

Thriving at the edge. Rewriting the urban creativity canon from the margins

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The celebration of cities as “man’s greatest invention” habitually confirms that mankind, as a sort of ultimate civilizational achievement, has entered the “urban age”. The current urban-age doxa draws on a robust register of theorems on the primary centripetal forces that, underpinned by the scientific authority of key urban thinkers from Simmel over Jacobs to Glaeser have become synonymous with urbanity. By mobilizing insights from sparsely populated Scandinavia over remote Alpine valleys to the fringes of New Zealand, we seek to challenge the urban-age perspective through which peripheries either are not seen at all or appear in the distorted shape of the *other* of the center.

Beyond deficiency. The term periphery routinely amounts to hardly more than a residual category for all those pitiable places that, despite their historical specificities, share a syndrome, not to say a destiny. They represent the areas that are left over by urban centers, lacking the quintessential urban attributes that fuel creativity: Simmel-diversity, Jacobs-externalities, Florida-amenities.

Beyond territoriality. Rather than in purely territorial terms, peripherality also has to be conceived in a relational sense: periphery is both, the remote location (i.e., the province) and a distinct relational position (i.e., the outsider). Building on the problematizations of the duality of territorial *vs.* relational and, phrased differently, topographical *vs.* topological vocabularies, interrelating these dimensions have produced elaborate conceptions of positions “at the edge” that nurture creativity.

Beyond destiny. Rather than perceiving peripherality as unavoidable fate sealed by geography and history, actors might deliberately choose a peripheral location or marginal position. Peripheries, rather than inescapable enclosures, might in fact be attractive destinations for actors who seek to shield their creativity from the isomorphic pressures of the field. In this perspective, peripherality does not equal backwardness resulting from ignorance of the mainstream, but a deliberate dissociation from the orthodoxy to leverage novelty.

Innovation contra heritage?

Tradition as selection environment in the radicalization of novelty

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Track 2 | Culture and Heritage

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“Architecture has to blaze”, proclaimed the founders of a young Viennese studio at the close of the 1960s - and blaze it did. What began with ethereal allusions to drifting clouds (and a studio name that already alluded to dissolution, i.e. “Coop Himmelb(l)au”) escalated in the 1970s into open revolt. All the aesthetic conventions that had petrified into the Viennese architectural heritage of appeasing Biedermeier façades, in their view, had to be shattered in order to make space for an architecture that “bleeds”. And from the passionate appeals for destruction it only took a small semantic leap to “deconstruction” - which turned into the signature design principle of an emerging global architectural avantgarde that swiftly admitted this studio into their ranks.

The bellicose denunciation of the archaic Viennese tradition by Coop Himmelb(l)au seemed to suggest just this: tradition is nothing other than obstacle, calcified by the stubborn defense of the status quo. And in an era fixated on speed, acceleration and the imperative to “think outside the box,” this default perception of “tradition-as-constraint” appears even more incontrovertible: established practices and perspectives seem designed to stifle novelty before it can take root.

The proposed paper, however, invites a different reading of the interrelation between tradition and innovation. Rather than merely obstructive, robust traditions can constitute a harsh but productive selection environment: one that forces the purification, radicalization and toughening of emerging movements as they struggle against inherited forms. The trajectory of deconstructivism, as the empirical analysis shall elucidate, turned the field of architecture into a veritable battlefield on which the insurgency against antiquated conventions unfolded across four arenas: 1. AREAS (the anchoring force of place); 2. ACCOUNTS (the discursive labor of justification); 3. AFFECT (the mobilization of passion); and 4. ARTIFACTS (the recoding of material expression).