

Joachim Koester / Matthew Buckingham
Sandra of the Tuliphouse or How to Live in a Free State
2001

Section 11/11

Like suits of armor, the new walls of the star-shaped cities both protected and constricted, sometimes paralyzing urbanism. Expanding cities were forced to build up instead of out, and when they were not under attack they found temporary uses for the free space protecting them. In Copenhagen, fortifications were used by civilians who built windmills on the bastions, and fished in the moats. Farmers rented the ramparts and planted hay and fruit trees. One trench with a cherry orchard was used so often for picnics on weekends it was renamed The Cherry Walk.

As the European arms race continued into the nineteenth century, and artillery defenses slowly became obsolete, the empty space between the Copenhagen ramparts was discretely sold to the private sector in pieces small enough to keep real-estate prices high. Profits from this financed an entirely new modern defense preparing Copenhagen and Denmark for war in the age of machines.

All over Europe cities have recycled their spaces of defense. Today the Tower of London appears to be under siege by an army of the next generation, encamped on its Eastern wall.

In Copenhagen Georg Carstensen, a journalist, founded the summer amusement garden of Tivoli, in 1843, on part of the former ramparts. The lakes inside are remains of the old moats.

Even the model depicting Copenhagen in the year 1530 in front of the City Museum occupies a space of military obsolescence: the former site of an air raid shelter, torn down in the '50s to make way for the small town.

Random fragments of the old defense are reused for ripening bananas, storing film and x-ray plates, and, in a few cases, they provide the foundations and basements for suburban houses.

In 1909 the Christianshavn ramparts were deemed out of date, and converted into the Boatman's Street Barracks. In 1969 the army moved out, making these ramparts obsolete for a second time. This left open an internal frontier—very attractive to a small group of young people.

Elisabeth told me that by 1970 some of her friends had begun a secret collective in the Boatman Street Barracks. She said they had a silent agreement with the night watchman, who, like so many gatekeepers before him, gently surrendered to circumstances. They lived safe and sound. The outer districts of the base were only for the brave and the adventurous—the ones who wanted to try the utmost extreme—to live all alone in a deserted place on forbidden land.

The twentieth century was the first without a frontier—the last bit of Earth not claimed by any nation-state disappeared in 1899, one year before Japan got rid of its last wolf.

But a hundred years later wolves are back in the streets of European cities. It's estimated there are forty-five thousand in Russia alone. They are living within a few kilometers of Rome (a city whose founder, of course, counted a wolf as his surrogate mother) and the people of Brasov, Romania, frequently find wolves around their shopping mall. This has led to a wide spread social war in the name of the wolf between the species' urban protec-

tors and the wolf's rural rival, the farmers.

Section 12

Although Pusher Street, in Christiania, has been around a long time it still looks provisional and evokes the feeling of a frontier town in the American West. But after wandering deeper into The Free City, it's easy to forget Pusher Street, and all of Copenhagen. Any path will lead you into the trees, and one will take you to the Tuliphouse where I spent the summer surrounded by an accidental forest. Gardens, defined by their borders, use received ideas about nature to position their subject, the visitor. Yesterday I made the trip to the only part of Copenhagen's old defense system still in use—the Citadel. This used to be a small star within the larger star, a spider's nest, the Queen's bastion. It's still maintained by the military as a garden of sorts—a museum of antiquated gardening techniques for war.

My fascination for the dots spread as I noticed they are to be found neatly lined up everywhere. The individual dot evades our capacity to find its center. Where is the central point, axis, pole, dominant interest, fixed position, absolute structure or decided goal?

This aspect of the dot is made explicit when it is multiplied by three, creating an ellipsis. A period, or full-stop demands an ending, but three points together imply infinite points, making endings impossible. The ellipsis marks the indeterminate, but it also has the ability to join any two sentences together, and any ellipsis can potentially be connected to any other ellipsis, forming an infinite chain of possible thought.

This is what makes these three dots a frontier of sorts, a horizon line—a limit which is not a limit, because it's always receding into the distance. Empty space urging us onward, reminding us that the vanishing point of history is always the present moment.

Byens Lys, Christiania
backstage videoinstallation
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