

Poliorceticon – The Form of the Siege

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“[...] crusaders are going to *Not* assist Portuguese to conquer Lisbon, it is written and so it is the truth, even if different, what we called false prevailed over what we call true, it took his place, someone could come and tell the new story [...]”¹

1 José Saramago, *História do cerco de Lisboa*. (History of the siege of Lisbon), 1st ed. Caminho, Lisbon, 1989. English edition edited by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.

2 Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, Halle, 1927.

Raimundo Silva, a lowly proof-reader for a Lisbon publishing house, by inserting a negative into a sentence of a historical text, alters the whole course of the 1147 siege of Lisbon. The past and the reality can be re-written as a romance, a pure invention that sometimes becomes history. The example of the siege, as a theoretic background, suggests in this case a method for the design processes of a city.

The ideal city has to be imagined, the real city has to be conquered.

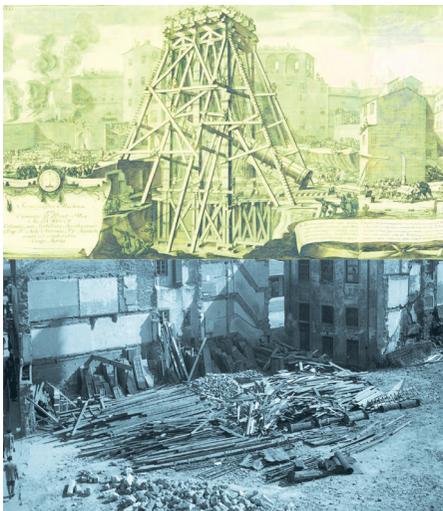
Poliorceticon is a permanent process that involves transformative heterogeneous-and-punctual actions in the territory in order to provoke systemic reactions and relations between the parts of the contemporary city.

Poliorcetics is the branch of military art that studies methods, techniques and means for besieging cities and fortresses. It is an art that, like architecture, transforms places into tools, actions, strategies, and implies a strong knowledge of subjects that go beyond the *Art of War* and include engineering, geology, anthropology and politics.

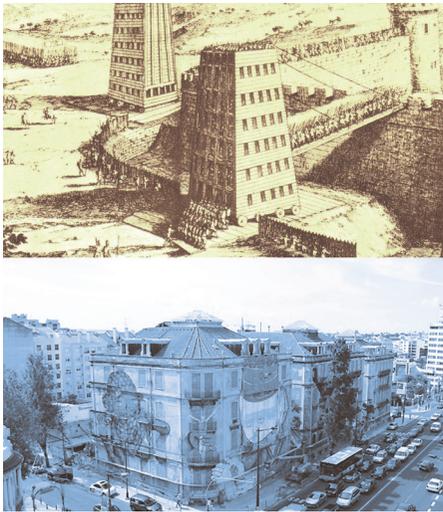
The idea of conquest, is not just linked to control, supremacy and suppression, but also to fusion among cultures, like in the case of Alexander the Great and the fusion of his Hellenic Reign with native peoples. Taking these considerations into account, the contemporary territory can be read as a juxtaposition of antithetical city models, and its form as the synthesis of different interpretive and modelling capacities typical of men and of their being-in-the-world.² The contemporary city is characterized by the coexistence of profoundly different types of city models.

Imagining future scenes in order to understand such a complex territory, means starting from a transformative process project, thought up not necessarily to be connected one with the other.

On such theoretical basis, the project proposal interprets the theme of physical re-conquest of places and the possibility for the community to regain collective knowledge of the territory where it lives through the modification tools used in architecture. The imaginary scene regards the near future and considers the present city as the reality from where to start from. Through different punctual interventions, the first step for the re-conquest of the contemporary city takes place through new connections among existing elements, able to build a renewed accessibility, with the scope of creating poro-



3 Daniel Libeskind, City without plan, Blau, 1992.



sity and functional connections.

Some of these areas, once transformed, will be available for the spontaneous and temporary utilization of their inhabitants. The “conquest” process will be considered finished only when a series of new interventions will form with the existing total functional urban mix, configuring itself as a “city without plan”.³ This is a city model built on fragments that derive from pieces put side by side for addition, from the repetition of independent elements, from “out-of-sync” buildings and combined with no logic, but that will be a fusion between productive and living culture.

Tools of siege

A siege starts with strategic actions such as the identification of the weaknesses of the city to be conquered. Walls, canals, structures, fences, infrastructures, elements that constitute interruptions, limits, critical points, the trespassing of which is the first action of breach and entrance to the besieged city. Poliorcetics provides that city boundaries can be attacked, to start the conquest process, using devices, machines or siege tools.

Connective tools able to open breaches, small architectures that trespass limits that today cannot be solved, demolition of defensive barriers witnessing an industrial past; the art of poliorcetics serves for the transformation of a territory that must slowly be re-conquered by the people.

Camps

A second phase of the siege foresees that the customs and part of the changes of the territory derive from non-planned and non-regulated methods. The spontaneous birth of new uses of the spaces will cause the temporary movement of the control of the urban changes from government institutions to the people. It is expected that the spaces accessible and available shall be repopulated, used, and modified by their spontaneous utilization. Eventually, the relationship between territorial

and social changes implied in such actions will be studied in consideration of its central role in the understanding of the socio economic changes of the area. The bottom-up approach used in this phase is intended as indicator of changes that now, for the rapidity and complexity with which the context conditions change, would be impossible to foresee by a territorial planning project.

Conquests

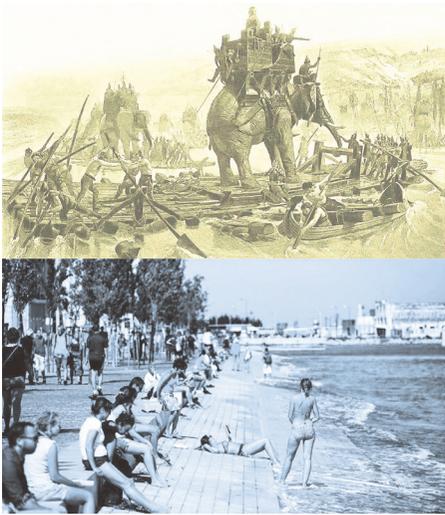
It is impossible to foresee the future form of the city because a lot of stakeholders are involved in its transformation. Strategies could be enhanced, in order to develop conquest methods specific to places, in which the architect will act as a strategist. In the future city, production landscapes as industries or quarries, infrastructures, shopping spaces, wastelands, will coexist peacefully with the living culture. New buildings will stand among silos and chimneys, but synergetic processes of production and energy transmission will investigate visions of a possible autocracy. Reclaimed land, in this sense, is intended as the conclusion of the re-conquest process of a territory, as the total sum of energy able to build a systematic principle that generates changes in the territory.

Every intervention shall use local resources, in order to present itself as a conscious model for future developments.

History of the siege

Living a place also means having a kind of narrative heritage made of a plurality of mental images, sometimes measurable, perceptible. As sensed by J.E. Hobsbawm in “The Invention of Tradition”, every society has accumulated a reserve of apparently ancient material, often merely invented, to legitimate and build their roots.

For this reason the project also uses a tale, a short-story, the interpretation of which significantly contributes to the perception of the places, to people’s feeling at home in such places, creating a sort of mental pro-



4 José Saramago, *Ibidem*.

jection. Places become occasions to set stories, to build mental images necessary to the construction of the feeling of belonging to a place.

“[...] the problem I have to solve is different, when I wrote *Not the crusaders went away*, therefore my looking for an answer to the question is pointless, Why in this history accepted as being true, must I myself invent another history so that it might be false and false so that it may be different. [...] He realised that until he overcame the problem he would make no progress, and was surprised, accustomed as he was to books in which everything seemed fluent and spontaneous, almost essential, not because it was effectively true, but became any piece of writing, good or bad, always ends up appearing like a predetermined crystallization, although no one can ever say how or when or why or by whom, he was surprised, as we said, for the following idea had never occurred to him, an idea which should have stemmed naturally from the previous idea, but on the contrary, refused to emerge, or perhaps not even that, it simply was not there, did not exist even as a possibility.”⁴

BABAU BUREAU is an architectural and landscape office founded in 2012 by Stefano Tornieri and Massimo Triches in Venice. BABAU BUREAU current research focuses on the reuse and transformation of buildings and open spaces as a contemporary requirement and as a sustainable development strategy. Beside the professional career, the office keeps an active research in the academic field, working in the “Architecture and Archaeologies of the Production Landscapes” research unit of the IUAV University of Venice.

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