field:
a free journal for architecture



ISSN: 1755-068
www.field-journal.org
vol.1 (1)
...badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields,
conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones ...

# ...badlands, blank space, border vacuums, brown fields, conceptual Nevada, Dead Zones[1], derelict areas,ellipsis spaces, empty places, free space liminal spaces, ,nameless spaces, No Man's Lands, polite spaces, , post architectural zones, spaces of indeterminacy, spaces of uncertainty, smooth spaces, Tabula Rasa, Temporary Autonomous Zones, terrain vague, urban deserts, vacant lands, voids, white areas, Wasteland... SLOAPs

Gil M. Doron

If the model is to take every variety of form, then the matter in which the model is fashioned will not be duly prepared, unless it is formless, and free from the impress of any of these shapes which it is hereafter to receive from without.[2]

The void cannot be earmarked as 'nature reserve', 'succession habitat', 'recreational field', or any other such designate, because to name it is to claim it in some way. And what is potentially more socially liberating about the void is precisely the absence of recognition and the subsequent indifference toward it. One simply does not 'see' it, even though it surrounds and enables performance, and is itself sustained by invisible mechanism and regulatory infrastructures.[3]

1 The term I have used to describe these spaces, which is reflected in all the other terms mentioned above, is 'dead zone'. The term was taken directly from the jargon of urban planners, and from a particular case of such space in Tel Aviv (cf. Gil Doron,'Dead Zones, Outdoor Rooms and the Possibility of Transgressive Urban Space' in K. Franck and Q. Stevens (eds.), *Loose Space: Possibility and Diversity in Urban Life* (New York: Routledge, 2006). The term should be read in two ways: one with inverted commas, indicating my argument that an area or space cannot be dead or a void, tabula rasa etc. The second reading collapses the term in on itself – while the planners see a dead zone, I argue that it is not the area which is dead but it is the zone, or zoning, and the assumption that whatever exists (even death) in this supposedly delimited area always transcends the assumed boundaries and can be found elsewhere.

2 Plato, 'Dialogues of Plato, vol. 3 – Republic, Timaeus, Critias [1892]' in *The Dialogues of Plato* trans. & intro by B. Jowett, 5 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892) III in The Online Library of Liberty, http://oll.libertyfund.org/EBooks/Plato_0343.pdf; p. 54; [accessed 2007].

3 G. Daskalakis et al. (eds.), *Stalking Detroit* (Barcelona: ACTAR., 2001), p. 124.

Taken from architecture and planning discourse, the title / list above is not a comprehensive lexicon of various types of urban space. This list is a desperate attempt by the discourse to make sense of a certain type of space, which, as I will argue, has existed in the city since antiquity. As some of the names suggest, from the subjective position of the urban researcher this place seems to be vague and undetermined, if not derelict or even empty. Nonetheless, to muddle through the ostensible marshyness of this space, the discourse has tried to define over and over again what it is, how it came about, and more than anything else, where it is located. Behind these attempts is the assumption that this space is unique, an anomaly that can be located in a certain place, and therefore managed, if not colonised.

This paper will try to draw a map of the genealogy of this space, within the discourse and within the city. However, this map will not attempt to locate it, but to show that this space transgresses the notion of a (localised) place. The effect of the map will be not to redefine it but to show that only in its disappearance from the map of the discourse can it truly come into being. In doing so this ostensibly uncertain space shows that the discourse itself is where uncertainty lies.

Fig. 1. Naples, *Bagnoli*. Photo: Gil Doron, 2004.

## The 'derelict land' and the elephant

> Ultimately, dereliction is a question of degree. Like the elephant, it may be hard to describe but it is relatively easy to recognise.[4]

I would like to start with what is supposed to be the most concrete and prescribed categorisation of the space that is the subject of this paper – the categories of derelict and vacant land. These categories must be crisp and clear since they are legal definitions, upon which grants and building permissions are given. The location of these spaces and their size must be apparent because they are the basis for much of the housing stock and urban developments in the foreseeable future.[5]

The UK's National Land Use Database of 2007 (NLUD) describes some of the land that was previously used, and currently falls outside the norms of occupancy, use, and 'acceptable appearance' as Derelict Land. The term derelict land means 'Land so damaged by previous industrial or other developments that it is incapable of *beneficial* use without treatment'. It is somewhat equivalent to 'brown fields', which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency describes as 'sites in which real or perceived environmental contamination impedes redevelopment' and to TOADS - Temporarily obsolete, abandoned, or derelict sites (U.S. General Accounting Office 1997) Using these definitions, derelict land could be spoil heaps, excavations or pits, derelict railway land, military bases, mining subsidence or general industrial dereliction.[6]

According to NLUD and the US Environmental Protection Agency, derelict land does not have to be empty, or devoid of *all* use. Land is defined as derelict when it has been used more extensively in the past, probably in more lucrative ways, and when it seems to have further development potential. By defining as derelict a site that has some uses and that might not be empty, these agencies are at odds with the more formal dictionary definition that defines a property as derelict, when it has been abandoned or neglected. This meaning is also the convention in legal terminology.[7] However, the UK government's definition for derelict land is not concerned with actual abandonment or ownership. It is worth noting that in a survey of attitudes towards such sites, the public often perceived them as public spaces.[8]

The term derelict has some moral overtones – it implies somebody has intentionally left something (or somebody) behind that is destitute and/or delinquent. The implication is understandable considering the places the term originally refers to were production sites that having been deemed unprofitable by their owners, were closed down with business transferring elsewhere. However, the term colours these spaces in overly negative hues even though, as I will show later on, they are often considered to be assets.[9]

4 Rupert Nabarro et al., *Wasteland: A Thames Television Report* (London: Thames Television, 1980), p. 11.

5 cf. Urban Task Force, Our Towns and Cities: The Future: Delivering an Urban Renaissance (London: Queen's Printer and Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 2000) at http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1127174#P78886090; [accessed 1 August 2006].

6 cf. John F. Handley, *The Post Industrial Landscape: A Resource for the Community, a Resource for the Nation?* (Birmingham: Groundwork Foundation, 1996) at http://www.changingplaces.org.uk/upload/documents/document11.doc; [accessed 2007].

7 J. Barr, *Derelict Britain* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 38.

8 cf. Handley, *The post industrial landscape.*

9 Definition of 'derelict' from, Dictionary.com (2007) http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/derelict; [accessed August 2007]: For a further discussion these issues see, Gil Doron, 'The Dead Zone & the Architecture of Transgression', *CITY: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*, 4(2) (2000): 247-264.

Another term that refers to previously used land is Vacant Land. Vacant Land is 'land which is now vacant and could be redeveloped without treatment, where treatment includes any of the following: demolition, clearing of fixed structures or foundations and levelling'. Vacant land can be any land that was previously developed, thus making this term 'both broad and imprecise'.[10] What makes this definition even vaguer is the fact that 'vacant land' does not have to be vacant – it can include, for example, structurally sound buildings.[11] The vacancy is neither physical nor occupational – it is temporal. Vacant land is *de facto* never empty but is sometimes empty of human presence. A similar argument was made by the Civic Trust: 'Vacant land, in general, is seen to be a problem when vacancy is prolonged, when it is an eyesore, or when it is an obvious social and economic waste of a scarce resource'.[12]

By excluding particular areas from their definitions of derelict and vacant land, government agencies have allowed these categories to slip into ever more fuzzy and open interpretations; for example, 'land damaged by a previous development where the remains of any structure or activity have blended into the landscape in the process of time (to the extent that it can reasonably be considered as part of the natural surroundings)'also, 'land in which there is a clear reason that could outweigh the re-use of the site – such as its contribution to nature conservation – or it has subsequently been put to an amenity use and cannot be regarded as requiring redevelopment.'[13]

The problem with these exclusions is that derelict sites and buildings often contribute to nature conservation and sometimes even new natural terrain, even though they are not seen as part of the 'natural surrounds'. Take for example, sunken boats that provide the platform for aquamarine life to exist, or industrial ruins and wastelands that often stimulate biodiversity (*London Wildlife Trust 2007*). These ruins simply create 'new nature'.[14]

Even more problematic is the exclusion, in NLUD's definition, of land that has 'subsequently been put to an amenity use'. Originating from the Latin word 'pleasant', *amenity* refers to social, cultural and aesthetic suppositions and preferences. Would NLUD, for example, exempt from the registry of derelict land a site that is known for 'amenity uses' such as raving, dogging or making bonfires? According to Tony Swindells, Brownfield Land Consultant from English Partnerships who is responsible for NLUD, probably not. The 'informal land uses' that would prevent land being classified as 'derelict' or vacant, would be 'recreational activities' undertaken 'by the general population', for example 'walking the dog or off road cycling etc.'. [15] Of course, the idea of 'general population' in a diverse society is problematic, and excludes or marginalises various groups from

[10] Ann O'm Bowman and Michael A. Pagano, *Terra Incognita: Vacant Land & Urban Strategies* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004), p. 4.

[11] cf. National Land Use Database, 'NLUD' (2007) http://www.nlud.org.uk; [accessed 2007].

[12] S. Joseph, *Urban Wasteland Now* (London: Civic Trust, 1988), p.1.

[13] NLUD, 2007.

[14] cf. R. Mabey, et al. (eds.), *Second nature* (London: Cape, 1984); T. Edensor, *Industrial Ruins* (New York: Berg, 2005).

[15] T. Swindells, 'Request for Information' (15.05.2007), personal email.

using and therefore redefining such sites – sites that are exactly the kind of places that marginalised groups often use.[16] Nonetheless, the mere possibility of excluding land from the 'derelict and vacant land' registry because it is used for informal uses is an interesting anomaly, in a system that from the start has catered to 'hard' land-use redevelopments.

[16] cf. Doron, 'The Dead Zone & the Architecture of Transgression', pp. 247-264 and also Doron, 'Dead Zones, Outdoor Rooms'.

The key issue of time and temporality is entirely excluded from the official definitions of derelict and vacant land, and for good reason because this factor can make these definitions completely futile. This issue was recognised by Thames Television's 'The *Wasteland* Report' which stated: 'A precise definition is virtually impossible: whether a site in partial use or a building unused for a given amount of time is 'derelict' remains to some extent a matter of subjective judgement.'[17]

[17] Nabarro et al., *Wasteland*, p. 11.

The attempt to include as much land and as many sites as possible weakens the category of derelict and vacant land further. Looking at the issue in an historical perspective, it seems that whilst the amount of this space has decreased in the past few years,[18] the amount of land that is perceived as or could be identified as vacant and derelict has increased. Until the 60s, the terms derelict and vacant land were usually used to single out areas sucked dry of their natural resources by mining concerns and only since the 70s has it been applied broadly to urban situations.[19] From 2000, NLUD has started to include under the definition of 'Previously-developed land by type (Brownfield land) sites which are currently in use with permission, or allocation, for redevelopment in addition to derelict and vacant land'. This has caused some confusion since other agencies such as the Urban Task Force (2000) and CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) (2003) have included in their audits of derelict land, sites that have had permission for redevelopment. Furthermore, CABE's 2003 campaign Wasted Space? included formal public spaces such as parks and squares that, due to neglect or 'anti-social activities', were perceived as derelict. As part of the campaign, the public was asked to identify what they considered was a 'waste of land' in their areas. No parameters were given to help them determine what constituted 'waste' or 'wasteland'. It was evident in the public's feedback that the appearance of such sites was used as the main criterion to judge such places i.e. aesthetic (dis)appreciation.

[18] NLUD, 2007.

[19] cf. Nabarro et al., *Wasteland*.

A similar generalising approach, relying on aesthetic judgement to determine what is derelict, vacant or wasteland, can be seen in a Mori survey that looked at perceptions about such spaces. In this survey, commissioned by Groundwork, derelict land was interpreted broadly as 'urban and industrial waste land. It may be vacant, unused or ineffectively used, or land which is neglected or unsightly. It can also mean land, which is likely to become any of these things'.[20]

[20] Handley, *The post industrial landscape*, p. 3.1.

The tension between the different definitions of derelict and vacant land by the government and other organisations is not new and was already highlighted in the late sixties. For example, in *Derelict Britain*, Barr argued that the government's definition for derelict land was 'narrow and exclude[d] so much that an average observer would consider derelict... To most of us 'derelict land' means virtually any land which is ugly or unattractive in appearance.'[21] Relying on the appearance of places as a key to identifying wastelands was also used by CABE (2003) and Groundwork (2003) in their surveys, and earlier by the author of *Reclaiming derelict land*.[22] The association of a certain appearance with wasteland is, I would argue, reducing the whole debate about these spaces into indeterminacy. Why? Obviously, if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so is unsightliness. But more importantly, the seemingly disordered landscape cannot be examined just by its appearance since it is known to be harbouring various spatial, natural, architectural, and social qualities that cannot be found in, and are often actively excluded from, other urban spaces, including the formal public space. These qualities show that these sites are not a waste of land.

Fig. 2. Detroit. Photo: Gil Doron, 1999.

21 Barr, *Derelict Britain*, p. 14.

22 cf. J. R. Oxenham, *Reclaiming Derelict Land* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966); Nabarro et al., *Wasteland*; Doron, 'The Dead Zone & the Architecture of Transgression'; Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*; INURA, *Possible Urban Worlds* (Berlin: Birkhauser Verlag, 1998); S. Willats, *Beyond the Plan: The Transformation of Personal Space in Housing* (UK: Wiley-Academy, 2001).

## marks of indeterminacy

Most of the space the governmental agencies have defined as derelict or vacant, that is, 'dead zone', is of the post-industrial landscape. Because of their high visibility and concreteness, they have been the focal point in the 'war of décor'. Exactly for this reason, post-industrial space or industrial ruins, such as abandoned factories and disused harbours and train yards, can provide a set of attributes or qualities that can be located in other, more mundane yet elusive urban spaces. Having observed sites of industrial ruin throughout Europe, the US and Asia as part of my research, together with analysing works by various writers on this subject and most notably Edensor, I have found the following:[23]

- Industrial ruins are mainly to be found at what was the edge of the cities in the 19th or early 20th century. As such, they are spaces in-between the downtown and the suburbs. They can be just a single factory or an entire industrial zone.
- The spatiality of industrial ruins vary – it can be an open space, an empty lot or a dilapidated structure with hidden and barely accessible spaces. Often it combines both characteristics.
- As ruins within the urban or rural landscape, they usually create a hiatus within the continuum. They stand out and do not correspond to or with their surroundings.
- The aesthetic of such spaces are 'the aesthetic of ruins' – disordered and messy but in some cases, bare and dull.
- The industrial ruin is a place that does not have a formal usage or a programme.
- As such, it is assumed to be an unproductive space, but it can still be profitable as a speculative space, and productive in a way that cannot be quantified financially.
- It is often occupied by informal activities (by humans and non-humans) that transgress the original usage of the building.
- These informal usages, predominantly carried out by those who are not the owners of the place, create a space that is neither private nor public.
- The industrial ruin is both a concrete place but also, because it has lost its identity, a hollow place that can engender and contain fantasy, desires, expectations.
- The industrial ruin stands outside history (the official past) and the present and at the same time is entrenched in both. If it does not undergo preservation or documentation it will fall outside the corpus of history, and if it does, it will lose all the attributes mentioned here and will become a 'dead ruin'. Essentially, it is of the present because it changes everyday, yet it is also outside the everyday working of the city.

[23] cf. Doron, 'The Dead Zone & the Architecture of Transgression'; Kevin Lynch, *Wasting Away*, ed. by M. Southworth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990); Robert Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt, and the Unbuildable: In Pursuit of Architectural Meaning* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991); Rubio Ignasi de. Sola-Morales, 'Terrain vague' in Cynthia C. Davidson (ed.), *Anyplace* (London: MIT Press, 1995); C. Woodward, *In Ruins* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2001); Edensor, *Industrial Ruins*.

- The industrial ruin is an indeterminate and volatile place: structurally, since it is dilapidating, and socially because, in contrast to formal public space, where the rules of behaviour are determined by norms and laws (often place-bound by-laws), the industrial ruin's space has no such laws. It is agonistic and radically democratic since the ways of being in this place are negotiated between the various groups and individuals who use it rather than those who pass laws elsewhere.

Stripped of their specific association with the industrial ruin, the characteristics mentioned above can be summarised as follows:

- These are either spaces in-between or at the edge and their interiority transgresses the boundaries of open/close, interior/exterior, private/public;
- They have no official programme or usage and as such they trigger and embody limitless choice and desires.
- They are perceived to be with no history (since they are not recognised ruins) and have no future (demolished or preserved, they have lost their essence). Thus, they seem to live in a temporal break, a hiatus, and exist in the continuous present – i.e. outside time. Nonetheless, because these spaces are unkempt and free of a programme, they are continuously changing.
- Their aesthetic is of disorder – where boundaries between autonomous objects disintegrate, and they are without seams – where no boundary whatsoever is apparent;
- as marginal spaces, in both spatial and socio-economic terms, these spaces are the 'constitutive outside' and are thus the embodiment of the agonistic place. This is true both in their relationship to the 'outside' city and in the relationships between the various inhabitants
- All the above characteristics portray these spaces as other to the city – between utopian places and dystopic ones.

To counter the determinacy of seeing the industrial ruins as just 'The' dead zones (which as I have insisted before are not dead), I will give here examples of two other seemingly unrelated spaces, that have been only marginally considered part of the 'problem' of the dead zone, if at all. However, as the industrial ruins, both these spaces also share most of the above characteristics.

chora and the toilet on the Bartlett's ground floor.

> Transgression contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being – affirms the limitless into which it leaps as it opens this zone to existence for the first time. But correspondingly, this affirmation contains notion positive: no content can bind it, since by definition, no limit can possibly restrict it. Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division; but only insofar as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture, or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, only retaining that in it which may designate the existence of difference.[24]

> This force of rupture is due to the spacing which constitutes the written sign: the spacing which separates it from other elements of the internal contextual chain ... but also from all the forms of present referent ... that is objective or subjective. This spacing is not simply negativity of a lack, but the emergence of the mark.[25]

Embodying the characteristics I have described above, the 'dead zone' can be the result of any act of demarcation. This space is not, however, a dichotomous Other, that forms beyond the line as a secondary space, but it is the space of the boundary itself. Short of expanding on this, it can be best described through the notion of transgression and spacing.[26]

The most obvious and ancient space of demarcation, on an urban scale, is the city wall. Within the wall, the Greek *polis* (city-state) was defined by the ability of the members of the governing class to meet in common places. Although the city-state often spread outside the walls, this ability ended at the city's gates, i.e. it depended on geographical unity. The space

[24] Michel Foucault, 'Preface for Transgression' in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 34-35.

[25] J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 317.

[26] For 'transgression' see, Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* (London: Penguin, 1962) and Foucault, 'Preface for Transgression'; for 'spacing' see, Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*.

beyond was the chora (or *Khôra*) – part agricultural land, part nature, and always militarised as it was the no man's land between the city-state and its often rival neighbours. A linguistic indication that the state of the chora was a no man's land can be found in the verb chōreō which, in the military sense, meant giving ground before the enemy. As a no man's land, the boundaries of the chora were never stable and always contested and in flux.[27]

In the *Timaeus*, some of these attributes can be found in Plato's concept of the chora as one of the three dimensions of the world/reality. According to Plato, the chora was a unique kind of space – a receptacle in which things were formed. It was associated with maternity, with the mother's womb. In itself, it lacked essence and could not acquire permanent identity. It was 'formless'.[28] Reading Plato, Derrida sees *chōra* as a radical otherness, or more precisely as a space that produces difference: 'It has to do with interval; it is what you open to 'give' place to things, or when you open something for things to take place' and 'chora is the spacing which is the condition for everything to take place, for everything to be inscribed.'[29]

Derrida emphasises that although Plato did not present the chora as a void, because it was at least temporally filled with content, he did see it as 'untouched' and therefore virgin space. But it is a very special virgin – The Virgin – who produced change, and gave a place for change to happen, but her surface stayed blank and unmarked. The virginity, the lack of characteristics, the passivity are all characteristics that would constitute the dead zone imagery after that.

In reality, it seems that the chora was indeed a transformative place, as 'it was on the out-skirts of the city that the new institutions, which set it off from ancient types, found a home.'[30] But this space was not serene. Generally speaking the chora was a space of contest, not only between rival city-states but also between reason and faith. The chora was dominated by faith, as it was here that most of the sanctuaries were located. The exception was Athens, but even here the Eleusinian Mysteries initiation ceremonies were held outside the city, as were the Dionysus anarchic celebration where sexual identity was transgressed. Even Socrates lost his mind in a state of erotic frenzy on the banks of the Ilissus when he ventured outside the city.[31]

The space outside the city is also the place of dissent – where politically marginal figures, women such as Antigone and the Wife of Phocion, transgressed the city laws and buried their brother and husband against the will of the king and against the will of the democratic regime. These

27 cf. L. Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: MJF Books, 1961); J. Bintliff, 'Issues in the Economic and Ecological Understanding of the Chora of the Classical Polis in its Social Context', in G. P. Bilde and F. V. Stolba (eds.), *Surveying the Greek Chora: The Black Sea Region in a Comparative Perspective* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2006); Indra K. McEwen, *Socrates' Ancestor: An Essay on Architectural Beginnings* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

28 Plato, 'Dialogues of Plato', p. 50, 51.

29 J. Derrida, 'Architecture Where the Desire May Live – Interview with Eva Meyer' in Neil Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 9.

30 Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 144.

31 cf. Ibid.; Dag Øistein Endsjø, 'To Lock up Eleusis: A Question of Liminal Space', *Numen* 47(4) (2000): 351-386; P. Dubois, 'The Homoerotics of the "Phaedrus"', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 17(1/2) (1982): 9-15; Plato, 'Dialogues of Plato'.

women's conduct transformed not only the marginal space where they carried out their deeds, but effected and changed the policies both of the city and of the home. Elsewhere, a transgressive act by a marginalised woman, Rahab the whore, in a marginal place, her home within the city's wall, had even more shattering effects.[32]

The chora, as McEwen argues, was a transformative space, and played a key role in the colonisation and re-organisation of the Mycenae and other cities in the region that were conquered by the Greeks. However, the chora as an exterior space and space of exteriority was not suitable for ordering and regulating the archaic and chaotic cities. For this mission, an entire utopian socio-political vision and a strict grid system was configured by Hippodamus, the first town planner. However, this social and spatial utopia could have been realised only on a place that was imagined to be a tabula rasa, or was made to be such.[33] Thus, the about to be colonised cities were projected with the imagery of an uncertain, chaotic, and blank space, or in other words imagery that resonated chora. But this chora, as a complete otherness, had to be tamed. The means for this task was, as I would argue, the chora itself – but this time not as a radical exteriority but extrapolated, reduplicated and internalised to form the grid system. The chora as a spatial Pharmakon.[34]

## In-conclusion

> The dynamics of contemporary life are such that crisis, and its discomfiting space of uncertainty and anxiety, is drawing ever nearer to the core of our common experience. Is there a no-man's land next door? if not, maybe you are already in one.[35]

The story does not end here of course, it just begins. Years after, in the modern city, the rational grid itself started showing its choraic innate traits in the form of what Jane Jacobs called Border Vacuum and in the perplexing 'Space Left Over After Planning' (SLOAP) … The imagery of the blank yet stained space of the Greek colonies was projected onto other colonies, in Asia and Africa, just to then be projected back again onto the metropolitan areas of the poor ... In post modern cities, away from the 'dead zones' of the industrial ruin, in the sprawling expanse, new 'nameless spaces', lacking identity or definition have sprung up ... And from all the metaphors that have been drafted in to capture this space, the imagery of the no mans land has struck the deepest: In the age of late capitalism, when the frontiers have been brought right into the heart of cities, the chora as a place of radical exteriority has become the total interior with no exterior…

32 cf. Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Joshua (2001) *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, Crossway Bibles, (Joshua 2001: 2 and 6).

33 cf. R. Paden, 'The Two Professions of Hippodamus of Miletus', *Philosophy* and Geography, 4(10) (2001).

34 cf. Derrida,'Plato's Pharmacy' in J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981).

35 Lebbeus Woods, 'No-Man's Land' in A. Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.200.


Fig. 3. Rome, *Campo Boario*, an abandoned abattoir, at the site of ancient Rome's walls. The place was squatted about 15 years ago, and transformed into a gypsy camp, Kurdish info centre, social art and activism centre and more. Next to the Campo Boario on th e banks of the River Tiber, there used to live homeless people. The area was also depicted in Pier Paolo Pasolini's film, Accattone ('The Beggar') 1961 (top right photo). Collage and photos: Gil Doron, 2000.

And yet, in another twist to the story, exactly at the moment we are told that an external position is impossible, because the 'dead zone' is everywhere, and it is not as bad and not as dead as has been assumed, we are offered the real thing – the resurrected chora, in a suburban park which celebrates rational thoughts. (Although, I must say, the failure of some of Parc de la Villette's follies to generate any productive activity has resulted in them being truly empty and dysfunctional thus transgressive. So, the project may yet succeed)… elsewhere we are promised that radical exteriority can be generated,

*deus ex machine*, in 'zones free of architecture' inside some extra large projects ... [36]

Looking at the fragmented map I have presented here, one thread of the many it offers discloses that the imagery of the dead zone has existed since at least antiquity and that this imagery has in the past few decades proliferated in the architectural discourse, and although this space seems to come closer and closer to home we have still yet to understand what exactly it is and what its potentialities are.

## Post Script

> It isn't a question of producing: it's all in the art of disappearing. Only what comes into being in the mode of disappearance is truly other. And yet that disappearance has to leave traces, has to be the place where the Other, the world or the object appears.[37]

Some time ago, at my MPhil to PhD transfer meeting at the Bartlett I wanted to demonstrate the mundaneness of these ostensibly extraordinary places. I decided then to take the committee and 30 or so guests for a journey in a search for the 'dead zone'. Leaving the lecture room on the 3rd floor, we partook on a long and treacherous journey, through the chaotic studios, and the uncanny corridor spaces off the tutors' rooms, to the men's room of the ground floor. The female entourage were ecstatic – they for a long time had heard stories about this contaminated shoddy pit, but could have only experienced a faint whiff of it, until now.

We enter. An eerie silence is flooding the place, interrupted only by the sound of dropping water. Making sure that we are not encroaching on any natives, I cautiously open the door of one of the cubicles. The place is empty. Pointing at the partition that separates this space from the adjacent cubical, I announce: 'here is the anonymous place where you can let all your self/ves disintegrate, this is the space public and private mix, where boundaries are transgressed, where unpredictable forms and programmes are created. Praise the architects (to be) who created this space. Their architecture shows us, yet again, the weak boundary between the architect private and public life.[38] This creative piece of architecture demonstrates the architect's desire to see, traverse the lecture hall and penetrate the privy'.

The baffled faces of the delegation make it clear they have not seen the void. Stepping into the cubical, I lower the loo's lid, sit down and point at an area of the partition about a meter above the floor. And there, there is the void. About two square centimetres in diameter, made by a repetitive etching, a hole transgresses the boundary of the space.

36 cf. Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Modern Library, 1993); J. Marriott, *The Other Empire: Metropolis, India and Progress in the Colonial Imagination* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Stefano Boeri, 'New nameless spaces', *Casabella* 57(597/598) (1993): 74-76 & 123-124; Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension*, trans. by M. Moshenberg (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991); Jameson, Frederic, 'Demographic of the Anonymous' in Cynthia C. Davidson (ed.), *Anyone* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1991); Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (London: MIT Press, 1996).

37 Jean Baudrillard, *Jean Baudrillard: Photographies 1985-1998* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2000), p.131.

38 cf. G. Stevens, *The Favored Circle: The Social Foundations of Architectural Distinction*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

It is not the first time that young architects project their desires, frustrations, and, I must insist, critique, into architecture, in the shape of penetrating holes. Gordon Matta Clark did it spectacularly. Of course, peeping holes and Matta Clarke's work have significant differences, but for our discussion on indeterminacy and voids, these holes have a similar effect. Not unlike Clarke's holes, the peeping kind has made the rest room a bit restless, diversifying the relationship with the architectural event, accommodating but also engendering desires that have no place where architecture is institutionalised. These holes have created architecture where a desire may live.[39]

39 cf. Derrida, 'Architecture Where the Desire May Live'.


## p.p.s.

Two months later the toilet was renovated, and the space next to it became a neat lavish gallery. The void was determinately designed out.