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From: “**The translated city**”.

“**T**o think of the modern city—Cairo, London, Istanbul, Lagos or Buenos Aires—is to experience a perpetual translating machine. Economical, cultural and historical forces are here locally configured and acquire form, substance and sense. These days much attention is given to how global flows become local realities in the multiple realisations of ‘globalisation’, but the archive that the city proposes actually represents an altogether deeper set of sedimentations. Cities as the sites of cultural encounters—from fifth century Athens with its Greeks, Persians and Egyptians, to present-day multi-cultured Los Angeles—are precisely where the outside world pushes into our interiors to propose immediate proximities. In this context, differences may also be accentuated: think of the ghettos and ethnic areas and communities of many a modern Euro-American city. Cultural and historical overflows, most immediately registered in culinary, musical and cultural taste, do not automatically lead to physical convivialities and friendship. Nevertheless, even if we cling to familiar accents, the grammar of the city undergoes transformation. This occurs without our consent. We inevitably find ourselves speaking in the vicinity of other histories and cultures, in the vicinity of others who may refuse our terms of translation, who insist on opacity and refuse to be represented in our reason. As a translating and translated space, the language of the city is never merely a linguist-

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tic matter. For what is being 'spoken' in a mixture of asymmetrical powers is precisely the intricate accumulation of historical encounters established in the conjunctural syntax of a particular urban cultural formation. As the concentrated locality of such processes, and their augmented velocity, the city continually proposes the urgency of considering life, both ours, and that of others, in the transit proposed by translation.

What precisely might all of this mean? Beyond the obvious threshold of translation inaugurated by the arrival of the other, the stranger, invariably called upon to transform his history and her culture into our language and understanding, there emerges the disquieting insistence that we, too, are somehow being translated by complex processes occurring in the very city that we consider our own. The city becomes increasingly problematic, and we grow accustomed to walking on troubled ground. The foundations of our history and culture, of our lives and sense of belonging, are disturbed. The assurance of a domestic place is exposed to unauthorised questions, unplanned procedures, and unhomey practices. We are literally transported elsewhere and are ourselves translated. For what is rendered explicit in translation is not merely the contingency of language and the manner in which it sustains our movement, but also a persistent interrogation. Seeded in ambiguity, uncertainty, mis-understanding, re-formulations, semantic contestation, and the uncontrolled passage of language elsewhere, there emerges the insistence on an irreducible opacity. Not all will be revealed to our eyes and reason. This, of course, is the complex challenge of the postcolonial city. It is here, where the colonial ghosts who haunt the making of modernity are housed and accommodated, that we encounter the most acute site of translation, deferred representations and opacity.

The forces of translation can be traced in multiple forms and formations: in the phenomenology of everyday life, in musical, pictorial and literary aesthetics, in clothing and culinary practices, in debating questions of faith, in renewing the lexicon of philosophical and critical discourse... Among the many ways of thinking of such processes, processes that are intrinsic to the making of the modern city and the modernity it is presumed to represent, is that provoked by critical considerations of contemporary architecture and urban planning.

Architecture as the material and technical appropriation of ground, history and memory proposes a problematic site of power and politics, of technics, technology and aesthetics. All of this is unconsciously secreted in the seemingly neutral grid lines of the survey, the plan and the project. If architecture provides us with a habitat, a home, it also contributes to the language in which ideas of home, belonging and domesticity, and the supposed opposites of the unhomey, the non-identical and the foreign, are conceived and received. This renders space both agonistic and partisan: no longer an empty, 'neutral' container, waiting to be filled by the abstract protocols of 'progress', but rather the site of a complex and troubled inheritance that questions all desires to render it transparent to a conclusive logic. Architecture, even if it chooses to ignore it, is about the *translation* of this troubled inheritance. So, opening up the languages of building, urban planning and civic projection, seeding them with doubt, and criss-crossing their concerns with lives lived, living and yet to come, is to render the 'laws' of cultural codification vulnerable to what they

seek to contain and control. Every act of representation is simultaneously an act of repression. Every excluded trace becomes the site of a potential transformation, the point of departure for unsuspected meanings.

For, despite the presumption of the explorer's map and the architectural drawing board, space is never empty; it has already been inhabited, nominated and produced by some body. Abstract coordinates are themselves the purified signals of altogether more turbulent and terrestrial transit. In this stark affirmation lies a profound challenge to an eye/I that has historically been accustomed to colonising a space considered 'empty' prior to its occupation by occidental 'progress'. Against a grade zero of history inaugurated by the West, its languages, disciplines, technologies and political economy, it is ethically and aesthetically possible to pose the historical heterogeneity of what persistently precedes and exceeds such a singular and unilateral framing of time and space. In translating abstract coordinates into worldly concerns they become both multiple and mutable. In the situated realisation of symbolic artifacts—the 'house', the 'square', the 'building', the 'street'—a complex historical provenance is pronounced in the shifting syntagms of an ultimately planetary frame.

The interruption posed by the other and the elsewhere encourages the interrogation released in a sidereal, oblique glance that cuts across the site and crumples the map with other times. Set free from the assumptions of disciplinary protocols secured in the institutional authority of architecture, civil engineering and public administration, the plan, the project, is here exposed to questions and queries that were previously silenced and unheard. The desire for the totalising translation of transparency, and hence control, is deterritorialised and reterritorialised by what insists and resists the architectural and administrative will (to power).

All of this crosses and contaminates aesthetics with ethics. A closed, idealist and metaphysical imperative—the idea of 'beauty', the 'order' of reason, the 'rationality' of the plan, the stable 'meaning' of the discourse—is transferred into the turbulent, open-ended syntactical turmoil of a quotidian event. We are invited to look and think again; to touch and feel the experience of the everyday and the ordinary rendered extra-ordinary. In this transitory exposure (Heidegger's *aletheia* or revealing), a breach in the predictable tissues of a cultural and critical discourse is temporarily achieved. Here the solution proposed is neither permanent nor conclusive; it is precisely in 'solution', in the chemical and physical sense of the term: a liquid state in which diverse forces, languages and histories are suspended and culturally configured in the shifting currents of a worldly unfolding. This architecture, and aesthetics, shadows, occasionally spilling over, the borders of more permanent pretensions. As a border discourse, this translating perspective proposes tactical interruptions of a hegemonic strategy seeking to realise its unilateral plan (often under the label of 'progress', 'modernity' and 'democracy'). It is in the borders, in a social and historical 'no man's' land where both civil rights, and frequently the very concept of the 'human', are suspended or yet to come, that it becomes necessary to elaborate another architecture of sense, another geometry of meaning: a poetics whose trajectory and potential translations literally leaves the political speechless. (pp. 1-3)

