

Sites Of Time, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, 2000

Inscribing time in the city, and finding equivalents for a high-speed panoramic view which would retain the memory of the city and create another image of it, a "mega-city", a megalopolis. Tokyo-Kyoto by train. Beirut between destruction and construction, Boulogne-Billancourt in its temporal strata: three city-worlds filled with becoming and the fluidity of an ephemeral urban memory. The city, then, as the infinite envelope of all the actual and virtual circuits, as fabric and texture of branching time. By turns infinitesimal or suddenly accelerated and condensed, it is as if it has been chopped up by the kaleidoscopes and the superimpositions of memories and images. For in cities without centres, such as Tokyo, an urban sprawl 120 km long, a veritable amoeba, what can we remember and how can we restore the "back and forth" of time?

Let us create sites of time, on the brink of these faults and tears, always suspended from the event and the vertigo of a void. Let us make of these sites the "exact point of intersection between mind and matter" like a Bergsonian memory. Let us abandon chronological and linear memory, and construct in images an urban "constellation of time", between destruction and construction, growth and mutation. In short, let us reestablish the tradition of the arts of the theatres of memory dear to France Yates, where in order to remember, places and theatres of memory are constructed. For these sites will always be those of erasure, of the traces and strata of a fluctuating time, with its cuts, circuits, its changes and happenings. A double and infinitely redoubled time.

Taking the Shinkasen between Tokyo and Kyoto, you discover an endless urban expanse. And then you come back and you imagine a system for giving not a real image of everything you have seen, but an imaginary, machine-like image of the real, with its speed, its uniformity and its variations. It is a sequence of images, all filmed in real time at the train's speed. It is a double vision, "out and back", an immense tracking shot over 5 kilometres with two digitalised video tapes mixed with a computer. We pass through and "it" passes by: a shinto temple in the distance, a car park, a tree, and concrete, concrete, and more concrete as far as the eye can see, broken only by the odd landscaped area and the neon lights. In this immense "image-time" at the speed of the train, everything and nothing has happened. Time is a circle, a reversible becoming which defies death. As if my life could be this fluid out and back of the video and its in between. Japanese time, impermanence (*mujô*) and the ephemeral, a time of becoming which sharply contrasts with the immemorial and the pace of the 21st century. Between appearance and disappearance, the urban is here the landscape of "events" which Paul Virilio talked of.

More speed and double view, double tape of video images: Beirut, a city stricken by war, a city of colorful ruins, gutted at the centre, and a city undergoing reconstruction and speculation. Here the double view, one tape spooling left, the other to the right, becomes one of contrast. It is as if it were necessary to give a two-faced, multi-faced cartography of the city merely through the play of transparencies. In the treatment of the 15 layers of images superimposed by means of a computer and combined with computer-generated images, the city emerges in

its "mixed networks" and its ordered chaos of superimposed plans. Like a map which gradually fades, the centre of Beirut has imploded and the periphery proliferates. One thinks of Piranesi and his architecture of ruins and labyrinths. For on the gigantic screen stretched diagonally between earth and sky that is the nave of the Fabrika in Beirut, the video installation restored the city's old memory to its present-future and to its inhabitants. A real site of time and events. For what will remain of this filmed memory in a few years? An electronic network between reality and simulation, a distant and transformable space-time, like the Icarian view that viewers could have from the mezzanine of the Fabrika, by looking at aerial maps of the city.

Between simultaneous double view and Icarian view, Beirut is indeed the exemplary metaphor of our present. Everything moves, crosses and uncrosses and suddenly it slows down and becomes empty, the picture is frozen. I see. I see what Beirut used to be with its faded pastel colours, in the looks of these women and men who know what they have suffered and what their history has been. I see the ephemera of a time that is already nostalgic and the violence of another time that is being reconstructed. For the event that is Beirut is at the frontier of a void and a virtual-actual time, where a historic situation becomes transformed into a site of time. Like these contemporary forms of urban growth, made up of collages of architecture, factories, zones and places outside the time of general circulation, rhizome-like stations and airports.

Materialising the site of time. Giving it its cavern, its camera oscura, its projection room and its "in-situ" architecture. A well of light, an architecture in the dark, which can render visible all the strata of memory and the urban changes thanks to computer-generated images and to interactive systems. Boulogne-Billancourt, town of washerwomen and laundresses, town of J. E. Marey, of the cinema and the motors of a Taylorist industry (Renault), before being transformed into a town of information and new technology, emerges from this luminous well, an immense container of images and memories. Taking the staircase which leads us there, and following the route above which runs along it, we become like Icarus, operating audio and visual machines which make it possible to see a whole century of urban changes, like Jules-Etienne Marey, who loved machines of every kind. With his scientific fascination for time and movement, he had created the ultimate smoke machine, which permitted him to photograph its rising fumes and its wisps which become deformed when they meet a body. Flows and extra fast, ephemeral traces, and a brilliant anticipation of all our nebulous images. The site of time suspended from a fractal beauty.