The Generic City
1. Introduction

1.1 Is the contemporary city like the contemporary airport—"all the same"? Is it possible to theorize this convergence? And if so, to what ultimate configuration is it aspiring? Convergence is possible only at the price of shedding identity. That is usually seen as a loss. But at the scale at which it occurs, it must mean something. What are the disadvantages of identity, and conversely, what are the advantages of blankness? What if this seemingly accidental—and usually regretted—homogenization were an intentional process, a conscious movement away from difference toward similarity? What if we are witnessing a global liberation movement: "down with character!" What is left after identity is stripped? The Generic? 1.2 To the extent that identity is derived from physical substance, from the historical, from context, from the real, we somehow cannot imagine that anything contemporary—made by us—contributes to it. But the fact that human growth is exponential implies that the past will at some point become too "small" to be inhabited and shared by those alive. We ourselves exhaust it. To the extent that history finds its deposit in architecture, present human quantities will inevitably burst and deplete previous substance. Identity conceived as this form of sharing the past is a losing proposition: not only is there—in a stable model of continuous population expansion—proportionally less and less to share, but history also has an invidious half-life—as it is more abused, it becomes less significant—to the point where its diminishing handouts become insulting. This thinning is exacerbated by the constantly increasing mass of tourists, an avalanche that, in a perpetual quest for "character," grinds successful identities down to meaningless dust. 1.3 Identity is like a mousetrap in which more and more mice have to share the original bait, and which, on closer inspection, may have been empty for centuries. The stronger identity, the more it imprisons, the more it resists expansion, interpretation, renewal, contradiction. Identity becomes like a lighthouse—fixed, overdetermined: it can change its position or the pattern it emits only at the cost of destabilizing navigation. (Paris can only become more Parisian—it is already on its way to becoming hyper-Paris, a polished caricature. There are exceptions: London—it's only identity a lack of clear identity—is perpetually becoming even less London, more open, less static.) 1.4 Identity centralizes; it insists on an essence, a point. Its tragedy is given in simple geometric terms. As the sphere of influence expands, the area characterized by the center becomes larger and larger, hopelessly diluting both the strength and the authority of the core; inevitably the distance between center and circumference increases to the breaking point. In this perspective, the recent, belated discovery of the periphery as a zone of potential value—a kind of pre-historical condition that might finally be worthy of architectural attention—is only a disguised insistence on the priority of and dependency on the center; without center, no periphery; the interest of the first presumably compensates for the emptiness of the latter. Conceptually orphaned, the condition of the periphery is made worse by the fact that its mother is still alive, steering the show, emphasizing its offspring's inadequacies. The last vibes emanating from the exhausted center preclude the reading of the periphery as a critical mass. Not only is the center by definition too small to perform its assigned obligations, but it is also no longer the real center but an overblown mirage on its way to implosion; yet its illusory presence denies the rest of the city its legitimacy. (Manhattan denigrates as "bridge-and-tunnel people" those who need infrastructural support to enter the city, and makes them pay for it.) The persistence of the present concentric obsession makes us all bridge-and-tunnel people, second-class citizens in our own civilization, disenfranchised by the dumb coincidence of our collective exile from the center. 1.5 In our concentric programming (author spent part of his youth in Amsterdam, city of ultimate centrality) the insistence on the center as the core of value and meaning, font of all significance, is doubly destructive—not only is the ever-increasing volume of dependencies an ultimately intolerable strain, it also means that the center has to be constantly maintained, i.e., modernized. As "the most important place," it paradoxically has to be, at the same time, the most old and the most new, the most fixed and the most dynamic; it undergoes the most intense and constant adaptation, which is then compromised and complicated by the fact that it has to be an unacknowledged transformation, invisible to the naked eye. (The city of Zurich has found the most radical, expensive solution in reverting to a kind of reverse archaeology: layer after layer of new modernities—shopping centers, parking, banks, vaults, laboratories—are constructed underneath the center. The center no longer expands outward or skyward, but inward toward the center of the earth itself.) From the grafting of more or less discreet traffic arteries, bypasses, underground tunnels, the construction of ever more tangentes, to the routine transformation of housing into offices, warehouses into lofts, abandoned churches into nightclubs, from the serial bankruptcies and subsequent reopenings of specific units in more and more expensive shopping precincts to the relentless conversion of utilitarian space into "public" space, pedestrianization, the creation of new parks, planting, bridging, exposing, the systematic restoring of historic mediocrity, all authenticity is relentlessly evacuated. 1.6 The Generic City is the city liberated from the
of the Generic City is an eerie calm: the calmer it is, the more it approximates the pure state. The Generic City addresses the “evils” that were ascribed to the traditional city before our love for it became unconditional. The serenity of the Generic City is achieved by the evacuation of the public realm, as in an emergency fire drill. The urban plane now only accommodates necessary movement, fundamentally the car; highways are a superior version of boulevards and plazas, taking more and more space; their design, seemingly aiming for automotive efficiency, is in fact surprisingly sensual, a utilitarian pretense entering the domain of smooth space. What is new about this luscious public realm is that it cannot be measured in dimensions. The same (let’s say ten-mile) stretch yields a vast number of utterly different experiences: it can last five minutes or forty: it can be shared with almost nobody, or with the entire population; it can yield the absolute pleasure of pure, unadulterated speed — at which point the sensation of the Generic City may even become intense or at least acquire density — or utterly claustrophobic moments of stoppage — at which point the thickness of the Generic City is at its most noticeable.

3.3 The Generic City is fractal, an endless repetition of the same simple module; it is possible to reconstruct it from its smallest entity, a desktop computer, maybe even a diskette. 3.4 Golf courses are all that is left of otherness. 3.5 The Generic City has easy phone numbers, not the resistant ten-figure frontal-lobes crunchers of the traditional city but smoother versions, their middle numbers identical, for instance. 3.6 Its main attraction is its anomic.

4. Airport
4.1 Once manifestations of ultimate neutrality, airports now are among the most singular, characteristic elements of the Generic City, its strongest vehicle of differentiation. They have to be, being all the average person tends to experience of a particular city. Like a drastic perfume demonstration, photomurals, vegetation, local costumes give a first concentrated blast of the local identity (sometimes it is also the last). Far away, comfortable, exotic, polar, regional, Eastern, rustic, new, even “undiscovered”: those are the emotional registers invoked. Thus conceptually charged, airports become emblematic signs imprinted on the global collective unconscious in savage manipulations of their non-aviating attractors — tax-free shopping, spectacular spatial qualities, the frequency and reliability of their connections to other airports. In terms of its iconography/performance, the airport is a concentrate of both the hyper-local and hyper-global — hyper-global in the sense you can get goods there that are not available even in the city, hyper-local in the sense you can get things there that you get nowhere else. 4.2 The tendency in airport gestalt is toward ever-greater autonomy; sometimes
they’re even practically unrelated to a specific Generic City. Becoming bigger and bigger, equipped with more and more facilities unconnected to travel, they are on the way to replacing the city. The in-transit condition is becoming universal. Together, airports contain populations of millions – plus the largest daily workforce. In the completeness of their facilities, they are like quarters of the Generic City, sometimes even its reason for being (its center?), with the added attraction of being hermetic systems from which there is no escape – except to another airport. 4.3 The date/age of the Generic City can be reconstructed from a close reading of its airport’s geometry. Hexagonal plan (in unique cases penta- or heptagonal); sixties. Orthogonal plan and section; seventies. Collage City; eighties. A single curved section, endlessly extruded in a linear plan: probably nineties. (Its structure branching out like an oak tree: Germany.) 4.4 Airports come in two sizes: too big and too small. Yet their size has no influence on their performance. This suggests that the most intriguing aspect of all infrastructures is their essential plasticity. Calculated by the exact for the numbered – passengers per year – they are invaded by the countless and survive, stretched toward ultimate indeterminacy. 5. Population 5.1 The Generic City is seriously multiracial, on average 84% black, 12% white, 27% Hispanic, 37% Chinese/Asian, 6% indeterminate, 10% other. Not only multiracial, also multicultural. That’s why it comes as no surprise to see temples between the slabs, dragons on the main boulevards, Buddhas in the CBD (central business district). 5.2 The Generic City is always found by people on the move, poised to move on. This explains the insubstantiality of their foundations. Like the flakes that are suddenly formed in a clear liquid by joining two chemical substances, eventually to accumulate in an uncertain heap on the bottom, the collision or confluence of two migrations – Cuban emigres going north and Jewish retirees going south, for instance, both ultimately on their way somewhere else – establishes, out of the blue, a settlement. A Generic City is born. 6. Urbanism 6.1 The great originality of the Generic City is simply to abandon what doesn’t work – what has outlived its use – to break up the blacktop of idealism with the jackhammers of realism and to accept whatever grows in its place. In that sense, the Generic City accommodates both the primordial and the futuristic – in fact, only these two. The Generic City is all that remains of what used to be the city. The Generic City is the post-city being prepared on the site of the ex-city. 6.2 The Generic City is held together, not by an over-demanding public realm – progressively debased in a surprisingly long sequence in which the Roman Forum is to the Greek agora what the shopping mall is to the high street – but by the residual. In the original model of the moderns, the residual was merely green, its controlled neatness a moralistic assertion of good intentions, discouraging association, use. In the Generic City, because the crust of its civilization is so thin, and through its imminent tropicality, the vegetal is transformed into Edenic Residue, the main carrier of its identity: a hybrid of politics and landscape. At the same time refuge of the illegal, the uncontrollable, and subject of endless manipulation, it represents a simultaneous triumph of the manoeured and the primeval. Its immoral lushness compensates for the Generic City’s other poverties. Supremely inorganic, the organic is the Generic City’s strongest myth. 6.3 The street is dead. That discovery has coincided with frantic attempts at its resurrection. Public art is everywhere – as if two deaths make a life. Pedestrianization – intended to preserve – merely channels the flow of those doomed to destroy the object of their intended reverence with their feet. 6.4 The Generic City is on its way from horizontality to verticality. The skyscraper looks as if it will be the final, definitive typology. It has swallowed everything else. It can exist anywhere: in a rice field, or downtown – it makes no difference anymore. The towers no longer stand together; they are spaced so that they don’t interact. Density in isolation is the ideal. 6.5 Housing is not a problem. It has either been completely solved or totally left to chance; in the first case it is legal, in the second “illegal”; in the first case, towers or, usually, slabs (at the most, 15 meters deep), in the second (in perfect complementarity) a crust of improvised hovels. One solution consumes the sky, the other the ground. It is strange that those with the least money inhabit the most expensive commodity – earth; those who pay, what is free – air. In either case, housing proves to be surprisingly accommodating – not only does the population double every so many years, but also, with the loosening grip of the various religions, the average number of occupants per unit halves through divorce and other family-dividing phenomena – with the same frequency that the city’s population doubles; as its numbers swell, the Generic City’s density is perpetually on the decrease. 6.6 All Generic Cities issue from the tabula rasa; if there was nothing, now they are there; if there was something, they have replaced it. They must, otherwise they would be historic. 6.7 The Generic Cityscape is usually an amalgam of orderly sections dating from near the beginning of its development, when “the power” was still undiluted – and increasingly free arrangements everywhere else. 6.8 The Generic City is the apotheosis of the multiple-choice concept: all boxes crossed, an anthology of all the options. Usually the Generic City has been “planned,” not in the usual sense of some bureaucratic organization
controlling its development, but as if various echoes, spores, tropes, seeds fell on the ground randomly as in nature, took hold—exploiting the natural fertility of the terrain—and now form an ensemble: an arbitrary gene pool that sometimes produces amazing results. 6.9 The writing of the city may be indecipherable, flawed, but that does not mean that there is no writing; it may simply be that we developed a new illiteracy, a new blindness. Patient detection reveals the themes, particles, strands that can be isolated from the seeming murkiness of this Wagnerrian ar-soup: notes left on a blackboard by a visiting genius 50 years ago, stenciled UN reports disintegrating in their Manhattan glass silo, discoveries by former colonial thinkers with a keen eye for the climate, unpredictable ricosets of design education gathering strength as a global laundering process. 6.10 The best definition of the aesthetic of the Generic City is “free style.” How to describe it? Imagine an open space, a clearing in the forest, a leveled city. There are three elements: roads, buildings, and nature; they coexist in flexible relationships, seemingly without reason, in spectacular organizational diversity. Any one of the three may dominate; sometimes the “road” is lost—to be found meandering on an incomprehensible detour; sometimes you see no building, only nature; then, equally unpredictably, you are surrounded only by building. In certain frightening spots, all three are simultaneously absent. On these “sites” (actually, what is the opposite of a site? They are like holes bored through the concept of city) public art emerges like the Loch Ness Monster, equal parts figurative and abstract, usually self-cleaning. 6.11 Specific cities still seriously debate the mistakes of architects—for instance, their proposals to create raised pedestrian networks with tentacles leading from one block to the next as a solution to congestion—but the Generic City simply enjoys the benefits of their inventions: decks, bridges, tunnels, motorways—a huge proliferation of the paraphernalia of connection—frequently draped with ferns and flowers as if to ward off original sin, creating a vegetal congestion more severe than a fifties science-fiction movie. 6.12 The roads are only for cars. People (pedestrians) are led on rides (as in an amusement park), on “promenades” that lift them off the ground, then subject them to a catalog of exaggerated conditions—wind, heat, steepness, cold, interior, exterior, smells, fumes—in a sequence that is a grotesque caricature of life in the historic city. 6.13 There is horizontality in the Generic City, but it is on the way out. It consists either of history that is not yet erased or of Tudor-like enclaves that multiply around the center as newly minted emblems of preservation. 6.14 Ironically, though itself new, the Generic City is encircled by a constellation of New Towns: New Towns are like year rings. Somehow, New Towns age very quickly, the way a five-year-old child develops wrinkles and arthritis through the disease called progeria. 6.15 The Generic City presents the final death of planning. Why? Not because it is not planned—in fact, huge, comprehensive universes of bureaucrats and developers funnel unimaginable flows of energy and money into its completion; for the same money, its plains can be fertilized by diamonds, its mud fields paved in gold bricks ... But its most dangerous and most exhilarating discovery is that planning makes no difference whatever. Buildings may be placed well (a tower near a metro station) or badly (whole centers miles away from any road). They flourish/perish unpredictably. Networks become overstretched, age, rot, become obsolete; populations double, triple, quadruple, suddenly disappear. The surface of the city explodes, the economy accelerates, slows down, bursts, collapses. Like ancient mothers that still nourish titanic embryos, whole cities are built on colonial infrastructures of which the oppressors took the blueprints back home. Nobody knows where, how, since when the sewers run, the exact location of the telephone lines, what the reason was for the position of the center, where monumental axes end. All it proves is that there are infinite hidden margins, colossal reservoirs of slack, a perpetual, organic process of adjustment, standards, behavior; expectations change with the biological intelligence of the most alert animal. In this apotheosis of multiple choice it will never be possible again to reconstruct cause and effect. They work—that is all. 6.16 The Generic City’s aspiration toward tropicality automatically implies the rejection of any lingering reference to the city as fortress, as citadel; it is open and accommodating like a mangrove forest. 7. Politics 7.1 The Generic City has a sometimes distant relationship with a more or less authoritarian regime—local or national. Usually the cronies of the “leader”—whoever that was—decided to develop a piece of “downtown” or the periphery, or even to start a new city in the middle of nowhere, and so triggered the boom that put the city on the map. 7.2 Very often, the regime has evolved to a surprising degree of invisibility, as if, through its very passiveness, the Generic City resists the dictatorial.

8. Sociology 8.1 It is very surprising that the triumph of the Generic City has not coincided with the triumph of sociology—a discipline whose “field” has been extended by the Generic City beyond its wildest imagination. The Generic City is sociology, happening. Each Generic City is a petri dish—or an infinitely patient blackboard on which almost any hypothesis can be “proven” and then erased, never again to reverbate in the minds of its authors or its audience. 8.2 Clearly, there is a proliferation...
synthetic: raw: atavistic practice that will be very popular in the third millennium. 9.9
Shrimp is the ultimate appetizer. Through the simplification of the food chain—and the
vicissitudes of preparation—they taste like english muffins, i.e., nothingness. 10. Program

10.1 Offices are still there, in ever greater numbers, in fact. People say they are no longer
necessary. In five to ten years we will all work at home. But then we will need bigger
homes, big enough to use for meetings. Offices will have to be converted to homes. 10.2
The only activity is shopping. But why not consider shopping as temporary, provisional?
It awaits better times. It is our own fault—we didn’t think of anything better to do. The
same spaces inundated with other programs—libraries, baths, universities—would be
terrific; we would be awed by their grandeur. 10.3 Hotels are becoming the generic
accommodation of the Generic City, its most common building block. That used to be
the office—which at least implied a coming and a going, assumed the presence of other
important accommodations elsewhere. Hotels are now containers that, in the expansion
and completeness of their facilities, make almost all other buildings redundant. Even
doubling as shopping malls, they are the closest we have to urban existence, 21st-century
style. 10.4 The hotel now implies imprisonment, voluntary house arrest; there is no
competing place left to go; you come and stay. Cumulatively, it describes a city of
millions all locked in their rooms, a kind of reverse animation—density implied.

11. Architecture 11.1 Close your eyes and imagine an explosion of beige. At its epicenter
splashes the color of vaginal folds (unaroused), metallic-matte aubergine, khaki-
tobacco, dusty pumpkin; all cars on their way to bridal whiteness … 11.2 There are
interesting and boring buildings in the Generic City, as in all cities. Both trace their ancestry
back to Mies van der Rohe: the first category to his irregular Friedrichstadt tower (1921),
the second to the boxes he conceived not long afterward. This sequence is important:
obviously, after initial experimentation, Mies made up his mind once and for all against
interest, for boredom. At best, his later buildings capture the spirit of the earlier work—
sublimated, repressed?—as a more or less noticeable absence, but he never proposed
“interesting” projects as possible buildings again. The Generic City proves him wrong:
its more daring architects have taken up the challenge Mies abandoned, to the point where
it is now hard to find a box. Ironically, this exuberant homage to the interesting Mies
shows that “the” Mies was wrong. 11.3 The architecture of the Generic City is by definition
beautiful. Built at incredible speed, and conceived at even more incredible pace,
there is an average of 27 aborted versions for every realized—but that is not quite the
term—structure. They are prepared in the 10,000 architectural offices nobody has ever
heard of, each vibrant with fresh inspiration. Presumably more modest than their well-
known colleagues, these offices are bonded by a collective awareness that something
is wrong with architecture that can only be rectified through their efforts. The power
of numbers gives them a splendid, shining arrogance. They are the ones who design
without any hesitation. They assemble, from 1,001 sources, with savage precision, more
riches than any genius ever could. On average, their education has cost 30,000 dollars,
excluding travel and housing. 23% have been launched at American Ivy League
universities, where they have been exposed—admittedly for very short periods—to the well-paid
elite of the other, “official” profession. It follows that a combined total investment of 300
billion dollars ($300,000,000,000,000) worth of architectural education ($30,000 [average
cost] x 100 [average number of workers per office] x 100,000 [number of worldwide offices])
is working in and producing Generic Cities at any moment. 11.4 Buildings that are
complex in form depend on the curtain-wall industry, on ever more effective adhesives and
sealants that turn each building into a mixture of Straitjacket and oxygen tent. The use of
silicone—“we are stretching the facade as far as it will go”—has flattened all facades,
glued glass to stone to steel to concrete in a space-age impurity. These connections give
the appearance of intellectual rigor through the liberal application of a transparent spore
compound that keeps everything together by intention rather than design—a triumph
of glue over the integrity of materials. Like everything else in the Generic City, its
architecture is the resistant made malleable, an epidemic of yielding no longer through
the application of principle but through the systematic application of the unprincipled.

Because the Generic City is largely Asian, its architecture is generally air-conditioned;
this is where the paradox of the recent paradigm shift—the city no longer represents max-
imum development but borderline underdevelopment—becomes acute: the brutal means
by which universal conditioning is achieved mimic inside the building the climatic
conditions that once “happened” outside—sudden storms, mini-tornadoes, freezing spells
in the cafeteria, heat waves, even mist; a provincialism of the mechanical, deserted by
gray matter in pursuit of the electronic. Incompetence or imagination? 11.6 The irony
is that in this way the Generic City is at its most subversive, its most ideological; it elevates
mediocrity to a higher level; it is like Kurt Schwitters’s Merzart at the scale of the city:
the Generic City is a Merzcity. 11.7 The angle of the facades is the only reliable index
of architectural genius: 3 points for sloping backward, 12 points for sloping forward,
2-point penalty for setbacks (too nostalgic). 11.8 The apparently solid substance of the
Generic City is misleading. 51% of its volume consists of atrium. The atrium is a diac-
abal device in its ability to substantiate the insubstantial. Its Roman name is an et-
ernal guarantor of architectural class—its historic origins make the theme inexhaustible.
It accommodates the cave-dweller in its relentless provision of metropolitan comfort.
11.9 The atrium is void space: voids are the essential building block of the Generic City.
Paradoxically, its hollowness insures its very physicality, the pumping up of the volume
the only pretext for its physical manifestation. The more complete and repetitive its
interiors, the less their essential repetition is noticed. 11.10 The style of choice is postmodern,
and will always remain so. Postmodernism is the only movement that has succeeded in
connecting the practice of architecture with the practice of panic. Postmodernism is not
a doctrine based on a highly civilized reading of architectural history but a method,
a mutation in professional architecture that produces results fast enough to keep pace
with the Generic City’s development. Instead of consciousness, as its original inventors
may have hoped, it creates a new unconscious. It is modernization’s little helper. Anyone
can do it—a skyscraper based on the Chinese pagoda and/or a Tuscan hill town. 11.11
All resistance to postmodernism is anti-democratic. It creates a “stealth” wrapping
around architecture that makes it irresistible, like a Christmas present from a charity.
11.12 Is there a connection between the predominance of mirror in the Generic City—
is it to celebrate nothingness through its multiplication or a desperate effort to capture
essences on their way to evaporation?—and the “gifts” that, for centuries, were supposed
to be the most popular, efficient present for savages? 11.13 Gorky speaks in relation
to Coney Island of “varied boredom.” He clearly intends the term as an oxymoron.
Variety cannot be boring. Boredom cannot be varied. But the infinite variety of the
Generic City comes close, at least, to making variety normal: banalized, in a reversal of
expectation, it is repetition that has become unusual, therefore, potentially, daring, exhil-
arating. But that is for the 21st century. 12. Geography 12.1 The Generic City is in
a warmer than usual climate; it is on its way to the south—toward the equator—away
from the mess that the north made of the second millennium. It is a concept in a state of
migration. Its ultimate destiny is to be tropical—better climate, more beautiful people.
It is inhabited by those who do not like it elsewhere. 12.2 In the Generic City, people are
not only more beautiful than their peers, they are also reputed to be more even-tempered,
less anxious about work, less hostile, more pleasant—proof, in other words, that there
is a connection between architecture and behavior, that the city can make better people
through as yet unidentified methods. 12.3 One of the most potent characteristics of the
Generic City is the stability of its weather—no seasons, outlook sunny—yet all forecasts
are presented in terms of imminent change and future deterioration; clouds in Karachi.
From the ethical and the religious, the issue of doom has shifted to the inescapable domain
of the meteorological. Bad weather is about the only anxiety that hovers over the Generic
City. 13. Identity 13.1 There is a calculated (?) redundancy in the iconography that the
Generic City adopts. If it is water-facing, then water-based symbols are distributed over
its entire territory. If it is a port, then ships and cranes will appear far inland. (However,
showing the containers themselves would make no sense: you can’t particularize the
generic through the Generic.) If it is Asian, then “delicate” (sensual, inscrutable)
women appear in elastic poses, suggesting (religious, sexual) submission everywhere.
If it has a mountain, each brochure, menu, ticket, billboard will insist on the hill, as
if nothing less than a seamless tautology will convince. Its identity is like a mantra.
14. History 14.1 Regret about history’s absence is a tiresome reflex. It exposes an unspoken
consensus that history’s presence is desirable. But who says that is the case? A city is a
plane inhabited in the most efficient way by people and processes, and in most cases,
the presence of history only drags down its performance… 14.2 History present obstructs
the pure exploitation of its theoretical value as absence. 14.3 Throughout the history of
humankind—to start a paragraph the American way—cities have grown through a
process of consolidation. Changes are made on the spot. Things are improved. Cultures
flourish, decay, revive, disappear, are sacked, invaded, humiliated, raped, triumph, are
reborn, have golden ages, fall suddenly silent—all on the same site. That is why archae-
ology is a profession of digging; it exposes layer after layer of civilization (i.e., city).
The Generic City, like a sketch which is never elaborated, is not improved but abandoned.
The idea of layering, intensification, completion are alien to it; it has no layers.
Its next layer takes place somewhere else, either next door—that can be the size of
a country—or even elsewhere altogether. The archaeologist (= archaeology with more
interpretation) of the 20th century needs unlimited plane tickets, not a shovel. 14.4 In
exporting/ejecting its improvements, the Generic City perpetuates its own amnesia
(its only link with eternity?). Its archaeology will therefore be the evidence of its pro-
gressive forgetting, the documentation of its evaporation. Its genius will be empty-
handed—not an emperor without clothes but an archaeologist without finds, or a site even.
15. Infrastructure

15.1 Infrastructures, which were mutually reinforcing and totalizing, are becoming more and more competitive and local; they no longer pretend to create functioning wholes but now spin off functional entities. Instead of network and organism, the new infrastructure creates enclave and impasse; no longer the grand récit but the parasitic swerve. (The city of Bangkok has approved plans for three competing airborne metro systems to get from A to B — may the strongest one win.) 15.2 Infrastructure is no longer a more or less delayed response to a more or less urgent need but a strategic weapon, a prediction: Harbor X is not enlarged to serve a hinterland of frantic consumers but to kill/reduce the chances that harbor Y will survive the 21st century. On a single island, southern metropolis Z, still in its infancy, is "given" a new subway system to make established metropolis W in the north look clumsy, congested, and ancient. Life in Y is smoothed to make life in U eventually unbearable.

16. Culture

16.1 Only the redundant counts. 16.2 In each time zone, there are at least three performances of Cats. The world is surrounded by a Saturn's ring of meowing. 16.3 The city used to be the great sexual hunting ground. The Generic City is like a dating agency; it efficiently matches supply and demand. Orgasm instead of agony; there is progress. The most obscene possibilities are announced in the cleanest typography: Helvetica has become pornographic.

17. End

17.1 Imagine a Hollywood movie about the Bible. A city somewhere in the Holy Land. Market scene: from left and right extras cloaked in colorful rags, furs, silk robes walk into the frame yelling, gesticulating, rolling their eyes, starting fights, laughing, scratching their beards, hairpieces dripping with glue, thronging toward the center of the image waving sticks, fists, overturning stalls, trampling animals... People shout. Selling wares? Proclaiming futures? Invoking Gods? Pursers are snatched, criminals pursued (or is it helped?) by the crowds. Priests pray for calm. Children run amok in an undergrowth of legs and robes. Animals bark, Statues topple. Women shriek — threatened? Ecstatic? The churning mass becomes oceanic. Waves break. Now switch off the sound — silence, a welcome relief — and reverse the film. The now mute but still visibly agitated men and women stumble backward; the viewer no longer registers only humans but begins to note spaces between them. The center empties; the fast shadows evacuate the rectangle of the picture frame, probably complaining, but fortunately we don't hear them. Silence is now reinforced by emptiness; the image shows empty stalls, some debris that was trampled underfoot. Relief... it's over. That is the story of the city. The city is no longer. We can leave the theater now...
TR I U M P H

Tropical

Tropical was afraid of the night, afraid his body would slip away from him, dissolved in that purple velvet with diamond eyes, the tropical night did not lie like a painted film-set, but was filled with deep openings, and seemed to have arms like the foliage.

TRUE

And this was the first thing that he was positively certain of being true and no imaginative slight error, since he had himself treated just as he had read these lights were treated in past ages.

TRUTH

Defiance possesses, as long as it lasts, an inscrutable truth.

TRUTH

What is truth?

TRUTH

Beauty is truth, truth beauty.

TRUTH

I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth because there's no way to say it all. Saying the whole truth is materially impossible; miss it. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.

TRUTH

The truth untried will not crush them. The truth has to be put out slowly, and even then not straight.

TRUTH

The truth is a straight line.

TRUTH

No, truth is something desperate, and she's got it. Believe me, it's something desperate, and she's got it.

TUNNEL

The train entered a tunnel, turning their small traveling room into a sleeping compartment. She felt her own strength touch and touch her hand.

TUNNEL

TUNNEL VISION

Tunnel vision is a disease in which perception is restricted by ignorance and distorted by vested interest. Tunnel vision is caused by an optical fungus that multiplies when the brain is less energetic than the eyes. It is uncomplicated by exposure to politics. When a good idea is going through the filters and compressors of ordinary tunnel vision, it's not only out of the picture, but in fact out of your life.