On the 29th of August last year, an innocent article about the touristic attractions of the French town of Carcassonne appeared in the *International Herald Tribune* under the title "Better than Disney: Carcassonne, the Fortress on a Hill."[1] This was of course a provocative title: the placing in parallel of the tourist-drawing power of the great theme parks of postmodern leisure and one of the supreme sites of the restoration and conservation of historic monuments. Even those who are perfectly aware of the controversy and polemic about the pertinence of the restoration of the mediaeval town carried out by the young Viollet-le-Duc in the middle of the 19th century are struck nevertheless by the surprising parallel between the architectonic and urban authenticity of a significant part of the old walls and buildings of the Cathar citadel and the deliberately fictive, simulatory complexes of Disneyland, Disney World or Eurodisney.

It is no less true that if we think of the Parthenon in Athens, of the Alhambra in Granada, of Carcassonne or of Mont-Saint-Michel, of the Coliseum in Rome or of the city of Venice, we realize that the perception and the contemporary consumption of these places is perhaps not so far removed from the perception and consumption offered nowadays to the great migratory multitudes of tourists who visit our contemporary Theme Parks in equally massive numbers.

Jean-Louis Déotte has identified in a recent book a characteristic phenomenon of modernity: museification.[2] A spectre is stalking not Europe now but the entire world, giving rise to a common aesthetic phenomenon, the *disappearance* of those apparently real objects that are inscribed in this imaginary precinct at the disposal of modern culture.[3] In effect, the Museum, with its apparent purpose of safeguarding objects of interest (artistic, historical, anthropological, natural, etc., etc.), submits all of them to an identical process of *exhibition* which inevitably involves an operation of *suspension* of their previous characteristics. Objects of liturgical ritual, pictures painted to arouse the piety of the faithful, weapons of war, artefacts of everyday life have been stripped of their original cultural substance (liturgy, piety, conflict, comfort) to be converted primarily into images. Images that serve as the material of art history, of the aesthetic experience, of national identity, of the idea of progress, of the cosmopolitan spirit, etc., etc.

Nor is architecture immune from this process. The museification of architecture, once again in Déotte's sense, in *monuments* (beacons of memory) or in ruins (witnesses to a generic passage of time) are similarly subject to this same process of *exhibition* that is destined to produce their *disappearance* as objects linked to specific situations and meanings. They will cease to be ordinary objects in order to enter in glory a universe in which, thanks to the suspension of every particular quality, it will be possible to include them in the empyrean realm of trans-historical values.

From the very moment that the enterprising compilation of catalogues of listed and protected monuments gets its hands on a building or site, those objects – architectonic in the case that concerns us here – are stripped of their everyday exchange value and lifted out of their ordinary commonplace status and endowed with value in a new market, that of those objects elevated to the generic, universal and abstract plane of *ruins, works* of art or *historic documents*.[4]

In this new state, those architectures regarded as golden, or at least distinguished above the common run of building, go on to enter into a particular system of consumption which is to constitute if not their sole then certainly their principal and most numerous market. Indeed, as Scott Lash and John Urry have described with penetration and precision,[5] in our present-day society of mobility there is not only what is known as the compression of space-time but the growth – to a position absolute primacy – of the travel, tourism and leisure industry. These two British sociologists suggest that it is only from a cultural perspective that it is possible to evaluate the consequences of the multi-ubiquity that is more and more an option for those of us from the developed world; an increase in ubiquity that is intimately associated with the modifications of what has been, since the end of the Second World War, the world's no. 1 industry: tourism.

Nevertheless, it is extremely important to look at the way that this activity and the industry that organizes it is underpinned by cultural systems which, if not explicit, are decisive in establishing the dominant relations between the objects which tourism and leisure focus on and our way of looking at and appreciating these.

Susan Sontag, in her justly acclaimed book *On photography*,[6] emphasized the psychological value of the act of taking photographs in mass culture. On the one hand, tourist photos – the largest single category of photographic consumption – is before all else an act of appropriation; the cheapest way of taking away with you the encounter with a landscape or a monument. On the other, this appropriation is neither spontaneous nor the product of an ingenuous gaze; it has prepared at length on the basis of certain repertoires of qualified images which the tourist will already be familiar with from information brochures, from tour advertising, from guidebooks and from television reports. Prior to the production of the real vision of the monument, that vision has been prefigured by experts in art history and in the creation of taste in order to temper absolute surprise or total incomprehension.

And yet this photography (and of course the shooting of videos, the buying of illustrated books,

etc.) constitutes the *medium* by means of which the quota of surprise and/or disorientation is controlled, ordered, classified, inscribed in the stock of references, images and knowiedge of the observing tourist.

However, the multiplication of the tourist gaze has not taken place at great speed without the introduction of certain significant changes. Once again it is Urry who has effected a stimulating analysis of the shift from what he calls *organized* tourism to *service tourism*.[7] From the appearance of the first travel agencies in the middle of the 19th century, with travel losing its former attributes of adventure and risk, to the rise of mass tourism for the working classes, whose great boom took place in the countries of Northern Europe after the Second World War, a whole cultures of landscapes and monuments is codified in the pages of the principal tourist guidebooks: *Baedeker, Guide Bleu, Michelin*, etc.[8]

Didactic, selective, organized on the basis of precise itineraries, these travellers vade-mecums made available to the masses the academic erudition and the taste of the experts. With a greater or lesser degree of intensity, monuments were approached with a gaze centred on the objects, their stylistic classification and the description of the most valuable of the sculptural and pictorial contents. (The way of looking an architecture characteristic of the culture of the modern movement has never been included in these authentic manuals of initiation to the world of art.)

Today students of the tourism phenomenon are agreed that since the seventies, not only in the West but in incipient form in the emerging countries of Asia, too, another way of travelling has been evolving, and with it another way of seeing. The new service tourism has abandoned the package holiday system to offer, by means of world-wide networks, fully guaranteed plane tickets, hotel rooms, the universal currency of the credit card, guidebooks of the *Discovery* and *Lonely Planet* type, in which the landscapes, the monuments, the values of popular culture, the food, the museums, the atmospheres are served up to the traveller as undifferentiated alternatives. The traveller is invited, with the backing of world-wide organizations, to discover and thus also to *interpret* a range of supposedly *authentic* possibilities which are in reality covered by the protective bubble of the plural values which in fact characterize the mind set of the consumer.

From this view we can derive at least two consequences. In the first place the multiplication of gazes. Not only monuments but picturesque and popular places and the remnants of the vernacular and local are objects of a continual re-elaboration which proposes a plurality of gazes. The culture of the canonical guidebooks of organized mass tourism has been succeeded by a new culture in which the multiplication of the circulation of images of all kinds has blown into a thousand pieces the carefully elaborated orthodox vision of art objects found in the classic tourist guidebooks.

Malraux's imaginary museum is not only the beginning of an enlightened cultural populism,[9] but with it the sacred precincts of the artistic are opened up to the multiplication of gazes, of reports, of books of pictures, of the specialist magazines devoted to geography-tourism, anthropologytourism, art-tourism. The canon of aesthetic values drawn up by high culture has lost its relevance, immersed and manipulated as it is in the eclectic universe of a thousand and one visual proposals.

But this cultural change in the universal looking of tourism has necessarily come about in union with the increase in power of images themselves. This is the second of the two consequences which we are attempting to analyse. Thanks to enormously sophisticated image technologies, the *mediation* which images acquire in the aestheticizing of every area of our daily lives is increasingly powerful. As Joan Fontcuberta has noted,[10] the universe of images is at the same time being put forward now as something more real that reality itself, while the possibilities for falsification and manipulation are growing ever greater.

The hyperrealism Umberto Eco has described is not only a current in art but the outcome of a technology capable of augmenting any simulation procedure in a truly disturbing fashion.[11] The boundaries between reality and simulacrum are tending to become fainter, if not to produce phenomena of substitution. At the same time the *cooking* of images by means of digitalization makes possible an infinite number of derivations of the represented reality which effectively baffle any kind of direct approach.

In the process of the replacement of reality by its images, the way of looking at monuments and places is also tending to disolve in an imaginary that is no longer controllable either by the authority of science and specialist knowledge or by the regulating power of the museum institution. What we might call the *theme park effect* on the reception of the architectural heritage is precisely the most immediate consequence of this new cultural situation.

Michael Sorkin has very perceptively analysed the culture that sustains this growing industry of leisure and organized tourism.[12] What not only the Disney theme parks but also all those that set out to create new attractions on the basis of some particular theme have in common are the technologies of hyperrealism and simulation. The capacity of modern technologies of representation, incorporating colour, movement, precision of detail, set effects of tone, brightness, etc., bring us two- or threedimensional simulations which with the possibility of manipulating all of these effects give the impression of being more real than reality itself. In the manner of fully controlled spaces, the theme parks exploit a tourism that is at one and the same time highly organized

and, once inside the gates, afforded a supposed freedom of movement. With all the efficiency of the organized mass tourism which we have already referred to, the theme park sets out to offer in addition an open, multiple experience within which the consumers can and must put together their own programme of preferences.

In this mixture of fortified citadel and erratic suburban garden city, what is presented for the consumer's choice is above all *simulation*. The *simulation* of historic places, people, monuments, atmospheres. These simulations have, moreover, a persuasive capacity at least as effective as that of the reality itself to which they allude, such is their technological sophistication and, above all, the *in-different* condition of the consumer. The entire aesthetic tradition of imitation is based on this very principle. The reproduction of the image, in all this has of selection and intentionality, produces a more certain effect than reality itself, confronted with which we find ourselves incapable of scrutinizing it with precision. Given that looking requires an apprenticeship, any method of representing reality constitutes in itself a technique for the organization of the gaze. To the extent that what is simulated are already familiar images, in which the aesthetic effect adds to the pleasure of imitation and rodundance, the relationship between reality and fiction becomes circular, reiterative, fed back. We obtain knowledge by means of representation, and representation in turn increases our capacity to add to our knowledge with more detailed representations. Underpinning this typically postmodern culture are, of course, mechanisms of commercialization of the whole process, in the sense posited by Guy Debord in his analysis of the relations between the society of the spectacle and the capitalist commodity universe.[13]

Historic, protected, consecrated architecture does escape this play of mirrors. In effect, the simulation of images of all kinds – taken of, inspired by, obtained from familiar monuments or places – can act in this context as an accompaniment to or as the *main course* of any proposed spectacle whatsoever. A series of by no means contemptible emotions and effects can be produced on the basis of the persuasive power that these architectures incorporated into the circuits of golden, canonical images can come to exercise over the gaze. The supposed *reality* of monumental architectures will thus be transmitted not on paper, video tape or CD ROM, but by way of three-dimensional effects in which virtual reality is capable of producing its particular engagement with a remote referent which we wish to continue to call genuine.

For that architecture protected by its classification as a part of the cultural heritage or of historical interest the consequences of this situation, the evidence of which would be hard to deny, are of three kinds.

In the first place, the kaleidoscope of images which indissolubly bond together reality and representation tends to validate open, multiply signifying, even experimental positions with respect to the treatment of the built heritage. It is not a question of advocating some kind of ultraliberal *laissez-faire* but rather of a recognition that there is no one reason nor any single method when it comes to the protection, restoration and reutilization of architecture. In fact the very plurality of these three terms, and of many other neologisms coined in recent years, are an indisputable indicator of the pluralism with which our architectonic culture can engage with any proposed relation between an object of architectural value and its visualization.

Secondly, we come to the multiplication of interpretations. If any aspect of the contemporary state of culture can be regarded as positive it is that we have moved from the old systems of values defined, legitimated, established by instances of power to a *re-flexive* situation in which the judgement of an experience, an image or an action is not given in any predetermined form but calls for a process of elaboration through the confrontation between different individuals or groups; through interpretations. With regard to those who act as experts, as administrators or as policy-makers in what is known as Architectural and environmental heritage, Cultural assets, Historical heritage, etc., there are always risks to be assumed, which will only be resolved through debate and the engagement between different ideas and options. In other words, the only possible course is to make propositions which, in the measure that they may not possess a prior validation, must be sufficiently flexible, provisional and open to admit of their being emended, reconsidered, modified.

Indeed, the work done by Debord serves to make it apparent that a radical critique of the consumer society, or what he calls the society of the spectacle, does not in itself provide alternatives to the total commercialization of society. For Debord, all that is left is a dual attitude of cunning and *dérive* or drift:[14] cunning in order to act with greater agility, ingenuity and rapidity than the universal machinery of the market; dérive as an alternative form of moving around in the mined territory of the systems of power which will inescapably pick up any new proposal and incorporate into the universal market of simulation and consumption. If the urban *dérive* was for Debord a means of making contact with the city, moving between chance and improvisation, the relations we might propose for the buildings or places we consider to be of note will also oscillate between the hazard of risk and the confidence that comes from intimacy.[15]

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Notes:

1) Alan Riding, *Better than Disney: Carcassonne, the Fortress on a Hill*, in: *International Herald Tribune*, Friday, August 29, 1997, p. 10.
2) Jean-Luis Déotte, *Le musée lórigine de lésthétique*, Editions L'Harmattan, Paris 1993.
3) Paul Virilio, *Esthétique de la disparition*, André Ballard Ed., Paris 1980.
4) The triad announced here rewrites the three notions formulated by Alois Riegl in his fundamental *Der Moderne Denkmalkultus*, Vienna 1903.
5) Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Sign and Space*, Sage Publications, London 1994.
6) Susan Sontag, *On photography*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1979.
7) John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, Sage Publications, London 1990.
8) Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* Editions du Seuil, Paris 1957.
9) André Malraux, *La tête d'obsidienne*, Gallimard, Paris 1974.
10) Joan Fontcuberta, *El beso de Judas. Fotografia y verdad*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona 1997.
11) Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-Reality*, Picador, London 1986.
12) Michael Sorkin, *See you in Disneyland* from Michael Sorkin (ed.), *Variation on a Theme Park*, The Noonday Press, New York 1982.
13) Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, Editions Buchet-Chastel, Paris 1967.
14) Guy Debord, *Potlatch (1954–1957)*, Editions Gérard Lebovici, Paris 1985.
15) See the catalogue of the exhibition "The Situationist International 1957–1972" entitled *On the passage of a few people through a rather brief moment in time: The Situationist International 1957–1972*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1991.