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Lexicon

City Sense:
Territorializing Information.
Manuel Gausa

CITY SENSE: TERRITORIALIZING INFORMATION

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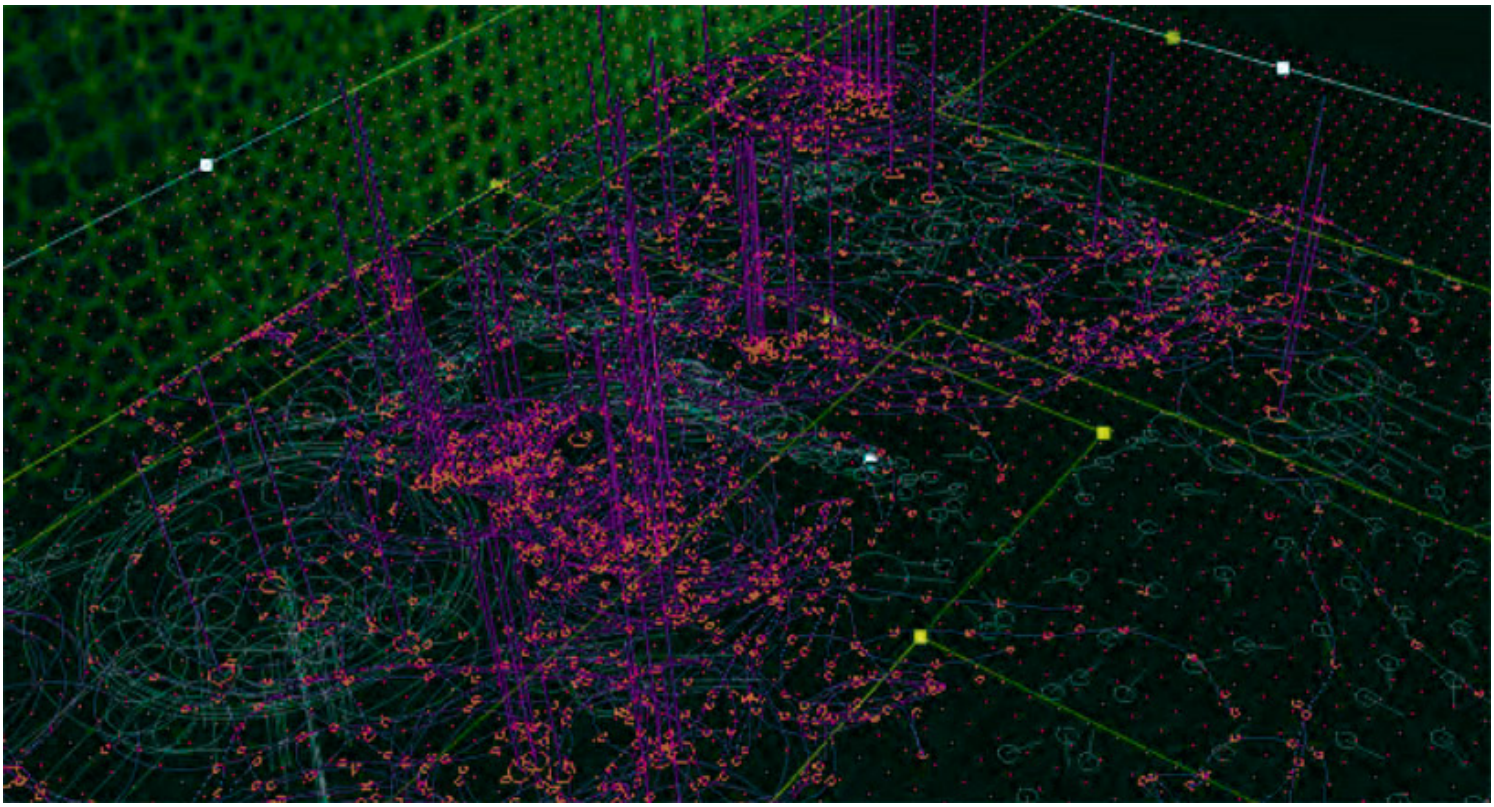
Our societies are the most complex dynamic and informational systems that exist: they are space-time (as well as sensorial) systems constantly exchanging information among the elements that comprise them, and between the latter and the environment, mutating and fluctuating in an evolutionary manner.

As their capacity for movement, processing and transfer—and the degree of connectivity—among conditions and information has grown, so has their ability to combine levels and processes of exchange and thus the complexity—diversity, heterogeneity, plurality and irregularity—of their most explicit manifestations.



In this new, definitively dynamic and interactive understanding of our collective environments (a condition they have always had but which has become more pronounced in recent decades, moving beyond the old stable and gradually progressive conceptions of their development processes) lies in fact the true revolution of our time and the basis of a shift in logic and thought—more open to the capacity for interaction—happening now in all that relates to the

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conception of space and the definition of our environments of existence and relations.

The city, the space of exchange par excellence, expresses spatially and territorially this type of ever more polyhedral and polyphonic social and cultural organizations.

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The new 'multicity' is no longer that 'island'—harmonious, pastoral, familiar, perfectly defined on the territory—but an increasingly more irregular and heterogeneous aggregate, much in the manner of any complex interactive system developed under the influence of different information and movements; it has come to manifest itself as the 'paraplanned' result of successive events with—and without—a will to plan.

The old structures—compositional (figurative or formal) or positional (functional or objectual)—have given way gradually to others more diffuse and impure, which express, then, a kind of more indeterminate and inform(ation)al order, whose undisciplined nature becomes more accentuated in step with the growth in freedom of movement—and displacement—and the degree of interaction between individual events and global structures.

We experience every day these phenomena—which may seem somewhat abstract—in the manifestations of our own society, more and more irregular, heterogeneous and changing with the growth in (inter)communication, mobility, mixing and tolerance towards the different. Perhaps that is what we call civilization: the possibility to imagine flexible contracts—relationships and interactions—among differences; and, therefore, a varied statement of individuality in plurality, not as an isolated episode but as an ultimate manifestation of intertwined diversity and identity destined to foster a more polyhedral, flexibly produced type of organization.
The new research springs from this interest in trying to understand the current processes of development in the territory, not out of mere fascination for the diffuse, chaotic or simply accidental city, but out of an activist will: to conceive new parameters of interpretation, organization and/or restructuring aimed beyond the traditional 'form' that has been interpreted traditionally as 'city'.
In the conceptual and instrumental understanding of new urban structures emerging today, the old geographical boundaries indeed have receded, almost all at once, before the various scales of a new, much more complex, elusive and vital urban territorial field of operations produced in a context of exchanges open to surprising combinatorial processes generated beyond the merely physical or geographical, with: a territory or territories, place or places, memory or memories, context or contexts—nearby and distant, virtual and real.

The city tends to lose its clear linkage to a single static space of location or of proximity in order to mutate, to fluctuate and change, to stretch and expand, but also to contract modally, into various settings of relation, thus evidencing the emergence of a new type of elastic territoriality but also a new type of informational order, at once flexible and fluctuating, in which traditional infrastructure networks coexist with other networks of informational connection (telematics, IT-based, financial...)

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as new immaterial links based on which 'other' possible territorial definitions begin to establish themselves, thus evidencing the complex nature of a global system of mobile (geographical and conceptual) boundaries, variable and discontinuous, according to the different productive forces which tend to have an impact on it.

The setting of this new dynamic and informational condition of the city is no longer built based simply on more or less substantive formal criteria but is defined and redefined dynamically, continuously, relationally, by the interactive combining of different—and simultaneous—layers of information (topographic, biological, economic, cultural, environmental, socio-political, etc.) which characterize it and (infra)structural networks of exchange (of transport, energy, diffusion, communication, demographic or financial movements, etc.) which organize it, materializing the fluctuations of a complex and diverse system, constantly affected by different a-continuous and unfixed situations and demands which are interrelated and continually transformed and whose strength would lie precisely in this constant capacity for renewal and modernization, building and recycling.

This territory, that of the city, is then no longer form—or at least it is no longer just form—but, rather, a complex system of relationships and events in process, among which simultaneous processes of action and reaction are triggered.
The main feature of this complex space where the variables multiply is, as in any 'nonlinear' system, uncertainty.

For that very reason, prospective mechanisms based on anticipation become more necessary than ever: systems of analysis and projection, open and versatile, adaptable to the particular conditions of a new fluctuating and global urban form that exceeds the limits of the traditional metropolis encompassing heterogeneous spaces, disdense areas of activity and function, no longer necessarily contiguous or continuous.

The approach to this new type of multiple spatiality—and to the movements and projections that tense it—thus requires, for its effective recognition, the development of 'n-dimensional' settings of recording and prospecting as well as the definition of possible strategies associated with them; 'n-differential' strategies understood as criteria for action which are oriented—'collective horizons of consensus' or virtual directional 'battle maps'—key to ensuring a qualitative projection of the overall system(s).

Informational (tendential) settings but also relational (intentional) strategies in the city and/or in the

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territory.

(Combinatorial) settings and (vehicular) strategies capable of selecting relevant data from a multiple reality, processing them, recording them, synthesizing them and intentionally operationalizing them for the purpose of better synthesizing their respective levels of incidental information and their ability to combine and 'project' them in operational settings, actually or potentially qualitative; projections, then, of a city of flows and connections and projections of a city of circuits and paths; projections of a city of inner patterns and fabrics and projections of a city of outer edges and profiles; projections of a structural city and a three-dimensional city; projections of a possible 'eruptive' city in relation to variable parameters of density, height and surface and projections of an underground city, the lower strata and infrastructural developments; projections as well of a 'optimized' and/or 'optimizable' city (from the 'constructive' angle); and projections of a recycled and/or recyclable city (from the 'reconstructive' angle); projections of an environmental city (that of large green areas and relational spaces but also that of parameters of energy and pollution) and projections of an 'ambient' city, from the sensory, symbolic or patrimonial, social and/or touristic angle; projections of an 'activated' city, in terms of the economic and productive factor, and projections of a 'reactivated' city, from the social and cultural, creative and recreational angle. 'Elastic' projections, of a 'retractable' city, suddenly stretched to other settings and adjusted to varying movements of flow, to temporary population transfers or seasonal drifts.

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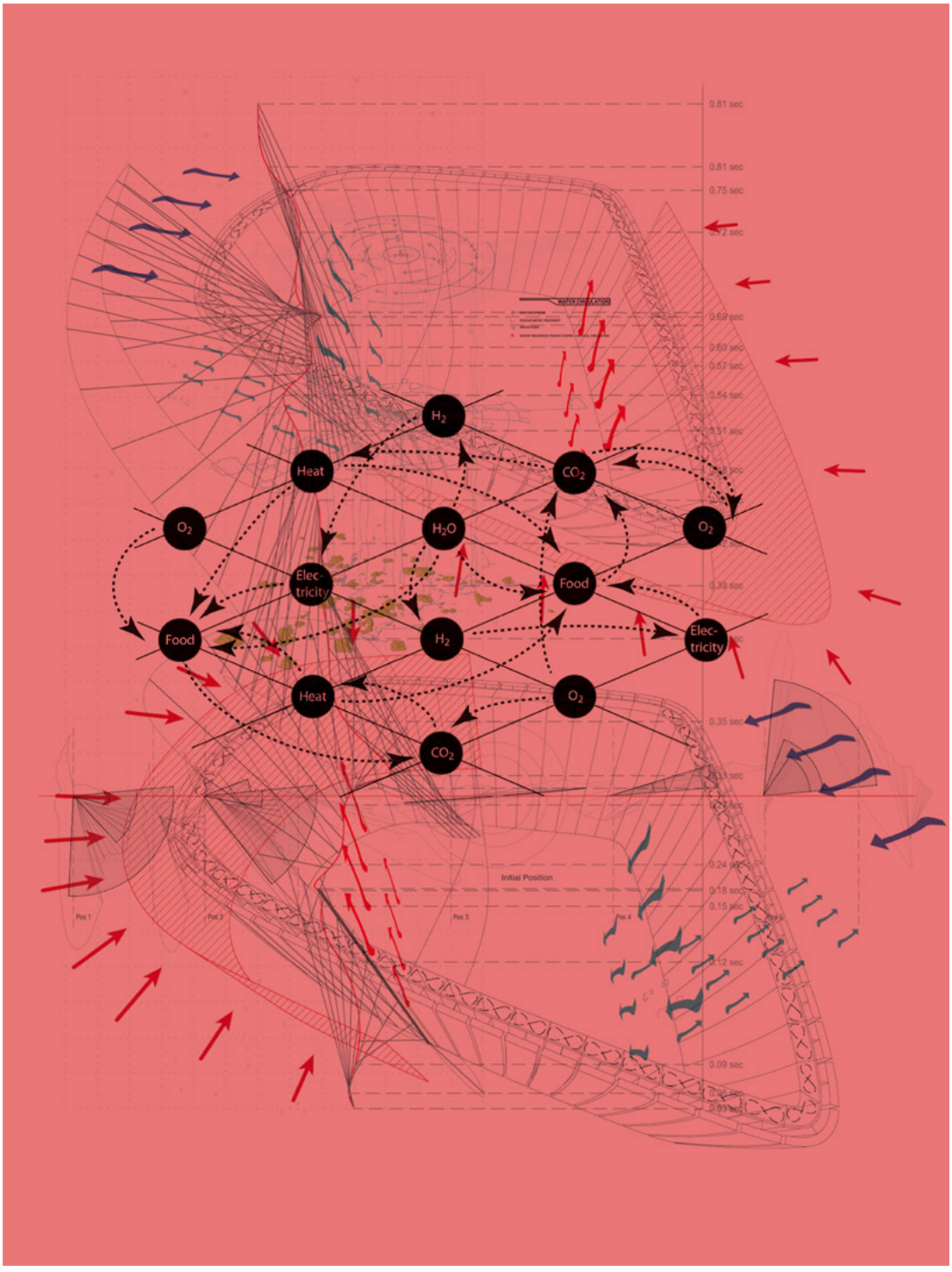

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Projections as well of a city of conflict: that of areas of tension and marginality or simply of obsolescence and deficit.

Projections understood as informational records, tendential but also biased—ie intentional—projections of the city and/or in the territory: strategic projections and thus understood as virtual 'battle maps', ie as synthetic settings of approach—at once 'diagnostics, answers and ventures'—able to select elements which induce reality itself, of compressing and vehicularizing them in 'decisions and instructions' as intentional in their definition as they are open in their development.

Projections, interpretations, actions and visions (settings or diagrammatic schemes associated with them) no longer totalistic or final but combinatorial, evolutionary, and which in any case refer to the different cities, both physical and virtual, coexist in the new 'multi-city'.

The above considerations may seem markedly abstract... related only to the technological and digital world, to data processing and its possible expressive instrumentalization: and yet they contain a strong component of sensitivity: that of a possible sense-city or sensiti-city which refers to the ability to process projectually the universe of information and transform it, territorialize it and project it into/towards more imaginative and qualitative dynamic spheres of life and relation.

This interactive and relational vocation—that of a society, a city and, ultimately, a new type of operational urban planning—refers simply to a vocation more open to (pro) positive exchange, destined to create positive relationships with the environment, with the context, with the medium, with the activity (and among activities), with the use and the user... ie with the citizen.

In short that of a more sensorial and sensitive urban planning.

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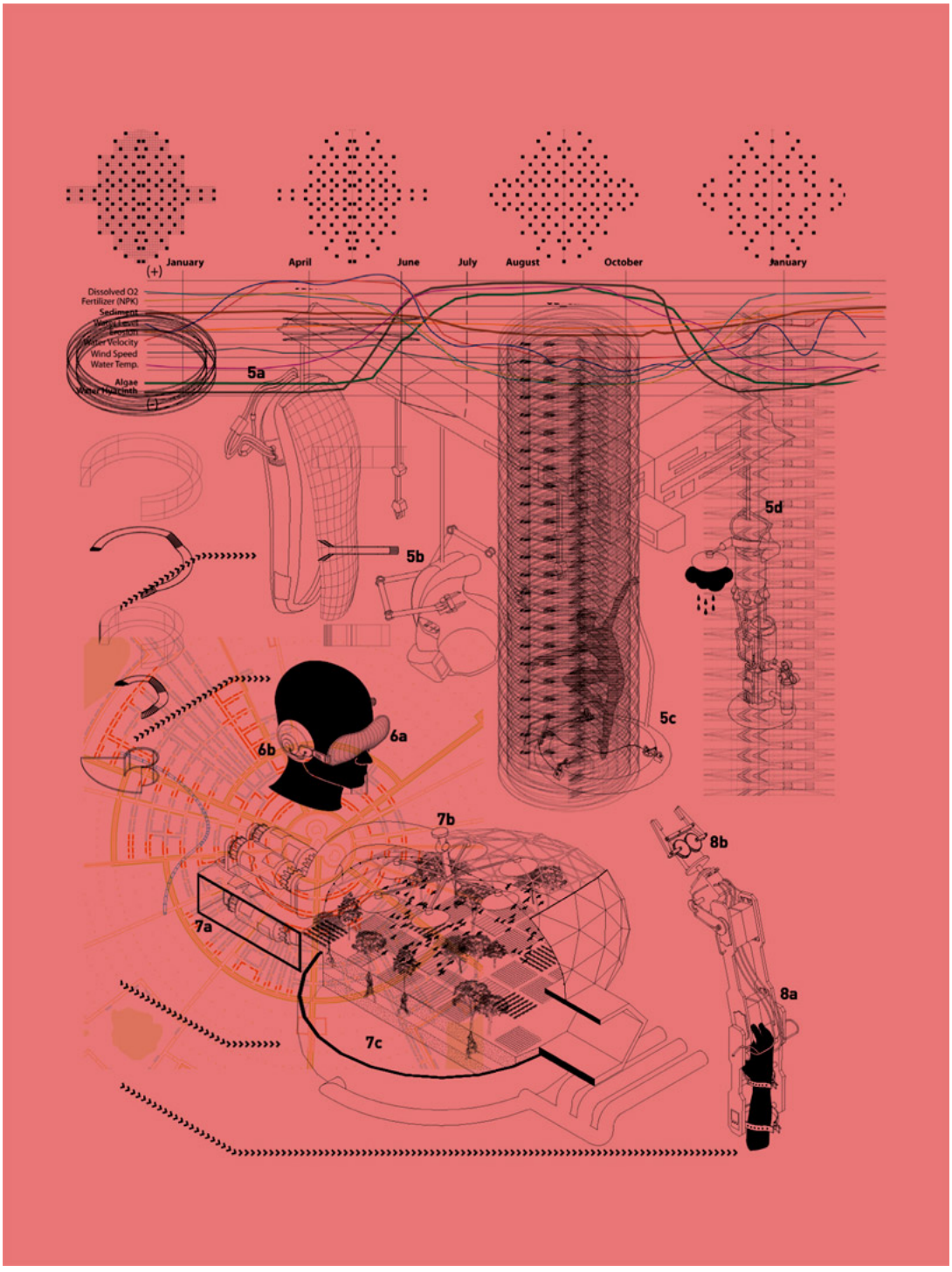

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A more empathetic urban planning. Precisely because it is more interactive; more transversal and informational, yet more convivial and relational.

Today it is not only about building or rebuilding, designing or managing the city but revitalizing and reactivating it. Integrating stimuli and points of reference, productive energies and collective projections—economic and spatial, social and cultural.

Today it is about moving from a (re)constructive model to a (re)generative model. An integrative model: destined to integrate, project—and reactivate—the city.

Making this a true generative environment capable of fostering the shift from a merely figurative or productive logic to a decidedly relational logic. Generative of relations of coexistence between the city and its territory but also between the city and its citizens (permanent or visiting), their expectations, their activities, their life spaces and their interactions with the environment itself.
We could talk, indeed, of a new kind of urban planning: an urban planning which is more empathetic precisely because it is integrating: in interaction with the environment (more sustainable), with the context (more sensitive), but also with the individual (more involved) and the contemporary culture itself (ie with a new society of creative information, exchange and innovation).

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