

WELCOME
TO NOWHERE

An explorative journey through the global
city and its transformation into an isolated
urban space.

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This research consists of a series of explorations into the multifaceted dimensions of a globalized city run by the economy, and the fragmented relationship between its society, culture and the built environment.

As a way to discuss contemporary issues of today, the arguments are explored through speculative imagery and text, with an aim to start a dialogue and present questions that are often disregarded amongst the architectural & urban realm.

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a world built on consumerist values and a spatial rationale of capital accumulation. This modern society has led to architecture thriving through super consumption and super production ultimately leading to the generic. Cities and spaces that were usually rich in variation and texture have become an architectural melting pot, rather indistinguishable. Architecture has now become smooth, simplified and reduced to one. The touchable city has dissipated. Instead, we are surrounded by an army of high glass robots invading our spaces, obstructing our cities and killing off public spaces. As spectacular as they are, these structures now function as the dynamic urban milieu favoring the market demands over human needs. These landscapes continuously change at an incredible pace based on new trends, with no time to understand how it really affects the city and its people. Instead, it has become a spectacle that thrives through these demands.

Although we have seen the creation of the 'spectacle' in many cities around the world, we see this urbanistic approach amongst the 'newer' ones as the ethos for the entire city. If the novelty spectacle was the model for buildings, now it has become the model for entire cities. The extravagant spectacle is an element of the global city, where the power of the economy and economic processes begin to shape the conceptions of a city. It becomes the main designing factor and ultimately determines the demographics and societal interactions within the urban spaces. This is urban capitalism which has aided in the rise of a new global urbanity.

A city that peaks through its capitalist attraction is Dubai. As my hometown, I have always been fascinated with how the city has been able to bloom from the arid desert and place the whole region on the map, alluring people from all over the world. With its time scale on steroids, the city is designing for international communities that have yet to be assembled, and doing so through hyper bombastic urban ornaments. It has become the epitome of a global city. These new cities like Dubai are met with forces of urbanization which transform them into showcases for architectural pageants, in hopes to be accepted on a global scale. However, through this process architecture becomes a prop and the city acts as a stage.

We may ask ourselves, *what is left when the show is over?*

I have seen the rise of this multi-ethnic metropolis, yet I have also seen how the fast paced forces of globalisation and urbanization are forming a city and society that is becoming increasingly fragmented and alienated.

This thesis is an exploration into the future of these cities' physical spaces, through a discussion on various themes to understand how we have landed in a homogeneous cultural and architectural landscape, powered through commerce and a global identity.

The following research will include themes of globalisation, supermodernity, forces of urbanization and the rise of technology, expressed through text and speculative imagery to create a free domain for interpretation, discussion and solutions. This imagery created will follow the story of my research, and embody the different narratives of what the global city may become.

01 GLOBALISATION

As a main basis for this research, we begin by asking *what is globalisation?*

It is the phenomenon which describes the existence of the free market world & a network of communications towards worldwide standardization of the cultural, social, economical, political and technological aspects of societies. Through this process, businesses or other establishments start operating on an international scale, developing international influence. It revolves around the interconnectivity of many aspects around the world, and has led to a new level of interaction and integration amongst the people. Although the growing connectivity has benefited us in vast ways, we must also consider the negative aspects and repercussions of globalisation, which includes .

The globalized city is multifaceted, but ultimately revolves around 'big money' which determines the evolution of the city. In the economic world, it brings new risks and uncertainties, competition between global and local markets, fluctuating profits, local product destruction and high levels of imitation. However we also see the power of the economy seeping into the urban and affecting various practices, including architecture.

With the demands brought forward through societal changes, technological advances, and as a result of globalisation, cities have been re-branding themselves on a global scale, and are left neglecting the local. Forces of globalization and urbanization have allowed relatively new cities such as Dubai to mold itself based on a trend and demand to suit these global needs.

With the predominance of the internet and technology, the perception of the world has been commodified and reduced to the two dimensional. In effect our world has been reduced to imagery and icons. The visual commodity has prevailed nowadays, and contextual architecture is lost. In the past the programmatic aspects of architecture in terms of the context and how the built was to be used was a huge part of the profession. However now we see the visual sensory perception of architecture being privileged and put ahead. We create a sensation, and spectacle without thinking through the value of the operation or how it will impact the society. The architects, the owners, the decision-makers from both the architectural to the urban scale must question these processes within the global city.

In a City like Dubai, the power of the economy is prioritized and is the main driving force in all aspects, such as urban development, architectural typologies, and societal exchanges. In a context of inflationary globalization and international economic competition, architecture serves these emergent economies as a symbol for development and national progress - Icons are formed. Monuments grow in the contemporary landscape, however only acting as a reflection of the needs and ability of the present. This means architecture now plays the role of repositioning the host cities on the international stage. Many times, this act is dominated by a single building or 'iconic form' in hopes of transforming a city - for example the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao. The gap between the buildings appearance and the function as a museum made it an instant icon. When one thinks of the building now, we are not reminded of the Basque country, but rather the irregular form and style of the architecture. The work becomes singular, and not defined by the local context. In society now, it seems as if every cultural institution has to make claims to 'regenerate the city', a burden too heavy for architecture in itself to bear. With this obsession of creating a form which in turn acts as an instant logo, the detail is lost. The Architecture becomes a sculpture and diverts its attention from the people within the city towards its global representation.¹

This rise in object design was partly due to the industrial revolution, where the traditional concept of architecture adaptive to the context changed. In a way, a building became an interchangeable industrial design product built to convey an image. Buildings became advertisements for companies and architects. Context became secondary, or for some even a distraction from the visuals the object was designed to create. By putting emphasis on these visuals, it seems that nowadays a city's true significance is found through its representation. This has been experimented with in the Gulf regions, such as Doha, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where they use the architecture of the 'spectacular' to construct an image of themselves as cities of culture.

¹ Sklair, Leslie. "Iconic Architecture and the Culture-Ideology of Consumerism." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 5, 2010, pp. 135-159

02 THE CITY OF THE NOW



Figure 1. Transformation of Dubai Deira District.

Dubai - A place where the tales of the desert are buried in the pavement under the excess amounts of super malls, theme parks and skyscrapers. Like many others in Asia, the city of Dubai did not exist in the post-industrial period. It was created due to the globalization storm, and is an approach in city planning towards a 'Hybrid Urbanism', where the city is treated as both Local and Global.² However, we notice that the global has been prioritized and local urbanism has been disregarded.

As a relatively 'new' city, Dubai has shaped itself as a remarkable place in the cosmopolitan global scale in just 54 years due to the discovery of oil. For the past 24 years, I have been able to call Dubai my home. I have seen the city literally rise from the sands and create this dynamic urban mirage that continues to unfurl into the future. (Figure 1) The desert, as a beautiful yet inhospitable landscape, has transformed into a complex city. One that might be viewed as peculiar and hyperactive for a visitor, but for residents it appears as a facade, a city lacking identity. A city that is continuously molding itself to represent what the public at a global scale would like to see. Consequently, there is a loss of civic and communal aspects of urbanism as the space continuously changes to meet the demands of a consumer society abroad.

We can view it as a massive circuit board, where the elite engineering, architectural, construction and retail developers from around the world are provided a space to plug in clusters of tech and entertainment zones, or even artificial islands, to create various cities within themselves catering to all possible needs. In the past it was the ideology of imperialism which extended a country's rule over foreign land, sometimes through economic control. However, Saskia Sassen, a Dutch-American sociologist describes it now as the 'power of extraction', or extractive mode. Big money is always moving and national economies become objects of desire for big corporations abroad, so they extract what they need without colonizing the space and then just leave.³ Global cities are built on this basis of extraction, however when these establishments from abroad take what they need and leave from these cities and markets, we again must question what is left.

Dubai has been the prime example of urban capitalism, and it is interesting to see the impact that international communities and globalisation has on the overall design aesthetic of a city. Visually it must promote itself as 'new', 'bigger', 'better', 'faster' or 'smarter'. Dubai's projects are deemed ambitious, however fail to take into account practicality. For example, the Burj Al Arab which stands as the only 7 star hotel in the world was believed to require around one hundred years to recuperate its costs while under construction. Another example is the Dubai Metro which runs in a straight line rather than going anywhere useful. This was done to achieve the title as the 'world's longest fully automated metro system'.

Although the fast pace scale of development has established Dubai as a centre for urban experimentation and icons, it has also raised concerns on its future. A Global city built and based around commerce, similar to the economic system, is fragile. It may eventually collapse, therefore how can a global city sustain itself through all the continuous changes in society?

² Katodrytis, George. Hybrid Urbanism, katodrytis.com/main/34/hybrid-urbanism.

³ Sassen, Saskia. The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo. Princeton University Press, 2001.

03 DUBAI CITY AS A BRAND



Figure 2. *Dubai Harbour 1950*



Figure 3. *Dubai 'Iconic' Architecture - 1. Dubai Frame - 2018 2. Burj Al Arab - 1999 3. The Museum of the Future - 2020*

Dubai from the beginning served as a city of merchants as it was the center of trade for commodities such as pearls and gold. Even before the discovery of oil, its strategic location between Asia and Europe allowed it to be a main free port within the region and an intermediary for world trade. (Figure 2) Its exponential growth and transformation into a global city was developed due to the discovery of oil in the United Arab Emirates and the subsequent influx of immigrants from both the East and West. The profits from oil exports allowed the leaders to design a new city. From that point, Dubai was envisioned as the city for the world, a global city. This new city was built through a spike, and in a sense appeared out of nowhere.

The primary goal of transforming Dubai into a global city has been through the transformation of its physical sphere, where its never ending construction and massive grounds for experimentation have become its brand. The endless array of cranes has become embedded into the skyline and keeps peoples imagination alive. It brings a continuous excitement of what Dubai is capable of bringing to the world. This is all part of Dubai's entrepreneurialism, and 'Starchitecture' has been its main element of transformation (Figure 3). Therefore the Gulf cities in the region have been acting as laboratories for the Starchitect's aesthetic experimentations. By branding the city, Dubai looks at itself not as a series of skylines, but as a series of brandscapes, where buildings are not only objects but rather advertisements, brief experiences and images. As mentioned before, this creates a city full of icons.

We can suggest that the production of a global megacity is based on the term 'festivalization', a trend powered by the audiences desire to be immersed in a multi day spectacle and a rich experience. This method of 'theming' a city is a fast-paced urban development strategy that reduces the everyday reality and replaces it with this culture of stimulation. It is a strategy that appeals to the tourist user group and has been proven successful as their constant production of new symbolism has been favorable in attracting investors and tourists. Dubai's strategy has focused on 'build it and they will come', which has also proved successful till now.

Through the first stages of research, the global city may be understood as a

corporation

By branding a city, we're not only creating a series of skylines, but rather a series of brandscapes. In a digitized and globalized world, the city becomes a landscape of advertisements, brief experiences and images, and in turn we reduce the city to an illusion of hyper bombastic urban decor. The city now stands as a stage, and architecture is the prop.



A CITY CORPORATION

04 DUBAI INJECTING THE LOCAL



Figure 4. Al Bastakiya District - Old Dubai

Through its transformation into a global city, Dubai was met with a stark change in demographics. With more than 80% of its population as foreign, there has also been an unresolved tension between the local and global aspects of the city in terms of its physical structure, social and economical factors. To draw in the world, I have noticed that everything in the rise of Dubai was always built against a Western model, including the construction of new residential areas designed to model Western style architecture. Again this is due to the standardization in globalisation, which affects the standardization within architecture. Financial sector buildings, hotels, luxury housing etc may visually look the same around different global cities, to bring in the high end consumers and big money.

However, we can also say that in an attempt to stamp 'culture' onto the city, they have injected the local through pseudo-Arabian districts, as a way to provide some cultural and historical language to the urban fabric. This is evident through the historic quarter, Al Bastakiya district, which stands as a reminiscence of Old Dubai (Figure 4). Its watchtowers, souks, mosques and houses are the only remaining traditional architecture within the city. Unfortunately, it has been refurbished and 'disneyfied' to stand as a cultural selling point for the international community. The houses and narrow streets are sterile clean with no local involvement, almost produced as a movie set. These districts start to act as a stage for tourism. We begin to argue the authenticity of these urban projects, and how this affects our urban spaces, as well as humans dependency and interactions with the built environment.

By turning a city into a showcase, we are met with an endless cycle of high rises, new shopping malls, transport hubs etc emerging as the new landscape and defining our contemporary culture, before we have time to even comprehend its impact on our cities.

04 THE SUPER MODERN & NON-PLACES

Marc Augé, a French anthropologist is known for exploring the isolating ubiquity of such places. With an anthropological perspective he created the term 'non-place', referring to spaces where the significance of relations, history and identity are lost.⁴ In his book titled 'Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity' he describes these spaces as motorways, malls, airports, international hotel chains etc.⁵

The book examines the changing characteristic of space, place and individuality in this overly excessive modern world. Augé describes the 'super modern' world as where history becomes current events, space becomes images and the individual is merely a gaze, generating a series of non-places. He goes on to characterize supermodernity by three figures of excess.⁶

Firstly, 'excess time', or rather the excess of simultaneous events in the modern world. The speed of events is due to globalisation and the increasing flow of information present nowadays. It has accelerated the process of human experience and in turn accelerated history.⁷ It has led to a society that can potentially have access to everything instantly through technological advances. We are able to receive images of other places and times, and a simultaneous view of an event taking place on the other side of the planet. In a sense we can say scales have now perished as the world can fit into our tv screens or the palm of our hands.

Secondly, we have 'excess space'. Supermodernity works on the principle of 'spatial overabundance', which is paradoxically correlative to the shrinking of the planet. Due to globalisation we are everywhere and nowhere at the same time. It compresses space while ironically resulting in an explosion of scales. For example Augé describes how the first step into outer space reduces our space into a small point, however at the same time the world is becoming more open to us. Architecture begins to reflect the attitude of a society based on excess by creating spaces exploding with consumption, circulation and leisure.

Thirdly, the 'excess of individuality'. The forces of supermodernity create these non-places where thousands of individual itineraries converge for a moment, yet all unaware of one another. There is an abundance of people, yet no relationships between them. These spaces created have surrendered to the 'fleeting, the temporary and the ephemeral'.⁸ The transient spaces create a new form of solitude that results in mass groups of customers, users and passengers, perpetually moving through, entering or exiting - this separates people from identity. Within non-places we become anonymous. An example of a non-place is an airport, you begin in a depersonalized space on one side of the world and as you cross a threshold, you begin a new life. This non-place becomes the door to everywhere. We can say that supermodernity marks the overabundance of information and events which our culture then feeds into. In turn, life becomes fast and chaotic and we notice ourselves decoupling from the world around us. We become invisible in this world. A person is always at home, yet never at the same time. Can a space be anywhere and everywhere, but also nowhere? This is something we commonly experience now in these interconnected global cities, where these three excess are spatialized, materialized and experienced.

4 Augé Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity. pg 77

5 Augé Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity.

6 Augé Marc. A Sense for the Other: the Timeliness and Relevance of Anthropology. Pg 103

7 Ibid pg 105

8 Augé Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity. Pg 77, 96

05 CITY AS A 'NON-PLACE'

Auges ideas of supermodernity are more relevant now than ever, they symbolize the seamless, sterilized, transient and privatized spaces in our landscapes today.⁹ Since the non-place is neither constant or related to local/historical time, it creates a sense of being lost and anonymous, but at the same time creates a sense of familiarity. We see this through the excessive replication of non-places around the world, where a foreigner can feel a reference to their home in the anonymity of 'motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains'. The forces of globalization and urbanization are creating more of these non-places (spaces of circulation, consumption and communication) and creating a brief image of a utopian city. Within the supermodern world we notice the disappearance of real space and dematerialisation of the city. Aspects of a city are continually reconstructed by information technologies to create illusions and images. These plays of imagery in supermodernity are part of its identity - Supermodernity is made of non-places, and parts of these non-places are made of images.¹⁰ These images take over our spaces and create a new dialogue. Therefore these spaces are made of short lived experiences and memories that only come to life through its imagery.

Can a city become a non-place? Certain places come into existence through these brief experiences, images and words that evoke them, therefore in a sense these cities have no identity rooted in place and time, and become cliches or 'non-places'.¹¹

'Non-places have no room for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle'.¹²

Dubai is known for this element of spectacle, and in the context provided can be viewed as one large non-place. It is a glorified transit point where history is lost and the terrain becomes completely artificial. The city is designed for the constant flow and transit of people. With this passing motion, it is hard to understand the city and urban spaces within. The spectacle can contribute to a general sense of alienation by emphasizing the disconnectiveness between the user and the physical 'object' or space. Within the spectacle we see the anonymity of the city and the people. As it is designed for the moment or the experience, the urban tissue may not hold together beyond a short time. The development of these endless non-places have led to the division of the urban fabric and disappearance of unity in the urban structure. There is nothing binding these places to the place and time, and in a world that is becoming ever more homogeneous, soon it will not matter where we go as the world will consist only of non-places.¹³

9 Non-Places. Iconeye, www.iconeye.com/opinion/review/item/4045-non-places.

10 Augé Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity. pg 117

11 Augé, Marc. Non-Places: Introduction to the Anthropology of Supermodernity. Pg 95

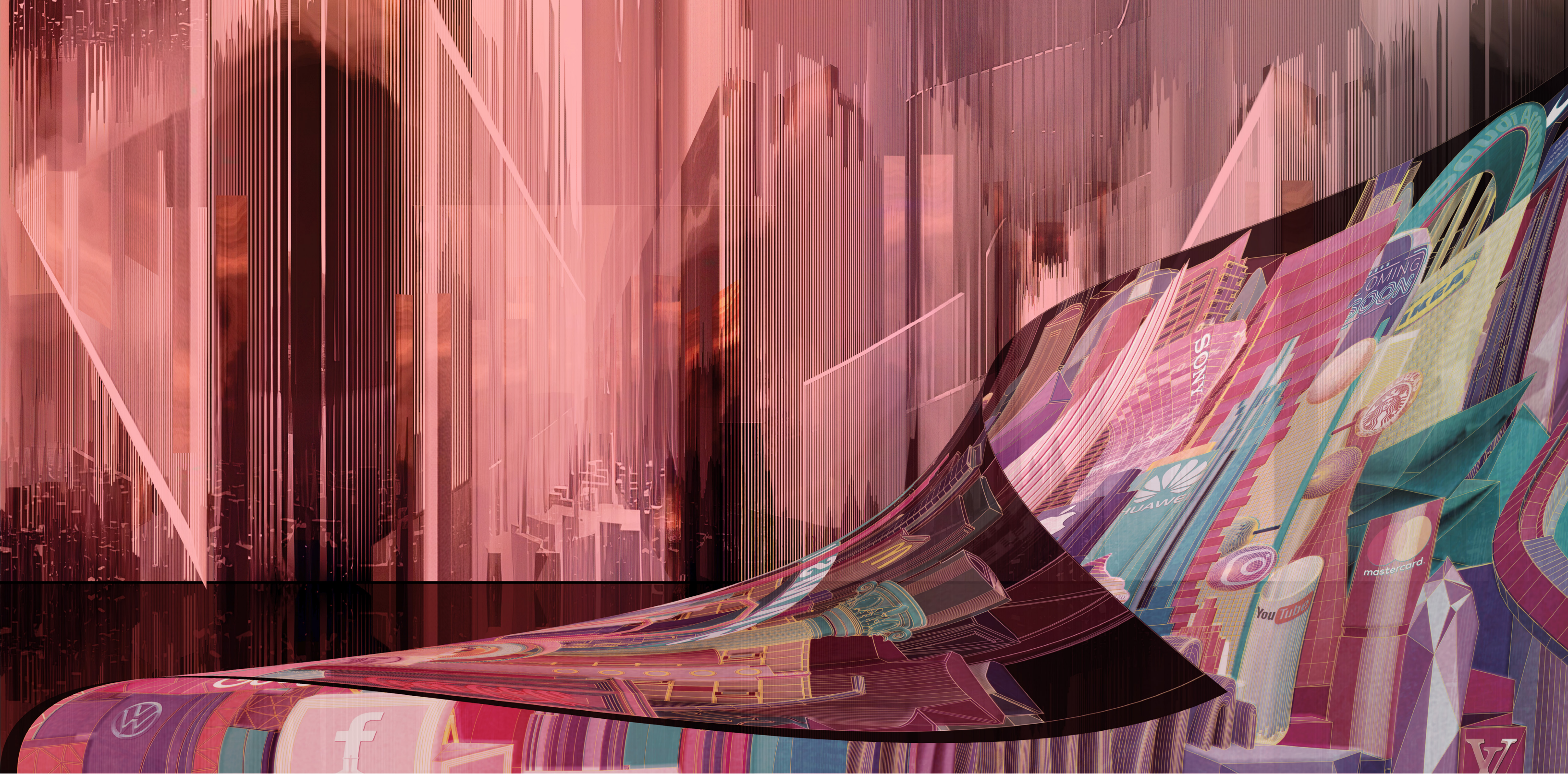
12 Ibid. Pg 103

13 Elsheshtawy, Yasser. Dubai: behind an Urban Spectacle.

The image of the city we saw before is merely an

illusion

In this overly excessive world we are headed towards the disappearance of local/historical aspects. An illusion is created to mask the underlying homogeneity that consume our cities. Spaces within this urbanism become anonymous and depersonalized, blurred and transient. We move through space unaware of our being. Within these supermodern cities, the repetiton of seamless layered spaces which are dimensionally rich pulls us in through the polished shine creating an odd sense of familiarity. Within this global city we are everywhere and nowhere at the same time.



THE CITY AS A FACADE

06 THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

CAPITALIST SPACES

This research led me to question the form of urbanism which disregards the importance of the local and context. Many architects have criticized the ways in which we are dealing with the contemporary city. Rem Koolhaas tackles these questions that are usually left unexplored. The essay 'Junkspace', published in 2001 for The 'Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping', is a long winded attack on the death of architecture due to modernization. At the time it was written it was seen as an unsparing critique, however 19 years later it is our reality.

Junkspaces are the products of modernization.¹⁴ He describes these new kinds of spaces again as the shopping malls, the airports, the convention centers, the hotels, the cultural centers etc, all uniting into one. Although he is one who has actively participated in its demise, he criticizes today's architecture as being devised for consumerism, meaning spaces formed are mollified and temporal. They appease the public's needs only in the present. These megastructures emerge like 'springs from a mattress' and must consume more and more program to survive. These spaces are perpetually designed to keep you in through its marble and shine and are rather homogeneous,¹⁵ if you have seen one you have seen it all. Koolhaas gives the impression that all wide open spaces will demand these junkspaces and soon we will have conquered space.¹⁶ In a sense Dubai builds with this mentality, a mantra of 'When in doubt, build a mall!'

However, Junkspace is not necessarily the building itself, but also the space around it. These are lost spaces negatively impacted by the construction. As seen in contemporary cities today, these buildings are mainly detached from the urban fabric and articulate emptiness within the city. Similar to mass production, there will always be by-products and leftovers, in this case these are the residual dark spaces. Due to the activity within these 'junkspaces' the life at street level is lost and urbanism has been interiorized. We understand that architecture does not only heal but also destroys urban areas.

Furthermore, the streets surrounding the buildings merely act as an 'organizational device' rather than a public domain. He suggests cities are developing too fast and designing buildings that are not needed. By cluttering our streets with junkspaces, we are not allowing our cities to breathe.

¹⁴ Koolhaas, Rem. Junkspaces Vol. 100, Obsolescence. (Spring, 2002), pp. 175

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Koolhaas, Rem. Junkspaces Vol. 100, Obsolescence. (Spring, 2002), pp. 188

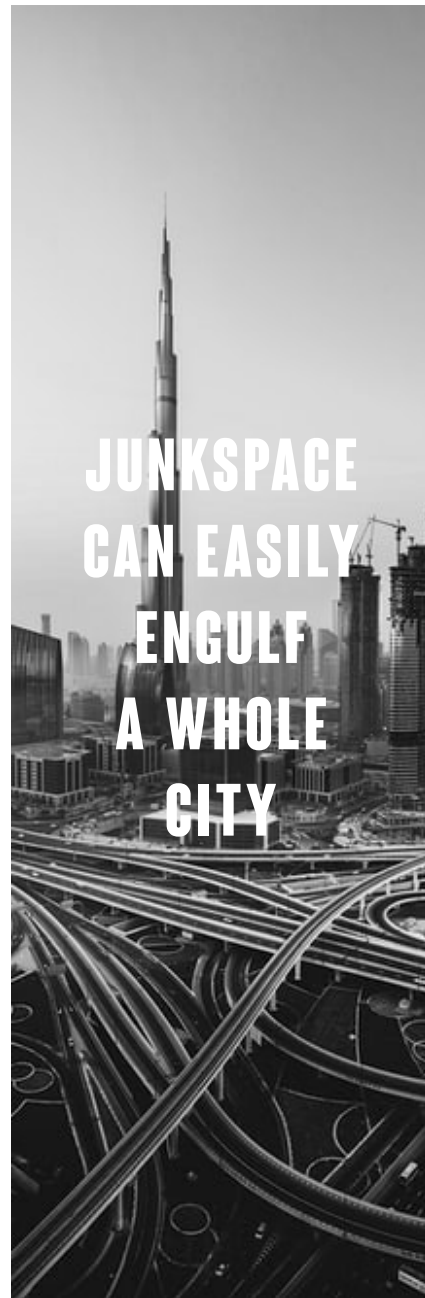
07 INTERIORIZED URBANISM



Figure 5. Photograph of Passage de L'Opera, Paris, 1935



Mall of the Emirates, Dubai



In another prophetic essay 'Bigness of the Problem of Large' Rem Koolhaas again describes these large interiorized structures as Bigness.

'Bigness no longer needs the city; it represents the city; it preempts the city. If urbanism generates potential and architecture exploits it, Bigness enlists the generosity of urbanism against the meanness of architecture' ¹⁷

This quest for bigness in urbanism was explored in the Parisian arcades built during the 19th and 20th century. This was the centre of attention for Walter Benjamin, a philosopher and cultural critic in his work 'The Arcades Project, 1935'. ¹⁸ These arcades were long passages between two buildings (Figure 5). Due to its glass roofing the boundaries between what was interior and exterior was blurred. He describes these arcades as a city, 'a world in miniature, in which customers will find everything they need'. ¹⁸ They became spaces of escape within the city and a new form of urbanity was developed. It also gave rise to the urban culture of the 'flaneur' in the 19th century as an observer of modern day life. The arcade was a space for them where people could meet, mingle, shop and entertain themselves. The diversity of activities is evident in today's modern-day mixed use interiors. The arcades have subsequently transformed into vertical shopping malls, public transport networks, massive interior spaces etc due to the transition into the consumer culture of the 20th century. Therefore these large interiorized spaces are again a phenomenon of the forces of commercialism. These forms of architecture reflect a society that desires instant access to places, information etc.

However similar to 'junkspaces', Bigness does not only refer to buildings, but also the paraphernalia of connection. These include decks, bridges, tunnels, motorways etc, which have taken over cities. ¹⁹ Relating back to Marc Auge, this increased connectivity constructs a city where the boundaries of the 'bigness' and the urban are indistinguishable. Thus, in cities like Hong Kong or Dubai, Bigness has become the city. It is evident through their architecture which stands independent and no longer responds to the urban tissue. As these cities continue to grow at a rapid pace, they inevitably become more dense with these structures. It suggests that these forced interior spaces must then act as an urban backdrop.

However this makes us question what happens after modernization has run its course. What happens to the remains and residues of these Junkspaces? This is something we are already experiencing. With the incline of virtual and online shopping there is a decline in high street shopping meaning these vast malls are residues in the making. ²⁰ As technology progresses, we lose the need for these physical spaces and they become things of the past. We must question this form of urbanism, and why we continue to design these buildings as products of the 'now' when there is no direct need for it. Will we eventually be left with giant carcasses of buildings abandoned with no purpose?

¹⁷ Koolhaas, Rem, et al. Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large: Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau. Monacelli Press, 1997.

¹⁸ Benjamin, Walter. The Arcade Project. 1935.

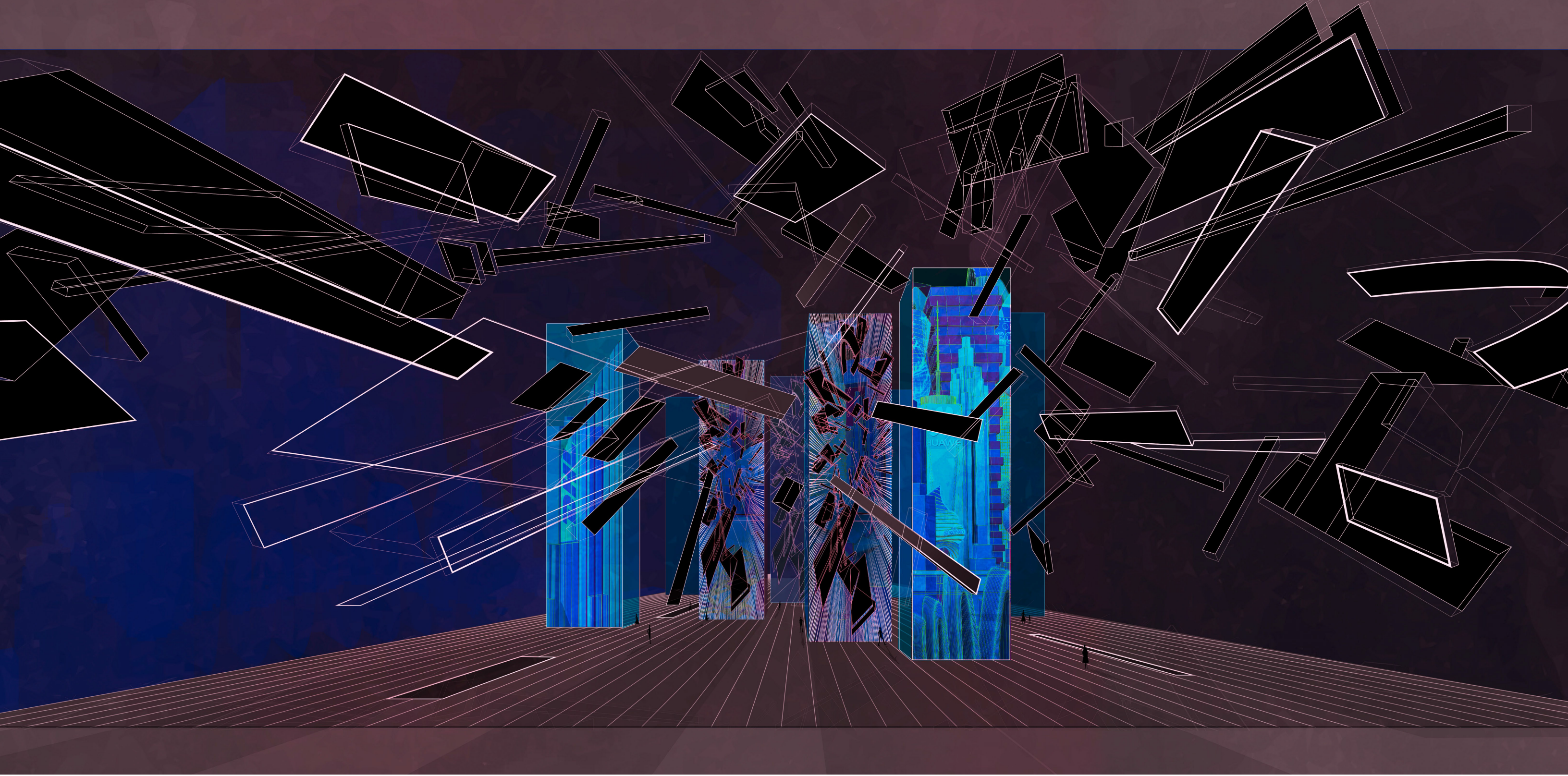
¹⁹ Koolhaas, Rem. Generic City. Sikkens Foundation, 1995. Pg 1254

²⁰ Koolhaas, Rem. Junkspaces Vol. 100, Obsolescence. (Spring, 2002), pp. 189

Through an exploration of this urbanism, we notice the city is

fragmented

With a continually changing landscape, urban elements within the ground level are disappearing. The fragmented public layers break away from the urban fabric and become interiorized. Urbanism is in a sense *disregarded*. Architecture now stands as separate entities creating enclaves. These large structures densifying our landscape must now act as the urban backdrop.



THE FRAGMENTED CITY

08 OPPORTUNISTIC URBANISM

It seems that we are in a form of urbanity that disregards culture and context, and instead uses all available spaces to adapt to available needs. In a sense this is an opportunistic movement that finds a way to place program in all forms of space, contradicting the modernist values of form follows function. Public and private are merging into one, and the mundane functions are inserted into the avant garde.

To many abroad Dubai has built itself to be 'the place to shop'. It is a sprawling maze of marble and glass with peculiar attractions, such as an indoor ski slope in the desert landscape. The buildings have led to a tremendous economic boost and provided spaces for activities such as tourism, shopping and corporate businesses to take place. These large infrastructures, massive malls and high-rises have become symbols and are emblematic to modernity and development. There is nothing wrong with these typologies, however when we prioritize them it becomes problematic. These spaces become favored and prompted because of a generated profit, favorable to the economy above other types of development. Therefore, different elements of the city are lost. When these forms evolved and expand at the rate they have in new cities such as Dubai, they suddenly become the city, with nothing else to offer. The people then fall victim to the city.

Architecture and Urbanism of our cities are no longer fair representations of our cultures. This is again a result of the dark side of globalisation, where our culture has become one. This is not only seen in 'new' cities but is a virus like phenomena that is taking over the world. This form of opportunism acts as a parasite and the city is its host. If all cities are starting to design on this basis, then their identity is stripped from them, and what is left after identity is stripped? The generic.

09 THE GENERIC CITY



Figure 6.
Dubai Marina Skyline - Structures repeated with similar materiality & expression.



Figure 7. *Paraphanelia of connection within Dubai.*

'It is big enough for everybody. It is easy. It does not need maintenance. If it gets too small it just expands. If it gets old it just self-destructs and renews. It is equally exciting-or unexciting-everywhere. it is 'superficial' - like a Hollywood studio lot, it can produce a new identity every Monday morning.' - Rem Koolhaas (The Generic City)

A city free of context, history and identity is a generic city. When liberated from the straitjacket of identity it allows the stream of tourism to create the history or character it desires.²¹ This allows the city to start with a clean slate and experiment different hypotheses. If failed, then it can be erased and forgotten. Its archaeology is 'the evidence of its progressive forgetting, the documentation of its evaporation'²², that is its history - there is none. Therefore the generic city is a petri dish city and breeding ground for experimentation. Dubai is an example of a city that thrives through this experimentation. It is continuously recreating itself as the centre of culture, history, arts etc, however always creating these worlds from scratch, as real history and tradition have been eradicated.

In a sense it is fractal, the same structures are repeated with similar materiality and expression. Typologies, such as skyscrapers are dominating the landscapes (Figure 6). All function and typologies that were present in the landscape have been swallowed up vertically, and can exist anywhere and everywhere. In a field, in the middle of a city - it makes no difference as the towers stand as separate entities. They show no interaction. This coexistence of buildings form an urban condition merely through its proximity, thus we can say that there is isolation in this new form of density. This isolation produces a fragmented city.

As seen in Dubai, the construction boom in the early 2000s led to islands of developments such as the Dubai Media City, Academic City, Internet City etc, with infrastructural projects including ring roads, double decked highway flyovers, metro and monorail systems constructed as a way to patch the fragmented urban fabric. However as previously mentioned these streets now only serve as transit and organizational spaces. The urban life at street level is lost. Boulevards and plazas are replaced with highways, adding another layer to cities and allowing building density to increase. These forms of connections within a city have made the 'in-transit' condition universal (Figure 7). These motorways have also become the 'non-places' where we spend most of our time. Within these transit spaces there is an accelerated need to move capital and people to meet the growing changes. These conditions give us the illusion of being in control yet are physically pushing us in one direction and forming our narrative. Airports known for the same condition are imploding with function now. Program and facilities unrelated to travel are taking over these spaces, on its way to form miniature cities within themselves. Similar to the contemporary airport, the contemporary city is the most significant representation of the 'nowhere'.²³ In an airport we are in the same state, everywhere but nowhere at the same time.

21 Koolhaas, Rem. *Generic City*. Sikkens Foundation, 1995. Pg 1249
22 Ibid Pg 1263
23 Ibid Pg 1251

Similar to the generic city, when disembodied from its site,
free of context and history, the global city becomes the

floating city

It can float around and set its roots, starting over with a clean slate each time. It can
exist almost anywhere and everywhere.



THE FLOATING CITY

10 'CAN ASPECTS OF CITIES BE SO PROFOUNDLY UNORIGINAL THAT IT CAN ONLY BE IMPORTED?'

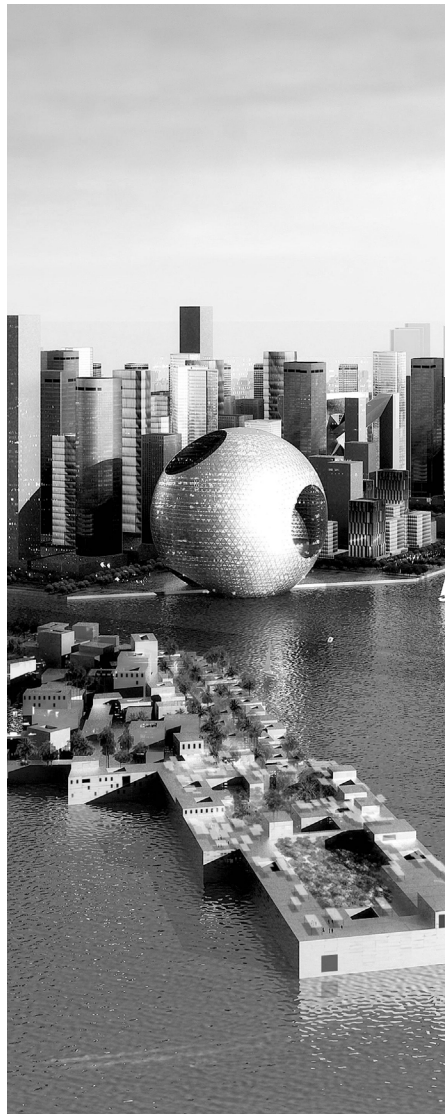


Figure 8.
Dubai Waterfront City Proposal - OMA



Figure 9.
Homogeneity and sense of familiarity between Dubai, Hong Kong & Doha skylines.

Cities have been able to replicate urban and architectural approaches with a 'copy - paste' mentality. The organizing mythos of the generic city is like a collage. Similar to patchwork, they take aspects that have brought recognition or significance from others and apply it to their own in hopes that it will recreate the same response. This results in a universal city, or rather a whole range of utopias in the miniature. Rem Koolhaas has experimented with this form of urbanism and critiqued the creation of a generic city through his proposal of a 1.5 billion square foot Waterfront city in Dubai (Figure 8). The proposal aims to create the same mass of density and diversity in Manhattan yet on an artificial island.²⁴ The project consists of housing, cultural and commercial complexes expressed through 'iconic' architecture.

Iconic Architecture is the architectural language of the consumerist culture. In Dubai, these are the monuments used to attract tourism and are symbols of luxury and an opulent lifestyle. It has been developed through the search for something different, the shocking or the new. However, there is a danger that this anomaly in architecture stands as an empty effort to be different, solely just to be different. On the other hand radical work in design also inherits the risk of being ignored, or a target of ridicule as it does not fit to the status quo.

The Burj Khalifa, which till now stands as the tallest building in the world, was built for the purpose of attraction through its record breaking height. Yet through its construction it also developed a revolutionary construction technique that allowed the structure to swing ten feet to accommodate the impact of high winds. By creating this condition of difference, they act as landmarks/monuments. If these icons stand as separate entities on a platform, then they can generate meaningless voids around them. Moving from one place to another, these voids in between become blurred and get less noticed. This leads to greater fragmentation within a city. Rem Koolhaas uses these forms of architecture to explore the opposing ideologies of the iconic and the generic. Although the form behind them differs, they are in a sense mass produced and installed around the world. Will the iconic not just become the generic?

I believe these forms hold a greater concern than the creation of a generic city when they are used a tool for self-promotion. As a way to brand the city, they reduce the cities to theme parks made up of architectural decor, produced to mask the underlying homogeneity it was built upon. Their desire to create a unique skyline actually leads to a relatively generic city made of independent objects. While traveling through cities in the region, it is clear that their longing for something different is lost in this half remembered familiarity.²⁵ Singapore looks like Dubai, which looks like Doha, Hong Kong etc. (Figure 9)

Forces of urbanization such as the World Expo or Olympic Games feed into the creation of these forms.

²⁴ "Waterfront City." OMA, oma.eu/projects/waterfront-city.
²⁵ Sasha, and Jonathan Ruffer. "Is the Bilbao Effect over?" Apollo Magazine

11 FORCES OF URBANIZATION



Figure 10. *Dubai Artificial Water Canal Construction*



Figure 11. *Dubai World Expo 2020 'The World's Greatest Show'*

My fascination with this topic began in my travels back home. Dubai was getting ready for its next big venture, Expo 2020. The city was expanding at a rate which seemed inconceivable; it seemed as if the city was redefining itself every six months. Towers were going up in a blink of an eye with large cranes redefining the new skyline. New highways and bridges wrapped around buildings like ribbon, changing routes and my familiarity with the city I once called home.

A great example of this is the Dubai Water Canal (Figure 10). A 6.4km artificial waterfront that runs through the city was envisioned and finalized in just three years, including the daunting task of intersecting one of the largest and busiest motorways (Sheikh Zayed Road). The city was and still is a never ending construction site. However as experienced in the 2008 economic crisis, a sudden event can result in the halt of all construction and leave these buildings standing as lone entities. Although the recession acted as a warning, the city continued to proceed with constructions.

Since winning the bid for the Expo in 2013, the city has been on a constant move to prepare itself for the world's eyes as an opportunity to express the country's wares and innovation. (Figure 11) It is to be called the 'Greatest Show on Earth'. In a sense, Dubai as a whole terrain can be viewed as an 'World Expo Site', just in a larger scale.

The ideologies behind the event can be applied to the formation of a city. The large international exhibition is designed to showcase achievements of nations. As an architectural playground, the temporary buildings of the expo carry both the expectation for innovation and the heavy burden of representing a whole nation, therefore pavilions can be used as a method of nation branding. We can suggest that Dubai as a cityscape expands through this ideology.

Capitalist forces of urbanization like the World Expo have been increasingly incorporated into urban development plans in aim to also promote urban renewal.²⁶ These mega projects are unmissable catalysts with substantial power in economic growth however only if handled well. If not the country could foresee low morale, an empty wallet and a few architectural regrets. Therefore cementing the legacy of the expo is just as important as its execution. How can the spaces created and heart of the events live beyond a 6 month run and avoid the disposability of the Expo? Now if we think of a city built through this ideology, then how do we avoid the disposability of the city as whole?

26

Li, Lingyue. "Urban Planning and Mega-Event Projects: Lessons from Expo 2010, Shanghai." *An Overview of Urban and Regional Planning*, 2018

12 THE DISPOSABLE EXPO



Figure 12. Milan World Expo 2015 - Vanke Pavilion



Seville World Expo 1992 - Bioclimate sphere cooling



Figure 13. Shanghai World Expo 2010



Figure 14. Seville World Expo, The Tower of Europe



Shanghai World Expo 2010



Figure 15. Seville World Expo, The French Pavilion

Past events such as the 2015 Milan World Expo show that the remains no longer express the splendor of the expo; they are isolated items (Figure 12). The Shanghai Expo in 2010 aimed at creating ‘Sustainable Urbanisation’, a paradox as the event which generated a lot of waste and has created a network of architectural sculptures not unique to China (Figure 13).²⁷

However we can look more closely into Seville’s Expo in 1992 which was one of the largest ever at the time. Costing almost 10 billions euros, the site sprawled across 215 hectares with pavilions dedicated to themes such as ‘The Future’, ‘Nature’ and ‘Discovery’. Like most pavilions, the structures were intended to be temporary, however the city had limited funds to remove them following the event. Now it is a web of metallic structures, abandoned, as symbols of the future that never arrived.²⁸ In a sense, it has created a post-apocalyptic landscape. They standstill as beautiful and bizarre snapshots. The Tower of Europe is a multicolored obelisk representing flags of 12 nations which came together to form the European Union in 1992, it stands now as a proud symbol of an era of optimism about cooperation in Europe (Figure 14). The French pavilion featured a huge wall of mirrored glass placed in front of the Spanish pavilion.²⁸ It wanted to reflect what every country in Europe was striving to become - the cultural capital of Europe (Figure 15). Again, this is a poignant monument to the better times, prior to the economic difficulties in Spain. They stand as modern day ruins and empty structures creating a sculptural landscape.

Nowadays ruins in modernity represent another meaning. Today’s ruins do not respond to works of mankind and natural passage of time within nature. Ruins appear everywhere due to devastation by natural or technological accidents, destruction through war and interventions through the agenda of capital. Today’s ruins multiply and pile up everywhere in the form of industrial ruins. These temporary and autonomous areas are repopulated and utilized by unexpected users who are removed as soon as the place is rehabilitated with new functions for capital gain. A continuous cycle that is an unforeseen condition of abandonment.²⁶ The issue of abandonment is one that an Expo site continually deals with, and the same fragility experienced within its development is experienced in Dubai as a city.

Many cities within the region rely on foreign investments for economic stability. We can compare the city to a balloon - the production of oil as a foundational element in the city blows the air in, however without an anchor the balloon will float away. The anchor in this case is its tourism, yet it has to tie itself to a more sustainable reality as the whole region cannot rely on these anchors to create the city. Without the tourism, the city may be left abandoned as a site of modern day ruins.

²⁷ University of Barcelona. “On Expo Dismantling: Martí Peran.”
²⁸ Hyams, Andrew. “Seville’s Abandoned World Fair.” Medium

An exploration into the fast paced forces of urbanization bring into light the issues of

abandonment

When consumerism has run its course, we must consider what happens to these architectural entities. They may stand as nothing more than ruins and shells of the past, and the image of greatness it was once surrounded by becomes an illusion. This bustling global city will eventually revert back to its inhospitable desert landscape.



THE ABANDONED CITY

13 A GLOBAL IDENTITY

Within cities, the relationship of places and their communities are not linear, but rather circular and mutually influenced. Places are formed out of the needs and actions of their communities, and in turn they shape the way these communities behave and grow. This mutual influence of community and place creates the cycle of urbanism. Within global cities, when the focus is shifted towards international communities, then the city's identity inevitably becomes global. Within Dubai we see strong cultural diversity, with only 11.4% of the population made up of Emiratis. This is used to adopt a global urbanism. However the growing globalization creates issues of identity, in turn effecting the urban and societal developments.

Culturally, there are many differences between the foreigners and locals. The Emirati culture is more conservative and private, while its Western counterpart is mostly public. Within the city, there is little interaction between the two. However, this seems to significant to the brand of Dubai, as it creates a hybrid culture that appeals to all.

The image of Dubai is also built around the idea of exclusivity and uniqueness. This exclusivity revolves around the economy, where money becomes an essential part of the city. If we think of the architectural aesthetics of the city, it becomes one of expensive overproduced iconic structures. The urban fabric is used as a way to stimulate the real estate market, and other economic related sectors, ultimately forcing the gentrification of many local residents, and the elimination of local characteristics within the urban environment. The identity of the city becomes global which aids in the fragmentation of the city. This further polarizes the society and creates isolated groups.

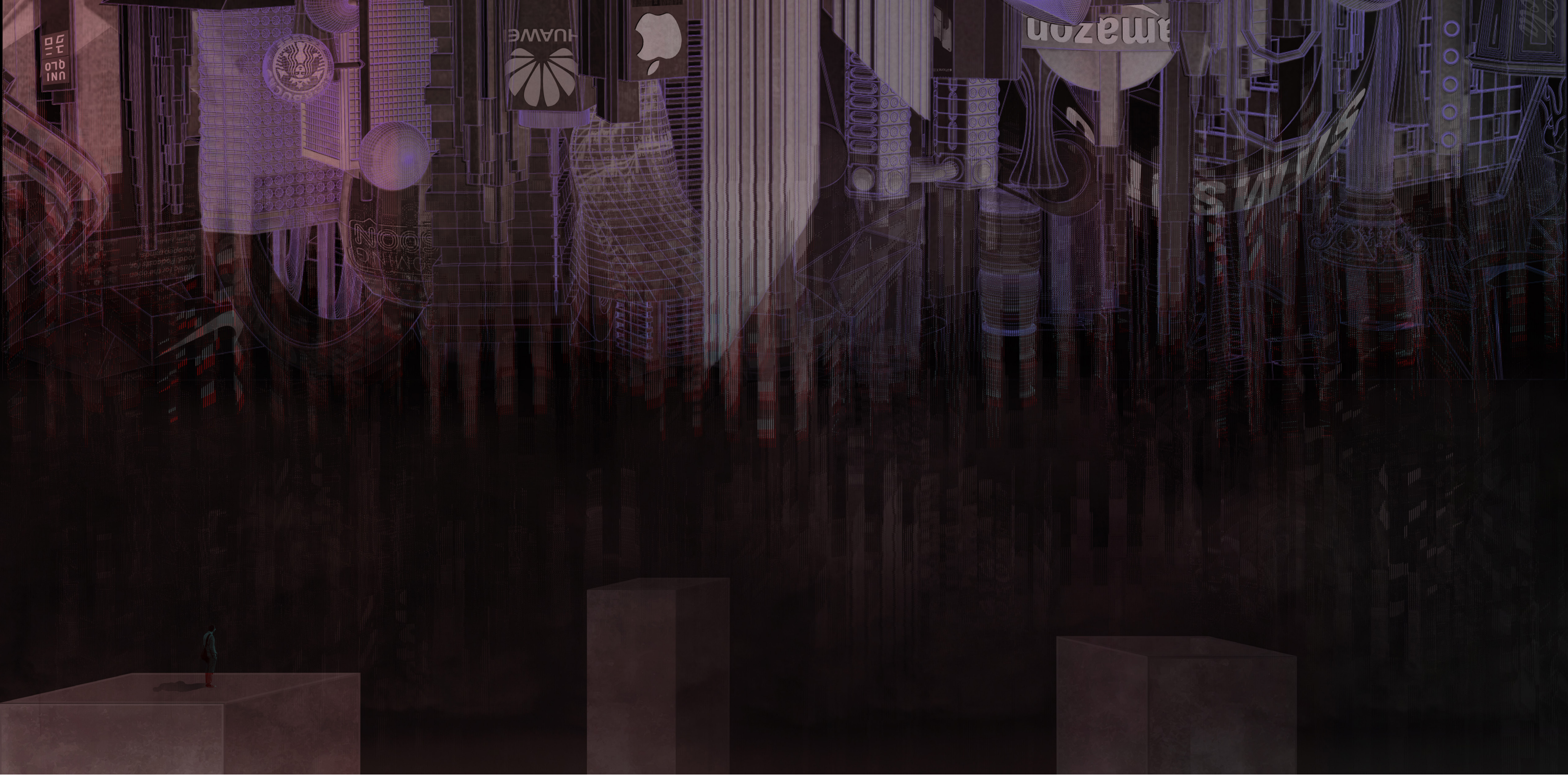
The centre consisting of the metropolis structures creates the global space within the city, therefore we see the boundaries and peripheries of the city slowly becoming more localized. This is evident through the build up of local production, companies etc, but also through social displacement. National and foreign inhabitants have become more separated and met with obstacles of social integration. These issues of identity have resulted in increasing loneliness amongst inhabitants who become lost and invisible within their own city.

If cities are comprised of interactions between buildings, people and spaces, what does the city become when people are removed from the equation? We undermine the capacity of a city to accommodate social interactions. This is because the structure is built to favour the economy/ brand, over its inhabitants and their conditions. Meaningful interactions between individuals become analyzed in economic terms, and in turn we are forgotten. An aspect of loneliness is introduced into the city

If a global identity is favoured, then the city ironically becomes

lonely

With no roots, the city detaches from the urban fabric, articulating emptiness within - the public sector has faded as the global identity is favoured. The global identity creates an illusion for society abroad, however the people within fall invisible and lost. We notice ourselves decoupling from the world around us as the city disappears. We fall victim to the global city.



THE LONELY CITY

14 A GLOBAL DIALOGUE

THE TECH ERA

Technology is a key factor of globalization and through computer networks and electronic technology, connectivity has increased drastically. This connectivity has created a global dialogue and the dominance of a global identity. The fast pace evolution of technology have been affecting our conceptions of a city and has played a key role in the alienation of landscapes and societies. To create an understanding of the future of these global cities, we can explore how our interactions and dependencies within a city have changed.

Electronic technology bypasses any previously understood idea of how the urban space functions. Passages were previously described as the streets, boulevards, squares, and physical paths on ground level. However with the new generation of technology, passage ways are now the airwaves, cables, fibre optics etc, which link inhabitants with not only each other, but also the rest of the world.²⁹ We can say that information has now been dematerialised, therefore its transfer and storage no longer requires a physical space or the need to be spatially defined. The need for the physicality of space has disappeared. This flux of information runs through our screens and becomes substitutes for windows, revealing what we see as the 'real world'.³⁰ Referring to Auges explosion of scales, we are now able to view the world from our phones in the comfort of our own home - consequently, the cyberspace becomes the new outdoors. We can suggest that the cyberspace now dictates our movements, reducing and isolating ourselves to being centered around technology.

²⁹ Livesey, Graham. *Passages: Explorations of the Contemporary City*. University of Calgary Press, 2004. Pg 91
³⁰ Ibid Pg 90

15 OUR VIRTUAL REALITY

Contemporary cities have increased in complexity with various new layers, the ground being rendered obsolete of past functions. The public life and public space is formed through the interactions and interchanges from one form of transport to another, and to surrounding buildings. The street is no longer a corridor of communication but a transient space. There are various lines that cross over a city at all levels, be it assembly lines, lines of flight, lines of division, power lines or lines of text.³¹ Lines now control the landscape of a city and the users. Marc Auge spoke of the physicality of spaces pushing you in a direction, we can say the physicality of lines do the same, giving the illusion that we are in control. In the text 'Passages' by Graham Livesey, he touches on the physical passages of a city being rendered less important than the passage of information.

Moments of intersection between the different layers and lines within a city creates a network of points. These moments of intersection create experiences and moments through code and imagery. Instead of the physicality of space, these images now assert our existence in the contemporary city, emphasizing the significant of the passage of information in society today.³² Therefore, technology has led to the rise of the visual perception of architecture. They can be viewed and experienced by anyone, everywhere, thus cities gain their true significance through their reputation abroad. We notice this invisible layer of a city could becoming the new urban structure.

If we look back at cities following metaphorical representations of the human body, then we can relate the skeleton to the transportational system, enabling mobility. The vascular system providing the power to distribute the energy, such as the oil, gas pipelines and electricity. The nervous system runs and controls communications and various functions within the city, expressed through internet cables, satellite/cellular networks, and data centres allowing us to store all this information. The connectivity is what maintains order as they burst with information. Similar to the function of the cloud that stores our information now, can we imagine a futuristic world that becomes purely cyber and virtual?

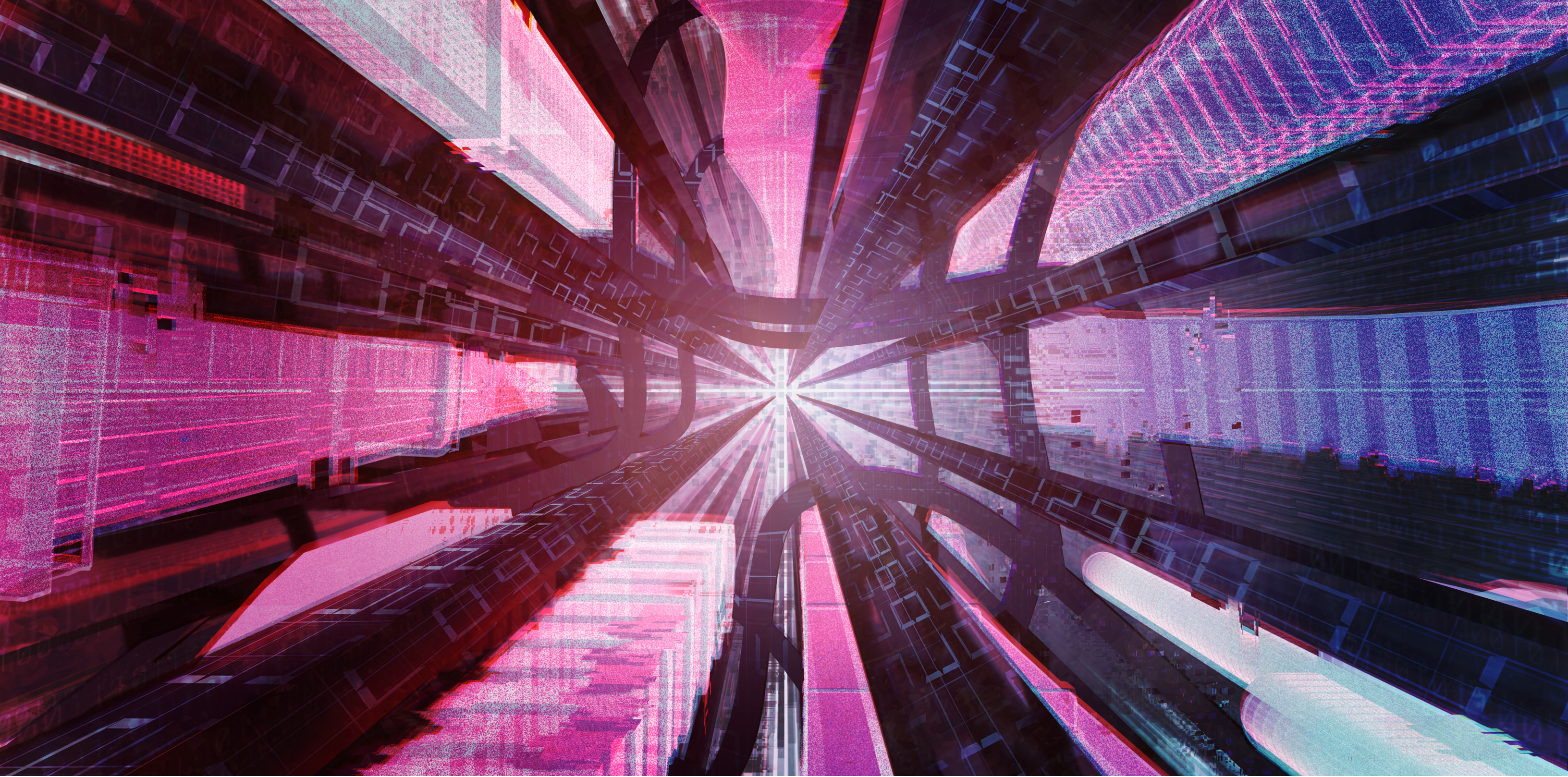
31 Livesey, Graham. Passages: Explorations of the Contemporary City. University of Calgary Press, 2004. Pg 98

32 Livesey, Graham. Passages: Explorations of the Contemporary City. University of Calgary Press, 2004. Pg 91

With the digital age adding to the alienation within our cities, we must consider the future of these globalised landscapes when they become

digitized

If the physicality of space takes a back seat in the future globalised and tech driven world, then today's architecture becomes shells or glitches of the past, where the new urban realm above flourishes over the broken city underneath.



THE GLITCHING CITY

16 AESTHETIC OF THE DISTANT

With media and technology accelerating the scale of time and globalisation, our screens act as the new reality. This implies that the new contemporary aesthetic is one of distance, painting an illusion that architecture creates. With social media, buildings speak louder than ever. The speed at which information is able to be dispersed in this age is faster than ever before. Everyone with a smartphone is an architectural photographer, and this constant stream of photos ensures that architecture is now in conversation with the world. No matter where we are, we are able to see the new innovative structures that might be built from across the globe, with the help of photo-realistic renders. Mass production of imagery have seem to find life in the third dimension, where environments can be built, modified, torn down or replaced, meaning there is little commitment or consequence attached to the actions of building. It has helped embed architecture into existence and the community before it is even built, however we fail to understand how the building is being experienced by the public, and the effect it has before we continue to build more.

It has created a new relationship between us the users and the environment surrounding us. Spaces are experienced digitally, or maybe not experienced at all. Events are run in a digital manner and generate multi-space interactions and experiences. We can be placed anywhere around the world, yet are no where at the same time.

Architecture can be built in the digital world, viewed from a distance through a screen for a specific moment or experience. The digital footprint we create cement our existence in society, always seen through imagery and distance. This aesthetic of distance means that we do not see the straits and cracks that architecture creates as they become disembodied from their site.

Individuals in society have the capacity to create and modify their surroundings, elevating the prominence of individualism. With this growing isolation in society we must consider what happens when people are taken out of the picture.

17 POST HUMAN ARCHITECTURE



Figure 16. *'Machine Architecture' - We become bystanders to the machines.*

We may ask ourselves what happens when the technology and artificial intelligence become the designing factors that may construct our world. In the text 'Post Architectural Landscapes' by Liam Young, he describes data centers as the new cultural landscape. In cities such as San Jose in California, the center of the computer industry, density is low and it is surrounded by freeways, flightpaths and communication networks. The traditional street or street life is absent.³³ Instead, with this new urban realm comes a new typology of data/tech centres which have destabilized the traditional forms of urban space. They embody this form of 'interior urbanism', which begin to archive our lives and store the collective history of our time. History has now become digital. These facilities are composed of server stacks spinning and writing the lives of billions of user. These centers are filled with light and noise, however absent of people (Figure 16). This 'Machine Architecture' is the new typology of post-human architecture.³⁴ We have become the bystanders to these machines.

These logistics buildings that store data are usually anonymous with dull facades, and stand in contrast to the strongly characterized exterior of the 'junkspaces' that they are replacing. These blank forms are now our libraries, cathedrals, culture centres, homes etc.

If we refer back to the scale of the modular, Le Corbusier designed buildings based around the proportions of the human body. The human scale was significant. However in the present, the human scale is lost and the body is no longer the main measure of space. Scales have exploded and the aesthetic of transparency, reflection and height is maintained. The reflections in the glass and steel of large skyscrapers, or now the tech centres, silently take in the memory of contemporary culture without projecting it into the present.³³ In a sense there is visual ambiguity of where we are as the spaces are not rooted in place or time, resulting in their own disappearance.

³³ Livesey, Graham. Passages: Explorations of the Contemporary City. University of Calgary Press, 2004. Pg 90
³⁴ Young, Liam. Machine Landscapes Architectures of the Post-Anthropocene.

A look into the digital designing factors gives us a glimpse into how our dependencies to physical space and a constant need for the transit of people is lost. The global city becomes

virtual

There is now a new relationship between the people and their surroundings. Spaces are experienced digitally or not at all. Scales have exploded and the cyberspace becomes the new outdoors. We notice ourselves experiencing the world from almost anywhere.



THE VIRTUAL CITY

18 A NEW LANGUAGE

Our existence is marked through code - our new language. We even access consumption through codes (e.g bar codes, pin codes etc).³⁵ You can imagine that if you are not registered within systems and leave no trace, no card transactions or calls are made, no bills are paid, then you could remain unknown underneath this modern worlds cognizance. You become an urban ghost. The same may happen to these large interiorized urban spaces. If our existence is now run through fibre optics and stored in tech centres, then all functions and programs within the structures that consume cities will fall into disuse. Within these new landscapes the human scale becomes irrelevant as code and its infinite scale prevails.

Our society can not evolve at the pace of our technology. With the machine landscape, humans are no longer in the centre and technology takes over. What does the role of the architect become? Liam Young describes the large architecture firms 'set-dressing the waiting room'. Spaces and interiors are filled with seating and objects used as expressive displays to distract us.³⁶

How can architects be used to aid the design of future global cities, or do we become backseat drivers to the tech companies and digital infrastructures? As architects it is important to value our role in this new digital world, and consider the significance of urbanism during these advancements, or rather what happens when it is no longer required.

What happens when the urban stands without people?

³⁵ "Annals of Junkspace:" Architecture and Modern Literature, Sept. 2017, pp. 221-248
³⁶ Young, Liam. Machine Landscapes Architectures of the Post-Anthropocene.

19 ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT PEOPLE

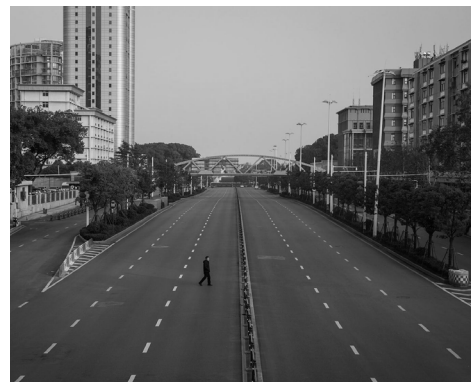
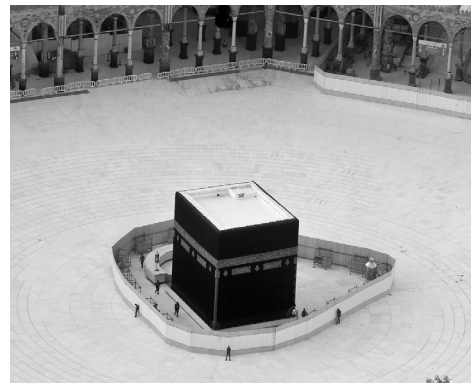


Figure 17. *Landscapes of Quarantine from Mecca, Paris, Wuhan and Dubai.*

Since the beginning of 2020, we have been dealing with the daunting spread of the Coronavirus. Although these viruses are not new, it's recent strain is alarming in view of its high infection rate, evident through the rapidly rising number of cases and deaths.

We have seen cities placed on full lockdown, cutting millions of people from the outer world, with public transportation and air traffic disabled and roads closed. These shutdowns within cities are creating dystopian views of a suddenly depopulated country, and an understanding into the abandonment of cities. We now see scenes of desolation turning the bustling city centers into ghost towns. Government orders and communities are uniting to prevent the spread of the virus by secluding themselves from their city. For many countries this is the new reality (Figure 17).

For years, cities, infrastructure and interiors have been redesigned to minimize the spread of infectious diseases, for example preventing centralization and overcrowding in urban planning. However, with global travel and increasing connectivity, a virus can place itself across the globe within 24 hours creating new levels of infectiousness. With past viruses, vaccines and medicines became the best way to control epidemics. However with no current vaccines or medicine available for the COVID-19 pandemic, we must refer back to the primitive form of disease control - quarantine, isolation and social distancing.

Quarantine, a strategy of separation and containment is a spatial response to exclusion, and has reemerged in society due to this era of globalization, emerging diseases, pandemic flus and bioterrorism.³⁷ This event makes one think of the landscapes and spaces of quarantine. For example, Venetian streets which are usually heaving with tourists are now left deserted, allowing us to visualize the streets in a new light. Cities and public spaces are now paralyzed by an eerie stillness. The dynamic of spaces are changing, such as the public squares in Italy. The intertwining highways wrapping around the cities in China are now merely empty rows of asphalt. The architecture stands without people.

By containing citizens indoors, car dependent cities are being tested and everyday functions are completed through the online virtual realm, e.g. work, grocery shopping, exercise etc. The city now becomes a playground for IT corporations and data companies as the digital infrastructure allows citizens to stay connected while being physically disconnected. The need for physicality of space has changed.

Within Dubai, we see the direct result of when the constant flow and transit of people that construct a city are taken out of the equation. The city is left abandoned and we see the change of dependency we have with our cities. At times like this we see the problematic aspects of globalisation and global cities. It may not only be technology or the economy that can lead to the abandonment of cities, but at times it is out of our hands.

If technology continues to reign and advance, and provides society with the resources to stay indoors, then we can imagine this state of quarantine becoming a constant. Could the dystopian public spaces of today due to the virus be a prophetic vision of the future cities?

³⁷ Future Plural, Landscapes of Quarantine (Group exhibition exploring the spaces of quarantine), March 2010.

WHERE DOES THIS LEAD US?

These explorations of various themes and concepts behind a global city has helped create an understanding of how a city such as Dubai, built for the purpose of the economy, may lead to

its own downfall.

As a result of the modernization era, Dubai, and many cities within the region have had the economic capabilities of redefining themselves through consumerism as the basis for their expansion. The impositions of this consumerist culture in society has led to infrastructural developments racing to meet society's demands, ultimately influencing all aspects of contemporary architecture. Cities affected are expanding at an inconceivable pace, redefining themselves in terms of global prominence and adopting globalization as the solution. These 'new' cities are equating their economic prosperity and success through their contemporary architecture resulting in the rise of iconic forms and sleek buildings 'modernizing' our landscapes. Although it projects new cities into the public eye, it does not necessarily do so in a positive way.

The visual perception of architecture has been prioritized to attract attention, and in turn the city becomes a spectacle. Cities transform into brandscapes, attracting the masses of tourists for the short term spectacle of stimulation. Suddenly, the purpose of the city is centered around the brief moment or experience. If the focus is shifted towards the international communities, then the city's identity is also shifted from the local to global, which becomes troublesome. The vibrancy of the city is no longer translated into local design, but rather promotes consumerism through these avant grade structures. These shifts to a global identity are even experienced through small scale societal changes. I am reminded merely through the dress code that in fact, I am residing in an Arab country. I see this through the loss of the Arab language as well, where the global English language is becoming more prominent, even amongst the locals. It has created an image of Western lifestyle in Middle Eastern settings, representing the gulf culture through its opulent lifestyle of luxury.

WELCOME TO NOWHERE

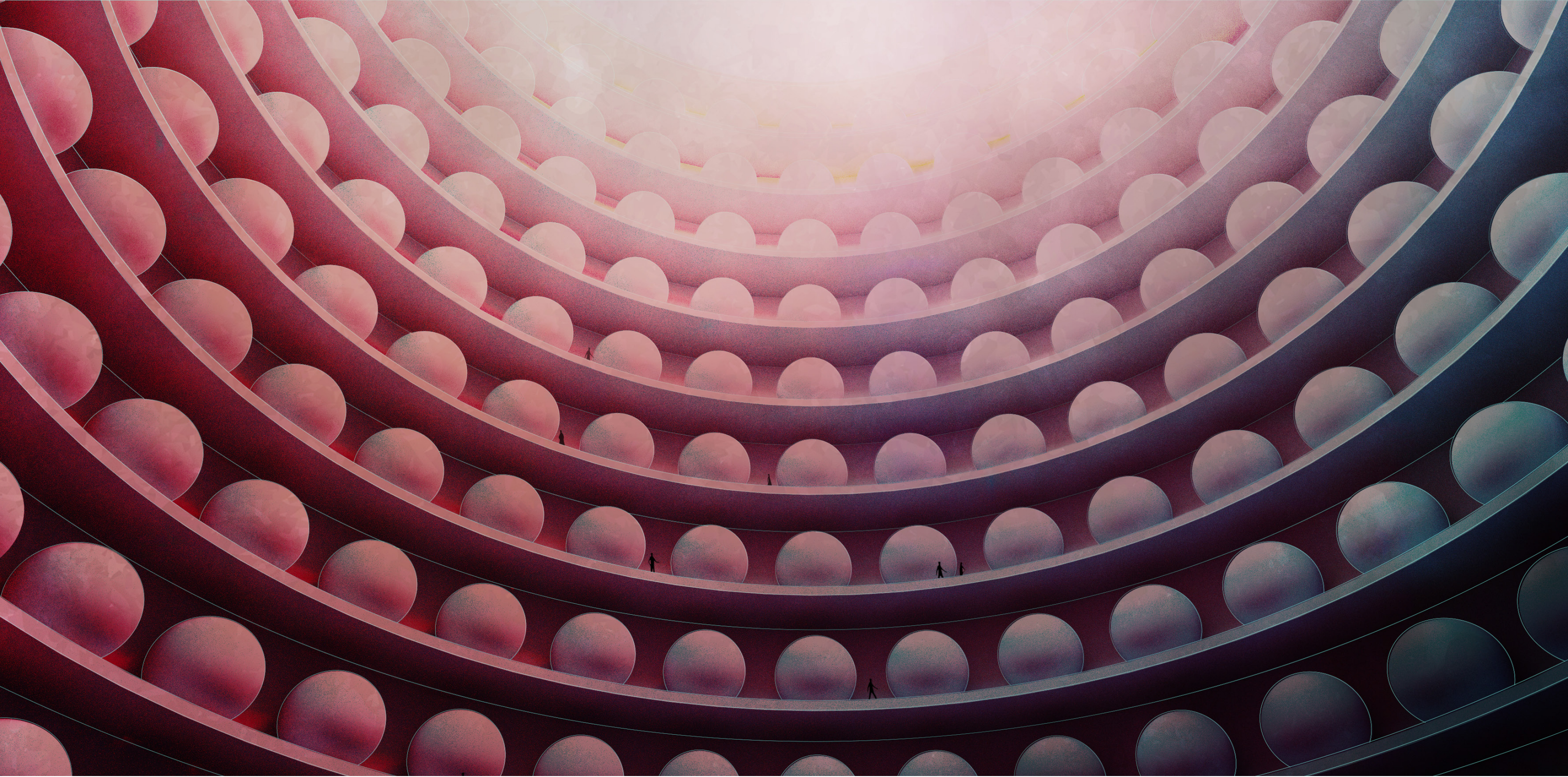
On a personal note, growing up in a city like Dubai, I have experienced the critical sides of globalisation, where it has contributed to a mono-cultural state, also making me question and search for the local identity. In a sense we can say they are creating an illusion for the society abroad, an image from the distance that portrays itself as a city for all, however at what cost? Dubai has become the victim of a global city as we see the clear deconstruction of unique identity of spaces. It embraces foreign cultures, yet denies its own roots. Architects need to reject the goal of designing a global object in favour of creating a local experience. Architects may play a minor role in the scale of a city, however as a multifaceted profession, we need to be more involved in the decision making process, and question the ethics and personal morale behind urban projects.

As mentioned before, these global cities become a stage for the architecture, which stands as a prop. These modern typologies of shopping malls, high rises, transport hubs etc stand as unique forms, popular to the masses for its singularity. Although they may show true innovation through construction, engineering and design, they are no longer contextual. These forms become disembodied from their site, and can be placed anywhere and everywhere. With no clear identity linked to Dubai, it has been the perfect breeding ground for the growth of these icons, which eventually take over our cities. In turn they reduce the cities to 'themeparks' of architectural decor. These 'decors' become mass produced and sprinkled all over our contemporary landscapes and soon it will not matter where we go, as cities built for capital exchange will all look the same. We have an aspect of familiarity within the cities which blankets our planet with homogeneity - Welcome to nowhere.

As I question the form of urbanism and growth of a global city such as Dubai,
the city is envisioned as a

showcase

We see the physical fabric of our cities mirroring the values that globalisation was built upon - 'sameness'. The realities, context and inhabitants of a place have little or no say in their development, and instead we are provided with illusions of endless possibilities. In reality, these future global cities will become showcases representing the same thing. Cities look the same, making the world appear much smaller than it actually is. The illusion is in fact not limitless, but rather limited. Therefore if a city becomes a stage, it is important to consider what may happen when the show ends.



THE SHOWCASE CITY

WELCOME TO NOWHERE

Although these new cities create a hyperactive illusion, in reality the increasing globalization creates a landscape that is lonely and invisible. Within a showcase city, there is no interaction between the architecture and they stand as separate entities. Public street life is swallowed up into the architecture, and urbanism has become interiorized. Everything else merely becomes spaces of transportation, therefore the urban street life in global cities has dissipated. The fast pace densification of these cities has led to increasing isolation and a fragmented urban fabric. Spaces created promote solitude and become transient. Through the exploration of these various concepts it is clear that the production of a global city has resulted in an alienated society, culture and built environment that cannot survive through the power of commerce. If we look back at the Expo event in Seville, and we build in the present day for future ideologies and communities due to a present demand, are we left with the same fate?

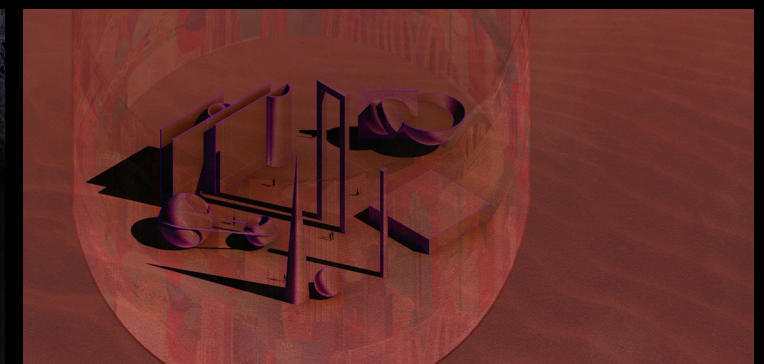
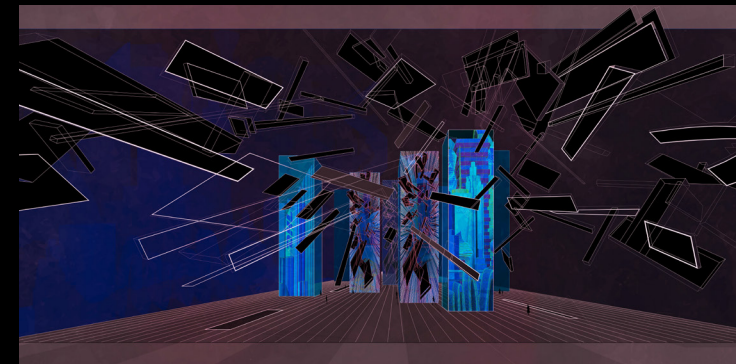
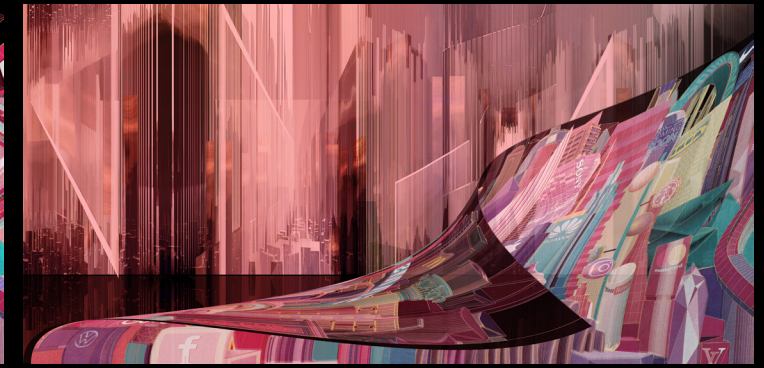
The digital age has only added to this alienation and acted as a threat to these cities. Although the advances in technology have aided significantly in creating a global dialogue, I believe it has created a new virtual realm, a parallel reality that is replacing the living one. It has resulted in a culture based upon the abstract and disconnected conception of space. It is reshaping our world, yet potentially for the worse. We see this increasing global dialogue affecting our interactions with physical space, as we can place and connect ourselves to the other side of the world from the comfort of our own home. Therefore, if a city is comprised of the interactions between buildings, spaces and people, then what does the city become when the transit of people is lost?

When a city is produced for a global identity, we notice the city is left with nothing to offer for local inhabitants and tourism is their line of survival. When the economy is effected, tourism is halted. Neighbourhoods that were once bustling with Airbnbs become empty. We discover there are no neighbours, there is no neighbourhood, and there is no city. As extreme and cynical as it may seem, within a city such as Dubai, if you subtract the tourists there is nothing. Cities will solely be left with abandoned urban skeletons and commercial debris. The fast pace global structures emerging will soon become the skeleton of a post-oil Dubai, and a future that never arrived. As a fragile foundation, the economic system is not sustainable and will collapse. When it does, the global city will soon follow.

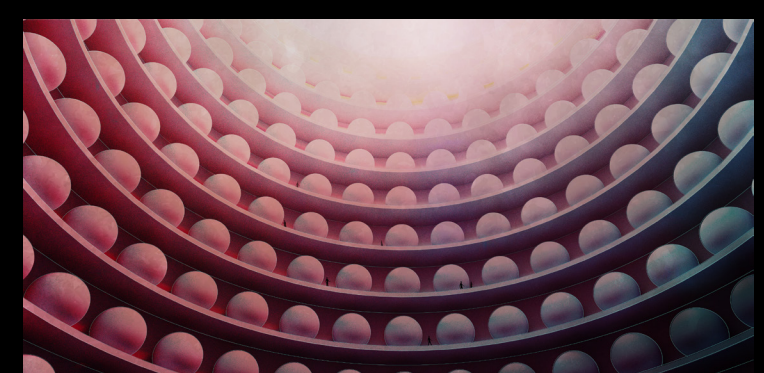
The economic recession in 2008 was a clear warning, however we continue to favor economic stability over concerns towards an architectural heritage and identity. History is being erased and memories are soiled. Our cultural identity is as important for our future as well as our past, and the structures we create now will stand as visual narrators of our history. Although architects may play a minor role within the scale of a global city, as a multi faceted profession we need to be more involved in the decision making process, and question the ethics and personal morale of everyone involved in the process, both in an architectural and urban scale. Questions regarding the future of these cities hold great value, but are unfortunately left unacknowledged when the power of the economy comes into play. I believe the global economy has become instrumental in removing expressions of ancient cultures and values, therefore we must revert back and take inspiration from a community's identity, and allow it to shape our designs and cities. In doing so, this global city may survive.

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