19. The Disappearing Nineties: Jerde Cities

The twentieth century ended in 1989, once the Wall came down. Afterward, from one continent to another, a strange blend of grotesquely primitive formations emerged, from Bosnian nightmares to warlord capitalism. Finally, they have come home to roost as entertainment, certainly here in the United States—even back into the Middle East. At the same time, genteel extremes for entertainment match the new oligarchies. The largest McDonald's in the world has opened in Moscow. Suites for Korean high rollers in Las Vegas offer the most expensive massages on the Strip. Once again, the contrasts behind special effects are staggering, and yet somehow ergonomic, for a world dominated increasingly by a new kind of corporate monopoly. Huge, newly enlarged (or even engorged) corporations are held together essentially by advertising campaigns and digital media—very much by an "easy-listening" model of power.

For cities caught inside these emerging contrasts, the Jerde Partnership had a unique role during the nineties,[1] as the builder of new paradigms "on every continent except Antarctica." The city was condensed into "toy towns" with "casbahs." The patina of antique city markets could be themed. Indeed, the shopping center of the early Cold War matured easily into a full-blown city of sorts. Its mall enclaves easily suited older city streets as well.

But what urban model is that? Like late medieval cities, the central hub expanded beyond its walls and occupied farmland outside. This process was common for Baroque cities of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—once their medieval walls were removed. Beyond the walls, occluded meadows were suddenly revealed. Upon these meadows, as symbolic commons, sculptural fantasies were added.

Bernini helps us understand the purpose of these phantasmagoria. "To make of Time a thing stupendous,"[2] he wrote. He meant sculpture as allegorical time for the popular classes. An animated fountain "gazes" at the

pedestrian who takes five minutes to cross the piazza. During those five minutes, a story unfolds, about political power generally. Wonders had arrived by condescension—to common folks— from the church, wealthy magnates, or the king. These five minutes were sanctioned; they were safe for God and safe for Caesar. Most of all, they accommodated a growing pressure in the seventeenth century, "the peasant population's invasion of the city;"[3] in nineties terms, a rudimentary way to expand consumer culture. Rituals originally for the knightly class were released to the "public."[4]

The Jerde spaces apply Baroque special effects on behalf of corporate interests.[5] Of course, how far shall we take this metaphor? These parallels are instructive more than absolute.[6] As the vital issue, like Baroque effects, illusionism within a Jerde city relies on a very stable code, on far more than simply floating signifiers (a phrase very popular in the nineties). Baroque models explain this code better than postmodern discourse, ironically enough.

As noted earlier, during Baroque eras, the walls and ceilings became a narrative text expanded from very material Renaissance devices, like perspective or anamorphosis. Ways to subvert perspective were studied very much as a walk-through. Locations assigned on the floor, indicated where to stand within the story, or your version of the story. This tradition around perspective awry matured after 1550: as Neoplatonic fantasy in churches, palaces, theaters, then extending into piazzas and roads. From 1638 on, elaborate handbooks[7] on how to disrupt perspective were published. This elaborate grammar is oddly parallel to the Jerde mall.

However, only during the early nineties handbooks updating the Baroque began to appear. They were labeled architecturally as postmodern illusion; and became a subindustry. Even the term "the Disneyland version" entered our language during the nineties, to remind us that hypertrophied mall cities have become essential to globalized tourism. As a corollary, much was written in the nineties about the collapse of public space, at least "public" as it was understood in the industrial city of, let us say, 1920 or 1940. And these invaded public sectors apparently "spoke" on behalf of franchise capitalism. So how should we proceed from there, as a new generation dealing with perspective awry?

Jon Jerde started off with a direct question, beginning with his signature mall, Horton Plaza, in San Diego (1985). He asked what public spaces have been built in major metropolises over the past fifty years. He meant parks, or variations of the piazza. What experience in 1985 (or 1994, when I began interviewing him) can compare to the dense street life we imagine for Manhattan or Paris, or see in the opening credits to every Sherlock Holmes movie? Indeed,

our culture was developing an alternative, which he called (1994) "a community of consumers." But how do we write a handbook about scripted spaces for this community, a way to sort out the evidence?

In nineties jargon (that I also used), the Jerrie city was not simply a precession of dissolving simulacra; it was too much like a diachronic movie about perspective awry. More simply, it scripted spaces where simulacra preceded as plot points, as architectural animation. Within the stories that his team developed, simulacra were coordinated like a Baroque scripted space more than an elegant car crash in a special-effects movie.

The plot points were coordinated as a shopping expedition. Breaks and lapses were added, inversions to move the script along—not textual critiques. Indeed, we had left the late twentieth century: The Electronic Baroque during the nineties was not late capitalism; it was more nouveau capitalism, a Marxist moment in a post-Marxist era. It was a by-product of capital accumulation on a scale that rivaled the industrial skyline, but in miniature—condensed, horizontal. It blurred in much the same way that trompe l'oeil and anamorphosis blurred—to play with blanks and figure-ground ambiguities.

We imagine a handbook to the Jerde narratization, then open to the first page—the basic operations. What were the illusionistic plot points within a Jerde city, so prototypical of the nineties?

Cinema

When Baroque sculpture alludes to theater—this can be equated with art direction in cinema. Bernini was, in effect, sculpting movies in 1640. But for Jerde cities, what was the role of the viewer in this sculpted movie? For example, forty years earlier, movie glamour implied a visit to a premiere, to be among the cognoscenti who first saw the finished product. Now, increasingly, the movie set itself had replaced the premiere. One was encouraged to shop inside this movie set, as if waiting for the shooting to begin.

It resembled Baroque scripted spaces as sculptural special effects, or as a walk-through postcard. This phrase has become liturgical for me, in lectures and essays, and throughout this book. I use it to describe cinema, new media, theme parks, even new directions in literature, or the fine arts. It is an ontological clue for practically every medium in the Electronic Baroque, from games on the Internet to action movies to Jerde cities; and finally to tourist planning in old cities, like Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna.

I visited Rome while the churches were being prepared for the Jubileo in 2000. I was continually told that Rome could never be a shopping mall, since it has been the center of all Catholic pilgrimage for many centuries, and of tourism since the age of the Caesars.

We have seen how scripted spaces were traced, going back to about 1550. They make for a relatively coherent teleology. The consumer, like the Baroque parishioner three hundred years ago, is the central character in a story of sorts—"story" in a Weberian sense. The script is a form of predestination, and the consumer's journey acts out the illusion of free will. The consumer finishes the story; however, the real conclusion (even the objects involved) belongs to those who own the script.

Story/Armature

To repeat, Jerde saw his buildings not as façade as much as it was a "story", a term he used often, much as Disney did. The story must be different for each visitor, even though the path is prescripted. The journey should feel like an act of free will; so much so that Jerde liked to call his projects "co-creative," to emphasize the freedom to complete the text yourself. Even though the owners will interfere, he understood his buildings as a commons. He believed in the old Sullivan idea of Democratic Ways, as if CityWalk were a town meeting.

After Horton Plaza (1984), his next signature project was CityWalk (1994). This was the first leg of a larger master plan to integrate hundreds of thousands, even millions, of square feet, from the Universal Outdoor Recreation Tours to the MCA office buildings—but first "to link the parking garage and the Tour gate." The theme essentially was to encapsulate Los Angeles, what Jerde calls "the transactual city, a deal-business diagram. We happen to drive between the spaces."

That sense of "between spaces" is repeated frequently in Jerde interviews. Building blocks essentially "choreograph the journey," from "one vessel to another." In CityWalk, the vessel is essentially the missing car, the windshield around your body, a full-bodied "parody of Los Angeles," as he calls it. As architectural animation, in 1994, we pass from one cartoon plot point to another. We start at the parking structure, immediately see the movie complex (the main profit maker for Universal, even more than the leases around it). Then we follow in half circle toward the highest point, near the see-through dome, in view of King Kong marking the halfway mark. Each miniaturized slice of Los Angeles

was punctuated by neon signs salvaged from bulldozed shops, to reinforce the sense of substitution. This animated set, what historian Margaret Crawford called "almost cartoon-like architecture," blended Artifice with urban misremembering.

It is important to remember that in 1994, Los Angeles was in crisis, in a fierce recession, aggravated by a massive earthquake, huge fires visible near Universal City; and the aftershocks of the urban uprising in 1992. It seemed that many areas were on the edge of decline. Thus, a taste of memento mori was built into the narrative (not unlike the sense of urban decay around Horton Plaza in 1985). These were areas beginning to suffer badly in 1994, as real estate prices sank by as much as 60 percent in some districts. So there was a bit of *memento mori* on the fake Melrose Avenue; on the ten feet of Venice beach; in snatches of neon from lost motels and the Pioneer Market in Echo Park. The edited buildings zipped past you as if in a quick edit; or an old AM radio dial while you were cruising in your car, caught *between*.

The site for CityWalk in 1994 was very much between as well. Universal Tours were just above the "city" and just below the San Fernando Valley; cut away from the urban fabric itself. As Jerde explained, it was "not attached to freeway, the L.A. River, a mountain, or a graveyard." Before getting the commission, he used to study the way it looked down upon his house below in the Hollywood Hills. He made it a literal metaphor for corporate space invested into a journey, very Baroque indeed, trompe l'oeil theater, informed by glimpses of L.A. movie memories.

He also claims that *Blade Runner* was part of the inspiration, the cyber-noir use of signage; the sense of overheads into dense crowds. Certainly, the space is laid out like a movie set, in a half circle that is interspersed (according to 1994 MCA executive Jim Nelson) by "hot spots," a bench or plants where the circle gets too obvious. Jerde prefers elegant curves to describe the "between." He likes to draw these on pads he keeps in front of him whenever we speak.

Indeed, Jerde had an almost metaphysical fascination with how the zeitgeist of the story was found, as if he were taking a divining rod to find an underground stream. He calls this stream an "armature," shaped like a line that, while "artificial," is irrepressibly "natural." I am reminded of what Barthes meant by the term *mythologies*, how the artificial becomes so natural that it cannot be questioned. Of course, Barthes was thinking of corporate ideology. Jerde was operating at the intersection of many ideologies at once: shopping, tourism; real estate; global entertainment—and finally, local imaginaries. He insisted that armatures are a local code as well, a strand of local collective memory:

He is indeed almost animistic in his sense that the armature was local collective memory; the flow of "*gaia*," the monads of global consciousness; monads here as the global shrunk down to a small unit, so parallel to Baroque microcosmos. This is particularly evident in the enclosing walls that embrace a stream under Canal City Hakata, in Fukuoka, Japan. He compares the armature there to rivers leaving strata on rocks, as if the path of consumers were responding to a nativist, genetic code.

The armature at Hakata is literally curved as if etched by the weather, literally striated. He is convinced now that the unconscious inspiration for Canal City was Canyon de Chelly, in Arizona, a canyon running flush with the desert into a "verdant valley" by a river. The rocky face of the canyon has been inscribed by winds for millennia, by "spherical wind cusps." And inside the canyon wall, ancient Anasazi Indians had cut a city. Similarly, the two faces of Canal City enclose a stream, and seem honeycombed, as if shops were cut into stone.

But beyond "making the real look artificial," for the space between, Jerde (or the Jerde Partnership, as he prefers to be cited) also imagined the armature as a catalyst. It grows more paths "organically." What's more; this growth should be accelerated, perhaps a century of urbanization in ten years, a kind of fast-drying patina. Postwar shopping centers (1950–1980) were not organic, certainly not in touch with streets around them, "boxes without windows," he calls them. They repeated a master plan engineered around industrial efficiency or one-stop shopping, like defense plants or stockyards, like supermarkets. By contrast, the Jerde city tries to heroize trophy imagery from the local culture, exaggerate, even parody it. The line of buildings for lease along the armature should encourage local businesses, not simply global franchises, though frankly, he feels, wouldn't any local businesses prefer to resemble the global, anyway?

Even more evident is the look of Horton Plaza from the outside. It opens to the public rather intimately, like a slim mountain pass in a movie western. Gingerbread storefronts line up on either side of the cleft. Jerde shrugs off the idea that the cleft resembles a sliced melon. He agrees, however, that it should open out, cut straight through a colorful bricolage. The effect, he felt certain, would not seal off the shoppers, instead take them through a branching system. I am reminded of different size envelopes stuffed into a basket—and given added presence through Baroque forced perspective, tricks of scale. He often describes the assortment as "kits," and refers to the drawings of "ghostly shapes" by architect Aldo Rossi (again for Horton Plaza in particular).

The kit often includes tourist caricatures of local imaginaries. The shapes he assembles leave an armature for shoppers to follow (a term he first used

when rushing for deadline on Horton Plaza). Horton was a series of clefts through a reassamblage. The usual building blocks of the linear shopping mall were juggled: two towers for department stores, an armature curled for shops, and then a "rich man's house," with fancy tile work, to interrupt the space further. This Jerde calls "Abbott and Costello at the Casbah." Jerde Partnership was formally allowed to "pull the top" (get rid of the roof). This was seen as money-saving, as well as responding to the gentle climate. Materials had to be inexpensive, "cheap stucco, asphalt and paint." He even simultaneously double-used the same colors (by Sussman/Prezja) to the 1984 L.A. Olympics. The entire budget came in at only $140 million. The colors were borrowed from the palette by Sussman/Prezja that Jerde applied to the 1984 L.A. Olympics. But most of all, this area in San Diego was considered too run down. It was the 1890's Gas Lamp district, on the side of Broadway that no one wanted to visit or lease, "a burnt-out town." The builder Ernest Hahn would explain that only five thousand people lived there, "half of them addicts, half of them fish."

Thus, Jerde was asked to consider Horton Plaza as a redevelopment project. He decided to make it a "condensed San Diego" with room to grow into the Gas Lamp District nearby. The space had to allow "the jewelry of the street to keep changing."

The result has a Baroque density like streets stacked on a receding hillside, modeled partly on Italian towns (Monte Fiasconi, Jerde explains); and echoing a tourist picturesque, like travel illustrations from 1870. I am always reminded of a colorful ant farm, layer by layer, striated in yet another way. Of course, Horton Plaza became an immense success, attracting twenty-five million visitors in the first year. Within a decade of its appearance, by the mid-nineties, the Gas Lamp District nearby had expanded, and in fact, began to copy the circus colors of Horton Plaza. In effect, as in cinematic special effects, the real was made artificial. The parody of the Gas Lamp district served as the original. As a scripted space, the solid bricolage reenacting an imaginary city street becomes a playful toy town, with playful inside jokes for the locals, and games within side jokes for the outsider.

How times change (note: 2023): After 9/11, Horton Plaza went through a number of failures, and after 2008, even more. The post 2003 economy proved too much. A few high-profile shootings and suicides added to its grim trajectory. Finally, in 2018, Horton was sold—and demolished—to make way for a tech office park more than a million square feet across. The power of Silicon Beach investors often wins out. It is like a return to aerospace engineering before 1970. Indeed, progress has a way of veering off course, or at least going

sideways. The Horton outdoor mall is seen as slummy. I met Jerde again soon after Horton was sold. He was suffering from dementia. But his kindness never abandoned him; only his peculiar drive.

Condensed City (Back to 2003)

The *condensed city* is a term that Jerde used, but applies fundamentally to the movie set, to the way a New York street on the Paramount lot can combine three parts of Manhattan and part of Brooklyn within a few hundred meters. And certainly to his work at Las Vegas casinos: the shrunken West Indies at Treasure Island; the Italian Alpine town at Bellagio.

But let us for a moment understand *condensed* as what is left out as well. As storytelling, it can be compared to Freud's notion of condensation, the instantaneous layering of many memories at once, in order to allow the desire to cathect painlessly, to keep the dreamer from awaking. It is urban chiaroscuro, for the community of consumers: a condensed, narratized replacement for what must be left out. It is designed experience for a world where audiences prefer to eat inside the movie, rather than simply go to the premiere.

Metropolitan Suburb

The Jerde city is a condensed version of what I call a *metropolitan suburb*; that is, a Baroque city honoring the nineties form of mercantilism—franchise tourism with a touch of the local. Indeed, throughout the nineties, many downtowns were suburbanized into a highly advanced suburbia. By 1994, consumer-driven malls had replaced the 1950s model for shopping centers linked to industrially planned freeways. Many postwar suburbs in southern California in particular had evolved into complex cities, particularly the eastern end of the San Fernando Valley, beginning with Universal City.

Thus, CityWalk announced the coming-of-age of Universal City as a metropolitan suburb: the company town as a citywalk. It stood at the center of a series of suburbs that were now the capitals of global media. How appropriate in the era of Electronic Baroque to have the scripted space evolve into epic cityscape. But not a city at all: CityWalk was isolated, enslaved. As Mark Gottdiener wrote of CityWalk, "a simulation of the city experience under tightly controlled conditions."[8]

However, this condensed movie city becoming an actual city was a hot paradigm for urban planning throughout the world. It very much paralleled the urban village designs in Florida (Seaside, Celebration), and the theming of older downtown centers throughout the world. During the nineties, as the horizontal Electronic Baroque economy took charge, funding for cities shrank. Many townships tried to "thematize" their historic (and also their suburban) boulevards, to design communities for consumers, in order to keep that tax base close to home.

Jerde was flooded with commissions to redesign in a metro-suburban way the shells of downtowns that had faded into near oblivion (Kansas City, Rotterdam, Fremont Street in Las Vegas, modeled on the Gas Lamp District in San Diego). In the U.S. certainly, these were imagined as cities reincarnated from the 1920s. The moderne architecture of the 1920s—and earlier—now reminded metro-suburbanites of walkable streets abandoned, but now exoticized. To the powers that be, even to the middle class, they have begun to resemble "our" Roman ruins, cityscapes to rehab. At first, like animation, they seem playfully upside down. Then restaurant investors and flippers come in. As an Electronic Baroque architect, Jerde remade many of these as "folie," a quirky pastiche, the spider silk of the pre-World War II streets as an armature, as a condensed movie set—essentially as a Gothic revival of the industrial city. He pioneered, ironically enough, the collective misremembering of the inner city as Gothic revival. In the future, any seventeenth- or eighteenth-century city (Prague or Old Stockholm) can be converted into electronic tourist communities as well, simply by readjusting the "jewelry of the street."

In a few more decades, we will find relatively little of the gritty industrial neighborhoods left, not in the West certainly—except as widening zones of neglect or as isolated, airbrushed bedroom communities (condensed cities as metropolitanized suburbs). If a street has not been rescripted as a community for consumers, it may not be able to support itself, and will drift away, or be ignored.

Indeed, the condensed city also represents a culture of distraction—more about what is left out—as the widening class structure finds its institutional forms, like the Jerde city. Of course, Jere insisted that he was not the developer or the sociologist. Instead, almost as a formalism, he offers only the grammar. It is for us to locate its complexity The scripted space resembles movie sets, applies Baroque traditions, mimics urban politics, and camouflages them as well. They are an ergonomic labyrinth—a cheerful isolation.

Before the shock waves on 9/11, these scripted spaces appeared to be peacefully colonizing the world, setting the agenda for public culture. Despite the Bush paranoia, crowds flock to them in practically every major town in the developed world. As I explain in the next chapter, we are indeed, becoming tourists in our own cities, and must turn that process into as complex a statement as the Baroque was, see the paradoxes as honestly as possible.