

Title, A Cyberpunk Landscape: Snapshots of 'the Mad Max Phase of globalization'

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Marshall McLuhan had no illusions on the nature of the city: "The city itself, is traditionally a military weapon, and it is a collective shield, a plate armour, an extension of the castle of our very skins." Maybe McLuhan was right. The real face of the city is not the "open city"—which always remained a slogan, a catchword for architectural workshops in the cloud cuckoo-land called "Good Intentions"—but the Closed City, the Gated City, the fortress—that is the real face of the city. The open city was just a short, exceptional, maybe even whimsical phase in the history of the city; a misleading face of the city, a mask of urbane "urbanity." The metropolis as the epitome of this open city was hiding a dark archaic reality. In Modernity, the walled city became an open city: the *bulwark* (from the Dutch word *bolwerk* meaning stronghold) became *boulevard* and thus opened up the broad transparent lanes of the metropolis. Now the boulevards go back to their etymological roots and become bulwark again. The city seems to be making a full circle. The wall has yet again become the true face of the city of Man (whether we like it or not). This *implosion of the polis*, this disintegration of the city, is not something that is ahead of us, but it is in fact already materializing in the new spatial disorder of our "a capsular civilization."¹

Somewhere soon in this twenty-first century we will enter what could be called *the Mad Max phase of globalization*. "Disaster capitalism" is maybe replacing the "informational capitalism" of Manuel Castells' Network Society. Naomi Klein sketches the mental and real landscape it produces: "If the dream of the open, borderless, 'small planet' was the ticket to profits in the nineties, the nightmare of the menacing, fortified Western continents, under siege from jihads and illegal migrants, plays the same role in the new millennium."² A most important overall consequence of this rise of disaster capitalism is that the Mad Max phase of globalization will therefore not be the collapse of capitalism, but the implosion of society. Speaking about this Naomi Klein writes: "At first I thought that the Green Zone phenomenon was unique to the war in Iraq. Now, after years spent in disaster zones, I realize that the Green Zone emerges everywhere where the disaster capitalism complex descends, with the same stark partitions between the included and the excluded, the protected and the dammed."³ In terms of "Disaster capitalism" one could say: the disaster industry is making movable green zones in the expanding red zones of the world. Every city haunted by disaster can become Halliburton city (as the Green Zone is sometimes termed).

The new spatial disorder is a collection of capsular entities, green zones, that are plugged in surrounded by unplugged red zones, a layered archipelago, islands inside bigger islands, from the scale of continents, to the scale of gated communities and high security condominiums, sort of Russian doll archipelago, with hotspots where the seams of the seamless smooth space of the network society are painfully visible: these new iron curtains are the fences and security walls all over the world: in Ceuta, Tijuana, Palestine. To keep these worlds apart are detention centers, labor camps, secret prisons, or outright concentration camps like Guantanamo, all spaces of exception, some of them not only extraterritorial, but also extra legal, outside the law, outlaw spaces that keep the split in place, break resistance and spread fear.⁴

We live in this dualized world already: the hyper-reality of the world of consumption, tourism, media, spectacle, in short the city, indeed the entire world as theme park and the infra-reality: that is unknown, repressed, invisible, ugly reality outside this matrix. Razor wire, being the marker of the division line between the hyper- and infra-reality, will most probably be one of the most important features of the architecture and urbanism of the twenty-first century. This is the sort of cyberpunk landscape that will only get more visible, more extreme. And of course ecology is crucial in the shaping of this new dualized spatial order. Air-conditioned biosphere-like capsular entities are no doubt ahead while the planet is heating up.

The mad max phase has begun.⁵ One concrete recent example, taken from the *International Herald Tribune*, is encapsulating the perverse logic. Europe is eating more fish (probably because the rumor went on for a long time that we should eat less meat). To avoid over-fishing in European fishing grounds, a grey, often illegal fleet (Chinese, Russian and other) has completely over-fished the West African fishing grounds, so the fishermen of Ivory Coast and surrounding areas, having no means of subsistence, take their boats and try to make it to the Canary Islands, that is the promised land called Fortress Europe. An estimated 6000 people have died trying to cross in 2007.⁶ But this is just the beginning, as Africa, according to the IPCC 4th assessment report, will be the amongst the most hit regions by climate change and the least equipped to adapt, and (not mentioned in the report) with the sharpest demographic growth. End result: mass migration from Africa to the north, first of all Europe, that will cause frictions, capsularization, gating, dualization ...

If we want to make a graphic map of the New Spatial Order we could sketch it as follows: there are two global archipelagos that are mirroring each other: an archipelago of protected often heterotopian/corporate/networked islands and the archipelago of camps in between them—the background, the sea we call the ubiquitous periphery, either slum and megacity in the global South or suburban sprawl in the North. The cities are not walled nowadays but the scale above and below are: neighborhoods in the form of the famous gated communities, or entire national or supranational territories. In a sense we see the return of the idea behind the Chinese wall, we see iron curtains pop up on crucial spots around the globe. One could call it “the seams of the world.”

We thought the network society and informational capitalism was seamless, but we see more of these crude and cruel stitches than before, where haves and have-nots are brutally kept apart. The walls and fences of Ceuta, Palestine, Tijuana prove that our world is not a smooth corporate network society, but a striated space of fortresses, enclaves and capsules. Like disaster, capitalism is the economic infrastructure, the permanent war on terror, the political and global warming the ecological context, gating is the spatial translation of this “capsular civilization.” That is a very concrete face of the “Mad Max phase of globalization” as neo-medieval, cyberpunk, post-historical science fiction landscape that is taking shape before our very own eyes.

¹ Lieven De Caeter, *The Capsular Civilization: On the City in the Age of Fear*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004.

² Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin Books, London, New York, 2007, p. 427

³ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* ..., cit. p. 414.

⁴ On Lieven De Cauter & Michiel Dehaene see: “L’Archipel et les lieux du ban. Tableau de la ville désastre,” in *Airs de Paris*, exhibition catalogue, Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2007, pp. 144–48; Lieven De Cauter & Michiel Dehaene, “Meditations on Razor Wire. A Plea for Para-Architecture,” in *Visionary Power. Producing the Contemporary City*, exhibition catalogue, International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, pp. 233–47.

⁵ On this see also Rudi Laermans & Lieven De Cauter, “The BeWILDerment of Pentheus. On the Attraction of the Nature State and the Nature State as Spectacle,” in *Kendell Geers Irrespectiv*, exhibition catalogue, SMAK Gent, ACTAR, Barcelona, 2007.

⁶ “The Fish Gone, Migrants Take to Sea,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 12–13, 2008, “World Pays a Price for Love of Seafood,” *International Herald Tribune*, January 15, 2008.