

BASE LAND 2050

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Abstract

BASE LAND 2050 is an imagined prospective urban territory model that is used in design at our landscaping and urbanism agency. In 2014 this territory covers a surface of 700 hectares of open, uncultivated land, with streets, esplanades and other areas dedicated to sports, culture, leisure and crop production. Although cars and buildings are generally absent, many other desirable aspects of the city are concentrated in this space which provides an enthusiastic perspective on a possible future for urban space. This territory may be a piece of virtuality, as it does not exist yet. This may be a virtual space, as it does not exist yet, but it is also a *digital* landscape responding to nothing more than the tips of our *fingers*.

1 Public Space

What if the mental revolution that we are experiencing did not happen on the web but in the street?

Since the car obsessed 1960s, the realities of city and metropolitan life have been shattered. Cities were made for circulation and trade. They now provide a myriad of social, political, commercial and sporting possibilities.

What was impossible to imagine 10 years ago is now being openly, spontaneously and uninhibitedly expressed in the public space.

On the streets of the 21st century, I eat, I sunbathe, I swim, I work, I buy, I debate, I gather information, I cook, I cultivate myself, I pick up, I sleep, I sing, I dance and finally I picture myself, alone or with others, in a family or social group that are not as de-materialised as all that.

In 2009, an umpteenth musical trend appeared on the web and on the streets in the north of France. Teckonik, the latest variation in repetitive electronica, born spontaneously in clubs and on Youtube, spilled out onto the streets of Lille and Valenciennes as small groups of adolescents in neon clothes wiggled and jerked their arms around to the beat. Along with this new musical trend, several public squares were transformed – into dance floors.

Paris-plage, flash-mobs, Botellón, techno parades, gay pride. These urban events have extended the domain of the street, alongside its physical extension, through pedestrian areas, to reconquer industrial lands, railway yards and soon the suburbs.

Where cars have rolled back, new dynamics are occupying space.

Some of these events are born unexpectedly and spontaneously, others are driven by political will. In any event, these practices define an urban space in perpetual evolution and re-invention.

Evaluating the changes that have occurred before our eyes means resolving to try and anticipate those to come. But it also means allowing them to develop, giving them space for expression and places open to appropriation, change and innovation.

2050 is our preparatory territory for these perpetually evolving practices. It is a non-project of a non-order, virtual and off-site.



Thanks to the evolution of our approach towards more and more systematically modelling our urban design proposals, 3D design finally allows us to develop proposals in a way that is direct, spontaneous and realistic, whilst enabling a faithful visualization of the spaces being transformed.

Here, once again, imagination occupies a central place in our profession. The hand remains its primary interface, between program and project, between design and space, between

space as a physical and dimensional projection and landscape as a cultural and social projection.

Among the many modelling tools associated with powerful rendering engines, we prefer the more basic but now unavoidable Sketchup from the no less unavoidable Google. Access to this tool is so direct and intuitive that it becomes forgotten as easily as the pencil disappears behind a line drawn on paper. And that is its main advantage.

Programmes are protected by copyright law, not as tools or mechanical processes but as works of art. And so they are. Adobe Suite (Photoshop, Illustrator, Indesign), which I am using to write these lines, goes far beyond the simple function of a tool to reach that of a veritable organ. Everything one could expect from it is there and the possibilities are never limited. This is because they stem from a collective and iterative intelligence, through cross-cutting and collaborative work based on the analysis of world-wide returns conducted since the 1980s.

At this stage no function is lacking and the successive plugins and beta versions transcend and surpass individual imagination. In truth, programs are more than the products of industry because they are elaborated with a constant concern for improvement, simplification and above all augmentation. They are fluid and self-transforming. To this extent, they are closer to more complex collective constructions such as towns and landscapes. Towns and landscapes, like these programs, represent both an extreme power and complexity, but also more rudimentary and unchanging principles.

CAD is a purely manual profession, which is what makes it intelligent. Manual intelligence is directly mobilized through a mouse, a cursor and a screen¹. Our western societies are based on a purely vertical representation of society with a head (capital) that desires, decides and directs the body but also a leader (captain) who guides the masses, and as a result capital which guides the social body, with the service and consumer society that results.

Our intuition is that human intelligence lies not in the head but in the hand. The hand which draws, measures, projects, verifies and tests. The hand which is linked directly to the unconscious and to intuition (reflexes).

Other organisms have demonstrated that intelligence outside the brain is possible. Certain trees, which have no brain, are capable of making decisions according to the evolutions of their environment, such as to delay their flowering when under attack by parasites. The collective intelligence of bees and many other species remains a mystery.

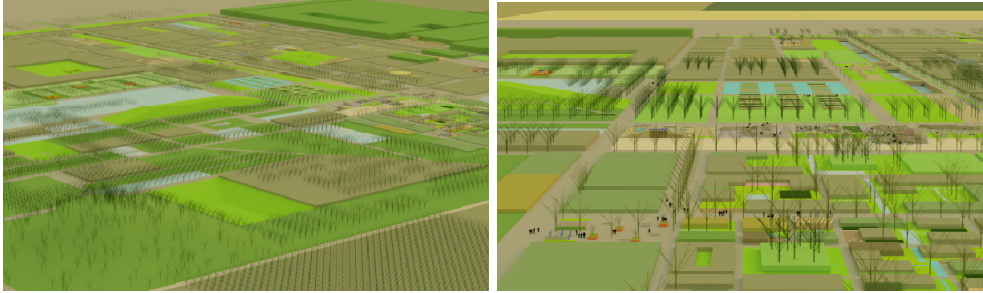
The same goes for the city. Its physical and social body is a living organism that acts in a way that is both collective and unfathomable, sometimes even animal². Its social, historical,

¹ To this extent, the mobile telephone is destined to disappear because it is a hindrance to the body. Removing an invariably hot, sticky and slippery handset out of a pocket corresponds only very weakly to a logical and natural bodily movement.

² When there will be no more fish, no more bees and no more oil and there will be more than one hundred billion people but we won't know exactly how many, when Brazil will no longer be big enough for India, but we won't know exactly what India is, then we will really start to panic. We're not talking about the "mass hysteria" panic, with crowds screaming, that we see today and which really represents frustration instead, for the moment. No. We're talking about a panic from which

geographical and economic mechanisms are often obscure. But like a program we have lost the manual for, it nonetheless presents extremely basic functioning principles: streets, alignments, squares, pedestrian crossings, footpaths.

In this respect the city eternally presents the declination of an immutable corporeal logic, and does so in an infinite and exponential way.



Paris is a city that developed around the Ile de la Cité. Four major historical directions meet here. Two roads to the north, traditionally more industrial (rue Saint-Martin and rue Saint-Denis), run towards northern Europe, and two others run towards the south (rue Saint-Jacques towards Santiago de Compostela in Spain, avenue de l'Italie towards Italy), which are more cultural and religious.

Remains of mammoth tusks were recently found during archaeological digs linked to the collapse of a bakery in the Rue Saint-Denis. The explanation was that this road used to be a path for mammoths towards the Seine, which our ancestors used too out of convenience, thus creating a road. Today's Rue Saint-Denis thus has its origins at least in the Palaeolithic period.

The work of landscaping, being based on geographical or agricultural logics, tries to get out of a systematic approach to urban planning in order to have our urban environment resonate more with its surrounding land, confident in its intelligence.

The landscape also responds with a collective and spontaneous intelligence. The peasants who forged our European landscape generation after generation did not stop to wonder about aesthetics. They acted out of collective intelligence, creating with their hands a work of priceless elegance, adaptation (a criteria of intelligence), resistance and beauty.

there is no return. An implacable panic which will have reached even the most nihilistic among us (and when I say we, it's just a figure of speech). An appalling panic to which the only response will be an iron society. A good old totalitarian hierarchy for which all the isms of the past were just a pale rehearsal. And we will resign ourselves to begging for this: because we will have to. By wanting to free ourselves from natural selection we created a dangerous game from which none would escape, they will say. And, this time, it will have been long since we had nothing more to reply. The problem with the exponential nature of our demography and the pillage that is occurring is that we will see nothing more coming: like an ant nest with an intelligence that is more collective than individual, and above all more animal.

As an example, in the Provençal language and in most other regional languages there is no word for landscape. The term was invented after the event, so to speak. The word and even the idea of the landscape were born in 14th century bourgeois Flanders, in a land that is desperately flat. It was born out of concerns related to the representation of the third dimension, cartography and perspective.

Today the anglo-saxon landscape urbanism³ movement seeks to return to these logics of urban transformation that are more geographic than systematic. Not with the goal of creating parks and open spaces everywhere, but rather with the goal of generating spaces that are in direct connection with their sites, their environments and above all in tune with the environmental concerns that we now have.

Our approach to the idea of the AOC⁴ city is, in a way, part of this exact trend.

Paradoxically, BASE LAND 2050 is a rather flat and abstract territory, even though elsewhere we aim to generally base our work on a particular site, its geography, its topography, its climate. Yet the site is not absent here because this territory is in fact an agglomeration of environments.

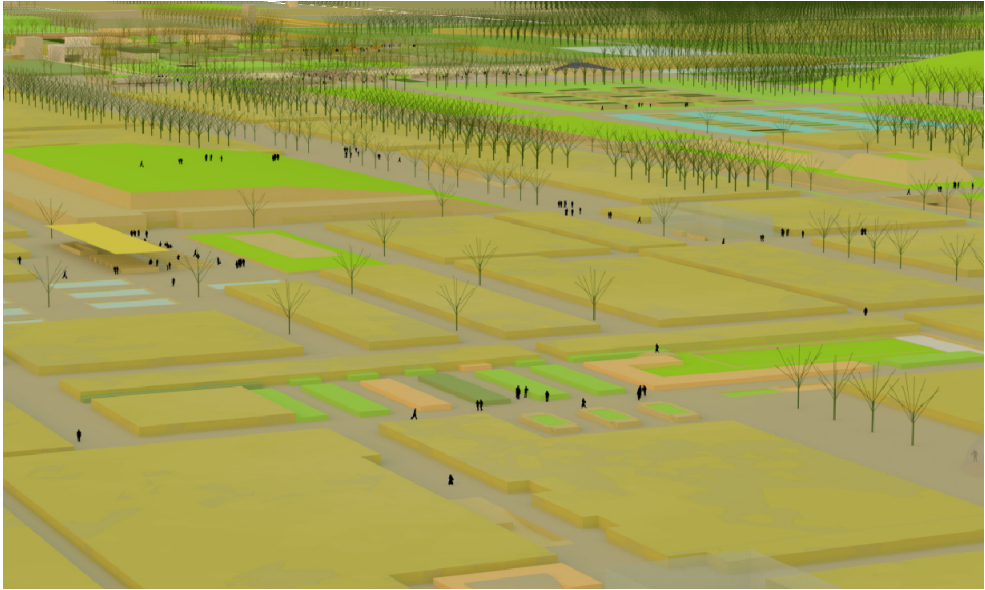
2 Environment

Describing, defining or imagining landscapes means thinking about environments. What is appropriate in one environment, in agriculture for example, could be completely out of place in another. Yet by definition there are no borders between environments and each one can be broken down into infinitely smaller spaces, materialising the shift to other environments. We can replace environment by territory, but territory implies borders and there

³ Landscape Urbanism is a theory of urban planning arguing that the best way to organise cities is through the design of the city's landscape, rather than the design of its buildings. The phrase 'Landscape Urbanism' first appeared in the mid 1990s. Since this time, the phrase 'Landscape Urbanism' has taken on many different uses, but is most often cited as a Postmodernist or Post-postmodernist response to the failings of New Urbanism and the shift away from the comprehensive visions, and demands, for Modern architecture and Urban planning. (Wikipedia)

⁴ The concept of the AOC City (Appellation D'Origine Climatique – Climatic Designation of Origin) begins with the principle that a city is established and develops primarily for natural reasons and according to logics of geographical adaptation. The intelligence of a city owes much to its abilities to adapt to the natural environment (topography, water courses, geology, climate, rural traditions) and in the way it manages to, indefinitely or durably, profit from the "identity value" that nature provides it. The city therefore capitalises on Nature: through transfers of image and identity, territorial embeddedness, the invitation of its landscapes, intermodality and variety of territories, climatic qualities and tourism. To magnify and maintain this privileged relationship between the city and the nature that surrounds it, runs through it and contributes to its advancement, we must establish the value of the precedence of these natural landscapes. Landscape Urbanism is a theory of urban planning arguing that the best way to organise cities is through the design of the city's landscape, rather than the design of its buildings. The phrase 'Landscape Urbanism' first appeared in the mid 1990s. Since this time, the phrase 'Landscape Urbanism' has taken on many different uses, but is most often cited as a Postmodernist or Post-postmodernist response to the failings of New Urbanism and the shift away from the comprehensive visions, and demands, for Modern architecture and Urban planning.

are no borders to landscape. There is a territorial entity called the “Territory of 3 borders” that exists between Luxemburg and Saarland in Germany and Moselle in France. The shoreline is in itself an entirely natural environment.



This reflection on environments is also part of the true interest of landscaping. It is impossible to practice landscaping with a binary or system driven approach. Reflecting on environments is based on the continuity of matter, adaptation as an ultimate value and the unavoidable spontaneity of the user: a single unified public, as impulsive as it is unfathomable.

The environment is multi-layered: water, trees, land, sky, topography and so forth.

It is also in the way it is perceived by the public, the “glasses” we wear: popular imagery, post cards, romanticism, childhood memories. Landscape is the opposite of a rational, reproducible and extensive construction. It is the relationship of desire between the environment, itself among other environments, and the “glasses” of the spectator. In this sense, it is the picture on a post card.

BASE LAND 2050 seeks to be the literal direct projection of an experimental and theoretical model that understands the city based on its public space, as a succession of urban environments and social scenes.

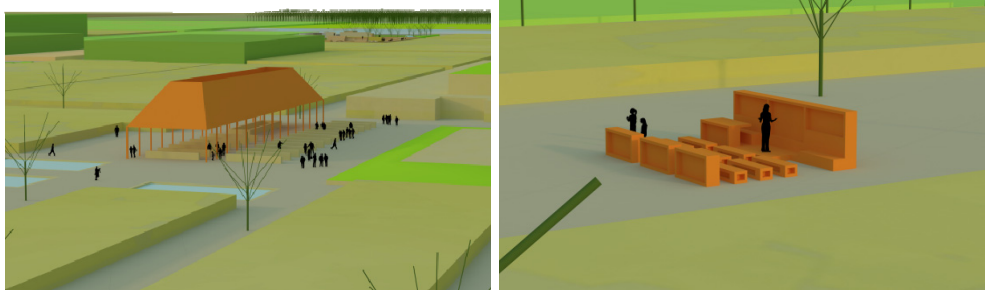
It is part of a historical lineage of often modernist urban models and counter-models of urban theory (Non stop City or Agronica, d’Andrea Branzi, BroadAcre City by Franck Loyd Right, Italian projections such as Superstudio, Archizoom, la tendenza, and English ones, Archigram etc.).

Beyond the liberating absence of cars and architecture, its specificity also lies in its infographic nature on one hand and its process as a non-project on the other.

3 Digital Landscape

Our approach, like many others is heavily conditioned by the programs we use. This digital landscape literally reflects the finger on the mouse, and seeks to be the prolongation of the body into the space. The 3D interface fades away to reveal a detailed dimensioning of distances, perspectives, visual relations and separations.

We rely on this spontaneous logic of the hand to spontaneously release the logic of the body in the public space. This body, freed from the constraints of the modern, linear, architectural, technical and commercial city, turns towards human and social relations.



BASE LAND 2050 proposes a city of transitions, passages and relationships; a city made of natural environments. In this sense, its conception is closer to that of a garment, a bunch of flowers or a gastronomic dish than to that of a systematic construction. It pays close attention to details, to transitions and the relationship of spaces to each other, as well as to their planning and their use. Off-site and shielded from many constraints it is easier for us to project these external lifestyles to which we aspire. Planning determines the scale of the space by targeting levels of the public: a wedding, a holiday program, a couple, a group of friends, a sporting match.

This is the starting point for a collective construction that establishes human relationships as the source of the central measures around which the more generic functions of simply moving around can be organised.

4 A Non-project

This free model does not respond to a series of dogmatic or organising principles. It is built by many. Many hands, tracing, organising and executing their projections one after the other, without any real planning.

The advantage of this model for our structure lies in the dialogue between us (our structure is divided into three sites, in Paris, Lyon and Bordeaux), but also in the dialogue between different projects. The spaces, models and programs tested in BASE LAND 2050 challenge and feed our urban projects and enable us to extend their social and human perspectives.

We are at the heart of the idea of arrangement and freedom and far from that of representation and control, or the political condemnation that lay behind the modernist models. By getting out of the logic of the controlled linear project, and thanks to 3D infographic integrated into the creation process, and the tool of the hand, we are able to fully be in the landscape, even off-site.