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# The Guaranteed City. The Ruin of Urban Criticism ?

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE GUARANTEED CITY. THE RUIN OF URBAN CRITICISM?

MARC BREVIGLIERI

### Prelude

First visit to the district known as *Les Grottes* (Geneva), around 16.30.  
Edited fieldnotes.

“[...] you seem to go deeper the further you go into the district known as Les Grottes; you immediately become aware there of the imprint of a very specific atmosphere. As you go further in, you leave behind you relatively anonymous public spaces, a big car park with very few cars in it, a busy street which runs along the railway line and, further on, crosses over a wider street on the other side of the district. So you have to cross this car park before you get the feeling that you’re going into Les Grottes. Behind the alley which runs along the side of the car park, the district is divided up into small squares and steep little streets. At first sight, it doesn’t seem possible to take all of it in, or divide it all up, and neither is it entirely homogeneous. As you cross over into this district, what is uppermost is the sense that impressions have stopped, the prelude to the palpable manifestation of a more ‘internal’, more intimately alive atmosphere. Going into the district feels like slowing down; going deeper, feeling as if the city is shrinking in the confined space of the district. [...] Given the traces of wear and tear on the buildings and the street furniture, the material aspects of the area clearly date from different times, all mixed up together. It is not easy to find your way here; the palpable tone surrounding a stroll in the district is steeped in an exploratory excitement accompanied by a slight feeling of anxiety (the impression of being disorientated is linked to the sense of going deeper and shrinking). This anxiety is made up for by the sense of having arrived in a district, of being protected by a fictitious membrane which envelopes it in a sort of unity. [...] The layer of impressions is thick, the area gives the impression of architectural density; the streets, alleyways and passageways reveal a network of corridors and narrow lanes which draw the attention in different ways and make various different directions possible; the squares

invite you to stay a while; the play of light and shadow puts the variety of architectural forms into a different kind of context. Finding your way is also complicated by the fact that it is difficult to know what spaces are for: the distinction between public and private spaces is not always clear, it is not always obvious where the entrances to homes are and what constitutes a fence, some pathways appear to go through residential areas. You hesitate when faced with such ill-defined, porous areas, mixed up between places where people live and places where they move around. From the departure point in front of the railway station, up to the point where you enter Les Grottes, the quality of interaction with other people clearly changes: I discover that I am not so much in a place of intersection, of overlapping paths, as in the shared space of a neighbourhood with which I am intimately involved. This results in both discomfort, which comes from the sense of being an intruder, but also the feeling, encouraged by the insistent looks of some inhabitants, a friendly word from a shopkeeper or a brief exchange with a mother whose bike-riding child almost ran into me, that encounters will be possible.”

This text focuses on analysing an underground resistance dynamic. This dynamic does not emerge in the form of aggressivity, but rather suggests an alternative to what urbanisation is now trying, on an international scale, to control, regulate and direct by employing the principle of the guaranteed city, that is, a city that seeks to assure us of the quality of its properties and claims to share the evaluation of them. Such a city thus supposedly guarantees what is ‘generally’ thought to be free-flowing traffic, heritage architecture, a good selection of shops, efficient public services, satisfactory profitability for investments and so on. Provided for citizens in a given space, these properties of the guaranteed city contribute to the empowerment of individuals, who are supposed to find there the means of reinforcing their ability to make choices. However, the creation of a referential and information space which underpins the building of the guaranteed city tends to remove from it some of its palpable qualities. Contemporary cities change, neutralise and render bland the most indefinable and most untranslatable of atmospheres, atmospheres that could give cities a disturbing deepness, changing emotional tones, opportunities for wandering without knowing where you are going.

## **The Call for Guarantees**

The prelude recounting my first visit to the district known as Les Grottes emphasises the palpable quality of urban space which calls up a disturbing curiosity created by the sense that there are no limits to the path being followed. In a way, the guaranteed city would like to no longer make that

possible, and neither would upsetting expectations, uncontrollable displacement of palpable supports, or unclear dividing lines within a given area be possible. It is for that very reason that there is resistance to the widespread creation of such cities, resistance that is manifested through forms of housing and ways of sharing urban space which confuse referential spaces and the conventional demarcation of zones which emerge from the urbanisation of modern-day cities, reintroducing lack of clarity in the way spaces are taken ownership of and made use of, giving back reality to the ‘regenerating otherness of the palpable’ (Lannoy 2008). There is a reason why recent protest movements such as the ‘indignant ones’ made so much of the question of space and its invasion by aesthetics and what is palpable (Bulle, 2012).

### **The Appearance of Civilisational Anxiety**

I will first of all outline a very general plan, from which it will gradually be possible to focus more on a reflection around the guaranteed city. First of all, we need to place the discussion in the context of anxiety which is peculiar to our civilisation, which broadly constitutes the first explanation for an almost unlimited request for guarantees. These guarantees, particularly when it comes to building and urbanisation, give rise to an unprecedented use of accreditation and evaluation (Vitale, 2009; Bourdin, 2010; Thévenot, 1986; 1994; 1997; 2009a)<sup>1</sup>. This anxiety imprisons ‘human acts’ [‘agir humain’] (Jonas, 1990) in their worry, and makes their authority dependent upon the credit accorded to other means which are likely to create trust. Such means are varied and meant to represent a number of neutral authorities independent of all display of arbitrary, oppressive power which could determine the direction of projects to build in or change the city. They include observatories which produce independent scientific reports, agencies responsible for quality assurance and certification, civil engineering companies, places where consultation occurs, making democratic oversight of projects and participation in them possible, or even campaign groups and sometimes trade union members suggesting alternative measures. The ways in which legitimate authority over an urban project is consolidated thus include the consultation of specialists, the application of evolving regulations which impose technical requirements (regulations which are more often produced by organisations representing a range of interests than by the state), or by organisations dealing with accrediting and certifying the quality of the project. It is by working with such bodies that a legitimate authority can gain credibility and be taken seriously by everyone involved. Integrating such measures (most of which

are legal requirements) into the development of an urban project leads to the proliferation and dense interconnection of performance and quality indicators (safety, energy saving, budgeting, awareness of inhabitants' needs and so on). Monitoring, benchmarking and targeting using databases made reliable through statistical and econometric tools are all made use of. On the one hand such indicators are fed into a large network of people involved in building or developing a space, potentially converging with instruments which oversee public activity on a national scale. On the other, they are integrated into a veritable marketisation of certified consumables, a point we will return to. It is in part under the influence of this double dynamic that large cities are coming to be more and more alike, whilst at the same time becoming comparable.

### **First Digression Towards a Critical Genesis: Architecture of Usage Compared with the Idea of a Guarantee**

This transformation of legitimate power which is at stake in the urban project, and which gives rise to a new economy based on the distribution of credit, calls into question the basic confidence that architects have to be able to accord inhabitants in the course of the creative process. We are not talking here about ways of consulting democratically which, before and during a project, put in place or refine a dialogue around inhabitants' rationalised needs. We are rather talking about a credit accorded to creative, unexpected, potential usages, which come into play once the building is constructed and the place created, through the singular and almost vital appropriation of it by inhabitants. A fundamental gesture, in that it structures the experience of living there in a positive way and in a sense partly contributes itself to the completion of the work, its progressive metamorphosis or its inventive evolution. It contributes to this actively by expressing, with regards to architecture and buildings, an embodiment which is there to stay, the redevelopment of a familiar material environment and a basic emotional topography. In short, an architecture of usage.

### **Elaboration of a Defensive Space**

So to start with, I will emphasise the diffuse sense of anxiety which leads our globalised urban civilisation to project a negative reference of its experience which often takes as a metaphor an urban hell. A hell which we fall into as if we were tumbling into the abyss, and which precisely implies an urgent request for guarantees about its reorganisation and for good use to be made of it. There is no doubt at all that this civilisational anxiety, when

faced with the hell represented by the death throes or gradual decline of some towns and cities, has a very specific connection with architecture and urbanisation, which have the power to convert the place we live into a shelter and enable security to take the upper hand in shared spaces. The victory of the guaranteed city must be projected into this primordial relationship.

What the anxiety that we are talking about here feeds, and what is being affirmed through it, is the finite, determined space which is conducive to defensive elaborations which involve the shrinking of emotional fields and of possibilities for having experiences which usually deepen our awareness of the city. The apparent paradox of this defensive space is that it does not have a closed, hermetic relationship with the outside world, since it imposes itself in a dimension which is from the outset globalised, and is even highly receptive when it comes to the flow of commercial and information exchanges which enable contemporary capitalism to thrive. For once the guaranteed city has been built, we once again have to trust the credit of a measure: the openly declared exemplary nature of architectural and urban constructions, which can be exported and guaranteed by objective quality indicators, can be subsumed into the monetary equivalent and thus be regarded by creditors as interest earned, creditors who themselves are subject to the demands of the transnational capital which fuels globalised exchanges.

The aspect of this anxiety which is hidden behind the desire for power of this defensive form of government promoting the guaranteed city fits into the context of the imminence of a global catastrophe, a disastrous and irreversible destabilisation of the major cosmic and biological balances; Hans Jonas outlined this very well (Jonas, 1990). This anxiety cannot be separated out from the theme of guilt; human acts in themselves contain the potential to threaten their own existence by developing a world which is based on the speeding-up of technoscientific progress and economic and information networks, which can lead to harmful side effects whose cumulative and irreversible outcomes escape their control<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, anxiety also has an ethical component, for it is indeed the ethics specific to the ideology of economic progress, whose deep-rooted pattern – consumption – takes for granted the destruction and exhaustion of resources and energy, that end up threatening humanity's very foundations. Human acts are putting in danger nothing less than the ground on which human existence is based; they are endangering "life which supports it and nature which in times gone by provided shelter as settlements came into existence" [*la vie qui le porte et la nature à l'abri de laquelle il découpait jadis l'enclos de ses cités*] (Ricoeur, 1991: 284).

## **Anxiety About Incommensurability and Concern for What Can Be Measured (Refusal of Political Imagination)**

The first conclusion that is evident for everyone is the size of the phenomenon or its incommensurability: the extent of it, the timeline involved, the civilisational (and not just natural) dimension, its capacity for destruction compared to its exponential destructive level, which is itself increased by the generalised interconnection characteristic of the planetary global network and its constant transformation<sup>3</sup>. So if we consider that anxiety corresponds to the coming together of energies that are oriented towards the future, we understand that our civilisation, particularly weakened by the challenge posed by incommensurability, becomes very tense when faced with the elimination of its entire repertoire of solutions, and thus the considerable weakening of its decision-making powers and its control of the future. So this tension exerts pressure to draw the feelings of anxiety about incommensurability back to a concern for what can be calculated. In other words to stifle the need for a U-turn in the ethics of development which Hans Jonas called for through a policy of care and a philosophy of responsible expectation, in favour of the challenge of evaluating threat. Rather than constructing another world architecture based on another idea of what is shared, which would require using the excentric function of political imagination and the creation of a new ethics, concern for what can be calculated once again becomes a question for scientific research and pseudo politics. ‘Pseudo’ because given over entirely to a fascination for public risk management and taken away from its key task through the systematic use of measuring and evaluating tools and the call to third parties who guarantee the quality of its approach and the efficiency of its objectives.

### **Calming Down (1), Normalising, Channelling Events**

The cognitive area for calculation which the challenge of evaluation creates is at the centre of collusion between local authorities, international bodies who help to regulate the global market and international law, and major investors in construction (especially the big building and civil engineering companies). The efficiency of this collusion cannot now be understood without referring to the part played by a normalising movement which has a considerable impact on human societies and their material and spatial environments. A specific cognitive area for calculation comes into play there: broadly speaking, normalisation organises the world into properties that can be measured, implying for example that the properties of

humans and of things and the relations between them, should be considered to be regular and predictable (Thévenot, 1995; 1997). The contemporary urban environment is undergoing a functional normalisation and is now almost entirely covered by a space constituted of conventional references which make it easier to predict the normal usage that will be made of it. Thus, the political and scientific challenge thrown out to evaluation, recharged by so many phenomena which give rise to the concern for what can be calculated (chain reactions, domino effects, underhand processes of contagion, sudden spread of crises, volatility of measuring indicators, collapse of values and so on), contributes to a qualitative change in the urban space and its material and natural environment. This change can be understood as a certain desire to channel unexpected events. So it is not a question of purely and simply locking down unpredictable, unstable areas, but enabling 'instruments of observation' to take charge of them. Such instruments enclose the event in an objective qualifying mechanism by necessarily reducing its inherent complexity (Thévenot, 1997). In such a situation, the ecstatic explosion of a celebratory mood will be reduced to the guarantee of urban entertainment and cultural consumption. The technical inventiveness of creators will be directed towards channels for innovation which guarantee the industrial recycling of the land and place value on the 'creativity of cities' indicator (Viaud, Pattaroni and Berthoud, 2010; Roy-Valex, 2010). A reinforced guaranteed environment thus exists there which appears to seek to take the city away or protect it from a vague awareness of perceptions where coming across something strange could still amaze city dwellers and, having destabilised them, prevent them from acting as autonomous individuals (Pattaroni, 2005).

### **Calming Down (2). The Attractiveness Coefficient, the City Evaluated by the Market**

We have to bear in mind that the massive spread of normalising systems and processes for certifying quality follows closely on the heels of the development of a commercial space which functions in the globalised flow of goods. It is precisely on this point that the European Community, a key player when it comes to expanding the normative sphere (whether concerning rights or technical norms), can be seen to be participating in the reinforcement of trade regulation and the increase of competition (Thévenot, 2007a). Certification of the quality of goods and services has become, in markets which have been made aggressive and volatile by this increased competition, an indispensable reference point for all those involved in the economy: an indication of trust and attribution of rights for



consumers and, thanks to the enhanced reputation it brings, a source of added commercial value for producers. Cities' attractiveness coefficient, which carefully counts up the quality and performance certifications (with regard to the economy, energy and so on) acts as powerful commercial information, leading to convincing and winning over human and financial capital. The power of this commercial information is mainly disseminated in the media by a sophisticated, metric mechanism (quality of life indicators and classification in the global human hierarchy) which introduces onto the market a dynamic conative element through the differentiation and rivalry created between cities. The latter then appear to be so many 'prestigious objects', both sources of 'mimetic interactions' (implying a movement towards greater similarity) and strategies for creating distinction (leading to difference) (Orléan, 2011).

### **Second Digression Towards a Critical Genesis: Opposing the Engaging and the Attractive**

Behind this commercial conception of the city, when it comes to city dwellers a somewhat unusual emotional economy is established. The urban environment improves in the objectivity of whatever makes it attractive (or appealing), it introduces elements of judgement which need to be brought up to date, it corresponds to a consumerist approach where individual taste and preference are challenged. Attractiveness sets up distance with the reality of attachment, where affinity and dependence, palpable or physical appropriation and convictions connected to a strong intimate bond created over time are at issue. The very idea of attractiveness loosens this bond, converts the strong sense of loving a place into a simple preference, reduces a network of palpable ties to an objective judgement. The entire way of seeing things is overturned and the nature of the existential complement that the city represents is changed. It is as if it were taken for granted that the guaranteed city wanted to give the assurance that it is attractive and has a power of attraction, but that nothing in its charm offensive can prefigure the attachment that some will have for it. Maybe we have to place this creative process and the progress of policies of quality certification for cities, back in the context of the expansion of a world set up to deal with an intensified flow of human beings and heightened mobility. The emphasis placed on attractiveness explains a coming into presence, an encouragement of moving around and the ever-present possibility that we will cease to identify with the city we live in. When moved to attachment, this emphasis makes clear what remains stable, the reasons for emotional rootedness.

## **Architectural Variety as a Commercial Guarantee**

The attractiveness of cities is thus defined in terms of their commercial legitimisation, in a context where competition between them is increasing. The strategies they use to position themselves in this competitive arena make them particularly sensitive to the impact on their reputation of classifications of quality of life, major cultural or sporting events or exceptional architecture, all of which are widely publicised in the media. But the demands of the market also have an impact on the variety of what is on offer, meeting the requirements of varied personal preferences and eclectic tastes. By wanting to make an urban production that is integrated into a global circuit of consumption variable or heterogeneous, the guaranteed city tends to create varied architecture, maybe even a search for the exceptional.

Jacques Lucan, describing the increasing number of residential blocks composed of ‘several buildings created by different architects for different contractors’ (macrolots), speaks enthusiastically of the emergence of a ‘diverse city’ [‘ville diverse’] and of ‘diversity’ being the key word in contemporary urbanism<sup>4</sup>. The central issue of economic rationality is never far away, since such an approach makes it possible to bring together in this structure an attractive range of architects whose reputation has been made thanks to the relative massification of architectural culture. Quoting a passage from a groundbreaking article by Christian de Portzamparc, Jacques Lucan says: “The residential block makes the ‘volumetric independence of different types of architecture’ possible, and this guarantees ‘an infinite range of possibilities for dividing up buildings and architecture’, and hence variety in the ways in which individual architects express themselves” (Lucan, 2011: 49). The impact on the urban environment can clearly be observed. Despite the rigidity of the specifications given to architects and which give rise to much discussion amongst them, the overall shapes are becoming more varied, giving rise to variety in architectural atmospheres, the choice of innovative materials, the use of forms which have never previously been employed, one-off approaches and irregular positioning of buildings, accentuating their independence and the likelihood that they will change over time.

## **Tension which is Integral to Intermediary Spaces**

But this movement towards a greater freedom from types, and the introduction of architectural differentiation, reminds us, when we look at it again, about the extraordinary place occupied by the question of guarantees.

Following Jacques Lucan's descriptions, which are based on a detailed study of different architectural projects carried out over the last fifteen years in various French cities, variations in architectural expression are found mainly in terms of the volume and the external appearance of the building, the aspects where the gaze engages with the size and the "sculptural dimension of the architectural form" (Lucan, 2011: 61). However, the creation of more and more different shapes of buildings and the irregular positioning of them tends to introduce between them irregular and broken spatial configurations in the spaces that go through and cross over them: roads that suddenly stop, passageways between buildings, contrasting atmospheres, surprising topography and so on. We are certainly here at the epicentre of an architectural renewal, often drawing on the opportunities presented by digital modelling, which introduces unknown, hybrid shapes (Shu, 2011). But we are also at a crossroads of tensions which reminds us that carrying out a project is a polyphonic conception, in which voices are often out of tune with each other. Indeed, one clear element of tension concerns the status of intermediary spaces, and this raises the question of thresholds and limits, and the tangible reaffirmation of a bipolar divide between private and public, divide which is intrinsic to defending individual rights and clearly including in the project the context of political liberalism, which we will return to later. In her recent doctorate on intermediary spaces in residential buildings in contemporary Paris, Valérie Lebois describes the dynamic balance between different architectural projects from the point of view of the difficult coming-together of many positions (architect, inhabitants, contractors, financial backers) (Lebois, 2010). The management of intermediary spaces represents a recurrent source of tension when it comes to building and maintaining residential blocks. Lebois's thesis suggests a range of mechanisms which reduce this tension, according greater power to an "economic and security logic" which leads to the reinforcement of a "client-focused approach" advocated very early on in the project by contractors (Lebois, 2010: 137). The generalisation of this "customer-focused culture" constantly contributes to the ideological polarisation of financial backers around a double objective: "to ensure the good management of buildings and ensure that everyone can enjoy peace and quiet" (idem: 171). The caretaker becomes a 'warden', who is expected to 'satisfy customers' whilst also, in collaboration with inhabitants, 'coproducing security' and evaluating the risk of damage, which the financial backers will put down as maintenance costs. Inhabitants take part in this type of evaluation through surveys and by voicing their complaints. When this happens, we note that their ability to socialise with others becomes reduced to a moral minimalism and the mere expression of their

individual preferences<sup>5</sup>. There is strong evidence that these preferences indicate a “request for quiet when faced with disturbances in their neighbourhood” and when encountering “the risk of intrusion from the outside” (Lebois, 2010: 150). Everyone appears to agree that it is necessary for the neighbourhood to be quiet and that this can be achieved through a “reinforcement of the private nature of accommodation [...] and the elimination of practices which do not fit into the clear public/private divide” (Lebois, 2010: 108). The vigilance with which separation is maintained and guaranteed is the basis of the ‘logic of the service society’ which is the overarching principle when it comes to the management of these residential blocks.

### **Third Digression Towards a Critical Genesis: The Disturbing Power of Architectures of Usage**

Reading these studies, we can suppose that breaking away from types and the desire to develop a ‘varied city’ (a mixture of differently-shaped buildings, a range of different types of intermediary space and so on), partly fails in its intention to open up to the diversity of usages and deepen the palpable relationship to space. It fails, at least as far as an habitual relation which takes control of space, moves into it, makes use of it where it can be lived in, makes exploration possible, creating playfulness and thus space to play is concerned. It is precisely this proximity, this emerging architecture of usage, which risks upsetting a functional normality and presents a challenge for the reasonable use of spaces. It was proximity which, in our previous example, bothered the warden and threatened the inhabitant who was holding fast to the illusion of potential quiet. This then led to a concern for evaluation and a legitimate request for guarantees to preserve the good functioning of shared spaces and protect everyone’s private sphere. This example shows us that the guaranteed city creates a structuring component which acts on the world right from the lowest level of daily usage and familiar contact. Yet the ‘varied city’ does not seem capable of countering this structuring power [IV. 3] (Podestà and Vitale, 2011).

## **The Restructuring of Habits and the Neutralisation of Spaces**

### **The Functional Designation of Spaces of Usage (Eradication of Undesignated Spaces)**

I believe it is important to emphasise that the guaranteed city is characterised as contributing to structurally composing the daily usage of the urban environment. We must once again mention three of these structuring features in order to better define this characterisation: a systematic approach to categorising floating, indefinite spaces; an excessive production of normative reference points and conventional referents in urban public space; an anthropological reduction linked with the promotion of autonomous individuals. First of all, the guaranteed city assures us that it can be easily and universally understood; everything appears obvious, the city revealing itself to be formed of the juxtaposition of referenced places which refer to a representation of the normalised functions of space. In fact, spaces which have no referents or where the referents are not clear, as is the case for example, when an area of wasteland is temporarily occupied by a protest group, upset the perspective of the guaranteed city and potentially break up its structuring power. At various points of Valérie Lebois's thesis, we discover the extent to which the febrile expectation of how intermediary spaces will be made use of leads those involved in a project, providing expertise or being consulted about it to engage in a real shared effort to clearly categorise and systematically name bits of space (passageway, internal passageway, footbridge, porch and so on). Sometimes this is in order to ensure that there is no space that does not have a specific function<sup>6</sup>, sometimes it is in order to clarify what the initial function of the space is, that is, it serves to enable people to move around, and is not a space that people should remain in for any length of time<sup>7</sup>. We also see that once the concern for guarantees is set off again by disturbances which arise, the work of categorisation is completed by rules being added or repeated, the introduction of prescriptive technical rules which are meant to provide protection from 'deviant' behaviour (ie behaviour outside functional normality), or finally by the elimination of spatial elements which can be made use of in different ways.

## **Normalisation of Spaces of Usage (Emergence of Individuals whose Behaviour is Normally Predictable)**

A second feature which characterises this structuring element of the guaranteed city when it come to daily usage of the urban environment is connected to the systematic policy of normalisation and certification of activities and facilities in public spaces. This element takes the form of a certain functional uniformisation of urban space: even if normalisation does not exclude the possibility of variety, the same functional referential space becomes generalised and as a result, the range of representations of normal actions becomes limited. In addition, norms become directly involved in familiar configurations by introducing both standardised cognitive reference points into ordinary activities and physical guiding forces which can direct movement and make the most rational use of the environment. Thus the guaranteed city is suited to being used by individuals in ways that can normally be predicted. Individuals never feel lost, are rarely upset, and pass through the urban space, which reinforces their sense of autonomy and complete individuality. They are fully in control of the path they choose, selecting from a range of objectified possibilities which have been projected onto a map, and they see the city from on high. They thus tend to move around in a finalised space, following directions, finding their way thanks to signifying reference points, anticipating problems which are generally pointed out, measuring distance and controlling effort. They walk confidently and, paradoxically, far from provoking in them a disconcerted surprise at the inexhaustible depth of reality, the attraction of the urban world's novelty seems always first of all to respond to certain expectations whose possible range is both determined in advance and possible to engage with on an individual level. The urban environment progressively changes its appearance in order to embrace and advance this desire for guarantees by reorganising its pre-phenomenal spaciousness, that is its actual and worldly contribution to the emergence of a way of using it and to the consecration of a generic public ideally made up of autonomous individual subjects, the only ones fully qualified to live there.

### **Use of the Gaze and Adjustment of Social Distance**

We still need however to discuss the third and final feature involved in this structuring element which impacts on the familiar relationship to the guaranteed city. We were pointing out that an anthropological reduction exists which tends to place in the forefront city dwellers whose ability to be

is closely focused on the individual ability to move around, directed by the ‘awareness of the gaze’ [‘conscience de l’oeil’] (Sennett, 2000). What does it mean when we focus on the visual at the expense of the other senses, in a complex space such as the city? Jacques Lucan’s description of recent redevelopments which, as in most large European cities, place the emphasis on architectural diversity, provides us with some initial thoughts. The range of different shapes, which as we have seen poses questions around thresholds and limits, seems to be accompanied by a polarisation of opinions and of the architectural conception of the visible. Not in order to promote an aesthetic which is solely limited to the visual, but specifically to help to determine the correlative question of thresholds and limits, so that sight is the principal sense being relied on. Thus, in order to make the best use of collaboration between architects, the rules laid down for urban development will give definitions which are precise enough to “predefine the volume” but also “the right to light or the status of public and private walkways” (Lucan, 2011: 53). “Opening up viewpoints and ways for the sun to come into residential blocks”, widening façades in order to “avoid flats looking straight into one another and create views” (Lucan, 2011: 65) are also mentioned. Openings are generally organised so as to look attractive and emphasise the power of sight in public: “visual openings” which open onto country scenes and visual passages which allow movement from public areas to the inside of some residences, for example to highlight small private gardens (Lucan, 2011: 156). But this facility for the gaze to penetrate into residential areas, gaze which is indeed not seeking to discover private areas but rather exploring what can be made public, only seems possible if a reinforced guarantee is given that the public will maintain a reasonable distance from private property. And it is specifically the gaze which is called upon here, since it is above all the sense which maintains its distance, and can therefore guarantee distance by being content to slide over the city without touching it, seizing as it goes the information which fills the public space<sup>8</sup>.

This first level on which the gaze is involved, recognising the distinction between public and private, which determines a liberal idea of urban space, is very closely connected to a second level. The gaze can modify its intensity and its availability for others and is the essential tool for pacifying relations between individuals in towns and cities (Breviglieri and Stavo-Debaugé, 2007). Whether it is called ‘polite indifference’ or ‘civil inattention’, this pacified regulation of the urban relationship interacts with the effect of the gaze which envisages others’ experience essentially as fleeting and reciprocal. Public interaction tends to remain superficial, bringing about a ‘neutralisation’ of perception which limits the city’s ability to provide

stimulation<sup>9</sup>. It is partly on the basis of just such this fleeting shared experience that an implicit priority accorded to mobility is created. Assisted by the gaze, which facilitates movement as much as it protects from interaction, this mobility turns out to be fundamental for city dwellers' individual autonomy. Their journeys are presented to them as controllable, they can determine the direction and speed of them, and journeys taken form part of the numerous calculated action plans carried out throughout the day. Here two demands come together which flesh out the figure of the individual subject encountered previously; the first requires individuals to place their preferences at the centre of their lives, and have their paths determined by those preferences, and the second requires them to make decisions for themselves, which confers on their choices the respect which is at the core of reciprocity in human relations. We are now assured that, behind the place accorded to the gaze's structuring role, and thus in the context of what its importance introduces into the relationship to space and to others, a specific model for organising the city combined with a certain anthropology of city dwellers. We still need to better understand how this guaranteed city which places so much emphasis on the individual subject, is somehow an echo of the model of the cosmopolitan city which takes with it the great values of political and economic liberalism.

### **Liberal Tolerance and Neutralisation of Palpable Elements**

We have described urban phenomena from the point of view of the gaze's abilities, but have in fact not yet directly touched on the political and moral context which surrounds on all sides this descriptive sketch. By clarifying it, through a rapid overview of the sociology inspired by the 'social laboratory' of the Chicago of the 1920s, we will once again come across the project of the guaranteed city. As we have already seen, this city leads to a sort of sanitising or palpable neutralisation of its spaces, by reducing them to a normalised state set up for the circulation of information in the service of those who have a role in the city (inhabitants and businesses). By looking more closely at what underpins this model of urban sociability based on polite indifference, we could clarify a quite decisive fact about political liberalism. A new way of clearly understanding the linking of political liberalism and the emergence of the American metropolis (itself at the origins of this sociability) leads us to consider the history of religious pluralism in the USA and the way in which public space organised according to the principle of tolerance became established (Walzer, 1988). Chicago is known as a place where a succession of migrants, all with their own traditions, came together, and where a range of



religious beliefs were able to coexist relatively peacefully and in an anti-authoritarian way. Just after describing the city, in a founding text, as a ‘world mosaic’, Louis Wirth added: “the juxtaposition of personalities and different ways of life tends to produce a relativist vision and a sense of tolerance for differences which can be considered as conditions for rationality and lead to the secularisation of life” (Wirth, 1990: 271). As a result, two fundamental elements are linked in a coextensive fashion. The spirit of tolerance which is an integral part of superficial and ephemeral interactions in cities, assuming that each individual’s convictions are relativised to the point of indifference, is the silent, ideological operation which makes it possible for an individual subject to emerge. Such an individual subject, becoming free in the urban environment, will be able to highlight the “segments of their personality” with regard to the “range of their interests” (Wirth, 1990: 272).

### **Living Side by Side and the Threat of Disaster in the Multicultural Metropolis**

There is however behind this position both a reductionist way of envisaging ‘the individual taking part in the liberal public space’ and a restrictive conception of the idea of tolerance (Thévenot, 2008). If this restrictive conception is equated with indifference, where in the end difference has no importance at all, we can appreciate just how poor communication has become. Sociologists have studied this through looking at urban loneliness or the withdrawal towards local links and the feeling of belonging to a very small neighbourhood<sup>10</sup>. Richard Sennett points out the human cost of relativism, by citing the example of inhabitants of large cities who are afraid of meeting others and find it difficult to accept conflict between differences by talking and exercising the critical power of the gaze. But what is this tolerance combatting? First of all, the hidden violence within intense religious beliefs or more generally convictions. It is based on a strong fear of religious wars, opening the way towards a secular society (Stavo-Debaugé, 2012b)<sup>11</sup>. In order to do that, it adopts a measured gesture which, through the mobility of the gaze and exchanges of looks, establishes the right distance between individuals. Thus, in its very expression, tolerance aims to guarantee an inviolable space which will always escape anyone who wants to impose their own convictions. Then, and these things are not unconnected, tolerance goes towards the problem posed by the high density of large cities, that is, the fact that people are living cheek by jowl. Louis Wirth points out the correlation between the two phenomena: “Never before have so many very different people [...] been brought together in

such close proximity as in the great American cities. In general, and particularly in America, cities contain a wide variety of people, cultures and ways of life, between which there is often only very minimal communication, complete indifference and a high level of tolerance [...]” (Wirth, 1990: 276). Overcrowding is a way of increasing pressure on closeness and emphasising its potential to be negative. More radically, and a few years earlier in the classic text *The City*, Robert Ezra Park emphasised that in large towns and cities one could expect “an unhealthy, contagious overcrowding in which the destitute, the morally corrupt and the petty criminal are all living”, which is supposedly the reason why “they reproduce endlessly, body and soul [...]” (Park, 1990: 130).

But before all this, what threatens peace (which is based on an implicit consensus of a mutual trusting relationship preserved by the agreement on tolerance), is the uncontrollable drive for liberation awoken by living in close proximity to others, and which has a powerful ability to spread. These ‘wild impulses’, ‘uncontrolled, undisciplined appetites’, these ‘predatory relations’ which urban civilisation partly refuses to acknowledge. Reflecting a link between the commercial economy and political liberalism, we find in Louis Wirth and Ezra Park constant references to Adam Smith. Smith identified the source of violence and the ruin of the unity of cities and political economies in the primitive, visceral appetite which threatens to put property and that which must above all else be protected (private possessions), under attack. The reason why famine sheds a sidelight on the entire political economy of Adam Smith, is that it brings with it an irrepressible violence, a release of the avidity that can give rise to the greatest disasters (pillaging, murder and so on) and bring in its wake incommensurable suffering (Breviglieri, 2009b). The formidable closeness created by envy and greed requires that a reasonable distance from the contractual relationship be established at their expense. This relationship assumes the role of damping down predatory impulses and enabling them to be expressed in terms of individual interests, at the same time neutralising their passionate undercurrents and thus adding to the enriching virtues of economic trade the idea of a guarantee of universal peace.

## **The Undeniable Breakthrough of ‘Normalising Liberalism’<sup>12</sup>**

### **Participatory Urbanism and Transfiguration of the Emotional Space Inhabited**

The work carried out by economic liberalism to calm down violence between human beings has an equivalent in political liberalism. So that the process of exchanging opposing views has the violence of personal convictions removed from it, these convictions first of all have to be translated and communicated as opinions which will then become the ‘chosen format for public expression in secular liberal systems’. This is a format which makes critical exchanges and disagreement possible, whilst also ensuring that no one can “claim to be superior [...] or that what they are saying is incommensurable” (Stavo-Debaugé, 2012b: 80-81). This position is clearly echoed in contemporary encouragement to get involved and the considerable growth in opportunities to take part in urban projects (public debates about development projects, consultation of inhabitants, community councils and so on) (Bacqué, 2011). Such procedures are meant to ensure the representation of inhabitants/citizens as well as their active participation in urban projects. The clear encouragement in favour of deliberative logic takes for granted the introduction of interactive procedures, focused on working together, which make it possible to demarcate interests, define strategies and finally construct and review operational choices<sup>13</sup>. At this level, “political actors act as ‘guarantors’ of these procedures for constructing incremental, open choices” (Pinson, 2006: 635). But they also play a key role in transforming the sense of living in a place, through a long procedure which encourages inhabitants to express their aspirations and critical opinions, that is, communicate in such a way as to contribute to the governance of an urban project. However, such a procedure requires some difficult work, both to cultivate detachment from feelings which are too influenced by close connections and to convert those elements into explicit declarations and targets where needs, interests and individual tastes are clearly expressed<sup>14</sup>. These objective dimensions, judged according to how representative they are and integrated into negotiations and the drawing-up of contracts for urban projects, include conventional reference points which can be integrated into a project’s quality control mechanisms. The considerable range of people involved (residents, campaigners, politicians, urban planning experts, architects and so on) turn communication mainly in the direction of public involvement of ‘liberal civility’, through which a ‘space for (realistic) options’ must

eventually be expressed (Thévenot, 2008). In fact, as Marion Carrel points out, the greatest frustrations appear to be expressed through the criticism of procedures which ‘don’t give any choice’ (Carrel, 2013). That is indeed a fundamental characteristic of the guaranteed city: it makes a liberally-inclined world possible, particularly by promoting the empowerment of an individual liberal subject able to find their way through a world set up like a series of certified options.

### **The Guaranteed Stranger**

We cannot emphasise the strong influence of liberal ideology without returning to the question of globalisation, which faces urbanisation with chaotic growth drives and increased possibilities of more or less legal migration (a phenomenon which has in particular led to a lot of media and political interest). When faced with these combined factors, the authorities running large cities seem tempted by the promises of liberal multiculturalism, which supposedly guarantees peaceful coexistence despite the differences between those who live there or pass through. But a strong sense of exclusion is also evident in this multiculturalism, manifested in reactions to differences that are challenging and legitimisation of the anxious tracking of the movements of people and capital. For the promises held out by the guaranteed city are first of all based on the idea of a stranger who is expected to arrive as an individual subject capable of acting autonomously. This vision of the city creates a fluid, transparent space whose key function is to facilitate individual plans for moving around for those who are in a position to take charge of those plans.

The body of values that crisscross this city placed under the aegis of multicultural liberalism were already mainly in place when large cosmopolitan American cities started to emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is quite true that they do not appear in that light in the arguments of the sociologists of the Chicago School, who were conducting research which claimed to analyse the growth of the city as neutrally as possible, from the point of view of regularities indicating trends or balances representing a law. But in order to understand the nature of the indicators which are today made use of by the guaranteed city, and which in fact are no more explicit when it comes to their values, we have to look again at the time when thinking about cosmopolitan cities very first began. The space left for individual autonomy and competition between interests, opinions and tastes, already represents there the substance of what is communicated between humans. The fact of having fully accepted economic and political liberalism, which makes it possible to meet the challenge of encountering

strangers, is also specifically tangible there. In due course, we will need to demonstrate that it is the questioning of these various values that fuels the widespread quest for guarantees which characterises modern urban development, turning it in the direction of the two pillars of contemporary urbanism represented by mobility and mixing.

### **The Promises of the Multicultural Liberal City**

What we have called a body of values are in fact organised in the following way: the polarity between on the one hand density and on the other mobility forms the basis of the major dialectic of cosmopolitan cities and this is also the major dialectic of individual freedom. In the same way, we see developing a whole series of events which are part of this dialectic: starting with the breaking down of divisions in traditional societies, they lead to the complete and peaceful mingling of humans, which we could nowadays term mixing. The opposition between density and mobility continues to be the axis around which everything is organised and the dynamic tension of all the ordinary referents of urban life: city dwellers' psychology, pluralism of beliefs, accommodation, fashion, traffic, the job market, the monetary economy and so on. But the dialectic is also at work on a background stabilised by trust (or convictions): in liberalism's ability to entirely take on the question of what is ours and what is different 'by lowering the thresholds for tolerance and acceptance' (Ricoeur, 2003) and in an implicit, reasoned prometheism in the service of developing and organising the city and enabling it to function. Conceived as a new substitute for religious conviction, this background directs and speeds up the movement towards secularisation, at the same time creating a cultural condition which makes the emergence of the city possible. It does indeed turn it away from ways of living that are focused on the neighbourhood community and rooted in old traditions, opening it out to a cosmopolitan space which faces the future, a utilitarian and patrimonial complex completely in the service of humans. There are however thousands of dangers inherent to urban life, which is based on the acceptance of plurality and the increasing complexity of human lives. The daily problems are well known, although they often crop up unexpectedly: incidental difficulty and living in close proximity to others, uncertainty of tenancy, segregation, traffic-choked streets, urban sprawl, breakdowns in communication networks, businesses under threat, technological innovation which creates anxiety, isolation, madness and so on. It would seem though that for each of these aspects, and as a kind of echo of their unpredictability, the background can reply with an implicit promise: a negotiation finding a

solution for a temporary situation, a contract that satisfies all parties, a way to improve movement, technical progress or a technological breakthrough. So we see here that the promise of secularised, cosmopolitan coexistence is being associated with the promise of functional efficiency focused on increased speed of circulation (of knowledge, people, capital). And as the Chicago School said, the assurance that ‘this apparent chaos is the specific balance of urban societies’, where originality and competition, which reinforce individuality, are compensated for by levelling-down brought about by the boom in mass production and the work of institutions (Grafmeyer and Joseph, 1990).

### **Collapse of the Background Supporting Promises**

The radical shake-up of this stabilised background of convictions contributes in large part to driving the anxiety which our contemporary, urban, globalised civilisation is plunged into, anxiety which the guaranteed city would like to manage. What is at the basis of this anxiety is not then the possible proliferation of all the day-to-day problems experienced in cities. Neither noisy neighbours, ever-present petty crime, open-air rubbish tips, nor the lack of parking spaces can explain what is increasing the feeling of anxiety. I suggest that it is rather the insistent revelation of a profound background ambivalence that creates the anxiety. First of all, the slow breakdown of the trust accorded to the liberal, secular model when faced on an ongoing basis in the very heart of cities with things that are intolerable. We could start from Joan Stavo-Debaugé’s observation in the study he carried out on Christian Fundamentalism in the USA: “Creationism is an apologetic vehicle, a means for converting, bringing about fundamentalisation of religion and a path towards desecularisation” (Stavo-Debaugé, 2012b: 29). The very centrepiece constituted by the idea of peace made possible through acceptance of different beliefs is questioned, tolerance being presented as a specific type of violence and its role in neutralising the strength of passionate beliefs appearing to be an attack on religion (Stavo-Debaugé, 2012b: 45). It is rather the frontline in a war that seems to be hardening, encouraged on the one hand by “proselytism and the claim to absolute certainty” and on the other the reduction of the phenomenon to a threat. All of this occurs in a public arena which more and more seeks to “be deferential to ‘religious’ reasons” (idem: *ibidem*). In a context of exchanges and globalised movement, this weakening of the trusting, open relationship towards difference, based on a founding pluralism, has consequences in the political and social environments of liberal cultures. Not only are processes for getting people involved

undermined by a generalised mistrust and vindictive tactics (obstruction, intimidation, victimisation), which reduce the chances of equality between citizens and an equal right to be different, but liberal forms of public civility are reduced, replaced by a day-to-day management of fear (the dominance of polite indifference retreating when faced with indifference which has become lack of involvement, avoidance, even a latent hostility)<sup>15</sup>. Finally, territorialism and exclusion become more and more solidly implanted, authorising the designating of enemies, the criminalisation of deviant behaviour, the reinforcement of authoritarian surveillance techniques of people on the move, more protective barriers, discriminatory ways of filtering people out and containing undesirables (Garcia Sanchez, 2004; Agier, 2008). Alongside this ambivalence regarding the notion of tolerance, which has become equally negative and positive, ambivalence towards human technical progress is also strongly affirmed, especially when it comes to enormous cities. The implicit prometheism which contributed extensively to the development of very large cities as well as to the saintly status accorded to technical inventiveness in the service of city dwellers, has also been badly affected by an anxious ambiguity when faced with its own enormous scale. This raises political rather than technical questions. Fear of the negative potential of technology has indeed been engendered as it developed power (in terms of energy and communications for example) that went well beyond human ability to calculate. Françoise Choay has discussed this question at some length, particularly the dominant trend for city buildings to be demolished: “this trend goes hand in hand with the emergence of a new technical civilisation [...] which is both opening up for us extraordinary wealth and threatening to take away from us humanity’s founding dimension, which can never thrive through the juxtaposition of technical objects” (Choay, 2006: 302-303). That being the case, had prometheism become pointless, the instrument of an illusion, a tragedy?

### **The Proliferation of Guarantees in the Service of Contemporary Capitalism**

The ruin of promises which are implicit in cosmopolitan cities and the ambivalence now evoked by secular liberalism and the prometheism which represented for cities stable, fundamental values, now sets up a background of anxiety and points to the beginning of loud calls for guarantees. Such calls have immediately been taken advantage of by globalised capitalism, backed up by normalising liberalism. As we have said, guaranteed cities do not directly face up to incommensurability, which would require reformulating architecture in our shared world, but throw themselves into

the frenzied production of indicators and evaluations. Such measures aim to guarantee the quality of building projects which are part of a general trend towards the normalisation of cosmopolitan cities. There are more and more of these indicators, particularly in the areas of mobility and mixity, which in this model of cosmopolitan cities already support the objectives of free movement and the right level of urban density. Mobility and mixity are curiously considered to be ‘natural goods’, that is not requiring any investigation into the principles that make them so. But, thanks to multi-criteria decision-making methods, they include a series of indicators which relate to the two key aspects of incommensurability mentioned earlier: technical disaster which inflicts irremediable damage on the ecosystem, and aggressive violence emerging particularly from increased scepticism about tolerance<sup>16</sup>. If we think about this as overlapping indicators, with mobility overlapping particularly with the theme of ecology, and mixity with insecurity, we can clearly see more and more correlations which in their turn make it possible to conduct an infinite number of backward-looking or forward-looking studies, confining human acts in the restrictive channel of measurable causes and consequences. What emerges from this is the increased legitimacy of indicators, whose growth (reinforced by their popularity with the market) is paradoxical if we consider that they aim to circumscribe a possibility which remains immeasurable according to its own principles. Growth which is in fact exponential and gives a negative picture of the ‘urban hell’, based on ‘alarm bell’ indicators and constant poor showings in the quality rankings. What is described in this hell is a traffic-choked city which stymies people’s lives and remains stuck in its ‘miserable chrysalis’, inaccessible and disgusting, full of wheeling and dealing, corruption and ‘bad practices’. Just like the city in *Morianne* (Calvino, 1974) with its rotten underside, threatening shadow of rusting metal sheets and blank walls, the guaranteed city is supposedly the reflection of the shameful symbols of unbearable closeness and stultifying immobility. The sordid reflection of a mixed urban environment represented sometimes by blocks of flats, the very incarnation of urban monotony, a fortified space closed in on itself which has absolutely no redeeming features. On the other hand it is sometimes equated with hovels (which in some respects reemerge attractively as slums), symbols of unhealthy closeness where hunger lurks and violence threatens to break out, and where all negative transgressive forces gather.

But then the progress of the guarantee opens out one final time. These more or less metaphorical and well rehearsed images of the threatening urban hell combine with the lucrative explosion of demands for security and assurance. Through yet another of capitalism’s cunning plans, we see taking



off an economy founded on the guarantee of quality for which cities have the most attractive of potentials, the potential to enable city dwellers to become completely free from all dependence and realise their individuality. But in the end, given that it only gives rise to a fragment of the physical and cognitive powers implied in the normalised action on which the guarantee is based, it is nothing but hollow potential.

### **The Guaranteed City is Supposedly Unquestionable**

Critical questioning finds itself in some difficulty faced with the ‘generalised urban setting’ which is coming into existence before our very eyes. The very form taken by the resistance organised in the district of Les Grottes has more or less lost its polemical structure and its polemological appearance, at least since the end of the squats which were on every street in the 1980s. Critics appear to have no arguments, because this process of promoting the guaranteed city seems to be progressing in a way that is unquestionable and irreversible. It is as if cities themselves, and what might animate and motivate them from within, had now escaped from their own history. But how can we understand this ‘unquestionable’ phenomenon and the difficulty encountered by critics when faced with the unleashing of this authoritative power? We have Laurent Thévenot to thank for looking clearly once again at what is generally missing in criticism of neoliberalism and globalisation, that is that it is not enough to reveal its normative bases, we also have to ‘take the time to reveal the mechanisms which inhibit critical thinking’ (Thévenot, 2009a). This process assumes that we analyse ‘a series of normalising mechanisms and supposedly independent regulating authorities which in large part escape the critical scrutiny of the political world’ and which are transformed into and instrumentalised as, quite simply, ‘government via objectives’ [‘gouvernement par l’objectif’] (Thévenot, 2009a). This way of governing, according to Thévenot, ‘claims to be unquestionable’, by extending the use of evaluation and indicators which ‘everyone is supposedly meant to accept through simple realism’, particularly through the very consensual form of measurable objectives which need to be met.

Laurent Thévenot adds another element to the relative short sightedness of critics, who have difficulty clearly appreciating the extent of the phenomenon and the forms taken by the oppression it imposes. In its very form, government via objectives, which is based on the operability of projects that can be evaluated and focused on defining targets, no longer claims to specify or even openly contribute to achieving a common good. The policy of such a form of government receives no answer. A formidable

operation of reducing the common good to objective indicators then begins, those indicators themselves being turned into targets to meet.

The third reason which leaves critics struggling for answers is that government via objectives has at hand an alibi when faced with the possible accusation that an authoritarian way of functioning independently of criticism has been put in place. This accusation is met by the fact that such a form of government can clearly rely on mechanisms which in a way encourage the initiation of criticism. Completion of the project which can be evaluated thus inevitably involves the stages of audit, promoting participation of all those concerned, evaluating satisfaction levels, self-regulation, allowing negative evaluations to be made, involving everyone in an approach which is critical but has been created from within the system rather than by breaking away from it. The critical approach in question is thus part of a reassuring dynamic, correcting and creating guarantees as a realistic action plan unfolds; it is reconciled with a spectrum of rectifiable targets; it ends up mainly being a tool for facilitating decision-making. Thus, the potentially fruitful, subversive, destabilising aspect of criticism, its radically reforming and uncertain nature, remains stifled.

The final reason that leads us to state that guaranteed cities leave critics short of answers is connected to the nature of the public urban space which guaranteed cities themselves wish to bring into existence. By conceiving such spaces in the context of globalised metrological conventions which are meant to assure certain quality of life objectives, cities remove any possibility that upsets or palpable tension – sources of public problems – may arise. Yet such upsets and tension were the very sources of energy which in the past enabled towns and cities to emerge. In a sense public space only exists to the extent that it contains palpable productions which generate experiential density: all originality, all difference, every impact, every inappropriateness, every unmet need has the potential to bring it to life and give it its true spacious embodiment. In that way, this emotional space which is under tension and whose dynamic is intrinsically unpredictable, does not correspond to negative quantities placed under the aegis of dysfunction, as shown by indicators measuring the security of public spaces. They create public space. In guaranteed cities, which accord great importance to clearly defining realistic objectives, upset is muffled and made objective, uncertainty is measured and anxiety falls back on measuring operations. Only limited exchanges are created by this guaranteed city, exchanges which are doubtless no longer capable of alone nourishing critical thought, that is thought which still has enough play to spring up and into confrontation. We observed this earlier concerning the fate of intermediary spaces in residential blocks, where the development of

the guaranteed city aims to neutralise tensions which may upset the quiet of the neighbourhood, through ensuring respect for the liberal separation of public and private space.

## **Epilogue**

A meeting in the district (17.30)/edited fieldnotes.

Block 13, Rue de Montbrillant. I meet up with a friend in front of the secondhand bookshop, in the courtyard which runs along 29 rue des Gares. I am sitting at a wooden table in the middle of the courtyard. A woman with three children very quickly comes to join me and the children start drawing. Clearly, when inhabitants come out into this courtyard, they are very much at home, and part of their life seems to spill outside. A bit further on, in a corner at the far end of the courtyard, a bit hidden by plant growth, some young people are sitting on a bench, chatting and smoking. One of them gets up and takes out of a bush a small bag containing some cans of beer. There are bicycles lying on the ground, a ladder is set against a wall, a barbecue completes the picture of things left there with no intention of tidying them away, signs of usage, things left over from collective or personal activities. Flowerpots are placed on the ground, picking out a symbolic front porch at the building entrance. Further away in the courtyard, large metal containers painted in bright colours contain other flowerpots in which plants are thriving, indicating a wilder type of vegetation growing over the unpaved paths which pass between the buildings. The very informal way in which the space is occupied by inhabitants (gardening, meals, DIY...) also seems intended for a very wide range of people, all likely to join in these collective moments organised by inhabitants. Taking an overview makes it possible to see there a living space which has well and truly been taken in hand and maintained in a way that suits inhabitants, who have an impact on it without purely and simply determining ways of occupying the space. They are creating an architecture of usage, constructing a place that is nourished by habitual usage and filled with familiar things, forming a landscape where what is worn and perishable is on display, slipping in an inhabitable space between the housing and the streets that lead towards the railway station. This space seems in some way to make an architecture invented by inhabitants possible, a place where there are all sorts of bright ideas about how to arrange it 'for the occasion'. Separations are blurred: the plants and shrubs which are growing haphazardly and the unevenness of the ground (and its texture) form different sorts of barriers, possibilities for stepping back and for untrodden paths. This interaction between showing and hiding oneself seems to make it easier for inhabitants to share the place in a more or less friendly way.

Architecture of usage is built and thrives on the material foundations of architecture which is already present. The epilogue of block 13 doesn't just

hark back to the glory days of an activist past fighting for an alternative life in a commune. It also enables us to envisage what, of the public urban space, we must still be able to deform, investigate, wear out or damage, break or crack, so that more ways of using it, more material and symbolic occupations and more ways of envisaging its function can be created. So we have spoken about an architecture of usage whose imaginative potential brings something extra to expected representations of how places will be used. This potential and this extra dimension constitute a critical context. Faced with demands for quality assurance when urban spaces are now being set up, which have led to a global tendency for big cities to look very much alike, taking their lead from the most attractive western cities, architecture of usage is indeed in resistance mode. It is resisting in so far as it defines itself less according to what can be guaranteed by objective methods about it, and more according to the potential it contains for unpremeditated life experiences and unpredicted development linked to space. Learning how to become a good citizen and the mutual trusting relationship from which a whole array of relationships in different tempos then come into play: coming closer, moving away, stepping to the side, dodging, being courteous, taking a longer way round, avoidance, impact, attraction, repulsion and so on. It is when faced with this potential of the intercalary space, itself transfigured by architectures of usage, that a reoccupation of collective space likely to upset the order established by the guaranteed city comes into play.

Translated by Joy Charnley

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The work of Laurent Thévenot, and his collaborative work with Alain Desrosières or Robert Salais, makes it in particular possible to appreciate the growing power of evaluation in politics and the emergence of government according to norms and on the basis of objectives linked to political and commercial liberalisation.

<sup>2</sup> We are not intending here to make technophobic criticisms, but rather to bear in mind the ambivalence of humans' technical progress. The phenomenal power of this technical progress, made even faster by economic, technical, political and communication interconnectivity, leads us to look again at the ways it is made use of and rethink the interlinked chains of responsibility.

<sup>3</sup> On questions of incommensurability, see Centemeri (2011) and Nancy (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Herzog and de Meuron chose the expression 'varied city.'

<sup>5</sup> Moral minimalism involves seeking to avoid confrontation, by displaying a relative indifference for the convictions of others and defusing the potential for conflict of neighbourhood disturbances. This is also an attitude to life in society which is strongly anchored in political liberalism (Conein, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere the author points out this quotation from a former director of the Office Public de l'Aménagement et de la Construction/Public Agency for Development and Building: 'We avoid all indeterminate, vague spaces which are neither private nor

public. External spaces are qualified and they are either beautiful shared spaces to look at, or private gardens’.

<sup>7</sup> These tensions between occupation and mobility in public urban spaces are analysed in studies about the redevelopment of spaces, which particularly reawaken such tensions (Stavo-Debaugé, 2003; Berger, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> The other side of this anxiety about whether this diversification of shapes in the urban world can guarantee both the attractiveness of towns and cities and a strict separation between public and private, is the subtle architecture of barriers. Varied heights, variation in the porosity and thickness of translucent walls, introduction of more or less obvious signage, changing levels of lighting, variation of the colour of housefronts or the texture of the ground: the many different forms of barrier can make a space more attractive, whilst also reinforcing the demarcation between public space and private property.

<sup>9</sup> “This is neutralisation: if something starts to bother me or move me, I just have to keep on walking in order to stop my feelings” (Sennett, 2000: 117).

<sup>10</sup> Park is very explicit on this point, seeking in particular through this phenomenon of retreat a way of explaining the segregation problem.

<sup>11</sup> The author returns in great detail to ‘the conative nature of religion’ and the dual role of political liberalism, which seeks both to accept religious diversity and protect itself from the threats which are supposedly incarnated in religious passions.

<sup>12</sup> The term comes from Thévenot (1997).

<sup>13</sup> There is in fact a remarkable challenge in starting from the interactionist framework to analyse the skills and vulnerabilities of citizens which are at the heart of these concertation measures (Berger, 2009; Carrel, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> In her lengthy study of urban renovation projects in Grenoble, Marion Carrel emphasises the difficulty for politicians of finding the public required by consultation or public debate. On top of the weaknesses of the established communication tools (misinformation, undermining through political disrespect or mistrust of inhabitants and so on), there is also the inability of participants to limit themselves to the expected skills (control of emotions to keep the exchange on track, acceptance of civil responsibilities, attempt to be intelligible when expressing a point of view and so on) (Carrel, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> On this point, see the important contributions of Garcia Sanchez (2002; 2008).

<sup>16</sup> We will not here discuss the fact that their exaggerated ability to extend ever further, through the interconnection of exchanges, techniques and movement, makes them interdependent on a cosmic level (Nancy, 2012).

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