

The Sacred Place

a morphodynamic hypothesis for the foundation of human settlement¹

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The article develops a morphodynamic hypothesis concerning the processes of production and perception of socio-cultural significations as a fundamental dimension which intervenes in the foundation of human settlement. Starting with Gilles Ritchot's concept of "vacuum", the article reassesses the propositions made by Jean Petitot which synthesize two fundamental semiotic theories: one by Algirdas Julien Greimas and the other by René Thom. The article also retakes the René Girard's theory of the mimetic desire and the victimary mechanism in order to precise the nature of the dynamic process which operates the spatial investment and the affective perception of socio-cultural significations. This leads to a more rigorous definition of the "vacuum", specifically its role in the foundation of human settlement and the morphological structuration of geographical space.

Tema SEMIOTIK

ONE OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS that has been brought out recently in the debate on the relationships between semiotics and urban forms consists in the understanding of how the production and the perception of socio-cultural significations can constitute a fundamental dimension which intervenes in the morphogenesis of human settlement. This problem enriches, considerably, the theoretical perspectives that are usually envisioned in architectural semiotics; namely: the one adopted by the textual analysis which searches to reconstitute the ideologies that are subjacent to the different processes of edification; and the other adopted by the architectural grammars where signification always

appears as a production and a perception of differences that are studied from the framework of a city already configured and in complete functional activity. In both cases, the signification of the inhabited spaces is considered as the result of a simple subjective projection, so that the question concerning the existence of spatial structures that are not only "objective" but also "intrinsically significant" – what we call "organizational abstract forms" that are deployed in the geographical space and that precede the edification of architectural forms –, is not posed.

This is not the case for the several works that have been produced on the basis of the "structural theory of urban form" conceived by Gilles Ritchot in human geography. These works reveal the existence of such spatial

structures², and they propose an “emergent” conception of the global organization of cities³. Their main argumentative posture is to introduce an anthropological and political dynamic in order to make explicit the processes through which the socio-cultural significations spatialize themselves by generating a geographical space that is morphologically structured in domains by qualitative discontinuities. The study of those emergent processes constitutes a preamble for all semiotics of architectural edification. They allow to understand how the concrete forms of human settlement are susceptible of acquiring a signification through the spatial genesis of their positional relationships. This is the reason why, henceforth, we can formulate the hypothesis according to which the spatial organization of architectural forms depends on *a morphological abstract structure of the geographical space in which places themselves are anthropologically and politically significant*.

Formulation of a twofold problem

A good way to develop this morphodynamic hypothesis consists in approaching the question of the foundation of human settlement by reassessing the concept of “vacuum », which was introduced by Gilles Ritchot (1977, 1982, 1985), in order to explain how a very particular site, which appears to be intrinsically significant, exercises an attraction and repulsion dynamic on the subjects’ appropriation behaviours. In previous works⁴, we have demonstrated that the vacuum is a “sacred place” reserved for the permanent dwelling of a symbolic and juridical-constituent instance of the social order: an “asymmetrical Other”. This instance is the guarantee of the “rule of property” which imposes permissions and prohibitions in the relations between the subjects and the objects, and it takes charge of the socio-cultural significations in order to spatially invest them in the geographical space. Therefore, to understand the emergence of the vacuum as well as its role in the foundation of

cities, it is relevant to situate ourselves in a context where the asymmetrical Other and the rule of property are not operative. In this situation of origin, the affective dimension of the subjects does not superimpose itself upon significations that are previously perceived, cognitively, and invested spatially. On the contrary, the affectivity conditions both the subjects’ perception and the spatial investment itself, the asymmetrical Other and the rule of property that mediates the appropriation behaviors will constitute its outcome. The emergence of the vacuum posits a difficult “aesthetic” problem. Its resolution requests the comprehension of the two following complementary processes:

i) on the object side, we need to reconstitute the existence of an unconscious spatial investment of the subject’s affects that transform a site into an intrinsically significant vacuum whose significations are cognitively undecipherable for the subject;

ii) on the subject side, we need to reconstitute the existence of an unconscious and affective perception of the significations which emanate from the vacuum; this process not only transforms the significations into axiological values which are cognitively decipherable, but also institutes the rule of property which defines the permissions and prohibitions that overdetermine the subject’s settlement in the geographical space.

In order to advance the solution of this twofold problem, we will first reassess the propositions made by Jean Petitot concerning the existence of an “aesthetic” component which is subjacent to the processes of both production and perception of signification. The advantage of these propositions consists in the synthesis of two fundamental semiotic theories: the theory proposed by Algirdas Julien Greimas which insists on the formal articulation of axiological values; and the theory of the salencies and pregnancies, formulated by René Thom, according to which those values are characterized by a substantial and affective con-

tent. Thereafter, we will use the René Girard's theory of the mimetic desire and the victimary mechanism in order to precise the nature of the dynamic process which operates the spatial investment and the affective perception of socio-cultural significations. This approach will lead us to define more rigorously the concept of "vacuum", specifically its role in the foundation of human settlement and the morphological structuration of geographical space.

A deep aesthetic component

Semiotics's theory forged by Algirdas Julien Greimas reconstitutes the existence of a fundamental semantic which is composed by anthropological and basic existential values. These values are called "interoceptivical semes" and they correspond to what Claude Lévi-Strauss has labelled "uncouscious codes" (Life/Dead, Nature/Culture, Sacred/Profane, Divine/Human, Man/Woman, etc.)⁵. Their investment into the objects transforms their mode of existence from "virtual" to "actual". The agent, which assures this conversion, is called a "transcendant noological Addresser". This instance is the actantial equivalent in semiotics of the asymmetrical Other in the structural theory of urban form. The Addresser is the guarantee of the virtual values. In pronouncing itself about their truthfulness and their falseness, it confers to the interoceptivical semes a status of "axiological values". In actualizing them into objects, it communicates those values to the subjects without relinquishing them. The subjects become "subjects of deprivation" which engage themselves in quests oriented toward the appropriation of objects. The transcendant noological Addresser finds itself, thereby, at the source of the subjects's intentionality for objects. It assures the "intentional conversion" over which the projection of the paradigmatic axis of values on the syntagmatic axis of actions rests.

But what happens in the case where this Addresser does not exist *a priori*? According to Jean Petitot:

"the fact that Addressers do not exist (...), which guarantee the conformity of the subjects's desire to the objective properties of objects (...), renders the veridiction undecipherable. The being does not function as the presupposition of the veridictory operations, but as their result" (1985b: 300).

In other words, the subjects cannot, anylonger, adjudicate on the truthfulness or the falseness of the values, since the participative communication with the Addresser is interrupted. The values no longer possess the axiological status of cognitively decipherable significations. Those values are undecipherable and remain virtual, because they cannot be actualized into objects. The absence of the noological Addresser unleashes a crisis concerning the subjects's desire. The cognitive interpretation of the latter is not in conformity, anymore, with the mythical level of the virtual values and it finds itself subverted by the affective dimension. In this context, the affectivity of the subjects does not connote axiological values which are stable in their truthfulness or their falseness – affectivity precedes values. Jean Petitot insists:

"the mythical level and the cognitive level separate themselves and enter into conflict. The cognitive level does not conform itself anymore to the values that are produced by the fundamental semantic and it finds itself subverted by the affectivity (the thymic category and the *pathos*)" (1985b: 40).

Therefore, the subjects function in a purely "aesthetic way". They are structurally constrained to apprehend the virtual values throughout the sensible forms of paysage, what Jean Petitot described in those terms:

"the non conformity between the cognitive level and the subjacent mythical level conducts to a structural ignorance. The aesthetic subject is an alienated modal subject, disjoined of the truthfulness concerning the

values retained by the noological Addressers. It is an existential and tragic subject determined by an “unconscious” which figuratively encodes values that remain inaccessible to itself – virtual – which cannot be actualized in the objects whose axiological content is in conformity with the fundamental semantic” (1985b: 40).

The “aesthetic” status of the subjects is characterized by a structural ignorance and undecipherableness concerning the truthfulness of the virtual values. According to Jean Petitot:

“this “aesthetic” status of the semiotics subject is opposed (...) to a “theological” status characterized by a double conformity between the cosmological Addressers and the noological Addressers (in other words between the cognitive level and the mythical level) and the aesthetic judgement of the subject to the virtual values (which have become actualized)” (1985b: 40).

For the aesthetic subjects, the values are pure “proprioceptival affects”, euphorical and dysphorical emotional tensions – that is to say, the thymical pulsions which are linked to the mental image of their “living body” and which are constitutive of their imaginary. These affects are diffused throughout the sensible world and transform it into a significant environment by attaching themselves to very particular salient forms. We consider that the vacuum, as a “sacred place” that finds itself on the foundation of human settlement, is functioning as such a form: it does not constitute an object whose significations are cognitively interpreted by the subjects, but an “object of desire” whose values are affectively invested and perceived. The intentionality of the subject for such an object of desire results from a twofold process contained in subjective awareness. On the one hand, it depends on a “figurative conversion” which spatially invests the proprioceptival affects of the subject into a vacuum. On the other hand, it depends on a

“figurative veridiction” which transforms the affects that emanate from the vacuum into a system of axiological values that are cognitively decypherable.

To attain a deeper understanding of this matter, it is relevant – following Jean Petitot – to make use of the concepts of “saliencies” and “pregnancies” which were proposed by René Thom (1980, 1981, 1988). From among all sensible forms, René Thom distinguished two fundamental classes: the salient forms which are sensorial *stimuli* that detached themselves from their content; the pregnant forms, whose perception activates overwhelming physiological and behavioral reactions from the subjects. According to Jean Petitot:

“the pregnancies’s theory allows to develop a conception (...) of the intentionality that relates the subjects to their objects of value. Such a theory makes explicit the fact that the perception of meaning is the result of a deep process in which semantic pregnancies are grasped by subjective awareness through an actantial syntax, in other words through the destinies of values investment into objects. Furthermore, it shows that the semes of the fundamental semantic (...) are not conscious significations which can be, thereafter, thymically invested. These are pulsional and unconscious thymical contents, which are both interoceptival and proprioceptival. To distinguish them from the semes, we could qualify them as semantic pregnancies. The semantic pregnancies constitute the substantial face of the virtual and abstract values” (1986: 175).

For the animal, the “aesthetic” investment and perception would be fundamental processes, inasmuch as certain pregnant forms, which are biologically significant (prey, predator, sexual partners), exercise a rather efficacious fascination that leads to a non-distinction between the “internal self” and the “external self” of the subject. In this concern, René Thom expresses the following:

“according to my general theory of language, in the beginning, the animal is an organism constantly fascinated by certain forms of the exterior world which display extraordinary capacities of pregnancies; particularly, the forms of predator and prey. From the moment the predator is starving, it has the tendency to see preys everywhere; it’s true for the animal but also for Man. Man has been able to escape from the appeal prompted by certain external forms which lead him to a kind of an alienation of his psyche through a process that is both of extension and weakening. This has given pregnancy to forms that, biologically, had no interest whatsoever and, simultaneously, has succeeded in making concrete the incarnation of this artificial pregnancy in a concept represented by a word of language. In short, I see language as a construction of a sort of identity between the true self and the exterior self (the other self) which is the prey (the prey is an alienating entity of the true self); to reconstruct the true self, to maintain it in presence of the alienating self of the exterior world, the psyche constructs a barrier and this barrier is language itself. From the moment we acknowledge an external object, which we can associate to a noun, its alienating power ends. Thereby, the acknowledgement of an object is a way to incarnate oneself in it, allowing us, at the same time, to preserve our autonomy. I believe that the origin of language is precisely this: a process that allows to disarm the power of fascination of external forms through the construction of concepts” (1983: 153–154).

The psychic development of Man has led to an integration of non-biologically significant forms through an extension and a weakening of the diffusion power of pregnancies, and thereby the possibility to establish a qualitative distinction between the “interior self” and “exterior self” of the subject. In this regard, it is pertinent to observe that, contrary to Man,

animals never renounce to satisfy their needs inside their group. Ethology teaches that animal groups organize themselves through domination relationships where, for example, the dominated males cannot have sexual partners since the dominant males have captured them all. In the animal species, no prohibition whatsoever, nor any exogamic system, can institute itself because, in their immediacy, animals never renounce to satisfy their needs. The congeneric animals would never renounce to the most accessible pregnant forms. A crucial question arises: what can drive an animal in the process of hominization *to differ* the satisfaction of its needs? Which particular dynamic process is susceptible of operating an effective extension and weakening of the diffusion power of pregnancies through an “aesthetic” perception and investment?

From the mimetic desire to the victimary mechanism

The reconstitution of this dynamic process can adequately avail itself through the René Girard’s thesis concerning the appropriation *mimesis*: “if an individual perceives one of its congener by extending its hand toward an object, it is immediately tempted to imitate the other’s gesture” (Girard, 1978: 16). In this triangular syntactic device which onset presupposes a structural ignorance, what originates the subject’s fascination is not the particular qualities of the object, but rather the desire that the Other has for the object itself. For the subject, the Other is at one and the same time a “model” to be imitated and a “rival” to be eliminated because they are both trying to appropriate the same object. On the grounds of numerous ethological observations about animal social behaviors, René Girard remarks that, among the superior mammals, this appropriation *mimesis* and the rivalry which proceeds from it, due to the factual convergence of the desire toward one and only pregnant form, are denied by domination relationships which bifurcate the desires to opposite directions:

“the individual or individuals that dominate (...) are frequently located in a central position. They are constantly observed and imitated by the other males that are situated in the periphery. That is to say that the imitation operates throughout all attitudes and behaviors of the dominant animals with the exception of the appropriation behaviors (...). Expelled from the domain where it provokes the rivalry, the imitation enforces itself in all other domains and it orientes itself toward the most powerful animal, the one that is capable of assuring the protection of the group, not only by itself, but as the leader and model of all the others; it determines the attitude of the group, which grants the signal of attack or retreat, etc.” (1978: 127–128).

Among the species in the upper stages of evolution, it would be the “intensification” of the mimetic rivalry that will destruct the domination relationships and produce the emergence of rather complex relations on the symbolic level. For René Girard, it would be at the moment when:

“the mimetic conflicts become sufficiently intense, for preventing the direct solutions which achieve the animal forms of society, that a mechanism outset itself through a first crisis, or a serie of crisis, and generates the “differed” forms, symbolic and human, of culture” (1978: 132).

This intensification engenders the passage from the appropriation *mimesis*, which disarrays the members of the group against each other since they covet the same pregnant forms, to the antagonism *mimesis* whose ultimate end result is the unity of all against a common adversary. The antagonism *mimesis* culminates with the collective murder of a “emissary scapegoat” who is victimized. In assuring the extension and the weakening of diffusion power of pregnancies, this victimary mechanism constitutes the dynamic process which characterizes the hominization:

“between the animal nature itself and the becoming of humanity, there is a true rupture and it is the collective murder rupture, in and of itself capable of assuring organizations founded on prohibitions and rituals, whatever embryonic state they are in. Therefore, it is possible to install the genesis of human culture in nature, by attaching it to a natural mechanism without removing that what is specifically and exclusively human” (1978: 136).

In the figurative conversion perspective, the victimary mechanism concurs to the extension of the diffusion power of pregnancies. Since the “emissary scapegoat” is the victim of all subjects, it is on its corpse where the collective sight is focus upon. Beyond the biological significant pregnant forms, the corpse of the victim acquires the status of a pregnant form of a new type. Reconciled through ignorance against and around the victim, the subjects are aesthetically fascinated by its corpse. This saillient object is penetrated by the affects which were strongly felt by the protagonists of the collective murder. Their dysphorical tensions and their euphorical loosening, suscitated by the mimetic crisis and its violent resolution, figuratively invested themselves in the saillient form of this corpse. Found guilty of the destructive violence and the unificated peace, the corpse of the victim becomes a singular pregnant form that grasps the repulsive affects, signifying “the life that brings death”, and the attractive affects signifying “the death that brings life”.

In the figurative veridiction perspective, the victimary mechanism provokes the weakening of the diffusion power of pregnancies. These affects do not diffuse themselves anylonger on a large number of different pregnant forms. They are confined, henceforth, on a singular pregnant form, the corpse of the victim which is, as an object of desire, tightly link to the significations concerned with “life” and “death”. At the moment where the reconciliation inter-

rupts the reciprocal violence, the typically animal indifference over and against the corpse gives way to a fascinated attention which, hereafter, is typically human. The subjects are aesthetically overwhelmed by this pregnant form from which emanate dysphorical and euphorical affects. In the imaginary of the subjects, these pregnancies acquire the status of symbolic significations and articulate themselves in an elementary axiology representing the individual and collective destiny. René Girard insists on this transformation:

“this corpse signifies for the whole community the return to peace, the advent of every cultural possibility, that is to say, for men, every possibility of life. It is on the reconciliatory virtues of the emissary victim that we should attribute, for men, the conjoint discovery, on the corpse itself, of everything that can be named death and everything that can be named life” (1978: 115).

The victimary mechanism makes viable the comprehension of the finality which motivates the diverse funeral rites, that is to say the refusal to perceive death only as the cessation of life and to overlook the corpse of the congener as if it was mere rubbish. Since, if the corpse of the sacrificial victim is a pregnant form, we could infer that, for the protagonists of the murder, it is not a matter to be abandoned. Thereby, this pregnant form is submitted to a particular treatment which reproduces, through a diversity of scene stagings, the moments of fear and joy provoked by the mimetic crisis, its violent resolution and the peacefulness it creates:

“it is always as a sepulcher in which culture unfolds. The sepulcher, its always the first monument to be erected around the emissary victim, the primary ground of significations, the foremost elementary and the predominantly fundamental” (1978: 117).

The deep finality which underlies the instauration of funeral rites fullfills, in this manner,

the crossing over through the critical moment of hominization. The dysphorical and euphorical pregnancies are, from the outset, aesthetically invested in the corpse of the emissary victim who is found guilty for the destruction of the previous communal links and the establishment of a new social order. Thereafter, these pregnancies are extended to all the members of the community, they loose their power to invade by confining themselves in axiological values that symbolized the thymical dimension which is the source of both “life” and “death”. Ultimately, when the time comes for each one’s death, funeral rites are elaborated to commemorate the foundational moment of the social order⁶.

The concept of “vacuum”

From the victimary mechanism as a dynamic process, it is relevant to withhold the three subsequent fundamental consequences concerning the role of the vacuum in the foundation of human settlement.

i) the rule of property is instaured in order to differ the process of satisfaction of the subject’s needs. This rule spreads out the unconscious desires in different directions, and alters the subjects from violent conflicts by impeding the unsettling of the appropriation *mimesis*. In its various forms, this rule establishes a dialectic of both permissions and prohibitions⁷. On the one hand, it allows the subject’s residence around the vacuum, where the funeral rite takes place, and which is reserved for the sacrificial victim. On the other hand, it prohibits the residence inside the vacuum which apprehends by contact the pregnancies that emanate from the saillient corpse of the victim. In doing so, the rule of property comports itself as the “spatial actualization operator” of the basic anthropological significations: “Life/Death”, “Nature/Culture”, “Sacred/Profane”⁸;

ii) in revealing death as a power which is at one and the same time “evil” and “good”, “terrifying” and “adorable”, the sacrificial victim is deified: it acquires the status of a transcendent

nological Addresser, an asymmetrical Other which, in so far as it is the source and the guarantee of the rule of property, situates itself in the “sacred” vacuum from now on prohibited to all permanent “profane” settlement;

iii) in virtue of the rule of property, certain subjects can constitute themselves in a delegate’s role which mediates the communication with the transcendent nological Addresser. The rule of property integrates the dimension of power with that of mobility; thereby provoking the disappearance of the primitive nomadism as the gender of life shared by all subjects. In accordance with the attractiveness and the repulsiveness exercised on all subjects by the prohibited vacuum, in which the pregnancies of the victim are figuratively converted, the disappearance of the primitive gender of life, which now exists at a residual state, passes through the sedentarization of a certain group of subjects, which loose the political control of their trajectories of mobility, benefitting the delegates for which the political control of mobility had become the privilege of an adventitious selective nomadism⁹.

The urban form theory contends that the location of the settlement’s prohibition determines the position of the site chosen for the foundation of cities. This site would be the allowed domain “informed” by the prohibited domain, the latter constituting a “sacred” vacuum reserved for the inhumation of the sacrificial victim¹⁰. This thesis retakes another commentary posed by René Girard:

“it is a commonplace to think that truthfulness is engraved in the very structure of the communities, in central points from which everything radiates and which constitute, more often than not, the symbolic places of a collective unity from which we should not suspect, *a priori*, the original character, often confirmed, but less so, by archeological excavations” (1972: 460).

In this concern, the author posits examples from Greece, where certain “sacred places” cor-

respond to the glorified hero’s grave, the *omphalos*, the *agora*’s stone and, lastly, the epitome of the *polis*, the common centrum, *Hestia*. René Girard adds:

“the traditions attached to these places, and the ritual origin of the functions that are associated to these places themselves, confirmed (...) the hypothesis that situates the sacred murder at the origin of the *polis* (...). It is from these symbolic places of unity (...) that every religious form is born, the cult is established, the space is organized, a historical temporality is installed, a first social life is brought forth, this is how Durkheim comprehended the matter as well. This is where everything begins, here lies the starting point from which everything departs, therein everything returns, when discord reappears, here everything ends” (1972: 461).

On his part, René Thom proposes to conceive the functioning of the sacred as a prolongation of the animal fascination in mankind. This conception confirms our hypothesis concerning the æsthetic status of the vacuum:

“the sacred partakes with the beauty this character of being intermediary between saliency and pregnancy. It always entails an element of location: it is always somewhere (...). The sacred object (or the sacred place) exerts on the human subject a pregnancy of infinite intensity, at once attractive and repulsive. This infinite force immobilizes the subject in front of the source’s form” (1990: 106–107).

The concept of “vacuum” allows us to formulate a deeper understanding of these observations concerning the “sacred places”. As a secondary pregnant form, the vacuum is the salient domain invested by the pregnancies of the sacrificial victim. At the anthropological level, the vacuum functions as a pregnant form which produces, figuratively, its own codification of symbolic significations. The vacuum is an “object of desire” covert and dreaded

by all subjects. At the level of the territorial appropriation dynamic, the vacuum situates a residential prohibition. It functions at once and the same time as an "attractive basin" and as a "repulsive site", that is to say, as a basin that attracts to itself the subjects's trajectories of mobility, and as a site that repels these trajectories toward the exterior and constrains the subjects to establish their settlement at a "good distance".

Thereby, the "sacred" vacuum organizes the abstract structuration of the "profane" geographical space which surrounds it, not only for the extreme situation represented by the hominization process, but also for all historical situations where the foundational symbolism of the social link emerges¹¹. In these contexts, the victimary mechanism appears as the ultimate phase of violent mimetic crisis provoked

by the progressive abolition of the prohibitions which founded the previous order of differences that was ruling the relationships between the members of a community. Released by this process of indifferenciation, the collective murder engenders the formation of a "sacred" vacuum which emerges from the site where the sacrificial victim is buried. The attractive and repulsive pregnancies, which emanate from this source form, play an essential role in the choice of the site for the subjects's settlement in the surrounding geographical space. In locating a residential prohibition, the "sacred" vacuum determines the spatial position of the "profane" settlement. The internal morphological structuration of this settlement is related to the socio-cultural significations that are invested in the "sacred" vacuum.

Notes

1. The author received a financial aid from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for the preparation of this article. He expresses his sincere appreciation to Jesus Nieves-Mitaynezx, doctoral student at Laval University, Québec, for his precious assistance in the english translation of this article. Mr. Nieves-Mitaynezx has also received financial resources from the SSHRCC strategical program.
2. The structural theory of the urban form was initially elaborated in the context of a study concerning the patrimonial real estate of Montréal, Canada (Ritchot et alii, 1977). Afterwards, the theory has been applied to numerus cities and neighborhoods, and it has been further developed by Gilles Ritchot who has gathered these analyses in his "Prémises d'une théorie de la forme urbaine" (1985). Since then, the urban form theory has been enriched by a semiotic component and it has developed links with the dynamic structuralism (Ritchot, 1991; Ritchot and Mercier, 1992; Desmarais, 1991, 1992a, 1993, 1995).
3. For further precisions concerning the emergent conception of structures which is opposed to the conventional projective conception, see Desmarais (1992b).
4. The concept of "vacuum" finds itself in the center of a morphodynamic model concerned with the genesis of human settlement. This model, which is called the "morphogenetic process", traverses four structural levels of reality (anthropological, political, geographical and economical). For a detailed presentation, see Desmarais (1991, 1992a, 1993, 1995).
5. For the definitions of semiotic concepts that we are using, see Greimas and Courtés (1979, 1986).
6. For an example of such funeral rites in relation with the morphological structuration of the Bororo village, see Desmarais (1992b).
7. The hypothesis of the rule of property, as a third term which mediates the relations between the subject and the resources of the exterior milieu, was introduced by Ritchot (1979). It was further developed in human geography by Mercier (1986, 1990, 1992). Its

role in the morphogenetic process of the human settlement has been made explicit in Desmarais (1991, 1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1995). Recently, Mercier and Ritchot (1994) have formulated an hypothesis according to which the rule of property and the vacuums that structured the geographical space constitute the foundation of law.

8. In the morphogenetic process of human settlement, the rule of property is the link between the anthropological and political levels, see Desmarais (1991, 1992a, 1993, 1995).
9. The political control of mobility constitutes a central hypothesis in the structural theory of urban form. It allows to transcend the insufficiencies of the empiricist conception of genders of life, the nomadism and the sedentarity. According to the aforementioned theory, the nomadism and the sedentarity are conceived as "actants" who entertained dialectical conflicts in order to acquire and preserve the political control of their mobility trajectories in the geographical space. For further precise definitions, see Ritchot (1985, 1991), Ritchot and Mercier (1992), and Desmarais (1991, 1992 a, 1992 b, 1993, 1995).
10. In Desmarais (1993, 1995), we have analyzed in detail this foundational dynamic, particularly the example provided by the city of Paris.
11. For example, in Desmarais (1993, 1995), we have demonstrated that the location of the celtic Lutecia was dependent, not on the

natural virtues of the Cité island, but rather on its peripheral position in relation to the central sanctuary of la Gaule situated more toward the North, in the plain of Lendit. Such an indo-european anthropological spatial investment has conditioned the choice of the insular site for the foundation of the initial urban pole in the South. This pole was at a "good distance" of a highly pregnant place for all subjects, since it was invested by symbolic significations which were simultaneously attractive and repulsive. The "sacred" vacuum of Lendit was prohibited for the establishment of the "profane" settlement. It was invested by the three divine functions of "sovereignty", "force" and "fertility". This is the reason why the Cité island was divided in three spatial domains reserved for the following social classes: "priestly", "military" and "economical". In these works, we have also demonstrated that an inversion of the repulsive and attractive polarities between the places of death and life has resulted from the christianization and the martyr's cult during the decline of the Roman Empire. This inversion has provoked an evasion of pilgrims toward the cemeteries located in a peripheral collar which receives from now on both life and death. This collar was invested by a "fusion of death and life" and it has polarized the foundation of numerous abbies in the surrounding of Paris.

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