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Gluing the Fragmented Metropolis

Abstract:

The paper starts by recalling selected anthropological classifications of cultural dimensions of globalization, focussing specially on those postulated by Professor Arjun Appadurai in 1996. Next, it jumps to 2013 and to the Universidade Lusófona's call for a Conference named "ShoppingScapes", concentrating on the understanding of that expression. Precedents that have possibly led to today's typical shoppingscapes are next approached, addressing particularly two of their major manifestations, those linked to developing economies and those related to developed ones. Next the text argues about typical features of a shoppingcape, bringing to light three incidental characteristics that are usually encompassed by a shoppingcape in urban contemporaneity namely (i) metropolitan fragmentation; (ii) marketing of the metropolitan fragments through iconic architectural branding; (iii) gluing the metropolitan fragmentation through the employment of urban activities typical of the tertiary sector. Finally, it concludes by raising some points linked to shoppingscapes and to urban design guidelines in contemporaneity.

Keywords: cultural landscapes; urbanistic contemporaneity; fragmented metropolis; shoppingscapes; tertiary sector.

1 Introduction

The city of the 21st century presents a quite intriguing structure, whereas some argue it presents no structure at all. Others claim it can no longer be called ‘city’, like Choay (1994) or the Harvard Design School (2001). Others, still, claim it is nothing but an extended urbanized territory, configuring what Ascher (1995) defines as ‘métapolis’. An interesting interpretation describing the anthropological constitution of today’s globalized urban regions is essayed by Appadurai (1996), who creates neologisms to represent the effects of the new cultural global economy on the construction of landscapes: ‘ethnoscapes’, ‘mediascapes’, ‘technoscapes’, ‘financescapes’, and ‘ideoscapes’, all related to how ‘images’ circulate globally. In this context, the descriptor ‘shoppingscapes’ seems extremely convenient to illustrate an urban morphological situation marked by an intense density of commercial activities. In fact, the main morphological characteristic of a shoppingscape evokes a recent categorization issued by urban-design theorist David Shane (2011), who advances four models to describe actual urban conglomerates: the metropolis, the megalopolis, the fragmented metropolis and the megacity/metacity. Of all four, the *fragmented metropolis* seems to keep the closest relationship to a shoppingscape as it will be argued ahead.

Actually, when it comes to designing utopian dreams, it is worth to recall a remarkable comment issued by renowned urban-architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who prophesied “You can design Utopia, and many have tried and failed. No one, from Tony Garnier to Patrick Geddes, knew that *shopping would be the glue to hold it together*” (Huxtable 1997:103, emphasis added).

Indeed, the tertiary sector became so widely overspread throughout the fabric of modern cities that it “turned the whole world into a shopping centre. Traditional forms of public space have (...) been subsumed into shopping (...). Even urbanism itself is now a subset of shopping because the city street is morphing into an outdoor mall” (Campbell 2002: 55). This situation clearly illustrates the profound mutations experienced in the behaviours of contemporary urban society. “At the end of the 20th century, the old factory chimney (...) no longer emits the noxious smoke (...) the major traders (...) migrate to the new shopping centres and themed ‘malls’ in new locations, forming new places in a new landscape (...)” (Castello 2010:85). In this new ‘cityscape’, shopping is irrevocably linked to the genesis of *places*. Indeed, shopping is at the DNA of *place*.

This situation is well illustrated by the numerous newly *invented places* (Carmona et al. 2003) scattered over the urban environments of contemporary times, which compromise huge land fragments to shopping and other tertiary activities. It seems likely nowadays that urban-architectural scholarship needs more serious elaborations on the patterns that will collaborate to correct the deviations in the morphological structure of the fragmented metropolis of contemporaneity, somehow 'gluing' its fractures. This matter will occupy the speculative assumptions raised in the present study.

The paper initially concentrates on further elaborating about shopping generalities in a fragmented metropolis. It also stresses the role of large scale shopping centres on the structuring of contemporary cities, since this type of construction has been used like the core element in urban renewal operations and new developments. Finally, the study argues about the introduction of new trends in the relations between the public and private sectors, with the arrival of new 'private public' spaces, that changes the very nature of the public space (Minton, 2012).

2 Background Notes – Late 20th Century

In 1996, the book *Modernity at Large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*, by cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai, shook the intellectual academic community with its unusual classifications of the cultural 'scapes' – 'ethnoscapes', 'mediascapes', 'technoscapes', 'financescapes', and 'ideoscapes' – scattered over a globalized world that somehow pointed out to an end of the nation-states.

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed fantastic modifications in almost every aspect concerning human life on Earth. Ultimately, these modifications led to the awakening of an entirely mutant society rising at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and displaying unusual patterns in many diverse matters – economic, social, behavioural, environmental, attitudinal, existential – that enabled it to be singled out in relation to other known Humanity times of our civilization. Indeed, this might be so

Firstly, because it is a society occupying a new type of world, an urbanized world. Secondly, because besides being urbanized, it is also a globalized world. This globalization mainly occurs in economic-financial terms, with flows of capital circulating endlessly to all corners of the planet 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in global conditions of time, space and scale not previously experienced by other societies. Besides these features, it can be seen to be accompanied by other equally

globalized manifestations which fully meet the cultural dimensions of the global population. Advances in information technology not only operate splendidly in globally interlinking the flow of finance, but also allow cultural events to become instantaneous and simultaneously perceived throughout the world with the same intensity and in the same proportions. Thirdly, because it is a society which is for the first time translating into real terms the shift from the old economy of production into the new economy of consumption. As a result, it can be fully expected that the behaviour of the inhabitants of this new urban reality would be taking a different form, manifestly developing *in new types of spaces*. (Castello 2010 p.xv). Altogether, the interaction of those phenomena resulted in a hurried utterance that society had reached something that could be understood as *postmodernity*.

3 Background Notes – Early 21st Century

“Perhaps the beginning of the twenty-first century will be remembered as the point where the urban could no longer be understood without shopping” (Chung et al., 2001, cover). Though running dangerously close to sensationalism, this assertion attributed to Rem Koolhaas, Director of the Project on the City (developed by The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping), warn us that the new millennium postmodernity would effectively bring mutations to our lives. Countless things remained unsatisfactorily explained and among them, the peculiar urban configuration referred to as a ‘shoppingscape’. Accordingly, in 2013, the Portuguese ‘Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias’ devotes an initial stance toward shedding some light into this query by organizing an International Conference called ‘ShoppingScapes 2013’. In their own terms of reference, they explain that “The designation of ‘ShoppingScapes’ tries to focus in a word the meeting of ideas related to the presence and meaning of commercial superstructures that have been spreading throughout the territory, transforming and (re)building the landscape, as well as affecting the development of cities in general. (...) it turns out that the areas provided by these shopping structures appear not to be merely dedicated to consumption. In the theatrical and simulated environment of its ‘streets’ and ‘squares’ - free recreations of the structuring elements of the historic city - one can wander, eat, drink, rest and consume symbols and goods.” (Excerpted from the *Call for Papers* for the Conference).

Interestingly enough, this interpretation comes quite handy to what this paper’s authors recognize as new urban *places* in today’s cities (Castello & Bortoli 2013).

Together with several other tertiary sector urban activities – such as the reurbanisation of old historical settings, hybrid compounds, architectural recovery of disused brownfields, iconic museums and libraries, all legitimate representatives of actual society cultural behaviours – these new urban elements clearly configure what can be seen as a typical contemporaneity pattern of today's urbanization.

4 Background Notes – an Upbringing of Today's Shoppingscape

In urban-architectural terms things have not always been the way they are today. At least three noticeable circumstances distinguish the different urban patterns of shopping in recent times and seem worth to be recalled here.

Firstly, the early manifestations in the spatial organization of shopping activities noticed in Third World cities, especially the features signalled by Brazilian geographer Milton Santos, characterized by the different shopping configurations expressed through a *double circuit* clearly recognizable in the urban economy, an upper or modern circuit, and a lower circuit, whereas the city is no longer regarded as a single entity, but thought of as composed by two subsystems. Santos teaches “The fundamental differences between the activities of the upper and lower circuits are of a technological and organizational nature. The upper circuit uses an imitative imported, high-level and capital-intensive technology; in the lower circuit, though technology is labour-intensive and often either indigenous or locally adapted, it often has considerable innovative potential” (Santos 1979, pp.20-21).

A second point to deserve attention is the controlled spatial distribution of shopping in urban areas during the rigorous canons of Modernist Urbanism. The extraordinary potential shown by the shopping sector to promote social interaction in cities – and hence, to contribute to the offer of ‘urbanity’ in the built environment's places – is relatively set aside by the rigorous land use dictated by the zoning regulations accompanying Modernist Urbanism. This has been particularly true in European locations, where criticisms started to be heard as long ago as in the 1970s. In the United Kingdom, for example, the Modernist principles were responsible for comments such as “(...) the need for a new paradigm for planning, not just in the retailing context (...), can be answered by (...) the realisation that there are many different groups with different demands and different spatial behaviour patterns.” (Kivell & Shaw p.145). Curiously, at that time, an indication about the future *shoppingscapes*, that would arrive only in the early twenty-first century was already hinted by the specialised literature, which read: “We still have a long way to go,

however, and in the retailing context we can suggest that (...) planners seem slow to recognise, and provide for, the fact that separate groups of consumers derive different benefits from different locational arrangements" (ibid.).

Thirdly, another topic to be remembered refers to the accentuated growth of the shopping sector, particularly in the industrialized countries, in which the increase of the business nucleations became so voluminous that some specialised authors, like Brian Berry, in the United States, were induced to produce lengthy typological charters trying to summarise the extensive spectrum of shopping areas already found along the urban concentrations of the time (Fig. 1).

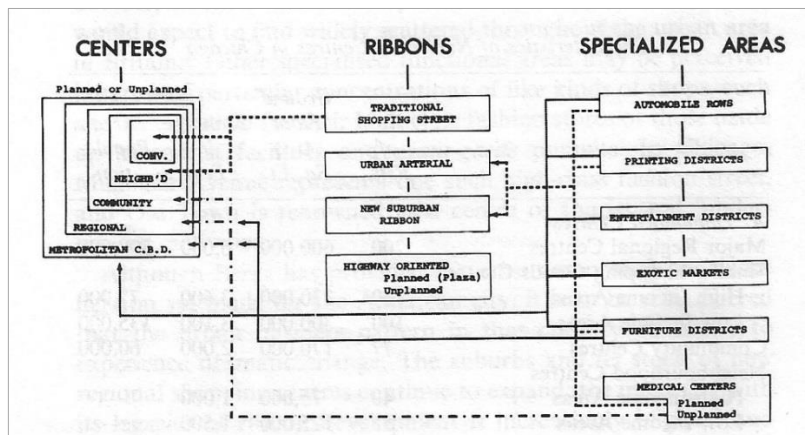


FIG. 1 Brian Berry's ShoppingScape: an urban business pattern for Chicago, USA. Source: Davies, Ross L. *Marketing Geography with special reference to retailing*. New Fetter Lane (London): Methuen & Co., 1977, p. 121.

One way or another, Modernist principles left a heritage of unexpected consequences to the shopping sector since they regulated the overall spatial distribution of shopping throughout the whole of the urban territory, and kept the distribution sector circumscribed to designated specialized commercial zones. The resulting urban configuration moulded by this Modernist strictness generated spaces that critics labelled as *non-places*, and originated psychological discontentments for the population, expressed by the so-called *placelessness*, an expression coined by geographer Edward Relph (1976) (a theory later on renounced by the same Relph, in 1996) to describe the overall lack of diversity and environmental animation in the quality of urban life.

An initial reaction against this lack of diversity in the tertiary sector of industrialized countries seems to be noticed more intensively in France, in 1975, when Paris surprised the retail geographer's academic community presenting a map (Fig. 2) instructed by conclusions reached out by the use of new methods (specially 'Factor Analysis'), depicting a scenario marked by an accentuated retail dispersion (Beaujeu-Garnier & Delobez 1979).

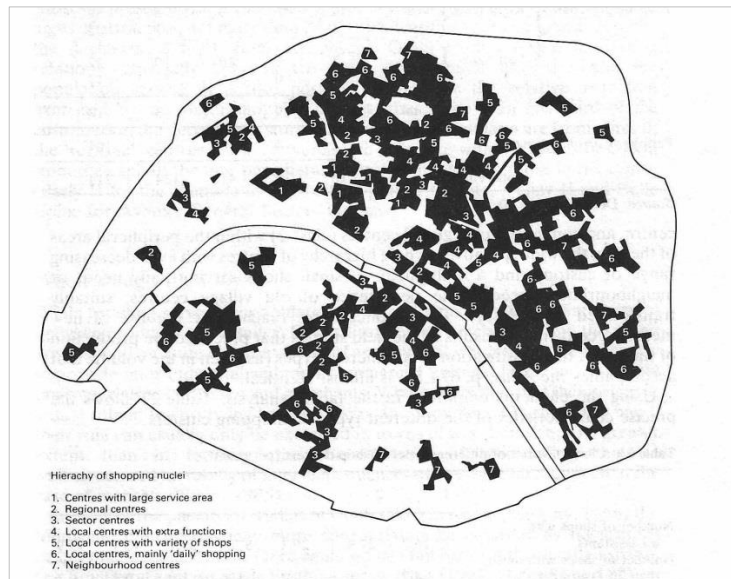


FIG. 2 A Parisian ShoppingScape (1975). Source: Beaujeu-Garnier, J. & Delobez, A. *Geography of Marketing*. London/New York: Longman, 1979, p.181.

Lastly, one final topic that should not be forgotten – associated to the contemporary consolidation of shoppingscapes and also linked more intimately to the industrialized economies – is the launching of the great shopping malls in the United States, pioneered in 1922 by the Country Club Plaza, Kansas City, Missouri (Bortoli 2006 p.34). Indeed, “If the first half of the twentieth century in American urbanism (...) can be characterized as the Age of Planning, the period after 1970 was the Age of the Market” (Rybczynski 2010 p.93). Actually, prior to that, the launching of several other shopping patterns had been experimented in industrialized capitalist countries like, for example, the typology known as ‘Arcades’, in London (Fig. 3), and ‘Passages’, in Paris.



FIG. 3 Piccadilly Arcade, London. Photo: L. Castello

Shopping habits however keep changing constantly and, as Rybczynski observes, “Today, many young people have never seen a true department store (...), and I suspect that in another twenty-five years many shoppers will never have set foot in a mall” (Rybczynski 2010 p.93). In fact, in today’s America, malls are already being progressively included in the preservation lists of historical associations, with one particular group – the association called *Dead Malls* – dedicated to the study of old relics of the area and to “the stories and history behind the great era of store chains that defined retail” (<http://www.deadmalls.com>).

5 Present Day Typical Features of a Shoppingscape

There are many things still unexplored in the contemporaneity of cities. And there are also many lessons to learn from present day shoppingscapes as typical representatives of contemporaneity in cities. To approach them more comfortably in methodological terms, three incidental characteristics closely related to shoppingscapes in urban contemporaneity will be highlighted in their individual terms, in this section: (i) metropolitan fragmentation; (ii) marketing the metropolitan fragments through iconic branding; (iii) gluing the metropolitan fragmentation through tertiary sector initiatives.

5.1 Metropolitan fragmentation

"The *fragmented metropolis* is a hybrid urban form that arose from the collapse of the metropolis, under the impact of the megalopolis." (Shane 2011, p.346). In this simplified statement, Shane admirably summarizes one of the most conspicuous characteristics of cities' contemporaneity, the *metropolitan fragmentation*. Initially circumscribed to the urban structuring of North American metropolises, it soon extrapolated American reality and spread out to the rest of the globalized world, Third World inclusive.

One of the first registers of this phenomenon comes from an author who is also an experienced American urban designer practitioner, Jonathan Barnett (1996), who produced a comprehensive book on that matter named "The Fractured Metropolis. Improving the new city, Restoring the old city, Reshaping the region". Even in the opening lines of his book one can already read: "American cities are splitting apart. Traditional downtowns still have their ring of old urban neighbourhoods, but nearby suburban villages and rural counties have been transformed into a new kind of city, where residential subdivisions extend for miles and shopping malls and office parks are strung out in long corridors of commercial development" (Barnett 1996 p.1). In his statement, Barnett calls for two embryonic determinants of city fragmentation, assuming their implicit protagonism: the presence of new urban concentrations in the outskirts of the metropolis; and the presence of new insular nucleations comprising independent shopping malls and office parks, also located in the metropolitan environs. These two features concur to the production of concrete urban fragments. In addition, "Each shop or office building has to provide its own parking, so each structure is surrounded by asphalt, fragmenting development even more" (ibid., p.6). Barnett describes the production of fragmentation saying that the metropolitan growth proceeds in 'spasms', caused by limits of an economic nature imposed upon the continuing expansion of the megalopolis along its linear progression. Such limits are usually associated to a plethora of factors, such as higher prices in oil supply, together with an increased move of people and activities towards more environmentally beneficial suburban locations. In general, the determinant factors are mostly associated to a decrease in the collection of taxes in the inner city areas, in favour of their outlying locations. All in all, this will conduce to the economic stagnation of the inner city areas, determining an overall economic retraction. To the 'fits' in the metropolitan expansion correspond noticeable hindrances in the inner city social and economic development, which, in turn encompasses inequalities in tax revenues due to inner political limits no longer corresponding to economic and financial realities. Consequently, it is not unusual to see the inner city becoming

insolvent, “(...) a place of poverty and urban riot as commercial interests faltered, the tax base shrank (...) creating dystopian urban scenarios” (Shane 2011, p.192). In his classic compendium about new tactics in urban design, Jonathan Barnett proposes to resuscitate an old technical approach to deal with metropolitan fragmentation, formerly tested in New York: to struggle against it by treating the new ‘fragments’ as urban enclaves, proposing design strategies for a more straightforward control of the small fragment of the city involved in the project. This is somehow similar to the conceptual guidelines employed by the New York planners’ zoning code of 1916, which established special ordinances for selected districts. Later on, the 1961 Zoning Resolution introduced new operative strategies, inaugurating the creative New York policy that encouraged the provision of ‘privately owned public space’, “(...) encouraging rather than requiring, private developers to act in a manner desired by the public sector, (...) introduced a new type of space: privately owned public space, located on private property yet, (...) physically accessible to the public-at-large” (Kayden et al. 2000, p.11). Actual *ShoppingScapes* are much indebted to these fragmentary design experiments because that “(...) system of urban enclave design enabled urban actors to control a small fragment of the city, while not dictating rules for everyone else (...) it became the norm for global capitalist development as well as community activism” (Shane 2011, pp.192-3). In the period 1967-1973, the City of New York established five special purposes zoning districts and, among some of them, created a catalyst building to highlight the unique circumstances of the district, branding its iconic quality (Kayden et al. 2000, p.13) (Fig. 4).



FIG. 4 ShoppingScapes in New York. The catalyst brand of an 'Apple's building. Photo: L. Castello

5.2 Marketing the metropolitan fragments through iconic branding

Geographer David Harvey (1992) relates urban fragmentation “(...) to the collapse of the modern Bretton Woods financial system based on nation states, and its replacement by a new system of global corporations that relentlessly sought profits but then had the problem of investing that profit in safe, urban enclaves to preserve its value” (Shane 2011, p.194). Shane also observes “In Mrs Thatcher’s Britain and Ronald Reagan’s America, huge urban fragments became feasible” (ibid.). And why would they become feasible? A simple linear reasoning helps to understand that. Let us assume that a global corporation invests in a mega iconic piece of architecture producing, for instance, a large multiple uses shopping complex; this complex will compromise a vast amount of urban land being allocated to a single purpose, which will imply in the creation of an extended urban fragment; as a consequence, the whole operation induces the creation of a new invented urban place, ready to become incorporated into the list of interesting places the hosting city has to offer to a resident or a visitor; in the end, through this city marketing tactic, the city will reach an upgrade in its international ranking in the tourist market, enhancing its status as an outstanding branded place.

In fact, there are several examples nowadays that illustrate this multiple feature of iconic buildings that create → shopping places that produce → urban fragments that work as → urban brands (Fig. 5).



FIG. 5 ShoppingScapes in London. Stratford Center. Photo: L. Castello

The combination of city marketing and iconic branding represents a large step forward in the production of *shoppingscapes*. Moreover, an additional feature very likely to ensue this process is the incorporation in that shoppingscape of an offer of a progressive variety of urban activities – integrating shopping, culture, recreation, entertainment, and the like – which will elevate its branding as a competing global destination.

This is a well-practiced city marketing strategy, combining placemaking and placemarketing. One of the most eye-catching examples of this practice is given by the successes achieved in the famous amalgamation between museums and malls, confirming the saying cynically expressed by Charles Jencks that, since the equation ‘museum = shop = icon’ is proving increasingly true, then it seems that Andy Warhol was right when he ironically observed “All department stores will become museums, and all museums will become department stores” (Jencks 2005, p.44).

5.3 Gluing the metropolitan fragmentation through tertiary sector initiatives

Lastly, it is under this heading that most of the operations entangled within the so-called shoppingscapes will effectively occur. It is also under this heading that, increasingly, the fragmented metropolitan pattern discussed earlier will be led to experiment a sort of environmental ‘re-gluing’, which will morph it into a really cohesive *shoppingscape*, containing within its borders the spectrum of a whole urban landscape singled out as an overspread collection of shopping foci. Ultimately, the resulting configuration could prove beneficial for the quality of life of the population. As members of a society marked by a behaviour compulsively involved with consumption, it seems particularly likely that they will definitely feel well served. Rem Koolhaas, probably the most skilfully dedicated architect to theorize about contemporary ‘shoppingscapes’, understands “Shopping is arguably the last remaining form of public activity. Through a battery of increasingly predatory forms, shopping has infiltrated, colonized, and even replaced, almost every aspect of urban life. Town centers, suburbs, streets, and now airports, train stations, museums, hospitals, schools, the Internet, and the military are shaped by the mechanisms and spaces of shopping” (Chung et al. 2001, cover). With this dramatic statement, Koolhaas and his team open their “(...) intellectual string of gnomic utterances, a fat book of statistics and analysis” as Jencks (2005 p.44) baptized the legendary *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping*.

It follows a sequence of random illustrations which will depict quite convincingly that indeed, shopping is here, there and everywhere, in today's cities all around the world (Figs. 6 – 10).



FIG. 6 – ShoppingScapes in New York. Times Square. Photo: L. Castello

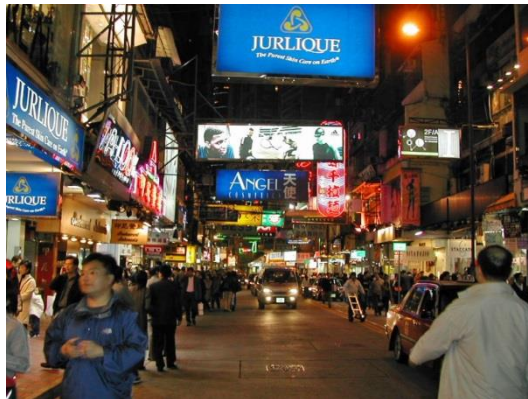


Fig. 7– ShoppingScapes in Hong Kong. Times Square. Photo: L. Castello



FIG. 8 A shopping mall in Dalian, China. Photo: L. Castello



FIG. 9 Shopping at the Annual Book Fair in Porto Alegre. Photo: L. Castello



FIG. 10- A string of contiguous shopping malls lined along a single avenue (Orchard Road), Singapore.
Photo: L. Castello

6 Conclusion

In the face of what has been previously outlined one can only conclude that the best alternative to try to answer the questions proposed by the 2013 ShoppingScapes Conference, such as, for example,

What are the effects of the current consumption practices in the process of transformation of the territory and the landscape? What about its impact on urban form and city structure and organization? What kind of relationship can be established with the historic city?

Will be to turn out to the wise contributions heralded by the already quoted work of David Shane, who hints towards good leads for alternative urban design strategies, founded by his understanding that: "For Koetter and Rowe, like Lynch, the key to the reintegration of the various fragments was a mental map carried out in the heads of urban actors and designers" (Shane 2011, p.204). Shane is referring to the reflections expressed in the book *Collage City*, published in 1978 by Rowe and Koetter, "(...) which examined the combinatorial logic of a city of urban fragments – some historic, some modern, some postmodern – themed to accommodate urban actors' dreams, like Disneyland" (ibid. p.28), and "(...) advocated an 'open city' where multiple actors were free to build their fragmentary, utopian designs (...) a fundamental shift away from the coordinated master plans of modernist architects like Le Corbusier towards the apparent freedom of a fragmentary patchwork city" (ibid., p.203).

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