

Returning from his last mission, Marco Polo found the Khan awaiting him, seated at a chessboard. With a gesture he invited the Venetian to sit opposite him and describe, with the help only of the chessmen, the cities he had visited. Marco did not lose heart. The Great Khan's chessmen were huge pieces of polished ivory: arranging on the board looming rooks and sulky knights, assembling swarms of pawns, drawing straight or oblique avenues like a queen's progress, Marco recreated the perspectives and the spaces of black and white cities on moonlit nights.

Contemplating these essential landscapes, Kublai reflected on the invisible order that sustains cities, on the rules that decreed how they rise, take shape and prosper, adapting themselves to the seasons, and then how they sadden and fall in ruins. At times he thought he was on the verge of discovering a coherent, harmonious system underlying the infinite deformities and discords, but no model could stand up to the comparison with the game of chess. Perhaps, instead of racking one's brain to suggest with the ivory pieces' scant help visions which were anyway destined to oblivion, it would suffice to play a game according to the rules, and to consider each successive state of the board as one of the countless forms that the system of forms assembles and destroys.

Now Kublai Khan no longer had to send Marco Polo on distant expeditions: he kept him playing endless games of chess. Knowledge of the empire was hidden in the pattern

drawn by the angular shifts of the knight, by the diagonal passages opened by the bishop's incursions, by the lumbering, cautious tread of the king and the humble pawn, by the inexorable ups and downs of every game.

The Great Khan tried to concentrate on the game: but now it was the game's purpose that eluded him. Each game ends in a gain or a loss: but of what? What were the true stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, a black or a white square remains. By disembodying his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which the empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes. It was reduced to a square of planed wood: nothingness.

...
(definitive "City")

→ THE ESSENTIAL
DEFINITIVE CONQUEST
(AFTER CONQUEST)
"NOTHINGNESS" IS

TO WHERE?

AN ILLUSORY
OPENING

THE GAME'S
PURPOSE IS
BEYOND THE
POINT

YET AN
OPENING?

THERE IS
NO GROUND

... The Great Khan tried to concentrate on the game but now it was the game's reason that eluded him. The end of every game is a gain or a loss: but of what? What were the real stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, nothingness remains: a black square, or a white one. By disembodiment of his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which the empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes; it was reduced to a square of planed wood.

→ AGAIN
Q: WHAT IS THE
ULTIMATE "DEFINITIVE"
CITY?

Then Marco Polo spoke: "Your chessboard, sire, is inlaid with two woods: ebony and maple. The square on which your enlightened gaze is fixed was cut from the ring of a trunk that grew in a year of drought: you see how its fibers are arranged? Here a barely hinted knot can be made out: a bud tried to burgeon on a premature spring day, but the night's frost forced it to desist."

→ OLIMPA

Until then the Great Khan had not realized that the foreigner knew how to express himself fluently in his language, but it was not this fluency that amazed him.

"Here is a thicker pore: perhaps it was a larvum's nest; not a woodworm, because, once born, it would have begun to dig, but a caterpillar that gnawed the leaves and was the cause of the tree's being chosen for chopping down . . . This edge was scored by the wood carver with his gouge so that it would adhere to the next square, more protruding. . . ."

The quantity of things that could be read in a little piece of smooth and empty wood overwhelmed Kublai; Polo was already talking about ebony forests, about rafts laden with logs that come down the rivers, of docks, of women at the windows. . . .

NOT A REDUCTION TO NOTHINGNESS

AS Kublai's original
Thought

MUCH MORE IN

MUCH CAN

OR PERHAPS

BE REF

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IS A

ULTIMATE

SOURCE

Nothingness

TRANSITIVE

THE

NOTICE ALSO —
THE QUESTION IS
PHRASED AS AN
ASSERTION

The Great Khan's atlas contains also the maps of the promised lands visited in thought but not yet discovered or founded: New Atlantis, Utopia, the City of the Sun, Oceana, Tamoë, New Harmony, New Lanark, Icaria.

Kublai asked Marco: "You, who go about exploring and who see signs, can tell me toward which of these futures the favoring winds are driving us."

"For these ports I could not draw a route on the map or set a date for the landing. At times all I need is a brief glimpse, an opening in the midst of an incongruous landscape, a glint of lights in the fog, the dialogue of two passersby meeting in the crowd, and I think that, setting out from there, I will put together, piece by piece, the perfect city, made of fragments mixed with the rest, of instants separated by intervals, of signals one sends out, not knowing who receives them. If I tell you that the city toward which my journey tends is discontinuous in space and time, now scattered, now more condensed, you must not believe the search for it can stop. Perhaps while we speak, it is rising, scattered, within the confines of your empire; you can hunt for it, but only in the way I have said."

Already the Great Khan was leafing through his atlas, over the maps of the cities that menace in nightmares and maledictions: Enoch, Babylon, Yahoo-land, Butua, Brave New World.

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TO HUNT FOR THE TRUTH,
THE SEARCH CANNOT STOP.

YOU MUST FIND A GLIMPSE,
AN OPENING, A GLINT.

THEN TAKE THESE FRAGMENTS, MIX THEM TOGETHER,
EXPRESS THEM.

THESE ARE THE
INSTRUCTIONS!

W → SHIFT,
KHAN INTERPRETS
THESE GLIMPSES/
FRAGMENTS AS
WITHIN THE
SUFFERING

DEBARS BY SUTTING
THE QUESTION
HAS NO LOGICAL
ANSWER, BUT...

WHAT IS MEANT
BY THIS?
"TRUTH"?

UPPER MENTIONING
POSITIVE CITIES

THE QUESTION:
KUBLAI'S WAY OF
ASKING
"WHAT ARE THE
NATURE OF
THINGS?"

CHANGE
EXPRESSION

He said: "It is all useless, if the last landing place can only be the infernal city, and it is there that, in ever-narrowing circles, the current is drawing us."

And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it."
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."

↳ LIKE IDENTIFYING WHAT IN A DREAM IS NOT MADE OF THE MESSAGES OF THE REST OF THE DREAM.

ALMOST

ABS40157.

TWO WAYS TO ESCAPE SUFFERING THIS RELATION EXPERIMENTALLY AND FROM SUFFERING

I BELIEVE "IT" HERE, OR "THE INFERNO OF THE LIVING," MAY REFER TO THE MAP-TERRITORY RELATION INTRINSIC TO THE COLLECTIVE HUMAN EXPERIENCE "WHICH WE FORM BY

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WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS?

↑
CENTRILITY

COLLECTIVE
NECESSITIES
FORMED THROUGH
INTERLOCATIONS

"cautionless"
as in recent
city of...
p. 151, 161