

A Political Philosophy for Design in the Post-War City

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While working on the academic side of international peacemaking, I was disenchanted with the abstract quality of the endeavor. How could the prospect of peace be not only thought and willed, but also sensed? My desire to be a landscape architect, therefore, arose out of the possibility of rebuilding places for livelihood out of utter despair while simultaneously living with and caring for those people whose dreams have just been seemingly shattered. My initial approach was based on the immediate perceptual experience of the street, falling into the realm of the phenomenological. With the lens of Kant's third critique, a different approach emerges which provides a much more convincing basis from which to address the collective experience of space. By examining this approach with the help of Hannah Arendt, I hope to arrive at a political philosophy and design proposal for a public space in a post-war city.

Introductory Terms

To move from the confines of the phenomenological first requires a broadening of the meaning of sensation. Kant accomplishes this to a degree by recognizing and comparing three forms of pleasure in the human experience, distinguished in their relation to the *agreeable*, the *good*, and the *beautiful*. In combinations provocative to the post-modern mind, the first is claimed to be both bound and relative, the second bound and universal, and the third, free and universal.

To like something because it is *agreeable*, Kant explains, is to be gratified by it. This pleasure produces an interest in, an inclination towards the object that is sensed. The pleasure coincides with the act of sensing and meets a desire in the person. I find the

smell of dairy farms to be agreeable, for example, as it momentarily cures my homesickness. I am inclined towards this pleasure because of my childhood. I in no way expect others to share it, but acknowledge merely that it is agreeable to me and perhaps a few others who have had similar experiences. When we make an aesthetic judgment in this manner it is not pure, but bound by charm, emotion or cognition. It is bounded in its subjectivity, and usually does not claim to be anything more.

To like something because it is *good* is to reason that it has use or intrinsic value in connection to moral law. This pleasure also produces an interest in the object, not based on gratification but on respect or esteem. I consider something good because it matches a previously determined concept of what it ought to be, for example virtuous or benevolent. The pleasure of the good may at times be in opposition to the pleasure of the agreeable. We acknowledge, for example, that it is good to deprive ourselves of income for a time in order to commit to education, even though it often provides no simultaneously financial gratification. Since the pleasure of the good is based on reason we expect it to hold universally. It is therefore bounded by its objectivity.

To like something because it is *beautiful* is to favor it. To Kant, this is the only pure aesthetic judgment, untouched by the partiality of emotion or the determination of the moral. It occurs not through direct sensation but through reflection or contemplation of the sensation, carrying no interest in the object's existence. If we see the object as having a purpose or meeting a desire, we have an interest in it and are incapable of judging it beautiful (or not beautiful). The act of reflecting on an object's beauty does not seek to

understand it or cognize it, but only to judge it as favorable or unfavorable, likable or unlikable. If a housing development were to be placed on my family's land, it would be impossible for me to contemplate its beauty or lack thereof, as I would not be indifferent to its existence. That the judgment of beauty is neither partial to the subject's prejudices nor determined by reason or morality, it is free—and yet it must be called subjective since it arises out of the subject's contemplation. It is finally transformed into the realm of the political with the conclusion that it must be universal.

...since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality.¹

The very concept of the universal communicability of a pleasure carries with it [the requirement] that this pleasure must be a pleasure of reflection rather than one of enjoyment arising from mere sensation.²

On Hope: Precarious Equilibrium and Invisible Cities

The setting was the Lauriol Plaza Restaurant, northwest Washington, DC on a rainy Friday night. It had to be the most happening place in town. We were sitting on the roof under a plastic tarp, trying to ignore the increasing number of drips by drinking in scents of fresh cilantro, garlic and lime along with the sounds of energetic traffic relieved at the birth of another weekend. We were just glad to have a seat. Throughout the four levels, including the packed waiting lobby, there had to be nearly 500 people. Dignified grey-tops to sprightly young blondes. A superficial happiness rested on each brow. Fine fabrics draped slender shoulders. Pressed collars framed stalwart necks. The lonely

¹ Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790, trans. Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987, p. 54.

² Ibid, p. 173.

silence or empty chatter had far surpassed its quota for the week—in the cardboard cubicles of office towers, on the crowded sidewalks lined with clothing stores, at home in front of the evening news. Animation now filled the weary skins. Smooth wines slowed the ticking of the rational mind and candlelight gave sparkle to tired eyes, enabling the subtle signs of passion. Like Italo Calvino's 'Despina', in *Invisible Cities*, this city "receives its form from the desert it opposes."³ Open, energetic, resplendent, and romantic. Symbols of a deeper longing. *A city of desire*. Like Marco Polo, I had to be a traveler to see it. When I lived there, I was in it and was blind.

The Lauriol Plaza city longs for the latter of Calvino's two options in his concluding paragraph:

There are two ways to escape suffering [the inferno of living]. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space.⁴

In this latter option, Calvino provides hope with a similar basis as that proposed by Isaiah Berlin in his essay, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*.⁵ Berlin argues for the maintenance of a "precarious equilibrium," involving constant grappling, turning, pushing, tugging in society—a free and critical exchange of ideas seeking to find the ideal, or what in the midst of the inferno is not inferno. Calvino suggests that those who are vigilant in the pursuit will spend time looking, learning to recognize the ideal and will then enable it to be seen by others, will carve its path in the world.

³ Calvino, Italo. *Invisible Cities*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1974, p. 18

⁴ Ibid, p. 165.

⁵ In Berlin, Isaiah, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, (eds.) Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer, New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2000.

On Freedom: 'Selbstdenken' and the Enclosed Garden

Kant saw a similar mutuality between individual reflection and common understanding. He found the freedom in reflective judgment, as in judgment of beauty, to be a critical part of the enlightenment, which he defined as, “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity,” with immaturity defined as “the inability to use one’s own understanding without guidance from another.”⁶ An enlightened one would have cultivated the art of *Selbstdenken*—to think for oneself, along with *sensus communis*—to think from the possible place of others. He would know four aspects of freedom, which in practice are most likely overlapping and without static sequence: freedom from the need for guidance, freedom for subjective contemplation, freedom from subjective partiality, freedom for engagement in public discourse. The exercise of such freedoms would create *a broadened way of thinking*⁷ or in Arendt’s words, an *enlarged mentality*.⁸

Arendt, thinking of Kant in the 1960s, emphasized that *sensus communis* cannot be separated from *Selbstdenken* lest it becomes empathy. With hindsight we can see that this is often the case in mass demonstrations or revolutions when affect and spirit override contemplation.

To accept what goes on in the minds of those whose “standpoint”...is not my own would mean no more than passively to accept their thought, that is, to exchange their prejudices for the prejudices proper to my own station.⁹

On the other hand, if thinking for oneself is elevated above the shared sense, freedom is degraded into a protection of individual rights, which in John Stuart Mill’s terms would

⁶ In Reiss, Hans (ed.). *Kant, Political Writings*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p. 54.

⁷ Kant, p. 161

⁸ In Arendt, Hannah, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, (ed.) Ronald Beiner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 43.

⁹ Arendt, p. 43

happily spare society from the disdain of ‘collective mediocrity.’¹⁰ This has been the stance of modern liberalism to the degree that *sensus communis* is barely alive today.

James Stephen contradicts Mill in his book, *Liberty, Equality and Fraternity*, with historical evidence that strong individualism grows just as often within severely disciplined and cohesive communities as in societies which emphasize individual rights.¹¹ This leads to thoughts of the enclosed garden—the place so frequently used by disciplined communities in which to escape the inferno of the world, to be within community while thinking for oneself. In fact the genre of the enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*), which flourished in the Middle Ages, can be classified into three formal typologies which illustrate variations on freedom while corresponding strikingly to

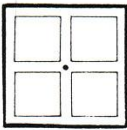
Kant’s three types of pleasure.¹²



Figure 1. *Hortus ludi*, *Hortus catalogi*, *Hortus contemplationis*¹³



The *hortus ludi* is the ‘garden as spectacle’, intended to be the site for play and all forms of gratifying pleasure. It was the place for courtly love, music, drama and sport, often furnished with fountains, turf seats, rose bushes, exotic fruit trees, flowery mead, gates and arbor ways.



Discretely walled, connected with a private residence and disconnected

¹⁰ ‘On Liberty,’ p. 226 in *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, (ed), J.M. Robson, Toronto/London, 1981, vol. 18.

¹¹ James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873, 2nd edition 1874), (ed.) Stuart D. Warner Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993.

¹² The names and descriptions of these typologies come from Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit, *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1999, pp. 38-59.

¹³ Aben and de Wit, p. 38.

from the chaos of the surrounding landscape, it accommodated an escape into subjective indulgence and deliberate illusion. Its layout did not follow geometrical rules to allow for a free accommodation to its users' whims. The *hortus ludi* corresponds to the pleasure of the agreeable.

The second typology, *hortus catalogi*, represents the 'ordering of the plane'. It was built for monasteries or for public use in town as a place for not only growing herbs and vegetables but also enumerating them. It was the place for distinguishing among the species, for classifying, measuring and drawing, the laboratory for the first writers of horticultural treatises. The layout was strictly proportional and geometrical with designated plots for each species and the wall served to protect and unify the collection. Such a configuration was universal, meant to be applied to any place, any site. It was a tool for divine understanding through deduction of creation's magnificence into smaller, comprehensible and scientific parts. The *hortus catalogi* corresponds to the pleasure of the good.

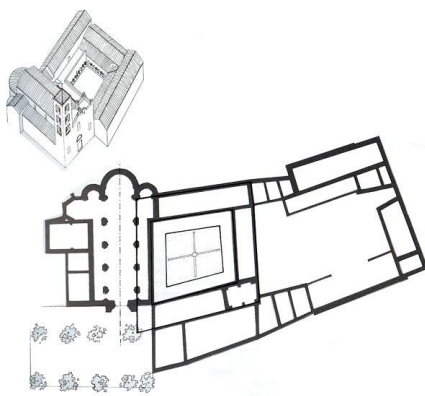


Figure 2. *Hortus contemplationis*: Santa Maria Vilabertran, Figueras, Spain¹⁴

Thirdly is the *hortus contemplationis* as 'the abstraction of space'. It was always located within a monastery with the descriptive feature of a strong central point at the intersection of two axes. This point, often marked with a fountain, well or tree, served not only to mark the confluence of finite lines (the horizontal) but also to join the finite with the infinite (vertical) and the

¹⁴ Aben and de Wit, p. 51.

man with the divine in the meeting of land and sky. The garden had the appearance of a courtyard, serving as an intermediary between inside and the outside. Its walls are the walls of the buildings. It is like a clearing which gains its meaning by its relationship to the path. “There, light and clarity complement the darkness and complexity of the forest. The great depth of the forest is visible between the tree trunks, of which the clearing is a constituent component.”¹⁵ In the Benedictine monastery in St. Gall, Switzerland, the garden is an open space serving as the nucleus for the arrangement of the entire complex—experienced as a state of enlightenment for the body, mind and soul.

The mood conjured up outside the building is one of expectation; inside it everything is shown in veiled form, and finally in the garden all is unveiled and explained.¹⁶

The monastic liturgy strove to form a convergence of all aspects of life—containing and presenting for communal experience the temporal rhythms of the day and seasons. In the same way, the garden in its unity and clarity sought to capture the whole of life in a place where one could contemplate its meaning. Though the garden is in a communal setting, it most likely did not promote a contemplation that led to what we would call political engagement with the others in community, though it certainly would have influenced the acts of teaching and communal worship. The *hortus contemplationis* corresponds to the pleasure of beauty (though not quite reaching the fullness of *sensus communis*).

If the *hortus contemplationis* provides an example of a place for reflective judgment, woven into the history of culture long before Kant wrote his third critique, it is all the more convincing that his claims are timeless. But how does Kant expand reflective

¹⁵ Aben and de Wit, p. 25.

¹⁶ Aben and de Wit, p. 50.

judgment beyond the space for contemplation, beyond the *Selbstdenken*? Though the judgments which are made in the garden or in the subjective are *believed* to be universal and communicable, they are not actually so until they enter and engage in the public realm.

On Society: 'Sensus Communis' and the Public Square

You must be alone in order to think. You need company to enjoy a meal.¹⁷

For a judgment to be a kind of *sensus communis*, in other words, it cannot be passive or solitary; it must be mediated in one form or another within society. Thus, the authority “which deprives man of the freedom to communicate his thoughts *publicly* also takes away his freedom to *think*....”¹⁸ On one hand the reflective judgment in its universality seems to be perfect and determined, and yet Kant is clear that it is not, that it needs to be tested and modified through its publicity. He remarks of his own practice of receiving objections from the public, which brings us around to the previously mentioned *enlarged mentality* or *broadened way of thinking*:

...that in thinking them over I always weave them into my judgments, and afford them the opportunity of overturning all my most cherished beliefs. I entertain the hope that by thus viewing my judgments impartially from the standpoint of others some third view that will improve upon my previous insight may be obtainable.¹⁹

Founded in April of this year, Italy's newest political party provides an interesting study in the state of the *sensus communis*. The slogan of the *Partito della Bellezza*—the Party

¹⁷ Arendt, p. 67.

¹⁸ “Was heisst: Sich im Denken orientieren?” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Prussian Academy (ed.), 1786, 8:131-147 IN Arendt, pp. 40-41.

¹⁹ “Letter to Marcus Herz, June 7, 1771,” Kant, *Selected Pre-Critical Writings*, trans. G. B. Kerferd and D. E. Welford, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968, p. 108 IN Arendt, p. 42.

of Beauty, is “*Aesthetics first, Ethics second,*” given further explanation by party founder and parliament member, Vittorio Sgarbi:

The moment has come to take note of the importance of every precious survival from the past and to provide for its protection, since every time we have fancied that we were improving or modernising, we have lost the flavour of places, their purity, their individuality... The Political Party for Beauty... asks citizens to take back responsibility for their cities from the unscrupulous bureaucrats who randomly and without any qualms of aesthetic conscience decide to inflict irreparable horrors on them.²⁰

Though certain of dissent, he nevertheless adheres to the national application of his party’s statement. The skeptics are simply lacking in information, or lacking in judgment. He is more concerned with educating citizens than with winning their votes, and through this process to facilitate the transfer of power into the hands of those with an “aesthetic conscience”—a conscience which values the local over the global, the old over the new.



Figure 3. A recent campaign poster pictures suave Sgarbi with the phrase: “We don’t need a face lift.”²¹

It is a brave move in an age of indifference.

Italy’s abusive patterns in the aestheticization

of politics are well known, but the Party of Beauty is in contrast speaking of a ground-up politicization of the aesthetic, a collective sense of beauty, by and for the citizens. If Sgarbi has the corrigibility Kant requires, receiving objections and allowing them to modify his judgments, he could successfully renew a national discourse on taste.

Contrarily, if he uses the publicity only for the means of power, he will remain as narrow-

²⁰ Cocks, Anna Somers and Vittorio Sgarbi, “Beauty gets its own political party in Italy. Italy’s Beauty is her International Role,” *The Art Newspaper*. May 2004.

<http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/article.asp?idart=11660>

²¹ <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/article.asp?idart=11660>. The phrase pejoratively references Berlusconi’s literal face lift of recent months.

minded as he is now and will fail to think with an enlarged mentality. Still the Party of Beauty signals a striking departure from the aesthetic indifference or relativity of post-modern society. Kant says that the beautiful does interest us empirically, but only when we are in society.²² If Arendt is correct in her interpretation that, “In Taste Egoism is overcome,”²³ then perhaps Sgarbi stands a chance.

Noticing such indifference, sociologist, Richard Sennett, has looked to historic urban models as possible facilitators for the recovery of public life.²⁴ Not surprisingly, he is drawn to the Greeks. In the *polis*, public life (*bios politikos*) was paramount for each citizen, serving as the primary means by which one would distinguish himself on a daily basis. It formally occurred in two different spaces: the *agora* (marketplace/ town square) and the *pynx* (theater).

The *agora* was a large open area in the center of the city with a major road running diagonally through it. Over the years (600 to 350 B.C.), it was increasingly surrounded by public buildings and colonnaded *stoas* where one could be engaged but less exposed. The *agora* was the center of intellectual and political discourse, ceremony and commercial activities—full of movement, fragmentary, at times overwhelming. It was strictly separated from the home (*oikos*). The *agora* was the place for democratic speech and action while the home was the place for labor, necessity and hierarchy. Public life for the male citizen existed only inasmuch as the women, children and slaves kept the home fires

²² Kant, p. 163.

²³ Arendt, p. 67.

²⁴ Sennett, Richard. 1998. *The Spaces of Democracy*. Ann Arbor : University of Michigan College of Ann Arbor.

burning. The *agora* facilitated the interaction of differences—not just in relation to identity, but also to thought, conviction, action, and manner. It did so in the following two ways:

- (1) few visual obstructions stood between events occurring simultaneously resulting in a lack of physical compartmentalization and an openness to spontaneity. One may have planned to come just to speak with a friend, but also get pulled into a lively debate, and
- (2) an intermediary zone was available on the edge of the open space in the form of the *stoa*—allowing one to step back from the engagement momentarily, to catch a view, to have shelter from the sun, to engage with a slight bit of confidentiality, to move between the public and private.²⁵

The design and function of the *pynx* facilitated a completely different type of public engagement—one that was more orderly and programmed. The audience sat encircling a space which included a platform for the speaker—where he could be seen and heard by all, and where the sun shone on his face from morning till late afternoon. Discussion had already taken place in the *agora*, and now it was time for decision-making. When the speaker began, the audience listened intently and afterwards responded with orderly comments and questions before taking a vote. Discipline and structure in public space were created by two qualities:

- (1) exposure between the speaker and the audience and between members of the audience, and
- (2) fixity of place²⁶

The *agora* and the *pynx* complement the *hortus conclusus* to reach a more worthy plane for reflective judgment and for the pleasure of beauty. We think with an enlarged

²⁵ Ibid, p. 15, 18-20.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 17-18.

mentality, however, not only in the act of listening, reading and looking for the standpoint of others, but also in *imagining* the possible standpoint of others. This is incredibly significant when dealing with the relationship of reflective judgment with the design of cities, for if communication were dependent on the immediate acts of listening, reading and looking alone, the assembly of people in public space would be its lifeline.

On Imagination: Film and the Memory of War

Kant's view of imagination, paraphrased by Arendt, is "the faculty of making present what is absent."²⁷ In accomplishing this it expands the time and space in which we can think from the standpoint of others. Though the city still shares a significant role, it is not overburdened. If the 'absent' refers to the object, the 'present' refers to the intuition or the perception. Instead of being sensed directly, the intuition and perception are re-presented to us through imagination. We are then the spectators rather than the artists. This is the means by which reflective judgment is impartial and disinterested, since the image of the object is detached from the emotion and charm of the immediately sensed object.

The mental "free play" possible through imagination, has, according to Kant, the ability to entertain us in our contemplation, therefore prolonging our attention; when free play is lacking we become bored and passive. The prolongation of free play is furthermore sustained through variation and contrast.²⁸

²⁷ Arendt, p. 79.

²⁸ Kant, p. 93-94, referencing example of William Marsden's travels in Sumatra.

Imagination is not confined to a temporal lineage of past, present and future. Henri Bergson distinguishes two forms of memory. The first is the memory which imagines.

To call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream.²⁹

The *memory-image* is a constructed assembly of fragments, sections cut out of the course of time and represented as in a still-life or a photograph. It finds the universal within the particular. In cinema these fragmented images are spliced together to form an illusion of sequence. Does this illusion become an intrusive façade separating and protecting us from life's responsibility? In other words, does imagination make a society of dreamers void of doers? Or does it work to make the space of which Calvino speaks, ("...seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."³⁰)?

Arendt lauds the politics which finds the universal within the particular, as in finding the law within personal stories or isolated events, rather than subsuming the stories under the predetermined law. The particulars, synonymous to the fragments of imagination, would then work against passivity even though they are in some ways dreamlike.³¹ The Surrealist flaneur in the streets of Paris, in his best intentions, would aim to live a dreamlike state not for a private nihilism but conversely for a collective revolution.

Walter Benjamin saw the political power of imagination through the medium of film.

The cinema's space of collective spectatorship, of montage and shock effects, could

²⁹ Bergson, Henri, *Matter and Memory*, (1910) trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991, pp. 82-83.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 165.

³¹ That is, they are detached from the here and now.

function like the Parisian arcade's space of condensed advertising and consumerism. But Benjamin also recognized the power of film to overcome the spectators, ultimately enslaving them. This would occur when the audience allows itself to fall in the shadow of the movie star's radiance, or the shadow of technology's seeming omnipotence—when active imagination of the masses is frozen into a passive state of distraction.³²

War-torn societies often witness a flourishing of film and other forms of creativity. This is more than a sign of idle hands or a longing for expression. It is also active imagination as a means for collective political space. It is an attempt to undermine the passive state of distraction wrought by the threat of a dictator or militia, or the amnesia born of enduring tragedy. Lena Merhej, a young filmmaker from Beirut, Lebanon states,

Most Lebanese avoid the past, the war. For a long time, I did the same. Oblivion, for most, is a sheltering method. When mentioning the war, many Lebanese refer to it as *al ahdeth* (the events). The usage of the word 'war' has been reduced in our language. The theme of it has been subdivided and ridiculed. Its experience has been normalized, and the war, for some, has ceased to exist. Being in a different social and cultural context in New York allowed me to reflect and to become critical about my own position towards the 'issue'.³³



Merhej has made her experience part of the *sensus communis* through her animated film *Drawing the War*, believing that by distancing the spectator from time and place he is given room for reflective judgment.

Figure 4. Frames from *Drawing the War*³⁴

³² "The Work of Art in the Age of Technological Reproducibility" in *Benjamin: Selected Writings 3*.

³³ Merhej, Lena. "Drawing the War," in *Transit Beirut: New Writing and Images*, (eds.) Malu Halasa and Roseanne Saad Khalaf, London: Saqi Books, 2004, p. 70.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 71.

Drawing animation is a potential to diverge, and expand, morph, bend, and twist images like the memories that we recall. Also like the process of remembering, animation appears, transforms and moulds.... There is no specific temporal or geographical reference in *Drawing the War*; rather it is the story of looking at war from the conditions imposed on its civilians. It is our story, as Lebanese, of walking on the residue of things past.³⁵

Another young Lebanese filmmaker, Danielle Arbid, produced *In the Fields of Battle* (*Maarek Hob*) awarded at this year's Cannes festival. It is praised in the Lebanese press since "though war is everywhere, we never see it; we just feel the pressure it exerts on the characters."³⁶ This summer an international film festival is being held for the first time in Ramallah. Director, Adam Zuabi says that it is a way to celebrate the stories of the Palestinian people, among others, and a way to imagine dreams coming true, "to make the impossible possible."³⁷ The famed Sarajevo Film Festival also started in the midst of violence as a source for freedom, resistance and imagination.³⁸

On the Post-War City: Beirut

The venue for film is the cinema, but it is now time to turn back to the venue for everyday life, remaining within the context of the society familiar with war. The physical scars on a post-war city are on one hand revolting barriers—marks revealing no-man's land, the lines of deeply-rooted divisions or arbitrary acts of destruction. On the other hand, however, they serve as monuments inviting a nation to recall its mistakes and thus avoid repetition.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Short, Ramsey, "Young Lebanese filmmaker gets big break at Cannes," *The Daily Star*, Beirut, 06 May 2004.

³⁷ Jaafar, Ali, "Ramallah to host global film festival in June," *The Daily Star*. Beirut, 24 May 2004.

³⁸ www.sff.ba

In Beirut, the almost complete obliteration of the city center left a field of scars most of which have been elaborately bandaged. It has also revealed a new public impulse to debate the relationship of social relations and urban space. Journalist, Thomas Friedman, accounted the way things were.

In Beirut, the embodiment of the Levantine idea was the city center. The Levantine spirit of coexistence was both produced in, and reproduced by, the covered markets and stone-arched alleyways, the red-roofed houses and craft workshops, the arabesque Ottoman fountains and bookstalls of old downtown Beirut, woven around Riyadh el-Solh Square. In Beirut's city center 7000 shops once stood shoulder to shoulder, with the Maronite cobbler next to the Druze butcher and the Greek Orthodox money changer next to the Sunni coffee seller and the Shiite grocer next to the Armenian jeweler. Beirut's city center was like a huge urban Mixmaster that took the various Lebanese communities from their mountains and villages and attempted to homogenize them into one cosmopolitan nation.³⁹

The cosmopolitan nation was shattered—strewing its pieces into the temporal security of homogenous enclaves or far beyond the country's porous border. For the past 12 years the city has undergone massive reconstruction.⁴⁰ A key figure within *Solidere*, the private company in charge of the project, states,

For the postwar society to negotiate its differences and explore the physical and spatial context that will best accommodate and dilute these differences, the neutral grounds of the city center provide the best opportunity...the right infrastructure for the emergence of a pluralist society in Beirut.⁴¹

³⁹ Friedman, Thomas, From Beirut to Jerusalem, New York: Anchor Books, 1990.

⁴⁰ Angus Gavin, Master Planner for *Solidere*, *The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District*, says of the plan: "The pattern of development that it engenders must inform the future and cherish the past. In the renewal of the great city squares and the making of new public spaces, it must provide a social arena and a means to reconnect a once-divided city. In the quality and example that it sets, and in the value placed on the city's heritage and its archaeological treasures, it must also instill a renewed sense of national pride and identity. Finally, under the pressure of private sector reconstruction of the city center, the plan must be sufficiently all-embracing to protect the public interest." Gavin, Angus & Ramez Maluf. Beirut Reborn. London: Academy Editions, 1996, p.13.

⁴¹ Kabbani, Oussama R. *Public Space as Infrastructure: The Case of the Postwar Reconstruction of Beirut in Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City*. Eds. Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis. London: Prestel-Verlag, 1998, p. 259.

This new center is so intricately planned, so well defined, that it seems more like a very large monument than a city. Like film, monuments are fragments of the temporal continuum. But do they work to stretch the imagination? Do they give everyday space for the dual process of reflective judgment? Does a colorful masterplan remake a cosmopolitan city?



Figure 5. Beirut city center, 2002

The post-war city understandably longs for order in contrast to times of unbearable chaos. What would happen, however, if after a relative order was achieved, the city would be given room to breathe? What would happen if instead of purchasing a designer's monumental masterplan, each citizen were asked to think for himself and to think from the standpoint of the other? People betrayed by their neighbors are afraid to speak up, afraid to enter into public discussion. But it is this very silence that leads to totalitarianism. Arendt is appalled not so much by the audacity of the State in abusing its power, but in the passivity of the people in allowing it. The crisis for the post-war society is in how to overcome that fear, to create or recreate a collective political sphere which is held together by its ability to make judgments, not just by remembering common events.⁴² The judgments regarding urban space could join other realms of civil

⁴² Taken from Ronald Beiner's (ed.) interpretive essay in *Hannah Arendt: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. Univ of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1982, p. 99 referring to Arendt's essay, "Understanding and Politics" *Partisan Review* 20, 1953, p. 384.

contestation for a city that is cosmopolitan in process, not only in appearance—a city which rebuilds trust on a foundation that is fluid and free.

In Beirut the identities are indeterminate, unfocused, in constant negotiation, often in violent conflict. These are spatial, demographic, cultural, economic and above all, political identities. A city in evolution, Beirut is a space under construction, a territory in continuous gestation...⁴³

Lebanon, once a wasteland of violence and totalitarianism, has reached a point where the beauty of public life and reflective judgment is possible, though constantly under contest. This realization gives hope—even for Iraq.

On space for Contemplation and Civic Life in the city of Rijeka: a proposal



Figure 6. Rijeka from hills/ from sea/ from sky, 2003

The city of Rijeka, Croatia lies in the Kvarner Gulf region of the northern Adriatic Sea, where the Mediterranean reaches assertively into the European mainland. The region marks the boundary between Croatia's Istrian peninsula to the west and Dalmatia to the south. The city's political history is highly sporadic, particularly in the years between and including the world wars with the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Balkan wars did not enter Rijeka in a physical way, so in that sense it is not a recent post-war city. In fact, it served, along with neighboring coastal towns, as a haven for many wartime

⁴³ Davie, Michael, *The Urban Identity of Beirut in Reconstruire Beirut*. Casabella 1995 Oct., v. 59, n. 627, p. 69.

refugees and is today known for its efforts at becoming one of the country's most ideologically open locations. However, it has in no way been exempt from the ongoing regional struggle in inter-ethnic relations. Many Serbs left voluntarily, in the war years, and others were forced out in the night.⁴⁴ Rijeka cannot easily escape the post-war Croatian nationalism, which appears helpful in providing momentary stability, but is in reality very unhealthy.

A recent political move was the acceptance of a World Bank loan related to port restructuring and physical planning. One of the three main components of the project is port/city interface development. The broad objective of the Bank and city officials is to create a place for public access to the sea, becoming "a unique recreation facility for city inhabitants and tourists,"⁴⁵ the interpretation of which constitutes a new public debate.⁴⁶

An architectural firm in Rijeka, *Randić-Turato* has initiated an unprecedented discourse in the city on the relationship between urban space and society. They perceive the architect's role as one of 'urban guerilla', or 'agent provocateur'. Provocation in the form of architecture and development is a worthy approach to combat the complacency wrought by years of dictatorship. By welcoming citizens to participate in the contestation of physical space, these agents are also facilitating a collective politic. Other visionaries and nascent non-profits have organized means for citizen involvement in imagining

⁴⁴ Before the war, Rijeka had about 11% Serb population. In the 2001 census the number was down to 6%.

⁴⁵ Rijeka Gateway Project, *Initial Project Information Document*, The World Bank, Washington, DC, March 25, 2003, p. 4.

⁴⁶ A comprehensive design proposal for this site will be included in my masters thesis, to be completed by August.

changes in the urban landscape, one of which held a workshop for children to imagine their city through drawing.



*Figure 7. Visions for Rijeka*⁴⁷

Can the urban landscape created through such a process be called beautiful, in terms of Kant's definition? The landscape as a phenomenological experience falls under the pleasure of the agreeable and as a cognitive experience, under the pleasure of the good. The landscape of beauty requires disinterestedness, imagination and communicability. The question for the landscape architect or urban designer becomes not about making objects of beauty but about making space in which the process of beauty can take place—space for both contemplation and communication—*Selbstdenken* and *sensus communis*.

With my task to create a design for the new public space by the sea in an emerging democratic city which is still relatively silent and distracted, I will have the disadvantage of assuming the role of the actor, the artist. I will always have an interest in the work, but can hope that the spectator will be able to experience the work without interest. The landscape architect is uniquely suited, however, to accept the flexibility and fluidity of the work. Her materials are not of stone and mortar, but of nature. Her design is never finished, but is only commenced and set free to the winds of time.

⁴⁷ http://www.urban-institute.hr/en/manag_model/citizen_drawings.htm

For Rijeka's new public space, I propose an enclosed garden within a park. As a *hortus contemplationis* within a monastery, the garden will exist in relation to the habitual, communal movement in the surrounding spaces. It will lie on the coastline, allowing the intersection of the finite lines of the city with the infinite lines of sea and sky. It will provoke one to think for himself, to make aesthetic judgments not on the garden itself, but on other particularities of life that rest in the imagination. The garden will provoke disinterested reflection and in that way be an affront to both passivity and prejudice. It will also be the site for occasional formal gatherings, as in the Greek theater, with disciplined and decisive public engagement. The park will blend with the city, its paths merely a greener extension of the streets. It will facilitate a daily *sensus communis*. Like the Greek marketplace, the park will give space for an 'enlarged mentality' in its vigorous exchange of ideas.

Applications of Kant's philosophy are countless. With the recent passing of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, for example, a revived acknowledgement seems to have surfaced across the globe on the virtues of a shared political discourse—though few if any are calling it what it is—a kind of *sensus communis*. Many have vehemently disagreed with Reagan's policies—with his reasoning and interpretation of moral law. Good judgment does not prevent fatal mistakes, especially in the "fog of war."⁴⁸ Many disliked his style—his ways of finding gratification (i.e. jellybeans and cowboy boots) though it did not concern them. But remarkably, all seem to agree that he managed to facilitate periods of political impartiality that our world has rarely seen. It arose from

⁴⁸ Referencing a common military phrase used as the title for Robert McNamara's recent documentary.

his ability to make reflective judgments, to communicate them effectively to the nation and negotiate them with the world.

There is hope for this “crooked timber of humanity.”⁴⁹ It can arise through the design of our cities, even those devastated by war, and through the leadership of our nations, even those corrupted by the misuse of power. This hope is not based on the possibility of perfection, but on the possibility of politics.

Like Augustine we live and think in the shadow of great catastrophe, and therefore, like him, we must attend to man’s capacity for beginning; for man is the being whose essence is beginning.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Kant, Immanuel, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), in Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990, p. xi).

⁵⁰ Arendt, p. 96.