

## **Vriesendorp Syndrome: Overwhelmed by the Geographies of Sensation, Memory and Plenty**

We meet at Starbucks where a sign reads 'Geography is a Flavour'. It's in a shopping mall called Villagio, in the shadow of a sculptural observation tower in Doha's Sport City that looks like a gigantic vase on the skyline. We're with our client and here to meet an engineer, his assistants and the Mall manager. They are taking us to see a potential site for a high-end fashion store.

We are led through a grand barrel vaulted hall as though we are on our way to meet a Roman emperor apart from the fact that one side has been slashed open to reveal an industrial-fluorescent Carrefour hypermarche so deep that we can't see its end. Ahead, a giant arch frames a view into an Italianate scene under a painted sky.

The name Villagio linguistically suggests an Italianified term for a type of settlement and explicitly reveals this mall's particular geographic flavour. Both Italian-ness and village-ness are exotic concepts in the nomadic-to-metropolis accelerated curve of Doha's Gulf coast urbanism. Out of time historicism and dislocated reference to place only serves to amplify sensations of unreality.

In the desert landscape, Italian-ness is expressed in the terracotta render and pan-tiled protrusions as the building writhes around within its tarmacked car park. The interior takes us on a lightening quick tour of Italian-ness. Trailing our guide, we walk through a Tuscan-esque town whose floor is so shiny that it looks like it has just rained. Through a pseudo-Verona full of balconies that no Juliet will appear from – unless that is, she's been working in the stock room. Then into a wing that is freshly-Venetian where miniature bridges cross a trough of mini-canal complete with motionless gondolas. Fine carved stone in Venetian gothic style is set into quickly erected studwork.

The Engineer opens a door in a temporary hording lit by tungsten-bulbed gas light fittings. And we step into a building site of an extension that is heading out into the desert landscape fast.

While the Engineer talks to the Foreman, we get a chance to look around. We're in a street that seems to be modelled on Milan's Galleria. Though it seems to have become bent. Above us is a giant oculus, whose centre remains open to the sky. Along its length it transforms from almost complete to skeletal steel structure as though it were a diagram explaining Mall construction principles. Scenography decomposes into desert.

This is soon to become Villagio's luxury brand wing. The Manager tells us that tenants already confirmed include Prada and Dolce & Gabbana. Perhaps their leases were laced with irony upon finding themselves residing in an artificial Milan like captive animals in accurate simulations of their natural habitat.

However, Villagio's double-take sensation comes not from its attempts to replicate Italy. Instead what it recalls are those famous desert based grand scale copies, The Venetian and Bellagio. Villagio is a copy of Vegas, a replica that echoes replicas.

Strange things happen in deserts: fairytale banishments, biblical flight and atomic testing as examples of extreme strangeness. It's a terrain outside of the normal conceptions of landscapes. They are places of mysteriousness and mysticism, of the secret, distant, lonely and desperate. They are stages for out-of-the ordinary narratives (sometimes beginnings, sometimes ends, sometimes ordeals). So its perhaps strange that there should be - amongst this emptiness – so many projects that replicate the core of Western civilisation: Villagio joins the Venetian and Bellagio as Renaissance replicas. Perhaps, amongst their simulated environments is a sublimated desire to contrast the density of culture with the deserts emptiness. The nature of the contrast remains unresolved as either ironic or optimistic.

Vegas' casinos and Villagio also belong to the desert phenomena of mirage – of seeing a thing or a place that is impossible. These hallucinations may be tricks of perception caused by the refraction of light, but they are quickly resolved as desire, as longing and as an escape from ones surroundings like a cartoon where an exhausted explorer reaches out toward a shimmering oasis.

Geography – like time - is an incurable condition. Distance condemns us to singular experiences. Space separates us from everywhere else and everyone else. Art and science – driven perhaps by a desire to slip these constraints - have offered us escapes and some respite from our geographic fate. Technologies of transport and communication have drawn the horizon ever closer. Geography as a hard fact of 4.5 billion years of cosmology, geology, evolution and human activity has become hazier. Our experience of geography is becoming more fluid.

Maybe that Starbucks sign is right. Maybe geography really has become a flavour. Something that can be measured, mixed, and poured; made and remade according to recipes. Maybe there is a kind of geographic alchemy, a philosopher's stone that transforms place.

Is that what has touched fabrications such as Villagio, Bellagio, and so on? Maybe these massive replicas are attempts to cheat geography, to slip the constraints of place. In this way they may be more than a simple commercial response to the problem of marketing leisure industry behemoths.

That commercial response is a kind of geographic drag act. A pirating of 'place' to cash in on the unprotected intellectual rights of signature locations. Through mimicry, they attempt osmosis of place, an infusion of identity. They hope for a short-cut to success through geographic and cultural passing off.

In place of accuracy, these places strive for sensation, to generate a feeling strong enough to work us over until we forget that the construction techniques that surround us are completely generic, that the mechanisms of resort hotels, of mega casinos and shopping malls are as globally consistent as the taste and texture of your Starbucks latte. Instead of knowledge, they deploy a glowing hyper real halucinatory quality – an effort of overpowering reality.

They deploy signs and signifiers in place of academic fact as shorthand that comes pre-digested from a shared cultural experience. They are closer to the travel brochure than the destination, to the advertisement rather than the experience. They use

techniques such as framing editing and narrative that have more in common with the construction of a press release than the specifics of architectural composition that one might find in a copy of Bannister Fletcher.

In truth they are replicas not of places but of the mechanisms by which we collectively know these famous places. They are built from that most lowly, detached, disengaged and aimless point of view: That of the contemporary Tourist.

Tourism is a particular kind of way of experiencing the world. It is an industry, a mechanism and a point of view. Tourism's low regard is derived from the quality of the experience it delivers. It is as though at some point there was a more normal, natural, authentic way to be in the world that commercialisation has been interrupted. Maybe it was the feeling Captain Cook experienced when viewing Botany Bay, Edmund Hillary felt at the Everest's summit, or perhaps Neil Armstrong as he stepped onto the Moon's surface. Maybe Ansel Adams felt it photographing Yosemite or JMW Turner trembled with it as he looked out over stormy seas. These are moments that we imagine to be of sublime experience, of unique direct connection between individual and place that we experience vicariously.

Against the markers of authentic experience that Cook, Hillary, Armstrong, Adams, Turner and all those other figures who discovered or profoundly experienced distant places, we feel that our package tour engagement with place is somehow emptier, more superficial, and disengaged – devalued by the mechanisms that have delivered us to the point of the experience, that have turned the sublime into a commodity.

Souvenirs are perhaps the most pathetic symbols of tourist culture – exposing a total inability to engage with a moment or place. They stand-in for a lack of immediate significant experience of our encounters with greatness, with history, the remarkable and the unique. They act like bookmarks in novels we may return to later; as deposits that we hope will repay us at a later date. They embody, through their commodified reduction of significance, Douglas Coupland's phrase: 'bought experiences don't count' – which summarises our distrust of the relationship between commerce and feeling, exactly the easy, uncomfortable relationship we have with tourism as an activity.

The souvenir simply proves that yes, you are, or were, there. They are the equivalent of not knowing what to say when you meet a favorite celebrity. Confrontation with experience demands some kind of reaction. And most likely, we are woefully under-prepared, under-educated, over-tired and overwhelmed by the experience.

You might call it a repressed or inverted Stendhal's syndrome – the condition identified by Dr. Graziella Magherini, a psychiatrist at Florence's Santa Maria Nuova Hospital. She noticed that many of the tourists who visited Florence were overcome with anything from panic attacks to bouts of madness that lasted several days. She named the condition after the French novelist Stendhal, who visited Florence in 1817 and soon found himself overwhelmed by the city's intensely rich legacy of art and history. When he visited Santa Croce (the cathedral where Machiavelli, Michelangelo, and Galileo are buried) and saw Giotto's ceiling frescoes for the first time, he was overcome with emotion:

"I was in a sort of ecstasy, from the idea of being in Florence, close to the great men whose tombs I had seen. Absorbed in the contemplation of sublime beauty ... I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations ... Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call 'nerves.' Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling."

Stendhal's syndrome is an extreme example of how tourism affects our perception. It overtakes the content and warps our understanding. Tourism, rather than the place we are visiting becomes the experience. It may condense experience into something unbearably dense and rich – as in Stendhal's case - or it can wreath sites like a trivial fog obscuring the great and the remarkable, cloaking it in the shallow and insistent as we descend the steps of our coach tour to yet another site, thing or place.

Stendhal was experiencing part of the Grand Tour – which became almost obligatory for young gentlemen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Grand Tourists were led across Europe by tutors to study art, history and politics, visiting the sites of antiquity and culture.

The Tour linked together culture, compressed geography and history into a concentrate. Distilled, Classical and Renaissance culture becomes a heady draft. The Grand Tour packaged up Classical civilisation and offered it as a experience that could be bought, with the promise that exposure to would transform those who took part. It's exactly the Grand Tour experience – the way it edits compresses and commodifies Classical culture (the mechanism) - rather than the sites it revealed (its content) was what threw Stendhal into light-headed reverie.

Young aristocrats would return from the Grand Tour a few years older, with a little more experience, a smattering of foreign language, having been immersed in classical culture (and sown their wild oats) with a clutch of mementos in the back of a carriage. These mementos are what we now call souvenirs and included portraits of themselves painted against a backdrop of Roman monuments, authentic ancient antiquities, continental works of art as well as paintings, prints and miniature models of ancient architecture. Indeed, first recorded use of the word 'souvenir' is in 1775, just the Grand Tourists were beginning to circulate around Europe. Historian Marcus Kwint argues the terms direct relationship with the Grand Tour.

"The souvenir's roots spread throughout the collecting and valuation practices of many eras and societies, but it flourished under the particular conditions of western culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries."

The demand for these proto-souvenirs resulted in a thriving industry manufacturing objects destined for the stately homes of the touring aristocracy, especially in the hub of the Tour, Italy. Ancient antiquities and continental artworks, acquired as Grand Tour souvenirs, flooded into Britain. The homes of aristocrats began to fill up with vases, sculptures, paintings, objects and artifacts of exotic culture.

Flicking through a Christies catalogue from 1998 concerning an auction of souvenirs from the Grand Tour we see a selection of the kinds of objects manufactured for the Grand Tourists. In these objects, we see not only the subjects of the tourists view but also other aspects of their contemporary culture – attributes of how they might have been looking, or what they might have actually seen when they were looking. We also

see the way that remaking these ancient objects as collectable souvenirs changed their nature.

We see transformations of scales and material. We see small bronze Sphinxes, a golden Venus de Milo, miniature models of the Temples of Castor, Pollux and Vespasian. There are slate models of Cleopatra's needle at Alexandria, there are figurines of Mercury made in bronze, and plates transfer-decorated with the faces of Roman emperors.

In others, we see the modern techniques reworking ancient motifs. We see engine milled ornament in ivory vases with drill-fluted bodies on waisted socles with stepped plinths. And in miniaturised Corinthian columns that have been re-tasked for as modish home accessories such as candlesticks. There are clocks set into the bases of Pharaohs.

The everyday classical world is represented by replica amphorae, along with highly specific items such as figurines of Lorenzo and Giuliano de Medici (complete, like a child's doll with their own to-scale collection of classical sculptures).

Certain antiquities are found in a variety of iterations. Trajan's column was especially popular at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It features here in bronze or in marmo rosso antico (as a pair with Marcus Aurelius' column), and as a 2m high example by Luigi Valadier in marble, granite, lapis lazuli, gilt bronze and silver-gilt. Its popularity led to a post-souvenir version as Napoleon was inspired to commemorate the victories of La Grande Armee with a full scale copy in the Place Vendome, this time featuring himself. Inevitably, this giant replica ended up being souvenir-ised itself.

Sometimes, the souvenirs depict things in as-new pristine form – as though frozen in perfection of antiquity, in others they are shown 'as found', where the ravages of time are included in the representation - such as an alabaster model of the Coliseum in ruined form.

The souvenir as a personal record of the Tourists presence is also apparent in the portraits of young aristocrats painted by artists such as Pompo Batoni (the volume of tourist trade is indicated by Batonis 250 portraits of English travellers). Their role is similar to the photographs offered at the end of a rollercoaster ride: fixing your image forever as a tourist right at the moment of encounter with experience.

What is significant is that these are objects manufactured for the consumption of Grand Tourists. They are not antiquities but contemporary objects. In these early souvenirs, we can see the touch of the modern hand which changes objects uses, materials and scale. They are objects that reveal a particular relationship to antiquity. the establishing of points of view in relation to antiquity. The objects reveal as much about the culture of manufacture and consumption as they do about the ancient world. They are a by-product of a new phenomenon, embodying the attributes, attitudes and desires of Grand Tourists.

This mass of knowledge, artifacts and culture washed up on the isolated island shores of British culture and had an almost instant impact. In the wake of the Grand Tour, England became enthralled with continental and historical exoticism, championing

classical, historical or literary subjects. It inspired radical changes in portraiture and landscape.

The Grand Tour developed out of growing awareness of other times and other places. Geography remained unmoved, but travel broadened the mind and changed the shape of other things too. Not least the aspirations of the English Aristocracy. Inigo Jones, William Kent and Lord Burlington all drew on their knowledge and experience of classical Italian architecture to provide direct inspiration for their work.

However, an original experience of the Grand Tour itself was not the only foundation of English classical revival. In the three great figures of English Baroque we see people whose classical knowledge comes once removed. Christopher Wren's only foreign trip took him to Paris; Hawksmoor never undertook a Tour, and derived his knowledge from etchings; Vanbrugh's foreign experience (befitting his bad-boy of the English Baroque status) included two years locked in the Bastille – not a traditional stop on the Grand Tour. Their points of reference came from the spoils of Tour-ism, from souvenirs such as the collections of measured drawings of classical architecture that were published such as 'The Antiquities of Athens' by Stuart and Revett whose first volume published in 1762. From this evidence, the English Baroque has its origins in what one might call Souvenir-ism.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the souvenir was much more than an end in itself, more than a vessel which simply transports information from one place to another. It is itself an agent of change, a device pregnant with possibilities and bristling with virile intention. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, these souvenir replicas, copies and fragments of the Ancient world provided the momentum for cultural change.

The process of 'souvenir-isation' brings its own pressure to bear. The techniques of representation employed by the souvenirs become as significant as their subject matter. So issues of collection, of idealized view, of scale changes, of the freezing of a moment in time, of dispersement, of material change, of dislocation of meaning and context are all also apparent in the English Baroque. The architectural language is not only Neo-Classical, but also reflects its once (or twice) removed status.

It is this that makes the landscapes of Stowe, the edifices of Blenheim and the churches of post-great-fire London such strange phenomena. They are evocations of distant places and times, and at the same time strong statements of their contemporary culture. The alien. Ancient architectural languages, cut loose from their context by the Grand Tour liberated the architecture of the English aristocracy. The result is historical hallucinations that blur the line between souvenir, relic, replica and reality which merge an idealised past with contemporary expression.

The model of the Grand Tour - however faint the echo - has become embedded as a cultural act. Perhaps its most lasting legacy is not Neo-Classical culture but rather the mechanisms that enabled the Tours to happen which have now expanded into the sophistications of the tourist industry. Destinations multiplied, horizons expanded, culture became global. The Grand Tour evolved from an exclusive and erudite education into the leisure activity of contemporary tourism. The Grand became everyday, the aristocracy multiplied to the masses. Increasing ease of travel, wealth, and technology have opened up experience.

Souvenirs too have mutated from their Grand Tour origins. Contemporary souvenirs are objects of almost no intrinsic value. Formed from easily mould-able cheap

materials, mass-produced and made without craftsmanship. They have no vernacular connection to the place that they celebrate. They are stacked on shelves in multiples at a variety of scales. They seem the dumbest of objects – entirely inarticulate about the moment of moment of encounter with their subject, if anything obscuring the potential moment of encounter. Parasitic tourist-retail flourishes to such an extent that it consumes its host. The tourist is overwhelmed, not by the sublime essence of place like Stendhal back in Florence, but by the familiar relationship and easy transaction of tourist to souvenir as an alternative to the difficult task of comprehending a new and different place, finding solace in the souvenir store. Amongst the shops, stalls and street vendors whose goods are arranged on a blanket, the souvenir-hunting tourist who will find replicas and imitations of buildings and places arranged amongst novelty goods and counterfeit versions of designer sunglasses and handbags. Souvenirs exist amongst the lowest kind of commodities: copies, fakes and jokes.

Historical perspective allows us to see the relationship between the high culture Grand Tour souvenirs and the architecture which occurred in its wake. The souvenirs showed the aristocracy how they might escape, giving them a language to articulate new visions. Perhaps the souvenirs of our own kind of tourism might offer us clues as to how to understand and unravel the tropes, aspirations and sensations of contemporary experience: maybe they show us where we have escaped to.

In an apartment in northwest London, Madelon Vriesendorp has amassed a vast collection of lowly touristic objects. Imagine Warhol's collections of consumerist ephemera via John Soanes ancient artefacts. Her collection fills surfaces, tables, boxes, suitcases and shelves, vast enough to seem like its own world - a kind of desktop urbanism. Vriesendorp says: "I call my collection a 'City' since it is constantly expanding, changing and incomplete. I was forced to rearrange and reshape the 'City' when it grew beyond its limits. I classified the collection into subjects and separated them into smaller groups losing some of the original arbitrariness"

There are buildings to the left, body parts and fake food to the right. Each neighbourhood has its own ghettos of self-similar objects – the Round Things area, for example includes eyes, globes, clear bouncy balls with objects suspended within and egg-shaped things. Like a complex Venn diagram, the zones intersect: the Eyes - squidgy ones, wind up ones, and one that stretches into a shower cap - segway from 'Round Things' to 'Body Parts'.

The cities population is made up of figurines divided into groups: marching bands, drummers, Day of the Dead skeletons (whose host include a skull headed Marylyn, a silver conical-boobed skeleton-lady riding a motorbike). There are nuns, robots, an army of crawling soldiers who seem friendly with a school of mermaids. And there are aliens, lots of aliens - so many that there must be some significance to these extra-terrestrial tourists. Perhaps they are the protagonists, for they like us, are open eyed in awe of this unfamiliar world. Describing the sensation that the collection has upon her "Surrounded by it, I feel like a tourist who has been given the wrong directions, misunderstood them, and ended up in the right place." The collection is made up of so many familiar things, but gives the sensation that we have never having seen them before. Through its unusual-ness it unseats us by generating a frisson of sublime wonder.

There are logics that flit through the collections arrangement like sparks between synapses. Surprises, incongruities and juxtapositions of reference, material, scale, technique hopscotch across the board. These ripples are reflected in the manner

Vriesendorp re-arranges and adds to her collection: “Now small clusters are migrating to other areas to settle and grow, to be dismantled and rearranged again when necessary.”

Vriesendorp tell us “My aim is to put together a wide range of incongruous and diverse items from different cultures which – through sheer accumulation – change their status. At its best the archive is a micro culture clash; a visual surprise; the least plausible depiction of an idea, with examples of accidental (or calculated) imperfection; objects of muddled origins, sometimes heavy with symbolic pretext; rejects from an outdated (or never fashionable) artistic order, re-interpreted, misrepresented; bizarre or mysterious.”

Buildings are arranged in groups of formal similarity that she names ‘sets’ like fragmentary acts from an urbanists dream. A gang of Statue of Liberties hang out together – elegant ones, dumpy ones, and glittering ones. A washed-up Mr Blobby has grabbed one of their torches in a final bid of Blobby fame. Nearby, there is district made up of Empire State buildings: one from wax with a wick, flopped and fraying - the original Delirious New York.

There are abstractions that recall culturally specific ways of looking: a Great Wall of China zigzags in non-perspectival space recalling the spatial conception of traditional Chinese drawing. There are Japanese models depicting Manga-like city-crushing lobster monsters, and giant maggot in a plaza (like horror-genre public art).

Three beautiful models of London landmarks: Tower Bridge, the Tower of London and Big Ben are in tiny vitrines. They are made from a fragile slithers of wood, delicate like a dry insect, and quite the opposite of Norman military might, Victorian engineering, or timepiece of the Empire. It's here that these souvenirs tell another story – a rich story of cultural mix, inconsistency, wrong-ness, difference, what's-going-on-there-ness. These familiar locations made wrong, by people who have never seen them. In another case, a Tate Modern lollipop dusted with sugar suggests the ultimate in touristic consumption. For more accurate London representation, she shows me some Big Ben pencil sharpeners. “Sharpeners are always good,” she advises. Perhaps it's something in their functional purpose that encourages souvenir makers to unusually sharp definition.

Other souvenirs have been hacked into. Snowdomes have been cracked open, their scenes pulled from their glittery amniotic fluid and framed as impossible skylines. Vriesendorp has performed a kind of architectural voodoo on a souvenir of Gaudis Sagrada Familia, by sawing off the recent additions.

Her collection embraces super-detailed injection moulded plastic and ethnic hand-hewn craft. And it's the point of intersection between what was intended and what has been created that fascinates her: “The objects that most miss their target are often the most irresistibly an Indian Minnie Mouse in regional dress, Father Christmas with wings, a skeleton scorpion. In short, ‘Freaks of Culture’”

This gives souvenirs a quality that suggests they are from places that we don't really understand – places that we've only just been too and have yet to fully take in. Their errors, misunderstandings and mistakes mirror our own misconceptions, the gaps in

our own knowledge. Vriesendorp contemporary souvenirs make no pretence to erudition, education or enlightenment.

She outlines the intention of her collection “With this archive I hope to add an ‘inventive’ way to interpretation, speculation, conjecture and random connection, like a gene multiplying uncontrollably. A nano-conception on a ‘grand’ scale. A memory-bank of scrambled issues.”

So much fun on such a scale has a strangely serious and melancholic air. These could easily be the ruins of civilisation, artefacts discovered in the dust. Vriesendorp fantasises a tragic end to her collection: “I would like to gather the whole collection into one space and organise an earthquake or volcanic eruption so that at a later date (400 yrs?) It can be exhumed, and perhaps create the confusion (or certainty) relevant to that future culture.”

Vriesendorps collection erodes the singular intent of its constituent souvenirs through multiplication and juxtaposition. They are no longer about remembering a particular place (indeed, many of these are gifts from others). Massed, they talk about something else and offer a route out of the endless repetition of cliché that created them. Her souvenirs are mirages of culture, a record of the flickering shadows cast by buildings, cities, and people.

The idea of the collection has its own narrative – of cluster, group, selection, curation. It displays a concept of reach, the power that enables the gathering. And even if this is a poor relation to the aristocratic centralization of wealth and power witnessed in the amassing of Grand Tour booty, her collection displays the voracious scale and reach of contemporary tourism. Vriesendorps collection comes from the things piled up in prosaic tourist shops, purchased in everyday ordinary tourist transactions. The massing of souvenirs is a technique to breakdown the power of the singular souvenir. These housebound, domestic objects are transformed through being collected. What one might think of as thoughtless gifts formed from lazy stereotypes become transformed into an artistic act through obsessive repetition. Arranged like this, they become more ridiculous and their intention subverted. They no longer talk about place, but about lack of place. They remind us of nothing and nowhere, or everywhere and everything. Their agglomeration from singular object to hoard changes their meaning. Vriesendorps souvenirs are not condemned to simply retell their origin, or the moment of intersection of visitor and visited, or at least an echo of an experience. In fact, they can together map out new untold narratives. Like the hold of Darwin’s Beagle, the collection acts as specimens that allow us to conjecture on a process that has been occurring almost unnoticed, suggestive of a form of cultural evolution – of who we’ve been or what we may be becoming.

Vriesendorp began her collection in the USA in 1972 where she lived with Rem Koolhaas until 1976. Together, they began to collect books and postcards of New York. She began to collect a specific kind of 'Americana' which she calls the 'Wish You Were Here' series. These showed “the most devastatingly sad places, motels, lonely high-roads, tunnels, inside the diner, the electric chair, cowboys, racist-cards etc. Wherever American history was still raw and smarting.”

The collection was a device: a lens through which to see a culture: “Souvenirs are a great warts-n-all revelation about a country, even in their jolliest attempt to present the glory days you are always on the precipice of abyss with souvenirs. They are a giant step of memory-lapse, clinging on to yesterday's future.”

Her collection began to appear as the cast in her paintings. Among these are those which were used to illustrate *Delirious New York*. “Although not done for the book specifically, they strangely fitted in ... *Delirious New York* and collecting were parallel, one informed and inspired the other”.

While Vriesendorp's concerns have been with the miniature, Koolhaas' have been with ‘Bigness’ – as though the collection over the years has explored opposite directions. Each direction sheds light on the other. Though themselves tiny souvenirs celebrate large scale. Bigness abstracts while miniaturisation concentrates narrative – a way of turning phenomenon too large to comprehend into a consumable scale. Their relative careers have played out as though parodying gendered role – Vriesendorp taking the private domain of domestic ornaments explored to an obsessive conclusion set against the public role-play play of Koolhaas' project. Equally, ideas of uniqueness and genericness characterise both their work: while the souvenirs celebrate the special, OMA's work has explored ideas of the generic. Though in topsy-turvy fashion, the souvenirs mass production makes them generic and OMA's concentrated logics turn generic-ness into iconoclastic specificity.

Just as Grand Tour souvenirs echoed in the work of Soane and others, the New York souvenirs informed early OMA projects – perhaps for the same reasons. The massing of souvenirs is way to grasp the quickening and expansion of cultural experience and a means to reconfigure found landscapes into new arrangements.

Souvenirs are much more than representations of the past. They are both document and proposal, memories that allow us to glimpse the future. Souvenirs, as Wren, Hawksmoor, Vanborough and Vriesendorp might argue, act like totems of something yet to come. They remind us not of what has happened, but what might, not of places that you have been to, but places as yet un-invented. In the act of recording the past, souvenirs show that versions of the past can be manufactured. And through changes in scale, material and techniques such as framing and editing introduce new techniques into architecture. Each new iteration deforms the original. Copies mutate into unrecognizable new formations.

While souvenirs ostensibly talk of things that happened or were created in the past, they also embody their time of production and consumption – reflected in manufacturing technique, and material. Thus the ‘traditional’ carved wooden souvenirs I was offered in the Old Souk in Kuwait City ingeniously telescope flat for ease of packing. Vriesendorp's collection not only reflects these characteristics but also leans toward the visibly ‘wrong’ and the ‘inaccurate’. The errors, shifts and mistakes in the objects offer an escape from this false memory syndrome. They are cracks in the surface of seamless culture, jagged so that we might hold onto them and haul ourselves out of our particular hole. And as much as they release us from synthetic experience, the ‘mistakes’ release the object from its singular fate. These possibilities occur because of the disappearance of meaning in the process of souvenir-isation. The souvenir is an articulation of an idea of 'loss' – a way of visualising the evaporation of cultural baggage. Their half-hearted telling suggests that the object is struggling to

become something else – to escape its fate. It also suggests the souvenir is as unfamiliar with the place in question as the tourist. Perhaps that's why they share an affinity and why the tourist seeks their company.

Vriesendorps souvenirs articulate a tension between the uniqueness and ubiquity. Between distinct place and homogenised globalism. These concerns in her collection mirror the real world. Globalisation is now a heady whirl spinning with the force of a tornado that rips tree from ground and house from foundation. It drags everything towards its centre and flings it to the extremity. The raging torrent of globalisation shifts ideas, capital and culture so effortlessly and alters everything, everywhere, constantly. It moves with such force and stealth that even if you stay home, your home will become strange and exotic. Your food will start to taste different, your friends will start to talk differently, and you will understand your children less and less. Your favourite music will begin to sound strange and disconcerting. Your garden will become full of strange plants. Perhaps we are all becoming like Madelon Vriesendorp– owners of a vast selections of souvenirs of places that we have never visited.

Globalisation erodes the exoticism of 'other' cultures. Tourism envelops authentic destinations. In places such as Villagio, it manufactures its own destinations. Transport and communication mean geography is re-distributed. The idea of place becomes looser and more fluid. Geography, as Starbucks says, becomes as instant an experience as flavour. It's something that might be called Vriesendorp Syndrome. Exoticism – the origin of the Grand Tour - is less a 'found' by-product of geography and increasingly a function of manufacture. That's to say the 'exotic', 'foreign' or 'other' must be synthesised. Increasingly, architecture's role is to provide this sythesisation. Which is perhaps why buildings are increasingly operating like giant souvenirs: as instantly recognisable three dimensional logos. Qualities of object-ness and un-contextuality suggest they have been placed on the surface of the earth in the same way as a souvenir on a mantelpiece. In an era when architecture is increasingly asked to perform an iconic role, to act as symbols for places, towns, cities, countries and regions, new buildings have become entangled in the mechanisms of place-making. From the regeneration of post-industrial sites to the construction of sovereign-wealth backed cities in the Gulf and across Asia. Architecture is used to manufacture identity through increasingly extrovert displays. In this sense – whether in the clone-constructions such as Villagio which shape themselves around recognisable familiar historical themes or the hyper-futurism of the towers of Dubai, architecture is built with the same motivations as souvenirs, only larger. This dominant mode of architectural design runs across the board: it rolls the avant guard up with the corporate, erasing difference with a singular desire for overwhelming architectural effect. It is almost impossible for architects involved in these kinds of projects to escape the gravitational pull at the centre of the projects: the demands of capital in a world described by press releases. It is an architecture of over imaginative shapes, of remarkable materials and high technology that operate with shock and awe in an effort to create a contemporary sublime which will induce a modern day Stendhal's syndrome.

This is perhaps also a function of the architect as tourist – though now an inversion of the Grand Tourist architect who returned from the exotic to practice home. Architects increasingly work in unfamiliar landscapes, inevitably dislocated from local character and custom. This provides a heady freedom – that sense of possibility that tourists experience away from their hometown routine, free from their usual responsibilities

and roles. Architectural Shirley Valentines, who throw themselves into holiday flings filled with rootless passion.

Vriesendorps collection of captive buildings captures a sensation. With each displaced, out of kilter, malformed, regurgitation, we find ourselves further from truth. The souvenirs are a document in which we can read the slippery effects of everything which creates them: ease of travel, mechanisms of mass production, marketing of 'place', and tourism. In essence, it is a way of making visible the mechanisms of globalisation, and its effect on our experience and understanding. It is a description of the overriding context within which contemporary architecture is produced.

What if we were to consider her collection not as a dead end - the final product of a particular culture - but rather as a beginning? What if we were to use the collection in the same active manner as the architects who drew on the Grand Tour souvenirs? As a projective project, the collection suggests a kind of psychedelic architectural postmodernism where language and narrative are used to directly address cultural experience. It pushes us toward an architecture that engages representation and meaning, which deploys borrowed and found languages and replays them through contemporary filters. It suggests vectors that allow us to escape both the empty abstractions of late modernism and themed phenomena of places such as Villagio. Her souvenirs might arm us with techniques and tools that allow us to creatively engage with the demands of a world increasingly organised by the mechanics of tourism and image-centric architecture engaged in an endless process of landmarking and place-making. These phenomena suggest that the non-sequitur marketing truisms scrawled on the walls of Starbucks provides us with significant insight. If geography really has become a flavour, in order to understand this new landscape of sensation you'll need to sip your thixotropically foamed Grande Latte and feel your way through imaginary cities made from multiplying replica mutations. Vriesendorps imaginary cities might well be the capital of this collapsing geography, a vision of an urbanism that has invisibly colonised everywhere.