

The city of *the sphinx*

Moscow suburbia – reality between periphery and sprawl

The boundaries of Moscow are definably marked by the massive infrastructure presence of the outer ring road; a concrete artifact, that disassociates its environment, whose mere purpose is that of serving the superior function of satisfying the individual desire for mobility spurring on the inevitable process of suburbanization. This peripheral space is composed by an undefined conglomeration of *splintered urbanities* and ambiguous living conditions, where the after-effect of its post-socialist society is materialized.

An area that condenses most of this characteristics in its most absurd peculiarity is the area marked by the entrance of the river to the city in the west of Moscow. An environment of social spatial and urban islands, floating anchor-less in a lethargic sprawl that is vainly awaiting its aggregation. This *environment*, becomes inscribed within the trajectory of the river, that delimit conditions of remarkable richness and difference: *Tower Block* areas - sleeping towns of high population density - the legacy of Khrushchev's era, a village of old Muscovites - stopped in time for twenty years, and a low density spray of individual houses for the wealthy, in the forest or on the green field, enclosed, fenced, gated.

In the Inside, parallel to the dissecting space of the ring road, a successive disturbance of *non-places* of consumption: shopping malls and commercial centers, alternating with informal markets, stadiums and sport facilities. Combined with civic structures like hospitals, rehabilitation centres, cloistered orthodox churches, a hill providing panoramic view and moment of reflection vis-à-vis the centre of Moscow.

In its Outside, behind the massive highway infrastructure that marks its political border, the secluded houses of forgotten farmers keep resisting, confronted with the rising appearance of “new” neo-historicist-style houses. Catalogues of standardised types of infinite variations, satisfying their residents' desires for individuality and to finally escape from the egalitarian straitjacket of the previous socialist condition.

This illusion of an unearthly urbanity is ultimately completed through the picturesque course of the river and extensive areas of birch forest; the natural camouflage of an environment of social inequalities and segregation. This condition of juxtaposed realities provides the perfect stage for massive real estate investments, such as *Rublevo*: A magical fantasy of an island city - a fake city – gated, save, separated from its social surroundings. Disposed to gratify its inhabitants needs and dreams of consumption and safety.

The condition of separated entities and disconnected areas, is to a great extend, the consequence of an infrastructure network that is no longer in the government's interest or ability to support public investments at the outskirts. The shifts in infrastructure construction towards the privatization of city growth is increasingly ignoring affordable housing conditions and negating freedom of accessibility and connectivity, this can easily be perceived in the spreading of an informal subsidiary network

affronting the connections and structures of privileged areas.

The ongoing process of this unique form of suburbanization with its devastation effect of social segregation, especially in the context of *Strogynno*, an area that demands an urgent re-consideration of its present situation. We strongly feel that an intervention is needed, a framework that links, connects, separates and distinguishes new relationships between the different conditions. An intervention that is simultaneously bold and raw in its publicness but also subtle and delicate in space.

The in-between anticipates the alternative arrangement

The imposition of the rigorous act of embracing is to incorporate the inherent idiosyncrasies of urban, suburban and landscape conditions, as spatial and social characteristics of differences, yet still in an incoherent loose formation to new coexistence.

The rigidity of rectangular container of 2 by 7 km with its vastness is of high relevance to accommodate the demand for annual growth of 2 million m² housing where the logic of proposed urban structure is to organize the space through the permanent presence of one main feature: social housing as the spatial framework— for us the utterly inevitable program for civic-life to embrace and expose its opposite of battle and change.

Positioned within the natural envelope of the river, the project enacts, providing through the river's natural reservoir feature, a density within itself, a containing envelope, a background to the release of the river's *chamber* condition simultaneously confronting the characteristics and qualities of the lake, the privatized *dacha* area, the sport stadiums and still remaining emptiness.

The sphinx

We envisioned the city of the sphinx, the guardian of the horizon of compositional diversity, which through its dialectical manifestation of form negates the existing *image of the city*: to oppose the iconicity of late capitalist developments that has a mere vertical expression to expose itself, rather than to unify.

The city, defined by the permeable urban form that marks the political limit of Moscow and opposes the uncontrolled growth of its immediate urban context able to densify within its inner growth. Through its dimension responds to the emerging large-scale investments of contemporary development but by its rigidity and compactness manifests the opposition toward immediate sprawl.

A Black hole, that is able to absorb the inside and the outside of the city.

The city of repetitive urban form, that aims for a shared space that induces collective consciousness of belonging to one. Where the repetitively distributed form on an endlessly open surface is to allow the friction of the opposite scales: to frame, to confront, to unify and distinguish and to house the other.

The sphinx attached to the entire circumference of the city- the political boundary —limits and defines the section of the river and consciously performs as dialectical to Moscow city center: to neglect, to

oppose and disrupt its present character.

The urban amalgamation of sphinx and existing outer ring accomplish also the infrastructure exigency of such a vast entity and provides Moscow, simultaneously with a large scale hub: the close proximity with two airports in the east respectively west, and its connection with the public transportation systems embeds its role as centrality in the regional context.

Four entrances are marking the accesses to the sphinx as strategically positioned infrastructure artifacts. A bridge, A wall, an arena for manifestations, a sequence of scales of urban patterns, are the spatial and physical features of these artifacts, containing large parking structures and accentuating the cities vestibules, also connecting, deviating and finally linking freeway-intersections with the sphinx.

As gates they emphasize the moment of trespassing into the *other* urbanity, processions of the spatial and experiential conversion from the village, through the informalities to the appearance of existing urbanity with visual course toward the references of the Moscow's monuments of collective memory.

To provide internal infrastructure we proposed public transport and pedestrian trajectory - linking the "gates" and specific, existing artifacts - as the city's enfilade, a void corridor to immediate vision of its spatial urban differences as an effect of violent transection to the openness to the public.

By public space we don't mean a division between public and private but a common world which defines a form of cohabitation among people where "*the location of one no more coincide with the location of another...*" *Hanna.Arendt*

The space- the public

Our proposal envisions a city of slab repetitions as spatial arrangement, to visually frame and intended to confront the distinction between existing conditions. This configuration of frames formulates the geometrical definition of an open space, a public space to expose the individual in a public realm.

For us the public realm transcends both time and space, and in turn produces places and events.

" the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by the things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors..."Hanna Arendt.

We believe that the city should follow the logic of the stage, a permanent feature of designated space for the performance of events and inherent temporary, ephemeral programs to happen.

The stage for people to act, the stage of freedom, *action and speech- a space of appearance* where architectural form will play the role of an audience to passively participate within the city life.

"action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost anytime and anywhere. Human life, in so far as it is world-building, is engaged in a constant process of reification, and the degree of worldliness of produced things, which all together from the human

artifice, depends upon their greater or lesser permanence in the world itself” Hanna Arendt

The spatial quality of the sphinx can be conceived as a large scale “Mies van der Rohe” space where the urban spatial perception is mainly constructed by an urban type.

Repetitively composed on the Euclidian structure based on hundred by hundred meter grid, medium scale slab (6 to 7 stories high) and the horizontal podium to formulate the architectural relationship between the slab and the plot and contains the basic needs of its specific neighborhood.

The public, the private, the common world collide in the one form.

The plot has two definitions of its space the permanent the open- communal space and defined, restricted part- of temporary -the free market development and ephemeral activities to appear.

“Everything that appears in public can be seen and heard by everybody...appearance- something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves- constitutes reality.”

As a principle of the plot, the slab, a permanent feature accentuates one side to neglect the backside/ front side or street/courtyard notation to definitely refuse the old syntax of quartaly’s as enclosed urban entities.

The perception of the city is constituted by a sequence of changeable stage conditions.

The positioning in the middle of one storey high plinth, the slab allows large cantilevers on both side of the plot and thus an open continuous space on a ground floor level that creates a spatial character of alternating compression and openness to define the dimension and the structural cadence of the continuous public ground, defining spatial niches within the endlessness of its stage to retreat from its exposure.

The city of the sphinx, allows its flâneurs to consciously experience and to participate in a condition of colliding differences, spatial sequences that expose sceneries of everyday urban life and releases the repressed and unexploited potential of Moscow’s urbanity:

Marble white concrete slabs, framing the stage for a furious crowd of a political manifestation;

Marble white concrete slabs, contrasting its rigidity with the colourful tents of a campground;

Marble white concrete slabs, demonstrating its sublimity towards the expressive neo-historicist building of a private investor in front of them;

Marble white concrete slabs distinguishing the emptiness and quietness of one side from the violent controversy of a group of political activists on the other sides;

Marble white concrete slabs embracing the peaceful scenery of the residents of an elderly house and the playing kids of a kindergarten;

from the gallery of the marble white apartment slab, an old man is watching the bustling going on of the market that takes place twice a week in front of his house;

“Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has twofold character of equality and distinction. If men were not equal, they would neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood.” H.A.