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C    Architecture as non-oppressive design
S    Jacques Ferrier

The never-ending expansion of urban spaces compels us to rethink the way we wish to experience our towns and cities. The world is now made up of layers of complex, superimposed infrastructures, whose daily operation is made possible only by the omnipresence of technology – which, while enormously useful to us, has nevertheless become an authoritarian component of our lives, forcing us to adapt to new spatial practices that lead us to feel more and more passive, and less and less like actors and stakeholders. Cities and buildings have gradually untethered themselves from the constraints of climate, geography, the passing of time and the seasons, spatial cultures, and so forth; ultimately, the city has cut us off from a living natural world with which humans have always cohabited. Each of us feels the pressure of an artificial world that seems to present constraints and opportunities in equal measure. Technology – the useful but invasive god of modernity – has ended up becoming a source of anxiety. The physical and sensory link between humans and the city has been sacrificed at the expense of progress.

Science and technology have long been instruments of emancipation and freedom for the city dweller. For centuries, the city has been the place that has fostered the development of the cultural expression of community, the production and transmission of knowledge, and the refinement of techniques for manufacturing and trade. The birth of cities is marked by our need to protect ourselves from the unsettling fickleness of a hostile and unpredictable natural world. But with the ever greater demand for autonomy from the encumbrances of natural conditions, the era of equilibrium has given way to the era of performance. Our insatiable quest for comfort comes at a price. As technology has become more and more sophisticated, it has insinuated itself into every last corner of our daily lives; by making itself indispensable, the servant has become the master. The roles have been reversed, the tables turned: nature, formerly an enemy, has now become a precious commodity to be preserved at all costs, while the urban world – if only as a result of greater awareness of environmental issues – has entered a period of doubt and criticism.

The functional city, through its desire for absolute control of atmosphere and ambience, has placed itself in a situation where it is now decontextualized, repeating and reproducing the same urban situations worldwide, sidelining any possibility of improvisation: the city without qualities is everywhere, and residents' ability to appropriate the city is nowhere to be seen. The artificial intrudes and interposes itself everywhere, compromising any possible contact with nature; city dwellers' experiences necessarily become poorer and more banal. For them, it is as though the world can be viewed only through the permanently closed window of an air-conditioned room or commuter train. It is high time we reopened the window and enabled metropolitan dwellers to get back in touch with their senses, enhance their capacity for perception, and rediscover the pleasure of city living. There is no reason for technology to continue to exercise its power to the detriment of a sensory experience of the city. Architects can redefine the role and place of innovation by taking the question of our senses seriously.

S  Today, we need to invent a new contract between nature and technology: a
C  contract where the experience of urban dwellers constitutes the core value,
S  with the aim of once again discovering the sensual experience of the city –
   essential for the fulfilment of all human lives. Senses, gestures, and the
   possibility for each of us to get involved and to take ownership of situations
   are key components of any contemporary humanistic project. Total control of
   built environments must make way for open technological systems that can
   be reconfigured, customized, put on standby and reactivated as and when
   desired. Instead of the hermetic boxes that have transformed our buildings
   into autistic, immutable objects, we need to create intermediate solutions
   that are not completely predetermined, but instead leave room for manoeuvre
   and improvisation in all sorts of scenarios, and subtly blend private and
   collective time and space. Geometric urbanism, which plans the city according
   to an endless and uniform structural grid, has to give way to micro-urbanism,
   a vision of the city that is sensitive to individual situations. In short, at
   every level, it is time for us to rethink the role of architecture as a means
   of relieving pressure and creating a context where everyone once again has the
   possibility of enjoying a rich, unique and sensitive experience of the city.

   We can only envisage the future in terms of change and invention. My firm
   belief is that the current situation, despite multiple global crises – and
   perhaps even as a result of them – offers creators opportunities to profoundly
   reimagine the links between technology, architecture and society. What we
   are talking about is nothing less than creating the conditions for the urban
   planet to be a truly liveable world in every possibe sense: diverse, changing,
   fertile, protective, uniting. To achieve this, architecture must be the
   instrument of a non-oppressive conception of spaces, using technology as a
   tool that gives priority first and foremost to people, and making the city
   synonymous with the complete experience of both individuation and community
   life.