

Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, by Marc Augé

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First published in 1992, “Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity” is probably Marc Augé’s most widespread work. Translated into several languages (it was first published in Portugal in 1994) and reprinted several times, it had a strong impact not only in Anthropology but also in other subjects that study the space and are involved in it, as for instance Architecture, to the point where the concept has become popular and has gained lexical frameworks, perhaps far from Augé’s initial proposal.

In Non-Places, the author finds that, at the end of the twentieth century, social scientists are faced with new spatial realities that although they could be analyzed by traditional methods of anthropological research, they lacked new conceptual tools and analytical categories that could best answer to the complexity of contemporary spaces.

Anthropology was primarily devoted to researching anthropological places, seen as a support of the spatial matrix of communities and their identity relations, representation spaces which meanings are shared by the individuals who live and interact in them, through time. Thus, according to Augé, an anthropological place gathers (although it can be achieved in different degrees) the following characteristics: an identity, relational and historical being.

The changes experienced in urban areas throughout the twentieth century are the result of supermodernity (surmodernité) that substantially changed the cities themselves and the lives of its inhabitants, enhancing the existence of places that are not capable of being analyzed as anthropological places.

The use of the term supermodernity does not intend to start a discussion about the end



of modernity and the emergence of the postmodern condition (such as Jean François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard defined it, which originated in the 1980's), but rather draw attention to a condition of modernity. According to Augé, supermodernity produces figures of excess: overabundance of time and events that increase the range of events that can be studied by social scientists; overabundance of space enhanced by the ubiquity of events brought about by the media; individualization of terms resulting from the interpretation that each individual has from the information available.

These figures of excess are intrinsically linked to the production of non-places, or spaces that do not comply with (in different degrees) the characteristics of an anthropological place and therefore are not identity, relational, or historical. As an example of non-places, Augé refers airports or highways, traffic spaces identical everywhere. However, he draws attention to the inter-relationship between places and non-places, referring that the latter are often overloaded with references to the first, for example, big advertising billboards at the edge of the highway suggesting visiting historic cities.

In three chapters, prologue and epilogue (where Augé refers to experiences that we have all lived in non-places), the author provides an important contribution to the theory of contemporary anthropology of space, creating an analytical link between this subject and others that work the territory by providing an operative concept essential to the reading of a contemporary space.

AUGÉ, Marc - **Não-Lugares – introdução a uma antropologia da sobremodernidade**. Lisboa: Editora 90º, 2006 [1992].