Abstracts
in English

Introduction

Dialectical landscapes: the ebb and flow of living

Piero Zanini

How can we talk about the periphery today? How can we understand it? What relationship exists between an idea of emerged periphery and the appearance of the modern hierarchic city and its present-day manifestations? How does the notion of *dialectical landscape* open up the possibility of reconsidering habitation conditions on the periphery?

A recent re-reading of Bertolt Brecht's *Work Journal* leads philosopher and art historian Georges Didi-Huberman to put forward a distinction between the philosophical use of the dialectic and the artistic use found in Brecht's works. Whereas the philosopher "constructs arguments to *set out the truth*, the theatre director creates heterogeneities to *dispose the truth*, not necessarily by dint of reasons, but of 'correspondences' (as in [Charles] Baudelaire), 'elective affinities' (as in [Johann Wolfgang] Goethe and [Walter] Benjamin), 'rendings' (as in George Bataille) or 'attractions' (as in [Serguei] Eisenstein)" (Didi-Huberman, 2008: p. 108). In this case, the dialectic is a work method, or a critical way of testing reality, better expressed as a stage production, in the sense of a knowledge method which "separates and reunites elements at their most unlikely point" (Didi-Huberman, 2008: p. 108) in order to restore complexity to the contradiction under consideration, rather than attempting to resolve it through synthesis.

Robert Smithson formulates the hypothesis of landscape dialectic in an essay entitled "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape" (1973). According to Smithson, both Olmsted's concept of landscape and his way of translating it to the real world originate in the theories of the Picturesque, a synthesis of Burke's ideas on the sublime and the beautiful. In the Central Park project, for example, Smithson is less interested in the *park* object as such than in the degree and intensity of the material changes (including those depending on chance) that have made the park what it is today. For Smithson, the dialectic is a way of making this complexity visible, more as a way of seeing things in a manifold of relations, not as isolated objects. From this, we can deduce that a park is *sine qua non* an unfinished thing, which can continue to give rise to the unexpected and the contradictory that may emerge in any field of human activity (political, social, or natural), as the result of its continuous transformation.

An intervention in 1973 by Pier Paolo Pasolini on an Italian television programme (*Io e…*) gives us an idea of the type of contradictions that may ap-pear. Pasolini speaks about the shape of cities, basing his discourse on two completely different towns that he knew well: the medieval town of Orte and the fascist town of Sabaudia. Pasolini said that he made "a frame showing the town of Orte in all its stylistic perfection, i.e., as a perfect, absolute shape, more or less like this. If you move the camera a bit [zoom back], the shape of the town, the profile of the town, the architectural mass of the town, is broken, damaged, disfigured by something strange, by that house you see on the left. Do you see it?"

For Pasolini, the shape of the city is another way to deplore the end of the world, the old world, in the face of the unstoppable advance of a new world trapped in the "obtuse logic" of capitalism. These two *shapes*, these two *styles*, come into tension in the frame described by an offended, indignant Pasolini. He wishes to defend "a thing that nobody defends, something that is the work, as it were […], of the entire history of the town's population". However, such defence is only possible, visually, by acting on the very condition that allows it to exist: time. Detaining time in one precise instant. Stepping outside history. The zoom creates a conflict within the image between the *absolute shape* of the historically consolidated medieval city and the perturbing presence of a strange, foul object that disfigures and corrupts the shape of the town today. Pasolini's frame is an example of what Walter Benjamin calls a *dialectical image*, i.e., an image in which *what used to be* suddenly encounters *what is now* in one revealing instant. Does renouncing the dialectical potential of the image, i.e., excluding one or other of the shapes seen by our present-day gaze, not avoid the critical (ethical, aesthetic) moment imposed by the image? Does hiding or moving away the foulness in the world help us avoid reproducing it in the future?

This conflict between *shapes* brings us to Henri Lefebvre's considerations on the urban phenomenon as "a general shape, of agglomeration, of simultaneity, of space-time in societies, a shape that imposes itself everywhere throughout history, regardless of the events in that history, and […] confirms itself *qua* shape right up to the explosion we are now witnessing" (Lefebvre, 1986: p. 160).

The panoramic view of Orte that Pasolini so vehemently rejected provides us with a radical metaphor for the urban condition in which we live. It also obliges us to rethink our relationship with the temporal dimension of inhabiting, a condition that is not univocal or even lineal, but is constantly coordinating different timelines: the time inside us (our set of experiences) and the time outside us (to which we belong). Even if we do not pay much attention to them, the places we inhabit and the landscapes surrounding us are the "incarnation of time in space" (Berque, 1986: p. 108). Each time we stand before a landscape, as if "before an image" (Didi-Huberman, 2000), we stand before the simultaneous present-

day manifestation of all timescales, in which past and present are endlessly reconfiguring.

To speak about *landscape* today means to speak about the innate ambivalence of the world, since landscape, as we know, means both the *thing* (a constructed, experienced, physical reality) and the *image of the thing* (an experience of the senses). It is both the *world* and its *representation*, to such an extent that it is hard to distinguish one from the other. The interest of landscape as a perspective for re-thinking the urban phenomenon is not to prioritise either aspect but rather to recognise its potential; we constitute and construct our reality of the world through this continuous coming and going. Only by recognising its irreducibly dialectical dimension can landscape be understood as the expression of our relationship with the world, and become a starting point for society to rethink itself. However, in order to go forward in this direction, we need to reach greater understanding of the vertiginous dissonance that persists, both individually and collectively, between the wishes, memories, and representations that determine our way of inhabiting the world, and the the ebb and flow of the material transformations linked to this way of inhabiting.

For an empirical example of this dissonance, let us consider a modern city and its periphery or, in this case, its *banlieue.* The Quartier des 4000 Sud in La Courneuve, to the north-west of Paris, is one of the housing estates, or *grands ensembles,* created in France after the Second World War in response to the far-reaching social and demographic transformations (decolonization, urbanization, economic boom) all over the country, but particularly in the Paris region. Built in the early 1960s, the Quartier des 4000 Sud figures in the official rhetoric of the decade as a new world, a showcase for the ideals of social justice linked to modernity. However, by the end of the decade, the new world of the *quartier* had begun to deteriorate into a galloping process of erosion (buildings, socio-economic conditions, quality of life, descriptions in the media) until it eventually turned into an archetypical French *banlieue.* For many residents, the initial enchantment and pride of living in a large, well-lit, comfortable apartment gave way to a deep disenchantment, fuelled by the many unfulfilled or partially fulfilled promises to renovate the *quartier.* This is one of the aspects highlighted by a major research project on the Quartier des 4000 Sud, carried out by the Laboratory of Architecture and Anthropology in the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture Paris-La Villette. The main contribution of this project is to demonstrate the extent of dissonances in discourses on the *quartier* by urbanists, architects, sociologists, politicians, journalists, artists, etc. over the years, revealing the lack of real dialogue among the different points of view. The research even detected the players' difficulty, or in some cases impossibility, in calling the same places by the same names.

The result of this type of generalised autism is a fragmented story in which all the players firmly believe that they understand their interlocutors, while actually reiterating and fuelling all sorts of misunderstandings. The disturbances in autumn 2005, which put the Paris *banlieue* on the map, once again proved the extent to which lack of shared history between the city and its parts reinforces the perverse effect of the original *we/they* dichotomy: "Why are *they* burning and destroying everything *we* did for them?"

The aim of the research was not to construct a shared memory of the Quartier des 4000 Sud. It was more of a Brechtian attempt to dispose the various perspectives of the players present, by placing them side by side, for once, in the evolution of the *quartier.* This approach allowed the differences, contradictions, and pluralities of applied logic (as well as the unexpressed love of those who took part in its co-construction) to emerge *from the inside,* thus relegating the *from-the-outside* discourse to a different perspective. The aim of this empirical stance was to find a way of bringing the profundity of the *quartier's* narrative *back to the present,* in an attempt to reinvest space-time into its controversial complexity, to reactivate the dialectical dimension, to avoid sclerotisation in and by the stigma attached to living in the *quartier.*

The danger is to remain captivated by the burlesque image of an announcement promising "a new future" for La Courneuve, which was dynamited along with the building on which it stood. A strange way of facing the social and political problem, here and in many other peripheries, of re-integrating into the city what had previously been expelled.

Thirty years ago, Lefebvre denounced the ideological tendency of avoiding the political dimension of reducing urban problems by relegating them to the category of local issues in terms of spatial production and management. His conclusion was that "forms last longer than contents and are resistant to time, even if they dissolve and come to an end like everything else in this world! The urban, as a present-day form of simultaneity, agglomeration and unity, questions the form as much as the content" (Lefebvre, 1986: p. 173). The difficulty facing us today, not only with regard to the periphery, is understanding how and where to position oneself for a dialectical cross-examination of form and content. In the Parisian context at least, amidst the heady debate on "Le Grand Paris", the problem in the Quartier des 4000 Sud in La Courneuve is clear for local community leader Tahar: "My first concern is for the people who cannot pay the rent today and may have to move out of the *quartier* tomorrow. Take me, for example. I live here in La Courneuve and I have a job, but my salary of 800 euros a month would not pay the rent in one of those new flats. Will I be able to stay on here while prices keep going up?" (Biase, 2009).

I.
From the fringes

Galicia. From rururban landscape to humanised mega-territory

Xerardo Estévez

The peripheries have always existed, but the urban phenomenon has split asunder in recent years, as never before. For economic reasons, core elements of the city's economy and its attendant paraphernalia are moving out to new spaces: fringe-peripheries, hypermodern spaces criss-crossed with infrastructures and inhabited by people hailing from all over the world.

If we consider these fringes as the new scenic spaces being churned out steadily and systematically, we should pause to wonder whether it is enough to register horror, or whether we should reflect on what to do with this jumble of mega-territories lying between the compactness of the city and the open countryside beyond.

Planners have always had a predilection for cities and centralism, but have been at a loss to know what to do with metropolises, urban agglomerations, and the leftover spaces in between. As a rule, they try to catch up with events –probably not from choice– and have simply not been up to the task of coordinating neighbouring municipalities. If planners ever anticipated events by actually coming up with the necessary political documents and instruments, reality usually kicked in at some point, or third-party decisions frustrated their initiative. Each municipality in the country has developed its own slapdash planning expansion policies, especially from the 1990s onwards, falling back all too often on modifying their original plans to find room for the explosion of dwellings and services within the municipal boundaries.

This acted as a further stimulation for polycentric urban growth. Successive expansion waves spread over the countryside until they eventually collided at the edges, giving rise to the so-called *collision fringes*. Geographers and planners cannot find a name for this new phenomenon of territorial colonisation. The morphology has outstripped the theory and practice of urban and territorial planning, both useful tools on a local scale but insufficient for understanding today's global space.

Despite the existence of more planning figures and restraints than ever before, despite all our meticulous plans and by-laws, it is curious to note that massive-scale building is going ahead with complete disregard for any evocation of place. Low-density residential estates are colonising the territory like the Roman camps of old, staking out the streets, and filling up the grids with run-of-the-mill objects. The idea is to build up the area as fast as possible, not to endow it with any sort of quality. Wherever one goes, it all looks the same, the same metropolis, the same place, the same half-empty streets with identical houses for people with similar or dissimilar needs, all coming together into an apparently irrational whole. This is how the fringes of the residential diaspora emerge, with scant variation in either geographical or territorial terms.

However, the fringes springing up along the major infrastructures are of a different nature. Airports and ports, railway and motorway hubs, all act like magnets inviting relocation of public facilities and urban sprawl. These fringes are usually linear, spreading out along never-ending arteries for further development. Local infrastructures have also produced urban sprawl and a hotchpotch of complementary services, which have generated a sort of "nomadic urbanism", with total disregard for orthodox planning.

Each time a new infrastructure is set up, the reverse side of the city is thrown into a new light. We discern different elements of the urban panorama in the distance, such as the skyline, emblematic buildings, and so on. Hence, the importance of combining development with other projects and programmes taking landscape, colour, and vegetation into account to enhance the values of the new vantage point over the city.

Over the years, Galicia has opted for a polycentric development model for its towns and cities, with a noticeable imbalance in favour of the west coast. The role of the AP9 motorway was indeed fundamental for developing this half of the region, but accelerated the shift towards the Atlantic axis, now a succession of *sui generis* metropolitan spaces ranging from the standard compact city to a sprawl of dwellings linking up the towns and villages in the area. The whole countryside is criss-crossed by fringes: linear fringes flanking the new infrastructures, coastal fringes linked to sea-faring activities, and the residential diaspora into semi-detached housing estates. The new landscape is a mega-territory, an urban region that has evolved from the former rururban system of one-family dwellings linked to part-time agricultural work complementing family incomes in the 20th century. We can understand the Galician metropolitan space as a whole, running along a road network from Ferrol in the north down to the Portuguese border in the south, with multiple (industrial, maritime, services) economies facilitating a dispersion, as diffused as it is confused.

The Galicia of indescribable beauty still exists however, the Galicia lying between the silent inte-

rior and the compulsive coastal development, between the densely built-up areas and the unspoiled natural spaces now sought after by an emerging tourism sector and discerning new *colonisers* from northern Europe.

During the last two decades of the 20th century, Galicia witnessed an unprecedented urban expansion. Today, in the middle of the current economic recession, we are now looking at all the *unintended* fringes, i.e., fringes built not without intention but without prior planning intention. It may be somewhat late in the day, but it is good that we can now see these fringes as they are. Up to now, they were invisible, and the invisible is even more subject to havoc and irrationality. The Galician regional government must first *see* the fringes and then *look at* the fringes. The government has the obligation to see the territory from an overall, supra-local perspective. In collaboration with the town councils, it can and must take into account geographical factors when making investments, it must foresee the territorial consequences of these investments and respond appropriately to protect them. Any project to endow the peripheries with infrastructures and amenities can indeed create rational economic activity and a new landscape. However, leaving things at the mercy of the market forces and of blind collisions between neighbouring municipalities will only result in grotesque situations of doubtful economic benefit and difficult administration.

The fringes are a reality that is here to stay, so we must understand their administration as a fundamentally political problem, with all its corresponding technical aspects. When we say that this is a political problem, we envisage cooperation rather than confrontation between the different administrations. In this respect, we must accept the fact that local planning policies are insufficient. We need supra-local bodies, guidelines, maps, plans, and catalogues encompassing the basic aspects of urban growth under an overall protection plan. However, it takes time for politicians and experts to come together and draw up the documents needed to implant and manage an overall plan, with public participation in the decision-making process. We have heard repeatedly how we should turn the current recession into an opportunity. Let us use it, therefore, to bring about a new territorial planning policy for the future, and prove that the economy-territory binomial is not only necessary but also beneficial from both the public and the private perspectives.

Landscape of conflict, space for dialogue

Daniela Colafranceschi

The peripheries act as fringes, as interfaces between geographical realities and landscape configurations. It is urgent that we look from the periphery towards the centre, and reflect on the spaces that represent a limit, both physical and conceptual. A multi-perspective approach will enrich our understanding and assessment of the fringes, and will inform our interventions. The chapter corresponding to this summary approaches the peripheries from the perspective of landscape and the public space. This is for two reasons: on the one hand, landscape is the disciplinary field that best reflects contemporary place identity. On the other hand, the process of carrying out projects on the city fringes encourages us to seek out the relationships between human actions and the shapes of the territory.

The *fringes* are the city's marginal areas, conflict zones, which are also crucial nerve centres. The profound modification of cities and their peripheries forces us to learn to read and interpret realities that did not exist until recently. The fringes are abandoned spaces where the city becomes blurred, spaces to which we entrust the destiny and the future of our metropolises. The contemporary landscape has acquired complexity from many points of view and in many spheres, to the point where it is characterised by undefined boundaries and a high degree of fragmentation. In former times, there was the city and the periphery, but today this distinction is increasingly blurring into the hybrid spaces of the fringes.

Like many other people, I feel this fascination for the threshold as an expression of my curiosity and my desire to explore. My interest consists in detecting possibilities for a contemporary landscape project on the transition fringes, a complex type of project with many different levels of meaning. The fringes are territories that speak to us, territories that show us how their characteristic boundary landscape separates and unites. This is not simply an in-between space, a grey fringe between a white fringe and a black fringe; it has a thickness with its own identity. There is no clear boundary, just unstable, undefined edge generating other territories capable of enlarging the same characteristics and their overlapping, hybridising conflicts. There are many possibilities for projects here, for endowing places with meaning, transforming them from spaces of conflict into spaces for dialogue.

If we approach the fringes with a non-conventional landscaping project, those neglected, rejected areas have a huge potential for quality-endowing processes. The very lack of definition of these surroundings provides the key for getting to the heart of their significance. The landscaper's task is to

evoke and interpret the drive towards urban expansion and generate a premise of centrality within it. The only space capable of resolving the conflict of these territories is the public space. The fringes are places in waiting: waiting for an idea, waiting for an experiment to endow them with meaning and identity. The fringes have no obvious quality: they have only potential.

Town planning usually starts with a specific intervention project and then seeks a place to put it into practice. On the fringes, this order should be reversed. In these marginal, peripheral areas, the best project should come out of the places themselves. The intervention project should not define the place; the place and its condition should suggest the intervention project that best identifies them. A non-conventional project can endow a territory with meaning and quality, and set up a wider process of recognition of its landscape as a cultural product.

Since the year 2000, the European Landscape Convention has been defending the need to understand landscape not only as places of exceptional value or beauty but also as everything present around us. This new perspective entails two fundamental consequences. In the first place, the concept of *landscape quality* is inverted to become *quality landscape*, in which *quality* obviously refers to the whole landscape, as a product. In the second place, it promotes a concept of landscape that includes non-homogeneous areas. The new logic recognises landscape as a complex thing, as an aesthetic, emotional, and social expression. The European Landscape Convention has given us a new map, as it were, that reflects the stories lived out in the territory; a map that speaks of human occupation, of the *topophilia* linking our affections to a certain place.

By way of example, I would like to talk about one particular fringe. This is the history of San Sperato district in Reggio Calabria, a city characterised by its complex, stratified geographies. There are mountains close to the sea and dried-up riverbeds that once cut deeply through the land. San Sperato lies between two rivers. It has been spontaneously expanding over the last twenty years due to the proliferation of self-constructed dwellings built on agricultural (i.e. non-buildable) land, in full sight of everybody, including the local authorities. San Sperato is officially an agricultural zone and, as such, has no basic services: the inhabitants have to devise ingenious means to procure their water and electricity supplies. The district is an example of the fringe between urban and rural zones, a territory where it is hard to draw a line between planned development and the self-constructed dwellings.

San Sperato consists of innumerable reinforced-concrete skeletons of huge unfinished buildings surrounded by fragments of countryside. The buildings have emerged in an anarchic manner, with no regard for planning, urban design, or use of public space. In fact, there is no awareness of the concept of public space; in this district, public is considered no-man's-land. The reason for this lies partly in the origin of the inhabitants. Most come from a well-to-do rural background and moved into the city from their isolated homesteads in the country. In San Sperato, they meet up with friends and neighbours in their own homes, in much the same way as they used to do in the country. They see no need for community spaces, or public meeting places such as squares or parks. The few existing squares were built without taking into account local opinion, and have not worked out. The origin of the inhabitants also explains the presence of so many unfinished buildings, conceived along the same lines as traditional farmhouses designed for gradual occupancy over a long period. The head of the family buys a piece of agricultural land and builds a completely featureless reinforced-concrete structure. He moves his family (wife and children) into one floor of the structure, and leaves the rest empty and unfinished. Like all the other inhabitants here, he expects that the empty structure will be finished gradually and occupied by successive generations over the years.

All these peculiarities give San Sperato a character that is both modern and primitive at the same time. The district looks like an abandoned, unfinished city, but this is just appearance. In fact, it is an urban landscape full of vitality, with superb spontaneous open spaces. It is a non-institutionalised city, never properly finished, with no public infrastructures, and no desire to install them. The district reveals the local administration's inability to channel the self-construction phenomenon to its own advantage. It is essential that landscaping projects designed for this type of reality include the landscape values of its inhabitants.

Landscape architecture has indeed evolved in its ability to bring natural and urban systems together into a complex heterogeneous whole, with the accent on open-ended, inclusive approaches. One detects a wish (and, therefore, a possibility) for a sense of community. The most suitable space to bring this about is the public space, as a motor for reclaiming values, quality and meaning amidst all the disorder and fragmentation. We are talking here about neutral spaces with no apparent content; residual spaces potentially available to the city, not so much available in the physical sense as open-ended in conceptual terms. Here is an opportunity to reclaim such spaces with a landscaping project.

San Sperato begs a simple, delicate, minimalist strategy to match its urban condition. Ground-level land has never been given much thought or attention here; the buildings appear to float in the air, totally disconnected from their context. However, we can see enormous potential: San Sperato needs a project that will enhance its value in metaphorical terms, reveal its worth, and transform it into useable, community space.

I remember when I discovered how medieval and Renaissance cities were represented as buildings grouped together on a sort of a tray under the protection of a patron saint. The images were troubling, and I used to wonder uneasily about the territories lying beyond the scale of the drawing. I was fascinated by the fact that a city could present itself to the world as a cluster of little houses sitting on a tray holding them all together. At university, we talk a lot about the volumes of buildings but very little about the space lying between buildings; we do not talk about the quality and value of free space, about the ground-level relationship, about the *tray* holding all the buildings together.

Some years ago, Calabria Town Planning Department invited representatives from several Italian universities to a workshop to give their advice on the new regional landscape plan. The topography of Calabria features a ridge of mountains running north to south, with the sea on either side. Along the stretches of land between the sea and the mountains, there are easily identified urban elements separated by agricultural lands, undefined fringes of abandoned territories, rubbish dumps, self-constructed peripheries, and so on. My university participated by working on the river system that characterises southern Calabria, for which we developed two public space projects as a strategy for the area. The first project dealt with a natural type of river, for which we designed a river park. The second project dealt with an almost dried-up river running through fringe areas with no identity or identifiable value other than their location *between* the city and the countryside. We thought up a very simple project, transforming the ground level into a complex space that admitted the possibility of new squares and a sequence of context-sensitive public spaces. The main aim was to create areas that would enhance the existing values by focusing on their quality. To achieve this, we designed a system of new spaces to unify an anodyne, unorganised urban stretch. We proposed a system that would restore quality and identity to the public space by generating a relationship between architecture and landscape, between the metropolis and the urban sprawl, between the legal and the illegal city, between urban and rural territory. Public space as a strategy for dialogue.

Landscape, literature and periphery

Toni Sala

I would like to contribute a practical vision of what the periphery means to me in terms of landscape, so I will start by telling you what happened to me the day I walked out to see what I could experience regarding the periphery. There is always the danger of rhetoric, of making landscape into something slick and threadbare from being looked at too much. We have seen so many films, documentaries, and travelogues on, for example, European capital cities, that we have a feeling of *déjà vu* even if we have never actually been there. I am not saying that landscape should remain untouched. I am only saying that this is a very delicate matter. We live in an age that seems incapable of steering a middle course; we lurch from picture postcard prettiness to the jungles of neglect of the peripheries.

I walk out from my city, noticing two things as I go along. The first observation is a truism. Ring roads cut our cities off, just as defence walls did in former times. The whole area surrounding the contemporary city is becoming a place of passage, a place where it is dangerous to stop. The second observation is the surprising neglect of these much-transited places. It is as if the cars passing through them had no windows. Like most towns and cities in Maresme County, the main road and busiest thoroughfare cuts right across the city where I live. People driving through the city only see that stretch of main road, whereas people stopping here must approach along that same stretch. It impresses me that the city extends such an ugly, aggressive welcome to visitors and citizens alike: houses blackened by the exhaust fumes of passing vehicles, old blinds drawn over the windows, a display of prefabricated swimming pools, and so on. Judging by the reception that they give us, today's cities do not appear to be civilised places. There is no building, no church spire seen from afar, no sign that one is approaching a place of welcome.

I set out from my city and walk until I reach the periphery. What do I find there? Disintegration, an assault of discordant debris. I head towards the south exit, the least transformed, and the one closest to the main dictionary definition for the word "landscape": *aspect, view, of a natural place.* What do I find when the buildings end? No "natural place" at all, just retired people's vegetable allotments, divided by wire and cane fences, full of old plastic jerry cans. A disused pig farm. The ruins of a Roman aqueduct. A cement factory. A lone industrial warehouse. A timber yard. A motorway ramp and a huge bridge. The crater of an abandoned quarry, now the site for a new wastewater treatment plant. Electricity pylons. Everything is in undecipherable disorder. This is the landscape on the periphery of most cities. It seems there is no perceived need to tidy it up, no criteria established for that sort of thing. The peripheries have simply sprawled outwards, and have stayed that way. There is no order here, there is no hierarchy, and there is no language.

I will attempt to channel the periphery issue into my own field, literature, and speak of the relationship between landscape, literature, and periphery. I will confine myself to Catalan literature,

which I hope will serve as an example. Indeed, I believe that landscape plays a larger role in 20th-century Catalan literature than in other literatures. Catalan literature, peripheral for many but central for us Catalans, will help us to understand the question of the periphery. I propose a short series of literary samplings to show how landscape in Catalonia ceased to be peripheral and became central, only to return later to the periphery.

In *Llibre de meravelles* (late 13th century) by Ramon Llull, the main character Fèlix wants to explore the world. He sets out from his city and finds himself on the periphery where there is "dense woodland". Llull does not describe this woodland, except as a place with "many evil wild beasts". Llull's landscape is devoid of adjectives; it is a landscape of instruction, far removed from the senses that distract us from what really matters, i.e., the soul.

The first decorative peripheral landscapes make their appearance in Catalan literature at the same time as the acknowledgement of sensuality. Let us focus on the difference between Ramon Llull and Joanot Martorell, the 15th-century writer from Valencia. Let us compare the "dense woodland" in Llull's *Llibre de meravelles* with a passage from the start of Martorell's *Tirant lo Blanc*: "In the fertile, rich and lovely island of England there lived a most valiant knight". This is indeed a leap forward, but two centuries have passed before it comes about. In *Tirant lo Blanc* the landscape is described; but only as a decorative backdrop, not as a value in itself.

As in literature, landscape in western art has largely been a backdrop against which human figures took centre stage; that is to say, landscape was intrinsically peripheral. With the Renaissance, landscape almost disappears from painting and does not reappear until the Flemish school in the mid-17th century. However, landscape does not take centre stage until the Romantic Movement's cult of nature, which appeared at this time largely because of the battered state of religion in the aftermath of the Enlightenment. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of man being happier and better in nature than in society had reclaimed the idea of nature and brought it to the fore.

By the late 18th century, descriptions and reflections on nature begin to appear in texts by Johann Wolfgang Goethe and, above all, William Wordsworth. The 19th century witnessed a sensorial approach to nature, as the place for finding the natural goodness described by Rousseau, and the transcendence denigrated by the Enlightenment rationalists of the previous century.

Returning to Catalonia, the poem *Oda a la Pàtria* is often presented as the first step towards the recovery of Catalan literature and Catalan national values. The poem speaks of yearning for the landscapes of the Montseny Massif and the River Llobregat, the landscapes of childhood, the memory of which unites us to the fatherland. Other poets of the

mid 19th-century Catalan Renaixença movement also sing of their landscape.

In this concise overview of landscape in Catalan literature, an important step forward came with the early 20th-century figure of Joan Maragall, who introduced symbolism to landscape in his poem *Les muntanyes* (1901). Maragall places landscape in the centre of the composition in a way that no other writer had done before, in Catalan at least. Landscape is no longer peripheral. Landscape is now the centre. The person has found himself; the person coincides with the landscape.

Joan Maragall had two great literary heirs, Joaquim Ruyra and Víctor Català. Both writers dabbled with painting, and discovered that the landscape one represents is not as idyllic as that depicted by Maragall. Indeed, Maragall himself insinuated this in *Les muntanyes,* and more so in the famous *Cant espiritual* in which he begs God to open his eyes wider here on earth. Joaquim Ruyra and Víctor Català, as well as Raimon Casellas and Prudenci Bertrana, lay bare the darker aspects of landscape. Language is of the utmost importance. Influenced by Johann Gottfried von Herder, Maragall had claimed that language was an emanation of landscape. The landscape speaks its own language and provides literary fruits, in the same way that the landscape conditions painting towards a certain light or palette of colours. Víctor Català wrote a series of terrifying short stories entitled *Drames rurals* and the novel *Solitud*, in which the landscape of the Montgrí Massif is personified as the main character, turned into a mountain through the Montgrí itself, harking back to Maragall's literary treatment of the same theme. Whereas Víctor Català deals largely with mountains, Joaquim Ruyra deals with the sea. The title of *Marines i boscatges* (1903) comes from landscape paintings: seascapes and mountainscapes. As with Víctor Català, Joaquim Ruyra's writings depict nature, landscape and the person in terms of turbulence, violence and death, both nature and landscape have inaccessible parts. From this point on, landscape begins to move slowly but steadily out towards the periphery. The next great writer to take up the baton is Josep Pla. In Pla's writings, we can no longer say that landscape and person coincide; the landscape is once more external. Josep Pla seeks certitudes rather than mysteries in landscape; he is interested in the classic, luminous, domestic landscape.

Literature seems to be moving away from the natural landscapes of the nineteenth century. Mercè Rodoreda's last books, in which the characters merge violently with nature, represent an aggressive re-entry into landscape. Literature has now left landscape behind for new spaces, which are and are not landscape at the same time. It is as if literature wished to shake off landscape. For me today, landscape par excellence is the landscape of the periphery. Is peripheral landscape in itself landscape?

I went there myself and checked it out. What best defines the peripheral landscape is precisely the difficulty of reaching a definition, either in temporal or physical terms. This is a landscape in constant mutation, ungraspable, located somewhere between the city and beyond the city.

Peripheries are always border places, or places of violence. The confusion generated by what you find there is a reaction to the helplessness, the clichéd disorientation, and the lack of values in today's world – and in all worlds. This is why many writers take refuge in one individual or one character, put to the test in an undefined territory. Joan Nogué says that a territory, or a landscape, is a culture. I would add that a culture is a morality, and that each moment of moral uncertainty finds a means of expression in the peripheries: territorial peripheries and personal peripheries.

Now, I come to my own books. I can only say that, without any conscious intention, my three or four published books have all converged on peripheral landscapes. In *Rodalies* and *Marina*, the periphery is the main stage. The Catalan word *rodalies* can refer to local trains, to the environs of a city or to the environs of the person. In *Marina*, the narrative also takes place on the peripheries, the periphery of a town and the periphery of man.

The periphery is an important part of the landscape. In fact, it is our nearest landscape, however deteriorated it may be. And this is how we must accept it. Besides, I want to say that any periphery can be brought to the centre.

II.
Detecting the fringes

Landscapes on the periphery: constructing the gaze on the 21st-century city

Francesc Muñoz

Since the nineteen-seventies, different schools of thought have been considering our urban voids as entities with sufficient semiotic and symbolic weight of their own within the city context. Various academic disciplines have thus acknowledged a whole range of new urban landscapes, clearly here to stay, as landscapes *per se* and as an essential part of the patchwork of metropolitan images making up the scenario of human relationships in the city.

Over recent decades, attention lavished by visual artists on the landscape of the urban has progressively highlighted its visibility. This has led to the emergence of an aesthetic canon of the periphery, heir to two unquestionably postmodern cultural images. The romantic-nostalgic gaze contemplates the open, interrupted, fragmented horizons of the periphery and catches glimpses of the times before urban colonisation. The conservationist gaze detects on the urban fringes a hint of colour beyond the grey city, a promise of nature denied by the urbanised space.

The aesthetic canon of the periphery has several easily recognisable common denominators, grouped here into four sets of urban landscape elements: *infrastructures* associated with interruption and fragmentation; *geometry of apartment blocks* representing the anomie of arbitrary, regular repetition; *open spaces and wastelands* denoting vagueness and limitlessness, and *vestiges* of industrial, commercial and leisure sites testifying to neglect and abandon. The four sets refer respectively to the four main attributes of the urban periphery landscape: *fragmentation, anomie, vagueness,* and *abandon*. These attributes are closely linked to the physical configuration of the territory, and can be seen as material conditions specific to the periphery landscape. These conditions have contributed to building up a certain peripheral *look*, an aesthetic canon of the periphery landscape present in contemporary urban imagery. We could argue, more daringly, that the periphery is turning into an aesthetic product, insofar as its representation has gradually incorporated elements pertaining to a specific canon. The material conditions of the landscape tend to appear as canonical images in all contemporary representations of the periphery.

From a conceptual point of view, however, we can further refine our definition of the periphery as a territory present in every type of city and at every moment in history. Beyond the material conditions of the landscape, certain constant features exist that give a more exact picture of its contents and values. In a few words, the periphery is the place where minimum conditions of centrality and regulation meet maximum interrelationships of multiplicity and vagueness.

From the same perspective, we can distinguish four main conceptual attributes defining the periphery and providing a glimpse of under-acknowledged issues that characterise its landscapes: *ambiguity, contradiction, hybridisation,* and *simultaneity*. By definition, the periphery is ambiguous, contradictory, hybrid and simultaneous. Put in other words, the periphery is not precise, coherent, pure, or successive.

The idea of *ambiguity*, as against that of precision, refers to the capacity of an object to admit different understandings and interpretations. The ambiguous nature of periphery stems from the fact that its spatial reality creates uncertainty, doubt, and unpredictability, due to the conceptual ramification of its range of coexisting possible meanings. The unused, abandoned *terrains vagues* are perhaps the best way of illustrating the suggestive power of the urban void.

The idea of *contradiction*, as against that of coherence, has to do with the coexistence of opposing, mutually denying attributes. The role of the periphery as a host for all the uses and activities that find no place in the city has doubtlessly accentuated this condition over time. Its aesthetic possibilism derives from the many different (not necessarily compatible) uses and activities all sharing the same space at the same time, with new elements springing up at any stage. The result is an interrupted, intermittent landscape, whose visual rhythm is alternated by silences, pauses, and the ineluctable syncopated succession of perceived images. The intermittent uses of the periphery are accentuated by a dynamic drive constantly changing its shape and appearance in a way not found in the formal city. More specifically, peri-urban landscapes doubtlessly share all these attributes. Peri-urban vegetable gardens are a good example of this type of landscape. By definition, the city turns its back on the countryside, whereas the periphery-city absorbs the countryside into its DNA.

The idea of *hybridisation*, as against that of purity, comes from the phenomenon of elements of diverse origin and nature coinciding in space and time. On the periphery, the hybrid content can be seen in the confusion between opposing cultural constructs, e.g., city and country, nature and culture. A good example of this coexistence is the scenario of disued energy landscapes. Obsolete energy production and treatment plants provide a clear visual image of a hybrid landscape resulting from neglect, an artificial environment invaded and re-colonised by nature. This attribute is common to many scenarios where abandoned industrial artefacts determine our perception of the landscape.

Finally, the idea of *simultaneity*, as against that of succession, refers to two or more phenomena occurring at the same time. Simultaneous events do not follow logically from what went before. The multiple, simultaneous condition of the periphery can be seen in its ability to alter the progressive order of urban events and in its flexibility for absorbing elements much more quickly than in a standard successive process. The convergence of both aspects characterises the periphery as a territory of fluctuation, as a liquid landscape. The experience of the periphery landscape is somewhat similar to perception of a moving image, as seen from the interstices in urban mobility or regional transport systems. From the vantage point of such visual platforms, the landscape on the other side of the window is perceived in constant movement.

Each category of periphery relates to different attributes, material qualities, landscape perception, and temporality. Ambiguity, exemplified by *terrains vagues*, relates to material conditions such as limitlessness or vagueness, and represents a form of absent-minded perception in slow motion. Contradiction, illustrated by urban vegetable gardens, relates to material conditions such as fragmentation or anomie, and represents an interrupted perception of intermittent flashes. Hybridisation, exemplified by obsolete energy landscapes, relates to the material condition of abandon, and represents a type of delayed romantic perception in "standby" tempo. Finally, simultaneity, expressed by moving landscapes, relates to material conditions such as multiplication and liquidity, and represents a cinema-type perception in zapper mode.

As we see, this set of characteristics may once have been typical of the periphery. However, at this particular point of the urbanisation process, these features not only characterise the periphery, but are also part of the overall reality of the contemporary city. In other words, the categories, landscape attributes, material conditions, types of perception and tempo of the periphery now apply to the entire metropolitan area. In brief, rather than a negative counterpart of the city, the periphery is now a paramount mirror and metaphor of contemporary urban life.

From the perspective of intervention and management of urban landscapes, this consideration of the periphery presents an excellent opportunity for re-thinking how we treat landscape, starting from new principles inspired by its *ambiguous, contradictory, hybrid* and *simultaneous* condition, by the material conditions and attributes of its landscapes.

In conclusion, we can no longer consider the peripheries as exceptions that do not quite fit into the established patterns for landscaping and management of urbanisation processes. On the other hand, by considering the peripheral landscapes as models of the deep changes affecting the heart of our contemporary metropolises, we can rebuild, on new principles, our ways of conceiving, representing, projecting, and inhabiting the urban landscape.

Walking along the edge

Pere Grimau

Fringes are the spaces on the margin of city planning that we see every day from the windows of cars or public transport as we commute in and out of the city. We experience real problems defining and delimiting these fringes, but we all agree that they produce a sense of strangeness and aesthetic rejec-

tion for a certain type of conservative mentality. However, over and above aesthetic considerations, it is true that social, environmental, and other types of problems tend to concentrate (but not necessarily originate) on these city fringes. Nevertheless, before leaping in with ethical or aesthetic value judgements, we should leave our prejudices behind and become acquainted with the reality of these areas. I propose to make a close, direct observation of the fringes simply by walking through them. In the chapter corresponding to this summary, there are no certainties, no answers, no value judgements, only the transcription of direct experiences of the fringe territory from my position as a walker and photographer. These experiences, like many others, seek to understand the fringes and the peripheries, and to incorporate them into our collective imagination.

Historically, the first aesthetic experiences of sea, desert and mountain helped to incorporate those concepts into our culture. The paradox could well arise that what we now perceive as undeniable, irrational ugliness may become protected and subject to strict conservation orders in the future.

My artistic work over the last ten years, in individual or group projects, has been directly related to the territory of the fringes. Three elements have been constant in my relationship with the fringes: I walk around them, I take photographs, and I concentrate on the areas around Barcelona, especially Baix Llobregat County. Examples from different sources show that most social, economic, and political problems today find an explanation in this complex, contemporary, constantly updating, metropolitan territory. Throughout this area, we come across vestiges from the past, more or less relegated to oblivion. In addition, although it may seem impossible, the beauty of our heritage landscape is contained here in this territory.

The fringe territory is very near and at the same time very far away. One can live there without having anything to do with it. Daily life blunts our capacity for seeing without prejudices, and we build up layers of insensitivity towards our surroundings, all the more so when we have no blueprints for assimilating them. We flee from these territories because we find them ugly, abominable and stressful, or simply because we place no value on them. In my work, walking around, I try to break through the fine membrane that separates my condition of dwelling on the periphery from the act of experiencing the periphery as such. The walking mind-set is the tool that makes this shift possible. In my early works, I was a dreamy photographer, a solitary walker through the geography of the peripheries. Between 2000 and 2007, I used to go out on walking trips that gradually acquainted me with the fringe areas of Barcelona. On these walks, the periphery appeared as a juncture, a hinge articulating the different urban realities of the territory. As a photographer, the im-

ages I captured merely aimed at reflecting my condition as an urban dweller in a territory that was as near as it was unknown. The images carried echoes of the Romantic poets and of the great walkers of history. Among the motorways, industrial premises and weekend houses, I caught glimpses of Montserrat Mountain, lauded by the Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer, and I was reminded of some lines penned by Joaquim Rubió i Ors, which might have drawn their inspiration from the makeshift shacks lining the banks of the River Llobregat.

The Italian Osservatorio Nomade (ON) was founded by the Stalker Group in 2001 as an open-ended online system of exploring the contemporary city. ON, in collaboration with Can Xalant Centre for Contemporary Thought and Creation, proposed the Streams//Riverbeds project, that was developed by a new group called Observatori Nòmada Barcelona (ON BCN). Streams//Riverbeds made a collective, trans-disciplinary exploration of the *ultracity* of Barcelona. Five groups set out from different points about 30km outside Barcelona, and walked back towards the city over a three-day period. Each stretch of the route had a guide who, not without his or her fair share of contradictions, enabled the group to roam through territories that often turned out to be labyrinths. My individual experience of the fringes was now a group experience; as a member of a group, one's understanding of the territory is completely different to that of the solitary walker. Streams//Riverbeds was a symbolic action in itself; the groups roamed through the territory, experiencing it without mediation, listening, interacting and documenting. At some points, we questioned the whole meaning of the project, and wondered whether it was not just a new form of ordinary tourism. However, Lorenzo Romito, founding member of Stalker, has no doubts: "This exercise is useful not only for setting up a direct, immediate relationship, but also because the researcher becomes an integral part of the research, an observer and a participant, which prevents him from shunning reality and its development" (Romito, 2007: p. 2-3).

Streams//Riverbeds did not bring about any changes in the territory, which is still just as constricted, contradictory and on the verge of collapse as ever. The only clear transformation perceived was in the participants themselves. We were able to read the landscape through the reactions of the others; one single walk multiplied into a myriad of experiences, a sort of measuring out the territory, with the body as the unit of measurement. The documentation gathered along the journey by the participants was put on file: drawings, notes, footage and, above all, photographs. On the one occasion that I was not working as a photographer of the periphery, the project was inundated by photographs to the point of collapse.

The Streams//Riverbeds walk was meant to be the first part of a larger research project, but the or-

ganisation structure did not prove solid enough to provide continuity. However, the members of ON BCN came up with several new proposals. In the first place, the Observation and Intervention in the Territory group (OITgrup) emerged in 2008 with a proposal for the ON River Llobregat project. The initiative aimed to extend the walking exercises of the Streams//Riverbeds project to the northern sector of Baix Llobregat County, a territory considered suitable on account of its complexity and relatively small dimensions. Since OITgrup was set up, the multiple fringes in this territory have given rise to several artistic proposals.

After ON River Llobregat, we embarked on a new walking exploration project, called ON Prat. Towards the end of 2008, El Prat de Llobregat Town Council wanted to plan a series of artistic interventions in its municipal territory. The artists' lack of acquaintance with the terrain provided a suitable opportunity for using walking as a way of understanding the urban reality of El Prat with a minimum amount of mediation. In this case, several members of ON BCN designed and coordinated an open-ended exploration of El Prat municipal area. We were interested in the territories out on the edge, convinced that from the fringes we could get an unprejudiced understanding of the reality of the town. Fences and geographic features determined most of our nine walking routes around the municipal area. It is not possible to have a cross-section experience of the territory; the walking experience is largely dictated by the presence of billboards and barbed wire. In El Prat de Llobregat, the fringes and the periphery are nearly extinct as a juncture space. The fences protecting the airport, the Nature Park and the Agriculture Park also confine the population within the urban territory. Working on the photo files, we were able to articulate a response to the territory and the obstacles in the way of walkers wishing to explore it.

Finally, the DOG TRACK/DOG TRACK project, designed for an ideas competition run by the Catalan Government's National Council for Culture and the Arts, proposed a walk around the edges of Barcelona and an approach to the city of the 1960s and 1970s. The idea was to *walk* a human-scale assessment of occupancy on the edges of the city. On that occasion, we took photographs with the aim of providing an image of the city/man binomial on the edges of the city. The seven-day route began and ended at the former dog track, with some 30 people taking part, including architects, anthropologists, artists, photographers, and so on. After the walks, we collected the images in a book, which then took on a life of its own and became another reality, parallel to the walks. The intention behind the book was not to provide a conclusion or the authorised version of the route: it is a different reality.

As Francesco Careri says on the subject of walking, "It may not be much, but if it only changes some people's way of seeing and experiencing the city, then that is already quite a lot" (Careri, Domènec, Faus, Grimau, 2010: p. 321).

The periphery as non-landscape

Aurora Fernández Polanco

The Minister of Public Works during the Second Spanish Republic, Indalecio Prieto, presented a plan for Madrid railway connections in 1933. At the time, the Republic was experiencing an unprecedented effervescence of urban planning, with which the authorities were enthusiastically tackling the terrible problem of the capital's outlying districts. Prieto's concept of urban planning was fundamentally British; his maxim was to achieve "for each family, a sunny house with a garden set against the stunning backdrop of the Guadarrama Mountains", and for the working classes he aspired to emulate the first British suburbs. His maxim would read somewhat differently today: for each family one house, four cars, and a garden with an artificial lawn sold by the square metre in the large suburban shopping centres.

In structural terms, the urban sprawl and peri-urbanization are new phenomena, more than regional-scale expansions of the old urban peripheries. However, the case study that I present belongs to the latter category. In the middle of the Spanish Civil War, the Second Republic drew up a regional plan for Madrid *from outside to inside*, passed immediately after one of the most destructive bomb attacks on the city. I start by citing this episode in order to describe the location of Madrid University Campus, on the periphery of the city in the 1930s, and still an exceptional campus today. Although no longer out in the country, it has so far escaped the usual outrages of speculative urbanism. The Universidad Complutense's Faculty of Fine Arts is here, the place where conceptual artist Perejaume set out on foot from Madrid, carrying three 18th-century drawings in a folder strapped to his back. Taking his poetically anachronistic gesture as a starting point, we will put together a small story that will help us to understand the periphery as landscape.

On contemplating Marseille in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin described a "hand-to-hand combat of telegraph poles with agaves, barbed wire with prickly palms" (Benjamin, 1995: p. 16) where the outlying districts represented a town in a state of emergency. In 1950, Eugeni d'Ors could still write "One step back and we find a street: houses, shops, life. One step forward and we find desolated, almost grass-less plains" (Nadal, Puig, 2002: p. 6). Walter Benjamin's disturbing dialectical game reflects the continued impact of his thought in the present day,

whereas Eugeni d'Ors' words show a more Hegelian sense of continuity.

The challenge chosen by Perejaume and his accompanying group was to walk out of Madrid from the University Campus through the chaos caused by the M-30 motorway road works. The exercise was heir to the modern tradition of walking through the landscape, which we will outline briefly here. Walker, walking, and landscape are a triad directly linked to aesthetics. Georg Simmel wrote that we convert nature into landscape when we step back and frame it. There is a lack of self-interest in this acceptance of landscape, an attraction of otherness as an element of contemplation, a "conforming act of looking", a delimitation essential for transforming something into landscape. Into a certain concept of landscape, of course. An idealistic concept too closely linked to the frame and to the subject of the vision that has predominated in modern culture.

Walkers on the periphery have an eye for the curious, far removed from that of other eyes that lose themselves in contemplation of lofty summits and misty seas. The Dadaist walkers may have been the first to espouse heterodoxical modernity, but they had a picturesque motivation to their walking. They were curious bourgeois strollers who initiated new modes of behaviour and developed new sensations, but they came nowhere near Simmel's gaze as a walker at one with the world. The Dadaists and the Surrealists were in debt to many features of Baudelaire's *flâneur*, resurrected by Walter Benjamin, the *flâneur* walking amidst the crowd with a combination of diffuse observation and dreamy contemplation. Benjamin's *flâneur* was heir to the Surrealist strollers, concerned as they were with other types of profane experience and enlightenment. Their experience of landscape culminated in the Situationist *dérive* and psycho-geography: a recreational appropriation of space. After the major social changes of the late 1960s, walking has evolved from the contemplations of the traditional rambler and the entertainment of the surrealist stroller to become part of the art=life equation. This is where the suburbs make their entrance.

However, life is all about playing and laughing, drinking and dancing. Pasolini portrays this very well with his poems and with his cinema images. For him, the *borgate* suburban slums are the habitat of a new mythology, representing the existence of a periphery in the strong sense of the word, where remoteness from the centre signifies remoteness in terms of cultural models. The miserable shapes of the slums generate an intense aesthetic experience that no *high culture* can bring about. It is essential to recognise *that* Italy as it is, not as another place of misery.

We do not conceive the urban sprawl periphery as landscape in Simmel's sense, nor as a space for living. Is it still possible to work out a psychophysics of space?

When I speak of the periphery as a non-landscape, I am referring to the peripheries of large cities, to the fringes as interfaces between different geographical realities and landscape configurations, fringes that are the threshold between mental and territorial realities more than the perimeter of a centre. We need many different perspectives to understand the logic and idiosyncrasies of the peripheries. One perspective is that of artists dealing with the periphery as a non-landscape, making frame shifts, seeking off-camera angles, systematically questioning the representation of the given.
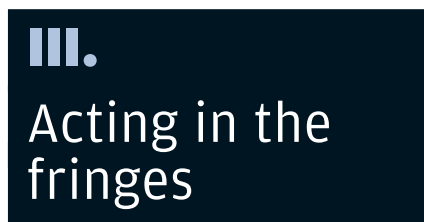
Cristina Peñamarín, Magdalena Mora and the author of the present article published a collection of essays entitled "Destrucción y Construcción del territorio. Memoria de Lugares Españoles" (*Destruction and Construction of the Territory. Memory of Spanish Places*) with Editorial Complutense. The book came out of our feeling of unease, as citizens, at the grave deterioration of the territory. The idea was to present documentation on the most flagrant cases of destruction of the territory and the most hopeful scenarios for its construction. The publication was completed with visual projects commissioned from different artists whose gaze would register surprise on contemplating places not their own. I would now like to refer briefly to some of these visual projects, particularly projects on the destruction of the territory, and to highlight aspects corroborating the idea of periphery as a non-landscape.

Rogelio López Cuenca's project on the Urban Development Action Programme of 3000 new dwellings for a population of 42,000 inhabitants at La Montaña (Aranjuez) is a good example. The project on Andalusia by Tonia Raquejo and Luis Ortega shows the phantasmagorical aspects of non-places, with the *Marbella-isation* of the beach on Isla Canela. The same artists find even critical aspects in the Pinar del Hierro Forest Park, originally designated as a "positive" project. In general terms, the artists participating in the publication had trouble with the required dichotomy (construction/ destruction of the territory; positive/ negative actions). We wonder whether this is because artists are more at home with nuances and awkward questions.

Human beings are characterised by inhabiting our own relocation. Our raison d'être is our disorientation, which is why we always try to find a place for ourselves. This should be a matter for the housing authorities to deal with, but we also find scattered incidences of self-managed ways of inhabiting places. We have seen how many young people have tried to solve the problem of atopia, i.e. the feeling of unease generated by space without places. We have seen other art works that treat the periphery as a landscape under assault. Bárbara Fluxá makes an interpretation of what she considers a cultural landscape in "Uncontrolled Refuse Dumps in Badajoz". Federico Guzmán's project addresses the devastating 2007 fire on Gran Canaria Island, and ends with

this quotation: "The fire aroused love of nature from its sleep". The hope-inspiring sentence invites us to revisit one of the images taken by Rogelio López Cuenca during a "positive" project in Madrid Sur district (Vallecas), a blown-up photo of Calle Volver a Empezar (*Start Again Street*).

Does starting again mean going back to modern clichés, as Campement Urbain appear to be doing with the Cité des Beaudottes in the Sevran *banlieue*? Is this the way to invert the negative image of the metropolis? Should we not state that, over recent years, the periphery has turned into a metropolis, in the etymological sense of "mother-city" (*métér-polis*), a generator of new social, cultural, and political models?

III.
Acting in the fringes

Urban peripheries. The experience of the Catalan landscape catalogues

Pere Sala

In recent decades, cities have been overflowing as a consequence of the intense dynamics of globalisation, metropolisation, and urban sprawl. The urban peripheries have spread out with little or no concern for the quality of the resulting landscape or for its efficiency as a model for a sustainable society and economy in the future. Today's urban peripheries are the everyday landscapes for millions of people all over Europe. The major challenge consists in regulating the huge potential of these spaces for the continuity of natural and agricultural systems, for residential and leisure use, and for economic development, with the aim of positively contributing to the quality of life of the people who live in or travel through these fringe areas.

In general, the first thing we notice here is the absence of narrative. The fringe landscapes usually have a great capacity for reinventing themselves, for permanently creating new values and new identities. Certain fringes retain some of the original place features and pre-existing natural, cultural, and social functions, although these are becoming increas-

ingly blurred and uninteresting for the inhabitants. Other more deteriorated fringes can turn into ideal scenarios for creative, integrated innovation projects from the social, economic, and environmental perspectives.

How should we interpret these places? How should we intervene on landscapes with huge potential but of more complex legibility than certain urban, natural, or rural landscapes? Can they be a focus of attraction for new economies? How can they become attractive to tourism? What sensations do these types of space evoke in their inhabitants? This summary of the corresponding chapter proposes a few reflections, coming out of the Catalan landscape catalogues, on the significance of the fringes in terms of landscape.

Fringes spreading to all types of landscape. Peripheries are present in most of the 135 landscapes of Catalonia. This is mainly due to a notable increase of fringe areas in small and medium-sized towns over the last 25 years, where urban growth rates have been proportionally higher than in the cities.

Fringes of an increasingly diverse nature represent very different landscape realities in each of the 135 landscapes. Despite variations in shape and function, there is a risk that all the peripheries will end up looking the same. The challenge for planning and intervention is to counteract this tendency by injecting diversity into the homogeneity.

Dissonant fringes. The relatively small percentage of urban land, building land, and land designated for infrastructures in Catalonia (6.3%) contrasts with the popular perception that much of the territory has already been spoiled. However, the problem is not *how much* but *how* this has occurred: the territory is dotted with buildings of all sizes, heights, shapes, colours and materials. The resulting ugliness greatly affects people's respect and appreciation for the landscape. This is detrimental to the quality of life of the people who live in and travel through these areas, and to the image projected by Catalonia beyond its borders.

Predomination of residential and industrial fringes. In terms of landscape, detached and/or semi-detached housing estates have brought about a change in shape and structure of the new settlements, ranging from new skylines to new urban shapes often contrasting with the traditional buildings of the nearby villages and towns. Other consequences include loss of quality forestry and agricultural lands, diminished ecological functionality of the remaining natural spaces, increased fire risk, and the alteration or obstruction of the horizon line. Catalonia has over two thousand industrial, commercial, services and logistics estates, some half-finished, concentrated along the main communications axes, and visibly contrasting with the surrounding landscapes.

Legible values and emerging values. Some

periphery landscapes are spaces with no apparent identity. At first sight, it is often hard to recognise any sort of overall meaning, coherence, or (natural, historical, production, aesthetic, social or symbolic) landscape values. However, obvious or latent values emerge from the middle of the seeming chaos and confusion, adding potential to the peripheries. It is important to pursue and encourage hints of latent values, as a way of endowing these spaces with more quality and identity.

Contradictory perceptions. The population generally perceives the fringes as degraded zones, or as the antithesis of landscape quality. This often results from the presence of certain infrastructures (communications, energy, etc.) that give rise to contradictory opinions. Planning should operate in both directions, i.e., by regulating and dealing with the physical aspects of endowing the fringes with attractive elements, and by paying special attention to the image and imageries generated by the new landscapes.

A plea for ignored fringes. One basic way of creating landscape imageries is the artistic perception, through artists' interpretations of the landscape. Until very recently, however, the fringe landscapes of Catalonia have received scant attention in literature, art, cinema, music and the media. American cinema, on the other hand, has reinforced many prejudices about certain types of fringes as odd, ignored, or even dangerous places. Public policymakers *must* re-think these media-exposed images.

Sense of place on the fringes. These places often produce a deep conflict of representation and meaning. How can we make the new inhabitants acquire a sense of place from these spaces? Sudden, far-reaching changes can cause feelings of unease, disquiet, and rootlessness among the population. Initiatives such as the recovery of vegetable allotments in Salt and Santa Eugènia (Girona) have contributed to restoring a collective sense of place.

Emerging landscapes on the peripheries. The intense mutability of contemporary peripheries leads to the emergence of new landscape forms that we must understand and provide with suitable responses. Examples of emerging landscapes include unfinished housing estates in the wake of the economic recession; new peripheries generated by airports operating with low-cost airlines; constantly increasing micro-interstitial spaces; proliferation of ephemeral artefacts, such as circuses and caravan halting sites; and the landscapes resulting from the increase of maize and sunflower crop fields.

The unequal challenge of fitting all the pieces into the puzzle. Maps have a tendency to become sacrosanct, which means that we must be very aware of what we represent on a map and how we represent it. We are faced with the challenge of mapping out what is happening on the periphery. How should we go about mapping the new landscape realities? How do we represent the changing

dynamics of these spaces? And the new identities emerging from them? We should probably replace planning systems based on conventional maps by others that include the new landscape representations.

Peri-urban agriculture plays a major role, by generating identity and economy, and contributing to maintaining biodiversity. This type of farming should be the main driving force for restructuring the peripheries of the future, by guaranteeing a network of farmlands characterised by maximum possible extension and minimum possible fragmentation. Peri-urban agriculture reinforces the role of the periphery as a hinge between the rural and urban worlds; it meets the requirements of consumers ever more aware of food safety and quality; and it increases the viability of these landscapes.

Efficient multifunctional fringes. The periphery is not an accumulation of diverse uses or a transition zone between the city centre and an increasingly urbanised countryside. It is a functional landscape in itself, a multifunctional landscape (from the social, economic, historical, environmental, and aesthetic perspectives) in which different activities come together and generate beneficial synergies.

Towards ephemeral, malleable fringes. We should get used to the idea of ephemeral, malleable fringes in our approach to planning and intervention. It would be a mistake to apply here the same solid, compact concepts used to design the central city. We will have to come up with flexible, agile ideas for *personalised* peripheries, with the emphasis on ephemeral, reversible concepts.

Making visible the historical footprints on the peripheries is important as a way to maintain the identity of these often-illegible contemporary landscapes. Awareness of the existence of, and the interrelationship between, farmhouses, canals and fields and other features of the landscape throughout history provides guidelines for urban, heritage, and sectorial planning on the fringes.

The fringes can cease to be the city's spillover space. We should defend the capacity of town centres for integrating spillover into their own urban fabric instead of continuing to transport it out to the valuable fertile land of the periphery. Likewise, we should also defend the capacity of the peripheries for absorbing rural infrastructures and services into their urban elements instead of using up even more valuable land.

Walling the city. We should try to prevent the sprawl spreading out further, as far as possible, and "wall" the city, metaphorically speaking. We should work towards creating a compact city that would respect the relationship between urban and rural environments, guarantee continuity between planning development and existing urban stretches, respect the heritage footprints in the territory, and avoid loss of fertile land.

The fringes are spaces of opportunity for the economy (starting with agriculture), leisure, cultural activities, transport, and energy production, among many other possibilities, and can contribute values to both cities and rural environments. In the present context of the globalised economy, characterised by growing competition among territories, landscape quality and specificity are two increasingly relevant factors of attraction and competitiveness, especially for companies in the more advanced sectors of the economy (technologies, information, innovation, etc.), but also for other sectors such as leisure and cultural activities.

Integrated quality projects. Integrated quality projects are needed to imprint character on today's underrated peripheries. Any such initiative must set out to recover the memory and place identity of the more marginal spaces, and involve the inhabitants in the project. A set of well thought out and well managed landscape projects can have an enormous catalysing and multiplying effect on other similar landscapes lacking in responses.

Landscape recycling. Certain disused economic infrastructures (e.g. former factories and power stations) and desolate industrial territories are now starting to acquire meaning and value for the population as an identity symbol of the local or larger area. Should we consider some of these scattered artefacts as heritage? Which ones are the most appreciated? By what criteria? We can widen and further complicate the debate by including other, not necessarily industrial, elements from the 20th century, as is now happening in some countries.

Educating our gaze on the fringes is fundamental for raising landscape awareness in spaces usually undervalued by the public. We are speaking here about non-directive education with the aim of educating the gaze in a metaphorical sense, i.e., raising awareness that the fringes are also meaningful, that they are susceptible to improvement, and how this can contribute positively to the quality of life of the population. Among other initiatives, the *City, Territory and Landscape* classroom materials help to deepen understanding of the values and dynamics of the peripheries.

In conclusion, the peripheries are a type of landscape that must be carefully thought out and treated as a main player in the structuring of the territory. For this to happen, we will have to substantially modify the time and place scales we are used to dealing with, and understand that today's social, symbolic (and even landscape) terms of reference are constantly changing. We are immersed in a global change in which the fringes, given their hugely dynamic, changing nature, will play a predominant role.

Preservation and adaptation of farming in peri-urban spaces. The example of Regadiu de Manresa

Ignasi Aldomà

Over the centuries, intensive farming has grown up on the outskirts of towns and cities in order to ensure their supplies of produce. In recent years, however, these zones have suffered from recession in the agricultural sector, and from the effects of expansion and sprawl of towns and cities. Manresa is an example of a town that is considering its options for regulating these peri-urban agricultural spaces. This involves raising public awareness of the value of these spaces in terms of production, environment, sports and leisure, heritage and landscape.

The features of Manresa's irrigated land area, known as Regadiu de Manresa, and the processes that have taken place are typical of the phenomena occurring on farming land located near towns and cities. The historical characteristics of these spaces coincide with the classic pattern of land use distribution originally described by Johann Heinrich von Thünen. His theory shows how farming profits decrease with increasing distance from the city, and how farming systems evolve according to their ability to generate income. This process derives not only from transport costs, as described in the original theory, but also from other proximity-related advantages that lead to intensive farming belts growing up on the outskirts of towns and cities. In the Mediterranean context, this mainly consists of vegetable production.

The land surrounding Manresa, as with most medium-sized towns, has traditionally been an intensive farming area, and much farmland still exists here today. Manresa is a Mediterranean town, so this type of farming depends on the presence of water, essential for producing most fruit and vegetable crops and/or obtaining higher yields from crops associated with non-irrigated land. Manresa draws its water supply from the River Llobregat via the Manresa Canal, built in the 14th century. For this reason, the peri-urban farming spaces flank the canal.

Manresa's urban expansion has been eating into its irrigated land area, now reduced to 600 hectares owned by 1500 smallholders. The current legislation has listed 391 hectares as a protected agricultural zone. This in turn is divided into two areas of similar size: El Poal and Viladordis. As in similar proposals for regulation of the Metropolitan Area in Barcelona and other cities, the irrigated land area is also part of the green belt that delimits urban growth and conserves and provides continuity for the natural and rural spaces surrounding the city, considering their functions for the economy, for the environment, and for leisure and education. Our case study

presents a public intervention approach to peri-urban planning. This approach takes place within a wider framework of reflection on other peri-urban areas, thereby adding greater scope and interest to the subject.

The characteristic features of the peri-urban areas from 30-40 years ago are immersed in a process of accelerated change, fuelled by the appearance of new dynamics linked to farming activity. Some land has been given over to extensive farming; other areas have simply been abandoned. Elsewhere, farming has been replaced by other uses and pursuits on the limit, or even beyond the limit, of agricultural activity as such. The proliferation of residential developments of different types and sizes, reconverted farm buildings for residential or similar uses, and new services and industries may or may not bear any relationship to the previous properties, facilities, and economic activities in the area.

The above-listed changes have resulted in the peri-urban space losing its historical (mainly agricultural) points of reference, and turning into an extraordinarily diverse space in terms of uses and activities. The transformation would not warrant much attention or preoccupation if the new uses were not at odds with one another, or did not jeopardise the equilibrium and general interest of the area under discussion.

In order to tackle the peri-urban imbalance, action will have to be taken on the two fundamental, mutually reinforcing dynamics of change, i.e. urban sprawl and agricultural recession. From the agricultural perspective, the main concern is to keep farming alive, which involves maintaining and promoting the high value-added agriculture formerly characterising the peri-urban spaces. Measures include the promotion of more intensive horticulture and agriculture by developing short-distance commercialisation channels; search for alternatives to extensive agriculture by using crops with a higher added value; adaptation of the social function of farming (mainly family-run vegetable farms) to the new needs and demands; exploitation of multi-functionality and complementarities between farming and the town; and finally, improvement of production structures by encouraging land grouping and infrastructure adaptation.

The dynamisation of production in peri-urban spaces depends on the remaining agricultural holdings and on new initiatives that may emerge in the area. It is therefore vital to recognise and involve both aspects for the proposed actions to succeed.

Interventions designed for agricultural activity will run into difficulties without prior regulation of urban growth that can often weigh in against such measures. The current urbanism regulation is mainly correct insofar as it delimits farming space and its uses and activities: the problem usually lies in the enforcement of the law. There are several options available for approaching the problem. Firstly,

new planning laws could widen the scope of public regulation and intervention. Secondly, a new type of intervention based on landscape, heritage, and the environment could introduce greater planning quality and complexity, adapted to the new functions of the peri-urban space and based on criteria of landscape quality and conservation, and on parameters of environmental and cultural heritage. A final option could be to incorporate new urban functions into the peri-urban space such as educational activities, walking routes, and sport and leisure facilities, while respecting the fundamentally agricultural nature of the territory and the configuration of the landscape. On the other hand, given the huge differences in land prices and the speculation pressure thus generated, we could also consider more pro-active interventions by private entities or associations, as for example land stewardship.

As residential and activity centres, towns and cities now have the opportunity to reformulate their relationship with their agricultural surroundings with new proposals and commitments. This is the starting point for exploiting the environmental, production, educational, leisure, and aesthetic values of peri-urban farming spaces, that is to say, for using the opportunities offered by a fringe landscape in transition.

Calabria and Sicily. Landscapes in waiting

Fabio Manfredi

The periphery in Calabria and Sicily is a city *built by its inhabitants*. It is a city of spontaneous, often illegal, settlement, with an inexistent urban structure and an unplanned, unregulated public space. The streets, squares, and pavements are residue, debris, or surplus left over from the self-building process carried out by part of the population. In fact, the citizens have created a territory in their own liking, with a little advice from building technicians and the complicity of the public administration employees, in response above all to the requirements of the family structure. They have built up urban agglomerations following a precise set of clandestine rules coming out of a complex network of tradition combined with individual interests.

The periphery is a sum of residential districts made up of buildings that appear to be placed at random, without rhyme or reason. Inevitably, the empty spaces of nature (or landscape) left between the buildings become an urban void: oases of spontaneous greenness, vegetable plots, and unauthorised private gardens. Public spaces, dwellings, and nature live side by side in flexible relationships with a spectacular organisational diversity. The urban

peripheries of Calabria and Sicily are a refuge for diversity, built out of all the residues and debris of human activity. They share the undecided character peculiar to the "third landscape", described by the French researcher Gilles Clément as a territory for multiple species with nowhere else to go. This is a territory admitting multiple activities, functions, materials, and freedoms incompatible with the consolidated city, as in our case. In his Manifesto of the Third Landscape, Clément describes the residues as terrains waiting for a destiny and hoping for the completion of abandoned projects.

Calabria and Sicily are almost entirely terrains (landscapes) in waiting. Waiting for what? For a project? For a strategy? For a policy? In order to read or try to interpret the landscape of the urban periphery in Calabria and Sicily, to understand its emergencies and apparent requirements we must understand the relationship between the inhabitants of southern Italy and the landscape itself, and understand their idea of landscape.

The great facility of the cinema for explaining the landscape and the ways of inhabiting it provides a privileged critical perspective and an unusual approach to research. The realism and caustic cynicism of cinematic descriptions of Sicily and Calabria give a portrait of the use of this territory and the contradictory relationship between the population and the landscape, above all in the extraordinary vitality of the public space in both areas. The images show intimate, everyday landscapes used for all types of collective activities, often inhabited by strange domestic animals, such as sheep and horses; full of vitality during the day and at night.

Despite the shortages of the *empty space* (narrow pavements, nondescript road surfaces, insufficient lighting, almost total lack of places to sit, absence of shaded walkways), the squares, streets, lanes and patios are largely representative of the community, due to the economic activity carried out there by the inhabitants. Obviously, these factors do not match up to universally recognised quality standards, but they make the empty space into a real public space, a space of relationship, a community space delimited by boundaries recognised by its inhabitants, a space of belonging, with all its knots and meshes, its networks and codes of behaviour.

In this context, we can safely say that architecture has failed on numerous occasions. The forty re-zoning projects carried out over the last twenty years on the peripheries in Sicily and Calabria have had no place in academic journals or in contemporary debate; their quality and relevance have failed to capture the interest of the population. Architecture is often accused of being chronically incapable of clear expression, unable to find the right balance between globalization and regionalization of languages and cultural references. The landscape project in Calabria and Sicily has undoubtedly been more *local* than *global*; however, in these contexts,

it still seems that architecture has either moved away, or has become too isolated or too obvious, despite obtaining the same effect, self-contracting or self-reducing.

The problem may have been the approach rather than the language. In most cases, there was no foreseeing the flexibility and willingness to adapt that would be essential in these spaces of a *city built by its inhabitants*; a malleability often put aside in favour of an architectural aesthetic or philosophy far from the prevailing contamination. A project is first and foremost the opportunity of a programme through which the periphery can be turned into a pole of attraction for the economy. Here, however, neither the production potential or endogenous resources were assessed for producing wealth or for encouraging spontaneous actions deriving from the re-zoning policy.

There may have been a lack of systematic, more homeopathic logic, in search of a generalised quality to counteract the marginal conditions of the urban area. The specific solutions hitherto applied may have offered quality, but did not in themselves guarantee a valid response to the demands of urban development, such as a system of public spaces or a planned, consensual re-zoning strategy in different spheres leading to a generalised landscape quality.

Perhaps Calabria and Sicily are simply landscapes waiting for architects and landscape experts to teach us how to produce an explicit aesthetic vision, how to gain a voice and a vocabulary, how to educate our gaze.

Hydraulic fringes, between geographical distress and survival strategies: the case of the Veneto mainland

Francesco Vallerani

The most urgent issue currently affecting the quality of lived spaces in the western world is the remarkable spread of the urban sprawl phenomenon. The major concern is the huge consumption of land, in particular, of valuable fertile land designated for agriculture. This leads to irreversible loss of the main support underpinning the basic eco-systems, and to an alteration in the dynamics of the hydro-geological system. In Italy, from the beginning of the new millennium, there has been a perturbing growth in property speculation affecting residential, production, and commercial sectors. This leads to a need to adapt road infrastructures and mobility fluxes in order to cope with the new situation. The phenomenon irreversibly deteriorates the quality of everyday landscapes and, despite growing citi-

zen awareness of the issues involved (as seen in the many organisations and associations springing up in defence of the territory), the government has still not taken clear, efficient initiatives for a more vigilant territorial planning. Geographers and experts from other fields (architects, anthropologists, ecologists, sociologists, and psychologists) have the task of speaking out in one clear voice that will keep critical thought open to proposing valid alternatives.

The first step in this direction is to deconstruct the government demagogical rhetoric of *doing*, based on flamboyant announcements more than on expert analysis of the effective use of projects, assessment of environmental impact, and cost-benefit relationships. Unfortunately, Italy has a long history of unedifying episodes of carrying out large-scale projects generating lucrative benefits, with no thought for adapting the project in proportion to the requirements of the affected community. Furthermore, we should mention the Italian peculiarity whereby *doing* is often somehow or other linked to Mafia interests.

The huge expansion of negative aspects of urban development is the backdrop against which we can analyse the recent transformation of the Veneto plain. The mainland of Venice is now characterised by a scattered proliferation of untidy peripheral fringes spreading out over what was, until very recently, a rural environment. The presence of a complex hydrographical network, of great interest from the historical and environmental perspectives, comes into collusion with the expansion of the urban sprawl, thereby posing grave problems for correct territorial management. Up to a few years ago, these water landscapes were undervalued. The same is true of the cultural imagery developed in connection with these lands over the centuries since the Middle Ages, despite historians, geographers, art historians and experts in ancient cartography insisting on the historical importance of the river landscapes on the Veneto plain. We should mention here the enormous influence of Andrea Palladio, in his defence of the river environments, hydraulic iconography, and numerous projects designed to control the waters, irrigation, and drainage of the lowlands.

At this point, we should approach the problem of recovering the rich hydrographical system of the Veneto mainland, where land consumption is closely linked to cultural, economic, and structural motivations that are still valid today. However, we should also note the growing social demands for green spaces for leisure activities and/or physical and mental regeneration, and attractive landscapes with the added symbolic value now considered important for improving the spaces of everyday life.

The revalorization process of water landscapes also involves the sectors on the lower Veneto plain between the Po and Tagliamento rivers. In the past, these areas were transformed by drainage projects to make the land suitable for agriculture; special importance is attached to manmade canals, dykes, pipes, irrigation channels, and drainage systems. The watercourses are controlled to favour intensive agriculture, but measures are now being taken to protect and recover the marshlands and the traditional landscape. This change in approach echoes the change in social attitude towards lived spaces. The demand "from below" is the starting point for concrete strategies for territorial innovation.

We must also bear in mind is the need to retrieve the former link between the inhabitants of Veneto and their rivers, by promoting citizen awareness of the risks threatening the hydraulic system in the territory. As well as the main rivers, it is equally important to take into account the dense network of smaller rivers running through the peripheral fringes, considered more as an obstacle to housing development than as an opportunity to restore the environmental quality of the landscapes. The smaller rivers are also part of the memory of these places, with a rich bank of history from which we can learn useful lessons on the negative effects of excessive human presence, particularly so in these worrying times of climate anomalies.

Over the centuries, the short, humble rivers of the Veneto plain have witnessed the growth a solid production organisation related to agricultural and artisan activity, as well as to commercial navigation systems linking up the numerous inhabited areas along the banks of the watercourses. Historical sources enable us to reconstruct the evolution of relationships between the local population and the hydrographical network; this could prove to be a valid starting point for a regeneration of the river landscapes within the urban sprawl. Fieldwork reveals environmental quality along these *veins* of water. An interdisciplinary approach from urbanism, human geography and the natural sciences is needed in order to recompose the main aspects of an ever-increasingly shared competence on hydrographical matters.

In a territory as rich in hydrographical features as the Veneto plain, we could work towards a sort of *hydraulic humanism* that would underpin the recovery and reorganisation of the chaotic peripheral fringes, as well as fostering political management of the water landscapes. This is particularly necessary in the aftermath of the recent series of water-related disasters, e.g. the impact of prolonged periods of drought (as in summer 2003), and the drama of devastating flooding (as in August-November 2010).

However, leaving aside the global dynamics behind the irrefutable climate change that is altering the water cycle and corresponding waterways, we need careful analysis of the relationships between the expansion of the peripheral fringes and the hydrographical network, as for example on the Veneto plain. This requires an assessment of the smaller

imbalances, minor degradations, and everyday inefficiencies, as well as the cumulative dumping of polluting substances that is impoverishing the quality of the water.

At this stage, we should consider the concept of *river corridor*, in the sense of a specific territorial interface between land and water systems, like a lineal oasis winding its way through densely populated regions. The value of a river corridor depends on the width of the spaces along its banks and on the quality of the area of fluvial digression, extremely important for containing the water during periods of increased volume of flow. In most hydrographical segments lying inland from the more industrialised regions of the world, there is a somewhat belated awareness of the importance of river corridors. Over the last century, hydrographical networks on the Veneto plain and elsewhere have suffered from exacerbated engineering interventions to meet the growing demand for more space for human activities, mainly linked to the expansion of urban development. In the case of the Veneto rivers, the artificial expansion of the hydrographical system has reduced the efficiency of the natural system of river flows, particularly as regards the absorption of water level rises and the dissolution of polluting substances in the rivers.

As mentioned above, the Veneto plain is witnessing an increase in public awareness of environmental and landscape values. This is occurring notably in the demand for suitable leisure spaces in built-up areas, by virtue of which each remaining natural stretch will play a major role in improving the quality of life in the degraded peripheral areas. The new social attitudes also generate a keen interest in river corridors, together with plans to promote public use of the hydrographical systems, especially the pre-Alpine segments and the watercourses running into the Venice lagoon. The strategy is a first response from the Administration to an ever-increasing popular awareness of the environment.

By now, a large segment of the population is aware of the advantages of living in a healthy environment, away from the galloping advance of the urban fringes. The political response is not very efficient, however, and all too often ignores the many environmental problems that still determine the relationship between human beings and waterways. A handful of initiatives would suffice to organise the new territorialities required by the growth of sustainable leisure and tourism; long stretches of the Brenta, Sile, Piave and Livenza rivers, for example, offer considerable environmental potential. Maintenance of the river corridors is closely linked to a general improvement in the quality of the urban peripheries. In the near future, this could lead to satisfactory strategies for overcoming the grave geographical distresses, by carrying out economic interventions for a more responsible, sustainable development.

MAD#sub. Notes from the *sub-suburbs* of Madrid

Sitesize*

MAD#sub is part of a research project on the territorial dynamics of the sub-suburban belt around Madrid. The project, set up by Sitesize in September 2010, is a micro-research/action process based on the production of a workshop, an exploration of the different ways of representing the landscape of the periphery, its cultural practices and the autonomous narratives and personal experiences generated by the transformation of these boundary spaces.

The condition of the large metropolises and ways of life: this is the keystone for a discourse on culture as a collective project, for investigating possible ways of appropriation. At a time when privatization of commonly owned resources is a resort for financial development, we must work towards collective ways of thinking and acting that may bring about new spheres of significance. The aim is thus to work from cultural creation in order to generate knowledge coming out of the community.

The periphery of Madrid as a case study. Over the last few years, in the aftermath of the real estate boom, we have been witnessing a crisis in the neoliberal model of development. Madrid has become a scenario where the economic collapse has clearly demonstrated the voraciousness of the system. Its legacy is a peripheral landscape of unfinished infrastructures and macro-projects spread out all over the suburban territory. Economics took priority over people, generating built-up spaces with no inhabitants, and social environments with no basis for everyday human exchange. The scenario of a story yet to be told, in which the urban imaginary does not coincide with actual experience of the place. Where cultural construct is upheld as an exercise of friction between what is possible and what is necessary.

MAD#sub is a dynamic for collective reflection, aiming to gain direct experience of the periphery and revisit some of the urban and economic analyses coming out of Madrid over recent years.

#Formule 1

We leave the motorway. According to Google Maps, the hotel is located in an industrial estate. We drive through deserted streets, passing parked trucks and cargo containers. Our yellow headlights shed a dismal atmosphere over the whole area. We follow the signs. We drive past the hotel without finding the way in. We get back to where we started. We drive around to the right once more, and we make out a metal gate in the gloom. We reverse. A sign hanging up reads "Key in the access code". Beside the sign, there is an interphone with a back-lit button. I push

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* By request of the authors, this summary consists of the first four unabridged pages from the original article.

the button and a woman's voice invites us to drive in. The automatic gate swings open. We park the car inside the enclosure. On the door, there is another sign asking us to key in the six-digit access code. We don't have the code. The receptionist activates the door from her desk. She asks for our ID and assigns us a room. No. 337, third floor, non-smoking. She prints out this information for us.

The blue carpet covering the floor and the stairs has a diamond-shaped pattern in an eyesore shade of red. We follow the arrows and the room numbers until we find our door. Once again "Key in the access code". This time we have the code. We look at the printout and we key in the six digits. The door opens with a click. The room is cold. The window is open; the place smells of cigarette smoke. I go over to the window and lean out before closing it. Two police officers are downstairs at reception. Maybe they are looking for somebody. It is nearly three am. It must be a routine inspection. Ten minutes later, they start up their car, the gate opens, and they drive off into the darkness.

The bathrooms are automated cabins down the corridor. Everything works by sensors. The motel does not need many people staffing it. In fact, the first places like this did not even have receptionists. After prepayment by credit card, the client received a code to access the building and the room. The experiment did not work out very well in Spain and they changed over to personalised check-in at a traditional reception desk.

I fall asleep watching the reflection of the flashing lights of Nassica, the popular leisure centre. Packed with visitors on Friday night.

#Ambient music
It is 10.30 on Saturday morning. The loudspeakers blare out music relentlessly. They are omnipresent, invading every corner of Nassica shopping and leisure centre. We have breakfast, we bask in the sun, we read the newspaper. It's too early for the piped music. In the shopping centre, no spaces are without a design or a programme. Unexpected moments are not allowed. Time and space, the two absolutes, are totally occupied and controlled. They belong to a generic condition, beyond the realm of specific places and circumstances. Time and space become interchangeable in their programmed condition, immune to individual behaviour and contextual singularities. No security cameras are needed in anticipation of disturbance. The design of the place forestalls the need for security staff. The ambient music is an echo requiring no interpretation or internalisation. It matches the images and objects overflowing in every corner. Everything here exists to fill the mind's capacity of retention. Filling and stuffing the mind, keeping out all images and sounds other than those transmitted by the relentless programming. The noise equalises all the spaces in the shopping centre. There is no emptiness or silence, no opportunities for awkward questions or independent thoughts. An environment that overwhelms wordlessly, pushing out to the limits of the tolerable, and leaving us in a state of inescapable irritation, of sluggish saturation.

The place in the image has become the image of the place. Representation is superimposed on experience. What place are we talking about? About a space that is more than a state of awareness, that belongs to the threshold of the invisible. Being neither inside nor outside. Being *in-between*, where it is possible to be dispossessed of the self.

#Strange land
There is something for everybody. We can choose between Mexican, Thai, or Chinese restaurants, Italian cuisine, tapas, sushi, whatever. People cluster around the menus and finally opt for one or the other. In the emptiness of the night, we are carried away by the leisure centre. The neon lights flicker on and off in time to the music radiating around the space. A bunch of children in harnesses hang from a vertical structure spewing out green and purple sparkles. A dizzying experience for a child's body.

The central passage channels the customers according to their preferences. Cinemas upstairs. Up to fifteen new films showing tonight. All for your eyes. Recreation area downstairs. One-armed bandits, video games. A billiard table at the back of the hall. We lose our bearings among the people and the pinball machines beeping out their bonus awards. On two panoramic screens in the next hall, teenagers compete side by side against the extraterrestrial invasion from Strange Land.

We decide to go into the Mexican restaurant. We wait patiently until a friendly rancher comes out and seats us in the last row in the corner. The place is full to bursting point. We choose fajitas, guacamole and nachos with typical specialities. We try to have a conversation. The background music, the crowd of people at the tables and the appalling acoustics oblige us to raise our voices. We end up shouting to make ourselves heard.

We finish our food and go out to the Agora square for a breath of fresh air. We go down the main flight of stairs with each step lit up; we could be flying on a suspended spaceship. A beam of light is projected to infinity. It is the disco laser announcing the party. A lighthouse in the darkness of the periphery. The car park fills up with pimped out cars. Nocturnal fauna.

#The mouth of the wolf
A queue of cars blocks the entrance to Arroyo Sur shopping centre. We wait patiently. The cars go down the ramp one by one. Now it is our turn to descend to the underworld. Floor -1, Basement -2, Basement -3. At last, we find a free place to park. We get out of our grey-upholstered car into the grey-cemented car park. Place 543. Memorise the

number to find it again on our way out. An army of trolley-pushing families crosses the exit passages. The racket of empty metal trolleys comes in from Access Door 4. Memorise that number too. Snatches of piped music can be heard in the dim underground landscape. Carbon monoxide perfumes the atmosphere and tightens the chest.

Satisfied customers come into the car park through Access Door 5 after the consummating act of shopping. They push trolleys overflowing with products. Tins, cans, plastic, sophisticated packaging containing foodstuffs, drinks, and items of clothing and so on. Anything. After completing the ritual protocol of filling the car boot, the customers obediently replace the empty trolleys in the bays, ready for the next customers to come along. Constant coming and going.

In the middle of the turmoil, we take refuge in reading a passage from *Fin de ciclo. Financiarización, territorio y sociedad de propietarios en la onda larga del capitalismo hispano (1959-2010)* (Isidro López and Emmanuel Rodríguez). We read attentively, trying to find clues as to where to direct our energies in the arduous task of roaming around the suburbs: "There is no place for reform from above. If there was ever a possibility of a reform programme placing the State machinery at the service of a real process of wealth distribution, this avenue now seems closed. We cannot hope for any great reform of the current capitalist system similar to the Keynesian plans in the 1930s and 1940s, on either a European or international scale. This means that not one single opposition party within capitalism is interested in reforming the current regime of accumulation. The political balance of power within the state apparatus has swung completely over to the financial faction of the capitalist élites. Despite all its anti-State rhetoric, neo-liberalism is just the ideological and political strategy behind the financial centres' conquest of the State." (López, Rodríguez, 2010: p. 484).

The PA system blares out this week's special offer and we stop reading. A child in a buggy cries inconsolably. An elderly man is helped out of an MPV. Whole families crowd around the car park with their recent purchases. Groups of youths join the commotion, arranging to meet here to pick up the cars later on. The Saturday ritual.

Artistic interventions on the landscapes of the periphery

Difusor

Barcelona was a universal reference for urban art during the years before and after the new millennium, a period characterised by numerous urban interventions in all fields. At that time, the city's climate of permissiveness towards urban art gave rise to a blossoming of local artists who created their own style, halfway between graffiti and illustration, full of colour, characters, and new forms of expression. The *Barcelona style*, as it was later dubbed, was one of the hallmarks of a city that looked out at the world and was observed by the outside world, at a time when everything urban was trendy.

However, this situation changed radically around the year 2005. The outbreak of citizen concern over anti-social behaviour, which was reflected in the media, led to a new by-law popularly known as the Civic By-Law, taking measures to foster and guarantee peaceful co-existence in public places. The by-law regulated many aspects of life in Barcelona's public space, including the practice of graffiti, with fines of up to €3000, and strong zero-tolerance policies (greater police presence and systematic erasure of graffiti). From then onwards, Barcelona's public space turned into a desolate landscape devoid of graphic interventions. The authorities erased many murals with social and political content, or positive messages questioning aspects of mainstream economy and society. Works by emblematic artists such as Banksy, carefully protected in other European cities, were also erased. The *tabula rasa* of urban images put an end to a true heritage of popular demands, and silenced a vibrant part of our postmodern urban culture. Even so, the practice did not disappear. It stayed alive by moving away from traditional graffiti, adopting other forms, seeking out new habitats.

Driven out of the city centres, Difusor and many other urban artists have been exploring new avenues. Interventions are beginning to appear in outlying districts where the more lenient attitude of local authorities facilitates the appropriation of space. Graffiti artists have always used river embankments and similar surroundings, but intervention spaces have now multiplied to include industrial premises, railway lines, motorways, etc., which provide the opportunity to locate and paint larger stretches of wall. One of the consequences of moving out to the periphery has been an increase in the size of graffiti works.

Another change is the new relationship between graffiti artists and their chose intervention spaces. For artists used to the ever-changing but ever-similar urban environment, going out to explore new habitats awakens curiosity and stimulates the imagination for site-specific interventions, e.g., painting a war bunker pink, drawing random white lines on a tennis court, or occupying abandoned places for artistic purposes. A new identity is thus emerging on the landscapes of the periphery, where the only previous interventions were monuments or land art endorsed by the authorities. This is a new type of autonomous intervention, an appropriation of space by anonymous citizens communicat-

ing with the rest of the population in a horizontal, face-to-face manner, and eschewing the vertical, top-down manner of establishment art.

A singular example of the new relationship between artists and their surroundings took place during a contemporary creation project in Priorat County, where Difusor was invited to paint a mural. The project led us to reflect deeply on the territory where we were to intervene, using concept maps, interviews, and *drifts* (unplanned strolls through unusual places as described by Guy Debord). The result was a series of socio-geographical maps on which we charted not only features of the physical landscape but also, and above all, features of the narrative and symbolic landscape that give Priorat County its own identity.

Three inspiring artists provide outstanding examples for exploring the peripheries. Swedish artist Akay built a tiny summer cottage perched in the middle of a busy road junction for his Traffic Island project. Brazilian artist Zezao uses abstract blue shapes for his interventions in the São Paulo sewer system. Another Swedish artist, Adams, designed a kayak that collapses to fit into a small backpack, which can be used to row through the city sewer system.

Exploring the urban periphery is not the sole means of survival for urban artists. An alternative to going out beyond the strictly urban environment is going down into it more intensely, seeking out chinks in the armour, penetrating the heart of the city. Some artists have been exploring abandoned urban sites; transferring their interventions from walls (systematically erased by the anti-graffiti brigades) to doors and blinds (where legal disputes concerning responsibility for erasure slow up the process); and interacting with the clean-up brigades by painting in the same colours as the colours used for graffiti erasure. Others have been exploring the possibilities of non-physical types of gap, e.g., legal loopholes and coordination breakdowns between the administrations responsible for supervising the public space. In this respect, Difusor has been behind two projects. The first is setting up officially designated spaces for graffiti on the Barcelona periphery, thus getting around the by-law prohibition; the second is using the game of hopscotch as a tool for intercultural integration by encouraging children and their parents to paint hopscotch courts in city parks and squares.

What began as a bleak future for urban art has turned into a fertile field for the artistic exploration of urban peripheries both inside and outside the cities, with outstanding examples coming out of Barcelona and many other contemporary cities. The move out to the edges of the city heralded a great change for urban art, giving rise to large-format interventions and, above all, to a new way of relating to the environment through direct exploration of a new territory. This has been of decisive importance for endowing frequently forgotten landscapes with a specific, meaningful identity.