



Poetics for the Uncertain

The Great Island
of Replicas

By Constantinos Marcou

Nicosia is Europe's only remaining divided capital. In 1974, after decades of conflict, the island of Cyprus was split into two parts: the Greek Cypriot side and the Turkish Cypriot side. In the meantime, the act of separation and the spatial consequences of the political conflict has given birth, on an existential level, to the need to dwell within a distorted understanding of what the two sides perceived as familiar. Domestic spaces were adapted. Streets were renamed.



Constantinos Marcou

Constantinos Marcou was born in London in 1988. He is a writer, architect and urban designer. Marcou studied architecture at the University of Cyprus and has an MA in Urban Design from the Bartlett School of Architecture in London. His research projects investigate the complex relationship between architecture and socio-political reform in the context of emancipatory struggles. He has been engaged with several projects, for which he received international recognition and exhibits and lectures both nationally and internationally.

Opposite: "The lady in blue handed a dossier full of sketches, blueprints and documents regarding the Great Island of Replicas to the young journalist."

The Great Island of Replicas, ch. 5: *The replica project*

This page "The agony and fear of losing important moments of the past can bring out the worst in people. Nobody wants to lose a part of himself..."

The Great Island of Replicas, ch. 2: *A colony of lost artefacts*



Narratives were suppressed. Monuments were either neglected or used as significant sites for the inscription of national ideologies, gradually producing culturally homogenous sides. The Buffer Zone between the two sides, on the other hand, remains the only untouched territory where dusty forgotten objects – the abandoned and once inhabited houses, the gardens and rivers no-one can cross, the leftovers of important historical moments – are camouflaged by a delirious and romanticised perception, often projected as an attraction or a territory for environmental study.

Loss and fear of the unfamiliar can take various forms, often leading to unorthodox or extreme acts. The illustrated story, “The Great Island of Replicas”, is an homage to such post-traumatic territories where familiar everyday life and “normality” are disrupted by the unexpected creation of ruins within our cities. The story takes place in a post-apocalyptic era and is a dialogue between a journalist and an archaeologist. The Archaeologist, the protagonist, was once a member of a secret organisation that was in charge of dealing with the preservation of society’s historical memory cultivated via its image of the city. Creating archives, mapping, documenting historical monuments and replacing the ruins with replicas are some of the practices undertaken by the secret organisation, acting always in a concealed manner, for the reconstruction process. Without ever actually referring to the case of Cyprus, allegories are used both in the text and in the narrative’s visual representation suggesting that loss and the iconography of trauma shape not only the way individuals reconsider the urban realm but also the collective cultural production on different scales.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle writes about how the art of poetry is based on imitating aspects of everyday life and human

Opposite: “Imagine a travelling circus. The greatest acts take place in the centre of the tent while all the other necessary yet secondary rituals take place at its edges.”

The Great Island of Replicas,
ch. 3: *Within the wall*



*“This story is not my story.
It belongs to the cities. It is our
cities’ story”*

The Great Island of Replicas,
ch. 1: A topography
of monuments

interaction, projecting at the same time ethics; society’s guiding principles. In the mid-1990s, the French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud invented the term “relational aesthetics”, describing it as “a set of practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context”.¹ Therefore,

¹ In Nicolas Bourriaud,
Relational Aesthetics,
Les presses du réel,
English edition, 2002.

Archifutures

architecture should be understood not just as built matter, but as the embodiment of values, ideologies and the effects of human interaction. “The Great Island of Replicas” – as a poetic for an uncertain future, where ruins become monuments to the unavoidable transience of human existence – serves as an example of how architecture can raise issues by using different means of communication productively, as instruments for problematisation. ■