

ARCHITECTS VS. THE CITY

OR

THE PROBLEM OF CHAOS

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AA DIPLOMA SCHOOL 2011: MARK COUSINS HTS TUTOR

THE ARCHITECT HAS A COMPULSION TO CONCLUDE

THE CITY HAS A COMPULSION TO DENY CONCLUSION

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| INTRODUCTION

Something changed with the advent of Modernism. Architects, hitherto broadly confined to the design of buildings, began to broaden their scope to the design of not only building, but full cities. The city, in brief, became the architect's project.

Modernist architects took on the city as if it was their rightful domain. They projected the city with the same attitude and resolution that they might project a house or an office, only they did it bigger.

They had their reasons. In the one hundred years that had predated the rise of Modernism, the European City had undergone a series of fundamental changes. The finite city, as it had come into being over the previous five hundred years was almost completely transformed by a series of technical and socio-economic forces. As economies became increasingly industrialized, cities grew exponentially. As cities became bigger, their architectures, or arguably more importantly, their *architects* became dwarfed.

Enter the architect. Buildings were made bigger. First in conception, and eventually in realization. As technologies, resolved the problem of size, as lift shafts and concrete and steel make height irrelevant and spans manageable, the building swelled, as did the cities.

For a long time, this swelling of our architecture proceeded almost blindly, each architect, going slightly bigger than the one before. Tweaking every part of the theory and

application of their predecessor, every part that is, except the size.

It was only a matter of time before the architect engulfed the full city. 1922, Le Corbusier, La Ville Radieuse. It was, again, only a matter of time, before the city as project was theorized, written up, and spurred on. 1994, Rem Koolhaas, Bigness. The final step. If anyone had any doubt, Koolhaas made it explicit. *"Bigness no longer needs the city; it competes with the city; it represents the city; it preempts the city; or better still, it is the city."*

The swelling of our architectures, the engulfing of our cities became legitimized as the norm, even the necessary.

It's hard to be nostalgic. Flip through a magazine, any magazine, *times*, *the economist*, *wired*. Each one will present a plentiful variety of 'cities being built'. Foster in Dubai, Jean Nouvel in Abu Dhabi, Zaha in both. As Koolhaas has said, and as his contemporary would undoubtedly nod in enthusiastic agreement. Bigness has arrived. It is now only a matter of finding *"opportunity in the inevitable"*.ⁱⁱ

But, set aside opportunity for a moment, and try again with nostalgia. Is the city really the architects project?

In 1978, Koolhaas put Corbusier up against Manhattan, and, perhaps surprisingly, declared, Manhattan the winner. Manhattan, the city, managed effortlessly to create what Corbusier had tried painfully (and unsuccessfully one might add) to recreate.

If Manhattan could outsmart Corbusier (not a meager architect by any standards) would it not be reasonable to consider that cities might be better at creating cities than architects are at creating cities? That cities, partly planned, partly unplanned, partly designed, partly forgotten are

simply better at creating the social and economic construct of the urban.

So in 1978, Koolhaas put Corbusier up against Manhattan. Six years prior to that, he put himself up against London. This time he declared *himself* the winner. The architect, the organizer, the designer, the one with the holistic vision, had won over, the unorganized, the historic, the chaotic, the sometimes rather ugly, London.

This story, wants to go back. Firstly, albeit briefly, to the story of the Ville Radieuse. Why was Manhattan so much more than it? And then to crux of the story. First to Koolhaas, then to London, then back to Koolhaas.

What is it that the strip of Exodus professes to do that London could not? What is it that Bigness later professed to do that the city could not? Can it, as it so confidently asserts, really be the city? Can it be more than just architecture, scaled up? Or is it doomed to be just architecture. Never really provoking the richness of the city, just denying the city the right to its own richness? These are the doubts that lead this story.

| THE BEGINNING

London 1801. A population of 1 million. By the turn of the century, it had 6 million. Paris, around the same time. A population of half a million. By the turn of the century, it had 3 million. By the beginning of the twentieth century, things had only gotten more severe. The sustained industrial growth of economies, coupled with the aftermath of the First World War, meant that many European cities were faced with the growing problem of urban slums. The question of how to deal with the lower classes of society became a European

wide concern. Corbusier took to the matter. In 1922 he proposed his Immeubles Villa. Large blocks of cell-like apartments to be stacked on top of each other. The whole building to then be topped with a communal roof garden. The first big swelling of architecture.

Later that same year, he presented his project for a "Contemporary City" of three million inhabitants. The second big swelling of architecture. The centerpiece of this plan was the group of sixty-story, cruciform skyscrapers; steel-framed office buildings encased in huge curtain walls of glass. These skyscrapers were to be set within large, rectangular park-like green spaces. At the center was a huge transportation hub. The hub worked on different levels, which included depots for buses and trains, as well as highway intersections, and at the top, an airport. As one moved out from the central skyscrapers, smaller low-story, zigzag apartment blocks, set far back from the street amid green space, housed the inhabitants.

The project, re-edited and polished, came back several years later in the form of La Ville Radieuse. The model of the modern city, any modern city. Any other city which professed to be modern, was a threat, and hence a target of Corbusier's wrath. Manhattan became that target. American skyscrapers to him were simply "*adolescents of the machine age*".ⁱⁱⁱ Not the real thing by any means.

Koolhaas, albeit almost 5 decades later, took to its defense. The defense came in the following form. Corbusier was insane. Clinically paranoid to be precise. This paranoia stemmed, as per Koolhaas's diagnosis, from Corbusier's inability to handle any degree of ambivalence. "*He introduces honesty on such a scale that it exists only at the price of banality.*"^{iv} His defense of Manhattan came from the fact that the city had a fantastic ability to merging realities.

The modern with the historic, the American with the European, the elegant with the ugly. While Manhattan set a platform for the unexpected, Corbusier, came with the definitive. The end of the unexpected. Every element, from the house, to the street to the transportation hub was designed, planned, and concluded. This for Koolhaas is what made Corbusier insane.

Koolhaas's love for the unexpected, it would seem, is still going strong. But, with an ever so slight modification. It is no longer the love of the unexpected City, but rather the love of the potential unexpected architecture. The architecture which captures everything that Manhattan did, but within its own confines. That story was best told in Bigness. But it started before that. It started with Exodus.

| EXODUS

Positive intentions^v. That's what started it all. London became unbalanced. It had developed a good half, and a bad half. As the good half prospered and the bad half fell into despair, an exodus ensued. The population of the good half doubled while the bad half dwindled into nothingness. The strip was the answer to this exodus. It was an *'architectural warfare against (the) undesirable conditions*^{vi} of the City. Instead of flocking from one half of the city to the other, now the inhabitants would flock from the city to the new architecture. As they arrived the new architecture would expand, gradually devouring the city as it went, until finally, London as it had been known would be reduced to ruins.

It's hard to see the difference. How was this new strip any different than Corbusier Radiant City? It denied the city. It even called for the exodus of the City. Its hard to see how

anyone, so enamored with the playfulness of Manhattan could call for anything as unyielding as the strip to be imposed on London.

This new strip, it would seem is the certainty and definitiveness of architecture imposed onto the city. Where the city was chaotic, complex and irritatingly illegible, the strip is certain, strong and direct in its intent.

The strip, it would seem is the ultimate object. To the involuntary prisoners of the old London, two walls define its being. There is no ambivalence in the walls, no point of discussion or negotiation. They are there to break all contact, all relation, all possible contamination from the old city.

It is, or seems to be, the ultimate order. To the voluntary prisoners of the new architecture, the walls are the definitive boundary. Non-negotiable and fantastically strong in their ability to contain. As far as rules go, it's hard to get clearer than the wall. Within this rigid containment, there were still further mechanisms of order, the indoctrinating reception area, the park of the four elements, the square of the arts, the baths and the allotments. Every stage of life, carefully accounted for and adequately designed, complete with programmatic strictness and spatial clarity. Within the confines of the walls, spatial ambivalence is a thing of the past.

Again, it is, or seems to be, the ultimate victory of the architect. The walls are a declaration. They don't care; they do what they deem best and with immodest certainty, ignore any contradicting opinions.

The strip, it would seem, is architecture against the city in no uncertain terms. London dies. Or to be more precise,

London the city dies, but London, as the strip, as the architecture, prospers. There's not much ambivalence in that. And not much difference, one might say, to Corbusiers lack of ambivalence.

But there is a second layer to the strip, a different intention. On the outside it is singular. It is object; legible and dogmatic. But on the inside, it seems to have gotten bored by its singularity, it looks back at its hosting ground, the city, and wonders if perhaps it may have overlooked something. So, against the certainty of its walls, it reveals a uncertainty at its tips. Here, the point where the strip presents itself as its most certain, it reveals a moment of self-doubt. As it extends outwards, tips confronting the city, it allows itself at times to consider whether there might be something within this confrontation which it might want to absorb into its being. It is the new; it might just want to steal a thing or two from the old.

On the outside it is order. But on the inside, its tired of this order. And so it sets up a reception area, a point where it might momentarily abdicate from its position of all knowing and hand the reigns over to its involuntary prisoners. They propose architectural refinements, extensions, and strategies. And in this way there is a growing lapse in the imposition of order. As the strip grows it becomes less rigid boundary, and more complex space.

This is the paradox of the strip. It starts as one thing and soon becomes another. It starts as the embodiment of architecture. Strong, ordered, definitive and conclusive. The conclusion; from now on these wall will define space. Nothing will happen outside, and everything will happen inside. But as its grows it loses its definitiveness. More and more, it hopes to transpose the chaos of the city within its own boundaries, more and more, it hopes to become more

then the walls, more than architecture. More and more it hopes to become what it originally set out to destroy, the city. "*Suddenly, a strip of intense metropolitan desirability runs through the center of London*"^{vii} The strip is not an architecture, it is a metropolitan, a urban place, a city in its own right.

This ultimately is the story of the strip, it isn't the order of the strip as architecture vs. the chaos of London as city. It is something entirely different. It is the architect, bored, dissatisfied, and a little jealous. The city has what the architect wants; life, the unpredictable, the regenerative, the unending. The architect has only the building. With a hint of tragedy, Oedipus is resurrected. The architect wants to kill his forbearer; the city and take his place as the partner of the unpredictable.

But before the story of Koolhaas can go any further, before the inevitable question is asked: Can the architecture replace the city? Before any of that can happen. First, the story needs to turn to London. To see what the city is, how it has become what it is, and ultimately, what architecture would need to do if it really was to replace it?

| THE STORY OF LONDON

Bearing in mind the *Exodus*, where better to begin than with the story of the wall. This time London's wall. Exodus may have been just a student project. It may have been laden with youthful naivety and sinicism. But for all that that may be true, it wasn't actually unthinkable. It had been thought before. It had been seriously drawn up before. It had even been built before.

| THE WALL

Londinium: Sometime around AD 200. First things first, written evidence, of which there is bountiful for London's recent history, is almost non-existent for London's early history. Suffice it to say, that in the 200 or so years since Londinium was established by the Romans, it came under tediously repetitive attack. And so, by the close of the 2nd Century, the Romans had had enough. Londinium, at the time a semi-circular area of 326 acres, was enclosed by a three-mile long wall of strong stone. 2.5 meters wide and 6 meters height, with gates piercing it at intervals.

For the first 1000 years of its existence, the wall was, by and large, a success. It would constitute the juridical boundary of first Roman Londonium, and later Anglo-Saxon London. During the time of the Romans, the Basilica acted as the centre of commerce and government, presiding over a gated city which was ruled to be civilized and lawful in equal measure. When Londinium dwindled into quasi-desolation during the decline of the Roman Empire, it was still within the confines of the Wall, that the foundation of the new city would be laid. In 883, following the pillaging of London by the Danes, the Wall was rebuilt. London began its second life as a gated city. A condition which would persist well into the Middle Ages.

A note of clarification. There was life outside the wall. But the life that existed outside it, was predominantly a more lawless one. The area to the south of London Bridge had a reputation (starting in the 10th century, and continuing for centuries to come) of being wild and disorderly. Other areas to the immediate north and west of the Wall, while not particularly wild, were largely self-governed. Urbanity, in brief, existed outside the immediate Wall, the cities jurisdiction, however, didn't.

But 1000 years into its existence and things started to change. First there was envy, some of the things happening outside the wall were more interesting than the things happening inside the wall. Eventually walls were pierced to open up connections, then gates were fortified. When that wasn't good enough, the city took to more drastic action. The city decided to move beyond the wall. By the late medieval era, the City jurisdiction began to expand beyond the Wall. First moving westward and later out to the east where it added Holborn, Bishopsgate and Aldgate.

The wall, in brief, was tried, it was thoroughly tested, but ultimately, the wall never managed to fully contain the city.

| THE FIRE

The city, it would seem, was not only uncontainable by the boundary and order of the wall, but by boundary and order more broadly.

September 1st, 1666: Pudding Lane. At first the fire which erupted at the baker's house seemed to be nothing remarkable at all. When the Lord Mayor was called to consider the situation he remarked, rather famously, "*Pish! A women might pisse it out!*"^{viii} Apparently not. By Monday night, Thames street, running from Fresh Wharf in the west, to Puddle Dock in the east, had been completely destroyed. Over the next day, the Royal Exchange, St. Pauls, and the Guildhall were consumed by the flames too. When the fire had finally started to die down on Tuesday night, 395 acres of the City had been completely devastated.^{ix} The total tally of the fire: 13,000 houses, 44 company halls, 87 parish churches, and almost a quarter of a million people left homeless.

Rather surprisingly, despite the appalling devastation of the fire, there was an undeniable note of excitement at the

opportunity that it provided. Atleast amongst some. Charles II, the then King of England, Scotland and Ireland, saw in the devastation, the happy coincidence of the tabula rasa. London, a city historically plagued by continuous fire, disease, congestion and chaos, could be rebuilt. The haphazard urbanity of uncontrolled economic and social growth could be remodeled into a neat, ordered and graceful city.

On September 13th, 1666, a proclamation was issued in the Kings name. All new buildings were to be built of brick or stone. All new streets were to be wide enough to allow for pedestrians and vehicles to coexist in fluid harmony. And most importantly, any unauthorized buildings would be pulled down. The London of chaos and improvised growth would a thing of the past.

Inspired by the Kings proclamation, aspiring planners throughout the country took to proposing a overarching plan for the new city. Of the numerous plans submitted, the one which attracted the greatest attention was that of Professor Christopher Wren (later knighted Sir Christopher Wren). Of the numerous plans submitted, it was arguably the most ambitious, one might say, the most severe. First, the entire area of the fire would be cleared. This time a definitive tabula rasa. Then, a fresh start would be made with wide straight streets and large open spaces. A new London, complete with radial boulevards and gridded neighborhoods to match.

That new London, however, never arrived. The practicalities of an impatient city intervened. The quarter of a million people who had been temporarily rehoused in the suburbs were anxious to return to the city. The trustees of the charities, whose livelihood was financed by rent, were anxious, that if tenants weren't allowed to return soon, they

would simply settle into their new suburban lives. Shopkeepers wanted to sell again and tradesmen wants to trade again. In short, the inhabitants of London were too consumed in the realities of urban existence to hold out for the new visionary plan to be realised.

Once again London managed, in a characteristically non-confrontational manner, to circumvent the application /imposition of an architectural order onto its being. Served up with the option of continued uncontrolled chaotic growth or somewhat manicured choreographed elegance. London chose chaos.

A momentary return to Koolhaas. It is not that London is not without its issues. It is not that no one has noticed that parts of it prosper while others spontaneously die. It is not that no one has noticed that it is laden with '*undesirable conditions*'. It is also not that no one has noticed that it lacks any clear definition. Its been noticed, for quite some time. It is just that the strip (albeit in a different form) existed, and it failed. First as the wall the city outgrew and later as a masterplan the city ignored. The city in brief, has been given the option to become dignified and qualified by the vision and the order of architecture. It simply chose to refuse. So far at least. There is still the problem that the inherent chaos of the city inspires an anxiety of great proportion in some. Most recently the Prince of Wales

| THE PRINCE OF WALES

Lord Palumbo, chairman of the Arts Council. "*I can only say God bless the Prince of Wales, and God save us from his architectural judgment.*"^{xx}

29th May 1984. The Prince of Wales is invited to speak at the 150th anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects. "*Ladies and Gentlemen*" It started well enough.

"what...are we doing to our capital city now? What are we shortly to do to one of its most famous areas - Trafalgar Square? Instead of designing an extension to the elegant facade of the National Gallery... what is proposed is like a monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend."^{xii} The 'carbuncle' in question, a scheme by Ahrends, was scrapped. A 'less exciting' scheme by postmodernist architects Venturi Scott Brown was eventually built in its place in 1991.^{xii}

The problem it would seem, was not one of style, but rather one of coherence. An absence of singularity. The Prince explains. *"I would understand better this type of high-tech approach if you demolish the whole of Trafalgar square and start again, with one single architect responsible of the entire layout."*

That was only the beginning. Since then numerous projects have suffered the wrath of the Prince. One poultry street, originally intended to be a tower by Mies van der Rohe, was replaced a flowery design by postmodern architect Sir James Stirling. Paternoster Square, originally intend to be a Rogers design, was forfeited for the Princes favorite architect John Simpson.

And so it has continued. Most recently, the Prince has actually gained in courage. In 2009, The Prince wrote to the emir of Qatar, the main backers for a proposed £1 billion housing scheme at the former Chelsea Barracks, calling for the proposed design by Richard Rogers to be scrapped in favor of a more traditional scheme devised by classicist Quinlan Terry. The Emir withdrew Rogers scheme and appointed Dixon Jones, Squire and Partners in his place.

1989. In case anyone had any uncertainty over his opinions on architecture the Prince publishes his *Vision of Britain: A personal View of Architecture*.

1993. Four years later and the vision is being built. The Prince lays out the guiding principles for an urban village. The overall plan developed in the late 1980's by Leon Krier. Construction started in 1993. By the end of its planned four phases of development, the town will reach a total of 2,500 dwelling and a population of about 6,000.

And yet, despite, the Princes now numerous, attempts to tame the city chaos, the city still lives. His vision, thankfully, one might add, had to be built outside the city. London, despite, the Roman wall, despite the momentary tabula rasa of the fire, despite, the Regal cries for elegance and order, has persevered as a place which, more often than not, is best defined by its chaos. By its lack of overriding vision and order.

| THE RAIL

Its not that there is no vision in London's story. It's that the vision is of a different creed.

1830. Railway mania grips England. First Liverpool and Manchester, and four years later London. The new railway cut through the northern suburbs, past its depot at Camden Town to its terminus at Euston Square. In a matter of a few years Parliament had sanctioned hundreds of thousands of rail, transforming the look and feel of London forever. Entire neighborhoods were devoured as rail tracks and stations were planned and built across London. Rows of houses were demolished, entire streets and squares were lost. The London-Birmingham Railway alone displaced 20,000

people; most of whom, unwilling to move far away, crowded into already overpopulated areas nearby.

Charles Dickens 1846 *"Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassible; Babel towers of chimneys; temporary wooden houses and ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing."*^{xiii}

And it didn't stop there. London had already been growing fast before the railways came. In the first 30 years of the nineteenth century, its population doubled to 1.5 million. With the rail, the growth became exponential. In every decade after 1840, half a million people were added to London's population. By 1900 it was six million.

The rail mania deepened. Literally. In 1845, Charles Pearson, the Surveyor to the City of London, made a rather logical, but nonetheless unthinkable observation. The city was still growing, congestions was becoming insufferable, there was no longer any room to built rail facilities overground, so, it would follow, the rail should go underground. The response was strong. There were calls that moving people underground was *'against the laws of God'* the Duke of Wellington, exhibiting a borderline tendency to paranoia, was certain that the French army would find a way to arrive in London by this new underground without anyone being the wiser. But despite the outrage, by 1863, the first excavated rail ran. Today the underground system has 408km of trackway. The French incidentally, never found their way in.

2011 and the railway mania is still going strong. Twelve years ago, the Central London Rail Study proposed an East-

West Crossrail. Set to be Europe's biggest live construction project, the underground train would run 118km, 20m-40m deep and would link for the first time, the West End, the City and Canary Wharf (along with a lot more on either ends) Ten years after that, with a projected cost of £15.9 billion, a projected delivery date of 2017 (although most recent calculations mark 2018), and continued speculations over London's ability to actually complete the project, the boring machines have started their decent.^{xiv}

The vision of a rail cutting through a dense and complex city of the early 19th century is exhilarating. But oddly, also somewhat modest and practical in its motivation. London wasn't the only city to be cut through at the time. Paris was similarly bisected by infrastructure. But a different type. The Hausmanian boulevards cutting through Paris historic grain were regal in their intention. Emanating from the radial core. They brought movement, but they also brought order, symmetry, and if military conspiracies are to be believed, they brought control over Paris's inhabitants. London's infrastructural bisection was of a different nature. Less Machiavellian, more pragmatic. The city needed to grow. The growth both needed and implies more people. The people would need a rail. Bisection of the city.

Arguably a bit simplistic, but the basis is there. London's story of the rail from the early 19th century to today has been undoubtedly visionary, but not an architectural one, a practical one.

| THE TERRACED HOUSE

And it wasn't just the Rail. The terraced house, arguably one of London most idiosyncratic features (at least when compared to its fellow global cities) was similarly born, not

out of architectural vision, but economic practicality/need/greed.

Nicholas Barbon, officially baptized Nicolas If-Jesus-Christ-Had-Not-Died-For-Thee-Thou-Hadst-Been-Damned Barbon, was a physician by training and a builder and speculator by trade. One of London's first great developers, one might say, reputed to be "*the most prominent London builder of his age.*"^{xv} In the aftermaths of the Fire of 1666, Barbon, took it upon himself to rebuild London. And so he did, often in complete disregard for the various Acts of Parliament and royal declarations which strove to set a new standard in the city. Barbon simply demolished without permission, and subsequently rebuilt, more often than not, again without permission.

Somewhere along this process, he is reputed to have built the first streets of uniform fronts, thus introducing terraced houses and the party wall to England.

By the early Victorian period, a terrace had come to designate any style of housing where individual houses repeating one design are joined together in rows. The style was used for worker's housing in industrial districts during the great industrial boom following the industrial revolution, particularly the houses built for workers of the expanding textile industry. The terrace style was the usual form of high density residential housing up to World War II.

Following the War, there was a brief abandonment of the terraced house, in favor of the highly publicized and architecturalized social housing tower block.

The typology had its hay-day. But soon the streets of the sky became known as the slums of the sky. The model became broadly considered to be defunct and more often

then not, demolition followed. The terraced house by comparison, may never had quite the publicity, but where it loses in fame, or infamy, it wins in resilience and longevity.

What is implied in both the story of the rail and the story of the terraced house, is that the virtue of London, was often born, not out of a vision of a singular ideal, a reductive conclusion of '*with this, we achieve the holistic and all embracing definition of our city.*' But rather it was born from a rather complex combination of varied needs.

| THE INDUSTRY

In the story of the industry and the docks, London reveals itself again as a city unfussed by its own definition. A city more interested, in simply getting on with it.

1800. No cotton mills, no ironworks, no smoking factory chimneys. The industrial revolution was beginning in England, but in London, with its high land and labour costs, and its shortages of coal and iron, the urban industry was still defined by traditional workshops and craft industries. So much so that London was branded as being simply the 'swollen head' of the industrial organism that defines England.^{xvi} A centre of luxury and ostentation. Predominantly, yes.

But that definition alone would not give a true picture. London played a vital role, it wasn't quite a straight forward role as the one played by the icons of the Industrial Revolution. It was first and foremost related to services; buying, selling and arguably most importantly speculating. It also had another very important role, namely, London as industrial incubator. It was London that brought new techniques from the Continent and from India. Dutch looms, fustian and calico printing, silk-throwing mills and the

stocking knitting frame were all adopted by 17th century London manufacturers before they spread to the north. It played a role, but by and far, the hallmarks of the Industrial Revolution are few and far between. The implication is that London's role was central, but the specifics and strictly definitive qualities of this role are hard to pinpoint.

| THE DOCKS

The same can be said of the story of the docks. It wasn't always a great international port. In the early 1980's, excavations were conducted on the waterfront near Billingsgate and London Bridge (home of the historic Roman Port of Londinium). The findings were somewhat surprising. The Thames, it would seem, had originally been a tidal river without, one might add, any deep water port. Contrary to popular history, chances are that Londonium had been unable to handle the great seagoing trade vessels or mighty ships of the Roman fleet.^{xvii} Its not that the Port was not important during this time, but rather that it was important in a rather different way. It served, or at least, so current theory holds, to provide its residents with lavished good, cultivating an extravagant lifestyle amongst its citizens.

The port did eventually expand. By the mid 17th century, it had transformed into a major international port with trading connections stretching from the East Indies to the New World.^{xviii} While London's imports broadened in variety, the city maintained its bias to the things of finer quality - silks, calicoes, sugar, tobacco, spices, fruit and wine. A bias in trading which, some have argued, helped transform the city, and eventually the whole country into a nation of spenders and consumers.

By the late 18th century the Port of London had reached its capacity. The West India Dock Act at the close of the

century allowed for new off-river docks to be built for produce from the West Indies. The act had impact. In 1802 the West India Docks were built, one year later the East India Docks, two years later the London Docks and so it continued until by 1886, London had a total of 10 new enclosed docks.

By the late 1960's what had taken centuries to develop came to an abrupt end. Manufacturing spurred on, trade spurred on, the docks, however, with their limited space and restricted water depths, were unable to keep up. It was the advent of the container the closed the docks definitively. London, unable to handle the new 8 by 8 by 40-foot metal boxes, was still unloading a ship in 10 days; nearby ports with adequate facilities were doing it in a day and a half. The London Dock and St. Katharine's Dock were closed in 1969.

As in the story of the industry, the docks never managed to define London in any definitive and conclusive way. Rather, they were an opportunity, seized upon, exploited and when the opportunity ceased to exist, they simply were digested and translated into something else.

|THE MORAL OF THIS STORY

All this to say, that the city, not only never wanted to be ordered and dignified, not only never wanted to be stripped of its chaos, it actually lived precisely because of its chaos. The chaos it would seem was not some '*undesirable condition*'. It was its condition.

If the strip would ever bring the exodus of London, it would do so only by capturing this degree of chaos. A degree of chaos, which incidentally, this story has only briefly touched upon. Its actual chaos, its actual complexity, is infinitely more than what this story has managed to capture.

And yet, *Exodus* is confident. It could be the city. For everything that *Exodus* is confident, Bigness is infinitely more so. Bigness *is* the city, it could be any city. It could be London. It has the plan to do so, and the plan starts from a single simple gesture, get big enough, and architecture can be the city.

| BIGNESS

It happens like this. First, the death of the art of architecture. On account of its size the art as a matter of composition, of sequence and order (occasionally repackaged as dis-order), of scale and proportion is lost. With the advent of the lift comes the dominance of the vertical. With the dominance of the vertical comes the end of sequence and order. It becomes simply vertical. With the swelling of its size, scale and proportion is lost. The only measure of it, the person, is simply too small relative to its greatness to see either.

With the death of the art taken care of, Bigness is free to be defined by something else. It chooses complexity. Beyond a certain size, a building can no longer be controlled by a single architectural gesture, or by a combination of architectural gestures for that matter. It is simply too big. It begins to depend. And in so doing, it gives up control to a number of other professions whose performance is as critical as its own.

With complexity nicely captured, it gives way to true chaos. As the building swells chaos can no longer be orchestrated. The design system of fragmentation becomes overloaded and eventually defunct. Disorder can no longer be planned. Bigness becomes the death of phony disorder.

With complexity and chaos within its rains, Bigness gains its independence. In its sheer mass, its relation to the ground, to the city becomes marginal, minimal, until eventually it is reduced to a single entry hall. Bigness works wherever it is placed, because it depends only on itself. Bigness becomes the death of context.

The final step. In all its virtues, Bigness is the conquest of the city. Its complexities exists within it. As it denies it own tradition of order and absorbs the city within it, the city becomes irrelevant. Bigness is the death of the city.

| THE GENERIC CITY

But it doesn't stop there. Bigness might be the city, but it hasn't quite killed it off. It only copied it, within it own boundaries. Like the strip of exodus, Bigness exists within the city, it still competes with it. It still has to convince its prisoners to chose it. Where Bigness falls short, the Generic City picks up the story.

The final coup - the chaos of the city is fully internalized, into its architecture. The city is left empty. Again a plan is drawn up.

First, the city is reduced to three conditions; roads, buildings and nature. They exist in any variety of combinations. Sometimes one bearing the lead, other times all three coming to a tie. Providing an endless array of combinations. Sometimes there is an absence of all three; this is the public realm, on its way to death.

Then, the move from horizontality to verticality. The skyscraper, originally just another typology, has rendered everything else defunct. It can exist anywhere. It can exist

alone or together, either way it does take account of where it is. It has achieved density in its isolation.

With density achieved, comes the next step. The generic city orchestrates the evacuation of the public realm. The urban field accommodates only necessary movement now, and mainly by the car. Highways replace the boulevards and the plazas aiming forever more to automotive efficiency.

With density repackaged into the confines of isolating architecture and the public domain striped of its occupants, infrastructure is liberated of its unifying obligations. Infrastructure becomes warfare. Where it had been mutually reinforcing and totalizing, now it can become local and competitive. No longer used to create connection and fluidity over the whole, infrastructure can become a tool to ensure the success of one area over another. This area is better connected than that area. This area prospers. That area dies.

With urban competition in full flourish, planning is left to dwindle into nothing. Plans still exist. There are innumerable plans, coming from all directions, bureaucrats, developers, idealists, and more often than not, funds permitting they are realised. The difference, is that no one is flustered anymore. The generic city holds that planning doesn't matter, and the well planned and badly planned are equally susceptible to the spontaneous self-combustion.

With the death of planning comes, finally, the long awaited death of nostalgia. The advent of amnesia. What does not work is simply abandoned. Nothing is ever elaborated or improved, but simply destroyed. The idea of layering, intensification, completion do not exist. There are no layers. There is no idealism, there is no preservationism. When space/place has outlived its relevance it is knocked down in

full, and the new grows in its place. There is no debate on the mistakes of architectures. It is active and up, or inactive and down.

And now the final coup enacted. The death of the city. Together all these events bring an end to the city. The city, as a totality, as an all encompassing framework of space, no longer exist. Everything is individual, everything is an island onto itself. In this archipelago of architecture, the historic in-between space of the city is irrelevant. It is empty. Everything, and everyone, has left the city and entered the architecture. The city is no longer.

| **BIGNESS, THE GENERIC CITY & *THE CITY***

The plan is well laid. No doubt. But for everything that Bigness and later the Generic City professes to be the conquest of the city. For everything that it professes to be the complexity of the city, hijacked and repatronized to the enclaves of architecture. They still can't help but be just architecture.

Bigness is still fundamentally concerned with the whole. The creation of the holistic object. Its verticality and its size may kill the art of architect, but it does nothing to its boundary. If anything, it reinforces it. The boundary becomes bigger, more definitive, more visible, more conclusive than ever before. The object of architecture is reinforced, not destroyed.

Its size might force it to resign itself to other disciplines, but those disciplines are still working towards one goal, one image, one conclusive holistic thing.

Its size might prohibit it from orchestrating disorder, but that hardly amounts to enabling it. Remember Charles Jencks' Remorseless Law of Diminishing Architecture (aka the Ivan Illich Law) Bigger=more predictable=more boring?

Its sheer size might give it density in isolation, but that isolation does nothing if not reinforce its singularity, its lack of complexity. Density is not complexity, its just more in less space.

In the end, Bigness is fundamentally still concerned with *"the whole"*. And if there is any doubt, *"the attraction of Bigness is its potential to reconstruct the whole, resurrect the Real, reinvent the collective, reclaim maximum possibility."* If there is one thing that can be taken from the story of London, it is that it is precisely because it has systematically denied the construct of the whole that it is what it is. It denied the wall, as definition of the whole, it denied the masterplan, as the definition of the whole, it has denied even Royalty in its desire to see 'the whole' built.

The things that have defined the city, were not built with the agenda of defining the city. They were coincidences, of economics, of practicalities, of infrastructures, of greeds. These are the things, which have defined it.

To see in Bigness the possibility to both, capture the city, and define the whole, is to deny the city its very nature. The city is not a whole, its not a conclusion, its an open ended story.

In brief, for everything that Bigness professes to exhaust architectures compulsive need to decide and determine, as long as it is concerned with the whole, the whole as a definitive and conclusive thing, it will never be the city.

As for the Generic City. What resounds throughout its entire description is ultimately its orchestration. It's ordering into a coherent and definable thing. The Generic City has no center. It has no boundary, except for an edge condition, perhaps a sea or an expanse of dessert. The Generic City has only three elements; road, building and nature, to be mixed as desired giving an infinite number of variations. The Generic city has no public realm but it has lots of public art. The Generic City is fractal and endlessly repeatable. The Generic City has golf courses. The Generic City has skyscrapers and favelas, or shanty towns (strike according to geographic specificity). The Generic City has competing infrastructures. The Generic City is post-modern...And so on.

In the story of the Generic City, having described itself it is then concluded. *"That is the story of the city. The city is no longer."*

It is this very definition, this very fundamental compulsion to give form and structure and end to things that makes Generic City become, yet another architectural project. The Generic City is not the City. The City never pauses for definition, clarification and synopsis.

Where the city constantly outgrows its own definition. Bigness and the Generic City cant help but stop, synthesis and conclude. In so doing, no matter how many threads of complexity it tries to bring into its being, it cant help but deny its original compulsion to conclude and ultimately become again, just architecture.

If there is one thing that can be taken from the story of London, it is that it will never bow to the comfort of conclusion. And so the architect unable to accept that much complexity that much uncertainty, will never possess it.

Architecture, any architecture, big or small, can never be the end of the city because; it can't beat it at its own game. No one does complexity and unpredictability quite like the city. Architecture ends, by just being architecture.

Koolhaas may have diagnosed Corbusier as a clinical paranoid. But for all that that may have been true. Koolhaas seems to suffer from delusion.

He professes to do what the city does. He professes to do chaos and the open ended. *"Bigness instigates the regime of complexity"* *"Bigness...is the one architecture that engineers the unpredictable."* *"Bigness can sustain a promiscuous proliferation of events in a single container."* Bigness is where architecture *"exhausts its compulsive need to decide and determine"*. And all this apparently in one big *'reconstruct of the whole'*.

| THE CONCLUSION

So what of the story of architects vs. the city. How does it end?

The architect, despite his efforts to exhaust his compulsion to conclude, finds himself with yet another conclusion. A bigger and more complex one. Bigness maybe more complex than smallness, the Generic City maybe more complex than Bigness. But despite this ever-desperate attempt to enclose more and more complexity into his architecture, he never quite manages to get there. A conclusion always intervenes. And here, at this point, the city once again gains validation to live on.

That is his delusion. That he can exhaust his compulsion to conclude. And so he writes stories. There is an exodus out of the London into the strip; the death of London. Or better still, broader still. There is an exodus out of the city into

Bigness; the death of the city. The final coup, there is an exodus out of the city into the generic city; the death of the city, and best of all no is the wiser. We all thought we were still in the city.

Except that never happened. The City changed course. As it always does, and just kept going.

And so, the story of the architect vs. the city has a different ending. The battle becomes a blip, an anomaly of modernism. The city continues to grow, defying at every turn, the architects desire to define it, synthesize it and conclude it.

In this different ending, the architect is reduced, rather grudgingly to his original playfield, the building. Here once again he is confronted by his own demons, order, sequence, detail, in brief, he is confronted by his own story.

In this story, bigness is neither his liberation but his demise. Bigness is where he is continuously confronted with the fact that he is not the city. He is too slow, too clumsy and too controlled to ever spawn the complexity and unpredictability that the city fosters so effortlessly.

And so the architect is reduced back to being, just an architect. Maybe all stories don't have a happy ending.

But there is another possibility. The city in all its complexity, in all its unpredictability in all the thrill it provides, is sometimes simply exhausting. And the third character of this story, maybe the protagonist, who somehow up until now has evaded mention, wants a reprieve. Wants the comfort of conclusion. Maybe that's where the architects become more again. Not in trying to be what he is not, but in being what

he is, a moment of definition, choreography, sequence, order and disorder in a city of chaos.

Perhaps it is not in being the city, but rather in standing in the highest possible contrast to the city, that architecture becomes its most again.

| NOTES

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- ⁱ Koolhaas, R. 'SMLXL' p. 515
- ⁱⁱ The New York Times "City on the Gulf: Koolhaas lays out a Grand Urban Experiment in Dubai" (March, 3, 2008)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Koolhaas, R. "Delirious New York" p. 238
- ^{iv} Ibid. p. 255
- ^v Koolhaas, R. 'SMLXL' p. 5
- ^{vi} Ibid. p. 5
- ^{vii} Ibid. p. 7
- ^{viii} Hibbert, C. 'London: The Biography of a City' p. 67
- ^{ix} Ibid. p.68
- ^x The Telegraph "The Prince of Wales on architecture: his 10 'monstrous carbuncles" 13 May 2009
- ^{xi} HRH The Prince of Wales. "A speech at the 150th anniversary of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Royal Gala Evening at Hampton Court Palace." www.princeofwales.gov.uk/spechedandarticles/
- ^{xii} The Telegraph "The Prince of Wales on architecture: his 10 'monstrous carbuncles" 13 May 2009
- ^{xiii} Dickens, C. 'Dombey & Son' p. 42
- ^{xiv} Wright, H. 'Crossing the Capital' Blueprint Magazine. Issue 295
- ^{xv} Letwin, W. "Origins of Scientific Economics: English Economic Thought, 1660-1776" p.49
- ^{xvi} Inwood, S. 'A History of London' p. 330
- ^{xvii} Inwood, S. 'A History of London' p. 25
- ^{xviii} Ibid. p. 201
- ^{xix} Koolhaas, R, 'Delirious New York' p. 237
- ^{xx} Ibid. P.237
- ^{xxi} Koolhaas, R, 'Delirious New York' 238
- ^{xxii} Koolhaas, R, 'Delirious New York' p. 255