Cities are sites of experimentation. They are the object of utopian planning fantasies and the stage of unending discoveries of new norms and forms of urban sociality. City planning is by necessity speculative – it is never concerned merely with current uses, but instead always looks forward towards an unknown future. Today, ambitious visions of city development are focused on the planning concept of the smart city. The smart city is a high-tech milieu, one that promises a smoothly organized city life through the provision of ubiquitous digital information and communication infrastructure. The smart city anticipates needs, regulates mobility, optimizes economic processes, minimizes ecologic harm, and, using the data of its inhabitants, continuously develops itself. Jeamin Cha's video work, FOG AND SMOKE, leads us into the planned city of Songdo, currently being constructed in South Korea and representing the most ambitious realization of a smart city to date (Halpern et al. 2013). The technoscapes of the city Songdo imagine an urban future where the city itself looks after us.

BACK TO THE FUTURE?

It seems natural to reproach smart city projects for repeating the failures of modern city planning and to want to challenge the technocratic phantasms of computer scientists, engineers, investors, and city planners with an emphatic, »What Would Jane Jacobs Do?« (Greenfield 2013).[1] This reaction is certainly not an absurd one: if modernist architects and city planners of the 20th century such as Le Corbusier or Robert Moses were to have dreamed of the centers of the future, then they undoubtedly would have imagined something resembling Songdo. Songdo is emblematic of cities built in line with rationalistic master plans. Despite attempting to consider and plan for every possible occurrence, these cities never end up imitating the natural growth and evolution of city structures. And it is not just modern city planning that casts a long shadow over Songdo, but also the phantasm of cybernetics. In Songdo, the computer scientists and engineers of Cisco Systems update the control fantasies of Cold War technicians of power such as Norbert Wiener for urban terrains.[2] At the same time, something decisive has also changed relative to the disciplinary city design and the early forms of cyberkenetic command and control thinking. No longer does the unplanned, spontaneous, and creative everyday urban life stand in contrast to a perfectly controlled urban clockwork, one in which individuals are unavoidably ground down. Instead, the residents themselves should now become the most important resource for the vital systems of the intelligent cities – cities which ideally will co-evolve with the needs, wishes, and desires of their inhabitants. Here the subjects of the city, the urban citizens, will not be subjected to »machines for living in« (Le Corbusier). Rather, they should themselves become part of the urban infrastructure, spilling data traces everywhere behind them and thus, by feeding and optimizing the informational control systems, co-producing control.

WHY THE SMART CITY IS SO DUMB AND WHAT WE SHOULD (NOT) DO ABOUT IT

In FOG AND SMOKE Cha succeeds in illuminating the paradoxes of this form of city planning in just a few shots of a disturbing psychogeography. The camera follows a tap dancer who performs a particularly experimental form of dérive (Debord) through the streets of the city. The city is empty. We see wide streets on which no cars drive, pavements without pedestrians, promenades on which nobody strolls, orphaned parks. Does anyone live in this city at all? There are only isolated lit windows in a sea of dark house facades. As we drive through Songdo by night we hear, »fantasies are bound to be broken,« from the car radio – a statement which clearly also applies to the dreams of Cisco Systems. The miniature model of Songdo built in the city's information center that is seen in the first shots of the video, with its animated blinking highways and high rises, appears livelier than the city itself, visualizing the contrast between the planned Utopia of Songdo and its heterotopic realization. Songdo's lonely public spaces are reminiscent of the huge, empty squares of Brasilia, joining a long line of examples of city planning that in their attempt to generate urbanity instead create spaces that prevent urban living.

FOG AND SMOKE informs us that since 2008 Songdo has been known as a »ghost city« – and the city does indeed appear spooky. If smart cities are to function as open, self-modifying systems with their inhabitants the most important system components of the permanently optimizing process, then the lack of those very inhabitants is even more dramatic, and the failure of Songdo even more absolute, than it was in the case of the modernist cities. At least there the planners could blame the supposed narrow-mindedness of residents, who were allegedly not mature enough to embrace the avant-garde designs. For the city planners who cut the urban space as if with a scalpel, the surgeons' bon mot applies: operation successful, patient dead. They prioritized the perfection of their planned idea over its livability. But if the city relies on the data trails of its inhabitants to become smart, to detect use patterns, and to go on evolving, then the city also invites total failure if no inhabitants are present to produce the information.

CITIES AT THE SPEED OF LIGHT

While FOG AND SMOKE does awaken associations with earlier planned cities, Cha does not simply present Songdo as a modified remake of long known concepts and their misguided implementation. This is not an obvious presentation. It is still quite common to consider Asian cities from a perspective of »catch-up development«. This viewpoint suggests that they find themselves in a prolonged process of catching up to metropolitan ideals that the West long ago left behind. This perception is misjudged, denying that the development of Asian cities long ago emancipated itself and that a new inter-Asian horizon of metropolitan visions and longing has begun, one that does without references to the cities of the West (Ong 2011). »The skyline rises in the East,« celebrated Rem Koolhaas in 2004 in reference to the spectacular development of cities throughout Asia since the turn of the millennium. A new horizon of urban aspirations has arisen alongside this ascension, of which FOG AND SMOKE grants a glimpse. The most remarkable feature of city development that this distinctive space of urban aspirations achieves is its incredible speed (Roy 2011). Here, cities don't only grow up into the heavens faster, occasionally, they also return to ruins faster than anywhere else. The highrises that appear in FOG AND SMOKE had scarcely been built and now already appear abandoned. Which future will these ruins have? Cha's video leaves the question of whether the »ghost city« of Songdo can accomplish the transition to an inhabited city unanswered.

FOG AND SMOKE is of interest because it establishes global connections – some link to the global financial crisis, which, as the video documents, had a serious impact on Songdo – but it does so without suggesting that modern city development everywhere follows the same logic and without insinuating that Songdo's rise and standstill is ultimately just another local example of city planning under capitalism, subject as ever to the same cycles of de- and re-investment and their devastating consequences. The video maintains a balance between presenting Songdo as a unique, situated experiment and as a convergence point of global dynamics. And it makes it clear that city planning is no longer speculative only because it attempts to plan for an unknown future, but also because it has recently linked itself to the inherently speculative practices of financial capitalism. A belief in a booming future has unleashed unprecedented construction activity in the financialized property market.

Excerpts from Cha's interview with a fisherman provide us with an idea of the economies of dispossession that have enabled the construction of the smart city and of the price to be paid today in exchange for the promise of an uncertain future. The developers of Songdo refer with pride to the fact that the planned city was built on reclaimed land, an artificial island wrested from the sea to be integrated into the free trade area of Incheon. But this story of an empty space where the planning Utopia could be realized without side effects is also exposed as fairy tale. Here too must the earlier uses and users be displaced to make space. Naturally, the city's advertising videos do not publicize the fishermen, their families, or the difficult circumstances under which they have had to pursue their livelihoods since the construction of the city. Cha shows us that, despite this, a few of them are still there. Unlike the developers of the city, FOG AND SMOKE avoids focusing on Songdo's high-tech communication and information systems. Instead, Cha shows the improvised infrastructure of the poor populations still living at the outskirts of Songdo. Indeed, it is the smoke rising from the temporary stoves of their homes that gives the video its name.

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[1] Critical discussion of the smart city is full of references to the architectural critic and activist Jane Jacobs and her legendary confrontation with the city planner Robert Moses in New York of the 1960s. While Moses strived for a complete restructuring of New York in line with his model of a »car friendly city«, Jacobs stood for the preservation of existing urban structures and successfully protested against the extensive planned destruction of the Greenwich Village district. The conflict of Jacobs vs. Moses acts as a paradigm for a confrontation of the opposing ideas of successful urbanity and good urban living, a confrontation which arises time and again in city planning disputes.

[2] Norbert Wiener was an American mathematician and physicist. In the 1950s with his book, *Cybernetics: On Communication and Control in the Animal and the Machine*, he came up with the concept of cybernetics, which combined several branches of knowledge concerning technical- and social-technological control as well as problems with the processing of information. These concepts of intelligent self-organisation and self-governing systems that he discussed were then taken up in military contexts. The modern ideal of the smart city, that of a flexible, adaptive, and resource-efficient city that is self-governing and organising, represents a new version of cybernetic thinking.

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