

Cultural Conflict and the Politics of the Weather

J.G. Ballard's short novel *"The Largest Theme Park of the World"* depicts a fictional cultural conflict taking place in the newly established European Union between the northern administration center and the southern Mediterranean coast, from the summer of 1995 until the fall of '97, when *"a hundred million Europeans basked on the sand leaving behind little more than an army of caretakers to supervise the museums, galleries and cathedrals... Along the beaches of Costa del Sol and Cote d' Azur , thousands of French, British and German tourists failed to catch their return flights... instead, they lay beside their swimming pools and dedicated themselves to the worship of their skins... ignoring the telegrams and phone calls from their anxious employers in Amsterdam, Paris and Dusseldorf... A relaxed and unpuritan sexual regime now flourished... the Mediterranean coast was set to be (Europe's) Venice Beach, a hot-house of muscle building and millennial dreams"*. This leisure migration movement escalated into major social reformations that shaped a 'Beach Revolution Movement' leading to the formation of the first 'leisure nation'. *"Forced to act, the Strasbourg Assembly dispatched a number of task forces to the south...the police and gendarmerie who arrived at the coastal resorts found militant bands of body-worshippers who had no intention of resuming their previous lives...The first open conflict, at Golfe-Juan, was short-lived and indecisive...the police was unable to cope with the militant brigade of bronzed and naked mothers, chanting green and feminist slogans...commandos of dentists and architects, releasing their fiercest karate kicks..."*

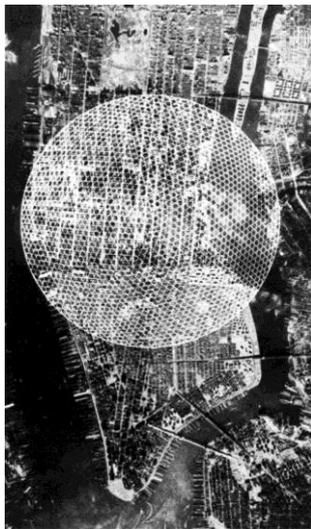
The story implies a state of cultural conflict spatially articulated in a previously homogenized state (the EU), violently separated in "two atmospheres". The concept of a productive European North and a problematic South (P.I.G.S.), as seen in the real case of the European economic debt crisis, politicizes the notion of weather - an otherwise objective natural phenomenon - by a series of antagonistic dipoles that emerge when we set the border between North and South: Cold Climate/Hot Climate, Work/Leisure, Reliability/Unreliability, Productivity/Laziness,

Asceticism/Hedonism, Normality/Pervasion etc. From the literal distinction of temperature difference we somehow find ourselves involved in a cultural conflict that reshapes the public realm. It is in our perceptual process that we tend to attribute identities based on spatial and geographical sets in order to construct "the other" and protect our system of values and ideals. Firstly we identify a set of values, and then we link these values with the properties of a specific territory.

Architecture has been engaged in "Weather Politics" from its very beginning as its main purpose is to provide a safe habitat, an enclosure that controls climate, away from the dangers of nature. Consequently, in a global neo-liberal world the aforementioned dipoles form spatial architectural concepts that define the way we design our environment regardless of the exact geographical latitude. If a South Mediterranean climate is considered the desirable prototype (a norm) for a certain activity - leisure for example- we can export and recreate it in a totally different northern climate zone and vice versa. The natural environment seems insufficient for our global culture as we tend to construct parallel climate conditions based on our ideologized weather.

This colonial attitude towards weather forms distinct spatial territories (heterotopias) with limited and controlled access. Think for example about the organization of leisure time – we have a prefixed working schedule probably in an office with a permanent moderate climate, while in our equally prefixed vacation, in the form of a propagandized modus operandi, we find ourselves in a southern, hotter climate zone, taking advantage of the beneficiary properties of sunbathing. A question arises when these conflicting conditions, otherwise neatly separated and distributed in our yearly schedule were to be suddenly mediated only by a thin boundary which would control the weather and the right to have access to the different climate zones. What kind of border-conflict condition would this boundary produce in the everyday routine?

The Competition / “a City with Two Climates”



You have to consider the **political aspect of the weather** by studying B. Fuller's “*Dome over Manhattan*” and make a 60years forecast. Fuller proposed in 1960, a two-mile geodesic dome covering Midtown Manhattan in order to regulate weather, air pollution and reduce cooling and heating costs. His approach is that of an engineer trying to find a rational solution to a specific problem regarding the fundamental architectural problem of climate control, without providing additional information about the socio-political consequences of his proposal.

However a closer look unveils hidden unconsidered aspects of the project:

- (i) The Dome separates the city in **two distinct climate sectors** thus creating a new social order. What are the social implications of those who live inside or outside? Are the ones inside the privileged that benefit from a stable climate comfort? What are the cultural identity and the

subsequent conflict between the insiders and the outsiders? Is there any form of border control in case of accelerated immigration among the two parts?

- (ii) What are the mutations of the built environment in the context of the new climate condition? What is happening on the weird intersection of the dome with the grid when a house is divided in two climate conditions? What should the residents do to overcome the problem? A schism can result in traumatic experiences provoking mental health issues such as paranoia and schizophrenia.
- (iii) Who controls the weather and defines the norms? Which climate you consider appropriate for the city?
- (iv) What if the citizens of the inner zone after 60years experience problems of laziness due to the "always summer condition"?
- (v) What is happening on the border 60 years after? Consider aspects of decay, appropriation by nature, smuggling at the buffer zones, immigration and cultural identity issues.

By taking in to account the former we can present a hypothetical scenario, which you can use to develop your drawings.

the Program

"The application of the Dome led in the formation of a "never-ending summer" climate zone in the inner part resulting in accelerated social mutations in the city. Most of the population of the outer part has migrated in the inner part refusing to return, while at the same time the outer part remained abandoned and appropriated by nature despite the strict border security control.

Miscalculations in the climate design resulted in hotter from the expected temperatures, which were responsible for the symptoms of laziness in the population. The behavioral patterns of the people started to change from work-oriented to leisure-oriented that ended up to a "Beach Revolution Movement" that changed the system of power after a period of riots and protests.

At the same time Architecture at the inner part started dramatically to change. Firstly there was a denial of the outer-skin of the buildings since there was no reason to maintain it. The citizens started demolishing parts of the facades, in order to enjoy sunbathing and the thermal comfort of the Dome. This denial towards the exterior envelope led to a social transformation from a strictly private and esoteric way of living to an extremely communal one. There was no need for the classical apartment building type but an intention to spread a kind of communal leisure landscape in every corner of the existing structures.

The high immigration rates increased rapidly the urban density of the inner part 3 to 4 times and demanded an extreme upward expansion of the urban fabric. Meanwhile the old parts of the abandoned outer part were reused as transplants for a new 'monstrous' architecture" reminding more of an "exquisite corps" surrealist game approach towards the built environment."

the Task

You can incorporate in your design the aforementioned program in order to illustrate fragments of the "City With Two Climates". Remember that projects such as R. Koolhaas' "*Exodus*" and B. Tchumi's "*Manhattan Transcripts*" were formed as graphic interpretations of a script.

You can pick a small part of the city at the border zone (not to exceed the size of a block) and try to illustrate by blending storyboard techniques, collages and architectural drawings, your personal view on the issue of the border/conflict topic regarding the narrative you have read. What modifications will you do in the existing structures to accommodate a program of extensive communal leisure activity? What will be the monstrous architecture of dismantling and collaging unexpected elements of the urban tissue in order to provide a new dense urban framework for the "leisure movement"? Can this provocative juxtaposition be applied not only in form but also in program? What are the limits of extreme density? How will you update the border infrastructure to meet with the new demands?

Improvise on the narrative, focus on the details or simply apply the methodology in another structure to create a "**City with Two Climates**".