

INFLECTION

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Presence

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Place as an image, image as a place.

The historical parallel unfolding of two types of human organization, the civil and the nomadic, has been named a tale of 'dark twins', indicating the false juxtaposition of a history of linear progression and human prosperity (the Citizen), with a parallel narration of underdevelopment, poverty and primitivism (the Barbarian). The paramount fallacy in conceiving this apparent juxtaposition between the Civil and the Barbarian is to centre its organisational *effects*, rather than its social *causes*. Both perspectives centre the 'urban identity' and the socio-economic and cultural consequences of civil development. The nomadic is placed outside civilisation, but it originates from within. Therefore, it is unwise to distinguish for instance between organisation of life within the urban as opposed to those in the rural, and rather inspect larger (and smaller) origins such as rootedness, agency, affect and mental imagery as deciding elements in any classification of civilisation or barbarism. In this context civilisation is an organisational form that discards, and nomadism is the residue that includes all other discarded elements, inside or outside the urban constitution. The juxtaposition is thus a fabricated dichotomy that obscures a far more subtle ecology of (social) agencies, significations and affective economies. *re its organisational effects*, rather than its social *causes*. Both perspectives centre the 'urban identity' and the socio-economic and cultural consequences of civil development. The nomadic is placed outside civilisation, but it originates from within. Therefore, it is unwise to distinguish for instance between organisation of life within the urban as opposed to those in the rural, and rather inspect larger (and smaller) origins such as rootedness, agency, affect and mental imagery as deciding elements in any classification of civilisation or barbarism. In this context civilisation is an organisational form that discards, and nomadism is the residue that includes all other discarded elements, inside or outside the urban constitution. The juxtaposition is thus a fabricated dichotomy that obscures a far more subtle ecology of (social) agencies, significations and affective economies.

The concept of *image* plays a crucial role in this ecology, as it is the embodiment of subjective perception, cloaked as an objective entity. In other words: no image is ever the same as no spectator is ever the same as no experience is ever the same. Therefore, the image acts as a place for occupation by thought and places consist only out of images formed by those who experience them. These places are thus both literal and metaphorical, as visions of selection and aspiration.

Drawing on Affect Theory this paper will voice elements, biological and non-biological, human and non-human that act, shape, modulate, resist, counter and question the optimistic and supreme chronology of progress and growth to make way for a critical and rooted realism of *presence* as a result of agency and not of identity.¹ The two case studies will show two extreme nodes in the fabric of a large (socio-economic) ecology, rather than a ranking of the two on a binary scale, although both are products of

¹ For an introduction in this field see: *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

urban development. Firstly, we examine a place that can never escape being more than its own image and secondly a place that unwillingly re-identifies itself constantly because of its tenacious rootedness.

Times Square, or the place that can never be itself

Times Square in New York is a place that evokes recollection in many people's minds, if not from first-hand memory, then from the image that has been conveyed through media exposure. And yet – unlike many other landmarks – the image of Times Square is far from stable and it is not the architecture that forms (the appearance of) its properties either. The image of Times Square is predominantly formed by images of advertisements that cover large areas of the built environment, and as these expressions have a commercially driven momentum of expiration, they are replaced regularly. The image of the place is thus formed by a continuously changing set of images, and though the place itself remains undeniably largely unchanged, its visual properties are highly unstable. In that sense the place is a medium itself, in the same way a newspaper is no more than a distinct format of paper that daily changes its content, yet still we can speak of a stable entity. On a more abstract level, we could say that the collective recollection of this place (either based on live-experience or on the image of it that has been created) can only exist of this meta-image of its properties. Yet even this is not stable. As every spectator attaches different connotations, interpretations, significations and affects to the image of the place, even a simultaneous exposure of the same place to two observers will never produce an identical experience. Experiences are highly individual as they are not primarily rooted in stimuli, but in the reaction (perception) of the individuals to them. Architect-philosopher Andrej Radman explains: "Perception cannot be considered independently of the environment since it is defined as an evolved adaptive and constructive relation between the organism and the environment."² Therefore, we cannot speak of perception *of* something, instead perception *is* something. The capacity to affect relates to the capacity to be affected in a two-way manner: affect is capacity, affection is actualisation. In this view, one could also claim that Times Square is made by the perception of its visitors, rather literally because the advertisements are there to be perceived for commercial purposes, and metaphorically as no single image of this place could ever be the same. This place is an image, its image is the place.

² Andrej Radman, *Gibsonism* (Delft: Delft University, 2012). P.51.



Figure 1: View on Times Square New York. Digital photography by author 2018.

Mediascape: interconnecting flows that create realities without necessarily actualising them

This place/image is part of what Arjun Appadurai would name the 'Mediascape,' that in turn is part of his interconnecting system of global flows (including Technoscapes, Ethnoscapes, Financescapes, Ideoscapes) that connect and influence citizens of the world.³ Elsewhere I have altered 'ethnoscapes' into 'ethoscapes,' as for my purpose this reaches a deeper level of human processing and action. By changing ethnoscape into ethnoscape, a crucial modification can be achieved without losing some of ethnoscape's stronger capacities (interrelations, fluidity), while attaching many more. Ethnos defines itself along specific social, cultural and racial lines, whereas ethos opens a gateway to a much more complex set of definitions. Individuals are indeed (at least partly) formed by their ethnos, but we cannot reduce the individual to these definitions. Ethos is self-referential, ethnos is not, ethnos is always multiple, ethos is always singular.⁴

Citizenship comes with the participation (voluntarily or not) in the interconnecting system of global flows, the city is its most efficient form of organisation and Times Square is perhaps a supreme embodiment of this system. The interconnecting system of global flows enables and ensures the operation of a system of technological and industrial progression and growth. Yet the logic and justification of this linear development can be only expressed in terms of its relative success, alternative

³ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). P.32

⁴ Marc Boumeester, *The Desire of the Medium* (Arhem: ArtEZ University Press, 2017). P.40.

ways of development that do not build on industrial progression have been historically underappreciated. Indeed, the average quality of human life has risen over the centuries (healthcare, safety, labour-intensity etc.), yet certainly not for everyone and at great expenses to the world at large and with damage that might not be repairable ever. It is the justification of linear development that has prioritised the history of citizenship over that of the *Barbarian*, which in this context can be described as the rooted, local and empowered in terms other than its *own* development.⁵ The barbaric can thus be defined as any form of progression that is not commodifiable or detached from its rooted intentions, a barbarian has its own ethos that does not respond to the interconnecting flows of global development.

The term Barbarian is loaded with negative connotations, as that was the whole purpose of the invention of the term: in the ancient Greek civilization anyone who did not match the Greek cultural coding (language, culture, customs etc) was classified and excluded from the civilisation as *Barbaros*. But even long before that, many civilisations had special terms for those outside of their own cultivation, all favouring their societal form over other social forms of existence. Obviously, it served many purposes to attribute all sorts of 'negative' qualifications to this group, as this contributed to the idealisation of the civil. And thus started a long (historical) tradition of juxtaposing 'the good and the bad'; the winners versus the losers, the successful versus the unsuccessful, the rich versus the poor etcetera, in terms of being inside or outside civilisation. Earlier critique of the bourgeois capitalist system often included a third leg to the juxtaposition inside-outside of civilization. Writers in the Marxist tradition as Luxemburg and Kautsky presented the triangle: "capitalist civilization cannot continue; we must either move forward into socialism or fall back into barbarism."⁶ Again, Barbarism is portrayed as the daunting alternative to ideology, set against a failing yet civil society. The implicit threat of regression into a state less refined as civilisation sadly does not come with the opportunity to rethink and reconceptualise the civil state itself.

Exo-identity: how the (mental) image makes the place

The organisation of state – either based on linear progression (capitalist development) or ideologic equality (states based on ideology) – has overtaken the alternatives that centre individual experience as the main parameters for growth, success and wealth. Alternative societies that prioritize(d) *a presence in the now*, rather than *a future of growth* do not produce wealth in a commodifiable way. My argument would be that in the aforementioned two- or three-legged juxtapositions a crucial movement has been denied access to visibility, yet it has unfolded steadily and strongly. Similar to a genetic code that has one dominant gene, this movement has been dominated by the anthropocentric viewpoint that submits rooted perception (as an act) in favour of imposed perception (as a commodity). Rooted perception demands an individuated action to perceive a singular exceptional moment, including a selection of what is defined as exceptional, whereas imposed perception is flattened and isolated to be transferable

⁵ "State and nonstate peoples, agriculturists and foragers, "barbarians" and "civilized" are twins, both in reality and semiotically. Each member of the pair conjures up its partner. And despite abundant historical evidence to the contrary, the peoples who have historically identified themselves as belonging to the ostensibly more "evolved" member of each pair – state people, agriculturalists, the "civilized" – have taken their identity as essential, permanent, and superior". James C. Scott, *A Deep History of the Earliest States*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017). P.148-149.

⁶ Karl Kautsky, Erfurt Program (New York: Franklin Classics ([1877] 2018). P.21.

in a non-ambivalent way. Spotting a Kookaburra in the wild versus seeing a cat video on YouTube, so to speak. Both have always been there, in the same place, yet only the latter is counted as being inside the civil, whereas the first is discarded as not-civil (Barbaric) and especially as it is not commodifiable, it does not fall into the system of (global) flows as described by Appadurai.

An *exo-identity* is a mental image of place, culture, behaviour, social status etc. that only exists on a meta-level, just like Times Square only exists in the image that we have of it. It does not contain a presence in the here and now, but it creates a set of values that can be filled with transferred experiences. Exo-identities are created over time and consist of expectations that need to be met, but will never actually truly fit the promise. Paris for example has a strong *exo-identity* - as have many other cities - and although many have a clear image of what this city offers, we will not find there any bereted citizens carrying a baguette under their arm anytime soon. Neither is the city of love filled with joyful couples flirting alongside the banks of the Seine, unless these couples are we ourselves. The image of the city is formed "over it" and we are most eager to actualize it by our own interventions, steered by the image that we impose upon the place. It is a similar phenomenon to 'our' experience of Times Square, which may be predicated on the image we have of it. This does not mean that these images are not real, they are of great influence and possess significant agency. The question, however, is "what image is it that we (want to) see and what causes it to be seen?" A long romantic weekend in Paris will most likely be experienced in that way, because if the expectancy is set, we cognitively bias our perception to register our experiences to fall within that expectancy. The (mental) image of place creates a biased perception that largely goes undetected because of the expectancy that is created by its exo-identity.

Civilisation has been developed to act as a logical state of organisation, using forms of *exo-identities* as blueprint for an organisational structure. In this view, the rural serves as the extended city, meaning that the planning and modification of the landscapes, seascapes and aircapes can best (or only) be seen and valued in terms of its function in the greater romance of urban endeavour. This view can (historically) be addressed by tracing the accumulation and aggregation of (human) capital and the opportunities created for commodification and the disconnection of value from costs and profit. In this constellation, the landscape serves as a tool for urban development and accumulation of capital, whereas - as the subsequent sections of this essay posit - its true potential lies on a far more complex, crucial and interesting level. Nevertheless, we have witnessed the geographic dislodging of a global industry of finance, services and entertainment, that has spread a ubiquitous network of non-local identities over many cities, which in turn are increasingly transforming into petrified images of their own historical importance. These 'living presences' are commodified to serve as beacons for the aforementioned industry of *exo-identity*, with tourism, trade and (financial) laws as its paramount instruments.⁷

Presence: how agency does not need an embodiment to act

⁷ Enrico Conti of the *Istituto Regionale Programmazione economica della Toscana* names the massive invasion of travelers towards the historic city 'hit and run' tourism, as most visitors are only focused on collecting images of the iconic landmarks, whilst a significant part of the revenue of their visit 'leaks' away to out of state ownership of commodities.

Simultaneously, there is a narrative to be told that draws on the unembellished and therefore unavoidable necessity of rural rootedness, a literal ecological perspective that does act in a different way to formalize its importance and effects on humanity and its strength on other futures that have been created. This is not a tale of biology and 'natural' ecology alone, its discourse centres empowerment and involvement, congregating aesthetics, rootedness and locality in search for a (non-petrified) *presence* that is not supreme nor excluding, yet nevertheless undetachable and endowing.⁸ And therefore, not commodifiable or transferable: it is a *presence* that only exists in action and relation to others. This 'non-local local' *presence* does not focus on specific distinctiveness, but on the degree of participation and investment of both sender/creator and receiver/audience that shape non-transferable rooted experiences. New materialism opposes abstract and humanist traditions in cultural theory that are grounded on dualist structures; instead, it offers an enticing alternative by opening up theoretical formulations in which matter is a very strong actor.⁹ Thus, the prerogative on agency shifts from the anthropocentric signification to a shared domain of non-signification (matter, medium, mind, body). Feminist philosopher Karen Barad summarizes: "Agency is not held, it is not a property of persons or things; rather, agency is an enactment, a matter of possibilities for reconfiguring entanglements."¹⁰ This makes way for an unbiased and inclusive perspective on a world within the now, rather than on an illusory future ahead.

Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche: Civil symbolism turning into barbaric presence

The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche serves as an exemplification of this thought, and was deliberately chosen as it is a known landmark in an unmistakably urban setting, in the midst of a highly commercial area of former West-Berlin. As the original church was dedicated to the memorial of Emperor Wilhelm I, the place was historically symbolic from its inception. After its destruction in WW2, a replacement church in high-modernist style was designed by Egon Eiermann, initially planned to utterly erase and supersede the ruins, but after local interference the remains of the church were integrated in the new planning. Its ruins signify the monstrosity of war, whereas the 'newbuilt' parts already carry the reminiscence of an era driven by an extreme belief in the makable society. A certain similarity to the history of the *Genbaku Dome* in Hiroshima springs to mind, which started as an exhibition space for industrial progression, but was 'involuntarily' transformed into the atomic bomb memorial site after long deliberations about the desirability of such intense reminder of monstrosity.¹¹

⁸ There is no such thing as an 'environment as such', let alone the environment, speculative realist Levi R. Bryant points out that 'environments cannot be treated as something that is simply given or there such that the organism subsequently fills a niche that already existed in the environment.' He argues that organisms perform actively in the construction of their own environment. Levi R. Bryant, 'The Democracy of Objects' (2011) <http://openhumanitiespress.org/democracy-of-objects.html> [accessed 25 July 2016].

⁹ Jane Bennett. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012)

¹⁰ Karen Barad. "Meeting the Universe Halfway". In *Feminism, Science and the Philosophy of Science*. Edited by L.H. Nelson and J. Nelson. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991). P.214.

¹¹ See also: William Logan. *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*. (London: Routledge, 2008).



Figure 2: View on the original Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin. Postcard collection author dated 1909.

What makes the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche particularly interesting to this discussion is the transformation of its symbolic yet rooted value as the predominant constant element of its existence. The content of its symbolism has changed several times over, but the mere presence of its structure and its tenacity to stay rooted lifts this place from one era to another to another.¹² It is not a nice or warm place; its setting has a distinct hardness and the exteriors of both old church and 'new' church do not convey much inviting or comforting affects. Contrastingly standing in an area dominated by shiny flagship stores of global brands, uninvitingly accessible by the intercutting of several roads and trenched in an atmosphere of neglect, the churches seem to be in constant battle not to be pushed out of their *place*, both literal and metaphorical.

¹² Another interesting case study is the 'Völkerschlachtdenkmal' in Leipzig, Germany, which originated as a memorial site for the biggest battle in the wars of Napoleon Bonaparte, but was 'rebranded' as a monument for the glorification of respectively the Weimar Republic, National Socialism and the Deutsche Demokratische Republic (DDR).



Figure 3: View on Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin. Instant photography by author 2021. Instant or diapositive photography offers the closest to unmediated imaging, which indicates the closeness to the subject matter in the experience.



Figure 4: View on replacement of Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin by Egon Eiermann, 1957. Instant photography by author 2021.

Although the new church functions as such, it is most often occupied as a temporary refuge for homeless people. Yet this place has a highly attractive quality to it, once one opens up to it in a non-signifying somaesthetic way. The unmediated *agency* of both ruins and modernist symbolism conveys a breakability that comes with its own hardship. The nowness of the church's existence, throughout its own history, is unfiltered and present. Just like the city of Berlin, this place is reinventing itself repeatedly. However, its story is continuously evolving without overwriting the older parts of it. Continuous decay of both older and newer structures emphasises the erosion of both physical and symbolic state in the passing of time, not only by the palpable digressing state of its properties, but also

by the multiple recontextualisations of its significance and presence. This in contrast to the image of Times Square that is constantly refreshed to depict an exo-identity of the near future, showing products that are to be bought, just one click away. Both places (Times Square and the Kaiser Wilhelm Church) are real, it is not helpful to dichotomise the two, yet the ground in which this reality holds foot is very different for every place. Whereas Times Square flashforwards a near (consumer) future, the Kaiser Wilhelm church holds ground in the presence: a presence formed by its history, carried by its decaying material structure and harsh exposure of human failing, yet lived in the now. The rootedness of the place is evoked by the presence of both creation and destruction, tangible in all aspects of the architecture as well as its setting, both in literal and metaphorical sense. This is a chronicle of that which does not fall within the civil, it is a story of rootedness and locality that does not hide or discard its scars or vulnerability. It is a presence of a saga of loss, not of progression, which can be seen as a submissive story amidst stories of dominance. A tale that gives true hope exactly because it has lost hope itself, many times. This can only be sensed if one is open to the experience of contributing to the making of this history, without any prerogative or ranking in the establishment of the symbolic orders, like religion or signification. The place has become a memorial of itself, inviting others to become part of it. Its image cannot be made apart from its agency and of those experiencing its presence by participating in it.



Figure 5: Exterior of both original and the replacement of Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin. Digital photography by author 2021.



Figure 6: Interior (of the replacement) of Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche Berlin by Egon Eiermann, 1957. Digital photography by author 2021.

Conclusion

The parallel history of the civil and the barbaric has mostly been reduced to a narrative of inside and outside a system of linear progression, a collocation of value judgement that dismissed the weaker in favour of the stronger. Yet on closer inspection we can see that the strong might not exist outside of its own image, an image based on an *exo-identity*, while the narrative of the weak is unfolding parallel and shows great durability, recreating a rooted identity over and over again. Experience as an *act* (as opposed to experience *of*) can unveil that the true value of presence is non-negotiable, nor commodifiable. The barbaric is not a state of regression, it is a state of inclusion, inclusion of stories told and affect felt. When we extrapolate the duet of the two places presented here, we can find many more stories untold that have always been embedded in civil history, but not been part of it. The civil has been an instrument of exclusion that favoured one particular view on humanity. By unfolding this insight there are many 'older futures' that have been developing indigenously, nomadically, non-normatively and out-centred to be perceived. Within the urban, civil fabric we have showcased two exceptional nodes of presence. Whereas Times Square can never be truly experienced, as it consists only of the image that we made of it, the entire history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche serves as a precondition to shelter one homeless person today. Rooted, actualized, inclusive and unfiltered, in other words: Barbaric.