

New Territories for Old Architecture: Nomadic History as a Design Strategy in the Redevelopment Urban Project for the Kadhimiya Historical Site, Baghdad, Iraq

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The purpose of this paper is to explore how the possibility of using history as a dynamic, intensive force in an urban design thinking process can escape the historicism and representational image functionary towards a re-engineered creative historical/ architectural dialogue. By comparing two existing urban project strategies for the redevelopment of the Kadhimiya historical site, this paper will examine the difference between mimicking historical styles in a decontextualized manner and repeating them with difference using the theory of *Difference and Repetition* outlined by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

This paper analyzes two different design strategies that architects and urban designers use to deal with history in renewal projects that have been submitted to an international-wide competition for the redevelopment of the Kadhimiya historical site. It will compare the historically conservative winning proposal by the Dewan Architects and Engineers Firm to another entry by the Assemblage Architects Firm. It may be said that the latter firm does not demonstrate as much of a retrospective and conservative use of history as the winning firm, but I will argue that it presents a more creative and prolific source in terms of future design, as well as a less detrimental approach towards the historic urban fabric. It will be shown that the Assemblage Architects' design does not use history in a reactionary or nostalgic way; "history as historicism," instead Assemblage Firm employs history in creative ways, blending with the present and future. The comparison of these two projects reveals different approaches of architectural reconstruction and preservation. Regarding the first proposal, by the Dewan Architects and Engineers Firm, it is argued that the formality of a "disneyfied" historical character has become "a string of actualities." The redevelopment design in the winning entry exists as an allusion. In contrast, it will be shown that the proposal by Assemblage Architects Firm applies a creative alternative detached from this predetermined method, the use of history in Assemblage's proposal will be beyond the artificial frozen-time image.

In this research, the main goal is not to refute or confirm the static and fixated image of history that is proposed by the winning entry, but rather to scrutinize the way in which this representational image of history becomes operative and dynamic. This research is a critical analysis about a transitional and productive return of history, "a nomadic history." The term 'nomadic history' is coined by the Deleuze scholar Craig Lundy, which is a conception that has been formulated by Deleuze's logic of creation. This comparative paper will investigate the problem of representational thinking in architectural/ historical design practice and to what extent repeating the past produces sociocultural uniformity, or cultural difference.

CAPTURING OLD ARCHITECTURE

The Kadhimiya historical site is located in the Kadhimiya district, a northern neighborhood west of the Tigris River, about five kilometers from the city center of Baghdad, the capital of Iraq. In the midst of the old site complex sits the mosque of the Kadhimain shrine, which contains tombs and dominates most of the historic urban landscape, greatly influencing "the functional as well as the socio-religious composition."¹ In 1980 the site went through an urban intervention that demolished its historic features and urban fabric.² This resulted in the destruction of 9 hectares of the most motivating architectural elements of the site's historic core.³ "The present problem is to reestablish the integrity of the whole site as an urban complex, providing adequate facilities for servicing, and scope for growth in prosperity."⁴

The central redevelopment dilemma stems from the desire to shield the past and the conflicting notion of bringing to life the urban or neighborhood "character" of the site. The current federal government is safeguarding and developing Kadhimiya by conducting a number of studies.⁵ The most important study was performed by the Mayor's Office of Baghdad in 2008-2009, which sought proposals for the regeneration of the Kadhimiya historical site. In order to persuade the Baghdad authorities of the viability of their proposal, Dewan Architects & Engineers Firm stressed the fact that the redevelopment project for the Kadhimiya site would revive its historical image. The mission of the potential bid winner would be that, by a repetition of the past, an exact construction and restoration would be accomplished.



Figure 1: View of the Qiblah Gate of the Kadhimain shrine, Baghdad, Iraq. The representational image of thought in the winning entry. Source: Dewan Architects and Engineers, Kadhimiya Development. < <http://www.dewan-architects.com/work-planning-kadhimiya.html>>

In fact, reproducing history may not only stymie the “productive force of creation,” but also re-enforce pride, becoming a catalyst in the development of the sentiment of nationalism, as well as opening the way for more accepted forms of imitation and representational urban design thinking. Using Deleuze’s theory on the logic of representation and the logic of surface, this project proposal potentially constitutes the Disneyfication of the historical buildings and site. It decomposes traditional architecture into its elements and principles, at the level of either facades or plans, and merges these elements into the Kadhimiya urban design project. This “merging” may be evident, or may simply involve a level of modification. The end result may be simpler than the original in detail but it must visually recall, in an almost cut and paste manner, the historical source from which it is derived.⁶ One of Deleuze’s themes which is part of his theory of *Difference and Repetition*, is the idea that repetition, by its nature, copies an original, precisely the model and its reproductions and copies.⁷ Dorothea Olkowski, an American philosopher, argues “the system of representation, whether in the realm of philosophy, psychology, social and political theory, ethics, or aesthetics, operates by establishing a fixed standard as the norm or model.”⁸ This repetition represents a predetermined “norm” as a formula of hegemonic architectural practice. For my example, Disneyfication can be described as the transformation of the Kadhimiya site into a conservatively controlled environment that is imprisoned and limited to a very narrow imagistic mode of history with homogenized qualities that “strip the place of its original character and repackages it in a sanitized format.”⁹ Despite the fact that it could be understood and indicated from this proposal that the situation for the Kadhimiya historical site “in depth,” meaning “to have experience, familiarity or knowledge of its past,”¹⁰ the repetition of the historical styles and the need to protect the tradition of the Kadhimiya site have caused some critics to label this kind of conversion as a ‘Disneyland,’ insinuating that it embodies “socially engineered identities rather than

a ‘real’ urban character,”¹¹ as reported by Kim Dovey, an Australian architectural critic.

In his rejection of this kind of representational thinking (Figure 1), Deleuze estimates that it is a source of false identity, “incorporeal and virtual forces that stretch over a sea of corporeal bodies and actual states of affairs.”¹² Deleuze describes this as a “dogmatic image of thought,” and he ardently refutes it because of its correlation to the model of representation which has its roots in the concepts of identity, which he vilifies due to its tendency to exclude difference.¹³ His critique of identity stems from his view that the power attributed to identity is usurpation¹⁴ when it comes to the representation of the supposed pre-existing image, and that process is the source of rejecting difference (Figure 2). Deleuze’s stand on the logic of representation is somewhat straightforward. He thinks that the logic of representation has nothing to do with the ‘difference in itself’ or anything in connection with the life in depth since it sorts out thoughts in conjunction with some type of fixed elements as well as some parameters that depend on false image.¹⁵ This is what Lundy called ‘surface becomings.’ “Surface becomings, according to Deleuze, are sterile, fixed and immobilized, they create identifiable states, and here the logic of surface is defined by its processes of virtual becoming in contrast to the depths of actualities.”¹⁶ Deleuze goes further in defying the imposed moralistic nature of such an image assumed to be part and parcel of everyday life. As British sociologist John Marks pointed out, “the image that Deleuze challenges is essentially dogmatic and moral. In this sense, it is representational in nature, in that it presupposes that ‘everyone knows.’”¹⁷ As humans, we first experiment places through our immediate stable environments, where we interact routinely in daily life and which allow us to firmly establish our actual identities; that we almost take for granted. Human classification fails to attain identity in its whole, ‘difference in itself’. Despite the fact that pure difference cannot be identified and is clearly



Figure 2: Constructing of new hotel in the Kadhimiyah historical site, Baghdad, Iraq. The fixed identity in the winning entry. Source: Dewan Architects and Engineers, Kadhimiyah Development. < <http://www.dewan-architects.com/work-planning-kadhimiyah.html>>

unattainable in the present, it stretches beneath all actual identities and enables us to expound their coming to being.

The theory of *Difference and Repetition*, developed by Deleuze, defies the logic of representation, whereby we contemplate each element (re) presents something that is subordinated to a category or a grouping considered as the original. Seen as such, difference is subordinated to some kind of accepted concept considered as the standard everything else is measured to indefinitely. This is the reasoning behind the selection of the Dewan Architects & Engineers Firm; their “keenness,” and “willingness” to preserve the historical, cultural, and social features of the area. The jury, primarily composed of local politicians and businessmen, decided that Dewan’s proposal was the most “aesthetically pleasing” among the submissions and demonstrated that it is an excellent illustration of a rich, and well-improved proposal. At the award ceremony, the Iraqi Prime Minister, joined by the mayor of Baghdad, reiterated the necessity of promoting the religious tourism in Iraq, and he praised the Baghdad Municipality for announcing this competition to conserve the pristine heritage of the Kadhimiyah site, including its sacred and remarkable premises.¹⁸ Despite the approval by the government, Iraqi architecture and urban design academics, as well as the initiation of its implementation in 2014,¹⁹ the project comes under scrutiny in this paper, which debates that its renewed elements and principles are in conflict with the heritage of the old site.

My research intends to demonstrate that the winning redevelopment project for the Kadhimiyah site may indeed lead to a potential Disneyfication of the historical site. To develop my arguments, I rely on the American sociologist Helen Morgan Parmett’s definition of Disneyfication, which she primarily equates to consumerism—for the goal is to create “an optimal space for the marketing and consumption of consumer goods and branded experiences, and thus, it is criticized

for creating uniformity, privatization, and commodification of public space, as well as for its exclusionary nature and its mimicry of authentic qualities.”²⁰ In addition, I parallel Parmett’s definition of Disneyfication to that of Alan Bryman’s, a British sociologist. In his explanation of the term, of which, “Disneyfication is typically associated with a statement about the cultural products.”²¹ This is to say that Disneyfication is the process of interpretation to change historic features into something shallow and oversimplified.²²

The American critic and theorist Fredric Jameson provides the most insightful analysis of postmodernity in his book *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, a cultural public sphere where every historic feature “becomes semi-autonomous and floats above reality,”²³ as an image and commoditized product. This idea relates to Disneyfication and authenticity in its argument that we live in an environment of superficial appearance, where everything is motivated by the authentic image of the old and entangled with the socio-economic state of late capitalism.²⁴ “Above all, we must be wary of any discourse which nostalgically calls for a return to some ‘golden age’, an originary state of oneness with the world, which was somehow erased by contemporary existence.”²⁵ According to Jameson, urban renewal projects risk slipping into Disneyfication, the blatant opposite of authenticity, mainly if there exists a search to appeal to or repeat some historicism.²⁶ The work of scholars such as Jameson, Parmett, and Dovey warn us to be careful of participating to a similarly nostalgic dialogue of ‘authenticity’. Jameson’s work suggests a theoretical framework that involves the comprehensive variety of subjects included in architecture, much like Deleuze scholar Adrian Parr’s concept of “machinic urbanism,” a nomadic practice that challenges the oppositional dualisms of history and becoming in representational urban design thinking.

This paper argues that the project proposed by Dewan Architects and Engineers, due to its enormous size and unsuitable nature, will be a design of an unreal or artificial site. The method of duplicating the same site by repeating its former elements and principles is inadvisable for the redevelopment of an urban historical project because it leads to the potential Disneyfication of historical identity. Thus, I argue that the return to tradition is more or less a dynamic of a system that always calls for reproduction, and thus it becomes a dogma; stymying rejuvenation and innovation. However, this is not the end, according to Lundy, there is another kind of history; a “nomadic history,” in Deleuze’s work, “that is irreducible to both historicism and pure becoming, but rather falls between them.”²⁷

MACHINIC URBANISM: CRACKING THE PAST

Deleuze makes it clear in his argument that, when it comes to architectural styles, it is unrealistic to cut and paste the past of our ancestors into the present, whereby we merely reproduce the forms and the adornments of the past. Deleuze wants to regain the history from the dominant authority of the representational image of thought, and thus,



Figure 3: The redevelopment urban project for the Kadhimiya historical site, Baghdad, Iraq. The machinic interplay between the classic and modern in the finalist entry. Source: Assemblage Architects, Holy City Masterplan. < <http://www.assemblage.co/holy-city-masterplan>>

liberate urban design thinking from the dualisms of historicism and surface becomings to produce unpredictable territories. Furthermore, Deleuze characterizes this return as nomadic history that functions as a dynamic mediator between the historicism and surface becomings. "A new middle emerges, where a new monism and pluralism can be pursued that brings about continual creativity."²⁸

In fact, Deleuze's goal is to reverse the primary importance given to identity and representation in the European logic of difference.²⁹ His approach thus defies two conditions that are assumptions, namely the special place given to "Being" and the representational image of thought.³⁰ Nonetheless, in Deleuze's approach, the two conditions have important and unexpected consequences on the "political, aesthetic and ethical" lives of people, for they constitute the established canon that Deleuze undertakes to disrupt by the means of "his notion of empirical and non-conceptual difference in itself."³¹ The main issue regarding the concept 'difference in itself,' as discussed by Deleuze in the first chapter of his book *Difference and Repetition*, describes the approach as a 'determining of a conception of difference' while avoiding the outlining of it via the assumed canonical terms of identity and/or representation. In her development, Olkowski holds the position that the system of representation is put to question by Deleuze's logic of difference. To counter the proponents of representation, Deleuze coined a new term: "internal difference." It is free of the four illusionary concepts of representation, namely: "identity, resemblance, analogy and opposition."³²

In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze achieves two essential shifts from the Kantian transcendental philosophy.³³ First, instead of striving for the circumstances of "possible experience," Deleuze offers a vital "account of the genesis of *real* experience, that is, the experience of this concretely existing individual here and now."³⁴ Second, to emphasize his concept of difference, Deleuze argues that "the genetic principle must itself be a differential principle."³⁵ In doing so, Deleuze seeks to refrain from viewing difference as perpetually being in opposition to what is accepted as a social norm, something that counters what is perceptible

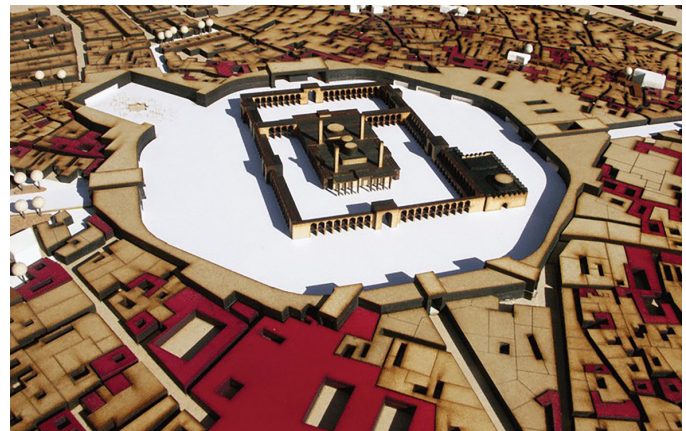


Figure 4: Proposed Sacred Wall encircles the Kadhimain shrine, Baghdad, Iraq. Nomadic history creates a link between the actuality and virtuality in the finalist entry. Source: Assemblage Architects, Holy City Masterplan. < <http://www.assemblage.co/holy-city-masterplan>>

or identifiable by humans. Difference is a genetic mechanism through which any representation becomes a dual force of illusion-identity in perpetual interaction with deepening and widening gaps as time goes by.

The most important element to this analysis revolves around the concept and definition of the term of what Adrian Parr calls "machinic urbanism". "Machinic urbanism produces connections and relations between elements to stimulate challenges to traditional economic, environmental, social and cultural *doxa*, creating lines of flight and alternative discourses from which to imagine, or fabulate, different futures."³⁶ An analysis of the proposal of the Assemblage Architects Firm will show that these alternate possibilities have this potential. Avoiding the visual reference of the Baghdadi house and using its spirit, Assemblage Architect Firm deals with history creatively. In their proposal they design a very effective urban matrix, overlapping with everyday life manners and facing numerous challenges to preserve the sacred and urban structures.³⁷

To redevelop the main area around the Kadhimain shrine, Assemblage Architects Firm designed a plan on a large scale, taking advantage of the vacant land available around the historical core. They considered it necessary to move the demanded services to the edge of the historic site. The redevelopment plan had two objectives: to enhance the living environments of inhabitants and to achieve a higher level of effectiveness around the shrine (Figure 3).

The current neighboring buildings conflict with the shrine, which needs more space for security checkpoints as well as extra service offices. In this light, a new protective wall, called Sacred Wall, with internal and external lines, has been recommended, which would surround and support the shrine, creating a machinic link between the actuality and virtuality (Figure 4). "The Sacred Wall encircles the shrine, working to enhance the intensity of the space around the shrine, filtering access and providing numerous functions for visitors. The Wall acts to mark the space of the sacred from everyday life."³⁸ The Assemblage Firm's

courtyards strategy emphasized (and at the same time enhanced) the commercial phase of urban life by infusing different services and substructure to the inhabitants of the Kadhimiya site. In addition, government financed educational facilities would support and give more importance to these courtyards, which would promote the development of small businesses, including but not limited to small stores, teashops and small guesthouses, filling the dynamic urban space. The goal of the energetic public spaces would be to allow economic assemblages to occur over time, the inhabitants comprised of different urban bodies. “The Sacred Wall and the courtyards are inscribed in the existing urban pattern, these new elements in the historical site are embedded in the urban fabric and feel as though they have evolved there over time.”³⁹ The machinic strategies adopted by Assemblage Firm crack the past, propose new, pragmatic, and open experiments in uncertain, pliable, and transitional spaces for all present and future proposes, connecting historic materiality with the flows of time.

According to Parr, a central feature underlying machinic urbanism is the non-regularizing methodology of everyday life where the human and non-human singularities are connected. Machinic urbanism characterizes the hybrid multiplicity occurring in the urban fabric, while it challenges the detachment “between the everyday life of the city and the city as a whole.”⁴⁰ The proposal in its entirety is adapted to the environment and is prudent regarding its possible impact on the rich existing urban diversity. Very few demolitions were required, besides, Assemblage’s proposal upgraded the uniqueness of the ancient roads and dwellings along with the activity of its marketable zones, reproducing the spirit of the old Iraqi *suaqs* (markets). Even though these architectural merits are characteristic of historic structures because of their relation to the movement of pedestrians and human scale of the site, they nonetheless pass between the dualisms of historicism and surface becomings, stimulating minor usage of history and energizing new social collectives.

Deleuze’s concept of nomadic history, shown in this alternative, is to liberate urban design thinking process from the *doxa*, a ‘taken-for-granted’ model of reflection. Deleuze proposes an ontology of becoming, “founded in celebration of the creativity and contingency of pure difference.”⁴¹ This “study of being” facilitates thinking of ‘difference in itself’ – “in terms of how we differentiate *in* ourselves in our inevitable and perpetual process of transformation, rather than the difference between things, and being different *from* each other.”⁴² The logic of representation subjugates difference to identity, a practice that Deleuze finds retrograde in terms of creative thinking. Instead of thinking about what differs, minds are attached to what is represented, and thus lack the ingenuity to innovate by negating true inherent difference. “Becoming is concerned with the not-yet, with ensuring that something remains for the people-to-come.”⁴³ Following this thought, Parr as an activist ardently recommends a practice of machinic urbanism for every architect and urban designer who seeks to achieve the “logic of collectivity” in his/her design.

Nomadic history attempts to cause a rupture in structures of domination and oppression to provide “wandering distributions” that moves back and forth between old and new anarchic relations (Figure 5).

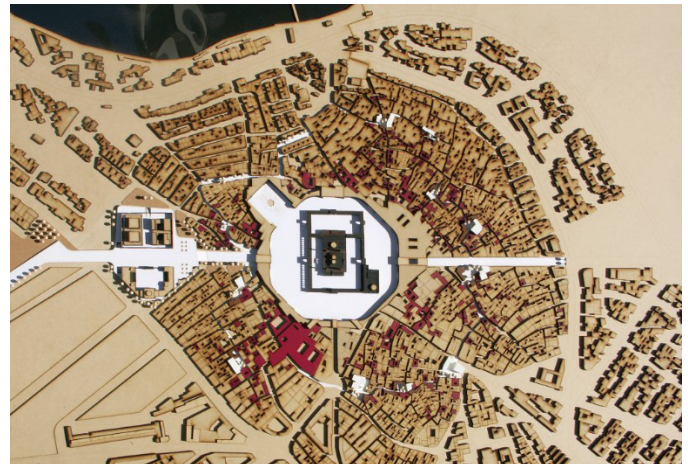


Figure 5: The Masterplan for the Kadhimiya historical site, Baghdad, Iraq. The courtyards in the finalist entry as a “wandering distributions,” that moves back and forth between old and new anarchic relations. Source: Assemblage Architects, Holy City Masterplan. < <http://www.assemblage.co/holy-city-masterplan>>

These emerging movements are mixed with intensive and heterogeneous assemblages in an attempt to find more machinic forms of “opportunistic events” for our future. By struggling to crack the repressive and representative traditions, which is a political action at the core of Deleuze and psychoanalyst Felix Guattari’s concept of becoming minoritarian, social-design activism will challenge any *doxa*, any taken-for-granted distributions of power. Minor architects are activist architects that excavate the underground of our representational thinking, “implying a break with static, fixed, closed and dangerously essentialist notions of place, preserving a provisional ontology of place-as-becoming: there is always, already and only becoming-in-the-world.”⁴⁴ The suggested strategy is to acknowledge, analyze, express, and resist the lines of force that are intrinsic to static history towards lines of flight, towards a nomadic history.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

This paper scrutinizes both the winning plan and finalist plan for redevelopment of the Kadhimiya historical site, questioning whether or not the process of redevelopment has achieved what it sought to accomplish: a nomadic history, or, in fact, the opposite, by erasing its historical personality through the illusionary neo-traditional styles, which in fact represent the *now* and lead to the closure of the processes of becoming. To provide a clear distinction (the ‘singularity’ of each competition entry, not the dualist distinction between them), this paper advocates the particularities of activity and event that can be mapped in each proposal as a movement of life. Through a comparative analysis, the objective is to find appropriate means of adding to the urban matrix of Kadhimiya without destroying the existing life structure. The goal is to “engage the creative lines of flight,”⁴⁶ and stimulate the interplay of the old and new in contemporary spaces that are endowed with curiosity and contingency instead of simply seeking expressions of the nostalgic past, which are loyal to the fictional idea of a frozen past.⁴⁷ The analysis of the proposals reveals that the proposal which showed construction of history on a displaced immanence as a

dynamic, virtual set of contingent machinic connections, can supplant the representational image of thought, generating new realities and virtual possibilities to think differently.

ENDNOTES

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