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Dr. Dalia Wahdan is an anthropologist and associate professor of urban studies at the Architecture and Urban Design Program of the Nile University in Cairo. She previously taught at the American University in Cairo and FLAME University in Pune. Dalia Wahdan works on urbanism in India, Egypt and Saudi Arabia focusing on new town planning, vulnerability in unplanned settlements, urban subjectivities, insurgent citizenship and spatial inequities.

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In a letter to President Nasser from 1963, architect Hassan Fathy raises the issue of self-colonization as a critical continuation of former colonial power structures. He lucidly captures the hegemony of western-imported ideals of architectural and building technologies as it manifests in state decisions over housing in rural Egypt. For Fathy “colonialism lives on, having transformed itself from an overt, undisguised process to a stealthy, self-colonization,” quoting the French-Tunisian sociologist Gaston Bouthoul, “Today, a new fact has changed things completely: the spirit of self-colonization has become widespread and has extended to the mass of the population.”*

While few would doubt the devastating impact of violent colonial pasts or their present-day indignant dependencies, self-colonization remains evasive and subtle in how it shapes individual subjectivities and spaces of everyday life in African cities. This paper traces patterns and routines of self-colonization within the administrative, engineering and design practices around Cairo and Accra, with urban interventions and new town developments actually exhibiting a persistent willingness to transform/modernize the rapidly growing metropolises along western principles and models of democracy, economy and culture.

The research underscores manifestations of parallel phenomena of belonging and dwelling that seek to resist self-coloniality. The paper argues that unlike post-independence processes of self-colonization were carried out by national leaders seeking to impose imitations of the West and combat inertia or fanaticism; today with the neoliberal bent, self-colonization is spreading to subjects, “who are now eager to reject their old way of life and change the color of their skins.”*

Yet, the dialectic of colonization and its sinister twin self-colonization is not final; it generates insurgent modes of existence and spaces through processes that gives nuanced meanings to a “Eurafrica” that might not be dead yet.

*Letter to President Gamal Abdel Nasser on Rural Housing from 1963, in Salma Samar Damluji and Viola Bertini [2018] Hassan Fathy: Earth & Utopia. Laurence King Publisher, London. P. 174 ff.

Coloniality of Infrastructure:
Eurafrican Legacies

Limits of Imitation: Post-colonial hang-over in Everyday Lives of African Cities

Cairo|Basel

June 2020

A photograph of Hassan Fathy, an elderly man with a mustache, wearing a light-colored short-sleeved button-down shirt. He is standing in a dimly lit studio, gesturing with his right hand while his left hand rests on his hip. In the background, a large white dome-shaped structure is visible, along with various studio equipment and materials.

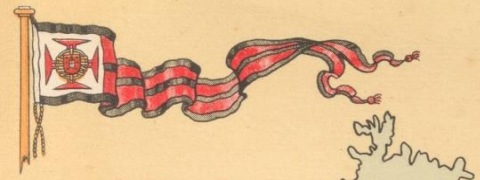
“Colonialism transformed itself
from an overt, undisguised process
to stealthy self-colonization”

Hassan Fathy at his studio in Darb el-Labbana, Cairo



The old imperial powers had to deploy the machines of science, the arts, law and order, and bureaucratic operation to inject and internalize a desire for modernization among the colonized – even in the absence of modernity.

“Men of Egypt! Women and children... Here, before the whole world, is a living symbol of your will, power, persistence, work capacity, and sacrifice. Here, this High Dam, is a victory souvenir over all obstacles. Here is a clear picture of your dreams, realized by the mighty work which subordinates nature, regardless of price in blood and sweat, to assert man’s determination, with God’s spirit and guidance, to honor, and be honored, by life. Friends, citizens, no spot in the world materializes the great struggle of the contemporary Arab, in its full scope, as this site on which we stand, the site of the Aswan High Dam. Here, the political, social, national, and military battles of the Egyptian people materialize as the bulk of the great rock which blocked the old Nile waterway, to accumulate its waters into the biggest lake ever made by man, as a permanent source of prosperity.” *Extract from Gamal Abdel Nasser’s the speech on the occasion of the diversion of the Nile River, 14th May 1964*



"PORTUGAL
NÃO É
UM PAÍS
PEQUENO"

Colonialism is the practice of violent domination, oppression that is by definition systemic and institutional abuse of power, aggressive greed and brute force.

Military Formation



Superfícies do IMPÉRIO COLONIAL PORTUGUÊS
comparadas com as dos principais países da Europa

Portugal (Cont.)	89.106 Km ²	Espanha (Cont.)	505.202 Km ²
Açores	2.392 »	França	560.986 »
Madeira	870 »	Inglaterra	244.734 »
Cabo Verde	3.930 »	Itália	308.717 »
Guiné	36.126 »	Alemanha	472.000 »
S. Tomé e Príncipe	971 »	Total	2.091.639 Km ²
Angola	1.255.755 »		
Mozambique	736.112 »		
Estado da Índia	3.806 »		
Macau	14 »		
Timor	18.989 »		
Total	2.168.077 Km ²		

Portugal não é um país pequeno | Portugal is Not A Small Country.
Henrique Galvão, Album comemorativo da Primeira Exposição Colonial
Portuguesa, 1934 Porto, Edição da Litografia Nacional. Ministério das Colónias.
<https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:3293851>



Omnipotent Bureaucracy

The Trial (Anthony Perkins in Orson Welles screen adaption of Franz Kafka's nightmare of the same name, 1962)



Monochromatic Enumerator

Brazil (Jonathan Pryce in Terry Gilliam's arresting dystopia, 1985)

Although this may seem a continuation of colonial hangover, five trends characterize the current phase of self-coloniality:

- ❖ The gradual retrenchment of civic bureaucracy and its replacement with a military bureaucracy and basic services
- ❖ The increasing role of the military establishment in infrastructure and housing
- ❖ The growing importance of international institutions' recognition for regime legitimacy
- ❖ The increasing role of real estate services, construction and building sectors in the gross domestic product
- ❖ The urban expansion of entire neighborhoods / districts with self-built housing and parts of the required soft infrastructure (insurgent subjectivities)

Insurgent Citizenship

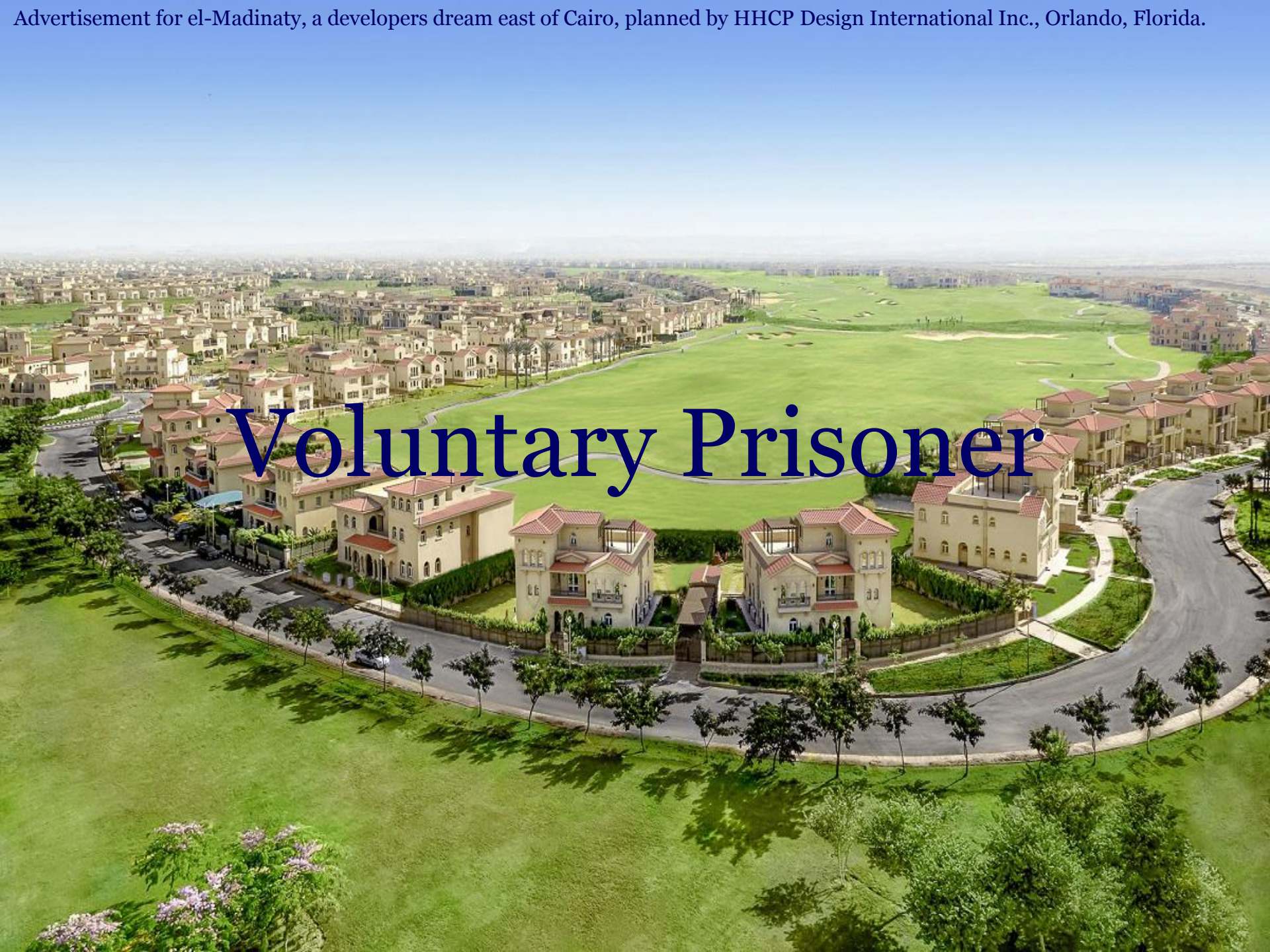


Beautification of Midan Tahrir, turning the square into an open-air museum, actually erasing the role and memory of a place.

Voluntary Prisoner

A wide-angle photograph of Midan Tahrir in Cairo, Egypt, during the day. The central focus is the Obelisk of Luxor, which stands tall in the background. In the foreground, there are several tall palm trees and modern, multi-story buildings. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The text 'Voluntary Prisoner' is overlaid in a large, blue, serif font, centered across the middle of the image. The overall scene depicts a modern urban landscape with historical landmarks.

Advertisement for el-Madinaty, a developers dream east of Cairo, planned by HHCP Design International Inc., Orlando, Florida.

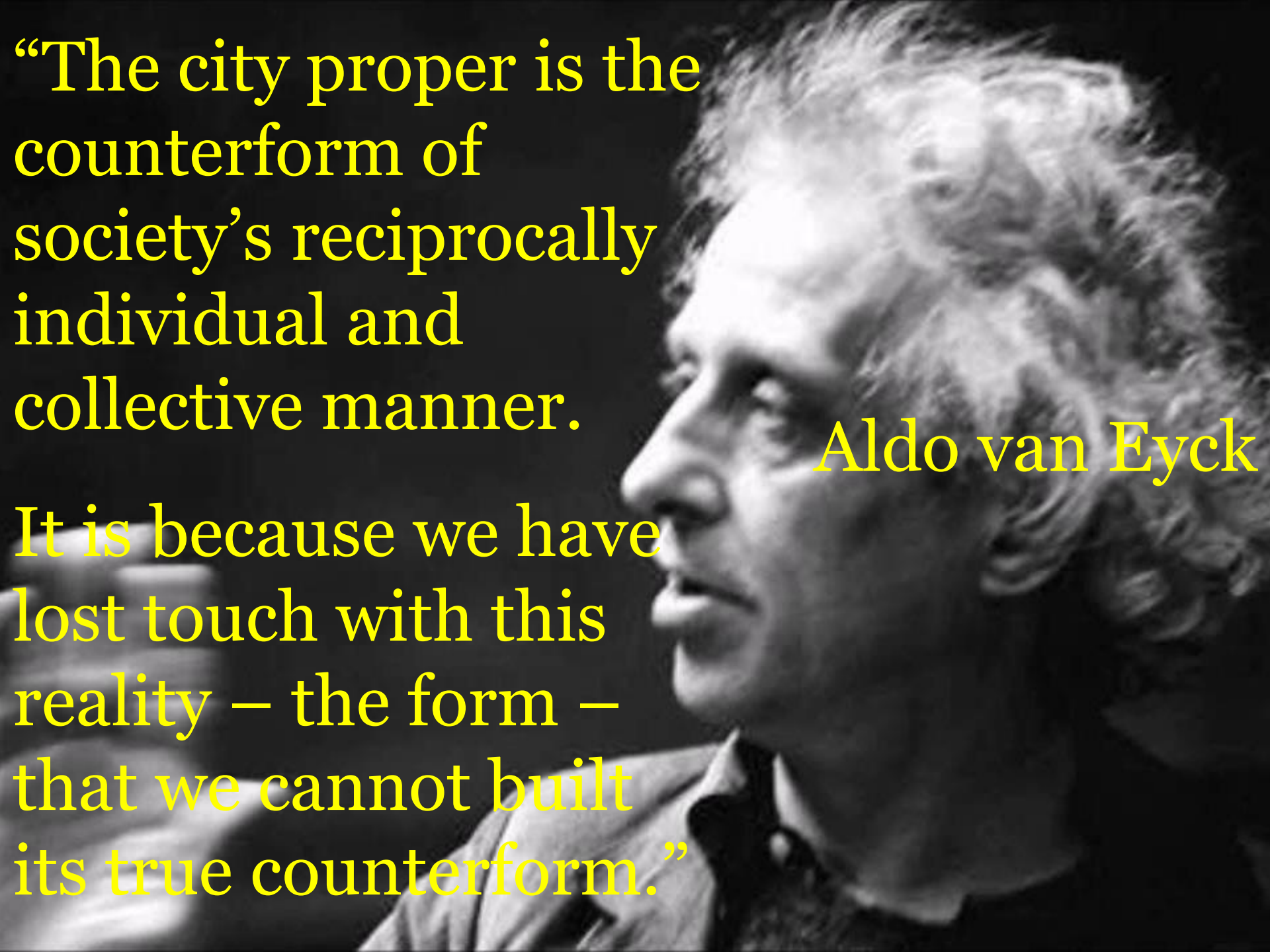


Voluntary Prisoner

The new administrative capital for 6.5 million residents will cover 70,000 hectare, making it about the size of Singapore, and will be located in the desert 35 kilometers east of Cairo. Plans for the US\$58bn administrative capital include a new parliament and presidential palace, Egypt's largest airport, Africa's tallest tower –Oblisco Capitale Tower– 172 meter higher than Burj Khalifa with its 828 meters, the world's biggest mosque, Africa's largest cathedral, the Middle East's largest opera house, a \$20bn entertainment district, and an urban park of about 800 hectare – two times larger than Central Park in New York. Image: UDC5+ Urban Development Consortium. <http://www.udc5.com/project/wedian-new-capital-city/>

Voluntary Prisoner

An aerial night view of a futuristic city, likely the New Administrative Capital of Egypt. The city is illuminated with warm lights, and a prominent glowing ring structure is visible in the center. The city is surrounded by a large body of water, and the overall scene is a mix of modern architecture and natural elements like trees and water.

A black and white profile photograph of Aldo van Eyck, showing his head and shoulders. He has curly, light-colored hair and is looking towards the left. The background is dark and out of focus.

“The city proper is the counterform of society’s reciprocally individual and collective manner.

Aldo van Eyck

It is because we have lost touch with this reality – the form – that we cannot built its true counterform.”