

SPACE FOR DISORIENTATION

*finding, creating and allowing other urban directions*

ACT IV

RE-ORIENTING AN AXIS



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Humans are no mono-elemental beings.

Let us consider humans as amphibians, continuously needing to adapt to new environments.

Why, then, would we prevent ourselves from experiencing different elements other than to diminish our adaptability?

Why, then, would we only want to walk and run and not want to learn how to swim or even fly?  
How to soar, submerge, emerge, land, soar and find new substances beneath our feet again and again. To Earth ourselves in all its glorious elements.

Why, then, would we want to learn how to grow roots and sink our feet in the soil even further, as if we want to make sure that we will never swim again? To tie ourselves, and one another, to the ground and then lift up the ground so that it becomes nothing but a Surface.

Why, then, would we want to spend the rest of our lives tightening this Surface, reinforcing it, as its elasticity is tested and its folds are smoothed out?

Then, we would be living on a frenetically tense Surface, hovering fearfully above a Sea which scares us with every ripple and wave she so naturally produces. A Surface is a privilege. It is a privilege to choose to learn how to swim, to dive, to emerge and to choose to submerge oneself again.

Now, I will not ask you to jump off.  
Rather than swimming, let us first face the Sea.

After all, let me ask; what rests us when the Surface eventually breaks?  
What could possibly determine our fate?

Do we sink? Or do we swim?

People need to develop an ability to deal with ambiguity, difficulty and the unknown to explore the unexpected turn rather than defend against it. *Less Self, More Other*; a person takes in more of the outside Other, projects less of one's Self on others. It takes psychological strength to practice this ethic but this power cannot develop in a vacuum. My insight - and I hope the durable value of *Uses of Disorder* - was that a big, dense, diverse city was the place where people could practise and gradually strengthen this moral muscle.

Our contemporary cities are continuously developed to adapt to increasing risks resulting from overpopulation, overconsumption and climate change. The projection of desirable goals aligns everyone with measures of efficiency, aesthetics, and perfection to protect everyone from these risks.

However, the mitigation of these risks is not sustainable, only shifting the problems to those who cannot choose to bear the consequences. We only truly protect the favoured few.

To understand this, we should consider the urban fabric as a Surface; a limited area of space and material that is held above the unruly nature of a Sea.

Multiple Tensors are attached to its edges, which stretch it tight. The Tensors disappear into a deep fog towards the horizons above the Sea. Therefore, we do not fully know how and why this frenetically tense Surface is continuously tightened, but we have been taught to accept it.

The current pursuit of economic growth, therefore of urban growth, has already long gone exposed the limits of our cities, and with it our planet at large. The edges are tearing, have been disrupting the margins for centuries, marking lived experience of marginalised individuals; consistently confronted with uncertainty, anxiety or outright life-threatening dangers.

The unpredictable outburst of natural disasters are increasingly affecting the livability of the Surface.

Perhaps, the Surface is essentially flawed in the way it deals with that which is only natural; the discomforts that are inherent to life.

It is through writing that we can carefully speculate new directions of urban development.

'to comfort', in Latin, meant 'to strengthen'

The comforts that we envelop our entire cities with – efficiency, aesthetics, perfection, smoothness, slickness, newness, ingenuity – they fully dismay the fact that comfort does not exist without discomfort.

Comfort is a temporary relief, an experienced freedom from anxieties, to find solace, the strength, to move forward. It is a warm bed for rest, to venture into the cold the next day.

By creating an urban environment that is increasingly fixated on finding, creating and holding onto comforts, we essentially lose strength.

It only builds up tension.

Essentially, we need to adopt an amphibious anthropology.

Instead of a corridor of spatial possibilities, we should see space as an interconnected becoming that is able to contort the body-mind-space, and is able to comfort when faced with adversity.

Instead of being a corridor of spatial possibilities, we find it as a malleable force field, a congruence of currents.

Architecture is often used as a direction of such currents, often in pursuit of making a laminar flow.

However, we can find value in the creation of turbulent streams, waves or whirlpools. Such vortices allow us to adapt to fluid and unpredictable circumstances.

Additionally, we can scrape the Surface, or tear holes. We could sew in zippers for occasional closures to access streams.

Here, we could learn to play with water, we could conquer its ripples through surfing or we could simply go with the current. We only come back to the Surface when we need to.

But, to be able to make this happen, we need to learn how to swim first.

Projecting this design philosophy should go beyond the built environment.

Making space for disorientation means acknowledging the unfair pain, fear and sorrow of marginalised communities. Only after that, we can make room for resilience.

Making space for disorientation means understanding that resilience is not the quality of one's defence mechanism. Resilience is hardship that is earned through learning living with.

Making space for disorientation means knowing the importance of good intentions and the strength in desiring hopeful directions.

Making space for disorientation means learning to live with the shortcomings embedded in one's Self; anxieties, insecurities, limitations that obstruct thinking patterns, paralyse a becoming-perfect or highlight the insufficiencies in one's existence.

Making space for disorientation means making continuous effort to understand that overcoming such struggles does not always equal happiness. It is not by earning (more) success, but by reflecting that one can recognise growth.

Making space for disorientation means recognising the continuous effort needed to be at ease with accepting the present.

Making space for disorientation means finding the strength to dare to find, create, allow and engage with moments of not knowing where to go or what to desire.

Making space for disorientation means learning to live with, and finding the power of life in, those increasingly rare moments.

[...]  
to stay close I swear  
I'll learn to swim  
when I'm out once  
& for all  
the body floats  
for a reason maybe  
we can swim right up  
to it grab  
on & kick us back  
to shore - I think  
I'm doing it right  
now finally maybe  
I'm winning even  
if it just looks like  
my fingers  
are shaking

