

# The Labyrinths of the City.

## A Guided Visit to Make a Journey Around Different Interpretations of the City

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*Entrato nel territorio che ha Eutropia per capitale, il viaggiatore vede non una città ma molte, di eguale grandezza e non dissimili tra loro, sparse per un vasto e ondulato altopiano. Eutropia è non una ma tutte queste città insieme; una sola è abitata, le altre vuote; e questo si fa a turno.*

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*

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### El laberinto de la ciudad. Una visita guiada alrededor de las diferentes interpretaciones de la ciudad

**Resumen.** Se ofrece una propuesta para leer distintas interpretaciones de la ciudad. No se trata de explicar las formas y problemas de la ciudad en general ni tampoco hablar de alguna ciudad en particular; su pretensión es más modesta, sólo busca encontrar algún ‘sentido’ dentro de las distintas interpretaciones. Se recurre a la metáfora del laberinto como estrategia para analizar las posibles formas de percepción de la ciudad (que llamo ‘clásico’, ‘arbóreo’ y ‘rizomático’); esta idea es empleada como una analogía de un recorrido en ‘busca de sentido’, y por lo tanto como una metáfora de la misma actividad humana. Estas reflexiones se presentan no como una ‘copia’ de lo que es una ciudad, sino como un mapa de los posibles recorridos que nos permiten las distintas formas de entenderla. Se busca con ello examinar a la ciudad más allá de sus formas organizativas y de los objetivos que se le asignan, desde un plano abstracto que permita advertir la ‘fragmentación de sentidos’.

**Palabras clave:** Teoría sobre la ciudad, laberinto, fragmentación de sentidos, procesos interpretativos.

**Abstract.** This paper proposes a way to find a common ground in different interpretations of what a city is. In general, it is not a theory explaining the patterns and problems of a city; neither does it make reference to any city in particular. Its only purpose is to find meaning within distinct interpretations of what a city is. I apply the metaphor of the labyrinth as a strategy for analysing different ways (‘classical’, ‘arboreal’ and ‘rhizomic’) of perceiving a city. This idea is an analogy for a tour in search of ‘sense’ and thus, is a metaphor for the same human activity. These thoughts are not a ‘copy’ of what a city is, but a map of the diverse paths that allow us to interpret the city in different ways. I attempt to analyse the city from an abstract level that allows us to realise a ‘fragmentation of meaning’ beyond the city’s forms of organisation and the objectives assigned to it.

**Key words:** City theory, labyrinth, fragmentation of meaning, interpretation processes.

### **Entrance: 'Welcome to the Labyrinth'**

The document the reader has in their hands has the objective of presenting different interpretations to understand the city. In general, it does not present a theory to explain the patterns and problems of the city; neither does it make any references to a particular one. It only seeks for some meaning within the diverse interpretations we can make of it.

I propose to consider the city as a space where plurality is created and expanded, drifting off to a crisis of meaning. With this aim in mind, I use the metaphor of a labyrinth as a strategy to analyse possible ways to perceive the city. This idea is used as an analogy of a tour in search of 'sense'. Therefore, these thoughts are presented, not as a copy of the city, but as a map of the diverse paths that the different ways to understand a city have to offer.

I propose that within the interpretations of the city, there are elements beyond the text itself. These elements allow us to create a map, like a set of contexts that the user, myself in this case, needs for a particular journey. To use this map, it is required to create a cartography as a strategy to analyse the sign systems that it comprises.

My main objective is to show the possibilities of a multiple gaze that let us analyse the city beyond its organisation patterns and objectives from an abstract level which allows us to realise a 'fragmentation of meaning'. Bearing in mind the assumptions behind these thoughts, I will indicate the landmarks that we will visit in this tour.

We are witnesses of a time where the social construction of space is difficult to understand from a single point of view, and in which definitions are cumbersome. In any case, as Gari (1995) points out, it is convenient to call this time, not without discrepancies, *post-modernity*. This concept can be confusing due to its links to very different contexts.<sup>1</sup> Here, I do recognise the post-modern approaches as ways of referring to a conceptual reality that takes into account the breaking of an ideology. This ideology is based on the rationalist myth created by the Enlightenment and the subsequent crisis of the systems structured on it, from ideologies to traditional artistic movements (Gari, 1995: 242). From this point of view, post-modernity does not announce

1. For instance, in the context of a certain artistic production during the 60's in USA; the one linked to the philosophic idea that proposes a theory to evaluate the cultural state-of-art after the transformations that affected science, literature and art in the 19th century; and in the architectonic context that confronts the predominant functionalism and rationalism, as the aesthetic term of the ending of industrial civilisation (Gari, 1995).

the ending or denial of modernity; it is not a new project, but a rupture of the modernity project itself.

A particular example of this fragmentation is given by the different ways of understanding the city, the literature of which is so vast that it would be literally impossible and inconvenient to give an account of it. It is precisely this multiplicity of interpretations that allows us to pull down and widen the boundaries of its comprehension.

The existence of a plurality of interpretations or meanings within the analysis of the city, makes it impossible to decide whether one of them is superior to the rest. The starting point of this argument is the recognition that we, human beings, are unable to see anything directly. Everything we see is perceived from a particular perspective, and there are no arguments to choose which of them is the best (Fay, 1996). I prefer to take up Maffesoli's 'sociology as a point of view' (1993), since I am not trying to generate 'contents', but to propose a specific perspective.

In this sense, the explanations of the city understood as either an ecological problem, or a manifestation of segregation and extreme poverty, or even in the ample panorama of equipment, legislation or planning problems; seen from the Functionalist or the Marxist approach, with influences from the so-called French school of thought or the Systemic one, from the perspective of Cultural Studies or even from the optics of Post-Modernism, are nothing but simple points of view. They are not better or worse than others, and the fact that a particular perspective is more appreciated at certain times and spaces does not make of it a superior form of knowledge.

This is the reason why I make reference to three types of rides or readings through different labyrinths (classical, arboreal and rhizomic) that have been created by the act of interpreting the city. Each labyrinth opens up a possibility that can be chosen to understand the city. By no means this implies that they have a sequence, or that a maze is preceded by another one. The idea is to distinguish diverse coexistent arguments about the city, even though their bases are placed in different temporal contexts.

It would be wrong to say that a certain type of labyrinth belongs to a particular city. It is necessary to recognise that the preferred interpretation will not depend on the city itself, but on the person who analyses it.

The city as a labyrinth, under this metaphoric system, suggests the multiple interpretations that can be made out of it. In this way, the tour proposed here is not a position that should be taken as ultimate truth, or the discovered path. It is only an attitude of evaluation and analysis that, with the aid of certain strategies, seeks to notice the elements

attributed to it and for which each city is enquired.

**First stop:  
A tour through the city as a classical labyrinth**

Quite possibly, the first idea that springs to mind when talking about the city is the image of modernity on its own. It is not very difficult to differentiate between a 'modern city' and a 'traditional town'. However, it proves to be complicated to find a unique way of referring to it. Maybe this difficulty arises from the different meaning that we attach to the city, and from the way we set up its boundaries. As explained by Baudrillard (1997) 'words kill what they refer to'.

The meaning of a concept is basically within its usage, and this is why a definition becomes necessary. To set the fuzzy edges of a concept (in this case the city) does not mean to restrict it. We try to establish a starting point, from which it is possible to see the interlaced meanings.

Therefore, I think that it is advisable to apply the deconstructive strategy proposed by Derrida to read the city. This strategy consists in paying attention to the marginal zones of the text and finding the contextual drift<sup>2</sup> from which it is clear that the meaning is the result of differences, and simultaneously, that such a meaning is differed in time, where everything is always a sign of other signs (Derrida, 1989).

I propose to use a map to guide us through the different forms to understand (or tour) the city. The first of these tours looks for the meaning of the city as a 'closed, perfect, autonomous' way of urban organisation, like in the medieval cities. This form of understanding the city is similar to a journey through a classical labyrinth. That is, with a single entrance door and a single exit, in a well known space where there is a unique, permanent truth.

It might be useful to apply this method to the form of organisation used by cities in the Antiquity. According to Max Weber (1987), these cities would integrate farms subject to personal benefits. At the same time, they would also comprise big family mansions with feudal properties in the city suburbs. This interpretation also describes the Western cities of the Middle Ages that had a political personality as principal protector, a public officer who would hold power inside the walls of the city.

A journey through a classical labyrinth makes reference to an agglomeration born out from immigration and several

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external factors that would change the social stratification outside the walls, as the population inside them would settle down. As a result, important differences in the status among the citizens would emerge. We are talking about a city whose logics are circular, like the cities to which Weber (1987) makes reference. Their main characteristic was the institutional association of the bourgeoisie, that used to have a

legal statute conferring them a common right that could only be exercised by them.

Nevertheless, this form of journey through the city is not restricted to Middle Age cities. It could also be applied to modern metropolises by recognising the normative structures of vertical power that lead us to think that these cities can be travelled in search for a specific time and place. In other words, I am thinking of a city that has been designed with a particular goal in mind. A city with a temporal and spatial distribution that responds to a previously designed project, and which is built in analogy to a machine where every single movement accomplishes a very specific task, like an organism regulated by rules.

This leads us to recall, in the case of urban studies, the intricate perspectives drawn from mechanical and organic approaches; more specifically, the proposal to understand the city having a machine as a model. According to Lynch (1985), this point of view was born in the Renaissance, when machines were seen as being built out of several parts, joined in such a dynamic way that they would allow the whole thing to work harmonically, and with a specific task. As such, a city can be seen as a machine that comprises different permanent parts, whose individual movements activate others. It is also accepted that the machine, and therefore its parts, can change. The mutation is, however, clearly foreseen or predetermined.

The cities, as the machines themselves, can be broken. These malfunctions are attributed to the parts, as they are mechanically interconnected. If by any reason the parts fail, they can be substituted and the whole machinery would work again. From this particular point of view, the failure of one part means that the assigned task cannot be

2. The deconstructive reading tries to find the contextual drift where the manifested meaning of the text is not the one that is being proposed, but a different, a contradictory one. In this way, the textual drifts are not only an unfortunate feature of writing as an imperfect representation of speech. They are the essence on language on its own (Derrida, 1989).

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accomplished. The main problem of this perspective is that it never questions the *whole*, but only the parts.<sup>3</sup>

The proposal to see the city as an organism was institutionalised in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe. According to Lynch (1985), a living organism is different from the machine because the first one reorganises itself by changing its size. An organism has differentiated parts that are closely interconnected. Unlike the machine, the boundaries between the different parts are not clear; its elements work together and subtly influence each other.

The city, from the organic approach, is a dynamic entity. However, its dynamism is homeostatic.<sup>4</sup> This is why the internal adjustments tend to bring the organism back to an equilibrium state every time an external force perturbs the system. This means that the city has a self-regulatory property; it repairs itself and goes through a born, growth, adulthood and death cycle. Seen as cities, the organic communities should be socially and spatially separated units. Even though, internally, their sites and population are highly interdependent. The vision of society as a competitive struggle is highlighted; in this way, illness strikes when the fine equilibrium is altered, when homogeneity becomes heterogeneity.

We could also add to the tour through a classical labyrinth all the ecological-urban aspects drawn from the classical Chicago school. Not only did its main representatives (Robert Park, Roderick McKenzie, Ernest Burgess) settle down the foundations of the hegemonic theoretical approach in the North American urban studies, but also have

3. In practice, according to Lynch (1985), this approach has been applied to the subdivision of land, traffic control, installation codes and zone division. Its goals are oriented to generate a reorganisation of the environment via the creation of an efficient access to the city and technical functions without problems, where the autonomy of the parts is highly desired. Like in a machine, this model let us analyse the elements independently from each other, offering a great economy in the applied efforts.
4. In other words, living beings with a set of mechanisms that lead to an automatic control of the their biological constants.
5. For a criticism to the statements of the Chicago School see Gottdiener and Feagin (1990); Topalov (1990); Lezama (1993) and Bettin (1982), among others.

influenced the analysis in Mexico, even in more recent times under the cover of 'human ecology'.

The main concern of the members of this school of thought was centred in the 'urban problems', especially of Chicago in the period between the wars (1915-1938). Problems like the increase in immigration, industrial activity and ethnic diversity, contributed to the inter-

pretation of the city as a 'social integration problem', which was evident from what was called 'urban segregation'. Not surprisingly, their main subjects were mobs, homeless people, ghettos and urban land letting, among others.

It is worth mentioning that the Chicago school theories correspond very well to a time when social Darwinism was in fashion. Together with the rediscovery of Comte's positivism and Spencer's organismism, they highlight the messianic proposal of solving the emergent problems in order to re-establish 'the order of life'. In this way, the ecologists talk about a sort of life that reconciles human existence with that of other species. The cultural factor does not exist or at least it is not decisive. The natural laws are far more important than the social ones (Lezama, 1993).

The main interest of the ecologists was to explain the urban phenomena in terms of a two-folded problem that can be summarised in two questions: What is the process from which cities are created and developed? How do human beings adapt to their environment? Urban order is understood as a result of economic forces; it is conceived as the result of selective and competitive forces that structure urban life. One should start from the idea that social equilibrium can be reached through adapting to the environment via functional interdependence, where there is an organisation-disorganisation relationship in the 'metabolism' of the city (Gottdiener, 1990).

We must bear in mind that, for the ecologists, the city consists of natural areas with their own environment, character and specific function to absorb urban economy in their complexities (Lezama, 1993). We are basically talking about a tour through the city as a classical labyrinth; in other words, an interpretation of the city as the archetype designed with specific purposes, where the spatial and temporal activity distributions correspond to a previously thought project. That is why it only has one entrance and one exit, in search for the only possible truth.

Far from the pros and cons of these perspectives or from their major or minor contributions to city studies,<sup>5</sup> it is important to notice that these interpretations give a parti-

cular meaning to the city, if by meaning we understand the triplet of principle, unity and goal (Laidi, 1997).<sup>6</sup> This, for instance, in the case of the ecologists, was centred in the possibility to explain and organise the city. That is, the possibility to unravel the unknowns of the labyrinth, to find the exit, to conquer truth.

Therefore, the interpretations of the city that I have called classical labyrinth, find their meaning by exhibiting their pretension to decipher, surpass and disperse. Decipher the world, surpass the present reality to obtain a goal considered to be a better one, and disperse to the others. Fundamentally, to have a meaning is to enumerate the problems of the world, to show the hope for a universal validity, to decline the censorship between the 'project for oneself' and the 'project for others', the welfare for oneself and the welfare for others (Laidi, 1997: 47).

Surely, neither the antique nor the medieval city, neither the organic nor the mechanic ones end the possibilities of a tour through the city as a classical labyrinth. Having said that, since every tour depends on the traveller, I just described mine. Undoubtedly, this tour can vary, be modified, and change according to the adventurous traveller that decides to take it up. However, I do think that these examples are more than enough to clarify the usefulness of the proposed exercise.

### **Second step: A tour through the city as an arboreal labyrinth**

A point of view that has quite strongly modified the way to interpret the city has as backbone the modern tradition whose more prominent features are progress, civilisation and development. These are basically the elements that, as a result of the fall of the Berlin wall, are categorised as dead or unfinished projects that are part of the breaking down of the sense of the world as understood during the decades of the cold war (Laidi, 1997).

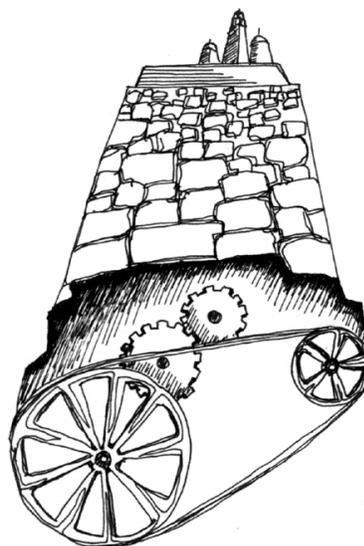
If we had to define a time for the beginning of modernity, we could mark it after the Middle Ages, when the Renaissance offers several technical, scientific and political changes. All of them introduced a new set of signs, habits and cultural manners that enabled a new social structure. In this way, the philosophical and political foundations of

modernity are settled during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with Descartes and the Enlightenment philosophy, as well as the substitution of the feudal state for a monarchic one (Urdanibia, 1994). I note here that, it was actually Rousseau who first applied the term *moderniste* in the sense used during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Berman, 1988).

According to Berman (1988), the history of modernity has three stages: the first one covers from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century up to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when people started experiencing modern life. The second stage begins with the French revolution in 1789; at this stage people shared the feeling of living in revolutionary times (change and improvement), touching diverse spheres of the personal, social and political lives; however, they do not feel materially or spiritually modern. Finally, the third stage takes place during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the modernisation process gets expanded and is applied to the entire world.<sup>7</sup>

The development of the capitalist system urges the constant progress of science and technology in order to generate changes in the production area (division of labour, which creates transformations in habits and traditional culture). As a result, social struggles emerge, changing profoundly the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Apart from that, demographic explosion, urban concentration and other metropolisation phenomena, such as media development for example, left a deep mark in the concept of modernity as a social practice based on change, innovation, instability and permanent crisis.

The meaning built from this processes is anchored in the importance of technology and science, and a chronometric



6. The meaning triplet according to Laidi (1997: 25) consists of: Principle, that is, a basic statement based on a collective project; Unity, the conjunction of 'images of the world' within a general coherent scheme and Goal as a projection to a different better part.

7. Nevertheless, Urdanibia (1994) considers that 'the modern' is thought of in two times. The period from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment under the directing thread of the Subject: 'All men are, by Nature, equal to each other'. This gives a vague idea of universality and identity. The second runs from the Romanticism up to the crisis of Marxism, when the cornerstone is not the Subject anymore, but History. From there, we get the idea of collective categories: nation, culture, social classes, and race. In this form, the nationalist and socialist ideas get shaped, having as a common denominator the concept of progress.

and linear time in close analogy to the productive system, where Fordism was considered a true life style. These ideas were based on concepts such as production and mass consumption, which originated a totalising aesthetics of modernity, the masses and the authority, all accompanied by a certain sensibility to creativity and novelty (Urdanibia, 1994; Lañdi, 1997). Le Corbusier did an extreme description of this.<sup>8</sup>

The modern city is basically the nodal point of all the rational organisation strategies of society and culture, being at the same time the justification of interest and Utopias (Lanceros, 1994). It is in the city where we ultimately experience progress. The blindness of development perceives the immigration from the suburbs to the cities, the loss of natural resources, the dissolution of common identity (farmers village) as positive processes that lead us to a more elevated position. These processes consolidate with the anonymity of the modern, abstract man; a citizen with continually expanding but never realised rights.

In general, we can talk about modernity as a universal civilisation project that relies on the optimism provided by the inevitable technological progress, on a 'secure' meaning of History and on 'real and democratic' domination. However, it is difficult to notice fully structured agreements about the form or method to achieve the so much desired and unavoidable modernity, even though, no one seems to doubt the possibility of reaching it. In that sense, modernity is the construction of a myth upon an instrumental, scientific and technological vision, which describes the forms of achieving the concept of modernity, but never discusses its ultimate goals (*telos*).

It might be possible that this the explanation of the diversity in the interpretations derived from the 'meaning' obtained from modernity, opening up new possibilities to encounter the final ideal. This is the main motivation of touring the city from the perspective of an arboreal labyrinth, since these are essentially the ways in which the descriptions of the city grow further apart, from the classical to the modern.

8. A very good example of the expression of modernity can be found in the area of urban space, which for Le Corbusier was an icon of progress. Le Corbusier, probably one of the most prominent architects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was looking for an impersonalisation in a world spatially and socially fragmented.

9. Even if this revision is not exhaustive, it is worth mentioning that in order to gain a better understanding of the modern approaches derived from Marxism, it is of paramount importance to place its political actions in two different planes; as well as the theory that provided so many philosophical, sociological and economical aspects to the interpretation of reality.

There is not only a single path; there are different projects that end up in the same ideal of progress (the convergence of the classical and the modern gives rise to a single exit).

I have no intention to revisit the wide spectrum of ideas in which development (modernity, progress) is thought to be attained. I will only concentrate on some examples from the structural Marxist approach, as well as the main statements of the modernisation theory, from the development and the dependence points of view, applied to the case of Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

The structural Marxism was originated in France at the beginning of the 1960's, influenced by the position of Althusser, who strongly criticised Marx for eliminating the Subject form the social theory to create a science of human practices (economy, politics and ideology). Nevertheless, with the background of the student movements and the impossibility of categorising the facts happening at the time and without a concept of human will, the structural Marxists tried to incorporate the masses rather than the human beings as creators of History (Donoso, 1988),

It is actually Castells in *The Urban Question* (1978) who makes a balance between the structural Marxism and its application to the urban problems. In this form, from a criticism to the traditional urban sociology organised according to the Chicago school, Castells proposes a

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Marxist social theory better equipped to explain the contradictions of the capitalist society. Understood in this way, the urban phenomena are nothing else than the expression of such a society, so that the application of the theory also extended to them. According to Castells, the urban space is a place where the simple and organised reproductions of labour take place. This allows the study of social situations without perceiving their origins. That is why it is absolutely necessary to introduce social agents and link the urban system to the social class struggles and the urban political scene (Castells, 1978).

Castells points out that, when a particular confluence states the need for an alliance to get hold of power, urban problems become a fundamental part of the political struggle. It is here where the urban social movements take up major importance (they have key roles in urban struggles), as they contravene the established order taking advantage

of the specific contradictions of urban problems (Castells, 1978: 9).

For Castells, these problems are by no means the result of a civilisation in crisis. They are a social process whose logics originate from the development of contradictions in the capitalist society. Under this same context, we observe the creation of the labour movement that seeks political freedom and social guarantees relative to the collective life style. It is important to mention that even if the urban issues allow political struggle and class articulation, when proletarian autonomy is discussed, they are very much denied in favour of political mobilisation (Lezama, 1993: 274).

It is clear that this perspective is strongly linked to particular historical moments, which do not doubt the objectivity and scientific rigour behind the 'truth' of structural Marxism. However, Castells analyses his own work critically in an interview by the journal of the *Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales*:

[...] I believe that the interpretation of *The Urban Question* that has been made in different leftist urbanism contexts is negative for science, negative for political practice and in fact, a certain tragedy for my own book [...] (quoted in Donoso, 1988: 27).

Gino Germani (1973) presented another discourse proposed to achieve the project of modernity in the particular case of Latin America. Together with the Dependence theory, Germani's position is the main conceptual framework that looks for 'national development', and from which many urban analyses have been made.

Germani highlights the transformation of 'traditional' values into 'modern' ones as an unavoidable factor to accomplish development. This process is led by the middle classes, which are better identified with change, since its benefits are associated to the social scale. He also points out that secularisation is an important agent of change. He related industry with urbanisation, which was grouped into two categories: the fundamental one that did not make any difference between urban and rural environments; and the definitive one, in which the values had changed and started conditioning the rural context. We can summarise his conceptual framework in a triplet: urbanisation, secularisation and modernisation (Elguea, 1989).

According to Lerner in *Modernization revisited* the demographic density, the edification and expansion of cities, the expansion of services, etcetera, are the ultimate proofs of modernisation. The urbanisation process generates a need for information, which increases the alphabetisation indices; mass media broadcasts necessities and expectations, which increases political and economical participation of

society. All of this can be translated into a developed or modern society. Lerner himself would later recognise the extreme simplification of this model (Elguea, 1989).

On the other hand, the Development theory identifies the key elements of increase in production and income that are able to contribute to the welfare of the majority of the population. This position is basically a form of evolutionism with a series of stages in the historical line through which every single country should pass by. Here, developing is seen as a lack of development and the problem is seen as a gap that must be filled in.<sup>10</sup>

The idea of development in the case of Latin America became a paradigm that hoisted the Western concept of progress. A very good example was the substitution of the old positivist concept of evolution with this idea of development. Progress is achieved via generalised and massive industrialisation, the introduction of machinery and specialisation; the abolishment of farming and other 'archaic' methods and the consolidation of the economic relationships of advanced capitalism, such as the economical transnationalisation.

The idea of industrialisation is, quite possibly, the main objective of economical growth theories, in which development and industrialisation are almost synonyms. This idea is combined with the notion that farming is old-fashioned and even highly unproductive (Rello, 1988). It was precisely the search of industrialisation which led to the economical growth that, in countries like Mexico, created a urban orientation that suddenly became a problem of group interests. In many cases such interests do not help to solve the problems of the marginalised majorities.

This single linearity and the excessive endogenous factors of the growth theories were severely criticised by the Dependence theory. However, under these premises the explanation power of the processes and the obstacles posed to the development are seen from the articulation with 'important' countries, which creates the indivisible binomial combination of development and developing. On the other hand, they did not succeed in their simplistic idea that the peripheral elites are the unconditional allies of multinational groups.

Up to now, the promises of progress have not been accomplished, and it is highly possible that they will never be. It is also a fact that the 'advantages' (paths) of growth have produced greater exclusion than benefits, especially

10. The goals of development (satisfy material needs) get confused with the means (reach the highest growth rate); this is because in order to achieve the means, one makes choices that actually sacrifice the goals.

**Each interpretation that tries to apprehend the city remains nothing but a metaphor, with part of it in its own reality and the rest in its own *logos*. At the same time, the city creates and annihilates its own significant and meanings.**

from the point of view of the poorer. Therefore, the modernisation and development programmes are seen as dead projects, annihilated by their own verification assumptions: empirical evidence.

Modernity can be understood as the time of reason (the 'light' of the Enlightenment followers), based on the rigour and accuracy of the scientific discourse. On the other hand, it can be seen as the extension and expansion of desires and necessities (extension of the symbolic space), which could only be satisfied by the permanent transformation of the productive forces and the constant struggle for inclusion.

The city, from this point of view, can be travelled and discussed through these different proposals that seek 'meaning' and give a reason to the search. We could well call it progress, development, social welfare, etcetera. But, at the end of the day, it is the *telos*, which gives a meaning to modernity. The paths to reach it are divided like the branches of a tree, but all of them leading to the same point.

### **Third step: A tour through the city as a rhizomic labyrinth**

The third tour through the city sees it as a space where meanings get diffracted. Once the great projects have diluted and the promises of modernity have been broken, the question in search of 'meaning' and the 'axis' of History disappears as well. This approach was long embraced by the social sciences; its main objective was to understand social processes in terms of order and systematisation. It was until very recently that this pretension to acquire knowledge and its systematisation have come into crisis.

In the 1970's the social theories started suffering an abrupt change in their theoretical and epistemological assumptions. The ideas to enclose society into a single social structure were transformed into interpretations that take into account the impossibility of structuring society in those foundations. The new interpretations highlight the social heterogeneity, as well as its multiple meanings and lack of systematisation. Since there is no definite order, we are facing a menacing immanent disorder. In other words, the dynamism endures in spite of provisional stabilisation; the stability is only a threatened temporal acquisition (Balandier, 1990).<sup>11</sup>

That is why I start this tour through the city by recognising the multiple voices coming from disorder; voices that are the possibilities of different stories arising from the analysis of the difference.<sup>12</sup> This recognition offers the possibility of seeing the city as a rhizomic labyrinth, where the city contains within it many other cities that depend on the different possible ways of thinking about it.

There are, then, many ways of travelling around the city, of stylising its logo-centrism<sup>13</sup> and applying metaphors. In this tour, the city is free in the same way that a significant can be attributed a number of meanings and senses. So that, each interpretation that tries to apprehend the city remains nothing but a metaphor, with part of it in its own reality and the rest in its own *logos*. At the same time, the city creates and annihilates its own significant and meanings.

One can very well qualify as modern the societies that try to base their discourses of truth and justice on the great scientific and historical accounts. Post-modernity though, lacks such a form of legitimisation (Deschamps, 1979; cited in Urdanibia, 1994). It is basically this absence the responsible of breaking down expectations where the 'meaning' is not a projection into the future, but only a nostalgic allegory of the past. Indeed, thanks to the adhesion or identification mechanisms it is possible to find the meaning of the individual and collective actions (La'di, 1997).

From this perspective, the rhizomic interpretation of the city could be represented as an infinite virtual net of relations with multiple entrances and escape exits. Following the map presented in *Mil mesetas* by Deleuze and Guattari (1977), the search is no more circumscribed to the finding of a 'common meaning'. It only becomes apparent with a 'crisis of meaning' as a manifestation of plurality (Berger and Luckmann, 1977). In this form, the travellers that chose to visit the city with the rhizomic tour start their journey from this loss of meaning. The labyrinth does not have a common entrance and as the different doors do not share a *telos*, there is not a unique exit. This is the spatial icon of no-sense.

11. Disorder, rather than lack of equilibrium or disadjustment, is a social reorganisation and re-elaboration. We should not forget that order itself has the seed of disorder.

12. I do not mean to say that reality has originally a meaning that later was lost (disorder). It only has the 'meaning' that man attributes to it. Therefore, it is not a inherent characteristic of reality, it is only given to it.

13. The idea that reason is able to determine the meaning and sense of a sign through the dissection of elements and analysis.

The discourse of the city, based on the expectations of modernity, is broken. This makes the traveller crash into walls that tear expectations apart and come across bridges that amplify frustrations. When interpreting the city, modern traditions assign to it meanings, functions and statuses, that actually are surpassed by the city itself. The unravelling of this process opens up several possibilities to the tour, where the importance lies on being reasonable, rather than being right.

This particular way of touring the city offers several proposals that, unlike in the previous tours, are not related to a single scientific discipline (let it be called urbanism, sociology, economy or urban planning); they rather try to develop their fundamentals based on several of them.

The rhizomic approach allows us to understand the logics of different contemporary cities, the ones with dimensions never thought of, that are now broken in several 'senses'. They are cities without unity, since they do contain all sorts of spaces from different times and models. The habitant of these cities only knows and lives certain zones, and is identified with them. So that, the 'historical centre', if there was ever one, is not the point of unity anymore; there are instead many 'centres'. These cities are configured into a topology where all places are equivalent to each other, where every citizen lives their own city, which might have nothing to do with what their fellow citizens experience. The new centrality, if there is such a thing, is given by the shopping malls, the multi-purpose spaces where businesses have brought back together what the city broke up.

We are talking about cities where the economical and cultural inequalities are growing, where globalisation has an every time greater role because of its excluding proposals. The change is a greater one and affects the life styles as well as the usage and sense of time. The logics of globalisation, which actually go beyond economy, are imposed through changes that have a major impact in every day life. This has caused a rupture in the ethical system that gives coherence to the changes themselves. García Canclini (1995) adverts that these elements inhibit the use of the city, because the inhabitants prefer to stay-in to consume internally what the city had to offer through cultural public equipments. For instance, the theatre has been substituted by the radio; the cinema by videos, stadiums by television, etcetera. Having said that, mass media design the new invisible links in the metropolis.

The confusion arises from a historical crack that makes the inhabitants be in a constant war state. In this context, the tour through the city is highly hazardous. However, the city is also a space where we can reconfigure different ways of being, of coexisting, of solidarity and citizenship, of struggle against inequality and difference. This analysis of the city

proposes to its inhabitants new forms of being and feeling. Cities are forms that belong to an ever-changing space, with anthropological, virtual and even non-places, as well as complex structures for which linear thought is not enough.

According to Marc Augé (1992) the opposition between a place for living and a place for passing by is analysed as place and non-place. This difference is established by the permanence and the passing, since the non-places cannot be defined as identity spaces, not even as relational or historical ones. On the other hand, the places are analysed in anthropological terms. They are defined as identity spaces because they are the start of meaning for their inhabitants and an intelligible principle for the observers.

If we choose to tour the city in terms of a rhizomic labyrinth, we have to recognise the simultaneity of places and non-places. The mixture of images, information, publicity and fiction tend to create some homogeneity in the spatial diversity. We would also have to notice installations that are placed in any or no place, and make us feel that we have been there before. For Augé (1992), these are the characteristics of over-modernity, which produces non-places and spaces that are not anthropological. These places do not integrate antique or 'memorable' places, which are only traffic points with temporary uses.<sup>14</sup>

When travelling through the cut-off paths of the rhizomic labyrinth, it is possible to realise that the city is no longer the economical, political and cultural centre of the bourgeoisie emerged during the Industrial Revolution and based on the idea of production. We are facing a city that arises from the Informational Revolution; a city that is not meant to be used, only promoted and consumed as a show. This is the kind of city that supports a power or a class that can be or live there without being citizens (De Ventós, 1976).

The emergence of information technologies and their impact on every day work and the cities themselves is a subject that has been discussed by several theoreticians. Castells, for instance, renovates his discourse by incorporating these elements and states that, even though they are not a casual factor in the social-spatial emerging configuration, they are an important feature in the general process of labour restructuration and the so-called 'dual city' configuration. This is an old segregation phenomenon that acquires specific characteristics as the transition from industrial to informational production coincides with the increase of flexible production (Castells, 1989).

14. It is important to point out that Augé (1992) defines over-modernity as opposed to post-modernity: 'the positive of the negative'. This is so, because it does not make any references to progress or the richness of events.

From this point of view, we are able to find an answer to processes that were not present before. This is the case of the cities that are no longer conceived as articulated by traditional economical capital, but seen as a set of agglomeration processes where not previously recognised elements are exhibited.

To think about the city in a world integrating process reminds us of the expansion of common images that set the foundations for the micro-societies to look for an identity via the reaffirmation of their differences. In this sense, the greater the relational capital (world integration), the more intense are the necessities of local differentiation, where a city can be many different cities.

**According to Baudrillard (1993), in contemporal society the abstraction does not lie on the map, on the mirror, on the concept. The simulation does not correspond to a territory, a reference or substance. It is actually generated by the models without order or reality: hyper reality.**

On this respect, the works of Sassen (1991) and Friedmann (1997), allow us to think about the city from different perspectives. For example, the capacity of control of the financial activities is no longer a residual activity subject to manufacture; it is seen as a way of controlling disconnected spaces that are articulated through a spatial world system. This situation modifies the traditional way to understand the 'frontier', becoming 'immiseration frontiers'. It is important to note the coexisting polarity between the major technopoles of the world, analysed by Castells and Hall (2001), and the cities that continue their progress through the traditional industrial development, which are actually the vast majority.

Studies of this kind let us see that, even if contemporary society is characterised by a decrease in the economical goods trade, where the participating individual is recognised as an active Subject (excluding process); there is also a process in which this exchange is substituted by an expansion in the symbols stock market. It is possible to take part in

15. On this subject, many authors have concluded that the high indices of economical growth in the developed countries are not related to the creation of employment. For instance, Rifkin (1997) points out that many companies, due to their restructuration programmes, apply policies of massive redundancy. He also makes reference to a study realised by the Geneva *Metalworkers Federation* which foresees that in the next 30 years only 2% of today's labour force will be needed 'to produce all the necessary resources to satisfy the total demand'.

this expansion by means of the mass media, making us feel that the participation process is growing, as well as the interdependence with the world.

Contemporary society can be seen as a time of expansion of rights (even if their realisation is only a virtual possibility) when individuals are excluded from participation. Not only is it an exclusion from the benefits like in the case of the early capitalist society, but also from participating in the market through employment.<sup>15</sup> It is, then, possible to talk about an exclusion process from the traditional goods exchange market through an inclusion of the symbolic trade, where the search for meaning from the modern point of view is lost.

This approach leads us to different paths; for instance when we talk about the grater importance of the symbolic trade in contemporary cities, we end up in a 'drilling precession' where illusion is not possible anymore because reality is not either. Therefore, the sham is more powerful as it allows us to think beyond the object, that order and law could well be a simulation (Baudrillard, 1993: 47). In this context,

Baudrillard recovers the fable described by Borges:

[...]In that Empire, the art of cartography achieved such perfection that the map of one single province occupied the whole of a city, and the cap of the Empire, the whole of a province. In time, those disproportionate maps failed to satisfy and the schools of cartography sketched a cap of the Empire which was of the size of the empire and coincided at every point with it. Less addicted to the study of cartography, the following generations comprehended that this dilated map was useless and, not without impiety, delivered it to the inclemencies of the sun and of the winters. In the western deserts there remain piecemeal ruins of the map, inhabited by animals and beggars. In the entire rest of the country there is no vestige left of the geographical disciplines (Borges and Cásares, 1970).

According to Baudrillard (1993), in contemporal society the abstraction does not lie on the map, on the mirror, on the concept. The simulation does not correspond to a territory, a reference or substance. It is actually generated by the models without order or reality: hyper reality. The territory neither precedes the map, nor survives it. From now on, it is the map which precedes (drilling precession) and generates the territory. If we stuck to the fable, it would be the piecemeal ruins of the territory the ones that would get rotten on the surface of the map. The traces of reality, not the map, would persist spread

on deserts that do not belong to the Empire anymore, but to our deserts: the proper desert of reality (Baudrillard, 1993:10).

From this point of view, the sham, contrary to the Utopia, emerges from the equivalence principle. We are not talking about imitation, reiteration or parody. We are talking about signs taking the place of reality, and it is this process that triggers the emergence of hyper reality. One of the most well-known examples of such hyper reality can be found in Disneyland, where fantasy offers more satisfactions than reality. There, we face simulations of different landscapes whose features can be confused with those of the original ones.

For Baudrillard (1993) a perfect model of these mixed drillings is precisely Disneyland. Its success is not based on the imaginary world that recreates, but on the joy of the perfect America that it shows. By no means is it a false interpretation of reality (ideology). It is, however, an active hiding and preservation of reality.<sup>16</sup> Alternatively, Eco (1993) makes reference to Disneyland as an example of 'false cities'. In other words, cities that imitate other cities, but being 'real things' on their own. In them, we find a mixture of reality and fiction. They are toy cities with hyper real details that make clear that their magic is enclosed in the fantasy that they produce.

It is quite clear that Disneyland is not an isolated case of false cities or shams. It is possible to find several other examples of its kind that create unreality from reality. The visitors go there to admire the incredible similarity of reality to a fantasy that seems to be more real. The reason for this is that the created space is closer to our expectations of Nature. Hence, these false cities turn the city into a giant robot that kills imagination and where the tourists pay a price for 'something real' that is only a reconstruction of the truth (Eco, 1993).

De Ventós (1976) refers to this same idea when talking about Waikiki, the tourist neighbourhood of Honolulu. In this place, the city has disappeared and instead we find a touristy paradise where there are no big resorts or shopping malls, because all of it is a big resort or mall. The same argument could be applied to La Antigua, Guatemala. This small 'recovered' city is not for the locals to live. It is only a scenario for the tourists to appreciate the beauty of a colonial city with its folklore and handicrafts that are impossible to find anywhere else. Some other cities have their own small Disneyland-like spaces with different goals. For instance Tlaquepaque in Jalisco, Mexico; or Garibaldi square in Mexico City. These false cities show us that the real and imaginary parts offer a reality as a scenic world. They enable

us to think about the contemporary cities as enormous stages with symbolic changes, where the most important thing is to simulate. In other words, to have what we lack.

To envisage the city with this absence reminds me of the Genesis myth recalled by Zarone (1993) when talking about the history of the city as a sign of exile and void.<sup>17</sup> We can, then, understand why, after the creation of the city, there is a gap between past and present, which has caused a disappearance of the absolute, the universal and the rational, as well as an annihilation of the things that remained stable and fundamental, a ladder of values and principles that gives life a sense.

At the same time, De Landa (1998) is also interested in the historic configuration of the cities. However, his position sees human history as something multiple and in perpetual motion. Hence, his analysis does not follow an exclusive line. It has several parallel trajectories with different velocities. In particular, De Landa proposes three descriptions of the city: geological, biological and linguistic.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, having these parallel trajectories does not imply that the journeys started at the same time. Their vision has no time and no direct sequence. Thus, the cities are not the product of human evolution, since matter and energy have a greater potential to generate these systems in different ways.

For example, the first description proposed by De Landa (1998) enables a characterisation of the cities opened to the sea and the ones closed to the inside. The harbour-cities have eyes only to the outside, like some European cities that were never looking to the inside. This reinforces the creation of an expansionist meaning. The case of the closed cities arises from the necessity of defence or self-preoccupation; maybe for liberating or simply self-contentment. In general terms, every society has a belief that forces them to make certain choices above others. The important thing to point out is that these factors (geological,

16. Seen from this point of view, the imaginary within Disneyland is not true or false. It is only a dissuasion mechanism in order to generate fiction from reality.

17. Zarone (1993) makes reference to the story described in the Genesis about fugitive Cain, stray on Earth after the death of his brother. He deserted Jahveh, and later built a city.

18. The geological description refers to the material exchange among different human groups, in analogy to a series of tectonic movements with big effects in different territories. The biological one explains the creation of cities. The linguistic one deals with the history of signs and meanings with which societies manage their exchanges. The first one corresponds to the expansion of knowledge, the second to the representation of human organisations and the third to their articulation (De Landa, 1998).

biological or linguistic) decide the configuration of every city, and they can help us to understand that every single city is the result of different parallel historical processes, without time and sequence.

As we can see, making this tour is getting into a very peculiar labyrinth, quite different from the one with a unique entrance and unique exit, and from the branched one that opens up new circumstantial truths. This labyrinth is perceived as a maze containing many labyrinths within it. Each of these sub-labyrinths could be classical or baroque, and each path can be part of more than one labyrinth, according to the way we travel around it. Hence the rhizomic structure, since every form to understand the city creates filaments that have the shape of roots.

The traveller that chooses a rhizomic tour begins with the assumption of a crisis of meanings. Their journey lacks the explicit intention of a *telos*, and the sense of their discourse is to recognise the different constituted *telos*. Clearly, if we take this position to an extreme, as prescribed by one of the many criticisms to post-modernity, the lack of 'meaning' loses its justification and foundations; at least until new parameters or goals are reconstructed. This would lead us into a circular process that is untenable from its own assumptions.

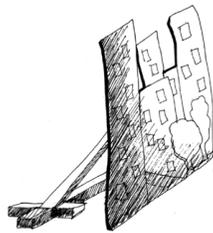
Thus, the last but modern critical vision is found in the school of Frankfurt, which tried to go beyond the scientific ideas, recovering philosophy as a method of constructing (intersubjective discussion) the foundations of human action. In other words, the construction of meaning through the only common feature among humans: communicative action.

It may be possible that this process takes place inside this labyrinth, when we recognise the coexistence of several tribes, each of them with their own initiation rites, identity ceremonies, distinct voices and expiring dates (Zavala, 1994). Maybe, at the end of the day, a city does contain within it many other cities that depend on the form of interpretation, very much like Eutropia where a city is inhabited while the rest are empty, and this happens in turns.

### **Exit:**

#### **Thank you for your visit**

The intention of all the above-presented arguments has been to place (map) different interpretations of the city. To that end, it was necessary to set a methodological proposal and it is worth noticing that the forms to unders-



tand the city do not finish with this revision. On the contrary, here I have only mentioned some of the paths that can be taken, that cross each other and combine in order to create new trajectories.

There are several ways to understand this kind of plurality, whose reference seems to contravene the idea of principle or unity. It is not adverted as a reflection of reality and does not pretend to unravel its hidden secrets; it is open to the multiplicity of approaches. In this expedition, I have proposed three different forms to interpret the city, even though I have to clarify that they are not some already existing places where the city or its interpretations accommodate themselves.

The cities are not built, created or conceived from each labyrinth. I am talking about a possibility of 'thinking' about the city and the way in which its interpretations generate labyrinths, 'meanings' and thus 'life worlds'. I am not trying to deny the existence of meanings, identities, intentions and continuities. They can be seen as the symptoms of particular forms of analysis. That is, they are a way of beginning (propose) a journey that seeks to identify, explain, reconstruct, and signify the meanings created by the city.

The labyrinth is an icon of perplexity, where it is possible to feel the anguish and vertigo symbolised by the transgression of the space-time. And even if a labyrinth creates disorientation and makes reference to infinity, its design allows us to see certain partial and occasional order immersed in an apparent nonsense. It leaves us the hope of fighting against the feeling of being lost and, like *Dedalus*, try to see the maze from the outside and bring light to its keys, make up a meaning for it. However, when we believe we have understood its secrets, we come across new nonsense which makes clear that every attempt of comprehension is temporal and that we have to try a different path.

At the end of this journey, I would like to note that perhaps everything that has been said here does not fulfil the initial expectations, that is, to enumerate the different forms of apprehending the city. Nevertheless, it has settled the foundations of an object of study: the fact that we can think about the cities as 'generators of meaning', that go beyond their organisation forms and their attributed aims.

That is, though, as Michael Ende would say in *The Never ending Story*, part of a different tale, and it should be told elsewhere.

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