

## The Corporate City Is the Zone

The corporate city occupies a discrepant territory between two different species of urbanity. It poses for advertisements in the mediagenic urbanism of financial or cultural capitals like New York and Paris while also sheltering in zone variants such as Special Economic (SEZs), Free Trade Zones (FTZs) or Export Processing Zones (EPZs). Heir to ancient pirate enclaves or the freeports of Hanseats and Easterlings, the zone is the perfect legal habitat of the corporation. It is the corporation's legal duty to banish any obstacle to profit, and the zone is the spatial organ of this externalizing – a mechanism of political quarantine designed for corporate protection. The earliest historical urges to incorporate express this desire for freedom and exclusivity. Breeding more promiscuously with other 'parks' or enclave formats, the zone now merges with tourist compounds, knowledge villages, IT campuses, museums and universities that complement the corporate headquarters or offshore facilities. More and more programmes and spatial products thrive in legal lacunae and political quarantine, enjoying the insulation and lubrication of tax exemptions, foreign ownership of property, streamlined customs and deregulation of labour or environmental regulations. Indeed, the zone as corporate enclave is a primary aggregate unit of many new forms of the contemporary global city, offering a 'clean slate', 'one-stop' entry into the economy of a foreign country. Most banish the negotiations that are usually associated with the contingencies of urbanism – negotiations such as those concerning labour, human rights or environment.

In 1934, emulating freeport laws in Hamburg and elsewhere in the late nineteenth century, the USA established Foreign Trade Zone status for port and warehousing areas related to trade. As the zone merged with manufacturing, Export Processing Zones appeared in the late 1950s and '60s. China's Special Economic Zones, allowing for an even broader range of market activity, emerged in the 1970s. Since then special zones of various types have grown exponentially, from a few hundred in the 1980s to well over a thousand today, and special zones handle over a third of the world's trade. Some zones are a few hectares in size; some grow in conurbations that are hundreds of kilometres in size.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the new legal hybrids of zone, oscillating between visibility and invisibility, identity and anonymity, have neither been

clean slate  
slate

mapped nor analysed for their disposition – their patency, exclusivity, aggression, resilience or violence.

## The Corporate City Calls Itself a City

Often the zone actually calls itself 'city', where 'city' is either a noun describing an urban area or a modifier indicating a place where something is to be found in abundance (a shopping centre might be called 'shopping city', for instance). *HITEC City*, *Ebene Cybercity*, *King Abdullah Economic City*, among hundreds of others, take on the title of 'city' as an enthusiastic expression of the zone's evolution beyond being merely a location for warehousing and transshipment. The zone has become a new primordial civilization and a warm pool for a latest cocktail of spatial products (for instance offices, factories, warehouses, calling centres and software production facilities) that move around the world. Many countries in South Asia, China and Africa used export processing zones as a means of announcing their entry into a global market as independent post-colonial contractors of outsourcing and offshoring. For example, with *Ebene Cybercity*, Mauritius, is evolving the EPZ form to include IT with help IT campus developers from India who worked on *HITEC City* in Hyderabad. Dubai has rehearsed the 'park' or zone with almost every imaginable programme beginning with *Dubai Internet City* in 2000, the first IT campus as free trade zone. Calling each new enclave 'city', it has either planned or built *Dubai Health Care City*, *Dubai Maritime City*, *Dubai Silicon Oasis*, *Dubai Knowledge Village*, *Dubai Techno Park*, *Dubai Media City*, *Dubai Outsourcing Zone*, *Dubai Humanitarian City*, *Dubai Industrial City* and *Dubai Textile City*.

## The Corporate City Is a Double

Duplicity is essential to the corporate city. Theories about the waning nation-state and the waxing transnational realm are the perfect camouflage for a corporate culture that clearly prefers to manipulate *both* state and non-state sovereignty, alternately releasing and laundering their power and identity to create the most advantageous political or economic climate. The zone aspires to lawlessness, but in the legal tradition of exception, it is a mongrel form that adopts looser and more cunning behaviours than those associated with an emergency of state. Commercial interests do not identify a single situation within which exception is appropriate. They move *between* zones, concocting cocktails of legal advantage and amnesty. Just as corporate interests play a number of zone types for advantage they also operate between state and non-state jurisdictions, seeking out relaxed, extra-jurisdictional spaces (SEZs, FTZs, EPZs) while also massaging

"city"  
"community"

legislation in the various states they occupy (NAFTA, GATT). The stances of any one nation are therefore often duplicitous or discrepant reflections of divided loyalties between national and international concerns or citizens and shareholders.

Now major cities and national capitals are engineering their own world city *doppelgangers* – their own non-national territory within which to legitimize non-state transactions. The world capital and national capital can shadow each other, alternately exhibiting a regional cultural ethos and a global ambition. Companies like CIDCO and SKIL can now be hired, as they were in *Navi Mumbai*, to deliver an infrastructural legal environment like those in Shenzhen and Pudong. City-states like Hong Kong, Singapore and Dubai, that assume the ethos of free zone for their entire territory, have become world city models for newly minted cities with not only commercial areas, but a full complement of

extra legal  
intra legal  
loophole  
smiling

Cybergateway, HITEC City, Hyderabad (image courtesy Satya Pemmaraju)



programmes. *New Songdo City*, an expansion of the Incheon free trade territories near Seoul, is a complete international city based on the Dubai or Singapore model, designed by KPF. Here, aspiring to the cosmopolitan urbanity of New York, Venice and Sydney, the zone is filled with residential, cultural and educational programmes in addition to commercial programmes. While the emotional streaming videos for any of the smaller 'cities' are often accompanied by tinny fanfares of low production values, the *New Songdo City* video messages are accompanied by new age tunes or heroic strains in the John Williams style – the spectacular theme music of the non-state state.

# The Corporate City Is on Vacation

The corporate city considers itself heir to the same privilege and liquidity that petrodollars enjoy. Just as the majority of these funds often remain invisible or unaccounted for, the corporate city should be able to get away and relax. Able to materialize and dematerialize with the caprice of offshore holdings, the newly coined corporate enclaves even assume an ethereal aura and an overlay of fantasy. Operating in a frictionless realm of exemption and merging with other urban formats, the zone also naturally merges with the resort and theme park. Indeed if corporations are often only vessels for liberated money, they can easily be maintained outside of the workweek environment. While corporate headquarters in national capitals and financial capitals portray a glamorous business-like atmosphere, the office park in developing countries has tried to project the image of, not the hotel or club of colonial or Hilton style luxuries, but of a kingdom with unencumbered wealth. IT campuses in India and Malaysia like *Multimedia Supercorridor* sometimes refer to themselves as IT resorts offering lush vegetation and a mixture of small-scale vernacular buildings and mirror-tiled office buildings. To this styling, the various Dubai cities like *Dubai International City* or *Dubai Media City* add themes of Islamic and international architecture. Indeed having re-emerged most powerfully *after* a historical era celebrating national sovereignty as an ultimate, the oil powers of the gulf more easily conflate ancient kingdoms and contemporary empire with perfunctory recognition of national power. *King Abdullah Economic City*, a production of the UAE's Emaar developers on the Red Sea near Jeddah, creates yet another corporate city as world city that now offers cultural, educational, business and residential programmes merged with a resort. Fly-throughs with swelling traditional music render the city as a shimmering golden man-made island filled with multiples of traditional Islamic palace buildings and "programmed" with leisure space. Even more extreme are those corporate cities that directly merge the corporate city with the offshore island shelter. *Jeju*, for instance, is a quintessential island retreat that has housed, as have many islands, all of those programmes or illicit activities that do not fit into the logics of the continent. Transforming itself from penal colony and strategic military position into a 'free economic city'. Citing Dubai, Singapore and Hong Kong as models, the island 'guarantees the maximum convenience for the free flow of people, goods and capital and for tax free business activities'.<sup>2</sup> A place of ecological purity, casinos, golfer's amnesty and mythomaniacal tradition, this corporate retreat also hosts global sporting events and diplomatic summits. On the island of Kish, off the coast of Iran, *Kish Free Zone* similarly attracts business to the island notorious for its relaxed religious standards. Here, there is not only a loosening of headscarves and a greater opportunity for socializing between men and women, but the standard set

escape

Jeju

breeding

"City" supplants the "world"  
 headquarters / socially "programmed" leisure  
 ↓  
 very important shift.  
 hybrid / perfect formula

of exemptions to which the corporation has grown accustomed. Nearby fantasy hotels like the Dariush Grand Hotel re-create the grandeur of Persian palaces with peristyle halls, gigantic cast stone sphinxes and ornate bas-reliefs depicting ancient scenes.

Function spatial recipes of commerce and business are not only vessels of organizational parameters, but also the medium of the many puffy fairy tales of belief that accompany power.

Q organization  
 efficient  
 ↓  
 fantasy  
 ↓  
 belief

# The Corporate City Is Extrastatecraft

Theories of Total War would speculate that infrastructures and technological developments, even most forms of urbanism, are

Dariush Grand Hotel, Kish Island



first military apparatuses. Yet, often massively capitalized corporate conglomerates create global alliances and transnational infrastructures that avoid war because it is bad for business. Foreign investment is funnelled not only through national treasuries but also through corporate conglomerates. From the US rail conglomerates that employed more people than the US military during the nineteenth century to the consortia that today operate satellite networks and submarine cable, it is private corporations have an elite parastate capacity. Enjoying quasi-diplomatic immunities, corporations may provide to nations the support and expertise for transportation and communication infrastructure or relationships with IMF and the World Bank. Networks of construction companies and infrastructure specialists like Bouygues, Bin Laden, Mitsubishi, Kawasaki or Siemens deliver technologies for high speed rail and skyscraper engineering.

The zone is the parliament for the de facto global governance of corporate headquartering. To the ports around which so many free trade zones, export processing zones and special economic zones crystallize, conglomerates such as PSA, P&O, Hutchison Port Holdings or ECT, like modern counterparts of British or Dutch East India company franchises, deliver transshipment and warehousing technologies. Technology parks around the world grow their own satellite and cable networks with their own headquarters or embassies at the interstices of the network, whole families of corporations stick together in the same legal habitat re-created anywhere in the world and separated by a plane trip or a satellite bounce. Real estate operators like Emaar move between zones to provide the spatial environments and amenities that corporate 'families' recognize as home.

This power must be continually refreshed by the fictions of

corporate nomads

Multimedia Super Corridor,  
Cyberjaya



symbolic capital, often provided by either media messages or architectural imagery. The largest conglomerates appear hat-in-hand in the media wanting the world to get to know them and support their work as they develop alternative energies and more resilient crops that might alleviate poverty. They ask for loyalty – a loyalty beyond brand recognition and closer to a form of patriotism for non-national sovereignty. Architects provide symbolic capital for these self-reinforcing communities in the form of cosmopolitan identities, selective historical traditions, signature skyscrapers or architourism highlights like a Guggenheim. The corporate city often uses business instruments for self-governance in lieu of the tools of a citizenry, but its sometimes also borrows the tools of participatory democracies. *Gazprom City* has asked the world to vote on its architectural monument from among a group of alternatives designed by famous architects. Moreover, for those

citizenry

*Doppelgangers* of the state, like Italy's mixture of corporate and ancient imagery has also become a monument to the state and its 'wise leadership'.

## The Corporate City Prefers Non-State Violence

While sometimes engaged as a military contractor, the corporate city benefits most from indirect association with war. Direct association is bad for business.

The gulf widens between the extremes of the Dubai development model and the slums of Lagos or Kinshasa. Yet the corporate city also has a formation within which poverty can be strictly



maintained without the chaos of informal economies. The off-shore sweatshops in Saipan or the *maquiladoras* on the thickened border between the USA and Mexico organize a form of labour exploitation that is stable and within the law. The corporate city not only provides a double to the national and financial capital, it has its own double in these offshore enclaves. More discrete and less visible, these backstage formations are not given the 'city' designation. They may be violent, but it is the violence of Bartelby, intractably passive and oblivious to its consequences, it is not involved in war because it says it is not involved in war. In Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, development expertise from Abu Dhabi and Dubai is helping Alsunut Development Company Ltd. to build *Almogran*, which includes 1660 acres of skyscrapers and residential properties. The new corporate city only underlines the extreme discrepancies between oil wealth and poverty due

to the exploitation of oil resources in the mostly non-Arab southern Sudan. Indeed, the overt, even hyperbolic, expressions of oil money are among the chief tools for instigating war and violence in the south.

## The Corporate City Is an Intentional Community

Given the ethos of 'honour among thieves', the pirate enclave sometimes became an unlikely vessel of democracy when a diverse group of retired or resting brigands tried to live together in, for instance, Salle, on the Northern Coast of Africa. Democracy, however, would never suit the corporate city. It chooses instead that aspect of the pirate enclave that resembles an intentional community with a fixed rule base operating outside of participation. The zone is a vessel set apart from the state and awaiting an overlay of legal parameters. Like Mendel's peas, after many cycles of zone breeding around the world, recessive or unlikely traits begin to appear. The zone as instrument of labour or environmental abuse, can, by way of its political quarantine, be filled with entirely different intentions. *Dubai Humanitarian City*, as an outpost of relief agencies and NGOs, makes a tenant out of the chief critics of zone politics and abuses.<sup>3</sup> Also, since the legal climate for each of these enclaves is designed to advantage, free speech, for instance, is permitted in *Dubai Media City* where the major networks are headquartered. Universities are perhaps the newest corporations to join in the zone habitat. *Qatar Education City* uses the campus/park/zone model to provide a headquarters for the franchise of major universities around the world. Corporate sponsorship makes of the university a kind of incubator of intelligence and manpower for the corporation as well as the region. *King Abdullah Economic City* will follow suit with an education sector. *Saadiyat Island*, a new development in Abu Dhabi, will introduce not only a Guggenheim franchise and a branch of the Louvre, but an outpost of the Sorbonne.

Moreover, it is often the very attempt to maintain massive optimized realms of exemption that lands the corporate city in the cross-hairs of conflict. Shenzhen has become an unlikely cauldron of survival that borrows real-estate survival maneuvers that borrow activist techniques associated with a participatory democracy.<sup>4</sup> The ports and export processing zones of the South China Sea have become the targets of international immigration and security issues that place them in the centre of the national concerns they had hoped to banish.

## The Corporate City Launders Identities

Countries just entering the marketplace may use the new zone economy, while also rejecting its incompatibility with state rhetoric or banishing it as a contradiction to the state's purity. The DPRK introduced zones like *Rajin Sonbong* and *Kaesong* to act as cash cows for the state but also remain separate and vilified as a capitalist economy. Kim Dal Hyon (a NK economic reformer) is reported to have said 'Let's consider the Najin-Sonbong area as a pigsty. Build a fence around it, put in karaoke, and capitalists will invest. We need only to collect earnings from the pigs.' Meanwhile vast zone conurbations collect in the *Tumen River Region* between

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the DPRK and Russia. The Stalinist Dynasty of DPRK understood the way the capitalist economy works so well that they even characterized the Mount Kumgang resort as a 'special tourist zone'. China's SEZs are the world's model of this phenomenon. Their early experiment with four SEZs to quarantine the capitalist market has exploded to produce scores of different zones of various types all across the country. Cross-national growth zones in the South China Sea move products between zones in different jurisdictions to take advantage of different quotas and levels of regulation. In Eastern Europe the zone allows other European corporations to take advantage of less expensive labour from entering EU countries. Similarly, *AllianceTexas*, a classic office park distripark corporate city north of Ft. Worth, renames and redistributes many of the products produced in Mexico under NAFTA agreements so that they can be calibrated to the desired profitability in a US context.

# The Corporate City Is Beautiful and Smart; It Has Special Stupidity

The corporate city is a cleaner and smarter version of urbanism. Even those corporate cities that remain largely devoted to logistics, like *Keppel Distripark* in Singapore, win architectural awards for their beauty. *Cyberport* in Hong Kong, developed by Richard Li, heir to the STAR TV corporate dynasty, has developed a city so beautiful that it appears to have jumped directly from the computer screen. The orgmen who tend the self-referential organizations of the corporate city are proud of the fluid, robust,



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information-rich environments they have created. Their automated warehouses and information *Landschafts* slowly and obsessively sort and stack enormous amounts of information. Yet this information must only be information that is compatible to a common platform. Indeed, an enormous intelligence is deployed to reset or eliminate any errant or extrinsic information. While remaining intact, the hermetic organization develops shrewd auxiliary tactics and strategies to fortify its stupidity and defend against contradiction. Regimes of power at once diversify their sources and contacts while consolidating and closing ranks, extending and tightening their territory. They grow while deleting information. This information paradox – wherein an enormous amount of information is required to remain information poor – is a common tool of power.

# The Corporate City Tutors Impure Ethical Struggles

Space, perhaps even more than international law, is often the medium of transnational polity and multiplied sovereignty. Duplicity is the prevailing logic and organizational disposition of this space. The logics of righteousness and the insistence on orthodox political sentiment evaporate in these environments. Most urgent for architecture is not the consolidation of a singular position, but rather the acquisition of an expanded, agile repertoire. Curiosity and ingenuity nourish a position wherein one is too smart to be right. While these unusual levers or toggles may not have the pedigree of political orthodoxy, they may be part of an indirect political ricochet that is instrumental in a cessation of violence, a shift in sentiment or a turn in economic fortunes.

Some backstage knowledge of the bagatelle in exchange, the players in the game and the cards being dealt returns more information about the dirty tools and techniques of extrastatecraft. It may be true that architects are often not at the table when policy decisions are being made. Yet, if most political decisions are made by shills, confidence men and go-betweens, architects are probably already at that table. The corporate city is a discrepant territory within which to rehearse impure ethical struggles and a new species of spatio-political activism. <sup>(R)</sup>

wjc

rehearsal - problematize

1 Xiangming Chen, 'The Evolution of Free Economic zones and the Recent Development of Cross-National Growth Zones' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 19, no. 4 (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 593-621.  
2 <http://www.jeju.go.kr/>

3 <http://www.dubaiinternetcity.com>:  
<http://www.arabsat.com/Default/About/OurHistory.aspx>; <http://www.dubaiholding.com/english/index.html>  
4 *The New York Times*, 18 and 19 December 2006, A1.