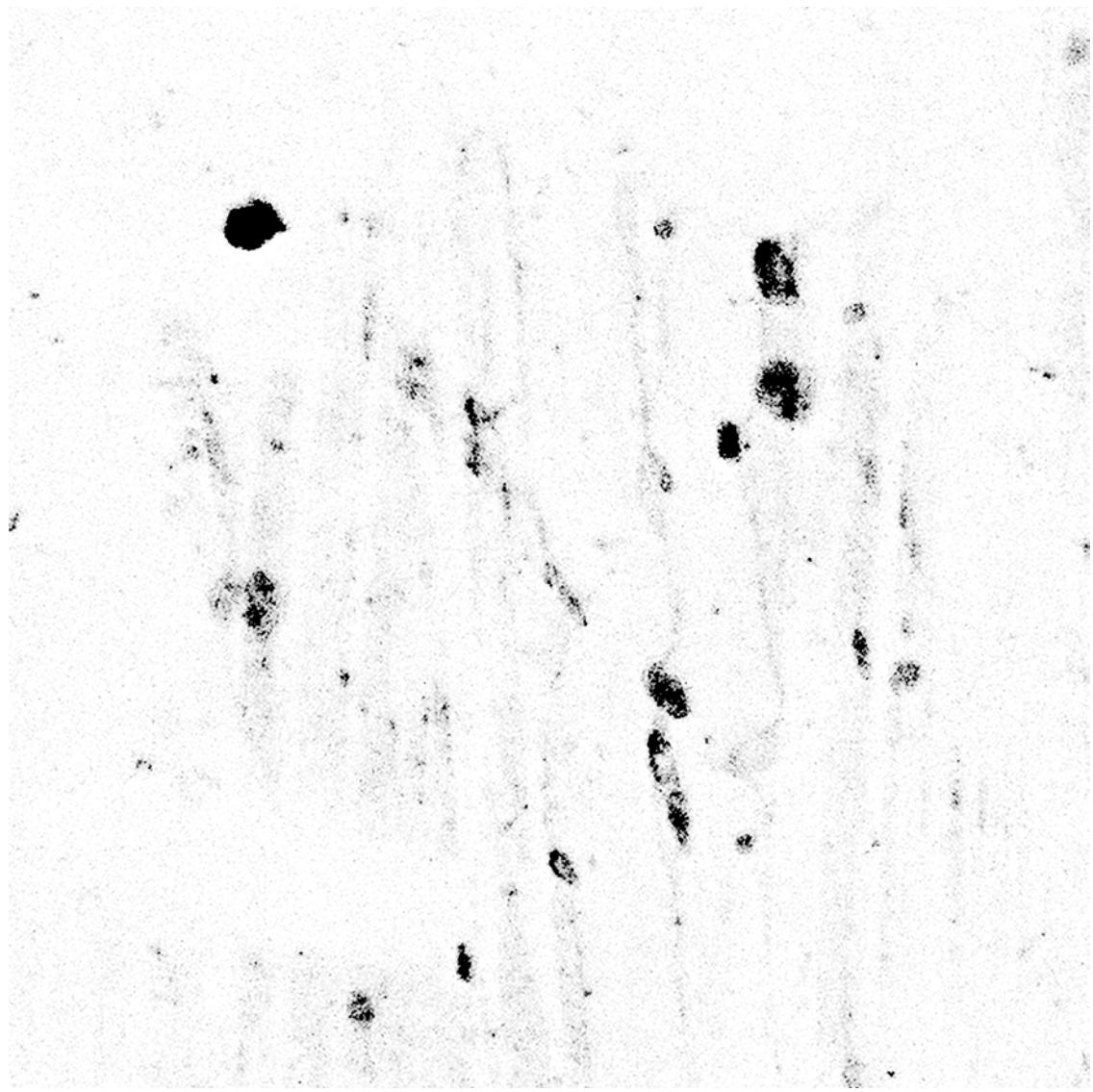
di passaggio. Proprio come la regione intera, la città mediterranea appare come una sedimentazione di tracce che l'artista esplora (ricordiamo anche un articolo di Giorgio Ciarallo e Ugo Nocera, "[Evasioni coincidenti. Fughe verso le porte del Mediterraneo](#)", in *Io Squaderno* n.5). Staccioli mira a rivalutare la doppia natura del confine: da un lato, linea sottile, invisibile e – si potrebbe aggiungere – arbitraria; dall'altro, elemento dinamico che assorbe pezzi dispersi su un vasto territorio. Da questo punto di vista, e contro il senso comune, il lavoro del confine coincide nientemeno che con il lavoro dell'impuro.

AMB, FG & CM

The impure corresponds to an unsettling *aliquid* that incessantly works through social life.

Luca Staccioli is the guest artist of this issue. The pictures accompanying these pages come from his on-going projects on the Mediterranean city, and specifically from dust-covered little details in inner-city public streets in Marseille and Genova. The Mediterranean is a border space of passage. Just like the region, the Mediterranean city is likewise sedimented with traces, which the artist explores (we would also like to remind a previous *Squaderno* article by Giorgio Ciarallo e Ugo Nocera, "[Evasioni coincidenti. Fughe verso le porte del Mediterraneo](#)"). Staccioli aims at revaluing the double nature of the border: on the one hand, a thin, invisible and – one may add – arbitrary line, on the other, a dynamic element that absorbs scattered items. Seen from this perspective, the work of borders is, indeed, the work of the impure.

AMB, FG & CM



Il “Primitivo” Lo spazio impuro della cultura

Francesco Gori

L'intera umanità è eternamente e in ogni epoca schizofrenica.
Aby Warburg

Gli appunti preparatori alla conferenza sul *Rituale del serpente*, classificati al Warburg Institute come *Pueblo Indians Lecture Drafts*, contengono le intuizioni più folgoranti di Warburg sull'antropologia generale. È in queste note, infatti, che Warburg ha formulato la sua concezione dell'*Unzerstörbarkeit des Urmensches*, la “indistruttibilità dell'uomo originario” che rimane “inalterata al mutare delle epoche e delle culture”. La fisionomia di tale *Urmensch* si ritrova nei simboli e nei rituali degli indiani pueblos, nella tragedia della Grecia classica, nell'arte del Rinascimento Fiorentino e nella cultura della civiltà contemporanea.

Come osserva Bettina Gockel¹, la riflessione di Warburg sulla struttura trans-storica della cultura si serve della malattia mentale di cui era affetto, il bipolarismo, come di un *Forschungsinstrument* che lo mette in contatto con uno strato “originario” dell’umano in cui si palesano le strutture di fondo, gli schemi adattativi e comunicativi che sostengono l’edificio della cultura. Grazie a questa esperienza “sciamanica” Warburg poté elaborare un modello organico della cultura, intesa non come progresso diacronico e lineare, ma come evoluzione da un centro che rimane sempre lo stesso – un albero che germoglia da un seme, per poi accrescere, diramarsi, complicarsi, ma senza perdere la sua radice. Come un albero, infatti, le culture crescono, evolvono, si espandono (oppure sfioriscono, deperiscono, si seccano e muoiono), ma non si spostano dal loro centro. Per questa ragione, il termine “primitivo” scelto dai traduttori per ragioni eufoniche, restituisce in maniera impropria il carattere dell’*Urmensch* come lo intendeva Warburg.

Inizialmente, il termine “primitivo” fu introdotto nel dibattito antropologico ottocentesco per sostituire il concetto di “selvaggio”, dispregiativo ed etnocentrico, allo scopo di conferire oggettività scientifica alla trattazione sulle culture “altre”. Se, infatti, il termine “selvaggio” si riferisce a un generico abitatore delle selve, contrapposto metonimicamente al progredito uomo “civile”, col concetto di “primitivo” gli antropologi di epoca vittoriana, capitanati da

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¹ B. Gockel, “Krieg – Krankheit – Kulturwissenschaft. Warburgs Schizophrenie als Forschungsinstrument und das Ideal moderner Primitivität” in aa.vv., Kasten 117. *Aby Warburg und der Aberglaube im Ersten Weltkrieg*, Gottfried Korff (Hg.), Tübingen, Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2008.

Frazer, hanno inteso riferirsi, col dovuto "distacco scientifico", a tutte le culture non ancora toccate dal progresso della civiltà. Il "primitivo", insomma, è l'uomo delle origini, l'*Urmensch*. Da questo punto di vista, sembrerebbe non esserci nulla di sbagliato nella traduzione del termine warburghiano; se non fosse, però, che col termine *Urmensch* Warburg non si riferisce a popoli lontani nel tempo, nello spazio e nel costume, ma precisamente a *se stesso* e alla propria cultura, in continuità e non in contrapposizione alle culture cosiddette primitive. Il suo *Urmensch* è un uomo "originario", ma non "dell'origine", "elementare" e "primario", ma non "primitivo"; è l'uomo *tout court*, colto nell'originarietà del suo agire simbolico.

La civitas si ricapitola punto per punto nella selva, il cittadino non fa che sognare il selvaggio, l'artificiale il naturale, l'inautentico l'autentico

Seguendo una pista suggerita da Matteo Meschiari nel suo *Antispazi. Wilderness Apocalisse Utopia*², vedremo come il concetto di "primitivo" non solo costituiscia l'antispazio necessario e consu-

stantziale al concetto di "civiltà", ma anche come si polarizzi in due opposti spazi di pensiero, l'uno concavo e l'altro convesso, legati l'uno all'altro come due diodi elettrici.

* * *

Nello spazio ufficiale della nostra cultura, il "primitivo" tende a essere identificato con l'uomo non ancora civilizzato, costretto a errare nelle boscaglie perché non ancora toccato dalla luce della razionalità. Ma c'è anche una versione positiva del primitivo, antipoidale alla prima, e che potremmo definire come "primitivismo", prendendo a prestito il termine dalla storia dell'arte del '900. Il primitivismo ricerca nel "primitivo" un'origine edenica, un'arcadia dalla quale la frenesia della modernità ci ha allontanato irrimediabilmente, quando l'uomo era ancora capace di parlare con gli dei, amico delle piante e degli animali. L'uomo primitivo diventa così l'uomo organico, ecologico, armonico, che vive nelle selve perché ancora non corrotto dalla *civitas*, dai suoi ritmi insensati, dai suoi conflitti, dalla sua violenza, dal suo inquinamento. Il "non ancora . . ." del positivismo modernista è ribaltato in un nostalgico "ancora non . . .".

In entrambi i casi, sia nello spazio "illuminista" che nell'antispazio "primitivista", il primitivo è identificato con l'uomo dell'origine, un'origine cancellata per sempre dal progresso. È questo il cuore pulsante del *logos* occidentale, dai greci a oggi, la sua autentica posta in gioco, rispetto alla quale la distinzione tra illuminismo e primitivismo, tra razionalismo e irrazionalismo, non sono che riflessi di superficie, uno che vede il progresso a partire dall'origine come una serie di conquiste rispetto a uno stato ferino primordiale, l'altro come un allontanamento catastrofico da uno stato di armonia cosmica, l'uno razionalista e positivista e l'altro irrazionalista e nichilista. In questo quadro, come osserva Meschiari, le correnti new age e l'immaginario contemporaneo della *Wilderness* e del ritorno alla natura non hanno nulla di rivoluzionario, ma sono una spinta endogena alla civiltà industriale e postindustriale, perfettamente organica ad essa, nella quale si produce l'orizzonte narrativo della sua legittimazione.

Per rendersi conto di questo immaginario di evasione che abita in profondità il *logos* occidentale basta farsi quattro passi nei corridoi della metropolitana di qualsiasi grande città europea, in quello che, cioè, costituisce l'autentico spazio della *civitas* contemporanea, lo spazio in cui, ogni giorno, i cittadini transitano per svolgere le loro funzioni vitali. Fin da

2 M. Meschiari, *Antispazi. Wilderness Apocalisse Utopia*, Macerata, (in corso di pubblicazione).

un primo sguardo, ci rendiamo conto di come esso sia letteralmente tappezzato dal suo antispazio di evasione: “vola con soli 19 euro” in Marocco, in Puglia, sulle Dolomiti, in Grecia, oppure – con qualche spicciolo in più – in Sri Lanka, alle Fiji, in Tailandia. A loro volta, questi antispazi dell’immaginario turistico si dividono in due macro-categorie: da una parte, contro il grigio spazio di transito del metrò si stagliano le immagini di *luoghi* in cui la *cultura* è ancora intatta, con le sue tradizioni, i suoi odori, i suoi sapori, la sua cucina, le facce dei suoi abitanti, vere, autentiche, vissute, una cultura autoctona non scempiata nella non-cultura globale dei fastfood, degli aeroporti e degli shopping mall, – i presunti non-luoghi della presunta non-cultura; dall’altra quelli in cui è la *natura* ad essere ancora vergine, non stuprata, non ridotta alla “waste land” dei grandi conglomerati urbani in cui vivono le masse anonime del ceto produttivo, i sorci dell’*underworld* metropolitano, che ciondolano lugubri nei vagoni del metrò, sognando uno spicchio di sole a buon mercato con cui riscaldarsi l’anima per due settimane all’anno.

Già da questa brevissima ricognizione si può trarre una considerazione di carattere più generale: lo spazio del *logos* occidentale si specchia costantemente nel suo antispazio immaginario d’evasione, nelle tracce del suo desiderio, nei crociera iconici del suo inconscio. La *civitas* si ricapitola punto per punto nella *selva*, il cittadino non fa che sognare il selvaggio, l’artificiale il naturale, l’inautentico l’autentico. Allo stesso tempo, però, anche il “selvaggio”, una volta entrato in contatto con il sogno prometeico della modernità – l’automobile, la televisione, il cellulare, un profilo facebook – comincia a vagheggiare di saltare anche lui, un giorno, sul treno della *civitas*, autoaccusandosi per la sua arretratezza e adoperandosi con ogni mezzo per colmare il “gap”. Talvolta con esiti tristemente grotteschi: alcuni anni fa, nel corso di un soggiorno sulle Ande peruviane, mi è capitato di incontrare una coppia di campesinos che, pensando di dare loro dei nomi “moderni” (e con essi delle chance migliori nella grande città) aveva chiamato i propri figli Batman e Robin... Ricordo anche come gli abitanti del microscopico pueblo di Llalla nel tempo libero si inerpicassero sulla “puna”, a oltre 4500 metri di altitudine, dove per qualche mistero dell’elettromagnetismo i cellulari prendevano nonostante l’assenza di ripetitori nel raggio di decine di chilometri, per mandarsi messaggini d’alta quota tra di loro, dato che non avevano nessun altro sufficientemente lontano con cui tele-comunicare.

Come ha mostrato Warburg, le culture – *ogni* cultura, non solo quella a cui apparteniamo noi – si rappresenta i fenomeni attraverso una sostituzione simbolica, presentificando ciò che è assente e allo stesso tempo rendendo assente nel simbolo ciò che è fisicamente presente; in altri termini, la *cultura* stessa, nella sua forma più generale, è la creazione di “una distanza consapevole tra l’io e il mondo”, l’evocazione di un *altrove*, di un luogo altro rispetto “a questo luogo”, di un’altra cosa “rispetto a questa cosa” che sono i simboli e gli oggetti di cui ci serviamo per comunicare. Se non avessimo la capacità di trascendere il dato sensibile per rivestirlo di attribuzioni semantiche, la capacità di servirci di *media*, non saremmo uomini. Di conseguenza, qualsiasi luogo, intriso di senso, di narrazioni, di immaginario, è una superficie in cui si spalancano infinite finestre verso degli altrove, altrove che possono essere desiderabili o detestabili, piacevoli o sgradevoli, palingenetici o apocalittici, catartici o reclusivi, liberatori o asserventi. In breve, *u-topici* o *dis-topici*: perché ogni “luogo altro” incistato nei luoghi in cui abitiamo il nostro qui e ora, non è mai *altro* in maniera neutra (*atopia*), ma sempre e necessariamente *altro* “in un certo modo”, positivo o negativo, desiderante (*utopia*) o disperante (*distopia*).

Ogni spazio si produce nella tensione polare tra utopia e distopia, e nella possibilità sempre palpabile di una loro inversione di senso, di una trasformazione del sogno in incubo, e

viceversa. I luoghi intrisi di storie e desiderio in cui meniamo le nostre vite, siano essi le mura domestiche o i terminal degli aeroporti, sono il punto limite, il grado zero dell'oscillazione tra utopia e distopia, tra altrove da sogno e altrove da incubo. Ed è nell'oscillazione di questo pendolo che Warburg addita la sistole e la diastole della cultura umana, ravvisando nella ciclotimia culturale tra stati maniaci e depressivi la struttura stessa di un'antropologia generale, ancora tutta da scrivere. Gli spazi non sono fatti puri, ma fatti interpretati, né oggetti puri, ma media, mediatori di un senso, portatori di una semanticità instabile, cangiante, disseminata, gravidì di storie, sporcati, usurati dall'uso, superfici su cui scrivono i *writers*, su cui appicchiamo gomme da masticare, gettiamo mozziconi di sigarette, che usuriamo con le nostre scarpe, che consumiamo, lisciviamo, ungiamo col sudore delle nostre mani.

* * *

Il pensiero dell'origine del *logos* occidentale produce narrativamente il proprio fondamento a partire dall'opposizione binaria spazio|antispazio. In questa zona di indistinzione tra spazio e antispazio fluttuano i tre concetti su cui riflette Meschiari – “Apocalisse”, “Wilderness”, “Utopia” – che si caricano di senso soltanto se fatti reagire con i loro conversi antipodali: “[palin] Genesi”, “Civiltà”, “Distopia”. In altri termini, ciascun elemento della coppia polare “spazio | antispazio” (“[palin]Genesi | Apocalisse”, “Civiltà | Wilderness”, “Utopia | Distopia”) acquista significato soltanto se entra in tensione con il proprio antipolo. Nella cultura, infatti, il senso si genera come l'elettricità: è la *tensione* tra due poli. Il concetto di Apocalisse, ad esempio, ha senso solo in tensione con l'antipolo della Genesi, perché non ci può essere fine del mondo se non c'è stata una creazione, perché, banalmente, nulla può finire che non abbia avuto un cominciamento.

Ogni spazio di pensiero, producendo il proprio antispazio produce anche il suo fondamento epistemologico: l'uno è il *Grund* su cui poggia l'altro. Per questo, dal momento che traggono il loro senso da una tensione, e non dal riferirsi a una sostanza, a un *essere* esterno e immutabile, polo e antipolo possono scambiarsi costantemente di posto, e le coppie polari stesse possono essere combinate in infiniti modi possibili: la Wilderness è *contemporaneamente* “utopia” (per i friketttoni primitivisti) e “distopia” (per gli scienziati razionalisti), e viceversa, la Civiltà è utopia per i razionalisti e distopia per i primitivisti; allo stesso modo l'Apocalisse è rappresentata dalla Wilderness per i razionalisti e dalla Civiltà per i primitivisti, così come la Genesi è la Civiltà per gli uni e la Wilderness per gli altri: potremmo andare avanti all'infinito a giocare a lego con questi concetti vuoti – o per dirla con Uwe Pörksen, con queste “parole di plastica”³.

Warburg decise di situarsi nel pieno di questa tensione, nell'immanenza più radicale, come un “sismografo dell'anima posto sullo spartiacque tra le diverse culture [...] collocato dalla mia stessa nascita tra Oriente e Occidente, spinto da un'affinità elettiva verso l'Italia e costretto a costruire la mia personalità sul confine tra Antichità pagana e Rinascimento cristiano del XV secolo, ero stato spinto in America [...] per conoscere come la vita nella sua tensione oscilli tra i due poli dell'energia naturale: istintiva e pagana da un lato, intelligibilmente strutturata dall'altro”⁴. Per Warburg la cultura umana è il prodotto di un'oscillazione ciclotimica tra polarità opposte, in cui l'ontologia, la logica, la verità, la scienza e la politica

3 Cfr. U. Pörksen, *Parole di plastica. La neolingua di una dittatura internazionale*, L'Aquila, Textus, 2011. Il primo titolo che il linguista friburghese, allievo e sodale di Ivan Illich, aveva dato a questo suo folgorante libretto era proprio “parole-lego”.

4 A. Warburg, *Gli Hopi. La sopravvivenza dell'umanità primitiva nella cultura degli Indiani dell'America del Nord*, a cura di Maurizio Ghelardi, Torino, Aragno, 2006, p. 88.

non sono il fondamento su cui tutto si regge, ma un caso limite di questa dinamica pendolare che genera il senso oscillando da un estremo all'altro. L'*Urmensch* che ha incontrato nei pueblos del Nuovo Messico e che ha scoperto di essere lui stesso una volta spogliato dalla malattia mentale dal suo *habitus* vittoriano non ha niente a che vedere con gli uomini allo stato di natura a cui gli antropologi hanno dato la caccia negli angoli più sperduti del globo. L'*Urmensch* non è l'uomo "dell'origine" – buono o cattivo, desiderabile o deprecabile, utopico o distopico – ma l'uomo "originario", catturato nell'oscillazione tra distacco razionale e abbandono orgiastico, tra contemplazione e fusione, tra Apollo e Dioniso, tra hybris e terrore, tra mania e depressione.

La natura stessa di quest'"uomo di mezzo", gettato tra le cose che accadono, preso nelle necessità del vivere, nelle sue paure e nelle sue gioie, nei suoi dolori e nei suoi piaceri, è quella di elaborare simboli, di "spiritualizzare il mondo", tentando di attribuire una causalità a ciò che accade, riconducendolo al cerchio delle sue credenze, facendo astrazione dal contingente per poter tracciare connessioni più generali. Quest'"uomo di mezzo", che rovista nella polvere del mondo alla ricerca di un senso che lo orienti nella vita, non sono soltanto gli Hopi di fine '800, sulla via della civiltà dopo due ondate coloniali, né il Warburg "ciclotimico" di Kreuzlingen: quest'uomo di mezzo, "eternamente schizofrenico", siamo noi stessi che dondiamo nel vagone del metrò.



Antispazi: Wilderness, Apocalisse, Utopia. (Costruire l'impuro, diffidarne)

**Matteo
Meschiari**

1. Fuck the Real

Ho cercato la salvezza nell'utopia e ho trovato un po' di consolazione soltanto nell'Apocalisse.

Emil Cioran

Due ore passate nelle paludi di Groton e il villaggio di Estill, Hampton County, South Carolina¹. Sembra il mondo degli uomini dopo gli organi senza corpo di Lascaux: sali la scala di metallo, la porta blindata si apre, hai nei polmoni il liquido amniotico della grotta. Poi esci, ti bruci le sinapsi nel lampo dell'aria: il colore alieno dell'erba, il verso acido dei trattori nei campi. Allora ti viene voglia di uno specchio per vedere se veramente ci sei: l'imbarazzo anacronistico dei vestiti, il vuoto della voce. Ti guardi attorno, cerchi con nostalgia quei cavalli, quei bisonti dipinti che invece sono rimasti laggiù. Ma no. Sei in Francia. O a Estill. E tutto quello che non vorresti vedere è là, attorno a te: le Ford coperte di polvere, la torre arrugginita dell'acqua, il negozio di liquori dove stai per entrare con un uomo che ti dice prendiamo il bourbon e andiamo. Ok, prendiamo il bourbon, andiamo. Ma fuori c'è lui. Per terra c'è un nero che si è pisciato nei pantaloni, candito dalla miseria. Quarant'anni, o venti, le spalle voltate a tutto, la fronte contro il muro intonacato. In mano ha una bottiglia di MD 20/20 in cui ristagna un liquido azzurro-fluo. Per un attimo scivolo in quel colore che non esiste, che sputa in faccia al vero della palude come un nano da giardino sulla cima del Cerro Torre. L'uomo sta parlando all'intonaco. Si dondola come un animale nella gabbia di uno zoo. Ripete una frase: *fuck the real, man, fuck the real*. Noi andiamo. Torniamo nella palude.

L'MD 20/20 è un *flavored fortified wine* che con il vino non ha nulla a che vedere. Nel lessico urbano è il Mad Dog, l'alcol dei barboni, dei ghetti neri, delle periferie depresse, una bottiglia di liquido dolciastro che oscilla tra i 13 e i 20 gradi alcolici. Colori artificiali, gusti artificiali, prezzi artificiali. L'azzurro-fluo corrisponde al *blue raspberry*, costa 3 dollari e 99 per 75 cl e poco meno del doppio per un litro e mezzo. Il suo morso arriva diritto al cervello, è rapido, ne basta poco. Bevne un po' di più e prendi il tè con William Burroughs e Strawberry Shortcake. Si fa fatica a immaginare un'icona commerciale migliore dell'MD 20/20 per rappresentare il disinibitore di Heidegger. Il colore, non l'alcol, innesca l'antimacchina antropologica che porta l'uomo allo stordimento animale. Bere l'innaturale ultimo, farsi sfrattare da un azzurro-fluo, è la soluzione finale di una tecnica di autoallevamento: come la zecca di Uexküll, l'uomo si lascia cadere sul (Mad) Dog e, completamente assorbito dall'assorbire, dimentica le paludi

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1 Questo testo raccoglie l'incipit e l'explicit di un libro che molto probabilmente non sarà mai pubblicato. Forse non è un male. Tutto quello che valeva la pena dire lo si trova qui.

delle origini e della fine.

Quel pomeriggio ero a Groton per andare nella Wilderness. La vecchia piantagione sudista oggi è una riserva di caccia. Secondo alcuni è uguale a com'era prima dell'arrivo degli Spagnoli. Soprattutto le paludi. Cipressi d'acqua, alligatori, un brodo biologico che macera dal primo Olocene esperimenti di vita e di morte. I miei accompagnatori ci vanno qualche volta con fucili e giacche mimetiche per cacciare cervi e maiali selvatici, per ritornare a Lascaux. Ma incontrare a Estill l'Uomo di Maddog mi ha fatto capire che la Wilderness non è più un ritorno al selvatico o a una fetta di natura intatta, bensì uno spazio inventato che volta le spalle al reale. In inglese *the Real* vuol dire molte cose, ad esempio "mondo spirituale indipendente" o "ciò che è autentico e immutabile rispetto all'universo dell'esperienza" o "l'assoluto contrapposto alla realtà sensibile" – tutti oggetti che non potevano appartenere al corredo funerario dell'Uomo di Maddog. Le declinazioni di Lacan e di Žižek ancora meno. Dunque quel giorno avrò capito male. Nelle consonanti impastate dall'alcol la frase doveva essere *fuck the deal*, o *fuck the meal*, o *fuck the weal*. Forse. O forse no.

Utopia vs realtà, reale vs immaginario, realtà vs reale, autentico vs fasullo, essenza vs esperienza, vero vs verisimile. Utopia = fasullo, realtà = immaginario (se contrapposta al reale), reale = essenza (se contrapposta alla realtà). E ancora: se la realtà è immaginaria rispetto al reale e l'utopia è immaginaria rispetto alla realtà, allora la realtà è in qualche modo utopica, l'utopia è in qualche modo reale? Se il reale è autentico e l'utopia si oppone alla realtà, allora il reale è in qualche misura utopia? Davvero? Vuoi proprio saperlo? *Fuck the Real, man!* Solo per alcuni filosofi "reale" e "realità" sono parole distinte. Basta eliminare il terzo intruso e tutto diventa più semplice, di una brutalità binaria, quella che per vie biologiche e sociobiologiche ha permesso a *Sapiens sapiens* di trionfare.

Semplice (o quasi): inventiamo uno spazio fisico o mentale e con esso il suo *antispazio*, montiamo un mondo d'immagini e il suo antimondo, con sovrapposizioni speculari inesatte, con articolazioni dialettiche imperfette, per lasciare delle zone opache che alimentino credenza e dubbio. Dalla credenza il dubbio, e viceversa. Antispazi come principi ortopedici, come casse di risonanza o *alter ego* asimmetrici in cui scandagliare le zone d'ombra. Esempio: nel nordest del Tennessee il sottoproletariato bianco prostituisce i propri figli per potersi comprare flaconi di antidolorifici. Ma quando la notizia di cronaca diventa un racconto metropolitano nella bocca della borghesia bianca, quando il *white trash* serve per definire *a contrario* il *white style*, siamo in presenza di un'icona "impura" che registra l'insorgere di un antispazio: una classe in crisi identitaria e l'apparato iconico sommerso che la aiuta a ritrovarsi o a consolarsi. Allo stesso modo ci piace dire che la Materia è realtà e illusione, che Dio è verità e menzogna, che il Mondo è percettibile e intelligibile, che c'è una Gerusalemme terrestre e una celeste, che esistono utopie reali e realtà utopiche, che la Wilderness è nel nostro giardino e che l'Apocalisse è adesso.

Dato uno spazio del pensiero, è sempre il suo antispazio a dargli consistenza e validazione, una falsa complessità e un'opprimente simmetria cognitiva, una macchina inferenziale geneticamente codificata che proprio perché inconsapevole, ineludibile, ineluttabile, costituisce il terreno privilegiato del fare biopolitico, soprattutto se la biopolitica sceglie di *fare cultura*. Perché il biopotere è anzitutto potere demiurgico di fare l'umano, potere antropologico, o meglio antropogonico, alla soglia indecidibile tra natura e cultura, potere di decidere di quella soglia, di affermare culturalmente in cosa consiste la natura umana e, viceversa, di assegnare un significato biologico alla cultura, alla necessità tutta nostra di farci delle rappresentazioni, di dare un senso alle cose e agli eventi, di raccontarci delle storie.

Il progetto è semplice: esplorare tre antispazi che la macchina antropologica sta utilizzando come MD 20/20 nella poststoria occidentale. *Wilderness*, *Apocalisse* e *Utopia*: paradigmi cognitivi antichi come Lascaux ma anche tecniche culturali di massa per produrre la nuda vita dei popoli. Come l’Uomo di Maddog, gli antispazi voltano le spalle a un mondo che sembra voltarle a noi, e insieme funzionano da anticamera verso qualcosa che non c’è, vestiboli di attesa e sospensione consolatoria, celle vuote che chiamiamo *Natura Selvaggia*, *Rivelazione Ultima*, *Mondo Nuovo*. Da un lato sembrano criticare la civiltà urbana neolitica e capitalista (*Wilderness*), un presente che non si è in grado di leggere e fronteggiare (*Apocalisse*), un sistema culturale e sociale che non funziona come dovrebbe (*Utopia*); dall’altro alimentano lo *status quo* proponendosi come

alternativa fantasmatica alla grande noia. Nella *Wilderness* si annida infatti l’idea che, per quanto male le si possa fare, la Natura comunque e sempre ce la farà; l’*Apocalisse* è l’incubo catartico e rivelatore, una *tabula rasa* virtuale per farci tornare al presente con rinnovata fiducia nel progresso; l’*Utopia* è la speranza che un domani la mamma che è sepolta in noi ci darà finalmente la marmellata. Da un lato, insomma, sono potenti endorfine sociobiologiche, dall’altro sono delle indispensabili epopee dell’immaginario, dei monumenti di neve agostana a Peter Pan e al concetto di Cultura.

Dato uno spazio del pensiero, è sempre il suo antispazio a dargli consistenza e validazione, una falsa complessità e un’opprimente simmetria cognitiva...

2. Iconocene

Gli uomini come specie si trovano da millenni al termine della loro evoluzione.

Walter Benjamin

Riproviamoci. Schermo nero. Musica elettronica, *Ambient 4 - On Land* di Brian Eno. Gocciolii, spazi sonori che si allargano, fruscii. Prima sequenza: una vecchia torre dell’acqua americana, la scritta ESTILL SC sulla vernice verde, macchie di ruggine. La cisterna scorre sulla sinistra, panoramica dall’alto, case ordinarie, quasi delle baracche. Poi un negozio. L’insegna al neon OPEN, la vetrina del negozio. Stacco. La mano di un Nero. Nella mano una bottiglia di MD 20/20 (*sponsor*). La bottiglia scivola dalla mano e si rompe in *slow motion*. Liquido azzurro sul marciapiede. Stazione di benzina. Ancora l’azzurro sul marciapiede, come liquido antigelo. Stacco. *Sharkey’s Day* di Laurie Anderson, i primi 20 secondi. Le paludi, i cipressi. Alba di primordi. Un uomo vestito Marlboro (*sponsor*) rema su una canoa. Dettaglio del rifle sulle ginocchia. Panoramica a schiaffo. Un cervo nel folto. Zoom rapido. Il cervo volta la testa verso lo spettatore. Al suono di uno sparo camera fissa sull’immagine di un cervo dipinto. *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* di Ernst Reijseger. Una grotta. Mani preistoriche tengono torce, sfregano frammenti di carbone sulla roccia, penombra. Stacco. La mano del nero. *Jesus Blood Never Failed Me Yet* di Tom Waits. Il nero che si dondola come un folle seduto sul letto di un ospedale psichiatrico. Voce off, poco percepibile, poi udibile: *Fuck the real man, fuck the real*. Dissolvenza. Nero. Silenzio. Sempre in dissolvenza entra la scritta bianca ANTISPACES. WILDERNESS APOCALYPSE UTOPIA, A New Book by Matteo Meschiari. Schermo nero. Fine.

L’episodio di Estill è completamente inventato: il nero ubriaco, la bottiglia di MD 20/20, la frase cantilenata. Sono reali la torre dell’acqua, la miseria di un paese dove la popolazione nera tocca l’80%, le paludi di Groton. Il resto è *storytelling* e *advertising communication theory*. Perché bisogna stare in guardia, bisogna fidarsi poco, soprattutto di chi fa *anthropofiction* per parlare del mondo contemporaneo, contrabbandando ecotopie postapocalittiche, disto-

pie regressive e selvagge, natura violata che scatena una vendetta ultima, alieni, zombie, non-umani che rubano la Terra all'uomo, virus barbarici che fermano l'orologio evolutivo e bruciano la biblioteca di Alessandria. Ogni crisi storica ha inventato angeli e demoni a propria immagine e somiglianza, ma di volta in volta la vera invenzione è stata quella di un antispazio in cui rendere visibile l'alternativa (positiva o negativa) al qui. Lascaux e Chauvet ne sono i primi esempi, e il palazzo di Assurbanipal o la Sala Ovale della Casa Bianca, con l'immaginario (implicito ed esplicito) che li accompagna, sono solo *avatar* tecnici del primo esperimento: «Il conquistatore del culto del serpente e della paura del fulmine, l'erede dei popoli indigeni e il cercatore d'oro che li ha spodestati, è catturato in una foto che ho scattato in una strada di San Francisco. È lo Zio Sam con un cappello a cilindro che va a spasso orgoglioso davanti a una rotonda neoclassica. In alto, sopra il suo cappello, corrono fili elettrici. In questo serpente di rame fatto da Edison, lui ha strappato il fulmine alla natura». Così Aby Warburg, nella conferenza di Kreuzlingen del 1923, annunciava la crisi della distanza in un Occidente già postumo.

Esistono zone d'indeterminazione concettuale, percettiva, emozionale che l'uomo traduce spontaneamente in articolazioni spaziali dialettiche. Per renderle più comprensibili e al tempo stesso più ambigue, le carica d'immagini che sono tanto più forti quanto più sono sganciate da una diegesi riconoscibile. Questo le fa galleggiare nel senso senza che debbano sforzarsi di produrre senso, disarticolate, neutralizzanti. E proprio per questo riescono ad attivare nell'uomo una condizione di sospensione estatica, dentro il tempo e fuori dalla storia. Gli antispazi, che sono per essenza antistorici e antinarrativi, sono innesco e collettore di questo galleggiamento estatico. Aperti davanti a una chiusura, sospesi davanti a qualcosa che non si dà, trasformano l'attesa in noia, la politica in etica, l'etica in un eterno aperitivo al crepuscolo: birrette che impediscono la rivoluzione, come dice Daniele Morello. Eppure in qualche modo ci danno consolazione, perché nella povertà di mondo che abitiamo e che ci abita, spargono briciole di mondi altri, di altrove dai colori saturi, di simulaci di dopo. Sono come MD 20/20: conclusa la morte mediatica di Dio, *Wilderness-Apocalisse-Utopia* sono il *B side* del trascendente, ma di fatto realizzano un itinerario antropologico inverso a quello dell'essere al mondo. Collocando l'uomo in un limbo d'attesa, corrodoni la fiducia dell'agire, imboniscono una Natura Madre che si ricicla in ecoballe mistiche, promettono una Fine del Mondo che ripulisce dalla bruttura umana come il deserto di Peter O'Toole in *Lawrence d'Arabia*, ci regalano un'America Celeste e una Cina Terrestre.

Viviamo in un momento chiave. Il tempo di Lascaux e il tempo poststorico del Tardo Occidente s'incontrano in un punto zero, si citano, si clonano. Entrambi negano la *History* e scelgono la *Story*, trascendono la *Story* e scelgono lo *Snapshot* iconico, mentre l'uso che fanno delle immagini è finalizzato alla pura sopravvivenza della specie. L'unica differenza è di ordine demografico: per ovvie ragioni antropotecniche, la criostoria della cultura occidentale è quella del passaggio da una gestione autarchica e anarcocomunista delle immagini a un loro governo colonialista e totalitario. Da immagini-*aide mémoire* ancora sorgive e produttive di senso a immagini-bozzolo-senza-crisalide, diaframmi senza flusso spermatico, punti ciechi, non-specchi, non-vedere. Per Lascaux e per il Tardo Occidente queste immagini estatiche funzionano come energia consolatoria contro la noia dell'Era glaciale e dell'Era capitalista, *The Big Chill* di Kasdan. E la consolazione, si tratti di MD 20/20, di *Guerra e pace* di Tolstoj o di una cena da Bottura, è una declinazione chiara dello stordimento animale heideggeriano. Anche la zecca di Uexküll si consola del suo altrimenti-non-esserci con il sangue del cane su cui si lascia cadere, mentre nei centomila Estill costruiti per non esistere le poetiche del ritardare e del ritardante praticano l'interruzione dell'umano, consolandolo.

SARS and the City

21st century epidemics and the anti-Modern imagination

Alastair Donald

In the cultural and spatial imagination the notion of disease as a marker of impurity has a long and evolving history. Medieval Christians, for example, interpreted strictly the injunction in Leviticus against consorting with lepers who were ‘unclean’: “He shall be impure as long as the disease is on him. Being impure, he shall dwell apart; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.”¹ The mid-nineteenth century, however, marked a significant turning point in society’s understanding and response to the threat posed by disease. With the Enlightenment fostering an increasingly scientific understanding of diseases, the Modern age confidence in city building generated vast infrastructure programmes such as the Cholera defying sewage systems and coincided with a transformation in confidence that society could shape the future.

In recent years the return of a more fatalistic outlook has informed a belief that today we are relatively powerless to deal with problems that confront us. Alongside fears over technological advances and environmental decay, the spectre of pandemics looms large as critics ask, expectantly, ‘how are humans going to become extinct?’² or draw up rankings of the threats to human civilisation.³ Unlike a century ago when rapid development was held to be the solution, increasingly the urban growth is now viewed as a problem. Avian Flu and SARS show that “infectious diseases have spread horrifyingly fast in cities” says one commentator adding urban environments also play a major part in chronic illness: “Heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer rates are rising, fuelled by unhealthy lifestyles; fast food restaurants proliferate in our cities.”⁴

With the spectre of ill-health looming large in the architectural imagination, bookshelves groan under the weight of tomes such as *Sick City* or *Designing to Avoid Disaster* while exhibitions explore *Landscapes of Quarantine* and investigate *Imperfect Health: The Medi-*

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1 Leviticus 13:46 <http://www.liberaljudaism.org/written-word-resources/45/1058-parashat-tazria-metzora-5775.html>

2 Sean Coughlan, “How are humans going to become extinct?”, BBC News, 24 April 2013, at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22002530>.

3 Matt McFarland, “The 12 threats to human civilization, ranked”, The Washington Post, 20 February 2015, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/innovations/wp/2015/02/20/the-12-threats-to-human-civilization-ranked/>.

4 Sarah Boseley, “Sick cities: how to beat pandemics that spread like we live in one big metropolis”, The Guardian, 26 February 2014, at <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/feb/26/sick-cities-pandemics-spread-metropolis>.

calization of Architecture. Global bodies such as the UN, national health services and local authorities all now peddle the planning dream of the Healthy City while a sense that 'crisis is the new normal' has given birth to the idea of planning 'resilient cities' as the means to avoid the end of days.⁵ Yet given we live longer, healthier lives than ever before, why has the spectre of disease moved central stage once more? What happened to change our perception of urbanization from a positive to a negative one?

The changing narrative of disasters

In his book *Dread* which mixes history and sociology to examine how societies react to the threat of disease, Philip Alcibes notes there are three aspects to the understanding of any epidemic: the *physical* event of an infection; the role of that disease in *social* crisis and change; and finally the *narrative* through which society makes sense of what we see happening as well as what we fear (and hope) will happen. Such narratives, he notes, are influenced by, and can themselves alter, society's broader narratives about itself.⁶

The 1918 'Spanish Flu' pandemic illustrates how these factors interact. Physically the impact was enormous, infecting an estimated 500 million people globally and killing between 20 and 50 million people, and the social disruption incapacitated many communities, even where mortality rates were relatively low. Yet the disease had a fairly limited impact on the Western imagination, remaining largely absent in art and literature for decades.⁷ Indeed it is only since the 1970s that Spanish Flu has made a significant appearance, firstly as scientists sought to promote the theory that flu outbreaks occur every decade and more recently as a means of promoting the ethos of 'pandemic preparedness'. That the evolving narrative now carries meanings that were not self-evident in the original event confirms that the meaning society gives to a crisis is primarily culturally determined rather than biologically or scientifically.

The narratives that society confers on disasters including epidemics have gone through three important phases.⁸ Traditionally, such incidents were attributed to supernatural forces, the outcome of fate or acts of God. The rise of secularism accompanied by new sources of knowledge altered people's perception of disasters. Scientific understanding including epidemiology and germ theory helped give meaning to outbreaks of disease which became explainable as acts of Nature, and also understood as events that society could potentially control. Urban planning and development including new technologies and infrastructure provided a means to wage war on disease giving society control over natural threats.

Today, despite a relatively low physical impact as measured by the number of infections or deaths, epidemics such as SARS, Avian Flu and Ebola have nevertheless impacted significantly on the cultural imagination, fuelling intense fears over society's capacity to resist the threat of epidemics. In turn this has informed significant changes in how societies choose to organise in the face of threats. Importantly, the narrative society uses to explain the occurrence of disasters has changed. Since the mid-twentieth century as the mood of society

5 Stephen Moss, "Judith Rodin's warning for the world: 'Crisis is becoming the new normal'", *The Guardian*, 27 January 2015, at <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/jan/27/judith-rodin-warning-world-crisis-new-normal-rockefeller-foundation>.

6 Philip Alcibes, *Dread: How Fear and Fantasy Have Fuelled Epidemics from the Black Death to Avian Flu*, Public Affairs, 2010, p. 5.

7 Alcibes, *Dread*, p. 6.

8 Frank Furedi, "The blame game", *BBC News*, 6 September 2005, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/4217024.stm.

has grown more fatalistic, disasters are no longer explainable as acts of nature but increasingly as the fault of humanity itself, for example, extreme weather events such as droughts or hurricanes blamed on over-industrialisation, or floods blamed excess development. The common understanding of the relationship between urbanisation and disease has also shifted significantly.

The City of Fear

In *The Ghost Map*, written about nineteenth-century London's 'battle between man and microbe' in the face of the Cholera epidemic, Steven Johnson concludes by speculating as to the threat faced by the contemporary megacity:

Despite a relatively low physical impact as measured by the number of infections or deaths, epidemics such as SARS, Avian Flu and Ebola have nevertheless impacted significantly on the cultural imagination, fuelling intense fears over society's capacity to resist the threat of epidemics

The perils of density grow more explosive – or more infectious, as the case may be – as the wages of fear are increasingly doled out in twenty first century currency: chemical or biological weapons, a freelancer virus or bacterium terrorizing the planet for no particular reason than its fundamental drive to reproduce... Tightly bound networks of humans and microbes make a great case study in the power of exponential growth.⁹

This speculation is remarkable for how easily it weaves together key contemporary bogymen, creating an amplifying effect that produces an all-encompassing threat; a virus, modern weaponry, terror (and implied terrorist), actions devoid of any rationale but rather generated by inner needs that operate unconstrained by the external world. As for the prospect of exponential growth, clearly it is modernity – in the form of cities ('the perils of density') and global connections ('networks of humans') – that facilitates the threat.

Writing after the 2009 outbreak H1N1 'swine flu', one purveyor of architectural speculations prophesied the dystopian future of London: "The politics of the city began to change: everything turned medical... It was the doctors who began to reshape the city". Airborne outbreaks such as flu, and even the common cold, become spatially impossible, cured by street widths designed to stop the spread infection, public squares are rebuilt using data taken from air-circulation studies and the physics of the human cough, while moveable walls made from microbe-resistant plastic incorporate built-in air filters. Not only does the travel distance of a sneeze influence architectural forms while the guards man blood-testing checkpoints and watchtowers, but congestion charging is now applied to pedestrians keeping the threat of transmissibility to a minimum.¹⁰

For all the sci-fi projections informing design *solutions*, the troubling aspect of these cities operating in accordance with imagination of fear are the limits they impose on human freedom – such as the need for reduced mobility, here through congestion charge rationing, and in other accounts through 'spatial distancing'. Because the uncertainties and insecurities related to the city of tomorrow are conceived of as human products (or by-products) that cannot be dealt with through Enlightenment prescriptions of 'more knowledge, more control', instead the prescription is of the need to limit and re-think or understanding of

9 Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map. The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic*, Riverhead, 2006, p. 242-3.

10 Geoff Manaugh, "Digital Cities: London after the great 2047 flu outbreak", *Wired*, 5 October 2009 <http://www.wired.co.uk/magazine/archive/2009/11/features/digital-cities-london-after-the-great-2047-flu-outbreak>

humanity's relationship to the external world.¹¹ For Giddens, the threat of unintended effects requires us to set aside attempts to understand and manipulate the world and instead to make individual decision making central to the sphere of policy-making activity and focus attention on deploying 'social reflexivity' to empower individuals to make *better* life choices.¹² The outcome, inevitably, will be limits to freedom of choices.

Instead of intervention to change the world, prevention is the watchword of the day, to be realised through developing 'resilience'. Transformation no longer exists in the sense of substantial change to improve the external world. Rather the focus is on the inner life of what are assumed to be vulnerable individuals. As one advocate of a resilience based approach put it, "psychologists, sociologists and neuroscientists are uncovering a wide array of factors that make you more or less resilient than the person next to you: the reach of your social networks, the quality of your close relationships, your access to resources, your genes and health, your beliefs and habits of mind."¹³ Each choice inevitably becomes opened up to the imposition of external direction and controls.

Conclusion

The explosion of fear around disease and contemporary epidemics is more a response to the dramatisation of epidemics and other aspects of modern life than to the actual threat they pose. The relative ease with which epidemic threats have been contained and the comparatively low casualty rates they have produced, certainly in the developed, urbanised West, shows that society has the scientific know-how and organisational capabilities to cope with outbreaks of disease. The obsession with avoidance of unspecified hazards that may or may not be around the corner and the focus on 'scenario planning' against imaginative projections of possible outcomes undermine the emergence of a more worthwhile architectural imagination. They reflect a defeatist attitude that can only deflect society from clarifying and pursuing any grand broader aims and objectives and project a sense of positive purpose. We should create the future not cower from it.

11 David Chandler, *Freedom vs Necessity in International Relations: Human-Centred Approaches to Security and Development*, Zed Books, 2013, p58

12 Chandler, *Freedom*, p. 59, citing Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*.

13 Andrew Zolli, "Learning to Bounce Back", *The New York Times*, 2 November 2012, at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/03/opinion/forget-sustainability-its-about-resilience.html?_r=0.

How formless processes and ultra-thin impurities activate transitive spaces

Thomas Mical

The transitive identity and attributes of spatial flows, from interior to exterior and back again, stage an important question of the new transitive aspects of lived spaces in design thinking. The purity of an idea, the purity of a body, and the purity of a space are all attributes given to representation and imagination. Less clear is the degree to which this purity, as modern ideal, is dependent on an alternative model of change, transition, or flow. Given that bounded spaces must be malleable and perforated – for access and atmosphere – and that spaces are experienced (but rarely designed) in near-cinematic series of scenes, the pressing concern in design thinking (and refined in architectural theory) concerns the need for differentiated models and processes to untangle or converge species of spatial flows.¹ Within this possible taxonomy, let us look to the small scale flow of impurities which have attached to a peculiar modernist aesthetic category, against idealism and spatial permanence.

Take, for example, the *other* of clearly defined and bounded figural spaces: the concept of the formless.² In modern art theory, the form-less (including dust, dirt, and other minimal impurities) was suppressed in the hygienic models of modern universal space, but also emerged as a mode of practice in modernism as a near-invisible exception to abstract-machine spaces. The formless, as a drift of matter without form, had many perverse connotations in Bataille's surrealist investigations, but then mostly disappeared in postwar formalism. The formless is both influenced by its spatial setting, as reactive, but also self-directed in its mode of appearing, often as a liminal or negligible disturbance or impurity in a more coherent and unified perceptual field. After the publication of the text *Formless: A User's Guide* (edited by Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss) the formless returned in recent decades as a sign of a more subtle but higher order organizational system that has as its conceptual legacy the entire range of liminal phenomena (and by extension, liminal spaces, the spaces between spaces where often attributes, qualities, and flows can become intricate arabesques and hybrids).

The formless, as but one process-driven model of spatial flows, is perhaps best shown by the well-known photograph of *Dust Breeding (Duchamp's Large Glass with Dust Notes)* by Man Ray (1920) which captures the fine granular dust-field on the back of Duchamp's fractured

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1 See George Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, NY: Penguin Classics, 2008; see also the recent Andrew Ballantyne and Chris L. Smith (eds), *Architecture in the Space of Flows*, London: Routledge, 2011.

2 See Georges Bataille: "Linforme" ("Formless") in *Documents 1*, Paris, 1929, p. 382 (translated by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr, *Georges Bataille: Vision of Excess, Selected Writings, 1927-1939*. Minneapolis: MN University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

Large Glass, seems to expose an urban-scale corruption of some utopian modernist landscape. The drift of ultra-thin impurities both marks the spatial edges as well as overcomes them, thus operating as a signifier of the contingency of linkages in architectural and urban spaces. The architectural setting usually operates as a predetermination and formalization of openings, conduits, passage, and terminal identities. The formless flows in and through those spaces, often invisible, are really advanced processes linking design, perception, and change that resists static conditions and essences. The possibility of transience or transition is already imbedded in the spaces before construction.

The drift of ultra-thin impurities both marks the spatial edges as well as overcomes them, thus operating as a signifier of the contingency of linkages in architectural and urban spaces

To look more closely at the particularities of dust, we know that Victorian-era campaigns against dirt were a constant re-affirmation of purity: dust was the omnipresent threat, an impurity of pressures

and drifts moving throughout the industrialized counter-nature of 19th urban life. The movement and processing of these impurities, from domestic to industrial scales, absorbs energy while also codifying work. As a noticeable impurity dirt also took on an elevated status and class marker, a semiotic trace hinting at decay, debauchery, or contamination. The presence of dust and dirt in lived space traced a connectedness to larger industrial infrastructures and spatial configurations that design did could not bridge. The sight of contaminants was exaggerated in epidemics when the causes were invisible organisms, and both came to be read as evidence of the failure of hygiene and corresponding social mores. The formless is a condition that is experienced as both emergent and fugitive, in that the range of overlooked particles, impurities, detritus, remnants is made into as concept, as image, but also as a process. The inevitable process of objects, entities, and spaces becoming-formless is the activation of liminal and imperceptible elements in lived space. Thus the formless as also spatial latency, or a subtle undercurrent, of architectural thought, architectural projection, and the raw facts of construction.

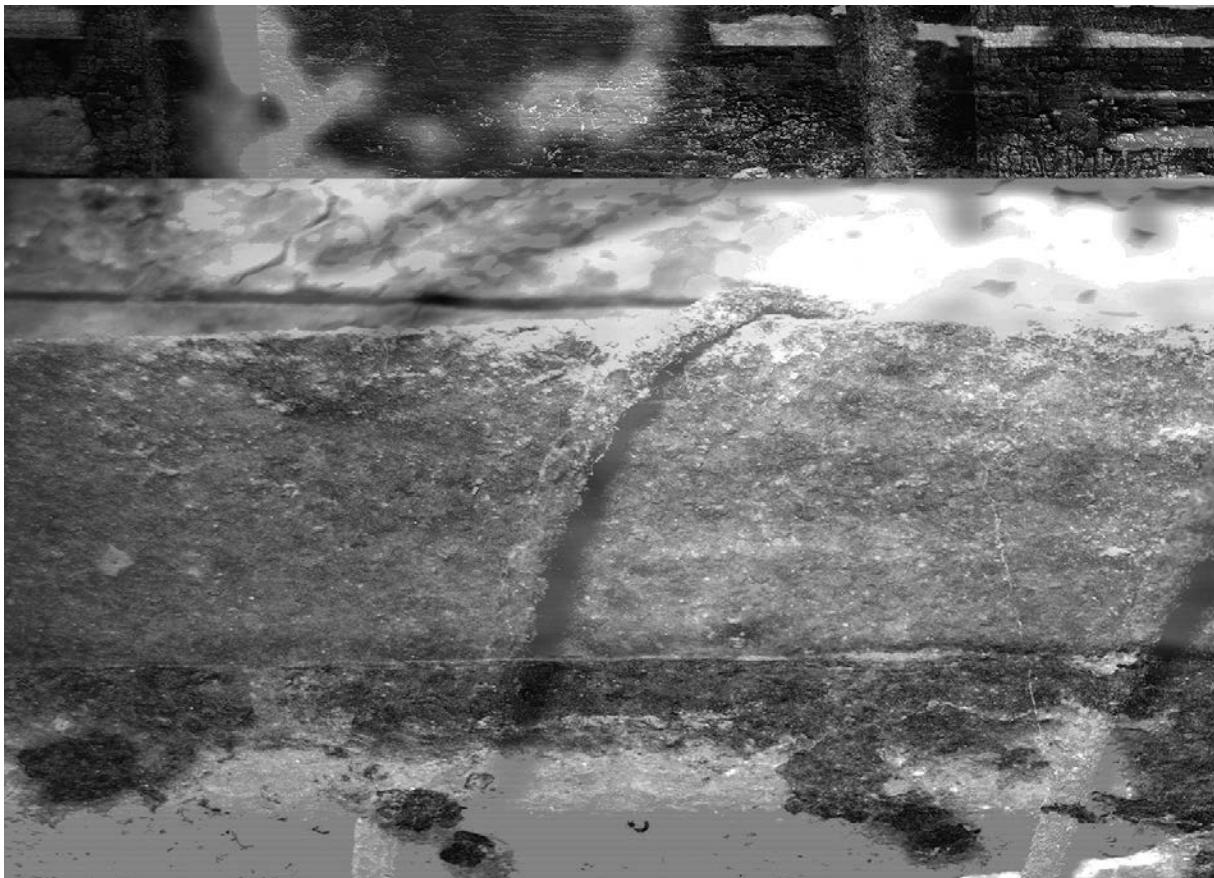
It is with this legacy that liminal and formless spatial phenomena were so attractive to the artists operating around the modernist alternative sensitivities of surrealism – noise, stains, indeterminate presences always seemed to take one into the proximity of another world, another identity just beneath the surface, like unconscious triggers.³ The artist records these impurities with the authority of an oracle. Architecturally, in the facades and surfaces regulating interior and exterior spatial transitions, differences concentrate on both sides of the transition. Here at the edges we can note the slow process of aging, the patina of weathering, the metaphoric dust of history – all are the negative connotations of the other of pristine spatial logic. We could imagine a range of species of temporal and spatial flows arising from the theory of the formless, the theory of entropy, theory of exhaustion, theory of disappearances, all forms of micro-erosion that challenge the persistence of designed objects and spaces. But these de-forming processes are just as necessary to the legibility of spaces.

Beneath the visual continuity of lived spaces, there is always a liminal inflection. The slow drift of particles and the slower movements of time, all charge the experience and understanding of objects in the city, but also these charge the architectural and urban space. As figural voids in the courtyards or spaces between buildings, or in the vast open plenums of

³ See my *Surrealism and Architecture*, London: Routledge, 2004, for a series of studies on these obscure traits of modern architecture and urbanism.

universal space of modern mobilities, the tangent proximities of interior and exterior spaces are experienced as spatial flows that activate and reveal other possible spaces, but also bring formless pressures and potentials to those existing (formed) spatial envelopes and manifolds. The theoretical and conceptual categories of drift and transitive states are anticipated in these particles transitioning through lived space, as lived space is not a static fixed quality but is activated sensually with the potential emergence of other liminal phenomena. Accumulation, expenditure, excess, all are attributes of the formless processes contouring perception and occupation of modern spaces.

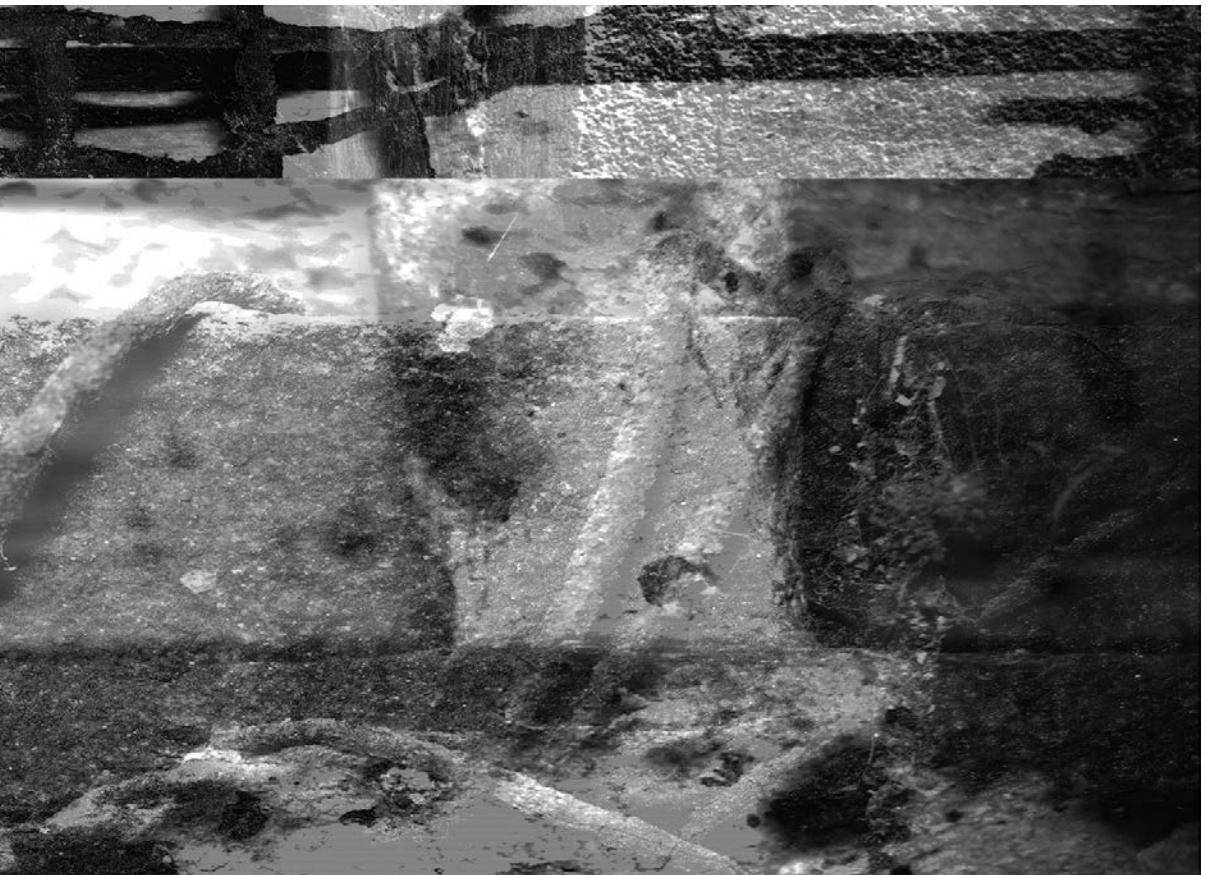
Like the analogous slow build-up of humidity, the drift of ultra-thin impurities (as traces of time's passing) will infiltrate the architectural spatial envelope, and marks the materiality of those envelopes with subtle distortions and minimal differences which draw us into the transitive play of sensory phenomena of the modern spatial manifolds. The blocks of pre-determined sensation equated with designed spaces are thus activated and made transitive towards other (alternative) atmospheres, other affects, through the triggers of material flows available to sense (and increasingly through subliminal sense). At the level of the ultra-thin, new forms of transitive flows are actually advanced formless processes of advancing impurity. The successful infiltration of formless impurities in architectural spaces relies on their perpetual dispersal, and the ultra-thin extensive flow is identified by minute trace elements measured in parts per billion.



As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands ... The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the Bags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls. (Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*)

The images shown in these pages come from the two interlocked projects Vicoli and Windowscapes, both belonging in a single thread named Urban Fibre, whose aim is to assemble an archive of objects, photos, sounds, debris and so on. Within this general framework, Vicoli is a photographic project that elaborates details of grates from old windows in the historical city centre of Genoa, while Windowscapes captures scanning impurities, dirt and saltiness impressed on glasses in an abandoned building in Marseille. In general, Urban Fibre explores the ambiguity of boundaries and the political and cultural issues entailed by the Mediterranean City. Beginning in Genoa, the research travel proceeds to Marseille, Marrakech, Tunis, Cairo, Tel Aviv, Istanbul and Athens.

The set of found objects from these places grows into a collection of everyday life products, residual objects, findings, traces, documents, newspapers, photographs. It is an archive which is both an art medium and a starting point to further artworks – an on-going exploration of the bonds between people and their environment. The grates in Genoa alleys from the series Vicoli provide an analogy for the mate-



rial, architectural and existential stratification of the city, in which void, intersections and rust become a correlative objective of the Mediterranean cultural settling and migration flows. Port, palaces, alleys, little squares of historical centre form a border space: a grate, a meeting point, the stage where time plays always new stories. The Marseille glasses of Windowscapes trace invisible and imaginary landscapes, maps and memories, recalling the idea of Mediterranean area as a contact zone where trades, travels, colonialism, wars and miscegenation occurred.

I would like there to exist places that are stable, unmoving, intangible, untouched and almost untouchable, unchanging, deep-rooted; places that might be points of reference, of departure, of origin ... Such places don't exist, and it's because they don't exist that the space becomes a question, ceases to be self-evident, cease to be incorporated, cease to be appropriated. Space is a doubt: I have constantly to mark it, to designate it (Gérard Pichot, *Species of spaces*)

Dust, rust, spots, remains – elements stratified in space. The surrounding environment is dynamic, variable and receptive: it takes shape in the protracted relationship with bodies inhabiting it. Dirt form a superimposition of traces, creating an ephemeral archaeology of the existential, lived space. The impure environment is open to a vague and informal elsewhere.



We do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another.(Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*)

My research investigates the spatiality of borders as places of passage that unravel themselves in a dimension made of spoors, echoes and existential signs. The border is a line without depth. The notion of ‘trace’ illuminates this dimension both spatially and temporally. Indeed, boundary places are but filters where markings become sediment, a grate around which micro worlds sprout, window glasses that lay bare the impressions of a relation between an inside and an elsewhere.

Insofar as it possesses no geographical (horizontal) dimension, the border acquires a dynamic (vertical) dimension, absorbing the remnants and remains from all the elsewhere it passes through. The trace, without which the border could not exist, exceeds the sheer contact between two different static realities. Along its line a conversation is established within a multiplicity of temporal and spatial regions: heterotopias appear here.

The border forms a crumbly, messy archive. It is an impure and dirt archaeology of colliding surroundings. Its spatial morphology is stratified. On the grate as well

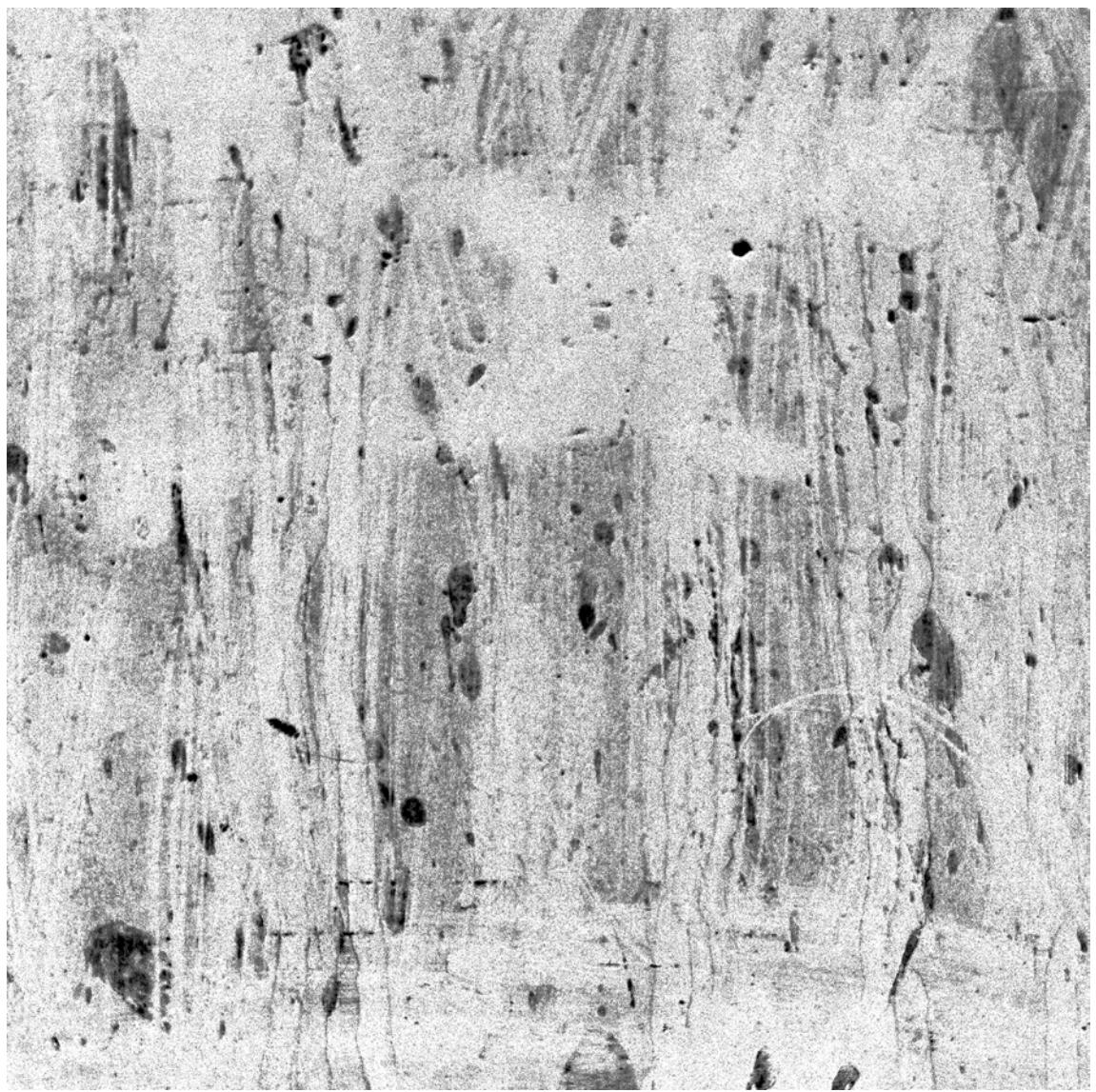


as on the window glass, this morphology symbolically coincides with signs left on the field. The visual metaphors of my projects emerge as images of relation between times and spaces, across different stories and contexts. In an increasingly confused world, the impure remains are systems, be they symbolic, cultural or social ones. Systems can be studied only in archaeological terms, whereby dirt means exchange and coexistence. Given the complexity of the boundary as a contaminated place, impure spaces are territories where answers to describe new meanings of the world might appear.

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Seeds of impurity

Andrea Pavoni

*Sunflower Seeds is contingent, oddly moving and beautiful.
It is like quicksand.*

Adrian Searle

1.

Ai Weiwei's art installation *Kui Hua Zi [Sunflower Seeds]* took place between 2010 and 2011 in the gigantic Turbine Hall of the Tate Modern Gallery, in London. It consisted of 100 millions hand-crafted porcelain seeds made in Jingdezhen, China.¹ An uneven surface to dive into, a haptic space of undulating vision, rustling steps, unusual horizontality, a meaningless quicksand where the separation between artwork and spectator is engulfed, the immunity of distant contemplation denied.

Unpredictably, by wandering over this grey matter the visitors' footsteps raised an impalpable dust, by-product of the black paint used to striate the seeds. Prolonged exposure to that may prove hazardous, the experts said. Although dust masks could have been a more than sufficient compromise, this meant exposing Tate to tricky matters of insurance and liability.² Much to Weiwei's disappointment, the gallery in the end, as a staff member put it, 'chose to be on the safe side'.³ 'The enthusiastic interaction of visitors has resulted in a greater than expected level of dust in the Turbine Hall',⁴ read the official statement. To some this very interaction, the sight of visitors running, playing, lying down, throwing seeds, resembled more a 'day at

1 The installation included: 100 million porcelain sunflower seeds; a short 'making-of' documentary; a 'Oneto-One With the Artist', where visitors could record themselves asking/answering questions. See also Adrian Searle, 'Tate Modern's sunflower seeds: the world in the palm of your hand', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2010 http://prod-images.exhibit-e.com/www_friedmanbenda_com/861a34ac.pdf.

2 'Are the Tate's sunflower seeds a risk to health?' *Recognition, Evaluation, Control Blog*, 18 October 2010 <http://diamondenv.wordpress.com/2010/10/18/are-the-tates-sunflower-seeds-a-risk-to-health/>.

3 As reported by Charlotte Higgins, 'Sunflower Seeds raise a quintessence of dust in the Turbine Hall', *On Culture Blog*, 19 October 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/charlottehigginsblog/2010/oct/19/sunflower-seeds-dust-turbine-hall>.

4 From 'The Unilever Series: Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds', *Tate Modern Website*, available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>.

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the beach' than an acceptable idea of 'artistic experience'.⁵ *Sunflower Seeds* was unexpectedly polluting not only the physical, but also the normative atmosphere of the gallery, the implicit deontology of art's aesthetic experience.

Likewise, also the invisible property lines striating the exhibition space were being contaminated. Walking over a carpet of one-hundred million seeds was for many too much of a temptation, and taking some of them home seemed a normal gesture, not carrying any moral or legal implications. Whilst Tate was busy 'encouraging people not to',⁶ Weiwei did not specify any protocol in this regards and, when asked, captured precisely the ambivalence of the situation: 'for the museum, it is a total work, and taking a seed would affect the work. Institutions have their own policies. But I know I would want to take a seed.'⁷ After only five days *Sunflower Seeds* was cordoned off, relegated to the status of a visual object to be seen from distance.⁸ 'There is more to art than interaction, after all,' a journalist commented.⁹

2.

Without a master, one cannot be cleaned. Purification... requires submission to the law.¹⁰

Purification may be understood as the spatial articulation of a presupposed separation.¹¹ An exceptional operation, constantly depurating (i.e. including) space – processing it by cleaning, ordering, beautifying – by purging (i.e. excluding) it from dirt, ugliness, danger. At the same time, it is the dissimulation of this very operation, that is, a process of reflexive self-purification. What is pure must appear as a given, and not the result of the purification – and thus, the subordinate derivate – of dirt. This is the immunising logic that can be seen at work in contemporary post-political societies, where conflict is singled out as the quintessential pollutant, for its uniquely 'political' capacity to bring "fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence".¹² Hence the necessity to purify our being-together into participatory, consensual and uneventful spaces.

Like 'politics', 'art' is essentially and profoundly conflictual, its 'sense' residing in dissensus, in rupturing consensual purity by contaminating the *common* sense and polluting the *good* sense. In fact, the artistic experience implies a necessary renunciation to immunity, any encounter with art being a glimpse into the impossibility to maintain an ideal distance. This,

5 Adrian Searle, 'What happened next? Sunflower seeds', *The Guardian*, 27 December 2010, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/dec/27/al-weiwei-sunflower-seeds-tate>.

6 As reported by Charlotte Higgins, 'People power comes to the Turbine Hall: Ai Weiwei's Sunflower Seeds', *The Guardian*, 11 October 2010, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/oct/11/tate-modern-sunflower-seeds-turbine>.

7 "Ai Weiwei: Sunflower seeds", YouTube video, 14:42, posted by "Tate" 14 October 2010, available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PueYywpkJW8>.

8 Of course what eventually prompted the closure was the risk represented by 'toxic dust'. Yet the role the other elements played in the debate that ensued is extremely instructive.

9 Jonathan Jones, 'Turbine Hall's Sunflower Seeds: Does it matter if they're closed off?', *Art Blog*, 15 October 2010, available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2010/oct/15/turbine-hall-sunflower-seeds?ntcmp=239>.

10 Dominique Laporte (2002), *History of Shit* (MIT Press), p. 2.

11 As Mary Douglas reminds, the etymological root of the biblical term 'Holy' is 'set apart': "'Be ye Holy' means no more than 'Be ye separate'". Mary Douglas (1966), *Purity and Danger, an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Frederick A. Praeger), p. 58.

12 Victor Turner (1974), *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors* (Cornell University Press) p. 35.

and nothing else, is the *sublime*: the turbulent experience of *threshold*.¹³ Yet, art is constantly purified, to be made safe, innocuous, predictable and thus, ultimately, viable to be capitalised upon. This requires enclosing art into proper definitions, meanings, practices as well as spaces such as the church, the museum, the gallery, the 'legal' graffiti wall.¹⁴

The contemporary art gallery is a quintessential mechanism of purification, able to ingest ever controversial, disturbing, transgressive works, simultaneously neutralising them from their conflictual quality in order for them to be equally enjoyed by everybody as objects of (an)aesthetic experience.¹⁵ A

safe, consensual and egalitarian space that dissimulates itself as the materialisation of an absolute freedom of intellectual enjoyment, whilst at the same time it is "completely populated by property lines, health and safety regulations, consumer protection barriers, public morality risks, insurance diktats and so on".¹⁶

What is pure must appear as a given, and not the result of the purification – and thus, the subordinate derivate – of dirt

Like a thick smoke revealing otherwise invisible laser beams, so the dust raised by *Kui Hua Zi* revealed, for a moment disrupting, the invisible threads holding together the purifying mechanism of the gallery: security, order, property.

3.

When written, shit does not smell.¹⁷

I was arguing with a member of the staff whether 'stealing' the seeds be part of the artistic experience of *Sunflower Seeds*, romantically pointing to the possibility of it being spread around the world. He replied me with a grin: 'As you'll surely know, there are works which explicitly contemplate the possibility to bring home a part of them – not this one'. Pretending to overcome the proprietary separation between artwork and spectator by simply articulating it into an internalised encounter to be 'explicitly contemplated' in advance, however, is an as much contradictory practice as those preached by the post-political rhetoric of 'community participation', where disagreement is warmly welcomed as long as it is pre-emptively neutralised of any real dissensus, i.e. safely de-politicised. In fact, Tate's choice to be 'on the safe side' expressed the conservative will to re-assert an immunitary paradigm that had been shaken. It is instructive to see how Tate Modern's curator justified *a posteriori* the decision to fence the exhibition:

The thinking behind the work lies in far more than just the idea of walking on it. The precious nature of the material, the effort of production and the narrative and personal content create a powerful commentary on the human condition.¹⁸

13 'Sublime' comes from sub: under; and -limen: lintel, threshold.

14 E.g., <http://legal-walls.net/>.

15 For a classic exploration of the role of the museum in this sense see Tony Bennett (1995), *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge).

16 Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013), 'Atmospheres of Law: Senses, Affects, Lawscapes'. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 2 (6), p. 3.

17 Roland Barthes (1971), *Sade, Fourier, Loyola* (Editions du Seuil), p. 140.

18 'The Unilever Series: Ai Weiwei: Sunflower Seeds', *Tate Modern Website*, available at <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/unilever-series-ai-weiwei-sunflower-seeds>

Sensible words where, however, the contingent potentialities of the installation are ultimately defused, explained away into layers of socio-anthropological supra-structures. Facing bodies *not for us* – suddenly irreducible to the abstractions and operations of law, the prevention of security and the de-territorialisation of capital –, the purifying apparatus re-configured itself by re-objectifying those bodies into inert matter amenable to safe interpretation, preventive control and capital appropriation.

Sure, I am not suggesting that elaborating a theoretical reflection on the seeds is less a material activity than walking over them. Yet in this case it is evident that, by being representationally reduced to a mere metaphor, and physically secluded within the immunitary and proprietary cage of a self-contained box, the seeds were ontologically erased from the picture, deprived of their capacity to generate concatenations, reduced to an epistemological tool for the creative re-imagining of a critic. A work, however, is never a mere ‘box with something inside’, to be uncovered by revelatory praxis. It is also, and most fundamentally, ‘one flow among others ... into relations of current, counter-current, and eddy with other flows ... flows of shit, sperm, words, action, eroticism, money, politics, and so on’.¹⁹ Thus loses interests the question ‘what does it mean?’ Far more promising appears instead the question: ‘How does it work? How does it work for you?’²⁰

Accordingly, we can follow the powerful, destabilising dissemination (from *seminare*, i.e. to sow) propelled by this work. The toxic atmospherics provoked by the frictional encounter between seeds, shoes and walking; the resonant noise distorting the aural space of the gallery; the incontrollable propagation through visitors’ hands and pockets into further locales.²¹ Thus, the work is capable of perforating the purified space of the gallery, endangering the safety of the art experience, polluting the normative ideal of (an)aesthetic contemplation, shaking the abstract scaffolding of property, disaggregating the artwork’s authorial integrity: turning a holy space of sanitised and authorial insulation into a holey space of unpredictable occurrences.

Note this is not meant to be yet another explanation or interpretation. Nor is it directly relevant *vis-à-vis* the author’s intentions. It is certainly possible that Weiwei did intend to produce the ‘commentary’ the Tate’s curator hints at. Yet, this can in no way determine the contingent taking place of a work. ‘I act in a way more or less as programmed by an uncertain force’, Weiwei himself states.²² ‘There’s nothing to explain’, therefore ‘nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit’.²³ The ‘sense’ of a work of art resides in the concatenations it generates, the disseminations into which it proliferates. Following them and reporting on their effects: this is what is being done here. It is by plugging into this work, then, that some promising and unexpected strategic reflection emerge.

4.

[Since] all space is already occupied by the enemy ... The moment of authentic urbanism’s appearance will be the creation, in certain areas, of the absence of this occupation. What we call construction starts there.²⁴

19 Gilles Deleuze (1995), ‘Letter to a Harsh Critic,’ in *Negotiations, 1972–1990* (Columbia Univ. Press) pp. 8–9.
20 *Ibid.*

21 Incidentally few months after the exhibition I assisted at a gallery opening in Dalston, London, where among the exposed works there were five ‘stolen’ sunflower seeds.

22 in Alex Rauch, ‘No Fake: An Interview with Ai Weiwei’, *Portland Art Website*, 9 August 2010, available at http://www.portlandart.net/archives/2010/08/no_fake_an_inte.html.

23 Gilles Deleuze (1995), *op. cit.*

24 Attila Kotayani and Raoul Vaneigem (2009), ‘Elementary Program of the Unitary Urbanism Office’ in Tom

At a recent debate on a movie about the contemporary wave of global protest, an activist and film director was asked the usual question: ‘What is exactly that contemporary protests want to achieve?’ ‘We are not interested in any notion of result’, he replied without irony. This is a ‘capitalistic concept that we refuse’. This is the sort of purifying ideology characterising many ‘radical’ circles today. On the one hand, the exaltation of critique and transgression *per se* – the naïve fetishisation of direct action for action’s sake. On the other, the iconoclastic refusal of any tool, concept and apparatus that is deemed compromised with, and thus irremediably tainted by the capitalistic machine.

Radical praxis, in politics as well as in art, tends accordingly to be reduced to a mere pose, a performance *per se*, the self-referential measure of one’s own critical stance, as such systematically detached from the contingent situation where it occurs. A praxis that, consequently, is utterly vulnerable to being recuperated within the capitalistic system itself, a system alienated by the constant internalisation of its own critique, literally *feeding* on transgression, automatically co-opting and neutralising (depruating) any ‘rebellion’ within its own logic.

Thus appears as wholly inadequate to simply criticise, oppose or transgress such a system. As it is to side with its ‘other’ side: disorder, impurity, anarchy... It is the paradigm keeping these dichotomies in place that requires to be dismantled instead. The trivial affirmation that ‘everything is possible’ – empty slogan equally shared by ‘radical’ vanguards, new age spirituals and corporation marketing – is to be supplanted by the strategic consideration “that, in every *here and now*, there are *potentials* that can be *acted upon*”.²⁵ This does not mean to naively and cowardly averting the task of achieving a result, but rather to *unplug* the notion of result from the capitalistic frame in which it is entrapped, and thus to *reorient* it towards other (common) uses. More precisely, the task becomes that of ‘freeing’ a given situation from its ‘state of affairs’ by deactivating its exclusionary configuration and thus opening it up to other possibilities. A *destituent* strategy, as in Agamben’s recent formula, according to which ‘something – a power, a function, a human operation – is made inoperose without being simply destroyed, but rather freeing the potentialities that there remained non-actualised, in this way allowing a different use of them’.²⁶

In the realm of architecture, Lars Lerup elaborated a praxis that resists the urge to produce a given, self-sufficient and finished work, without however naively abdicating the task of building something. ‘Building the unfinished’, he termed it, where the task is neither active production nor passive inaction, but rather *deactivation*, that is, making space for the irruption of the potentialities, conflictuality and excesses of being-together, by deactivating the operations that preventively closed them off.²⁷ This is, I argue, the strategy that the contingent taking place of *Kui Hua Zi* apparently performs vis-à-vis the pure space of the gallery. *Sunflower Seeds* does not seek, in guerrilla-art fashion, to directly transgress (and thus implicitly reassert) this space in the name of a libertarian strive for unbounded artistic freedom. As Sloterdijk once rightly observed, the boundaries of art coincide with the limits imposed to its realisation.²⁸ Firmly situated within these boundaries, and yet renouncing to prescribe any pre-determined *ought* to its fruition, the installation pollutes the atmosphere of the gallery itself by making inoperose its purifying operations: security, order, property. Thus excavated,

McDonough (ed) *The Situationists and the City* (Verso) p. 148.

25 Rodrigo Nunes (2010), ‘Politics in the Middle: For a Political Interpretation of the Dualisms in Deleuze and Guattari’, *Deleuze Studies* 4, p. 121.

26 Giorgio Agamben (2014), *L’Uso dei Corpi* (Neri Pozza), p. 345.

27 Lars Lerup, *Building the Unfinished: Architecture and Human Action* (SAGE Publications, 1977).

28 Peter Sloterdijk (2013), *Critica della Ragion Cinica* (Raffaello Cortina).

within the space of the gallery, is another ‘space that escape[s] the grasp of power and its laws, without entering in conflict with them yet rendering them inoperative’.²⁹

In an obviously indirect, imaginative and somewhat allegorical sense, *Kui Hua Zi* thus paradigmatically sketches the contours of a promising strategic praxis: making space for the eventful contingency of a situation by perforating the superficial coherence of an apparatus, in this way letting emerge conflict where it has been suppressed, frictions where they had been smoothed out. In this sense, Tate’s reaction is also a reminder of how quick is the system to re-configure and re-ingest spaces of resistance. Temporary autonomous zones, whether left to themselves, are innocuous niches of self-satisfaction, bound to be sooner or later recuperated within the system itself.

Twofold thus appears the task of any (artistic or political) praxis that wishes to challenge, rather than simply reproduce, the purifying logics of the dominating paradigm. On the one hand the ‘deactivation of the spatial apparatus of exclusion’ and thus the ‘restoration of things to the common use’.³⁰ On the other, the necessity to *counter-effectuate*, as Deleuze would put it, the potentialities thus unleashed, constructively turning ‘absences of occupation’ into novel configurations that would prevent the ever-present risk of re-appropriation by the system itself.

29 Giorgio Agamben (2005), *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford University Press), p. 27.

30 Eyal Weizman, ‘Political Plastic (Interview)’, in *Collapse Vol. VI: Geo/Philosophy* (Urbanomics, 2010) p. 296.

Hebron. Purity and the Impure in the Exclusionary City

Aide Esu

For the past 48 years the city of Hebron – a name that means ‘Al Khalil’, ‘the Saint’, in Arabic and ‘Unite’ or ‘Friend’ in Hebrew – has been at the core of an uncommon urban strategy of resettlement. After Jerusalem, Hebron is considered the holiest city for the three monotheistic religions; both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions refer to Hebron as the location of biblical events. During the British Mandate, in 1928, the city’s synagogue was destroyed and its Jewish habitants expelled in retaliation for the killing of two Arabs in Jerusalem. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, when Israel took control of the West Bank, Orthodox Jewish people undertook a struggle to resettle Hebron and take control of the suq and Harat al-Masharqa quarters adjacent to the Ibrahimi Mosque and the Cave of Machpelah.

The Cave of Machpelah, which is side by side with the Ibrahimi Mosque, has come to be a sacred symbol for the renewal of Jewish orthodoxy, enclosing the tombs of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs. Multiple narratives regarding the interpretation of the sacred area have arisen; the galvanized process of religious renewal, through a combination of Zionism and Judaism, inflamed a symbolic and conflictual reinvention of this space. The religious renewal, animated by Rabbi Levinger, a graduate from Rabbi Kook’s yeshiva, was directed to make real the reunification of the dispersed and expelled community with the place where, according to the Scriptures, Jewish history began. To repossess the Machpelah represented the main goal for the first settlement project, which was erected in the nearby area of Kiryat Arba ('The Place of Four'). These settlers pioneered a re-territorialisation strategy integrating the exegesis of biblical text and the profane political use of religion. This double strategy, which harmonized loyalty to the Torah with loyalty to the government of Israel, made possible the winning model of settlement policies in West Bank that has since been applied in places like Ofra, Shiloh and Kedumim.

The first step toward restoring the Jewish community in Hebron was to clean and purify the Avraham Avinu Synagogue, which had been transformed after 1928 into a goat pen. Cleaning the dumping area of the cattle’s profanation was a prerequisite for restoring the purity and imposing the ‘Halacha’ order (the code of Jewish law). Other necessary steps included bringing back the Torah scroll, which had survived the massacre, and reunifying the Jewish community with the place. Removing any material contamination was no less relevant than the symbolic practices. Indeed, it enhanced the genealogy of the place as rightful and sacred, belonging to Jewish people as part of the biblical homeland. Removing the contamination was the main path to restoring the place’s purity from past profanation. It was a part of creating an expansionistic and nationalistic Hebronian milieu—a *lieu de la mémoire*, ‘where

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the past resonates endlessly in everyday life.¹ Practices of remembering went along with the construction of the first settlement, thus knitting together the threads of past, present, and future. Their view was not so different from that of Ben Gurion, who searched for a historical lineage to legitimize state sovereignty. In the early stages of state formation, the decennial work of the official commission to outline the Israeli map ratified the historical continuity of the Jewish people with the land, and epitomized a process of sacred Judification of the land. Levinger's followers revitalised the religious fervour related to the belief in the 'sanctity' of Greater Israel. The adoption of sacred geography to rename the West Bank as Samaria and Judea and the adoption of the biblical name of Eretz Israel to refer the state of Israel reflects the contamination and ambiguities between Zionism and the religious Orthodox pioneers that colonized the West Bank.²

Exclusionary policies and 'dirty work'

The pioneering colonization of Hebron paved the way for the messianic movement of Gush Emunim ('Bloc of the Faithful'), a driver of radical, conflicting practices that ended in the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre perpetrated by Baruch Goldstein in February 1994. The murder violated the sacred Islamic area during the Friday prayers, killing 29 Muslim worshipers and wounding another 125. The terrorist attack took place on the Purim holiday, a celebration of the Jewish people's salvation from a conspiracy to destroy them. In the messianic view, such violent acts are authorized through the principle of divine warfare. Members of the Kahane group described the Goldstein massacre as a military act the roots of which stretched back to biblical times, indicating that the present-day Arabs are simply the modern descendants of the enemies of Israel described in the Bible for whom God has unleashed wars of revenge. The Palestinians were viewed, according to their biblical interpretation, as temporary alien residents whose residency was prohibited and based on theft, fraud and distortion.³ This rejection was based on biblical sources and used to foster a libel⁴ that was applied to everyday practices in order to create the conditions necessary to clear the area around the holy place.

The settlers strategy is to empty out the Cave surroundings. The everyday life of the neighbouring residents is made difficult by settlers' attacks, which consist of physical assaults, stone throwing and the hurling of garbage, body fluids and chlorine. The settlers have also dumped all kinds of waste material, creating unliveable conditions to clear the area, leaving an empty space full of rubbish. Muck is a tool used to engender the expulsion of inhabitants and traders,⁵ turning the vicinity of the holy space into a disused and desolate area. The striking outcome of this wholehearted use of religious symbolism to take the control of the holy place is immediately obvious upon a visitor's approach to the area: there is a jarring contrast between the vicinity of the Machpelah Cave and the Ibrahimi Mosque and the desolate surrounding city. The ordering and renovation of the front space of the Cave are utterly strident with the rubbish, day-after vicinity. It is a clear picture of the existence of two worlds that are side by side but separate: a worrisome image of the devastation caused by 48 years of fighting. Emotions on both sides have strongly affected the struggle for control of the area. Fear, frustration and aggression are the everyday grammar of social relations.

¹ Feige, M. (2001). 'Jewish settlement of Hebron: The place and the other'. *GeoJournal*, 53, 323–333.

² Kimmerling, B. *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³ Masalha, N. (2000). *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*. London: Pluto, p. 119.

⁴ Douglas, M. (1992). *Risk and Blame*. London: Routledge, p. 85.

⁵ Hebron was an important hub of traders and manufacturing. B'Tselem has calculated that more than 2000 shops on Shudada Street (the Suq's main street) have been closed.

More than 2,000 soldiers are engaged to protect the 800 settlers that have occupied the abandoned houses in Tel Rumeida, Beit Hadassah, Beit Romano and Avraham Avinu. The soldiers' duty is to maintain the order created by the orthodox settlers by applying the 'principle of separation' to the divided city, as sanctioned in the 1997 Interim Agreement.⁶ The army, over the years, has performed what is called 'dirty work'⁷ to maintain segregation. It has adopted the excessive and unjustified use of force, engaging in the seizure and control of houses, harassment, detainment and the humiliation of pedestrians. As humanitarian observers⁸ have documented at length, Israeli occupation forces have encouraged the settlers' violence.⁹ For decades Israeli society turned its back to what was happening in Hebron. In 2004 a group of veterans that had served in Hebron became

actively engaged in collecting testimonial accounts of the Israeli army's unfair conduct and in organizing political tours in Hebron to show the situation to visitors and disseminate information about the daily human rights violations. Soldiers' testimony about unethical army conduct vis-à-vis Palestinian residents reflects the conflicting heterotopic experiences between the soldiers' behaviour and the silence in their civil lives. Testimonies of soldiers have told of the conflicts within these experiences, who must deal with both the memories of their time in the army and their experience of everyday civilian life. Thinking and speaking about the 'dirty work' done by the members of this group gives us a glimpse of their distressing condition of conflicted identity; it also displays their strength and their capacity to bypass fear and embarrassment, to break the barrier of denial and to refuse the conspiracy of silence.¹⁰

Muck is a tool used to engender the expulsion of inhabitants and traders, turning the vicinity of the holy space into a disused and desolate area

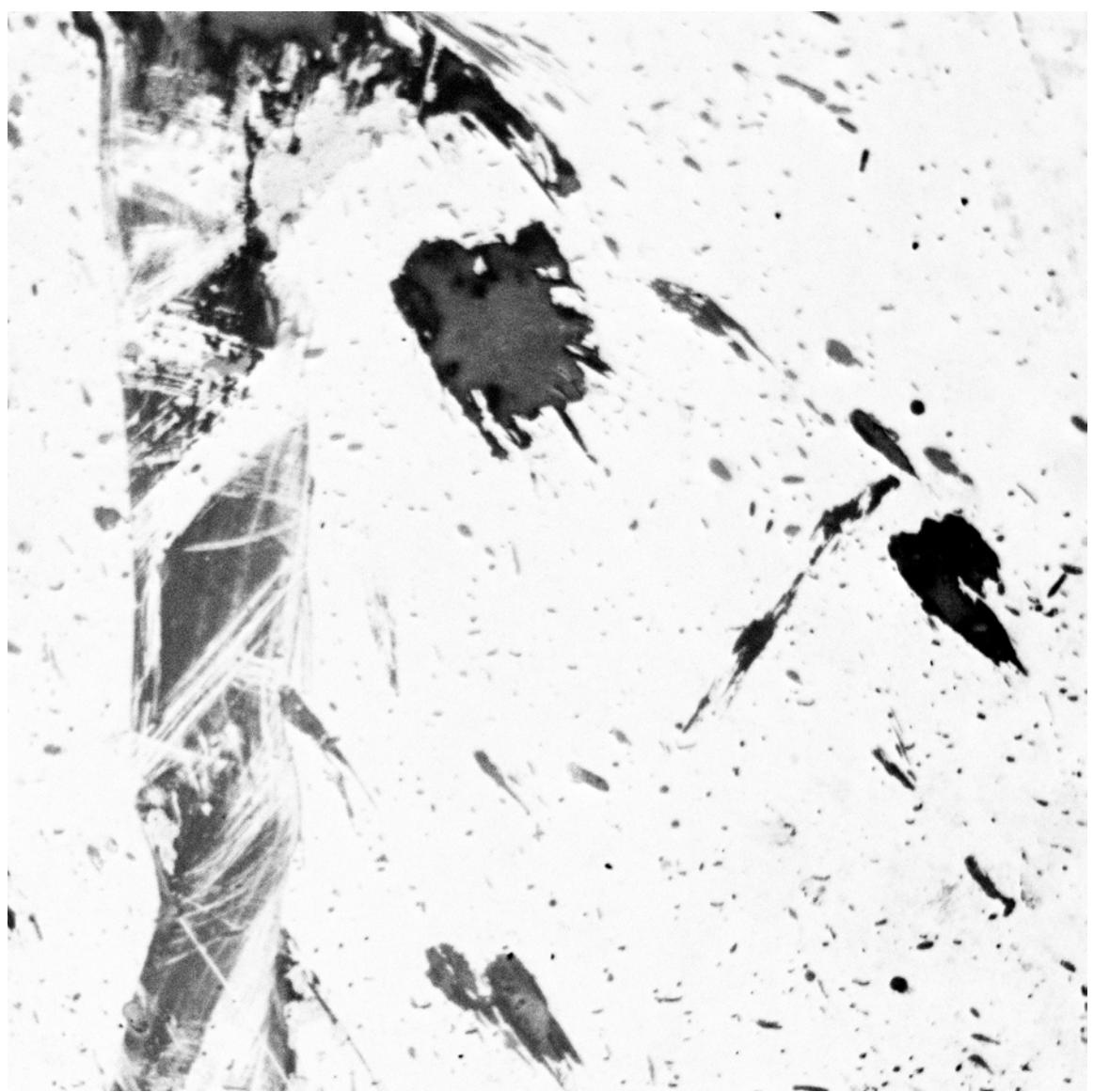
6 Hebron was divided into two areas: H-1, under Palestinian control, and H-2, under Israeli control.

7 Hughes E.C. "Good People and dirty work", *Social Problems*, Vol. No.1 (Summer 1962), pp.3-11.

8 See reports of B'Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

9 In HCJ 175/81, Al-Natshe v. Minister of Defense, Piskei Din 35(3), p. 361. The security forces' failure in handling settlers' violence against Palestinians in Hebron has been discussed in many reports, governmental and non-governmental, among them the Karp Committee Report, which was submitted to the attorney general on 23 May 1982; the State Commission of Inquiry on the Massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, 5754–1994 (the Shamgar Commission); B'Tselem's Tacit Consent: Policy on Enforcing the Law on Settlers in the Occupied Territories (March 2001), and countless requests by B'Tselem, the Association for Civil Rights, and other organizations to investigate cases of violence and the authorities' failures in handling of these cases.

10 Zerubavel, E. (2006). *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press.



The impure and the intense

**Andrea Mubi
Brighenti**

Mary Douglas famously argued that dirt is a by-product of order: something is perceived as 'dirty' to the extent that it does not match with cultural classificatory systems. Dirt is a heterogeneous, residual category which threatens social order by threatening people's cognitive order. Against its perils, rituals of cleansing help redressing mental wounds, restoring the faith in established systems of classifications which keep beings and events in 'the right place'.

However, it is hard to deny that the impure is a peculiar type of dirt, or at least a peculiar manifestation of it. As we inspect the phenomenon of impurity more closely, we realise that the point raised by anthropologists – i.e., the fact that what is dirt or impure is felt as inescapably 'out-of-place' – is noteworthy, but far from exhausting the whole of the matter.

More features need be taken into consideration. Let us tentatively list two of them. The first one is the psychological stress generated by the impure: encountering the impure is always an emotionally charged experience. Put differently, the encounter of the individual with the impure is located in the domain of trauma. The fact that the impure can be deliberately sought for – e.g., in the form of 'the transgressive' – does not really contradict the previous assertion. Sure, transgression is a much requested item because of the excitement and thrill it brings with it; but its operation only unfolds on a solid bedrock of fear and disquiet.

This situation reminds the condition of the individual facing the crowd: the former is mysteriously attracted by the second, even while experiencing profound phobia and repulsion towards it – the horror of crowds so well captured by Maupassant and Conrad rhymes with Canetti's 'secret nostalgia' of the individual longing to return to be part of the crowd. The type of ambivalent uneasiness Freud encapsulated in his notion of *unheimlich* carries various resemblances with this state. At bottom, the unholy, the transgressive and the *unheimlich* share the fact of being *unsettling*: they come with fear and anxiety, and even the pleasures they profuse are fundamentally not alien from those stressful feelings. The impure thus recalls what Benjamin once defined an 'enigmatic signifier', which resists any attempt at assimilation on the part of the subject. It is a matter of not just cognitive disorder, but directly affective impact.

The impure reaches you, it grabs you, you can't escape its touch. Its contagiousness determines its quintessentially stressful nature. Bringing psychological stress into the picture returns a richer understanding, which adds layers of meaning to the structural anthropologist's otherwise correct claim that 'dirt is dangerous'. But, why is the impure so psychologi-

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cally loaded, oftentimes in contradictory and yet always imperious ways? This question leads us to a second feature. It seems that psychological stress is the outcome of some more encompassing dynamic which concerns the social relationship in its entirety. Arguably, this is the most interesting facet which social theorists might want to explore.

At this second level, what is at stake is no longer the individual psyche. Indeed, the perspective could be thoroughly reversed: we could say that all manifestations of the impure-as-

stressful are, in fact, by-products of something more radical, which inheres deeply in the roots of social life. What is this more radical ‘something’? The experience of the impure reveals a basic attribute of social life which could be called ‘the intensive’. Social life – recent reflections are inviting to ponder

Our spatial life leads us into risky business. Unmistakably, the impure sweeps away your established mode of existence.

It is an intensity in motion, a traveling intensity that mobilises the elements and beings it intersects, forcibly joining them into unexpected associations, evoking new alliances

– is neither organic nor organisation. Rather, social life has an *intensive* nature: it is defined by inorganic and pre-organised gradients of intensifications; its coordinates are drawn by undulating modulations of subsequent and superimposing intensions and distensions of the social intercourse.

We have said that the intensive is an ‘attribute’ of the social phenomenon. However, an important qualification is that social life has no other substance apart from that attribute itself – and certainly not an institutional or a neural substance. In other words, the intensive is the veritable ‘movement’ of social life, its carrier wave, so to speak. In this sense, the notion of ‘pregnance’ – as developed particularly by the mathematician René Thom – illuminates important facets of the intense, in that it points to its peculiarly mobile relation of pregnancies (infusive qualities) to saliences (neatly defined forms). While it is very difficult to define pregnancy, it is relatively easy to grasp what a pregnant salience looks like – just think about food for a starving animal or the image of a sexual mate.

Not surprisingly, then, all phenomena commonly associated with the impure – infiltration, corrosion, pollution, contamination, defilement, promiscuity, disruption . . . – turn out to be directly related to the vicissitudes of intensity and its manifold appearances in the domain of the social. The impure is an essential locus for the manifestation of intensity. In the context of the *Collège de Sociologie*, Cailliois already made explicit a Durkheimian insight, namely that the impure is integrally part of the sacred: it is a left-hand sacred, a demonic sacred. *A fortiori*, we know that for Dukheim sacredness is nothing else but the summoned concretion of the collective. The pure and the impure are other names for the social, yet they capture different sets of processes in social life: whereas the pure is the mirror of we-ness, of collective subjectivity, the impure testifies of a faceless (beheaded?) form of collectiveness; whereas the pure represents the ‘unitary evolution’ of a social aggregate, the impure interrupts that evolution through abrupt ‘quantum reductions’.

The structural explanation – impure dirt as cognitive disorder in classificatory systems – works well, but only as a theory of consequences. As a theory of causes, it falls short of really making headway into the mystery of intensity. We don’t have a causal theory of the impure yet; but we might at least begin to elaborate a ‘trajectology’, that is, a study of its movements. Amply understood, such movements certainly include a logistic of travels and transmissions, but they also cover the complex dynamic made of emanations and impregna-

tions which are determined by the relation between saliences and pregnancies.

Just like every other intensity, the impure travels fast and pops up unexpectedly. Its subterranean currents determine latent phases whereby its apparition is felt as the irrevocable proof of a baffling pervasiveness. One could even conceive of space itself as a medium of impurity – one that, by default, facilitates its diffusion. That is why our spatial life leads us into risky business. Unmistakably, the impure sweeps away your established mode of existence. It is an intensity *in motion*, a traveling intensity that mobilises the elements and beings it intersects, forcibly joining them into unexpected associations, evoking new alliances. New modes of existence come into fruition thanks to such slantwise encounters that tend to happen in those ill-defined zones like the *brousse* around Auteuil in the outskirts of Paris, described by Leiris in his essay on the sacred in everyday life. Nobody is the author of those intensities – but you certainly recognise them when they meet and collapse *in you*, and the bushy land around offers no helpful references.

The impure is one of those ‘invisible intermediaries’ of the *socius* which, sooner or later, intersect everybody’s life. How is it that you are joined by such traveling intensities, these sudden visitations of the impure? It is because, at bottom, your are *exposed*. Exposure – that is, existence in the domain of the visible – is what makes the experience of the impure possible. Exposure *qua* human existence in the domain of the visible brings about, and by the same stroke, sociability *and* vulnerability. The visible thus constitutes – as hinted elsewhere – the sensitive flesh, the element in which intensities unfold as telluric and oceanic waves. Ultimately, whatever the connection between the impure and the intense, it can only take place in the domain of the visible, on that moving fringe of what ‘matters most’ to a social congregation.



Io Squaderno 36
Impure Spaces

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36

In the next issue:
Stratifications, Folds, De-stratifications

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