

ELS VERBAKEL LECTURE

ARCHITECTURE LECTURE SERIES
2018, UNIVERSITY OF CYPRUS

VANISHING POINTS: THE HORIZONTALITY OF ISRAELI URBANISM



THURSDAY 15 MARCH, 2018
19.00 - 21.00

LEDRAS 68, 1010, NICOSIA
GROUND FLOOR EXHIBITION AREA
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE

LECTURE

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When debating horizontality as a viewpoint by which we look at contemporary cities, we may think in very literal terms. We may imagine a homogeneously distributed, spread out, low rise city without borders, crawling across the territory following market forces and seeking benign grounds for it to prosper and multiply fed by market forces. In a sense, the horizontal characteristics of the city become more apparent only when zooming out and looking across the terrain at an ever expanding urban landscape.

Yet in parallel, a more profound understanding takes shape that points at a more complex condition of horizontality, whereby urban layers are grafted upon previous layers that organized the territory such as infrastructure, industry, topography, agriculture, conflicts and interact with one another not unlike the shifting of tectonic plates. This deeper understanding of horizontality challenges us to develop descriptions and models that are less literally interpreting the contemporary city as homogeneous, low-rise and spread out, but rather dissecting the urban realm as made up of horizontal layers that interact with one another, either by mutual adaptation or resistance.

In a territory in conflict such as the Israeli urban realm, horizontality has become a powerful tool for a new Israeli city to survive despite the urban layers that existed before. The new Israeli urban realm has developed as a horizontal layer hovering over the land avoiding points of contact as much as possible, without engaging with the territory. As a national project, the new Israeli city was to conquer the wilderness, disregarding former urban inhabitation and relating to the landscape as an uninhabitable wild form of nature that should be tamed and cultivated. The horizontality of the Israeli city was thereby maximized as a strategy to disconnect as much as possible from former layers, and allowed for a high-rise type of sprawl on columns. Between the feet of the Israeli city, ruins of former Palestinian settlements remained, taken over by a barren, dry and arid landscape.

And still today, as regional and international supremacies maintain and feed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the Israeli city continues to develop horizontally, designed as an extruded two dimensional plan, incessantly multiplying mutations of the patterns of Le Corbusier's clockwork city. Sections have become completely obsolete in designing the Israeli city. The architects behind these new neighborhoods and new towns of tens of thousands of housing units planned for the Israeli periphery get by with 2D layouts for the repetitive generic urban loaf of 10 to 25 stories high to mold itself across the territory.

ELS VERBAKEL



Els Verbakel is founding partner of Derman Verbakel Architecture and the Director of the Graduate Program in Urban Design at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem. She directs the UNESCO Chair in Urban Design and Conservation Studies and is a founding member of the Israel Urban Forum. She has taught as a professor in architecture and urban design at the Technion Faculty of Architecture and Town Planning, Columbia University GSAPP, Princeton School of Architecture, Pratt Institute and the University of Leuven, Belgium. Els has a PhD in Architecture from Princeton University, MSc in Architecture and Urban Design from Columbia University and a Masters in Architecture and Civil Engineering from the University of Leuven in Belgium. She has published the books *In Search of the Public. Notes on the Contemporary American City* (2013), *Cities of Dispersal* (2008) and *Constellations: Constructing Urban Design Practices* (2007).

