FEELING THE NAKEDNESS OF A CITY
UNVEILING TERRAINCOGNITA

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ABSTRACT

The paper begins with the introduction of the city as more than its architecture and buildings but rather a multiplicity of ambiances and atmospheric settings in which intangible relationships with its occupants are formed. Referring to Situationist's ideas of psychogeography and derive, the notion of the embodiment of the city as flows of emotions and desires is discussed.

In the light of contemporaneous times, the city is full of mediation, like a body with a veil adorned. Borrowing the metaphor of a veil, the mediation of the city is explored in three aspects. They include: the veil as a separation, as a blindfold and as a three-dimensional prison. In one's relationship with the city, the veil comes in between as an obstruction. Social codes and conventional behaviour patterns form the mediation which reduces their humane relations to mere transactions. The issue of alienation is elaborated in terms of the spectacle and the realities of commodification. Concurrently, the power of mediation also extends into that of a blind fold or a noose, rendering the underlying side of the city invisible, camouflaging presence of the unknown (or yet to be known). Notion of invisibility is explored in the problematics of conceptual mapping and the possibilities of psychogeographic mapping. The introduction of the expression terraincognita is to elucidate the characteristics and potential of this unexplored realm. The blinding effect of mediation is further developed in the ideas of disengagement with the body and senses. In addition, the veil is asserted as not only a two dimensional cloth of separation but more so as a three dimensional prison that imprisons the subject by preventing one from gaining self-consciousness and self-control. Unveiling nakedness of the city parallels the confrontation of one's estrangement of the self: the stranger in the mirror. Disorientation is described as a strategy to displace the mediation of the quotidian by exploring new perspectives and individual agenda through the reconnection of one's body with its senses.

In conclusion, the expected examplification of the assertions of terraincognita, which will likely invite closure, is consciously omitted. A caution is taken not to fall into the trap of effecting mediation in re-presentation of this space, as would the very act of naming it defies its nature of indefiniteness. Thereafter, the paper seeks to affirm the asserted issues through exploring the
situation of “squatting” to highlight its strategy in engaging an unmediated relationship with the city and perhaps elucidates the “truth” of terrain cognita.

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The city is more than its architecture and buildings. Not only does it constitute the space in which urban life is lived, it is where inanimate relationships with its occupants (static data) are formed. The fabric of the constructed, without referring to the more organic nature of the environment, seems to go much further than is established by the three-dimensional space, otherwise reckoned as architecture. For it unbrates a multiplicity of architectures and atmospheric settings, a situation completely different from that invoked by the old Vitruvian function.

Fusing one of the Vitruvian triads concepts to define architecture, texture expresses the capacity of stability and permanence in terms of solidarity of its material form while physical consistency relates to the architecture’s definition of space. Yet in the context of the city today, the movement of the energies and currents as well as the temporality of change and transformations which shape our surroundings define the Vitruvian paradigm. As suggested by Giedion, “form are not bounded by their physical limits, [but rather they] unmate and model space.” This is aptly illustrated in the Fig.1 below of Cast Pappano where the effect of geometry extends beyond the building.