

# GENERIC CITY

*Dialectics of Totality and Infinity*

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*"Let a thousand flowers bloom."*

*Moa Tse Tung*

*"How can the new come into being?"*

*Alain Badiou*

*"A truth is that which makes a hole in knowledge."*

*Jacque Lacan*

## **PROJECT – Design a GENERIC CITY inside of Central Park, New York.**

At the most general level, the project for the Generic City will address issues pertaining to the ontology of genetic architecture in light of Alain Badiou's philosophy, which poses critical limits to the logic of genetics. Since genetic architecture is concerned with the propagation and mutation of hereditary information especially at the level of the generative construction of possible worlds, it deals with the *space of compossibility* of architecture. In so doing, a whole constellation of issues raised by Badiou needs to be dealt with if genetic architecture is to move forward beyond the confines dictated by its potential grounding in the myth of origins. As such, we will address the following set of issues raised by Badiou from the standpoint of genetic architecture: *the Real, the Generic, the Indiscernible, the Multiple, the Undecidable, the Unnameable, Evental Site, Set-theoretic concept of Forcing, and last but not least, Totality and Infinity.*

We have arrived at a point in history when what is considered *relevant* is determined to a large extent by the metaphysics of empiricism or realism: that which is governed by the reality of the situation must be verifiable or veridical. It is a cultural disposition that is predominantly based on the facticity of facts and nothing but material facts. Important and necessary as it is to address issues triggered by current states of affairs such as globalization, little consideration however is given within the field of architecture to fundamental questions concerning the reality of the so-called Real. The Real is something we take for granted but philosophical interrogation into the Real is a slippery and difficult proposition if not impossible. The concept of the Real is one crucial aspect the studio will address in the project to design a Generic City.

As stated above, the constitution of a Generic City is concerned with issues pertaining to logic of the *space of compossibility* of architecture understood in the most general and far-reaching sense of the term. How can an individual or a studio has the audacity no doubt born of ignorance and, if not, entertain the pretension to design a complex phenomenon such as a city? Obviously, according to conventional wisdom, it is just simply not possible: a city is an emergent outcome of large-scale dynamics involving multiple issues, forces, and phenomena. It is the supreme example of complexity with regard to human construction. How can we therefore even imagine, short of ludicrous projections based on pure fantasy, approaching such a scenario as the design a Generic City?

These are questions that deal fundamentally with the *space of compossibility* of architecture within a situation. Notwithstanding the fact that the history of architecture is not without precedents with regard to utopian proposals, one could appeal to discoveries made in the last twenty years: there are universal patterns of formation at numerous scales among disparate phenomena, which Stephen Wolfram discovered with his investigations into 1-D cellular automaton, and also some instances in the science of complexity has come up with assessments concerning complex emergent phenomena that are similar in many respects. Historically, a figure of critical major importance to the modern invention of Set Theory such as Georg Cantor has once entertained the possibility that such heterogeneous objects as a Rembrandt portrait and a Beethoven symphony might have similar order types at the level of deep

structure and that order type theory might reveal unsuspected unity among the diversity of natural phenomena. No doubt this is the dream of science that attempts to uncover what Leibniz refers to as the Principle of Sufficient Reason concerning the structure and logic of existence. The underlying assumption of course is that there are universal laws pertaining to emergent phenomena, which appear to be incomensurable at the phenomenological level available to human perception. Once again, we will address these issues in light of Badiou's philosophical intervention into the question of generic truth, set-theoretic concept of *forcing*, which resonates with Derrida's formulation of *messianicity without messianism*, and fidelity to generic procedures of truth, which Badiou carefully states as the set of conditions which cannot be totalized by any logic of predication contained within a system of signification or language, generic or otherwise.

In light of these issues, what is it to compose a work of architecture within a given situation? And, what constitutes the range and complexity of a situation? In other words, what is a situation? What constitutes a situation? Is a situation to be delimited by its geography, urban condition, visible culture, the Internet or does it include the invisible spectrum of the encyclopedia of a milieu, which without a doubt establishes conditions of possibility for the emergence of a cultural condition from a historical precondition? The structure of any situation is an inherent multiplicity, a collectivity that foregrounds the multiple. It is at this point that the generic asserts its conceptual efficacy.

According to conventional wisdom, the generic is that which does not allow itself to be discerned. The generic is the indiscernible. The indiscernible is such not merely by virtue of its anonymity or the negativity invoked by the term but more significantly it points to that which is *subtracted from knowledge*: that which cannot be discerned based on the resources and determination of a given situation. In other words, there are elements within a situation that, even though they belong to the situation, cannot be described by the tools of the language pertaining to the situation. As such, the generic is intrinsically multiple, or better still, the condition of possibility for the logic of the multiple or multiplicity, which is in excess of the language of circumscription or predication that attempts to totalize that which cannot, by definition, be contained or

completed: be they proposals derived from scenario planning, parametric modulation of complex phenomena, or any set of conceptual determination, systematic or otherwise. The generic truth of a situation is infinite and unnameable; only the concept of the infinite resists any attempt to arrive at the end game of knowledge: totality. Totality is a notion that continues to haunt architecture from the moment human beings establish markings to territory: the colonization and manifestation of being.

On the contrary, a generic truth procedure, according to Badiou, is basically a praxis consisting of a series of enquiries into the situation made by militants who act in fidelity to the event. The event is a disruptive occurrence, which has no place in the scheme of things as they currently are. The proposal for a Generic City is a creative disruptive event, an index in a series of theoretical propositions invoking the emergence of a new paradigm about architecture *situated* within the epistemological context of the *encyclopedia of architecture*. The encyclopedia is the epistemological situation par excellence, the normative *ground model* available for the intervention, excavation and '*forcing*' of a new kind of generic architecture based on the logic of genetics, one that functions as a harbinger of possible worlds to come. As such, the Generic City is a city situated at the horizon of expectation: the potential embodiment of the architecture of possible worlds that is still yet to come but whose potential existence cannot be deprived of or dismissed by the vicissitudes engendered by the normative imperatives of the world in its present condition. The future is already contained, to some degree, within the present but it requires an act of fidelity to the potential irruption of creativity, the event pertaining to the truth of a situation: the Generic City.

Required readings:

1. *Being and Event* by Alain Badiou
2. *Logic and Memory* by Paolo Rossi
3. *A New Kind of Science* by Stephen Wolfram
4. *Monadology* by Leibniz