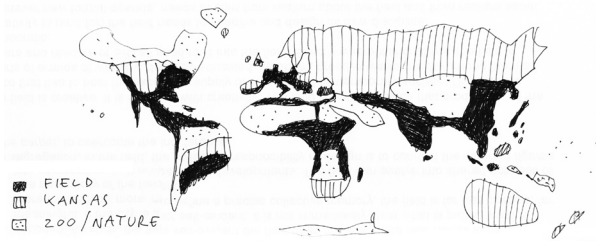


CALL FOR PAPERS

San Rocco 2: The Even Covering of the Field

San Rocco is interested in gathering together all possible external contributions. San Rocco believes that architecture is a collective knowledge, and that collective knowledge is the product of a multitude. External contributions to San Rocco might take different forms. Essays, illustrations, designs, comic strips and novels are all equally suitable for publication in San Rocco. In principle, there are no limits – either minimum or maximum – imposed on the length of contributions. Minor contributions (a few lines of text, a small drawing, a photo, a postcard) are by no means uninteresting to San Rocco. For each issue, San Rocco will put out a “call for papers” comprised of an editorial note and of a list of cases, each followed by a short comment. As such, the “call for papers” is a preview of the magazine. The “call for papers” defines the field of interest of a given issue and produces a context in which to situate contributions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES **A** External contributors can either accept the proposed interpretative point of view or react with new interpretations of the case studies. **B** Additional cases might be suggested by external contributors, following the approach defined in the “call for papers”. New cases might be accepted, depending on their evaluation by the editorial board. **C** Proposed contributions will be evaluated on the basis of a 500 words abstract containing information about the proposed submission’s content and length, and the type and number of illustrations and drawings it includes. **D** Contributions to San Rocco must be written in English. San Rocco does not translate texts. **E** All texts (including footnotes, image credits, etc.) should be submitted digitally in .rtf format and edited according to the Oxford Style Manual. **F** All illustrations and drawings should be submitted digitally (in .tif or .eps format). Please include a numbered list of all illustrations and provide the following information for each: illustration source, name of photographer or artist, name of copyright holder, or “no copyright” and caption, if needed. **G** San Rocco does not buy intellectual property rights for the material appearing in the magazine. San Rocco suggests that external contributors publish their work under Creative Commons licenses. **H** Contributors whose work is selected for publication in San Rocco will be informed and will then start collaborating with San Rocco’s editorial board in order to complete the preparation of the issue. Proposals for contributions to San Rocco 2 may be submitted electronically to mail@sanrocco.info before 15 March 2011.



The field is where we live. *Buildings in cultivable soil* – that is the field. Agriculture and city and expansion of city and sprawl and infrastructure and trash and buildings and favelas and old villages and gated communities and agriculture and some more other buildings. A collection of “organs without a body” (Angélil and Sires, 2008) laid down horizontally as far as geography permits it. In fact, apart from mountains, deserts, jungles and large areas of mechanized agriculture/mining with little human personnel (as in Kansas, Siberia or Rio Grande do Sul), everything is field: East Java, northern Italy, valley of Mexico, the Taiheiyō belt, Flanders, greater São Paulo, Cuangdong, New Jersey, the Nile valley or Bangladesh.

The field is the place where William Morris’s scary definition of architecture as “anything but desert” becomes true. It is associated with a Malthusian tone, with the concept of no escape: more people, more capital, more cars, more buildings, more energy, more noise, less soil, less water, less food.

Even if it is not *all the same*, the field is *one*. A condition with no alternatives. Still, patterns in the field are different, and figures in the patterns are different once again.

The field lies outside of the binary opposition of city and nature. From the point of view of nature, it is dirty, polluted, compromised, settled and consumed. From the city’s point of view, it is rusty, uninteresting, sleepy, backward and provincial.

The field is not an evolution of the city, but its *natural domain*: it is both its pre-condition and its unavoidable

conclusion, the (urban) consequence of the Neolithic Revolution.

Today the field is almost filled and it looks like a monstrous version of the city, but it is not. The field logically precedes the city. The city evolves within the field like a historical process within a geological one. The city is just a possibility within the field, but not the only one, and not the primary one.

According to contemporary statistics, two thirds of the world's population will be living in cities by 2050. But these agglomerations are cities only according to statistics. Nothing about them is metropolitan except their density. To understand these systems as *cities* is a mistake. They are merely denser rural areas crowded with restless masses of (underemployed) farmers. Finally, after the modern infatuation for cities, we are going to have to consider *villages* once again.

The field is slow, resistant, heavy, opaque: anything but a *tabula rasa*. What is there remains there. It is not possible to add to it, and it is not possible to get rid of things (in the field, you need to bring trash to a filling dump, or – at the very least – throw it into a canal). There are even *identities* embroidered into the field. Habits and traditions resist within the field automatically, because of the inertia of the sheer mass of what has accumulated there.

The field is *landscape* not because it is natural or green, but because it has no centre and is horizontal. In fact, the field stretches over a large surface, a kind of thin, dirty incrustation of the planet.

In the field, there are places, not just positions. Objects are not purely defined by their relationship with the other objects around them; there is a geographic background. Still, the background does not appear anymore. Geography survives as an explanation of bizarre infrastructural solutions, a sort of psychoanalysis of the field.

The field defines a new condition for architecture, reducing its ambitions and mocking its principles (at least the Western ones). In fact, the very existence of the field makes the figure-ground relationship look obsolete. The figure is lost among figures. The possibility of the figure disappears not because of abolition, but because of proliferation, of visual pollution. The land-

scape becomes a "figure-figure" universe, to the point that figures become irrelevant. Form disappears because of the oversupply of figures, desires and creativity. Architecture disappears because of the oversupply of architects.

Within the field, creative interventions can only modify and transform. Modifications are of the kind of contemporary electronic music: sampling, remixing, dubbing. The themes are already there; they cannot be invented, just found. The garbage already in the field is the raw material from which to shape whatever contemporary architecture, urbanism or landscape architecture. Recycling is the compulsory exercise.

"The even covering of the field" is an expression coined by K. A. C. Creswell. According to Creswell, a bored British Army Captain posted in Egypt during World War I who became a scholar of early Muslim architecture, "the even covering of the field" is a basic principle of Muslim art (Creswell, *A Short Account of Early Muslim Architecture*, 1958). Although Creswell does not elaborate much on his statement – the "even covering" is proclaimed more than explained – the expression nonetheless suggests the existence of an entirely developed aesthetic, precisely what we are now lacking with respect to the contemporary field.

San Rocco 2 would like to investigate the *aesthetic consequences* of the field, from both urban and architectural perspectives. What does "field" mean, exactly? How do we experience it? What kind of knowledge do we need to understand it? What is the difference between field and city, and between field and territory? What kind of images do these jammed scenarios leave in our memories? What (and how) can one design in a world without a background? And without a background, what happens to the figure? Should the figure disappear as well? Are there exceptions within the field? Should the "covering of the field" be "even"? Does the field have borders? What kind of operations are possible within it? *Field operations?*

Finally, San Rocco 2 raises a political question: should the field ever be *planned*?

In the next pages San Rocco presents a provisional list of possibilities for dealing with "the even covering" of the field:

▪ **White Noise** ▪

Don de Lillo publishes *White Noise* in 1985. The novel is staged in a fictional place called Blacksmith, a perfectly generic non-town in suburban America. Yet something is different there: from the very beginning, professor Jack Gladney and his fourth wife Babette complain about the lack of a leading metropolis in their territory. The mall is the only shiny place in their otherwise ugly and chaotic landscape. There's nothing but the field. And the field is polluted, pervaded by radiation and electronic waves. White noise is everywhere. An airborne toxic event enhances spectacularly prolonged sunsets, which have to be seen from the bridge crossing the highway. The weak equilibrium of the territory is always in danger, due to the extreme and unplanned proximity of everything. Imminent yet bearable catastrophe is perpetually present. There is even a specific science in the field: at the College-on-the-Hill, Hitler studies accompany research on texts printed on the packaging of breakfast cereals, data analysis of VIP car-crash deaths and secret studies of pills that treat the fear of death. The narrative structure of *White Noise* mirrors the geography of the described landscape: there is no hierarchy, no proper beginning or end. The novel produces a field in which the possibility for action in the traditional sense is definitely ruled out. The geometry of the composition displays the same fluctuating regularity of Steve Reich's minimalist music. All the elements appear to be interchangeable.

▪ **Campus Martius** ▪

In 1762, as a fellow of the London Royal Society of Antiquaries, Giovanni Battista Piranesi publishes the groundbreaking *Campus Martius Antiquae Urbis*, which he dedicates to his former pupil, the Scottish architect Robert Adam. The book is an extensive project for an analogous Rome, masked as an archaeological restoration. The frontispiece, showing a bird's-eye, quasi-axonometric perspective of a part of the city, displays an impressive array of urban objects that entirely fill the frame and suggest an endless urban field. The plans strengthen the notion of a completely new kind of urbanism, although one still produced by following all of

Classicism's clichés. Well-established compositional rules (axes, symmetry, circular elements used as centres of rotation) define the disposition of the huge complexes within the field; at the same time, the ridiculous amount of elements creates a continuous, pattern-like (and therefore utterly anti-Classical) design. The intimate monumentality of the objects is nullified through repetition.

Piranesi shows his plans as if they were engraved on newly discovered stone slabs. This trick emphasizes the impression of an endless composition that happens to be known only from its surviving fragments. Within these documents of a non-existent past, buildings float as microorganisms observed through the lenses of a microscope. The space in which these creatures swim is too tight: sometimes they touch each other, and sometimes they collide or merge. There is no space left for autonomy or aura. The outside and the inside are barely distinguishable. It is not clear whether incestuous inbreeding created the overcrowded field or the other way around.

▪ **"The Even Covering of the Field"** ▪

It does not come as a surprise that in these post-colonial times one must go to Berlin in order to appreciate one of the clearest (and most beautiful) examples of "the even covering of the field". The Pergamon Museum hosts more than just its eponymous altar: on its upper level, one of the rooms displays a superbly decorated wall roughly 5 metres high and almost 60 metres long. This is a fragment from the 144-metre-long southern façade of the unfinished Umayyad palace at Mshatta (about 30 kilometres south of Amman, Jordan), which was probably built around 740 AD and was rediscovered by Layard in 1840. The stone façade consists of a plain socle, a richly decorated base (a network of interlacing vine-stalks forming loops), a wall face and an entablature (vine ornament again, together with acanthus leaves). The wall surface between the socle and the entablature is divided into upward and downward triangles by a cornice-like moulding that runs up and down in a zigzag. Exactly in the centre of each triangle is a great rosette. The rest of the space is filled with vine-

stems in which birds appear plucking at the grapes. Sometimes a pair of animals appears in the centre, on either side of a vase. Here, the field is the entire building; the decoration simply stops dead at the perimeter. Everything else is filled. Hierarchy is weak. The only rule is that a limited set of elements be repeated, mirrored and rotated. The decoration at Mshatta repeats the textile-like richness of the tent in the emptiness of the desert (here it would even be possible to give Semper some credit). The “covering of the field” becomes an act of appropriation. Primitive accumulation is immediately turned into decoration. The result is surprisingly light: abstract patterns evoke paradisiacal nature in the middle of the desert.

• From the Object to the Field •

In the work of Superstudio, the Miesian grid, as the conceptual tool that embodies the mathematic precision of architecture, leaves the borders of the building to conquer the entire world except the wilderness of the mountains and the deserts. In Superstudio collages, the grid crystallizes in an endless plateau that is at the disposal of the wandering new (wo)man, finally freed from his/her local roots, thereby defining the premise for a new appropriation of the world.

Around the same time on the other side of the pond, a similar relationship seems to develop between the vocabulary of Le Corbusier (in his Purist period) and a series of drawings by John Hejduk. The “Diamond House” series depicts the dissolution of the architectural object into a set of compositional variations. The components of Le Corbusier’s villas are sampled and recombined in innumerable reconfigurations. What Superstudio realizes as an expansion of the Miesian grid, Hejduk produces through the repetition of Le Corbusier’s elements. Hejduk’s rigorous formalism arrives at the same conclusion as the politically committed (?) Italian Radicals. Once again the object becomes the field. Still, for Hejduk, the field maintains a border. Contrary to Superstudio’s images, the frame of the field in Hejduk’s “Diamond House” does not coincide with the frame of the image. Hejduk perceives the frame as part of the picture; it itself is a subject for

architecture. And so architecture seems still possible, even within the field.

• Weak Urbanization •

For Archizoom Associates, the city is the weakest form of organization of the entire industrial system and the most confused and outdated tool of capitalist society. Starting from this consideration, the Florentine group redefines the city as an urban process of quantitative accumulation. *No-Stop City* (1970) is organized as a factory or a supermarket where the productive functions are distributed over a continuous and homogeneous surface. Starting from this ruthless interpretation of the capitalist city, Andrea Branzi develops a theory for an architecture that gradually loses its physical borders, a non-figurative architecture that defines a continuous and permeable territorial system: a series of evolutionary and temporary “weak urbanization models”. In *Agronica* (1995), Branzi postulates the coexistence of agricultural production and temporary architecture by imagining flexible territorial policies based on seasonal cultivation rules rather than on urban planning. In *Pineta di architettura* (Architectural Pine Forest, 2007), architecture disappears and the territory becomes a homogeneous surface covered by enzymatic spots of nature, a freely crossable artificial wood. Throughout his career, Branzi has moved his attention from urban to territorial phenomena. He has been developing a new grammar in which architecture is nothing but an infrastructural device, a climatically safe universe open to endless transformation. What kind of knowledge do we need to manage this type of infrastructure? What kind of experience is related to this type of environment? *Spatziergangen* in the architectural pine forest? Or *Déjeuner sur l’herbe* in the architectural pine forest?

• Early Muslim OMA •

In the 1980s and early ’90s, OMA releases an impressive set of projects that investigate the field from an architectural and urban perspective. The projects range from medium-scale (Nexus Housing in Fukuoka, Housing Kochstrasse/Friedrichstrasse in Berlin, Convention

Centre in Agadir) to large-scale (Congrexpo in Lille, Parc de la Villette in Paris). In all these projects, the design is produced by overlapping three different figures: a pattern and a border define a field and then some independent figures are randomly placed within this. The repetition of cells incorporates minor variations each time (e.g., hotel rooms in Agadir, housing units in Fukuoka, functional strips in La Villette, structural elements in Lille). This texture is abruptly truncated by the “borders”, such as the streets surrounding the plot (as in Fukuoka, Berlin and Paris) or by an independent Platonic shape (as in Agadir), if not by a weird combination of the two (as in Lille). Larger-scale elements appear within the field, cutting the pattern-like background; these elements can be the main circulation routes (Agadir, La Villette), pre-existing buildings (La Villette) or spaces with special functions (the “royal chamber” at Agadir). In plan, the buildings take the form of a uniform pattern of dots in which an apparently illogical geography of islands seems to emerge. Difference is produced by combining patterns of different intensity in sequences. These postmodern fields have a strange early-Muslim tone. This aspect becomes extremely clear when OMA designs a Convention Centre in Agadir, Morocco: a weird superimposition of Mendes da Rocha’s pavilion at Osaka 70 on an Umayyad mosque. As early Muslim mosques, OMA’s fields of the 1990s are rough hypostyle halls that are designed more in terms of geography than in terms of geometry. The positioning of the elements is not sharp; the order is approximate. Architecture is tolerant, or even fond, of accidents. More than anything else, there is a sincere passion for emptiness.

▪ Superstructure vs. Super-flat ▪

The Japanese are cautious about transforming the natural environment. Villages rarely modify the topography of a place, and buildings are gently inserted, usually on raised platforms. A permanent state of emergency and regeneration resulting from frequent natural disasters influences the way settlements are conceived. As a result, Japanese cities are light and temporary; the urban elements are somehow negligible. This trend reaches its peak in the second half of the 20th century. Thanks

to increasing wealth, built matter “circulates” fluently. Every year Japan is flooded by an enormous quantity of new buildings with an average lifespan of only thirty years.

Starting in the late 1950s, the Metabolists (a group involving, among others, Kikutake, Kurokawa, Isozaki, Maki, Otaka and, to a certain extent, Tange) try to oppose this phenomenon by imagining an alternative way of housing the enormous populations of the very near future. Their proposals, in contrast with Japanese tradition, are conceived on a colossal scale. Metabolism is an attempt to resist *the field* in the name of *the city*. Viewed from a contemporary perspective, what is even more striking in the Metabolists’ designs than their Gargantuan cellular accumulations is their infatuation with ruins, their desire for an architecture that can survive the test of time, gather stories and help document collective values. Some traces of *city* inside the *field*.

Soon after its emergence, however, the Metabolist agenda proves obsolete. Postmodern Japan goes on becoming more and more crowded by an infinite array of small, independent urban artefacts (a condition effectively described by Takashi Murakami as “superflat”). In this period, the major shift is not in scale but in density. Contemporary Japanese architects (including SANAA, Fujimoto and Ishigami) completely forget the fight of the Metabolists. By surrendering to the field, the contemporary Japanese *New Naïves* appear to discover an entirely new set of possibilities. A possible new urbanism emerges on an unexpectedly small scale: moving cups on top of a table, putting flowers into vases, leaving a chair outside the door. Is contemporary tolerance for the field a sign of the decline of Japan’s economy and population? Is this a new gentle/cruel technique of fighting that we need to learn in order to survive in the field? A new martial art? As Bruce Lee would put it: “the art of fighting without fighting”?

▪ The Nile City ▪

The Nile city is a series of settlements located in the Nile valley (“city” is here used for lack of a better expression; its use should be taken as more of a suspicion than a description). The Nile city is 900 kilometres

long. Its population is 26 million, and its density, 2,100 inhabitants per square kilometre. The Nile city has the clarity of a scientific experiment. Variables are reduced to the minimum: the valley is entirely flat; there is either fertile land or desert, with very little in between. Water comes only from the Nile. Agriculture is possible only because of irrigation. Population increase corresponds to expanding settlements and shrinking fields.

The Nile city is enclosed within the Nile valley. The Nile valley is a *landscape*, an artificial environment entirely defined by man-made interventions. The stability of this geography does not depend on *natural* features. The Nile valley is the most abstract, and the most boring, of all possible countries. The conditions never change: the valley is almost always visible in its entire width. The border – an enormous sand barrier – always appears in the background. Crops are the same all over the valley: wheat, corn, cotton, clover, onions, tomatoes, sugar cane. Palms are the only trees. Fields are organized according to an extremely tight orthogonal grid. The result is a landscape that is at once very abstract and very intense – an abstract grid dotted with an infinite number of rough bits charged with primal human experience, a world as primitive and as artificial as those of ATARI videogames from the early '80s.

How can one understand the paradoxical beauty that hides beneath the drama of this crowded strip of brilliant green running into the desert?

- In the Name of Thoth -

Since ancient Egyptians consider all arts to be different forms of *writing*, there seems to be only a single form of ancient Egyptian art: *graphic design*.

Ancient Egyptian architecture is graphic design as well, although it operates on the scale of an entire landscape. Buildings such as pyramids are “linguistic signs, [or] monumental speech acts” (Assman, 2000) crystallized into the crowded flatness of the Nile valley. The landscape is *written* by means of architecture.

On an architectural scale, buildings are just a way to produce walls that can be filled with text. Temples thus function as monumental hard drives encrusted with hieroglyphic code. A series of courtyards, each more

exclusive than the last, are permeated by ever more inaccessible secrets. The Egyptian temple looks like an extreme version of the “decorated shed”; actually, the “decorated shed without the shed”, or the “decorated wall”, or even better, the “monumental page”, or more precisely, a “monumental page not intended for readers”.

Is there something we can learn from the radical flatness of ancient Egyptian architecture? Is there something familiar in the horror vacui of the Egyptian walls? Is the Egyptian page/wall somehow similar to the contemporary field? Does it represent something we can reuse? Is graphic design the architecture of the future?

- Field Photography? -

“An atlas is a book, the place where all the signs of the earth, from the natural to the cultural, are conventionally represented: mountains, lakes, pyramids, oceans, cities, villages, stars, islands. In this totality of symbols and descriptions, we locate the place in which we live and where we would like to go, the route to follow. I think that travelling on a map, something that writers are particularly fond of, is one of our most natural mental activities.”

Luigi Chirri, *L'atlante* (Milan, 2000)

If “the even covering of the field” is an experimental attempt to imagine an aesthetic for the contemporary landscape, we suspect that photography anticipated us. The field has already been understood by photographers. The accumulation of objects has always been part of the game, and the selection of a subject and the impossibility of eliminating its context has always been an issue. Because of the unavoidable realism of photography, the field has never been erased, nor the figure cut out. In fact, since the very beginning photography provides irreplaceable support for science because of its documentary power and its embarrassing likelihood. We can read the great illusions of Thomas Demand, the cinematographic photography of Jeff Wall, the early masterpieces of Lewis Baltz, the language investigations of Florian Maier-Aichen, the replica studies of Armin Linke, Joel Sternfeld's women looking at models and the helicopter surveys of Olivo Barbieri in this

way. Far from any reference to painting, these works provide an additional level of abstraction; they are, above all, classic photography.

• Planispheres •

Following the tracks of his distant ancestor, an 18th-century Piedmontese Dominican who became a legendary leader of the Caucasian resistance against the Russians, Alighiero Boetti arrives for the first time in Afghanistan in 1971. There, in what will become his second home, he meets the carpet-embroiderers with whom he will establish a long collaboration, one destined to resist the Soviet invasion of the country. The logic behind Boetti's carpets is accumulative rather than selective. The carpets display grids of squares, numbers, characters, multiplication tables, or large and playful inventories (as in the series *Tutto*, "Everything"). Boetti and his assistants saturate the surfaces with a kaleidoscope of figures, leaving the Afghan embroiderers the freedom to choose most of the colours to employ. A further level of complexity is reached in the series *Planisferi* (Planispheres), the weave of which evolves chromatically according to geo-political evolutions. Boetti is not interested in controlling every single step of the process: "My problem is not in fact to make choices according to my taste, but to invent systems that then choose for me" (interview in the *Corriere della Sera*, January 1992). Boetti's carpets turn artificial, flat, conventional signs into a thick landscape of threads. The outermost artificial code of contemporary heraldry – the very abstract alphabet of flags – gains life through Afghan material culture; conventions turn into objects, and legal definitions end up being a pretext for the activation of desires. In these flat geographies automatism and tolerance seem to coincide in a sort of *cadavre exquis* of weaving, in which the work is designed by one hand and woven by another.

• The Figure in the Carpet •

Starting in the late 1960s, Roberto Gabetti and Aimaro Isola d'Oreglia begin to disseminate subtle and uncomfortable projects throughout northern Italy, includ-

ing the Olivetti housing in Ivrea (1969–74), the design for the FIAT headquarters in Candiolo (1972–73), the housing development in Sestriere (1974–80), the Snam Headquarters in San Donato (1985–92) and the competition proposal for the Bicocca in Milan (1985–87). These projects are usually described in baffling watercolours, presenting very unusual proposals with the mild tone of a gardening magazine for old ladies. The proposals are difficult to decipher: provincial and spoiled, cosy and distant, conformist and radical. Pure, geometric forms gently emerge from an everyday landscape to suggest a new possible equilibrium. Yet these figures, sometimes colossal, do everything they can to undermine their own monumentality. It seems that the architects consider it impolite to disturb the ugliness around their interventions. The figures seem to be caught in the moment of their appearance (or, perhaps, disappearance?). Gabetti and Isola look at us with the icy politeness of old Piedmontese landlords; we do not understand if they are really serious; we do not know if what they propose could really have any positive use. We suspect genius, but we are not really able to see how to make use of it.

• "The Territory of Architecture" •

In 1966 Vittorio Gregotti published *Il territorio dell'architettura* (The Territory of Architecture). Although this text has yet to be translated into English, a translation of Gregotti's "La forma del territorio" (The Form of the Territory), which came out in *Edilizia Moderna* a year before the publication of his book, recently appeared in the Dutch magazine *OASE* (OASE 80: On Territories).

Gregotti's book is probably the first detailed discussion of what later started to be called *landscape urbanism*. In the book, Gregotti supports the idea of architecture as a modification of the environment. Nevertheless, Gregotti understands modifications as landscape interventions happening in an empty, *natural* context – monumental gestures before an empty background (such as his contemporary designs for the University of Calabria and a housing development in Cefalù). What is the difference between the "territory" described by Gregotti

and the “field”? Is modification, as Cregotti suggests, still a viable strategy within the field?

▪ The Field is Already Here ▪

Recent Japanese architecture seems to be the first to develop an aesthetic that entirely depends upon a “field” condition. The *New Naives* seem to take this for granted. The result of their attitude is a set of buildings whose ambitions do not expand beyond their borders. These projects are incredibly ambitious – and almost cruel – inside, and desperately resigned outside, towards the environment in which they are located. *New Naives* suggest to design the city starting from a new, sublime weakness. It is possible to find a somewhat similar attitude in recent British architecture, yet in England the “field” seems to be less naive. In recent British architecture (like that of Caruso St John, Fretton or Sergison Bates), a picturesque attitude provides a possible reading of the micro-geographies hidden within the field. Feeble traces of beauty are recognized in the grey fragments scattered around. Contemporary British architects try to convince us with their eulogy of the banal: the brick, the pebble, the ivy on the wall, the asphalt of the car park, a concrete pillar with smoothed corners, an ugly lamp. More than a dubious phenomenology (touching the brick, eating the moss, licking the pillars), this type of attention seems to contain a residual urban potential: the mediocrity of our cities finally confronted in all seriousness; “context” in its unbearable extension; context as a *field* – “Reality as found” next to “Reality as found” next to “Reality as found”.

▪ Black Hole House ▪

While mourning the death of her daughter, a woman loses her young husband, the firearm magnate William Wirt Winchester. Saddened by these tragic events, the widow is drawn to consult a medium, who leads her to believe that there is a curse upon her family: thousands of people have died because of the guns the Winchesters have manufactured, and the spirits of the dead are seeking revenge. She thus has to leave New Haven, go west and build a house for herself and the vengeful spir-

its. Sarah moves to San José, California, where she buys an old country mansion. Under her day-to-day direction, from 1884 until her death in 1922, a team of craftsmen expands the house without any precise long-term plan. The building grows into a seemingly inexhaustible balloon-frame Maelstrom, continuously consuming materials and time: 160 rooms, 47 fireplaces, 10,000 windowpanes. Sarah Winchester elevates the everyday paranoia of contemporary suburbs to the level of madness. To build is to defend. To build is to protect. To build is to escape from the city. The villa is actually a stronghold. Yet in Winchester House, the labyrinthine field that is usually produced on the outside of paranoiac villas invades the interior as well. The confusion of the city outside takes its revenge on the heavily protected interior. In 1906, an earthquake levels the top three floors of the house, leaving only four floors standing. Sarah is trapped inside the building. Given that she sleeps in a different room each night, the servants do not know where to search for her. They take almost twenty-four hours to find her.

▪ Planning, What Else? ▪

It would seem that contemporary environmental issues can only be solved by starting from the point of view of totality (“Aus dem Gesichtspunkt der Totalität”, to use a marvellously outdated expression by Lukács). Is it time for the great revenge of planning?