

Dislocations and Ecologies. The Disruption of the Urban Experience of London in Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair and Gilbert & George

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London is an urban and mythical entity that has exerted a power of attraction and repulsion upon the minds of travellers, writers and artists alike. Impressive not only by its size but also the scope of its variety and polymorphism, London is a genuine cultural environment of its own. Its past is sometimes overshadowed by the never-ending process of change, yet a close investigation helps to unveil hidden parts of a collective memory. Such has been the ambitious endeavour of Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair and to a certain extent, Gilbert & George. Each of these authors has explored various aspects of London's memory, be it through the prism of cultural studies, psycho-geography or contemporary art. In order to make sense of the urban explorations, Ackroyd, Sinclair and Gilbert & George had to elaborate specific tools so as to re-present the urban experience in its entire disruptive dimension. *London: The Biography* by Peter Ackroyd, *Lights Out for the Territory*, *London Orbital* by Iain Sinclair and the *20 London E 1 Pictures* by Gilbert & George epitomise various representations of urban experience as it is filtered through imagination. This experience reveals not only the very nature of the urban ecology but it also unveils fragile realms of memory. Indeed, walking the urban ecology gives access to an alternative past. If ecology designates an environment regulated by specific rules and mechanisms, what is the mechanism that regulates this urban ecology? Our aim is to demonstrate that dislocation is the main mechanism that informs both urban and fictional ecologies. Besides, the very nature of the relationship between the urban ecology and fictional ecologies prompts questions. How do they interact? Does the urban ecology challenge the artistic universes created by Peter Ackroyd, Iain Sinclair and Gilbert & George to the extent of dislocating them? Do the artistic works partake in the dislocation of the urban ecology? Besides, the semantics of the term "dislocation" leads us to ponder into two directions simultaneously. Indeed, is our understanding of the city of London simply dis-located, merely displaced, whenever we attempt at representing it? Or is it totally disrupted, meaning altered in its very nature by the works mentioned above? We may also reverse the elements of this interaction and wonder whether the works of these authors are being simply displaced, or utterly challenged in their very essence by the specificity of the urban ecology.

In this paper, I intend to analyse the impact dislocation has on cultural texts and to address the problematic representation of dislocation. My contention will be to unveil how the urban ecology is translated, displaced and dis-located into written and iconographic codes. If the understanding of the urban ecology keeps receding and distorting itself, then in turn, the works stimulated by the culturally fertile environment adopt the principles of process and metamorphosis as underlying structuring principles. To demonstrate this assumption, I shall analyse how the urban ecology shapes the artistic works and how the artistic works in turn contort the body of the subject matter to their ends.

First, the destabilising exploration of London shall be assessed by the extent of its impact upon the physical experience. As Sinclair and Ackroyd wander around the city, crucial concepts such as body, empiricism and the spirit of the place are dislocated by the frustrating quest for the city. Then, as a response, and to befit the challenging nature of this ecology, the authors respond to the frustration by portraying it through disrupting devices echoing the dislocation. By means of fragmentation, juxtaposition and montage, the writers and artists build up transgressive re-presentations of the urban ecology, contorting the subject matter and the forms it takes. That is why the various artistic universes that emerge can be analysed through the paradigm of dislocation. Eventually, it is through the dis-membering or the dis-articulation of the city that a re-membering and a re-collection of London become possible. Thereby the authors can manage to reach and reproduce the memory at the verge of disappearing. The attempt to reach the immaterial memory of the city leads the reader and the spectator to consider the very works of these authors as fragile ecologies of knowledge and sites of memory.

The Disrupting Experience of London

While trying to encompass the urban ecology, for example, an environment regulated by rules and mechanisms, the authors have to acknowledge the hardships this quest entails. Indeed, dislocation is the regulating principle of this urban ecology and it contaminates explorers/the artists and their works alike. First, the urban ecology dismantles the physical experience. The wanderings through the urban ecology cannot be likened to a pilgrimage, since they do not lead to a reward or spiritual goal. Instead, the explorers undergo tremendous challenges that exhaust and dislocate their bodies. Iain Sinclair's friend, Kevin seems to embody the strenuousness of the effort:

Kevin eases off his boots, abandons the formerly white socks, and stares at the forensic evidence of his overambitious hike. [...] tendons have contracted, skin is raw or puffed into the mushroom cushions. The twenty-six bones, a hundred-plus ligaments and thirty-three muscles are outraged by mistreatment. [...] My photographs of feet in bowl are like those watercolours in Tate Britain of the

deformities of war, insulted flesh stitched together, torn mouths, missing appendages. (*London* 279)

Kevin's body is distorted. The stigmata of suffering are endowed with an aesthetic dimension while the rain relentlessly attacks the walkers: "we're not wet; we're soused, deluged, bedraggled. Colour has run. We're blue. We look like something rescued from the North Sea and left floundering on the deck" (*London* 514-15). As the flâneurs explore this specific ecology, which turns out to be a traumatic experience, they can be likened to survivors. Their identity is annihilated, and so is their humanity. Therefore Iain Sinclair compares these men to objects, designating them under the generic "something." However this ordeal seems to grant them access to sudden and rare revelations: "All the usual irritants with which great gardens protect themselves are blessings: they make access difficult. Persistence is rewarded" (*London* 91). Suffering and tiredness become the very conditions that guarantee the ultimate knowledge of the urban ecology. It makes Iain Sinclair wonder: "How long does it take before actuality, blood and pain, is safely registered as memory? Before it is written up" (*London* 536-7).

Yet, the city's dismantling principle does not stop here. Beyond the dislocation of the physical experience, which challenges the bodies of the urban explorers, the very notion of empiricism is questioned. If the term "empiricism", from Greek *empeira*, refers to the philosophical belief that "experience rather than reason is the genuine source of knowledge" (Bouverese 3), we may wonder how urban ecology challenges the idea that our senses enable us to grasp our surroundings.

Urban ecology resists being encompassed: indeed, successive screens hide it away. Not only is the present tense flânerie frustrating as the walk entails exhaustion and awareness of its absurdity, but the quest for the alternative past also leads to a dead end. When unclaimed, memories tend to vanish. As Sinclair and Lawrence Bicknell come across this tunnel, they become aware of the very limits of their understanding:

We feel a nudge in our perception of space/ time. [...] A pre-visionary condition, in which it is possible to let go of the present and access an older narrative, a secret garden or enchanted wood.

By (Laurence Bicknell's) reading, the tunnel under the motorway is a gate of memory. Concrete walls become screens on which are projected phantasmagoric tree shapes. But reaching the tunnel, coming up against the wall — cut to fit the fit of the motorway escarpment — we find that the concrete is no casual wash. The wall is made with deep grooves, like a sheet of corrugated paper. The effect is of something wrapped and hidden, a stone curtain. [...] Nothing to be seen, everything to be imagined. (*London* 138)

The flâneurs take a damaged concrete wall for a tree; their senses are thus betrayed. It comes as no surprise then that, deprived of his landmarks,

Iain Sinclair admits relying on his affect rather than on reason: “I don’t know where we are. None of the landmarks relate to anything in my past [...]. My world has been turned upside down” (*London* 270). What is more, the relationship between ecology and walker seems doomed: the walkers turn out to be under an influence they can help but submit to. This is what Robert Bond and Jenny Bavidge mean when they summon the notion of hermeneutics, which, according to them “acknowledges the collision between the data and its interpreter” (8).

Eventually, the urban ecology disrupts yet another concept: the spirit of the place is renegotiated. While memorials epitomise history recuperated by the official discourse, Iain Sinclair favours apparently meaningless sites: “Because something has vanished, because it can no longer be seen, doesn’t mean it’s not there [...] The trick was to move back, to step away, treat the road as a privileged entity, a metaphor of itself. Enlightenment came with distance, detachment” (*London* 14). According to him, the urban ecology tends to speak by figures of loss and void. For example, the places that have not yet been regenerated and that have kept what Barry Lewis defines as the *genius loci* – “a particular spirit presiding over the people and the activities that cluster there” (116). To understand London means to witness some fragments of past floating in genuine geographical sites by mere chance.

These geographical sites inform the way in which the authors compose fictional ecologies of London. They tend to privilege the anthropomorphism of London, because it elicits an imaginative response, counterbalancing the unease caused by the disruptive essence of the urban ecology. Both Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair resort to organic metaphors. For Peter Ackroyd, “the byways of the city resemble thin veins and its parks are like lungs” (1). Iain Sinclair compares the walk to “a phantom biopsy, cutting out a sample of diseased tissue without an anaesthetic” (*Lights* 4). The fictional city resembles a dismembered body desired but never totally possessed. Either dead or self-regenerating, the city questions the very principle of heart and periphery and conveys the idea of contamination.

The body of the explorers and the fictional ecology represented by the metaphorical body of the city tend to coincide in the authors’ minds. Iain Sinclair admits that “the shoulder of the motorway, from Bluewater to Brands Hatch, became [his] shoulder, frozen by traumatized muscles and tendons, clogged by weight of traffic” (*London* 9). However, even if the wanderers tend to privilege the similarities with the human body, they still do not manage to grasp the urban ecology. The city resembles a body gone wrong, which cannot be prevented from expanding. That is why Roy Porter considers “the city [...as] a process” (8).

However determined the authors might be, they have to give up any illusion to master their relationship to the urban ecology. In the end they can only “stop, turn, retreat, begin again” (*London* 184). Peter Ackroyd admits that

the relationship is unbalanced, the urban ecology dictates its rules: walking codes as well as writing codes:

London is a labyrinth, half of stone and half of flesh. It cannot be conceived in its entirety but can be experienced only as a wilderness of alleys and passages, courts and thoroughfares in which even the most experienced citizen may lose the way; it is curious, too that this labyrinth is in a continual state of change and expansion. [...] The readers of this book must wander and wonder... (1)

Both Sinclair and Ackroyd suggest we might take a distance with the city/ the text. Their works become worlds of make-belief in which the retreats, surrenders, words and images tend to replace the object of the quest: the urban ecology of London.

We may agree with the view that London to quote Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* is a metropolis, which refuses to “submit to the dominion of the cartographers” (327) (Guignery 13). Not only does the urban ecology reject any attempt at mapping its evanescent memory, but it also challenges the explorers, questioning the notions of body, empiricism and spirit of the place. This is the conclusion Graham Swift reaches: “this almost exhausted twentieth century of ours has taught us, often cruelly, sometimes kindly, that we live in an increasingly dislocated world, a world in which cultural and geographical boundaries become even more volatile and confused” (qtd. in Guignery 126).

The Dislocated Representation of London

As they attempt to voice the forgotten past, the authors face the fragmentation of the present. Not only is the past out of reach but obstacles also have piled up on their path. “Everything happens in the present tense. No history, no future. There is no interference with the subject. Fragments of London are perceived as Polaroid epiphanies; signed and abandoned” (*Lights* 2). To understand the past means to unfold various layers of sediments. Even though Walter Benjamin considered that “the past become(s) citable in all its moments” (qtd. in Wolfreys 10), these layers have been disturbed, and the past is no longer within reach. While, according to Sara Danus, the Modernists claim that “the experience of London is the experience of the ‘disintegration of experience’” (qtd. in Wolfreys 16), the Postmodern writers may equate the experience of writing the urban ecology with the experience of the disintegration of meaning.

In order to make sense of this chaotic heritage, Peter Ackroyd reorganises the wealth of references that punctuate his discourse into thematic entries. Thereby he emphasizes the continuities rather than the disruptions, which testify to his conception of history as a whole. The French scholar Georges Létissier coins the term *continuist* to designate the way in which Peter Ackroyd organises *London: The Biography*. Intricately interwoven notes of significant

events, renowned sites, quotes by famous historical personalities or references to fictional characters enable Peter Ackroyd to compose a fictional ecology that turns chaos into a network of quotes, references, where everything connects (305). Therefore, when he reads the biography, the reader finds himself at a crossroads. Indeed the chapters composing *London: The Biography* seem to be connected, providing the reader with a panoramic view, as if he were in a surrogate urban space. Yet, while the narrator pulls on the strings to activate the fictional body of the city, the reader experiences fragmentation. What he deals with is a destabilizing profusion of historical, sociological and cultural details:

Rather than arranging topics according to a linear narrative, or even grouping ideas together by an associative logic, each chapter drills down from a particular point into its subject. The process yields a vast range of insights, as the initial starting conditions differ from the each journey into London's present and past. Yet there is a certain degree of self-replication across time and space, echoes and continuities that pattern what would otherwise be endless, diffuse data. (Lewis: 121)

As the exploration of the city leads to the questioning of empiricism, the fragmentation, experienced by the reader when handling with historical data, becomes a means of conveying the disrupting effect of the urban ecology upon the fictional ecology. Peter Ackroyd relies on both Modernist and Postmodernist devices to convey the ecology in all its disruptive essence. Thereby he ignores the dichotomy between Modernist and Postmodernist aesthetics, showing that only the deliberate hybrid use of literary devices belonging to both aesthetics can match the subversive nature of the urban ecology.

To echo the subversive urban ecology, Gilbert & George make juxtaposition their privileged device to create an imaginary world of their own. In order to represent the city, Gilbert & George use the grid. Its dark contours and the impersonal fonts the artists use to inscribe the title of their works partake in a strategy, according to François Jonquet:

An image is made up of panels, first black and white then coloured, small or gigantic. A grid in which [the artists] place the whole world. The infinitely small and the infinitely great, the sublime and the grotesque, the metaphysical and the trivial coexist inside the grid, without any hierarchy, more and more intricately combined. (15)

How do we make sense of elements that are strangely related within the grid? A work of Gilbert and George might prove a useful case in point: *Fifteen Haunts* from *20 London E1 Pictures*. Against the white background, twenty-four squares can be made out. The picture focuses on Gilbert & George, who stare at the camera. Their enlarged *en pied* portraits are surrounded by the names of streets, reproduced according to the urban iconography (black fonts on white background). We can also make out the E 1 in red - a recurrent

thematic element within the series: E1 stands for East 1 – the postcode of the area where Gilbert & George have been living for forty years. *Fifteen Haunts* stand for the exact number of street tags. Though they refer to specific places in the East End, these streets tags are diverted from their function to enhance the silhouettes of the artists. Both Gilbert & George wear grey suits; only their shirts and shoes are painted red. They stand on a scaled down London ground: the cityscape with skyscrapers hardly meets the knees of the artists. By manipulating the scales, they distort their relationship to the urban ecology. The cityscape appears infinitely small; by contrast the artists seem oversized.

Another detail catches the eye. The magnified bugs function as crowns above the heads of the artists. According to them, bugs symbolise the common denominator to humanity, i.e. promiscuity and dirt. By sporting these bugs, Gilbert and George claim they are the would-be monarchs of city, but can there be two monarchs for one city?

By subverting aesthetic hierarchies, Gilbert & George do not seek to represent the urban ecology realistically; they rather invite us to question our assumptions. Indeed “haunts” also refers to a privileged site, a place you belong to. Yet, does the title *Fifteen Haunts* refer to a real or a fictional ecology? Even though the details (such as street tags, bugs, red shoes and shirts, a down-scaled cityscape) in this work are few, they can be likened to the paraphernalia that help create the illusion of truth on stage, as they represent the world metonymically. Juxtaposed as such, these details form a mosaic. Gilbert & George incite the viewer to scrutinize this mosaic in order to unveil the mechanisms underlying their artistic universe. As much as the urban experience fuels their artistic universe, so much so do the artists distort it by providing the spectator with a subversive representation of the urban ecology.

Whereas Gilbert & George privilege juxtaposition in order to structure their images of their iconoclast ecology of London, Iain Sinclair relies on the Modernist technique of montage. Indeed, it seems to befit his conception of the urban ecology and the way in which he might translate it into word codes. In English, two terms correspond to two procedures that result in montage when combined.

First, in order to rearrange elements into a montage, you start by cutting, i.e. selecting elements such as notes, photos, takes. Then, these details are arranged into narrative units by means of juxtaposition, which is known as “editing” (this creative stage). In the process of writing, the technique and the aesthetic principles merge, enabling Iain Sinclair to elaborate an eminently personal narrative. When he comments on the way Patrick Keiler proceeds, Iain Sinclair incidentally provides a metatextual commentary on his own writing, “constructing a narrative of his own, an anticipation of his future cut-up project, *London Labyrinth*” (*Lights* 299).

Sinclair admits that the city itself functions as a “[s]erial composition” (*Lights* 2). He deliberately reduplicates the fragmentation of the city in the

ecology of his documentary fiction. That is why in Sinclair's works the montage is obvious; the contours of the details remain visible. Like in a patchwork, the author stresses the borders of the objects, images, ideas, so as to emphasize the randomness of the ecology they convey. "There is no interference with the subject. Fragments of London are perceived as Polaroid epiphanies; signed and abandoned" (*Lights 2*). Sinclair privileges montage—with its cutting and editing stages—because it mirrors the dislocation of urban experience. Montage testifies to the various strategies the walker, the author and the reader alike deploy in order to grasp the city. It is through montage that the mind tries to cope with a heterogeneous experience.

Since the fictional ecology relies on the editing of heterogeneous elements: "a sharp-witted collaging of existent narratives, a tapping of voices," (*Lights 126*) Iain Sinclair simply reproduces the discording voices of the urban ecology. He thereby distorts the alienating effect of the city upon him and manages to retaliate by creating a fictional ecology of his own. To achieve this, Sinclair explains: "I'd sit in the pub, read them over, edit them: twin voices, contrapuntal contradictions" (*London 118*). What draws our attention here is "contrapuntal contradictions": contradictions etymologically designate incoherent speeches or actions. "Contrapuntal" belongs to the analysis of music, the counterpoint technique helps to emphasize an instrument by setting it against an ensemble, or contrasts a tune by juxtaposing a second instrument, a voice or a secondary melody. "Contrapuntal contradictions" seems to become a metatextual comment on how the urban ecology is transcribed into a fictional one. In the very same way as Iain Sinclair describes his writing process as contrapuntal, in the very same way his use of Modernist device of montage is to be set against the Postmodern aesthetical framework.

To conclude, the authors address the disruption of the experience in the urban ecology by mirroring its dislocating effects upon their fictional, artistic and documentary ecologies. Fragmentation, juxtaposition and montage help the authors renegotiate their problematic relationship to the city of London and its vanishing past. Just as the urban ecology dislocates the endeavours to understand it empirically, similarly so the artistic and fictional ecologies dismantle the reader's and the viewer's understandings. The artistic universes may be likened to a *mise en abyme* of the urban ecology.

The Dislocation of the Site of Memory

Paradoxically enough, it is through the dis-membering or the distortion of the city body by the authors that a re-membering and a re-collection of London become possible. Therefore, the authors can manage to reach and reproduce the memory at the verge of disappearing. Disorientation and dislocation, be it geographical or metaphorical, are symptomatic of what Anthony Vidler defines as posturbanism:

In this conception of the city, [...] we find ourselves lost '(a) midst the ruins of monuments no longer significant because deprived of their systematic status, and often of their corporeality, walking on the dust of inscriptions no longer decipherable because lacking so many words, whether carved in stone or shaped in neon, we cross nothing to go nowhere'. It is this sense of being nowhere that Vidler terms 'posturbanism', an experience of place where the margins have entirely invaded the centre and disseminated the focus. (qtd. in Parsons 9)

The concept of post-urbanism exemplifies the systematic questioning that underlies the way we apprehend our surroundings. If the individual is no longer able to make out the inscriptions on the monuments, memorials, traces or ruins, then his perceptions cannot be trusted and have to adjust to the challenging environment.

Despite radically different approaches to their common quest, Iain Sinclair and Peter Ackroyd share the conception of wanderings:

The city appears as a changing character and a shifting site, it is geographically and historically (re)mapped and (re)patterned, and it remains at the same time elusive and labyrinthine, full of mystery and hasard. Walking the streets of London features a recurring theme and metaphor in the writings of both authors: the 'stalker' or 'walker with a thesis' provides both narrative position for Sinclair and the point of entry into the text for the reader. In Ackroyd's writings, the figure of the 'walker' or 'wanderer' signifies the relationship between the subject and the city. (Onega & Stotesburry 142)

Whereas Iain Sinclair ponders on the materiality of the city/ the text, Peter Ackroyd considers the city as a vast reservoir of knowledge to be apprehended ontologically. He focuses on the way in which the city comes to embody our past. As a result, the fictional, artistic and documentary ecologies are to be read as endeavours to conjure up a vanishing heritage. They can be likened to alternative memorials to the collective memory.

In his seminal work, *Writing London*, Julian Wolfreys explores how the fictional representation of London is a means whereby a specific memory can be reactivated. The scholar contrasts acknowledged blue plaques, memorials, National Trust and English heritage industries with the notion of sites of memory: "*lieux de mémoire*: sites of memory: a concept for an alternative historical praxis addressing the relation of memory to particular locations" (165). Although Julian Wolfreys summons this concept in relation to Iain Sinclair's documentary fiction, it is also relevant when applied to Peter Ackroyd's cultural biography of London. By conjuring up fictional or documentary ecologies mirroring the urban ecology, both Sinclair and Ackroyd perform what has become the ethical duty of writers, to Julian Wolfreys' eyes:

Where various areas of London have been radically emptied of collective memory, through extensive rebuilding, commercial development and

gentrification alongside project of community relocation, it becomes the writer's responsibility as the conduit for the mnemotechnic, producing the palimpsest — topography of that which would otherwise be obliterated. (166)

The concept of sites of memory is borrowed to the French historian Pierre Nora; they seem to challenge a double-edged issue. On the one hand, sites of memory embody a form of the past that should be preserved as such. On the other hand, it is through the intervention of walkers, writers or artists that the memory is activated, establishing a genuine and immaterial connection with the vanishing past. Even if it entails the risk of betraying the memory (by means of appropriation or fictionalisation), Pierre Nora approves of a distortion in the way we may use those sites:

Indeed, if it is true that the fundamental reason of a site of memory is to stop the time, to prevent oblivion, [...] to embody the immaterial in order to [...] encapsulate a maximum of meaning within a maximum number of signs, obviously and this is what makes them so enticing, the sites of memory only survive through their ability to change, to reinvent their meaning endlessly and to foster unforeseen connections and ramifications. (xxxv)

For the historian, sites of memory elicit creativity. Julian Wolfreys explores even further this creative relationship to the past. To his eyes the urban ecology turns out to be a space invested by imagination, a space that shapes the artists' universes and is in turn shaped by them. There exists interdependence in the reading (deciphering) of the memory in the urban ecology and its recreation within artistic realms. Bearing this in mind, Julian Wolfreys establishes a connection with Andreas Huyssen's conception of the topographic exploration of urban ecology as "a register of imaginaries" (4).

Inscribing the temporal dimension of urban place in such contextual production is significant, argues Huyssen, in two ways: it brings out of the present location 'memories of what was there before', while, often, simultaneously, it projects 'imagined alternatives to what there is.' (Wolfreys 166)

Wolfreys considers the artistic endeavours to reach the past and the collective memory as so many attempts at offering alternative pasts and memories. Even though "cities promise plenitude, but deliver inaccessibility" (Wirth 8), they still invite us to interact with the past. The documentary fiction by Iain Sinclair, the cultural biography of London and the urban series by Gilbert & George have then to be interpreted not only as sites of memory but also as alternative and creative responses to the past that can no longer be reached. Indeed, *London: The Biography*, *Lights Out For the Territory*, *London Orbital* are instances of sites of memory: They bear the characteristics of such sites as defined by Pierre Nora, they are "material, symbolic and functional" (xxxiv). The fictional ecology becomes the very space where words

can conjure the past. It coincides with Julian Wolfreys' belief that "(t)he materiality of history thus becomes translated as the materiality of the letter" (162).

The act of writing London is then a double act: of reading as rereading and rewriting, of invocation and disclosure of the hitherto invisible, whereby what comes to be remarked is what is already at work, and which, in returning, appears as the traces of multiple cultures, histories and events. (Wolfreys 129)

The various endeavours to retrieve a collective memory seem to be exhausted by the very nature of the urban experience. However the artistic realms that spring from the frustrating urban experience turn out to be replenished, to reinterpret the past, preserved by the institutions, offering alternative memories to the walker, the author and the reader alike.

The exploration of the collective memory within the urban ecology of London has unveiled several theoretical and practical dead-ends: the very notions of the body, of empiricism and of the spirit of the place have been renegotiated within the urban realm. This in turn has heavily impacted the artistic universes of Peter Ackroyd, Gilbert & George and Iain Sinclair, who have attempted at mirroring the regulating principle of the urban ecology by the dislocation of their works. In the end, the artistic recreations of the past have offered the most valuable attempts at reaching an evanescent memory, providing the reader with fragile ecologies of knowledge. By the term, fragile "ecologies of knowledge," we mean elements from the past assembled through the techniques of juxtaposition, montage and fragmentation into puzzling and provisional systems of knowledge.

The frailty of these ecologies of knowledge is obviously related to the nature and the scope of the dislocation at work within the urban experience. The analysis of the works leads us to equate dislocation with distortion. Indeed, dislocation does not simply entail the displacement of the subject matter but, more radically so, its utter disruption. The dislocation of the urban experience by the urban ecology corresponds to its radical questioning that is mirrored by the artistic ecologies created by the authors. Furthermore, our access to the vanishing memory is similarly displaced, i.e. redefined: while the reader expects to re-collect collective past, by the end of his quest he or she discovers the ways in which the authors have addressed the issue of representing fragile realms of knowledge. In the end the attempts at representing the frustrating quest for the past have proven more meaningful than the quest itself, obeying to the phenomenon of dislocation.

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