LEONARDO LIPPOLIS

Leonardo Lippolis (Génova, 1974) é professor e historiador da arte. Tem trabalhado e escrito sobre os cruzamentos entre o espaço urbano, a arte e os movimentos revolucionários, interessando-se em especial pelas vanguardas históricas e pela experiência situacionista. Entre as suas publicações destacam-se: *Urbanismo unitario. Antologia situazionista* (Torino: Testo & Immagine, 2001); *La nuova Babilonia. Il progetto architettonico di una civiltà situazionista* (Milano: Costa & Nolan, 2007); *Viaggio al termine della città* (Milano: Eleuthera, 2009) e *La rivoluzione delle avanguardie in* P.P. Poggio, *L'altronovecento. Comunismo eretico e pensiero critico vol. I, L'età del comunismo sovietico. Europa 1900-1945* (Milano: Jacabook, 2010).

Foi a leitura do livro *Viaggio al termine della città*, editado em português com o título *Viagem aos confins da cidade – a metrópole e as artes no Outono pós-moderno (1972-2001)* (Lisboa: Antígona, 2016) que suscitou a vontade de conduzir esta entrevista. Uma "viagem" que reflete os limites do urbano e a dissolução da cidade contemporânea,

questionada a partir da arte e em especial da literatura e do cinema. A cronologia em questão situa-se entre duas derrocadas (tanto reais quanto simbólicas): a implosão do complexo norte--americano de habitação social conhecido por Pruitt-Igoe (1972) e a destruição terrorista das Twin Towers (2001), ambos acontecimentos televisionados em tempo real. A principal intenção foi interrogar o lugar do urbano hoje, entre violência e segurança. A cidade precisa de defesas ou de ser defendida?

Leonardo Lippolis (Genoa, 1974) is a teacher and art historian. He has worked on and written about the intersections between urban space, art and revolutionary movements, and is particularly interested in historical avantgarde movements and the Situationist experience. His publications include *Urbanismo unitario. Antologia situazionista* (Turin: Testo & Immagine, 2001); *La nuova Babilonia. Il progetto architettonico di una civiltà situazionista* (Milan: Costa & Nolan, 2007); *Viaggio al termine della città* (Milan: Eleuthera, 2009) and *La rivoluzi-*

one delle avanguardie in P. P. Poggio, *L'altronovecento. Comunismo eretico e pensiero critico vol. I, L'età del comunismo sovietico. Europa 1900–1945* (Milan: Jacabook, 2010).

Reading the book *Viaggio al termine della città*, published in Portuguese under the title *Viagem aos confins da cidade – a metrópole e as artes no Outono pós-moderno (1972–2001)* [Travel to the ends of the city – the metropolis and the arts in the Post-Modern Autumn] (Lisbon: Antígona, 2016), led us to conduct this interview found here. In this case, he undertakes a 'journey' that reflects the limits of the urban and the dissolution of the contemporary city, taking the arts, and literature and cinema in particular, as his starting point. The chronology in question lies between two overthrows (real and symbolic): the implosion of the American social housing complex known as Pruitt-Igoe (1972) and the terrorist destruction of the Twin Towers (2001), both televised in real time. Our main intention was to interrogate the place of the urban today, between violence and security. Does the city need defences or to be defended?

com **LEONARDO LIPPOLIS**

CONDUZIDA POR MARGARIDA TAVARES DA CONCEIÇÃO E RENATA ARAUJO

Entrevista

RHA – At the beginning of the book, you cite Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, which suggests the viewpoint of someone perceiving a loss that is both inescapable and paradoxical. It seems as though we, the "ultra-urban" beings of today, will be the ones to witness the end of the organism in which we live. In this sense, can the "journey to the end of the city" be read as engaging with the conceptual boundaries, the limits of the urban notion itself?

LL – I think that's right, the city will no longer be the one we are familiar with, I think there's any doubt about that. Calvino wrote *Invisible Cities* in 1972 and I chose a quote from it partly because this coincidence of time is not a matter of chance. In 1972 Calvino, the Situationist International and others, all coming from very different angles, foresaw the death of the traditional city, and it is obvious that the rapid changes of subsequent years can only have aggravated this prospect. Besides, my book, which is around ten years old now, stops at 2001, which I chose as the historical end point of my research because of the symbolic value of the Twin Towers. Almost another twenty years have passed by since 2001 and there's nothing to indicate that there's likely to be a reversal of the trend as regards the key factors in those changes. Those conceptual city boundaries, I believe, have already been crossed by the visionary capacity and intellectual acuity of some of the period's discerning analysts. Let's not forget that Louis Chevalier wrote *The Assassination of Paris* in 1968. These days those prophetic views are becoming clear to everyone, they're almost clichés, because in fact we are all inhabiting an urban environment that is completely new and has yet to be analysed in any innovative way. I think that such an analysis, as is so often the case, won't come from architects and urban planners, but from poets, writers, film makers and theorists of one sort or another. Myself, I don't have the critical apparatus to offer an analytical interpretation of what's happening, partly because you'd need to travel a lot to see it with your own

eyes, but I can still feel how rapid the changes are and how the ground under the analyst's feet keeps shifting.

RHA – Going back in time, the city took shape first of all as a citadel, a sanctuary (walls and boundaries) that in a sense also represented salvation from primitive violence (as evoked by founding myths). But the *polis* is also a place of politics and a space where the community of citizens finds representation and freedom. Don't you think that the duality of physical safety and citizens' freedom has always been part of the city's defining matrix?

LL – Yes, in a historical sense. In the Middle Ages "the air of the city brought freedom" because it liberated the peasants from the chains of servitude and dependence to which they were subjected in the countryside, and because its walls offered protection. Physical security and freedom went hand in hand. Now I'd say that the nature of the discussion has changed. Historically, in the pre-modern era, the city offered liberation from the oppressive ties of tradition and closed communities, but with the advent of capitalism it has increasingly become an instrument of its own processes of alienation, culminating in our present times, when it has lost not only its walls but its very boundaries, its *limes*, and the dual sense of protection and freedom has disappeared. The function of the sacred has been assumed by the new temples to consumerism, the shopping malls (as Ballard pointed out). The heart of the city has lost its purpose as a place to live and has been reduced to a cold administrative centre, or a tourist shop window, and freedom has been replaced by anonymity. Isolation, the dismantling of social ties, the destruction of neighbourhoods, the death of the high street: the city's charter has been redefined by this temporal process that is destroying urban life. The whole organisation of urban space conspires to negate the historical nature of the city as a place of encounters and possibilities. The sequence of random anonymous spaces and the decline of public spaces, seen as dangerous places that must be avoided, have turned our cities into dead cities, places where individuals are condemned to isolation, reclusiveness, and reciprocal surveillance. Physical safety and freedom have become over-abused words, nothing more than electoral propaganda slogans, the inverse of the noble meaning they had in the past.

RHA – In any event, as far as the Ancient Greeks were concerned, such an equilibrium implied a balanced urban dimension. Does that mean that the modern megalopolis, which has grown so big that its boundaries have disappeared, is in principle barbaric?

LL – To follow on from what I said earlier, yes, I believe so. Migration phenomena are going to rise exponentially, as a result of the ongoing environmental catastrophe, which is the prime cause of exodus and war, as can be seen in the case of Syria:

Demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, 1972, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research.

the disaster that confronts us today was triggered by a climate crisis, an exceptional drought that dried up the countryside, and forced thousands of peasants to move to the outskirts of the big cities, prompting a situation of overcrowding that then gave rise to civil war. Migrants are clearly the new barbarians, as we are reminded by daily xenophobic propaganda, and the walls that once defended cities are now the walls of Fortress Europe. As a result new barbaric forms of urban living are emerging; the Calais jungle was in fact a city, for the time being separate from the body of the great metropolises, but it's easy to imagine that in a not too distant future other jungles will grow up as peripheral extensions to the metropolises, as indeed already happens in the megalopolises of the Third and Fourth Worlds. Migratory exodus, whether within a nation, as in Syria, or coming from outside, is already the matrix of the present day. For the moment the city is still viewed, at least by us in Europe, as a system that needs to be modernized in order to neutral-ize these barbarisms, but it's inevitable that in a short space of time they will make an increasingly significant mark on the urban form.

RHA – From another point of view, fear cannot be separated from the human condition. The city is fearful, and has always been so. These days fear is unrelenting and widespread. How do you see this fear, in a diachronistic sense? To what extent has the absence of actual walls caused forms of defence and exclusion to multiply?

LL – I'll answer this difficult question with a tangible example, which will help to better explain this relationship between city, fear and walls. China is, across all

spheres, including city planning, the laboratory of the future. Indeed, in the Chinese megalopolises housing tens of millions of inhabitants they are experimenting with the most extreme forms of urban change.

Shoubaozhuang, Dashengzhuang and Laosanyu are three of the sixteen urban villages wedged between two industrial zones on the extreme periphery of Beijing, which in recent years has seen an influx of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the countryside, who by day go to work in the metropolis, drawn by the economic boom, and by night return to the village to sleep. The Chinese administration has decided to seal off these villages, forcibly segregating the inhabitants, who are kept in by barriers, constantly supervised by the police who check their identity as they come in and go out, subjected to a nocturnal curfew and monitored by a video surveillance system. There is only one access point that is open twenty-four hours a day and only those who have a pass can go through it; the other gates close at 11 pm and reopen at 6 am. By day the prisoners in this town/jail can only go in and out with a pass that confirms their identity, their ethnic origin, their occupation and a telephone number. So, in the urban context, the workforce in one of the fastest developing places in the world is brutally controlled, using the rhetoric of security.
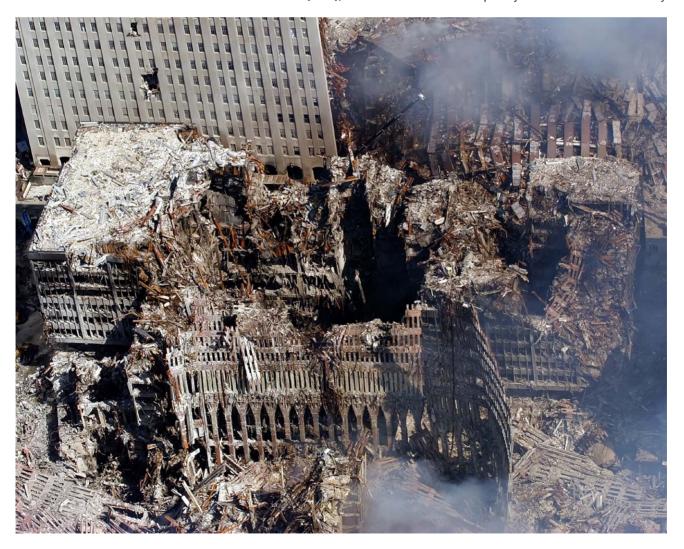
There is a flip side to the sixteen village/prisons for immigrants from the countryside: the nine satellite cities planned for the Shanghai middle classes, who are in the grip of a security neurosis caused by the continually expanding megalopolis and prefer to desert the city, taking refuge in fortified citadels constructed specifically to meet their demands. This is the project called One City, Nine Towns, devised for a million Chinese belonging to the affluent classes: ten gated communities "on a human scale", each accommodating a maximum of a hundred thousand inhabitants, built around Shanghai by top architectural studios in Europe and the USA, each one replicating a typical European townscape. There's a little London with a few red telephone boxes with signs in Chinese, Victorian houses and villas, a statue of Churchill and a copy of Bristol cathedral almost seventy metres high. There's a little Paris with a replica of the Eiffel Tower, the Champs Elysées and the Arc de Triomphe. Then there's a German Weimar Village, a little Amsterdam, Venice with navigable canals, and so on. In practice, what these cities have in common is that they are luxury dormitory towns: in the mornings they empty out their rich inhabitants, who head off to work in Shanghai, and then they are deserted all day long, patrolled only by teams of street security guards and by squadrons of underpaid immigrants who keep this human and social desert clean. While the old working-class quarters of Shanghai are razed to the ground in the name of economic growth, and age-old ways of life and social relationships are buried under the rubble, the idea of happiness in the advance of the new is clearly visible in the tidiness, geometry and silence of these still-born cities.

In my view, it is in this dichotomy between fortress and withdrawal, which affects the rich as well as the poor, that we see the tangible evidence and dissemination of an obsession with fear, as well as the demise of urban civilisation.

RHA – You quote Bauman, who held that there is no more effective form of social control than the insecurity that threatens those who are controlled. This points to a new invasive and far-reaching totalitarianism, reinforcing a paranoid dimension to security. How do you see this internalisation of control, which is paradoxically responsible for attitudes of constant exposure and vigilance, and whose price seems to be the loss of privacy?

LL – The citizen who starts to police himself is the most worrying aspect of post-modern decline. The problem is the feeling of fear and paranoia that breeds in this dynamic and feeds off it, and which could one day spill over in a worrying way. Looking at the cinema of dystopia, "The Purge" is a prophetic film (actually a series of films, since the first episode was very successful, unsurprisingly): in the near future (2022), when crime has been completely controlled and the security

Ground Zero, New York City 17 Sept. 2001. U.S. Navy photo by Chief Photographer's Mate Eric J. Tilford.

paradigm, the paranoid dimension of security, has become the matrix of ordinary life, "purge night" is introduced, twelve hours in which all laws are suspended, the police are stood down, and everyone can give free rein to their own criminal impulse and instinct for revenge, with no fear of punishment. There's no doubt that the film is an excellent depiction of a fantasy that is attractive to millions of people, to a greater or lesser extent, but it's the dark and desperate urban atmosphere that it evokes, in all its hyperrealism, that is the real vehicle for its message. It's because the urban space is so familiar that the spectator perceives the dystopia as realistic. According to Letterist International, it is the setting that determines the action, and cities that are already so paranoid and desolate are bound to provoke more or less legalised "purge nights".

On the other hand, isn't it obvious that the culture of suspicion underpinning the spreading paranoia about security is inherent in the basic logic of functionalism, in other words in the fact that an inhabitant of the metropolis becomes suspect if he or she does something that doesn't accord with one of the four anthropo-logical-urbanistic doctrines of the Athens Charter? Something that has no value in the production/consumption/recreation cycle has less and less right to exist in the city; it's not just a superfluous activity, but a forbidden activity. The request for greater security, a priority for all governments of "affluent" countries, centres precisely on the idea of making urban life even more sterile and anonymous. It is the direct consequence of the isolation forced upon individuals in cities when the organisation of space and daily life disrupts the social bonds and ways of living that were typical of the old urban fabric. It's obvious that streets whose only pur-pose is shopping and which become empty as soon as the productive cycle of the day comes to an end will become inhospitable and "dangerous", because they no longer accommodate stable social relations. A few years ago, Bob Dylan was spot-ted wandering in a residential quarter of New York. When a police patrol, failing to recognise him, asked him what he was doing, he answered deadpan that he was just looking around and strolling aimlessly. This simple statement was enough to put him into police custody, and he was only released when the cops discovered his identity. This small example gives a good idea of how modern cities are structured, and the increasingly limited ways in which they can be used.

RHA – Since the 2001 terrorist attack in particular, there's been a growing militarisation of the urban landscape and way of life. Are we moving towards fortified cities? Do digital monitoring and air surveillance represent the new paradigm of contemporary fortification?

LL – Talking about 2001, I must tell you what happened less than two months be-fore that attack in my home town, Genoa, which hosted the G8 world summit. The summit was held at the Doge's Palace, close to the medieval centre (very sprawl-ing, completely pedestrian and still ungentrified in many places), which was locked

down for the occasion with metal grilles three metres high, closing it off from the rest of the city for several days, so that it was only accessible to residents. As we all know, there were protests that developed into guerrilla warfare, spread through the whole city and were violently repressed by the police, resulting in the assassination of a protestor. The legacy of this fortification experiment, the normalisation of this exceptional set of circumstances, was that many small alleys in the historic centre (narrow pedestrian streets, only a few feet wide) were closed off with gates. Basically many streets where there was no commercial activity or anything that made them likely to be frequented by significant numbers of people, which would prevent them from appearing unsafe, were closed with gates and only the residents were given keys. The labyrinthine beauty of Genoa's historic centre was thus sacrificed in the name of a rhetoric of security and decline, without any public debate. This is a small but significant example of how public space is now perceived by those of us in the West. It's true that technology will allow the implementation of such archaic systems (walls, gates), responding to the need for control and security, but at the moment what I find more frightening are directives and initiatives like this one that alter and shape communal ways of life. Cities of culture are obsessed with the need to neuter any form of spontaneous social life on the part of the residents because of the image they want to sell to tourists: urban life is becoming inundated with regulations: rules that forbid eating a sandwich in the street, sitting on the steps of a church, playing football, or walking dogs. The working classes have been banished from historic centres for decades (with a few exceptions, like Naples), but now life has become impossible for all residents. In Venice, following on the heels of Barcelona, it's no surprise that we've begun to see residents protesting in various ways against this touristic exploitation of the city.

RHA – In your book you cite "Fortress Los Angeles" as an example of this type of vigilantopolis and you make reference to a city split into wealthy and poor quarters, where the former voluntarily shut themselves up in residential compounds protected by security, and the latter are restricted to ghettoised neighbourhoods. In this "carceral archipelago", do you see some glimmer of hope, some possibility of escape?

LL – Glimmers of hope and hybrid zones still exist, nothing is definitive. The "end of history", postulated by Fukuyama and cherished by weak postmodern thinking, has turned out to be a hoax. History, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, is not a linear and inevitable process, there are always break points and unpredictable leaps. It is true that the slippery slope of Western capitalism seems to be an unstoppable descent towards the abyss, and especially towards catastrophe in terms of the climate and the environment. However, something necessarily remains, and so the ways of life that today are resisting the totalitarianism of capitalism could perhaps flourish again at some future point. The favelas in South American cities, rebelling against World

Cup regeneration plans, show that material poverty is not the yardstick for making decisions about urban zones considered by their residents to be much more habitable than so many of the anonymous districts that are unloved by their inhabitants. The great city centre of Naples, the only city in western Europe that is still lived in by ordinary people and hasn't been turned into a business and tourist centre, continues to provide living evidence of what a city should represent, with its relationships, its chaos and its vitality. It's true that we're talking here about residual phenomena, but since history doesn't proceed in a straight line and the final word hasn't been written, it's impossible to be sure that things won't change direction. What I believe is that the possibilities for change are linked to forms of life shared by ordinary people rather than to the traditional political battles of militants. That is to say, the "rebel cities" described by Harvey, referencing Lefebvre's "right to the city", are not those connected to the various Occupy movements, politicised around specific demands, but those inhabited by a population that is still full of life, that takes many forms, that is chaotic, unregimented and not resigned to the obligatory pathways that capitalism forces upon on us in its totalitarian way. Despite its need to obliterate space, in practice capital cannot do so completely, and in the gap created by the contrast between this urge and the real life of the city, unforeseen spaces open up, offering the potential for people to appropriate them and live in them in a different way.

Fifty years down the line, despite the fact that neighbourhoods and their models of social interchange have irretrievably disappeared, the antiutilitarian practices proposed by the Situationists remain achievable and valid: using social space-time creatively, reclaiming abandoned spaces in order to practice modes of self-management, rebuilding forms of community and social relations, these are all types of protest that are certainly still possible and that demonstrably attract people who have not surrendered to impotence. In this sense, I think that the playful behaviour of drifting and psychogeography still has a powerful currency. If there is to be a new protest movement, it will grow out of new behaviours and ways of life, rather than from economic claims or assertions of rights.

RHA – In your book, you recognise that the "melancholia of art" tries to propose "heterotopias" (Michel Foucault) and to "invent the practice of everyday life" (Michel de Certeau), yet you accuse both these approaches of lacking the courage to think in a revolutionary way about the world's destiny. Where do you think the possibility of transformation resides?

LL – I think that the only hope of salvation lies in an ecological outlook. We have now fully entered the Anthropocene Era, which some people prefer to call, less ambiguously, the Capitalocene Era, and I believe that an awareness of what is at stake, and the environmental campaigns that follow on from this, are the essential prerequisites for once more giving meaning to collective life. Even cities can

be saved if only that awareness can evolve into new ways of living. As I've said, I don't believe in institutional change, handed down from above, but in the development of forms of living that address the fact that the engine of progress is headed towards an ever closer catastrophe, and that radical change is not utopia but the only possibility of salvation. The news itself shows how the question of territory is becoming increasingly central, so much so that these days the main social protest movements are linked to themes which no longer have anything to do with the economically based categories popular with the traditional left, but with concerns about the quality of daily life for people and communities. A concrete example of this debate in Italy is the No TAV movement [a protest against the proposed Turin-Lyon high speed rail project]. For capitalism, there is no distinction between city and countryside. Capitalism no longer has any concept of the city, to the extent that it has obliterated cities and destroyed them, because its only needs are to organise land in terms of its own utilitarian requirements. It is the land itself that must be a function of the economic machine. For capitalism, space itself is hostile, a waste of time, a glitch in the production-consumption cycle. The TAV project is a demonstration of this: the high-speed train is nothing more than an instrument for cancelling out the space between two cities, an instrument that brings yet more changes to the extra-urban space, what remains of valleys and countryside, as a function of a metropolis that itself no longer has any boundaries. Not wanting to see their own land ravaged by the absurd necessity for high speed, the inhabitants of Val Susa have therefore implemented a practical critique of capitalism's demands. Something similar happened in the ZAD protest movement against the construction of an airport outside Nantes, in Brittany. Here too we should not be fooled by the fact that the protest is palpably decentralised in relation to the urban fabric, given that the space conceived by these operations is intrinsically and constitutionally urban. The Situationists suggested that the possibility of overthrowing the dominating, totalitarian yoke of economics could only spring from a project consisting of self-construction and self-management of shared experiences. With the addition of a necessary ecological conscience, this critical juncture seems even more apparent today. Protests that defend a different way of perceiving space and living in it, and thus invent a new imaginary and new ways of life – these seems to me to offer a possible turning point for resisting the race towards disaster.

Translated from Italian by Ana Yokochi (Kennis Translations)