





The sprawl looking toward the city from where it expects redemption. (Newport City, New Jersey)

# Redemption.

by MARKUS SCHAEFER

- 1 **Synchronicity** Coincidental occurrence of events, and especially psychic events (as in similar thoughts in widely separated persons or a mental image of an unexpected event before it happens), that seem related but are not explained by conventional mechanisms of causality—used especially in the psychology of Carl Jung.
- 2 **Fantasy** "At the Jerde Partnership we believe that the particular, applicable language of architecture should be derived from the 'host' place. Each building is a contributor to a common vernacular architecture, or glue, that forms the background to the experiential matrix of that unique location. This goes beyond mere contextual fit, and as a corollary to *heartmaking*, it includes a distillate of the fantasies that citizens collectively hold about their place. This is a subtle issue of great importance, fantasy about a place is a primary perceptual method by which people form a bond with their home."
- 3 **Los Angeles** Urban sprawl at the end of the world, a former desert with the highest incidence of incorporated production of cultural syncretism. Featured in a myriad of films and TV shows, it is as much figment as it is reality. Its "sound studios were immense hangars insulated with mattresses. Within this cavernous subconscious, the collective dreams of American culture were fabricated."
- 4 **Childhood** Since the advent of psychoanalysis, an important rationalization of the self and a source of personal authenticity.
- 5 **Oil field trash** Jon Jerde's mythical origin. The nomadic day workers who travel the oil fields of North America.
- 6 **Foxhole** Retreat for the loner and womb in which to spawn personal insight. Cf. Luke Skywalker's experiences on Dagobah.
- 7 **Crowd** Instance of social behavior that fascinates Jerde. Cf. Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (London and New York: Routledge, 1856).

Synchronicity<sup>1</sup> revisited. Arriving at LAX, diving into a city that started as a myth . . .

*Jon Jerde works on the reinvention of the city, on reviving the genuine, the communal, and the fantastic.<sup>2</sup> From the raw material of commercial architecture—shops, offices, hotels, entertainment districts—he creates places that are mythological occurrences as much as space. They might be called themed environments. But they are as well the decorated sheds vis-à-vis the ducks of the modernist narrative of technology, materials, publicness, and authenticity, which at the moment has to be concocted ever afresh, with vast doses of theoretical effort and free student labor.*

Moving along a band of gray asphalt through the bleached colors of Los Angeles,<sup>3</sup> tipping downward, toward the sea at the horizon . . .

*Jon Jerde was born<sup>4</sup> into oil-field trash,<sup>5</sup> whose nomadic life stretched from lower Texas up to the fields of Canada, working in a place for just months at a time, then moving on. The eccentric beauty of the old steel would fascinate him all his life. He was a loner but increasingly adept at connecting to people and observing his environment. He discovered a foxhole<sup>6</sup> once and built a city in it, captivated by the interior negative space that so closely resembled the world of his imagination. Sauntering among the visitors to a rural amusement park, he savored the detached concentration of the loner in the anonymous masses. Yet the yearning for the collective was so strong, even the madness of the crowd<sup>7</sup> would have been a relief. Later, Jerde moved with his mother away from the fields and began to study architecture, first autodidactically, then at the University of Southern California. Kahn and Rudolph were his heroes, high architecture his*

aim. Kahn, after all, was the incarnation of an architect's individuation; the stronger his buildings resembled ancient mandalas,<sup>8</sup> the more incomprehensible, yet seductive, became his speech—silence and light, the realm of the illuminated and the burned.

Apparently, Jerde was a good student. He received a scholarship to study in Europe. There he discovered the Italian hill towns, which were a revelation; he encountered the imprint of the collective he so desired. Human creativity in organic unison met cultural depth under the light of the Mediterranean Sea.

When his first wife left him, he was alone again and stuck in what every self-respecting architect resented most—retail. He therefore started to reinvent himself anew. Rejected by the people, humanity became his goal. Following the path of the ancient prophets (Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed), he strove to fuse the “we-culture” and the “you-culture” into the “us-culture.”<sup>9</sup> Again and again, he found a basic human sense of place in foreign cultures, impressions he would later translate in his designs.

In Jerde's utopian cities—the perfectly round built-up hill of Eurodisney,<sup>10</sup> for example—imageable technologies, such as water channels and windmills powering elevators and boats, celebrate the synthesis of ancient and future technology that is so powerful in the nostalgia of science fiction. Whether Jerde is constructing the future to come or the future we have already lost remains to be seen.

He is the fox in his hole, hosting us and holding us captive with his tales. In his paintings, he provides the armature<sup>11</sup> for new cities. The essential task is heartmaking,<sup>12</sup> creating emotional poles that are staked into the anomie of the metropolis. Shopping is just a bait to lure people into the cave, where “I can do with you what I want.” And it is collagen<sup>13</sup> that holds the project together. In the new “secret city” in Las Vegas, a motion simulator evokes a passage from the ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, the purification of the soul. Inescapable imageability, individuation for the mob, shareholders of the ka.<sup>14</sup> Somewhere in the back of our heads a slight anxiety in dealing with cyberspace,<sup>15</sup> the vastness and fluidity of the purely symbolic universe, the black continent of our time.

Venice beach.<sup>16</sup> Aegean light over the global driftwood of humanity. Jerde's office is in a building that abuts Oceanfront Walk. The storefronts on the ground floor are interspersed with mirrored windows, behind them people working on Asian cities. It is entered through the garage, no sign, some potted plants. A receptionist thumbs me to an elevator. I step into a cave, a wooden Buddha smiling, all paths leading to a place out of sight. Light comes down a blue curved stairway. Eddy Wang<sup>17</sup> is walking by, smiling mercurially. In the library I flip through the books: China, Italy, . . . On a shelf, one of those globes

**Mandala** Sanskrit for “circle.” In Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism, a symbolic diagram used in the performance of sacred rites and as an instrument of meditation. The mandala is basically a representation of the universe, a consecrated area that serves as a receptacle for the gods and as a collection point of universal forces. Man (the microcosm), by mentally “entering” the mandala and “proceeding” toward its center, is by analogy guided through the cosmic processes of disintegration and reintegration (individuation).

**Individuation** According to Carl Jung, the self is a totality, consisting of conscious and unconscious elements, that dwarfs the ego in scope and intensity. The maturation of the self is the individuation process, the goal of the healthy personality. Jung published studies of mandalalike drawings executed by his patients. In his view, the spontaneous production of a mandala is a step in the individuation process and represents an attempt by the conscious self to integrate hitherto unconscious material.

**Us-culture** World unity stripped of religious ideology, but nevertheless understood within the traditions of the founders of the great world religions.

**Eurodisney** So far, the clearest formulation of Jerde's utopian project. In a situation of ideological perversion and programmatic absurdity, he proposed the perfect city, modeled after the ancient conception of the world: “If for some crazy reason you wanted to leave the earth and you grabbed that disc you would probably have a fairly good representative section of the planet in the way of built habitat, domesticated landscape and wilderness.”

**Armature** Framework used by a sculptor to support a figure being modeled in a plastic material. In Jerde's terminology, it describes his contribution in the “co-creative” environment of his projects. First and foremost, it is a painting by Jerde, a way of self-expression, its undulating shapes closely tied to his **hand**, and a sensibility, its expressiveness drawing upon the strength of narration. As such, the armature is form as well as a vision, replacing the formulaic character of the master plan or the abstract nature of the **grid**. It serves as a vessel for bringing together form and the various specialists at work on it. Its narrative aspect oscillates between “theme,” its application in shopping or amusement park environments, and “myth,” its reverberation in individual and mass psychology. Armature is “based on a catalogue of archetypes.” It is a “structure upon which to attach the menus of Experiential Design, geographies of use, and zones of special place.”

**Hand** Icon of the modernist architect, urbanism at the fingertips, a symbol of agency.

**Grid** Modernist answer to the dead end of cultural symbolism and the basis for an impressive number of careers in art and architecture. The grid is a matrix that holds all possibilities, most profoundly expressed in the “City of the Lost Globe,” where all the utopian projects of modernism find a haven and a place for coexistence. The grid, in this sense, is based on the idea of maximal possible freedom rather than participation in a myth.

**Heartmaking** Reconstructive surgery on the contemporary city, which is a montage of disjointed parts. “The promise of heartmaking is meaningful relatedness to place that engenders a sense of belonging, of well being.”

**Collagen** Connective tissue in the body.

**Ka** In ancient Egyptian religion, with *ba* and *akh*, a principal aspect of the soul of a human being or of a god. Written by a hieroglyph of uplifted arms, it seems originally to have designated the protecting divine spirit of a person, and later the personified sum of physical and intellectual qualities constituting an “individuality.” The *ka* survived the death of the body and could reside in a picture

or statue of a person.

- 15 **Cyberspace** "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts. . . . A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non-space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding" (William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 1984).
- 16 **Venice Beach** Where prophets rub shoulders with the masses. **Masses** Object of redemption.
- 17 **Wang, Eddy** Jerde's longtime partner, orchestrating the business side of the office.
- 18 **War room** Panoptical fantasy of a shrinking globe. A place for drama, where sweating, exhausted field agents appeal to the empathy of the powerful. A place for the scheming of redemption.
- 19 **Slot** New technology (fax machine?) to be implemented in Jerde's war room, illustrative of the perceived synchronicity as well as the extent of Jerde's empire.
- 20 **Japanese** Important and long-standing exponents of the "yoculture." Increasingly familiar, but still very effectively foreign in a group appearance.
- 21 **Jung, Carl G.** Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytic psychology, in some aspects a response to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis.
- 22 **Wynn, Steve** Turned Las Vegas into a corporation and an attraction for families.
- 23 **Shaman** Priest or priestess who uses magic to cure the sick, divine the hidden, and control events.
- 24 **Globe** Constantly shrinking speck of dust somewhere in the universe, implicated in the creation of numerous plots, schemes, and utopias; was presumed to be lost.
- 25 **jack out** Term used in cyberpunk literature: to leave the symbolic universe of cyberspace, which is, due to the vicissitudes of plot, always done with a sense of urgency.

with snowflakes inside, a beach scene with two surfers, a Christmas present from the Jerde Partnership.

We visit the "war room."<sup>18</sup> A paper dropped in the slot<sup>19</sup> on the table is supposed to appear in any other office in the world, at any time, since "the sun never sets" on Jerde's projects. A delegation of Japanese<sup>20</sup> appears, white-haired, distinguished. They bow, Jerde bows back. Stout in blue shirt and suspenders, vintage, with a slight whiff of hand-rolled cigars; serious, as if an important transaction is about to take place. He sees himself like the Jews in earlier times, cross-fertilizing cultures, and Jung<sup>21</sup> is his "big man." On the wall a drawing: "from multiplicity to unity." He talks about sitting at a poolside with Steve Wynn<sup>22</sup>—being flown there in Wynn's personal jet—scheming the rescue of downtown Las Vegas. Jerde's own office, an inner sanctum, three doors and three turns from the entry, has dark red walls with a hand-knotted carpet, a big table made from heavy heartwood, a Buddha in silver, smiling imperturbably, and again light filtering down. He looks for a word for what he is doing, nobody he has ever asked has had an answer. "Merging," I think, creating "second depth" out of the hallucination of a potential past, somewhere between cultural pastiche, shamanic<sup>23</sup> vision, and Jungian mandala, laying it down as seed for future becoming—a gift to the city of the redeemed globe.<sup>24</sup>

Some more Japanese. I jack out<sup>25</sup>—leave to lie in the sun.

Utopian perfection in the face of ideological perversion and programmatic absurdity. Challenging the simulacrum with the mandala. (Satellite New Town, Paris, France)