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Post-Ideological Urbanism

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Remix

Negotiating Post-ideological Ideologies

By Michael Hirschtbichler

[FRUSTRATION] Everything has already been done. Building new worlds out of nothing does not seem to be an option anymore. Styles and movements emerge, fade away and are resurrected just to make room for other dormant incarnations waiting to reappear. In light of this situation a deeply felt frustration arises when it comes to the possibility of conceiving of, designing and producing the genuinely new. **[REVOLUTION OF THE FAITHFUL]** In the domain of architecture and urbanism, Modernism was the revolutionary movement par excellence that claimed not only to oppose a specific historical situation and regime but to end history itself and start entirely anew, a heroic revolution by those faithful to the modern age. **[DISBELIEF]** Today's insurgencies, however, seem to be devoid of truly heartfelt conviction – actions without faith. Whereas in the past, belief used to fuel revolutionary uprisings and the formation of counter-ideologies, today's revolutions, if they happen, are founded on disbelief. Empty gestures emerge suddenly and develop into intense outbreaks, leaving people baffled over motives that resist being traced – spontaneous ideologies of the “anti” (sudden fanaticism) or opportunistic theories of feigned solicitousness (consumerist lethargy). **[IDEOLOGY'S SITUATION]** This insinuates a historic phase, where ideology itself seems to vanish. Despite many claims of having overcome ideology, there can in fact not be a post-ideological condition. There is no society imaginable that could exist beyond an ideological framework that is totally free from ideological contexts. What appears to be post-ideological today is in fact the coexistence, silent combat and mutual neglect of innumerable ideologies, neo-ideologies and pseudo-ideologies. In this pluralistic environment, no single ideology or group of ideologies is perceived to be relevant enough to become a point of reference or single desirable truth. Urbanistic ideologies, as many of their social and political counterparts, exist in an atomized, self-referential condition that prevents them from gaining momentum. This situation did not emerge haphazardly, it is the consequence of both frustration with the failure of past ideologies and the comforts of a seemingly post-ideological and therefore ostensibly non-ideological freedom. **[INDIFFERENCE]** At

this point, due to an excess supply of ideological positions and a lack of an all-encompassing faith, no breakthrough can be achieved. Ideologies appear weak and interchangeable. While they continue to underpin every social, political and cultural expression, indifference has replaced the revolution as a mode of action. What we currently witness is not a lack of ideologies and innovative thoughts but rather the contrary, a supermarket like condition of ideological goods that are presented to the superficial gaze of consuming actors. **[META-IDEOLOGY]** The question arises of how to act productively in a situation marked by bustling advances that nonetheless, in their combination lead to a paralyzing standstill. Refraining from adding new conflicting ideologies to the already exuberant field and instead focusing on ways of organization and productive exploitation of the multitude of existing theories and ideologies promises a loophole from the impasse of post-ideological stagnancy. A meta-ideology, a mode of structuring and organizing what already exists, is needed. **[REMIX]** The practices of mixing and remixing, already employed as strategies in various fields, can be used on a higher level as an organizational meta-ideology of cultural production. The term Mix describes an operation where a series of fragments are mixed together in order to form a new composition. Remix refers to an alternative, altered version of an original entity. Both Mix and Remix are structural operations used to reorder a set of givens. Their goal is not to invent, but to reorganize, reinterpret and thereby reinvent parts of an existing cultural universe. **[PROCESS]** The result of a remix is a new arrangement, a transformation of the already existing. The new is not invented, but new instances are created through a remixing process. The unknown unfolds through transformations and permutations of the known. The process consists of two necessary and one optional procedure: **[DECONTEXTUALIZATION]** In a first step, a fragmentation and selection of a given reality excerpt or multiple formerly intact entities have to be performed. The objects of the remix are separated from their conventional context. Thereby certain relational contexts are severed, various meanings and connotations are annulled. The object is transformed into a fragment, enters a vague state of suspense and is freed up for a new use, a precondition for its new existence. **[RECOMBINATION]** Using a variety of techniques, combinations of selected fragments are developed. New relations and cross references are established, new meanings

and qualities emerge. Former codes and connotations change, lose relevance, are forgotten and replaced by new ones. The combination of fragments finds a new configuration, hierarchies of strength and meaning form while leading and infill elements arise. **[AMALGAMATION]** On account of the fragments' different origins remix creations possess different degrees of stability or instability, coherence or incoherence, harmony or tension. According to the modalities of their decontextualization and recombination, some are more stable than others, depending on the strength of their interrelations. Amalgamation is a final procedure that enhances coherency and strengthens links and similarities between recombined fragments in order to obtain a robust new entity, which exceeds a mere assembly of parts. **[TERRA COGNITA]** The remix is based on the challenging and painful acceptance of an already existing, purposefully designed and therefore at first glance adventureless territory. The map of today's world is drawn, the mysterious unknown continents have been discovered, classified, integrated. Countless explorations into a terra incognita have over time created a world of the known and once they became useless, faded away. Our expeditions therefore have to be conducted in a terra cognita, confronting us with the problem of exploring an already chartered territory. **[REPETITION]** In a world of the known, ideologies, styles and movements in various realms of cultural production are repeated with an ever increasing speed. The prefixes 'neo-', 'post-', 'post-neo-', 'post-post-' etc. become necessary in order to describe the various emerging instances and variations. **[SYNCHRONIZATION]** The ever faster succession of movements and ideologies finally reaches a point, where their sequentiality ceases and a condition of simultaneous existence is created. This synchronization marks the end of a linear development and the beginning of an ahistoric and synchronic remix reality. **[AHISTORICITY]** Modernism's main success consisted of introducing the concepts of ahistoricity and radical newness. By wholeheartedly opposing and destroying the old and historic and by creating a blank new territory for cultural operation, history could not be extinguished but a new mode of dealing with it could be established. Modernism erected a borderline in the comprehension of historic development dividing a Premodern age where movements grew out of each other or at least maintained causal relations and a Modern age, where the causal chain was cut off and newness had to be created over and over again in

an ahistoric vacuum. **[PERPETUAL NEWNESS DELUSION]** As the delusion of perpetual newness became obvious, newness was gradually superseded by sameness. The negative effects thereof being evident, new ways of reintegrating history had to be sought. As the link to the historic, however, was broken this was done in an ahistoric and arbitrary fashion. The historic remained a resource of innumerable fragments that could be used and combined at will. Whereas the Premodern cultural logic was linear and causal – which did not mean it was without ruptures and jumps – the contemporary remix logic is cyclic and seemingly arbitrary, spinning in a no-man’s land between the severed past and the impossibility of the new. **[REVERSE MOVEMENT]** The most promising way of moving towards the future appears to be by circling backwards, facing the past and trying to push oneself away from it, creating a distance without breaking up. The past is always present, no matter how hard we try to overcome it. If we move away from one past, we encounter another. Innovation and the quest for the new seem to consist of a circumnavigation of different pasts. Instead of steering towards the wide new open, we steer away from the old known just to return to it under different circumstances. **[THE NEW OLD]** As we turn backwards in the face of the impossibility of newness, the new becomes a potential form of being the old, it reveals itself in certain constellations. The opposition between the old and the new finally becomes useless: both are instances of ongoing processes defined by a gradual departure from and steering towards conditions of the known. The anti-modern slogan of Modernism’s frustrated grandchildren could be: “The new is dead. Long live the new old.” The old can, however, not be historic any longer, it is the mere mass of that which presently exists. **[REVIVAL]** The revival is the process of the old becoming new. The old is not stable nor always the same. It is affected by its rebirths. Resurrections are creative operations on the substance of past works and movements. The revival is the reincarnation of the past as a projection into the future. **[NOSTALGIA]** Beyond the frustrating acknowledgement of the omnipresence of the known and the apparent impossibility of truly new invention, the yearning for idealized images and versions of the past is a driving force of remix. However, the real past is not the aim of nostalgic desire, but an improved version of a past condition, stripped clean of its context and traces of negativity. Such a utopia of the past is never readily available, it first has to be

constructed and projected. Due to the great number of pasts on hand and the varied tastes of their constructors, the present is transformed into a synchronized landscape of nostalgic ruin. The future becomes a heretical museum of imagined pasts with their underlying permanent reinterpretations. History, as it is perceived, is yet another playground of remix.

[STYLES] Styles are at the same time instances of and tools for the distillation of nostalgic versions of the past. They pretend to be a past reality disguising the fact that they are actually contemporary, mere projections of assumed yesteryear aimed at the future. They are fundamentally flat, as the process of becoming stylized reduces an object's complexity. Its context is minimized and abstracted so that all of its qualities that do not directly correspond to the style's central essence are edited out. Styles are symbolic forms that convey only as much meaning as their surfaces can encode. They can be viewed as stereotypical stage sets for a play, the script of which frequently changes and reveals different constellations between contemporary modes of life and frozen cliché histories. As styles become superficial form and empty gesture, they open themselves to new appropriation.

[TEMPORARY AMALGAMATION] Just like newness and originality, the notion of the final product is put into question by the cyclic procedures of remix. Anything can be used as input material for remixing processes, also "final" works resulting from previous transformations. The temporality of states of being is thus enhanced, fluid and dynamic qualities are introduced to an otherwise static field. Outputs are mere starting points, inputs for further transformations in an ongoing process, temporary amalgamations.

[IMPURITY] The remix dismisses the illusion of the blank canvas, of the virginal tabula rasa territory. It acknowledges that all materials and surfaces are necessarily impure, they all bear traces of previous work and action.

[IDEOLOGICAL TAINTING] As we have to rely on previous discoveries, thoughts and agendas, our constructs are inescapably drenched in ideologies. Nothing we do is neutral, everything is comprised of negotiations and is a result of various choices made in a process of negotiating ideologies, consciously or unconsciously.

[CHOICE] Choice and selection are key elements of a cultural remix - practice. The designed and fabricated cosmos at the beginning of the 21st century, the summed up collection of productive efforts hitherto, is vast and uncontrollable in its totality. Selective and exclusive acts are necessary in order to start any

formative process. Thus negation and conscious ignorance become cardinal virtues in a remix reality. **[REALITY VERSIONS]** Although the remix focuses on the collective resource of previously produced cultural outputs, which form a common ground for intervention, the common understanding of this resource naturally reaches a limit. The sheer quantity and diversity of available fragments renders the notion of a functioning common ground as an illusion. Remix realities depend all the more on personal selections, choices and recombinations. Strengthened and amplified by the procedures of cutting and mixing, subjective perceptions increasingly lead to subjective productions. Those cannot in the traditional way be called unique or original. They are not authentic inventions, but different versions of similar phenomena. Just as a city is not perceived the same way by any two individuals, Remix realities are characterized by essential subjective differences within a field of similarity. **[MEMORY AND DESIRE]** Our memory is filled with past fragments, our desire is directed towards future invention. We are stuck in a strange deadlock where moving forward seems difficult and the possibilities endless. The sameness of the new and the ubiquity of the existing threaten to swallow up any progress. We spin and mix with growing intensity. Maybe there's a way to break out of the vacuum? **[LOOKOUT]** We find ourselves on wide open seas on board the Pinta, perched on the lookout. We have been sailing in unknown waters for more than a month when our tired eyes suddenly make out some blurry mass on the horizon: land! We start shouting and waking the crew. Hope, expectation, curiosity and anxiety rise and fill our minds with joyful uncertainty. Slowly and excitedly we approach our discovery. The blurred image gradually sharpens and suddenly contours are clearly visible in the mist: The old world. We have been going around in circles; we have landed where we started. There is no new world, not anymore. Crestfallen and discouraged we direct our view towards the horizon. A slight breeze comes up and as we stand there, disoriented and clueless, we realize it's too early to give up hope.

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