

SUGARCANE(AIR)FIELDS: THE EFFECTS OF THE AEROTROPOLIS ON THE EVOLUTION OF PLACE

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Abstract

Instant urbanism – a description applicable to the proposed new urban form of the 21st-century future city, termed the 'aerotropolis'. Encompassing strategic performance-based development that is established in infrastructure planning, airport cities are commercially propagated to generate economic growth via the catalytic development of surrounding regions. But to what effect?

Synonymous with homotopia, as implied by the sprouting of non-places across the globe, the aerotropolis is associated with globalisation, supermodernity and mobility. Whilst the current age of mobility is characterised by speed, networking and power; it also entails the interconnectedness of experiences in a time-space continuum, and infers a range of cultural, social and historical aspects, rich with physical and psychological configurations.

In order to probe the aforementioned implications, the investigation will be conducted in and around the site of the Dube Tradeport – an aerotropolis located on a greenfield site on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The north coast is characterised by an abundant topographical and cultural landscape, manifest in material and symbolic geographies. The region is a vague space in a state of flux and tension, as intensified by the introduction of the aerotropolis, which may exacerbate global networks of flow, accelerated patterns of growth, and instant impact in the region's development; and/or offer opportunities for the creation of place that counteracts alienation, and encourages the pursuit of meaning via experience, association and belonging; and/or present an inbetween condition – an encounter with otherness.

Drawing on post-structuralism and phenomenology, the framework of psychogeography will be engaged in order to interrogate the ecological and psychological impacts of the aerotropolis on the evolution of the region. The term 'evolution' will be interpreted in relation to the continuum of time and identity; thereby focusing the study on aspects of perception, imagination and memory.

Keywords: aerotropolis, cultural landscape, memory, mobilities, psychogeography, situationist international.

INTRODUCTION

This study is motivated by the author's interest in the topic, which is based on a dissatisfaction with an existing practice of the 'visionary' design of the aerotropolis that is driven primarily by economic mechanisms. It also stems from the author's personal experience regarding an emotional attachment to place, which may be threatened or enhanced by the presence of the Dube Tradeport aerotropolis in the region of eThekweni, South Africa.

The author adopts a position that accepts the occurrence of the aerotropolis as inevitable, hence does not seek to interrogate it specifically, but proposes that ecological and psychological impacts of the aerotropolis on the evolution of place be examined. The aim of the study is to raise awareness around the associated effects of the aerotropolis through 'other' means of analyses that establish connections between psychology and architectural discourse, by referring to psychogeography and the Situationist International, in order to investigate those qualities that could ensure the continuum of time and identity of a specific context.

The paper is structured to begin briefly with the development of Durban and its subsequent regional growth, followed by recognising evident parallels between modernity, the aerotropolis and its correlation with mobilities within evolving contemporary society. Enquiry is undertaken into the relationships between these environments and the human body and psyche via emotional geographies, associated with perception, memory and imagination in the ecology of place (topographical and cultural landscapes). These aspects contribute to understanding the dependency of people and place on movement, which is probed via revolutionary ideas envisaged as attempts for urban evolution needed within modern society. Rather than drawing exhaustive conclusions, concerns are identified to prompt the need for a change in attitude,

further investigation into alternative approaches, and the generation of new interpretations in response to the existing developmental frameworks of the aerotropolis.

(D) URBAN EVOLUTION

Places are about relationships, about the placings of materials and system[s]...located in relation to sets of objects [and] through subjects and their uniquely human meanings and interactions.... Places also carry traces of the memories of different social groups who have lived in or passed through that place (Urry 2005, p. 80).

Durban began at the Bay of Natal. The historic, cultural, economic and spatial development of the region may be associated with Tim Ingold's taskscapes, which comprises "networks of paths [that] show the sedimented activity of a community stretching over many generations" (ibid.). As a 'migrant' home to a majority of Zulu, Indian and European settlers, who arrived at the Bay or hills of the coast either by trek or ship; the movement of people, their patterns of settlement, and activities of trade contributed to the development of Durban's port and its surrounding regions, where the sugar industry marked an important development in both the city and north coast (Weinberg, Robbins and Mhlope 2002, p. viii).

Not negating that the growth and trade of sugar entailed indentured labour, it contributed to the resultant social and environmental landscapes of the region, which is evidence that – no matter how contentious – "social and natural history combine in often unpredictable ways to engender emotional attachments" (Smith 2005, p. 221). However, whilst the evolution of eThekweni has embraced these qualitative characteristics specific to place, by contrast the aerotropolis is one of homogenised economic spatial frameworks developed quantitatively by business mechanisms, engineering and town planning methodologies, established as a new urban order of instant existence.

So although the Dube Tradeport aerotropolis further emphasises the north coast as a place of movement (in addition to its historic aspects of settlement migration and trade movements) by prompting circulation and exchanges within a contemporary global context, it may restructure the region as one of "intense and heightened consumption" (Urry 2005, p. 79). Thus, the established topographical and cultural landscapes of the region are now 'evolving' into the Dube Tradeport aerotropolis, thereby raising concerns of not only its effects on the physical context but also the "effect that one's current ecology of place is having in emotional terms, as well as the potential effects that changing this ecology might bring" (Conradson 2005, p. 108).

AEROTROPOLIS: THE (MODERNIST) CITY OF THE FUTURE

The goal of modernity was "to write the future ahead of time, to invent a future that could be planned, universalised" (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 110) through the establishment of a dominant order adopted and supported on a global scale – characteristics synonymous with the aerotropolis. The aerotropolis is defined by economy-dominated time (ibid., p. 76) circumscribed to the heaviness of time and a 'drudgery of place' (Urry 2005, p. 80) due to its development in a self-referential context of immediacy focused on the 'end' in which "shared memory cease[s] to be the obligatory reference for creating" place (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 84).

Thus, as opposed to acknowledging the origins of place, it is grounded in a fixation with the globally shared doctrine of functional, technological and economic mechanisms. The aerotropolis expresses the modernist and industrialised ideology of separation, autonomy and repetition imposed on a chosen site by "arranging objects, plugging in or assembling networks or components" (ibid., p. 72). And, just as the dominance of modernity's "predetermined closure to the alien otherness of nature" and its utilitarian paradigms marginalised the significance of natural environments as modes that affect ways of 'being-in-the-world' (Smith 2005, p. 219); so too does the abstracted, disembodied and disengaged aerotropolis "assist in this 'desubstantialisation' of place" (Urry 2005, p. 81) via the removal of meaning and subsequent 'decontextualisation' (Leach 1999, p. 3).

However, although the aerotropolis may be decontextualised from its topographical and cultural landscapes, it is 'recontextualised' within global discourse comprising distance, communication, travel and linkages that could invest it with another meaning (progress), within which Massey identifies a framework

that holds potential for the creation of a global sense of place (Massey 1994). She emphasises the importance of globalisation and mobilities, positing that the character and progression of a local place “can only be constructed by linking that place to places beyond” (Massey 1994). Whilst this may be characteristic of the aerotropolis via associated mobility networks, the significance of the “specificity from [an] accumulated history of a place” cannot be negated; for as opposed to either being in flux or stasis, the distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations and multiple identities contributes to the perception of place as process (Massey 1994).

THE SHOCK OF OBSCENITY

The aerotropolis may share similarities with Baudrillard’s hyperreality that depicts “a world that has lost touch with its referents in the real world” – a weakness of “the cult of commodity under capitalism”, which reduces society to mere representation rather than ontological experience (Leach 1999, p. 3). Expressed as a condition of excess identifiable within the information society; the ecstasy of communication, the culture of reification and the society of affluence – summarised by Jean Baudrillard as obscenity – are symptoms illustrating globalised contemporary life, which are so dominant “that society itself has become a spectacle” (Leach 1999).

The Society of the Spectacle, identified by Guy Debord and the Situationist International, refers to an obsession with consumption, commodification and simulation, through which society’s “primary moral deficiency remains indulgence, in all its forms” (Debord 1955, np), and where ethical interests are replaced with superficial preoccupations, resulting in a reality that is distorted and “remote from the actual concerns of everyday life” (Leach 1999, p. viii). James Burch refers to Kafka’s Little Fable to emphasise society’s own “restrictive socio-economic self-definitions” that have formulated the “boundaries of self-entrapment that perpetuates this misapprehended definition of human action” (Burch nd, p. 9). Similarly, in their sense of social commitment, the Situationists placed significance on human responsiveness and emotional attachment: class society and capitalist production had permeated all areas of social life, knowledge and culture, with the consequence that people are removed and alienated...from their own experiences, emotions, creativity, and desires. People are spectators of their own lives, and even the most personal gestures are experienced at one remove (Plant, cited in Leach 1999, p. 56).

Thus, these emotional attachments are produced by interactions between people and environments in a range of social and physical contexts that not only affect relationships with the past, present and future, but entail the replication of the external world, which Walter Benjamin terms mimesis: the human psyche is in essence an organic mechanism, which is constantly adapting to its physical surroundings. This adaptation has to be seen as a defensive mechanism predicated on survival. The human being, in this sense, is like a chameleon, governed by an instinctual urge to find similarities in the external environment, and, where none exist, to adapt itself to that environment (Leach 1999, p. 40).

Explained in reflexes of human beings in reaction to the effects of external environments (identified by Freud as protection against stimuli and reception of stimuli), mimesis may be related to his notion of consciousness and Marcel Proust’s *mémoire involontaire* respectively (ibid., p. 42): whereas the latter is premised on the involuntary recall of stored ‘stimuli’ in the mind, the former prevents the stimuli from “being retained within the memory, therefore act[ing] as a form of shock absorber, which limits the long-term damage of the shock” (ibid., p. 43).

Hence, because “attributes to the body reflect deeper cultural conditions”, consciousness and mimesis are essential in negotiating impulses and experiences of everyday contemporary life in which commodification, technological and machine-like traits of environments such as the aerotropolis could be replicated in the behaviour of human beings. “Just as for [Georg] Simmel the abstracted circulation of capital in a society dominated by exchange value came to be reflected in the abstract circulation of individuals in the modernist metropolis, so too for [Jean] Baudrillard has the mechanisation of the lifeworld in a society dominated by technology been replicated in the dominant functionalist attitude to the body” (ibid., p. 74).

Although mimesis may be considered a response to shock, it also threatens the longevity of identities and memories based on people’s attachments to place. As adaptive survival, the mimicry necessitated by the imposition of the aerotropolis on the existing topographical and cultural landscape could endanger original

emotional attachments that are “integral to how places are imagined and portrayed, with profound implications for the embodied experiences” (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005, p. 6).

HYBRID ECOLOGIES

The artificial production of the aerotropolis in an established context may be likened to the modernist city, which “generally refused to engage in dialogue...and appear[ed] to have come from elsewhere and claimed that surroundings are a mistake; they don’t exist” (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 105). Just as Le Corbusier was fascinated by the “gesture of wiping out the past...[and] replacing the world with another world, a wholly different one”, the aerotropolis is in effect “the remaking of another world [that] presuppose[s] the destruction of the old one[s]” (ibid., p. 96).

As “environments of memory” (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005, p. 9), the existence of society dissolves when places are annihilated – referred to as *topocide* (Porteous, cited in Jones 2005, p. 215) – thereby threatening relationships between landscape and the self. The acknowledgement of place is therefore essential as it is “attentive to both the embodied and intersubjective dimensions of human feeling” (Conradson 2005, p.105) and attachments that are crucial to the preservation and vitality of both topographical and cultural landscapes “as vessels of daily life, economic activity, quality experiences, and intangible values and meanings” (The IFLA Cultural Landscape Committee 2013): cultural Landscapes are shaped at a focused moment, and are created over time or are associated with cultural beliefs and identity of peoples. They contribute to society by providing inspiration, understanding and appreciation of past places and cultures. They express...meanings, offering insights and providing a continuum of land use and history across generations that roots people to the planet....Cultural Landscapes of all types, land and water, as well as all scales, history and meaning and their contexts, are globally, nationally, regionally and locally significant resources. Culture and nature co-exist with these landscapes...They comprise real places (ibid.).

Engagement between people, things, environments and their related emotional attachments forms an ecology of place (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005, p. 1), which is emphasised in Hans-Georg Gadamer’s concept of effective history as it “provides us with a particular cultural ‘home’” (Smith 2005, p. 222). Thus, the self emerges by “calling upon one’s previous experiences so as to feel/know how the sense of what is expressed is similar to and differs from what has gone before” (ibid. p. 227). It is shaped by wider relational contexts and exchanges (the here and now or the there and then), which impact on affective and emotional outcomes such as perceptions and interpretations, memory and imagination (Conradson 2005, p. 106):

When the self is understood as a complex relational entity, capable of making and sustaining connections with other bodies across a range of times and places, then it becomes possible to appreciate how context exercises some influence upon human feeling. Such an approach certainly aids our understanding of the felt dimensions of self-landscape encounters, whilst also helping us to account for variation in individual experience and interpretation of particular landscape elements. It also highlights the contemporary significance of mobility and relocation for the reflexive management of one’s emotions (ibid. p. 114).

Thus, a hybrid ecology exists between the self, place, and time. The conscious and unconscious interact constantly in both the construction and interpretation of the environment, thereby influencing spatial practices and the shaping of identity. Spatialised moments, sequences, encounters, and terrains accumulate as vast stores of past geographies that are inscribed into minds and bodies, which re-form with other places and events when remembered. “Memory is not just a retrieval from the past or of the past, it is always a fresh, new creation where memories are retrieved into the conscious realm and something new is created” (Jones 2005, p. 208). Thus, memories inform identity through an ecology of the self, which is always in flux and related to the “socio-spatial mediation and articulation” of emotion (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005, p. 3).

This spatialisation of memories is therefore significant in “the construction of our ongoing emotional and imaginative geographies” (Jones 2005, p. 210). Whereas Proust’s *mémoire involuntaire* implies “sudden sharp moments when the impression of some past place or event springs fully formed into one’s mind”, Bachelard’s notion of *reverie* describes an episode of memory that allows the “consciousness to slip back towards a more dreamlike state, where the imagination, freed from all the firm direction of focused thought and action, can begin to ‘drift’ back into all the remembered spaces, events and feelings which are not in our

minds" (ibid. p. 209). Hence, there can be no definitive distinction between memory and imagination: imagination is employed in the act of recall, and "in imagining something, in exploring it imaginatively we use memory" (Warnock, cited in Jones 2005, p. 210).

MOVEMENT(S) TOWARD URBAN (R)EVOLUTION

Primarily responses to "emotions of some past encounter rather than the [sequential] narrative of that encounter" (Jones 2005, p. 210), description and narrative aid in articulating the spatialities of memories and imagination; where the interactions of people with environments is shaped in the pursuit of meaning, based on experience, association and belonging (Coates 2012). Thus, the reading of environments through an understanding of place assists in developing the quality of experiences of the world through the social construction of lived space.

Similarly, the Situationist International established an approach toward the Society of the Spectacle in order to substantiate society's existence and stimulate "creative re-readings...to be more fully alive" (Burch nd, p. 11). They achieved this via the play between the existing abstract context and alienation of the capitalist society, and the practice of readjustment and experience. By reacting within an objective framework, they responded with a "revolution of radical subjectivity" (ibid. p. 10). Hence, the built environment featured prominently in the Situationists' analysis of contemporary society due to the direct relationship of architecture and urbanism in social concerns, through which psychogeography defined "the groping search for a new way of life" (Debord 1955, np).

Debord defined psychogeography as "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals,...[and the] influence on human feelings" (1955, np). By contrast Bondi, Davidson and Smith argue for "a non-objectifying view of emotions as relational flows, fluxes or currents, in-between people and places, rather than 'things' or 'objects' to be studied or measured" (2005, p. 3). Correspondingly, Harrison postulates that "there is something about 'emotional experiences' that eludes our attempts at recollection, which resist representation" (cited in Jones 2005, p. 205); but again, the Situationists differ in perspective. Rather, ecological and psychogeographical maps are used to represent experiences in a renovated cartography that is "the arrangement of the elements of the urban setting, in close relation with the sensations they provoke" (Debord 1955, np) engaging enlivened frames of reference and situations.

Whereas a 'situation' constitutes a "form of active, spatio-temporal engagement" it differs from Lefebvre's notion of the 'moment', which "remained somewhat passive"; albeit both share the "fleeting, intensely euphoric sensation that appeared as a point of rupture revealing the totality of possibilities of daily existence" (Leach 1999, p. 60). Lefebvre's rhythm analysis depicts this use of time and space to capture the multiple rhythms of everyday life and the implications in urban nature (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, Schmid 2008, p. 15). Thus, places depend upon movement reflected in the "accumulated imprint of countless journeys that have been made" as people go about their everyday lives (Urry 2005, p. 80).

However, the movements and psychological impacts of everyday life vary depending on the environments of the individuals within them. This is apparent in Simmel's comparison between metropolitan individuals and those who live in the countryside, which reveals associations in systems of conscious human behaviour in different environments (Leach 1999, p. 33). Whilst the life of the rural individual is distinguished by steady and familiar patterns accommodated with little mental effort due to the "slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm", thereby "appeal[ing] 'at a more unconscious level' to feelings and emotional relationships"; the life of the metropolitan individual is characterised by the "registering of the fragmentary and irregular impulses of the city, experienced as an "intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli", thereby resulting in "greater expenditure of mental energy...grasped at a more "abstracted, intellectual level" (ibid.). They develop a "disinterested form of movement that echoes the circulation of money...[and]...replicates the movement of the machine" (Leach 1999).

However, Simmel identifies an alternative defensive mechanism required to survive within the capitalist conditions, mental impulses and overstimulation of the city: the blasé, which is an adaptive phenomenon that renounces neurological responses to metropolitan life (ibid. p. 34). At the basis of it lies a 'trancelike state' initially articulated by Charles Baudelaire who observed the metropolis as a "mesmerising site" (ibid. p.

36). Although similar, the difference between Simmel and Baudelaire's observations is that the blasé is "the distracted engagement with the world" (ibid. p. 88) defined by physical circulation that involves mental detachment from modern life or desensitisation from overstimulation; whereas the 'trancelike state' entails 'roaming' that is fueled by sensory "stimulation and intoxication" via the imaginative perceptions of the city (ibid. p. 36). The latter is synonymous with the Surrealists who, like Benjamin (via his 'meandering' flâneur), saw the "city as enchantment" (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 74). Therefore, unlike the blasé individual, Benjamin's flâneur is "the urban dawdler...not a creature of the crowd,...[but] 'someone abandoned in the crowd'" who surrenders to the intoxication of the commodity that surrounds him (Leach 1999, p. 39).

Thus, whilst a blasé attitude may be induced as a numbing effect to the shock of contemporary life, it is also liberating for "reenchanting, seeing again, rereading things that are already ancient, as well as inventing things that do not yet exist" (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 110). Herein lies the paradox: if enchantment is an obscured reality that can be considered the 'other' to abstracted rationality, then the city is enslaved by a "false consciousness...that has adopted new guises in the supposedly progressive, fashionable world of the commodity" (Leach 1999, p. 38). Through his psychoanalytical account "that the mind is what is anaesthetised by the continual shocks of contemporary existence" (ibid. p. 40), Benjamin proposes that it is the "task of the responsible individual to see through this myth [of commodification] – to demythologise the world" (ibid. p. 38).

The Situationists' primary concept to combat the spectacle engaged the strategy of *détournement*: a subversive means to reappropriate society by a reversal of perspective (ibid. p. 58). It involved the "rationally constructed theory of the Spectacle and an insistence on the presence of some 'other', [where] the boundaries of the Spectacle are subverted toward subjective ends" (Burch, nd, p. 11). *Détournement* resulted in "the mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the bringing together of two independent expressions, supersed[ing] the original elements and produc[ing] a synthetic organisation of greater efficacy" (Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, cited in Burch n.d, p. 11). For emphasis, Debord refers to de Chirico's paintings, which exert a subjective effect on objective architectural origins thereby transforming them. The Situationists "recognised that 'emotions, desires and experiences' differed 'according to the architecture of a space, and the arrangement of colours, sounds, textures and lighting with which it is created'" (Leach 1999, p. 58). They therefore sought emancipation from the spectacle by using these insights to engage movement and exploration in order to illuminate the ontological experience of the individual through the city.

Hence, they practiced the *dérive* (drift): "a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behavior and awareness of psychogeographical effects" (Debord 1958, np). It may be attributed to the "Surrealists' experiments in automatism – the surrendering of the self to the pleasures of the city" – however, through the *dérive*, the Situationists did not "simply abandon themselves to unconscious desires" but employed strategies to "consciously challenge...[and] counter the dominant perception of the city as grid of real estate, and to explore its potential as the site of lived experience" (Leach 1999, p. 59).

The art of drifting emphasised the freedom of movement to resist the control over the reified existence of individuals and the constraints of the spectacle. Characteristic of "nomos: arraying oneself in an open space" (Brian Massumi, cited in Burch nd, p. 15), it resulted in spatial availability (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 80) and heightened imagination through which situations of place could be spatialised through narratives of experience and atmosphere. Thus, instead of imposed, separated and objectified spatial arrangements (understood by Deleuze and Guattari's striated or stratified space) closed to the continuity of time, the city could be interpreted as a smooth space: one of subjective and haptic perception that is not distanced from direct tactile experience but "offers opportunities for exploration without closure, for endless *dérive*" (Burch nd, p. 14), emphasised by Deleuze and Guattari as an open-ended and heterogeneous space of multiplicity that can "be explored only through legwork" (ibid.).

The practice of *détournement* and *dérive* in smooth space may relate to Heidegger's free space that is "linked to *Gelassenheit*, which translates as 'serenity', 'letting go'" (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 113). Consisting of interventions that create new and open situations in places that acknowledge past, present and future, it shares similarities with Lebbeus Woods' interpretation of freespaces, which "offer a 'dense matrix of new conditions'" (cited Leach, 1999, p.31). However, Woods' suggestions refer primarily to form, which Foucault reacts against in that "architectural form in itself cannot be liberating, although it can produce 'positive effects' when the 'liberating intentions of the architect' coincide with 'the real practice of

people in the exercise of their freedom” (cited Leach, 1999, p.32). He posits that architecture in itself “cannot determine any particular politics of use, [rather] all architecture can do is offer spaces that might – at best – ‘invite’ certain spatial practices” (ibid.). Thus, as opposed to a planned city’s “linear conception of use where objects are conceived for, and specified by, the work they perform” (Portzamparc and Sellers, 2003, p.111) a future can be imagined in unimposed spatial interventions that are enlivened by offering interpretations and opportunities for everyday experiences.

The Situationist theme of ‘unitary urbanism’ offered an alternative vision that reacted against the perfected final solutions of the totalitarian cities, and instead “viewed the city holistically as a combination of artistic potential and engineering resources” (ibid.). It therefore attempted to avoid static spatial limitations, abolish separation and liberate human behaviour through the unification of multiplicity, linkages, modifiable, imaginative and transient spaces open to perspective, and “rooted in the idea of a city that would have time in its future, that would not be closed, that would keep going” (ibid. p. 112). The city became the key site / situation for investigation and intervention in which the “world-view is disrupted, re-opened to fresh perspectives...[to] inform a new understanding of space” (Burch nd, p. 9).

Thus, the contemporary socio-spatial context of the aerotropolis is similar to that which Debord and the Situationists rejected in favour of subject-based environments experienced through existential adventure, chance and unpredictability (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 80). Rather than simply defining a new urban space in reaction to the capitalist city, the Situationist International sought to raise public awareness around the conditions imposed on society as well as a means to change them by proposing approaches toward a new urbanism and architecture via the translation of their revolutionary ideals, which played a significant role in “determining the possibilities of lived experience” through an “architecture that fired the imagination” (Leach 1999, p. 58) and was responsive to the continuum of time.

CONCLUSION

Given that urban systems exist both as independent and networked entities that are reliant on mobilities and integrated transport infrastructure, the aerotropolis is constantly justified through propaganda and “dictated by its own necessity so as to enable it to function” (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 105). Thus, the concept of the aerotropolis as a future city brings with it both visions and obstacles in which four primary concerns may be identified: superficial indulgence, artificial production, transitional ecologies, and self-referential immediacy.

Superficial indulgence

The obsession of “the present-day slave [that] feels compelled to be absolutely modern” (ibid. p. 76) is evident in the influences of the aerotropolis on a society that appears to be preoccupied with the opportunistic economic affiliations thereof. The domination of the aerotropolis could superficially transform the north coast as one of excess, consumption, commodification and simulation that is detached from the realities and considerations of the everyday. These symptoms of a distorted reality may be the extent of contemporary life in a future driven by the aerotropolis, which appears to lack in a human dimension and negates its impact on people and environment.

Artificial production

The aerotropolis is marketed as “the new direction that has to be followed” (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 95) – seemingly through a language of reification, “where one stops belonging to a culture and can only tour it” (Wordsworth, cited in Urry 2005, p. 82). Whilst the eThekwin metropolis evolved by growing from its beginnings at the port of Durban, the Dube Tradeport aerotropolis is artificially produced within the north coast and does not appear to acknowledge its regional surroundings. In addition, the Dube Tradeport aerotropolis may further isolate Durban, exacerbating the city’s condition of abandonment and reinforcing the modernist idea of separation by creating boundaries on various levels and inscribing a class distinction and control over space. It could result in splintering the eThekwin metropolis into two cities (an old and a new) “where two worlds, two cultures, coexist in a sort of absurdity....each with their different histories and times” (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003).

Transitional ecologies

The existing natural topography (as part of the eThekweni region's cultural landscape) forms an ecology of the emotional geographies of people and place, due to the essential affective relational encounters between landscape and the self. However, the territorial conquests of the aerotropolis could disengage the existing natural environment of the north coast and marginalise its significance to people's 'being' in place. The urban development of the aerotropolis thereby presents potentially alarming effects of a changing ecology, where its impact may not only be evident in the urban form on its natural landscape, but also on the related psychology of individuals who live within it and their place attachments. Thus, the ecologies of place seems to be in transition, pending the effects of the aerotropolis, which may alter the complexities of the social and environmental contexts of a region.

Self-referential immediacy

The aerotropolis is defined and confined by economic time that is focused on the end outcome of financial 'progress' interpreted as current investments for future returns that eliminates or forgets the past "because it is no longer actual, and there is a present that is simply action oriented" (Portzamparc and Sellers 2003, p. 114) – thereby obliterating the need for references to the past, and the acknowledgment of the origins of place. The aerotropolis may be deemed a fabrication of a self-absorbed opportunistic world that replaces contextual environments via the destruction of the natural landscape that is interpreted as a blank slate and the substitution of an existing city. Thus, the aerotropolis risks being "closed to time, closed to the future" (ibid. p.112) – potentially threatening the existence of society and its cultural continuity via the eradication of place and its affiliations with past and present.

Whilst the aerotropolis is an accepted phenomenon of the 'future city', it has impacts and effects that reach beyond mere economic opportunities. This prompts the need to interrogate the effects of it on the contextual evolution of place by considering environmental and human qualities that ensure the continuum of time and identity; where the recognition and significance of "our nature and our culture holds within itself that which we have the possibility to become" (Smith 2005, p. 228). This approach is necessary in order to acknowledge and potentially enhance the quality of life and the urban experience of people who will be engaging directly or indirectly with the aerotropolis, thereby improving its liveability by allowing it to respond sensitively and meaningfully to the ecological and psychological qualities of people and place.

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