PANEL DE CONTROL

INTERRUPTORES CRÍTICOS

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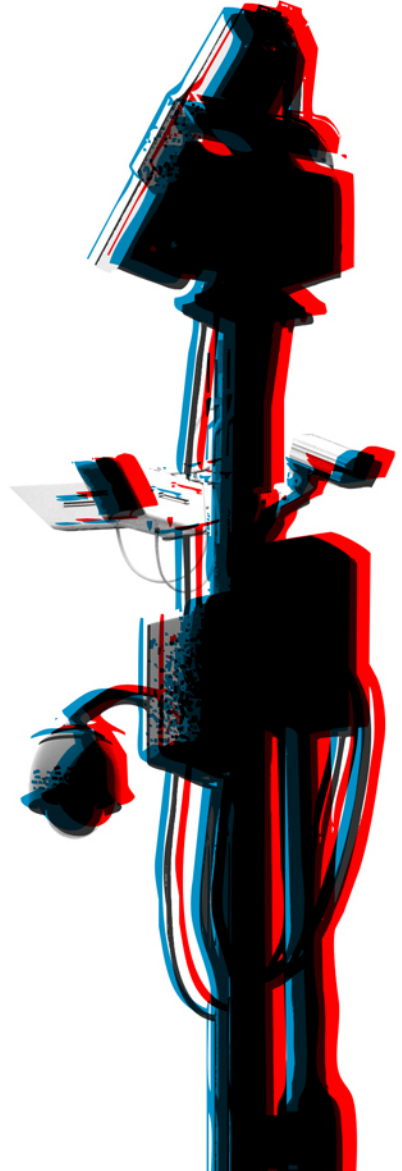
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STAGING THE ORDER

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Cecilia Andersson is a curator and director of Werk Ltd, a curatorial agency in Stockholm. Werk collaborates internationally to organise, produce, stage, publish and promote contemporary art. Recent and current projects include *SuperSocial,* a series of nomadic events staged in various locations, the exhibition To the left of the rising sun produced for Castlefield Gallery as a Manchester First co-production in association with the Manchester International Festival, and *Citytellers Stockholm* - a series of workshops and lectures in collaboration with Francesco Jodice at the Architecture museum in Stockholm. Cecilia publishes in magazines and writes artist catalogue texts. She is an independent advisor for *Disonancias*, a platform for exchange between artists and businesses in San Sebastian, and part of a working group for *Madrid Abierto,* a public art project in Madrid.

Abstract

With an interdisciplinary approach this text weaves its way through material that addresses the modernist strive for order. Starting with an introduction of practices based on scientific explorations to claim territory and with examples ranging from Polar expeditions and Carolus Linnaeus' desire to classify, the idea is to reveal some of the connections between biology and utopian models for city planning as they developed in the late 19th century. Recognising the post-modern city and its struggles to exist outside of the modern order, I will draw on examples from contemporary artists' work when considering some of the current circumstances of urban life in its struggle to provide for civil liberties.

Keywords

Biology, city, planning, modernism, posmodernism, order, classification, freedom, territory, science, technology, biometrics, camouflage, videosurveillance.

Over the past 125 years scientists from around the world have joined forces to organize the International Polar year. This scientific research program is staged in its third edition between 2007 to 2009 with the remit to explore significant changes in an area that offer unique vantage points for terrestrial and cosmic phenomena (1).

The polar areas are unique in many ways. This is where circulation patterns for air and water reveal themselves as they reach the surface of the Earth. Here are concentrations of the Earth's magnetic field lines and glaciers with air and water trapped from ancient times. The two poles provide the best circumstances to study certain geological, ecological and meteorological circumstances.

Throughout time the polar areas were embedded in myths and legends. When geographical explorers slowly scientists began to arrive in the 19th century some of these myths were dispelled. Or rather, they were substituted by an emerging rational mindset where measured and quantifiable entities came to dominate over fable. The previous functions of myth were replaced by deliveries of scientific 'truth' and order.

Robert Peary and his expedition claimed to have been first at the geographic North Pole in 1909. In Peary's search for the North Pole he came into contact with the Eskimos of northwest Greenland who served as human resources for his expeditions. "These people," Peary wrote "are much like children and should be treated as such" (2). Peary fathered illegitimate children with Eskimo women and brought six villagers – four adults and two children – back with him to New York City where he deposited them with the American Museum of Natural History without further responsibilities. The empty, vast and uninhabitable North was now the arena for scientific and imperial actions.

Peary's claim to be the first person ever to reach the North Pole has been challenged for a number of reasons. Mainly in regards to the distances he travelled and the speed maintained. Especially with a team where no one was trained in navigation, their achievement borders on the incredible. In 1989 the National Geographic Society, a major sponsor of Peary's expedition, made an inquiry into some of the circumstances surrounding the 1909 expedition. By observing shadows in the photographs and ocean depths measured by Peary, the Society concluded he was no more than five miles away from the Pole. Peary's original camera no longer exists. We don't know what lens he used which makes the shadow analysis dubious, and the Society never agreed to release the photographs for independent analysis (3).

Early explorers were ideally equipped not only with persistency and bravery, but also with inventiveness, narrative skill and an orderly mind when staging

the scenarios in support of their claimed discoveries. Obviously making use of the technologies at hand, it was of utmost importance to build and accumulate scientific trustworthy capital in order to claim territory. History, it is said, is written by the winners.

The Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus was equipped with bravery and narrative skill. In the arly 18th century he set out into the world on his own mission to classify all animals, plants and minerals. Obviously something of an adventurer, at an early age he embarked upon ambitious expeditions into the various regions of Sweden in order to observe flora and fauna. His observations were published in appreciated volumes financed by the king of Sweden. From 1735 to 1738 he also travelled extensively in Germany, Holland, England and France, where he developed an impressive network of colleagues, disciples and friends. Once back in Sweden he became a popular lecturer who took personal interest in his students and often encouraged them to travel the world as his 'apostles' in search of further specimens to classify. Linnaeus published a classification system, Systema Naturae (1758) in which he outlined three kingdoms of nature. Linnaeus' mission was a kind of natures' inventory; to describe and classify all materials found on Earth. As part of this process he got rid of remnants from Medieval times. Tailed men and seven-headed hydras were left out in his updated inventory.

Linnaeus made use of an impressive amount of images and visual references that inspired him in his search for an order that would simplify and organise nature into a system that anyone could learn and remember. Further, as Michel Foucault pointed out, "His wish was that the order of the description, its division into paragraphs, and even its typographical modules, should reproduce the form of the plant itself"(4). Apart from his systems' apparent visual resemblance to the root system of his family flower, *linnaea borealis,* other examples of some of the visual references he made use of include the maps by Dutch cartographer Frederick de Witt, militant orders and formations of cavalry squadrons along with depictions of the recently discovered nervous system in the human body. His life-long mission, as stated by himself: "God creates. Linnaeus orders" continued until his death.

The desire to order, according to sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, is one of the main characteristics of modernity. By referring to the Arctic explorer and the natural scientist I wanted to set the stage for my enquiry into the topic of order. I wanted to benefit from the historical perspective while at the same time be able to give examples that illustrate the ordering of information. I wanted to highlight that what we look at and how we look at things are fundamental for our understanding of and engagement with a topic, and with the world at large.

Stemming from Linnaeus' system of classification

emerged a steady flow of inspired improvements, adaptations and improvisations on the theme of order. The structure of language and thereby of information had reached new levels and could, as observed by Foucault, accommodate "the possibility of linking representations together…. Instead of having validity solely when applied to the relations of nature and human nature, it questions the very possibility of all knowledge" (5).

The Scotsman Patrick Geddes found himself at home in the linguistic space accommodated by Linnaeus and his classifications. A geologist and botanist, and later town planner, Geddes developed a classification scheme for town planning around the three components of Place, Work and Folk. In this he followed certain ways of thinking introduced by Linnaeus and concluded that human society could be looked upon in similar ways as animals and plant societies. Geddes perceived of himself as a gardener who ordered the environment for the benefit of life. The difference between creating gardens as places for plant life and cities as places for human life was, according to Geddes, only a matter of degree: "My ambition being … to write in reality – here with flower and tree, and elsewhere with house and city – it is all the same" (6). For Geddes, the region was to become the visual expression of the order he detected in nature.

Geddes sought to break down the barriers that exist between disciplines. In this search he conceived a means by which to order his thoughts and ideas into thinking machines: "Take this double sheet of paper for our ledger of life; the left side is for the more passive aspects, or man shaped by place and his work, while the right side is for action; man guiding his daily life and remaking place. Now fold this ledger in half horizontally; we thus get four quarters, one for each of the main chambers of human life; the out-world both active and passive, and the in-world both passive and active. In each of these quarters belong a nine-squared thinking machine…" (7). For Geddes, the thinking machines functioned as a means to reveal his trains of thought. Like squares of a window where individual panes represented the variables of a problem, each pane was adjacent to at least one other pane. By this method relations and dependencies between the variables were to be symbolized. They were like large spread-sheets that allowed for generalizations while accommodating "the most trivial details of common life" (8). Obviously working at its best not as a formulaic solution but as means of expression, Geddes thinking machine vitalised some of the static and dissociated images of our present thought. In that he had similarities with Linnaeus' efforts with the classification system and they both laid the ground for new forms of thoughts by linking representations and establishing new connected principles.

Geddes was not concerned with the training of experts. He was far more concerned that the ordinary

citizen should have a vision and comprehension of the possibilities of their own cities and actively participate in town planning. His vision included a Civic Exhibition and a permanent centre for Civic Studies in every town. These centres would make efforts to reveal the correlations between thought and action, science and practice, sociology and morals. For this purpose, Geddes bought the Outlook Tower in Edinburgh 1892 and transformed into a dynamic meeting place (9).

Following in the steps outlined by Geddes and as part of Edinburgh Garden Festival 2007, artist Apolonija Šušterši worked in collaboration with architect and theoretician Meike Schalk. Their project, titled Garden Service, was installed as a public art piece along the Royal Mile where Geddes himself lived and where he at the time installed gardens. Garden Service consists of benches and a table, flower pots and programmed sessions of Sunday afternoon tea talks. In Geddes' legacy, the discussions were open for all and focussed on architecture, urbanism, city planning, environmental activism and of course on Geddes himself. This is the second project Šušterši and Schalk produces about Geddes. In 2005 they mounted a glass house along the river in Dundee where he held a position as professor in botany for 30 years. The project was an acknowledgement of Geddes' idea of a meeting place set within a garden. The glass house was equipped with plants, books and other material in order to support meetings and talks being held in the house. After the exhibition period the house was donated to an activist group concerned with the future developments of the city.

In a similar vein but with emphasis on spiritual and religious content, one of the works presented in this years sculpture project in Munster by artist Maria Pask was titled Beautiful City. Located in a large tent in the park, and surrounded by smaller individual tents for people to sleep in and with a cultivated kitchen garden, people were welcome to hang out, drink coffee, cook food and read available literature. This was an initiative for people to come together and discuss questions of "how to build a beautiful city, a city built not of walls and towers, but of visionary ideas, ethics and mutual trust" (10).

Vienniese architect and planner Camillo Sitte is often cited as the founder of modern city planning which he considered to be an art (11). In the mid 19th century he travelled around Europe trying to identify the aspects that made towns feel warm and welcoming. His conclusions, published in a book titled "City Planning According to Artistic Principles" (1889), marked the beginning of a new era, especially in German city planning. He emphasised irregular structures and spacious plazas. Medieval towns were in his opinion the most successful town planning and he was in favour of monuments and other aesthetic elements. "Squares and parks should be catalysers of public life, social condensers able to re-propose the way of life regarded as absent" (12). Many of his ideas were similar to those of the British Garden City advocate Ebenezer Howard.

The challenge for cities to be catalysers of public life, for the city to be alive and able to accommodate its inhabitants in their social needs is probably one of the main challenges we face in city planning today. This, while increased social control, isolation and privatisation in combination with additional demands on cities to accrue revenue, inspires rather bleak attempts when it comes to city planning. It is becoming increasingly difficult for planners to afford the existence of urban space that allows for citizens to congregate when not consuming. City centres today are designed to keep people moving, ideally in already premeditated patterns where one shop seamlessly takes over a customer's attention as soon as s/he moves into the territory of the adjacent shop. These manoeuvres are, as we're all well aware, accompanied by omnipresent surveillance cameras. When you're done shopping this is not a place where you'd like to hang out. Does it make sense to continue referring to this layout as a city? Manuel Castells, Bernard Tschumi, Paul Virilio and Edward Soja, among others, have all commented on the changing meaning of the city and on the fragmentation and dislocation of the urban environment. Urban historian and sociologist Richard Sennett explains what he sees as an important contribution to this development when he writes about the grid system as it developed in American cities. Firstly, in the horizontal form of nineteenth-century street networks and later, in the twentieth-century vertical grids by introduction of the skyscraper. This 'neutralization of the external world' is for Sennett associated with a flight from urbanity and a withdrawal into the home. We can also observe how aspects of the grid system have been extended and now include the abstract space of digital information and communication networks, inculcating a specific order in our lives and minds.

It didn't take long for university professors to begin teaching urban planning with the assistance of digital game environments: "I use Second Life for students to explore ideas about public space and what makes a good public space" says professor Anne Beamish University of Texas, and continues "Being in Second Life all of a sudden puts them in this different environment, which is similar but different, and it forces them to explore how they think about these things… When you're in Second Life, because it's similar, but the physics are different, people react differently. And it makes them think more deeply about how one designs public spaces" (13). This approach had already been instilled by the first release of SimCity 1989, which has been used as a training tool by local planning bodies since the mid 1990s.

Artists Langlands & Bell explore the relationships that link people and architecture in their work. Based on a specific environment, their new piece is an interactive

digital commission for Somerset House in London that comments not only on architecture but also on contemporary urban experience. Titled Superactive i2i, the work is accessible for visitors via computers connected to the WiFi network recently installed in all public areas at Somerset House, and also over the Internet. The artwork evolves around a digital model reconstructing the central Fountain Court at the House. People 'visiting' the artwork via their computers will be able to navigate the virtual Somerset House space and to trigger 'content episodes' that reveal hidden aspects of the building and its daily life. Visitors will also be able to create a virtual identity (an avatar) for themselves and communicate with the avatars of other visitors.

Also addressing questions about contemporary urban experiences, artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer provide environments in the form of large scale interactive works. While on the one hand strengthening social capital within local communities, he simultaneously challenges all embracing control mechanisms of digital networks. When introduced to his recent works shown at the Mexican Pavilion at Venice Biennial this year, the audience becomes aware of the artists' increased engagement with biometrics; methods that allow for unique recognition of humans by either behavioural or physiological expressions. Lozano-Hemmer's installation Pulse Room consist of handlebars that, once gripped, registers up to twelve different qualities of a person's heart beat. Some of these unique qualities are expresses in a light bulb that lights up for each person activating the interface. While poetic and beautiful, the work comments on the control mechanisms inherent in today's technologies. Lozano-Hemmer says: "I'm interested in biometrics. It's the technology used by the US Homeland Security and in combination with the Patriot Act they are looking to develop identifiers for each individual person; surveillance cameras that can detect your ethnic origin for example. To me these are terrible technologies. I'm interested in the idea of using the very same technologies of biometrics to create environments that express poetic and critical ideas" (14)

Hasan Elahi, an art professor and artist in the US, feeds as much information about his own life as he possibly can into a self-devised system of surveillance. For this he has developed a networked GPS tracking tool so that anyone can find out his whereabouts at any time. Accompanying this online information, Elahi also keeps a visual log of his meals, of airports and toilets visited over the past four years. Being so orderly and meticulous about his calendar in the first place probably saved him from further investigations by the FBI when he was detained and interrogated as a terrorist suspect at Detroit airport in June 2002. He began the Tracking Transcience project to protect himself from unwanted scrutiny by the authorities and to be able to move about freely. At any given moment he is able to present what he calls an 'alibi' (15).

As we have learned from earlier efforts in the ordering of information, however, is that we will soon discover yet another layer of unruly material not encompassed in the order just arrived at.

Notes

(1) http://classic.ipy.org/index.php
(2) New York Times Book Review, 25 June 2000 p.25
(3) www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Peary
(4) M. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994 p.135
(5) Ibid., p. 162
(6) Boyd Whyte, Ian and Welter, Volker M. *Biopolis: Patrick Geddes and the City of Life.* Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002 p. 54
(7) P. Geddes, *Cities in Evolution,* London: Williams & Norgate Ltd, 1949 p. 195
(8) Boyd Whyte, Ian and Welter, Volker M. Biopolis p. 50
(9) P. Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* p. 96
(10) www.beautifulcity.de
(11) P. Rabinow, French Modern. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989 p. 213
(12) www.sciencenet.com.br/ingles_abril/news/06/03_about.htm
(13) www.wired.com/Gaming/gamingreviews/news/2004/09/65052
(14) Interview with the artist Venice 10 June 2007. Also please note, when looking up patriot act on Wikipedia a 'disclaimer' tell us "this article may require cleanup"
(15) www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/06/18/eveningnews/main2944580.shtml y www.publicjournal.ca/data/hasan-elahi.pdf