

VOID: A View from Acropolis

A xurban_collective work in progress, 2005

Postulations

1. Remains of cataclysmic events are archaeological objects that can be meaningfully studied through artistic methods. [We are referring to artistic method as the phenomenological approaches of articulating, approaching, observing, studying, documenting the social phenomenon vis-a-vis its spatial context. Further critical actions should be taken with respect to the findings. Any techniques and tools should be relevant to the method.]
2. Anatolian territory is covered by thousands of species of plants, a good part being endemic. The sedimentation of soil, the flora-covers the mythic landscape of civilizations. This landscape acts as a protective layer for the archaeological ruins, i.e. the top layer of the historical stratification acts as a blanket; quietly warming, taking care of, and filling the voids by time. It presents a variety of flowers as decoration.
3. Structures can be understood through their voids. Void, in our case, is the spatial realm, which is in between the archaeological formation and the contextual framework that the site rests on. (For instance, structural cracks in the buildings) The non-content created can be understood through remains of everyday life at the time of the catastrophe.
4. Science fails to show the complexity of the social phenomena within its authoritarian discourses. Categorical reductions eliminate the understanding of social voids. The social ought to be understood through its void. The contextual environment of the objects defines the possibility of the void. Nothing is transcendent about it.
5. First, the void can be understood as a meaningless ground of circulation. Second, physical forms are necessary. However, the point of departure is not to be a monumental structure but the voids themselves, i.e., instead of reading the registered aspect (read monumental), the approach attempts to grasp the immersed as it is in utterances (read filling in the void).
6. If Middle East (to include the Anatolian Plateau) as the sedimentation of a tormented history is still relevant, it is because it antedates the 'Classical-as-the-origin'. Not only does archaeology as we understand dispense with the task of restoring the original, but also we know that the blind poet of the Iliad dreamed of his ur-history, the time when all that was solid melt into the soil. We believe that the prehistoric wisdom still punctuates the conflicting frames of acceptance of the world and fate, as we observe through the modern catastrophe: ruins, cruelties, torture and unspeakable atrocities that infest the region.

Notes

* Politics should be understood as the act of defining the limitations: as in law, for instance or, let's say, how much suffering we can take.

For us, the archaeological mound is the post mortem sozial plastik itself, where the dead, the material culture, and the soil blend into the mound in the Messianic time of its own. We tend to separate artistic production from social activism, not to promote the cult of the visionary/solitary artist, but in order to specify the unique divide in between the intervention that can produce a suspended artifice and the realm of communicative purposes and instructive politics.

* Public engagement (like public education) is an unfulfilled, fictional construction. We, as artists, do not necessarily produce for and with the "public", but we think that independent artworks themselves freely engage with other bodies. The only condition for the uninterrupted democratic condition, for us, is to free all the bodies, human, animals, plants and the artworks, from the institutional (read capitalist state and other variations). Participation and inter-activity are problematic fields that need to be considered and re-considered carefully.

* Art is not the testing ground for politics. It is the ground of actualization for a significant political engagement. Experimental methods for verbal/visual/textual engagement are used in the sphere of "social reforming". Xurban's works intend to reflect upon contemporary social condition. We care about both the territorial and the historical transformations.

* Memorial is the justification of hierarchical structures, i.e., the artificial stratum, positioned on top, covering, therefore eliminating all other possibilities. Re-appropriation of memorial structures is unfeasible. Architects, real estate developers, sponsors, state officials should be eliminated from the process. The Museum hauls and displays the artifact, whereas we are interested in the transfer of the void, that which is left behind. Our concepts are usually developed within a collective process of intellectual dialogue alongside long journeys to the site. The surface survey of the archaeological methodology can be taken by us to mean the impromptu encounters that we record at the site and its social environs.

The Procedure

Keywords: Dig, Excavation, Earth, Dirt, Evidence, Site, Location, Transfer, Truck, Gallery, Mine, Farm, Grain, Defence, Subtraction, Antagonism, Twofold, Unfold

1. What is a dig for us?

A dig is an artistic routine executed to extract and collect the evidence of a possible void!

The possibility is generated through a process, a series of continuous actions that can be considered as a recursive treatment.

A dig is the cut on earth.
A trench is the void!
Water is the filler.
Plants are the decorations.
Settlement is the context.
Resistance is the motivation.
The Altar does not exist.

Transference:

Excavation will take place in a location, which will be decided later this year. We intend to create a collaboration between local government and activists to decide on the actual dig site. Our non-memorial will be a site located in between the Acropolis of Bergama and Ovacik –known as the gold mine area...

Earth will be transferred to the exhibition space as an evidence of the void!
Seeds will be planted on dirt. Water will be sprayed!
Photographs – Landscape
Wall text – Data/Manifestation/Rhetorics
Video – Close-ups: Plants – Flowers – Bugs and other residents of the site

2. Why do we choose that specific location?

Importance of Pergamon and two separate controversies --- > one connection!

*Colonialism: Extracting and exploiting the 'local' resources and transferring 'the extracted' overseas.

*Archaeological transfer is a meaningful (read scientific) destruction of the earth to uncover the truth! The particular truth is constructed by a powerful action. Power corrupts and destroys, it imposes its own rules.

*A Mine: An infection enclosed by gold! The means that is used to extract the gold is the famous cyanide leaching process! Cyanide is a well known and highly deadly poisonous substance.

3. The connection between sites: Bergama → Istanbul → Berlin

We do not consider our gesture as a land art practice. For us the process of transferring is more essential than the actual result/form created during the process for which failures are also the part. Being well aware of the polemics and complete histories of the two

controversies (gold mining and all there is in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin), we tend to take a tangential approach to sensitize a chosen site/situation in order to make possible other vistas. Istanbul is merely the stop in the way which, in the past, facilitated the transactions among the nodes of power that actualized the exploitation in both cases, and now, for us, the given site of the non-museum for our non-memorial.

Meanwhile, we acknowledge the controversy in each case as being symptomatic of global confiscation of resources and livelihoods, irreparably.