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**The Concept of Built Landscape, Non-Place and Public Place  
in Contemporary Photography**

DLA Dissertation Theses

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The past fifty years witnessed striking change in the structure of metropolitan areas: the actual urban landscape keeps mutating, alters its borders, centres and peripheries with modifying component structures. As a result, the historic city has been reduced accompanied by the enhancement of transitory areas. Anthropologist Marc Augé offers a new terminology for the new place filling the space between the city and the nature, he calls it *non-place*. Non-places constitute neither parts of nature nor genuine urban districts, these typical commercial or industrial zones of the postmodern city are situated between the Nature and the Metropolis by representing a concourse or transitory place in physical and spiritual sense as well.

Obviously, contemporary artists are inspired on these new urban landscapes: standardized suburbs, closed trafficking concourses displaying infinite are often occurring in their works. The landscape-photography has been radically revisited; artists are urged to seek answers to questions raised by the new mythology of deconstructed postmodern city.

Since we do not understand the new industrial landscape, commercial complexes, we remain using old schemes. We do not have either a base for the comparison of changes or a critical vocabulary to describe the recent surrounds next to us. We feel fear and confusion against these surrounds. We do not understand it because, among others, we try to explain the new area with the help of a terminology that has no impact on it. We are advised to be accustomed to it and accept the actual built landscape instead of insisting to the nostalgia of the old idyllic one. We should write a new esthetical vocabulary that let us to understand and like our future cities.

In my dissertation I analyse works of contemporary artists showing specific awareness of our changing urban precondition by exploring industrial zones and commercial area around big cities. I asked, if there were a prospect, and we were able to influence radical changes in our surrounds, in the new non-historic parts of cities that were built in the interests of traffic and commerce. I look at *i)* the possible ways of presentation of these urban areas; by exploring *ii)* workable critical, esthetical vocabularies applied by artists and photographers, and *iii)* similar type of ideas, variants of concept known in the contemporary arts.

The question of presentation of the postmodern city has been invited first. It implies several others including how we treat ugliness, desperateness of metropolitan areas, which viewpoints are apt to exhibit these areas, if any? Should these viewpoints call into question politics, social affairs and

society with critical vigour? Alternatively, are we supposed to try idealising them (*i.e.* non-places) with a more receptive, peaceful gesture?

These places and non-places carry various kinds of conflicts concerning politics, identity and symbolism provoking many possible reactions of artists, including from the accessory participation or ecstasy through the objective, neutral report or provoking behaviour.

The major issue concerning the contemporary built landscapes resides in the way how should we report it. Following the era characterized by extinguishing old suburbs, building up transitory zones and increasing metropolitan areas, artists seeking for new modes of representations have been inspired by the landscape-photography and the document-photo of the street. Today, the reactions of artists go far beyond the simple documentation or reproduction. They explore their own works to interfere, analyse and criticise by preparing pictures of the Metropolis, those of its disappearance, peripheries, abandoned places – the very same where we live. Artists observe and represent the Metropolis with a critical vigour as it is; as a consequence of disappearance and changes, they give up the nostalgia and sentimentalism.

By dealing with the non-place, the artists are forced to answer the following questions: how do we represent ugliness, desperateness, continuous demand for changing places, expanding and less-transparent underlying industry, such as the closed highway-systems, airports, chains of shopping centres. Moreover, we live in, create and use these facilities every day.

All of the artists introduced in my dissertation give an answer, present a possible solution to the questions outlined above. Proposals and trends of the artists are distinguishable: they make pictures of disappearance, peripheries and abandoned places of the city as they stand up before us. Some of the photographers observe and present the city as it is by documenting changes and disappearance without sentiments. Others shape a critical space between their personality and the exposed landscape.

Artist represented here are apparently working in agreement with Alain Roger landscape-architect who answered the question of what to do with these new types of place. The proposal of Alain Roger is the imperative to try to understand and accept our new environment. In works of these artists on non-places and suburbs one cannot find nostalgia towards innocent nature; an acceptance and analysis of the actual situation, a correct diagnosis instead.

There is a sign of critical reflection: they speak about aesthetics, beauty and ugliness – peacefully or provocatively, depending on their character. Concerning his pictures, however, the author of the most ironic photos Jeff Wall speaks about some enthusiasm to make better and about the perceived beauty – as the photographers of idealised landscapes do.

All pictures displayed here represent hard or peaceful or optimistic answers to the problem of the altered landscape. The viewer cannot keep away from this urban landscape by going through it every day. Artists suggest that the viewer should understand and accept it in order to be able to transform and making it better.