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HYBRID TERRITORIES + URBAN REINVENTION: AMERIKA

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In 2007 the Waidspacher Puppet Theatre from Erfurt developed a stage version of Kafka's novel *Amerika*, a work that Kurt Tucholsky described as "one of the most beautiful books in all German literature". The novel tells the story of a European emigrant who, rejected by his family, seeks his fortune in the "land of unlimited opportunity". The young Karl Rossmann comes to New York intending to become an engineer. His arrival is awaited. Karl meets a rich uncle and moves into an apartment in the house of this self-made man, high over the city. A fresh start that begins so surprisingly and promisingly soon takes a turn for the worse when the boy's legal guardian sets him out onto the street. Alone and seeking work, the protagonist meets companions who torment him, as well as sadistic bosses and demanding women.

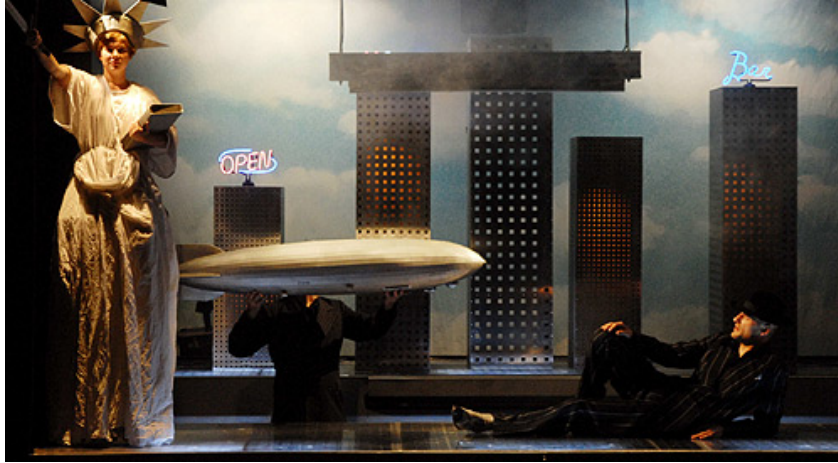


Figure 1. "Kafka. Amerika". Version for theatre by Thomas Potzger, after the novel of the same name by Franz Kafka. Direction: Bernd Weißig. Design: Frank Zauleck. (Available at: http://www.kurt-weill.de/images/photos/2009/2009_V12.jpg)

It is in these hybrid territories of a "non-official" America that some city users are creating innovative and inspiring urban reinventions. Creative practices. New meanings. In the borders of formal and informal. It is in these non-expected territories, through the shock of differences, that local reinventions contaminate and help make a new map of contemporary America. Amerika¹, as brilliantly portrayed by Franz Kafka in his 1927 novel. Kafka never stepped in America. His perception of the territory is a strong reading in between reality and imagination, creation and recreation. An hybrid territory, filled by resignifications.

The Karl Rossman that navigate through the borders of New York, between prostitutes and cheaters, entrepreneurs and immigrants re-signifies the territory and give it new possibilities of use and interpretation.

It's not dual. It complex. Reinvented.

According to a recent article published by Saskia Sassen, not just the influence of cities will eclipse the power of nation-states in this century, but also we are facing the "seeds of an urban geopolitics and much of it is informal": the rise of these new vectors would include in a short list of just seven urban emerging vectors, the region of Sao Paulo-Rio de Janeiro.²

¹ Franz Kafka. *Amerika*. Kindle Edition. London: Randon House, 2012. Original version 1927.

² Saskia Sassen dominant urban vectors: 1. Washington/New York/Chicago; 2. Beijing/Hong Kong/Shanghai; 3. Berlin/Frankfurt/Brussels; 4. Istanbul/Ankara: Istanbul; 5. Sao Paulo/Rio

Sao Paulo, with 20 million people in its metropolitan region, emerged into a megacity emergent power in recent years as the locomotive of the new Brazil, 6th largest economy in the world. The megacity GDP is comparable to Brazil's main neighbor, Argentina and equals to a rich country like Austria (381 U\$ Billion, 2012).

Concerning Rio de Janeiro, there is an impressive Phoenix phenomenon in course in the city since 2010, with huge urban infrastructure works all over the city, favelas being pacified and urbanized, economic and political power finally being recovered after decades of decay and losing power to Sao Paulo, the city to receive major international events – World Soccer Cup in 2014 and Olympic Games in 2016.

Another recent and well publicized in the international media event was the election of Medellin as the “most innovative city in the world”.³

The city became an international case of urban renaissance almost leaving behind the dramatic drug cartels urban war of the 80's and 90's, as well as recognized new architecture projects.

As for Bogota, it is a known fact its reinvention in the recent decades with a series of urban solutions from the Transmilenio BRT huge system – inspired in the Curitiba system – to the new public libraries and parks, collective housing and an impressive network of bike dedicated lines which transformed his last transformer Mayor Enrique Peñalosa into a city sustainability popstar consultant internationally.

But what is appearing behind and besides this headlines-curtain in the city scene, these official histories?

What is happening in the concrete community stage of common people in these cities?

de Janeiro/Brasilia; 6. Cairo/Beirut/Riad; 7. Geneva/Vienna/Nairobi. *From: Sassen, Saskia, *Ephemeral Kingdoms, Eternal Cities* in The European, 11.03.2013.*

³ In 2012, the Wall Street Journal Magazine teamed up with the Urban Land Institute (ULI) to determine which city — wherever in the world — deserved the title “Innovative City of the Year.” For the first round, ULI produced a list of 200 contenders, and then asked readers of WSJ. Magazine and others to vote on the city that deserved the title. The original list of 200 was reduced to 25. They then asked readers and others to vote again and the list was narrowed to three finalists. *From: <http://online.wsj.com/ad/cityoftheyear>.*

Hybrid territories urban reinvention.

There is an urban reinvention and social innovation process through people in these emerging cities hybrid territories.

In many cities around the globe this century we are seeing the reflection on the territory of the end of the fordist era – cities built through huge infrastructures and for cars, without urbanity (local urban dimension). The recent transformations on the urban territory are based on strong demands by urbanoids, urban citizens reinventing places everywhere for people to meet, interact, share, innovate.

Facing the challenge of ally master strategic plans and construction of huge infrastructures for the city with tactics of macro-micro infiltration, there's an emergence of construction of urbanity, building tactics of appropriation of local dimension.

Cities for people. Reinvented by people. In dense non formal cities. Creating something new in between formal and informal realities. Hybrid territories.

As recently remembered by Rem Koolhaas:

Even though infrastructure can separate communities, it can also help integrate them. If streets, alleyways and public spaces are "porous," a term used by urban sociologist Richard Sennett to explain the nature of a city's boundaries, they have the potential to create a more integrated urban society. If they are not, you may end up with a city of ghettos. One of the biggest challenges mayors and urban designers face is how to handle a city's existing metabolism (KOOLHAAS, 2012, p. 2229).

A common solution for those "out-of-the-box" city strategies is the growing role of civil society and new forms of governance, especially Triple Helix actions (universities + businesses + government), or projects which are led by the society or the private sector and politically sponsored by the local government.

Besides this strategy, which we could see in many cities around the world nowadays, the basic particularity here is a less formal process of botton-up creative and innovative situations in these cities territories.

Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogota and Medellin are showing us new forms of urban reinventions, inventively connecting formal and informal, creating in between situations, non-orthodox programs.

Emerges a contagious power of reinvention in these large urban clusters. People and cities that are being rediscovered in a creative and innovative way, rebuilding their destiny after periods of decline and generating hybrid situations contaminated by old pre-existing conditions and the emergencies of the new: opportunities, programs, events, people.



Figure 2. *Unsolicited Urbanism, Hybrid Urbanism. BioUrban Complex, Bairro Amarelo, ressignificação do espaço. São Paulo. Jeff Anderson e Biourban.* (Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BADKZF5o7OU>)

Similarly to Karl Rossman, Jeff Anderson left the formal world of his medium class of São Paulo society for several years, to live in slums, resignifying the territory with the local community and reinventing himself. His Biourban replicates itself along the hybrid territories of Sao Paulo, on the borders of formal and informal

Careful eyes easily discovers on these territories CineSlums, community gardens in slum houses' slabs, outdoor itinerant cinemas and integration squares. Some of them were mapped by Marcos Rosa (ROSA, WEILAND, 2013).

Emerges a proliferation of botton-up initiatives, creative practices and local entrepreneurship, even informal ones, that gives other face to the American megacities puissance.

These emerging powerful places are no longer in the Northern Hemisphere, in rich, developed countries. They are in Mumbai, Bogota, Lagos, Shanghai, Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo. They all have territories in dramatic transformation. Mutants. There, people are living in a complex and less formal way. Less and less alike the well solved formal cities like New York or London. In them, the hybrid territories between formal and informal appear now as powerful agents of productive transformation and generating innovation.

The stories of people and places merge in these paths of reinventions, where the turning point occurs invariably in symbiotic relationships between one another. People who have built new routes from a creative turn where the urban environment, the city, was the protagonist. Urban environments, cities and territories that have reinvented after depressive dives, urban and economic stagnation, decay and abandonment, through the presence of local characters that leveraged new uses and meanings, and reprogrammed places, reactivated, reoccupied them.

Current topics – issues, concepts - are being presented in these megacities of South America: reinvention, resilience, innovation, creative practices, urbanism & happiness, the reinvention of everyday life, activism, creative occupations, meeting points, formal-informal dynamics, micro entrepreneurship, creative economy, emergencies, contamination, cooperation sharing, tactical urbanism, DIY urbanism, handmade urbanism, micro planning.

The theme suggests adding informal territories and formal territories.

The hybrid territory is, before they design, an open piece that attaches, post aesthetic operation of the look that discovers a new use.

Spaces more fluid, with more freedom of action and possibilities for momentary re-settings, and that we could call infrastructural architecture. An architecture as structure of support and power of a future. A Khôra, an in between-spaces (GUATELLI, 2013).

Rem Koolhaas on a recent publication concerning the Future of Cities, pointed out:

The reinvention and the reimagining of cities are taking place all

over the world. The energy that inspires reinvention either comes from pressure—when negative forces lead to a breakthrough, which is what I noticed in Lagos—or cities get their energy from striving. Cities are machines for emancipation. When the striving for emancipation is at its most intense, when there is the clearest promise of success, change is at its most intense...The Economist's Johnny Grimond once said the following about cities: 'One of the striking things about slums is that many people there are really quite cheerful. It is a tribute to the human spirit that, even in the face of considerable adversity, so many people get on with their lives and organize themselves in an extraordinarily impressive way (KOOLHAAS, 2012, p. 2576).

A new urban ecosystem: liquid clusters in hybrid territories.

At the end of the 20th Century, due to the growing process of digital world we saw the appearance of strong statements: "death of distance", "end of geography", "end of history" and the "death of cities".

After some 15 years passed, what we see now is almost the opposite. Even being more and more connected digitally and virtually, people around the world is meeting physically. In cities. Like never before. To do everything, from occupy movements, to share knowledge, culture, emotions, jobs and innovative ideas.

As remembered by economist Enrico Moretti, from Berkeley,

"urban reinvention is made possible by the traditional urban virtues that were to be found in nineteenth-century Detroit: educated workers, small entrepreneurs, and a creative interplay".

Emerging new ideas are coming from the emerging hybrid territories from emerging megacities like São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bogota and Medellin. Generating new kinds of city innovation.

Emerging city innovators are reinventing the territory of Silicon Valley also. They are interested in living and producing ideas no more in the low dense car oriented small cities on the valley but in dense interesting and mixed use with a concentration of diverse people meeting each other on the city for people They are moving to San Francisco bay Area reinventing places like SOMA, The Design District, Mission Bay. They are trying to better connect through sustainable and interactive mobility forms and not through individual cars that territory. Buses, Muni, Caltrain, bikelanes, sharing vans, and the Grand Boulevard Initiative transforming El Camino Real into a high

speed corridor linking the Valley to San Francisco Bay Area are being reinvented to connect people from Berkeley to Palo Alto, from SOMA to Stanford.

A huge territory of Silicon Valley and San Francisco Bay Area are beginning to be reinvented from the most innovative minds nowadays.

What are they looking for? Urban density and sustainability, city amenities, public transportation and good public spaces crowded of diverse people.



Figure 3. DIY Urbanism, SPUR, San Francisco.⁴

As well as they know that there is a strong relationship between creative class neighborhoods and the accessibility of public transit, they also know that proximity and density creates “something in the air”, as Alfred Marshall putted out in 1890 delivering to modern world the fundamentals of innovation and emergence of new ideas from the clustering environment of people (LEITE, 2012).

And again, those young people in the Bay Area are less formal. Richer than their generation on the South cities, but with the same demand and similar

⁴ Mimi Zeiger. The Interventionist’s Toolkit: Project, Map, Occupy. Places, 27.03.12. <http://places.designobserver.com/feature/the-interventionists-toolkit-part-4/32918/>

tactics: to reinvent the territory, to create in between situations, to generate hybrid dynamics.

Edward Glaeser, maybe the most renowned urban economist nowadays, puts people skills, small entrepreneurships and strong connections environment and education as the basic attributes for cities reinvention in the 21^{rst} Century (GLAESER, 2011).

He also mapped innovation appearing in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro and Mumbai. Certainly not the same innovation that has been created in San Francisco Bay Area. Brazilian megacities has upgraded social inclusion including access to education for the people in informal territories, but that educational environment is faraway from Northern California Universities. The common point is not this but all others attributes and probably some intangible attributes presented on that hybrid dense emerging territory.

Steve Johnson, the popular science and media theorist, revisited Jane Jacobs basic concepts focusing on the demands for emergence of innovative ideas: the power and creative potential of urban densities for sharing ideas, generation of innovation and the development of "collective intelligence" in territories he called "liquid environments" (JOHNSON, 2002).

Maybe we are seeing the emergence of new forms of clusters. Diverse from the high-tech clusters of traditional Silicon Valley, these ones are more informal, hybrid, but again based on the strong power of concentration of people generating ideas and innovation. Diverse people. Innovating in social design in the territory.



Figure 4. The Happy End of Franz Kafka's "Amerika". Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 1994, mixed media, dimensions variable, © Estate Martin Kippenberger, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.

"The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out..." (DELEUZE, GUATTARI, 1986, p.7-8)

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