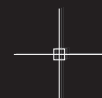


DSD Publications



On Criticality Arie Graafland

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On Criticality

Arie Graafland

The flat screen of my computer has a name of its own. It's called digital life. Is there life inside my computer? Well, sometimes it looks like it. It does things on its own. Indeed, it seems to have its own mind. It shows me lively pictures; it communicates for me all over the planet with its equals. It can drive me mad, actually, but mostly I am quite happy with what it does for me. At least it has changed my working life considerably. And isn't that what most life-forms are about? Changing behavior. But where does that leave me as a person? Am I lost as a mere 'interface'?

Quite a few architects and artists will tell me: 'you are not lost, you just have to talk back. Communicate!' Communicate with our (plans for) digital architecture and art forms. I am already part of what William Gibson wrote twenty years ago about cyberspace; I am part of that 'consensual hallucination' called cyberspace. It also seems to be a lot more than that. Certainly, more than the computer itself. It is about networks, compatibility, architectures, access, non-accessibility; it is about power, transfers of money, data and information that flow through it. And it is also about new forms of architectural practices, office organizational strategies, and profiling.

Enabled by the new information and communication technologies, Michael Speaks¹ writes that network practices in the 1990's became communities that are more powerful than any single studio or office. Speaks explores the organizational structures of a few offices that, like academic research groups in the same period of time, became more internationally oriented, using each other's networks and expertise. For example, the Amsterdam based un Studio (United Network Studio) of Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos organized their office as a 'network studio'. These network firms proliferated in the 1990's, reflecting the need for small, innovative studios to create working partnerships. Speaks focuses on organization and economic change, indeed, his vocabulary is on 'innovation'. The central idea of this innovation is a highly organizational one. Speaks talks about 'knowledge based services' and refers to 'cultural intelligence'. In referring to ShoP (Sharples Holden Pasquarelli), a young firm in New York, he quotes Gregg Pasquarelli who was looking for a new way of practice, in which design was not just handed off, but was part of an entire approach. SHO P to him is unlike most architectural offices - the model is a consultant firm, not the traditional master-builder type office. He stresses the combination of design intelligence with computer design technology and a sophisticated approach to marketing, public relations, and other aspects of the business of architecture in order to create that 'truly innovative' practice.

Speaks is in fact referring to the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation, described by David Harvey and others² in the 1990's. This more flexible form of capital and organization emphasizes the new as a category, a recurring term in these accounts on the benefits of computerization. It is the fleeting, the

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ephemeral, the fugitive and the contingent in modern life, rather than the more solid values implanted under Fordism³ that becomes paramount. Harvey discusses three accounts from that period of time, all dealing with the same economic and organizational issues. The rather celebratory account by Halal⁴ of new capitalism, emphasizes the new entrepreneurialism. The second is Lash and Urry's *The End of Organized Capitalism*⁵, and the third is a book by Swyngedouw from 1986⁶ providing in great detail the transformations in technology and the labor process. Many of Speaks' arguments are similar to Harvey's in theorizing this transition.

The period from 1965 to 1973 was one of the inability of Fordism and Keynesianism to contain the inherent contradictions of capitalism. On the surface, Harvey writes, these difficulties could best be captured by one word: rigidity. There were problems with the rigidity of long-term and large-scale fixed capital investments, in labor markets, labor allocation and contracts. The 1970's and 1980's have been a troubled period of economic restructuring, and social and political readjustment. This shift to flexible accumulation rests on flexibility with respect to labor processes, markets, products and consumption patterns. Furthermore, the shift is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets and above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological and organizational innovation.

According to Speaks, even the most forward-looking members of the architectural establishment have ignored these innovations. And for sure, for some of the offices their way of working is new. Greg Lynn (Los Angeles), Douglas Garafalo (Chicago), and Michael McInturf (Cincinnati), mostly architects with smaller offices in different cities, took advantage of electronic imaging and new communication technologies. Together they realized the Korean Presbyterian Church of New York. Stan Allen and James Corner – one in New York, the other in Philadelphia – collaborated in architectural thinking, research and landscape architecture. Also the Dutch firm mvrdrv is into research of datascares, urban design/decision-making models like Regionmaker, and publishing office work as research-related. An important aspect of this innovation is the fact that the principals were far more involved in academic research-related work than the majority of their colleagues ever were. Their colleagues are still more interested in publishing their completed office work. Mostly built work, they do not make that step back, there is virtually no distance from their design production. Probably Rem Koolhaas is the inspiring figure here, his first form of 'practice' being, so to speak, a book on Manhattan. Later publications show more of the tendencies Speaks indicates – writing about architecture and urbanism, a clever mix of proposed and executed office work, critical articles, and a surplus of photographic material combined with an ingenious way of presenting, made possible by advanced digital assembling techniques and the design skills of Bruce Mau and the like. In the 1990's amo, an offshoot of oma, was set up when principals Rem Koolhaas and Dan Wood, then project architect for oma's abandoned Universal Studios Project in Los Angeles, decided to begin this theoretical arm together. At the moment, Reinier De Graaf heads amo.

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Another example of Italian origin is Stefano Boeri⁷, exploring urban projects, doing design research, and with an architectural practice in Milan. For some architecture schools, this new methodology meant new forms of architectural research. Koolhaas started his 'Project for the City', an immensely influential and fast paced project at Harvard School of Design. In Rotterdam, the Berlage Institute is always on the cutting edge of design and architectural thinking and has established a name for itself. More recently, the tu Delft established its Delft School of Design, an internationally oriented research laboratory at the Architecture Faculty. They all have in common the exploration of the fields of architecture and critical thinking.

Nevertheless, for Speaks, the times of 'critical theory' are past. At stake here was more than the transition to flexible accumulation in Western economies as proposed by Harvey. Instead, this new flexible accumulation of architectural image and practice, as well as forms of management, is the new successor to the so-called 'exhaustion' of primarily Continental theory. In this depletion, Speaks sees the failure to recognize the important shift in the relationship between thinking and doing that occurred in architecture in the 1990's. Consequently, the more recent focus is on American pragmatism and on these 'newly emerging forms of practice'. For him the new challenge for architecture is to develop forms of practice able to survive the fiercely competitive global marketplace. The idea is that architects use 'intelligence' in a twofold way: as a specific form of practical knowledge characteristic for the profession, and in the practical way the American CIA or military might want to use 'intelligence'. Architects should be able to think ahead and visualize ahead – a form of fore-knowing the effects and, at the same time, the social impacts of their proposals. Yet, in order to be able to do so, they must employ 'intelligence' like the military, be able to work from seemingly endless fragments of 'information', rumours even, and disinformation. The 'chatter' of the outside world should be related to the projective capacity of the profession. The way to do it is just to use your imagination and to play along.

The question is, however, are there other ways to deal with projective practice and how can critical thinking be involved in this procedure? Or is critical thinking, indeed 'exhausted'? The first thing to be said is that virtually no office in the past has been interested in critical thinking; this investigation has always been solely the domain of philosophy and sociology in the universities. Certainly, critical theory was not a field of interest that played any role in actual office work. The link Speaks makes between modernization of the work process in architectural offices, and 'the exhaustion of Continental theory' is questionable in itself since Continental theory never played any role in daily office practice in Europe and America. Architects get their ideas elsewhere – from confrontation with the specificity of site and program, from work of other architects, from periodicals and professional literature. The discourse on theory, in fact, streams along in all of its convoluted complexity, largely unnoticed by the average practitioner of architecture. If the articles get too complex, simply no one will read them. Indeed, there has always been 'chatter'; and in fact, there will probably always be 'chatter' in the architectural office with its chaotic work processes, and also in the Universities where different interests and ideas have to work together or at least tolerate each other. Speaks' argument runs two ways: firstly promoting flexible and

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inter-nationally oriented office practices, and secondly announcing the 'exhaustion' of critical thinking in the Universities. I argue that although the two are substantially unrelated practically speaking, they are both relevant questions for architecture and especially for architectural education.

What other ways are there to approach this question? What is needed here, in my opinion, is what I would like to call a 'reflexive architecture', an architecture addressing its own foundations reflexively, paired with the digitalized work processes on a larger scale than the traditional office practices employed until recently. To be clear, in the end I do not think that the offices can do this reflexive architecture on their own. Most of them will have neither the focus nor the time for extended experimentation. A Studio setting is necessary in order to be able to get the desired focus. The designs in my *Socius of Architecture*⁸ were made in our office, but the text came from my work in the University. 'Reflexivity' is an activity mainly in Universities since it relates to 'critique' and to contemporary notions of time and space. If this split between office practice and University research remains, it will leave the historians and critics on the safe side, they won't have to bother with the messy daily practices in the offices where negotiating and adapting are more common than the grand design. However, I think the research groups in Universities cannot do reflexive architectural research without the offices involved. They lack the much needed pragmatic context and client. What is happening in Speaks' discourse is the effort to promote a few American and Dutch offices to the forefront of contemporary architectural practice. His main argument being an organizational and instrumental one, a position of instrumentality covered by a 'pragmatic' stance no longer assessing the outcome of the designs. Not quite a new position.

This 'obsession with instrumentality', as Alberto Pérez-Gómez⁹ writes, rages unabated in architectural practice and almost always underscores the 'leading edge' positions. He traced the instrumental obsession in mid-eighteenth-century technical theories in order to probe their myths of rationality. His focus was on pre-modern architecture where essential aspects of architectural knowledge were defined as *techne* founded on mathemata that could be transmitted through a 'scientific' treatise. Pérez-Gómez examined the polemic between two instrumental theories in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France, the work of Charles Étienne Briseux and his criticism of the earlier writings of Claude Perrault.¹⁰ The contemporary 'obsession with instrumentality' encourages fashionable architectural projects that are oblivious to their cultural context, to their intended programs, to their historical roots, to ethical imperatives, and to our experiencing body. Although Pérez-Gómez is correct, in my opinion the problem is that today's architectural practice is no longer on the level of historical consciousness, or even managerial and organizational levels as Speaks suggests, no longer on a cognitive or historical level, but on the level of a software-driven flattened out aesthetic reflexivity.

This kind of aesthetic reflexivity has more recently found an important place in the production and consumption of the culture industries. Architectural books and magazines are also a part of this mechanism. Treatises are no longer an option for an architect, rather a necessity. For the offices it will be hard, if not impossible, to step back from this aestheticization. The conditions under which they work are

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in a sort of symbolic flow, cultural capital creation and aesthetically cast expert systems that are intrinsic to the current profession. Whereas intellectual property rights are the main form of capital in the culture industries, in architecture what is sold is not the intellectual rights since it is a singular operation, but the 'product', the architectural project, and especially the 'name' the firm or architect has managed to make for himself by way of publishing. Quite a lot of the smaller firms Speaks mentions, do niche marketing, finding holes in a major markets of building practices. What some of them have invented are not so much an economic and managerial innovation as well as a strategic aesthetic innovation in profiling and image production. This invention/promotion of course has been the case for longer periods of time in the twentieth century, and was always followed by a critique from both Marxist and conservative sides. Nevertheless, the critique is also getting more and more complex. In Marxist critique, at least there was always a stronghold, a form of resistance with aesthetic depth, as in for example, Tafuri or Adorno. But what is happening now is the disappearance of that subject of resistance in the circulation of images in contemporary information and communication structures. This very disappearance, however, is what Speaks characterizes as the 'exhaustion of Continental theory'.

We are no longer dealing with reflexive subjects, but reflexive objects, as Lash and Urry¹¹ argue. They have argued that the current cultural artefacts in the music industry, to use one example, are no longer transcendent as representations, but that they have become immanent as objects amongst other objects circulating and competing in information and communication structures of popular culture. Music has become a lifestyle. Their claim is that with modernization and autonomization, hence differentiation of the cultural, culture became primarily representation. More recently we have seen representations taking up the functional position of objects, objects which only differ from other objects of everyday life in their immaterial form and aesthetic character. Madonna as a star is not just an image, but a representation. She has become a cultural object in the anthropological sense of culture. With the declining significance of social structures and their partial displacement by information and communication structures the aestheticization of everyday life becomes possible.

Our current condition of postmodernity is in effect the generalization of aesthetic modernism to not just an elite, but the whole of the population. Aesthetic modernism, however, presupposed that autonomous subject with depth and reflection. It assumes an aesthetic expressive subject. Lash and Urry argue that the circulation of images in contemporary information and communication structures entails not an aesthetic subject, but these reflexive objects.¹² Although their observations might be too close to Baudrillard's notion of dystopia¹³ here, it is true that the subjects tend to be flattened out in the ongoing proliferation of digitalized images. But to me this process is not yet completed, not yet exhausted, there are still critical possibilities left. For sure this flexible accumulation is much more than a merely economic managerial flexibility as suggested by Speaks. In our digital world, contemporary architectural image production is replacing modernistic aesthetics for an 'anaesthetics' as Neil Leach¹⁴ has recently suggested.

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Record companies are not so much selling the record, but the artist. For architecture this is not the same situation; architecture does not command that kind of widespread interest in society, although interest is growing rapidly in magazines originally not dealing with architecture. But for the architectural in-crowd, Rem Koolhaas and Frank Gehry are functioning in a comparable way. It is not so much the building, but a 'Koolhaas' as a brand name, reinforced by his own publications and the oma/amo office, and even more by the endless publications on his work in books and magazines. Many culture sector firms have become like advertising agencies, and advertising itself has become more like a culture industry, Lash and Urry have argued. For example, the pr firm of Saatchi in London profiles their advertising business as 'commercial communication'. The amo office is not too far away from the same practice. oma/amo's research into Shopping more or less coincided with their Prada account. The office not only designed the shops, but took care of the corporate identity of the company in advertising and publicity.

I am avoiding the already obsolete terms 'innovative' and even the terminology of 'critical architecture' since I am also of the opinion that 'critical' in social theory and philosophy are indeed problematic, and cannot easily be related to a projective aesthetic practice like architecture. Nevertheless, in saying 'critical' we must be precise. Certainly 'critical' can be related to 'retrospective', historical, and critical analyses. Critical itself is either under a lot of pressure, or is fading away completely in social theory and philosophy since for many it seems to have lost the much needed critical subject. There is certainly much more at stake here than the mentioned shift to a new organizational model. It is also a matter of knowledge as Speaks suggests. Philosophical, political, and scientific truths have fragmented into proliferating swarms of 'little truths', appearing and disappearing so fast that ascertaining whether they are really true is impractical if not altogether impossible, he writes.¹⁵

Yet his altogether too hasty conclusion is a farewell to critical theory; ideas or ideologies are no longer relevant, but intelligence. The 'critical architectures' of the 1960's and 1970's had none of the theoretical, political, or philosophical gravitas of their early 20th-century predecessors, he writes. On top of that, Post Modernism, Deconstructivism, Critical Regionalism, and many others in the late 1980's and 1990's posed as false pretenders to Modernism. The opposition Speaks is laying out here is about different forms of theoretical and aesthetic practices. His claim is that 'vanguard practices' are reliant on ideas, theories and concepts given in advance (my italics), and that 'post-vanguard' practices are more 'entrepreneurial' in seeking opportunities for innovation. That is to say, practices that cannot be determined by any idea, theory or concept.¹⁶

I think it is here where the misunderstandings are in danger of arising. To my mind, architecture as a projective and creative aesthetic practice can never be both solidly and safely guided by critical theory which is retrospective by definition. The projection of architectural thought into a building and its prospectively hoped-for aesthetic effects will always be an uncertain stab in the dark, whether it comes from 'entrepreneurial opportunities for innovation', or from 'critical' intentions. It has nothing to do with

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the idea of 'stable theories' given in advance, or the inventions of entrepreneurial practices. I will stress the aesthetic side of this projective process; it certainly does not mean an 'anything-goes'. There are many stable ways to analyze and organize the context, the program, the construction, the budget, etc. But in many cases, it is this aesthetic effect that is discussed at length beforehand in both educational and practical settings. Philosophy in this context easily leads to a confusion, in many cases coming from Eisenman's writings and especially his linking up with philosophical partners like Derrida and Rajchman where, at least to my mind, there is a false suggestion of projective archi-philosophy. Whether this is due to the way Eisenman always publishes his projects, or whether it comes from a genuine philosophical interest in the projects is hard to decide. I think it is possibly both, but what seems to be certain is that it is confusing the American discourse on 'criticality'.

Speaks himself seems to be 'exhausted' by this discourse, but that does not mean that we are completely at a loss here. Certainly it is possible to say something intelligible about economic conditions in design practice, about political choices and decision making in urbanism, about territorial conditions or 'terrestriality', about design ideologies and managerial relations. In the end, architecture and urbanism are about our lives and the way we experience our world. Nevertheless, the comments of Speaks, although I do not agree with his argument, no doubt confront us with the more serious problem, that of critique itself. The argument presents us with yet another opportunity to question the status and usefulness of deconstructionism, critical theory, and our ideas about society and nature.

Indeed, Bruno Latour writes, 'it has been a long time since the very notion of the avant-garde – the proletariat, the artistic – passed away, pushed aside by other forces, moved to the rear garde, or may be lumped with the baggage train.'¹⁷ It looks like we are still going through the motions of a critical avant-garde, but is not the spirit gone, he asks? Staying with the idea that critical thought is a weapon, a 'Waffe der Kritik' as it was once called, Latour writes that we have to re-think our critical strategies and instruments. The actual threats might have changed so much that we might still be directing our entire arsenal east or west while the enemy has now moved to a very different place. Our critical arsenal with the neutron bombs of deconstruction, with the missiles of discourse analysis, might all be misdirected. And yes, we might be using the wrong arsenal, we will have to go back again to deconstructivist architecture and our newly established digital architectures to see what went wrong. And at the same time come up with alternatives, the latter more imperative than the former.

At first sight there might be a correspondence between Speaks' notions and Latour's. But in fact their positions are very different. Latour's plea is to get closer to the facts, not fighting empiricism, but on the contrary renewing empiricism. The new critical mind for him is to be found not in intelligence, but in the cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude, to speak like William James, a realism dealing with what he calls matters of concern, not matters of fact.¹⁸ Instead of moving away from facts, we have to direct our attention toward the conditions that made them possible. For architecture it implies the redirection of our

thoughts to what I would call an architecture of the street. A reflexive architectural way of proceeding, renewing empiricism, and addressing the sophisticated tools of architectural deconstruction and its inherent construction – or better, the lack of – social construction. The desired outcome of architectural practices discussed at length in architecture schools, books and magazines can never be guided by a rhetoric of 'entrepreneurial architecture', or 'design intelligence'. A discourse which only focuses on organizational questions, and is referring to 'critical' architectures as lost cases, is in fact a hastily post-modern and post-political manoeuvre that needs to be addressed. It is still possible to think of critique in other ways. Not so much in the exclusive Marxist way which I will briefly explain a little further on, but in a way Latour and Lash suggest. Not as the critic who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic in his thinking is not the one who pulls the rug from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather, Latour writes. That is to say, generating more ideas than we have received, not being purely 'negative', but in fact productive.

In order to explicate this progression in the field of architecture, I will relate to an earlier publication where I tried to show both relation and ruptures between architecture and 'critical' theory.¹⁹ In an insightful article in *Harvard Design Review*²⁰, George Baird sketches out the American discussion on 'criticality', which has its origin in Europe in Marxist and Kantian thinking. The lineage of criticality in architecture more or less starts with Peter Eisenman, accompanied by Michael Hays, who has developed a position consistently focussed intellectually on concepts of 'resistance' and 'negation', Baird writes.²¹ Both refer to the Italian historian and critic Manfredo Tafuri. To my mind, one of the crucial notions on criticality is to be found in Hays' book on Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer²², which is heavily indebted to the work of the Marxist thinker Fredric Jameson.²³ For Hays – following Tafuri²⁴ – Mies van der Rohe was the paramount exemplar of negation in late Modernism. The work of Mies is examined as critical, or resistant and oppositional. In another writing²⁵, Hays addresses the surface distortions and formal inscrutability of the 1922 skyscraper project published in the second issue of *G* magazine. Mies insists that an order is immanent in the surface itself and that the order is continuous with and dependent upon the world in which the viewer actually moves. Hays puts the building into the context of the German city at the time, referring to Georg Simmel's ideas on the blasé individual. This sense of surface and volume in fact wrenched the building from the atemporal, idealized realm of autonomous forms, in order to install it in the historical world of that time. The design, then, becomes open to the chance and uncertainty of life in the metropolis. The moment of resistance is that it is not subsumed in the chaos of the metropolis, but rather seeks for another order through the systematic use of the unexpected mirroring of surfaces. Hays addresses the building, not the architect's intentions or oeuvre.

Other later works of Mies, like Alexanderplatz in Berlin and the Adam building on Leipzigerstrasse, do not fall under the same category; it all depends on how the buildings can be related to a focused and critical assessment from sociology or philosophy. Instead of Simmel, one could also argue from Walter

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Benjamin's work. The main question is how the relation is assessed between project and city. Not in the sense most urbanists discuss this relation as a fitting-in with the site, but as a critical reading of both city and architecture at the same time. The later projects abstain from any dialogue with the physical particularities of their contexts; the glass walled blocks could be reproduced on any site. The sameness of the units and undifferentiated order tend to deny the possibility of attaching significance to the arrangements. Yet, Hays argues, it does not mean that these later designs are unrelated to the 1922 skyscraper designs. It is the repudiation of an a priori logic as primary focus of meaning that ties them together. Mies' achievement in the Alexanderplatz design was to open up a clearing of silence in the chaos of the nervous metropolis; it is silence that carries the burden of meaning in this project.

Interestingly enough, the new position of 'criticality' seems to be with Elisabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, since Michael Hays' first act as curator of New York's Whitney Museum was to give them a major exhibition. But even more interesting is that they chose to exhibit many of the museum gallery projects that have made them famous, Baird writes.²⁶ None of the building projects on which their recent design practice has focussed was shown – projects that will have to meet the more difficult test of being critical 'in the street'. To be able to relate to notions of 'lived space', which is part of this criticality in the streets, we will have to relate to the ideas of a critical theory, and especially projective thinking as in reflexive architecture (not to be confused with 'critical architecture'). 'Critical' can only be used for theory, not for architecture. In the projects in the Socius book²⁷, it is directly related to an 'architecture in the streets'. Remarkably, the earliest and most severe critique on Eisenman's work came from Tafuri, where Eisenman's work was considered to be fit for the boudoir, and not for the street.²⁸ So let us turn to that 'reflexive architecture in the street' and see what it has to offer.

The Human Body and its Ground. Before we go back to the architectural discourse, we first have to address more general notions of (human) nature, sustainability, bio-sphere, and information society. How do we address these questions? The concept of human nature is highly complex; I will not strictly follow the problem of what is called 'the post-humanist subject' as it is already well presented in current cultural discourse or theory.²⁹ I will address the problem of 'digital worlds' from the problem of 'grounding', and the necessity of a spatio-temporal 're-framing' of architectural thought in terms of the organic and inorganic in order to get at ways in which we may rethink the possibility of sustainable action and agency in our times. Cyberspace in particular, Timothy Luke argues³⁰, forces human beings to re-conceptualize their spatial situation inasmuch as they experience their positions in cyberspace only as simulations in some 'virtual life' form. His argument is that we might need another reasoning to capture these digital worlds. The epistemological foundations of conventional reasoning in terms of political realism are grounded in the modernist laws of second nature, he writes. We might need another epistemic notion on what is real and what is virtual. In taking up the notions of 'first' and 'second' nature, Luke defines the 'third nature' as informational cybersphere/telesphere.

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Digitalization shifts human agency and structure to a register of informational bits from that of manufactured matter. Human presence gets located in the interplay of the two modes of nature's influence. First nature, according to Luke, gains its identity from the varied terrains forming the bioscape/ecoscape/geoscape of 'terrestriality'. Earth, water and sky provide the basic elements mapped in physical geographies of the biosphere that in turn influence human life with natural forces. Yet a large part of the biosphere is polluted beyond recovery. For example, car and air traffic are jointly responsible for some 40% of the usa's annual energy consumption, but the built environment consumes an equal amount, the rest taken by industry. Urban sprawl in the usa is one of the major problems of energy consumption. Subsidized gas, relatively low taxes on cars, high accessibility by car, and low land prices guarantee more and more sprawl every day. Of course the problem is far more complex than what can be briefly described here in a few lines. My main concern is how to understand our own actions in relation to nature and the possible architectural and urban solutions.

Both architecture and urbanism play an important role in the understanding of digitalized work processes and digital architecture, and the relation to bioscape, ecoscape and geoscape. It is difficult, if not impossible to say where these systems begin or end, where solutions to the environment might be found, what kind of agreement we might reach to solve architectural and urban problems. There is indeed a witches' brew of political arguments, concepts and difficulties that can conveniently be the basis of endless academic, intellectual, theoretical and philosophical debate, as David Harvey writes.³¹ Some common language has to be found, according to Harvey, or at least an adequate way of translating between different languages. His common ground is in 'the web of life' metaphor; it might indeed help us to filter our actions through the web of interconnections that make up the living world.

In addition, Luke's definition of the nation state, mass society and global geopolitics as historical artefacts used for constructing and conquering the built environments or social spaces of second nature can help us along this path. It is a domain historically described for architecture by Richard Sennett in his book *Flesh and Stone*.³² Second nature is discussed in the sense of the technoscape/socioscape/ethnoscape of territoriality. Luke might be right that many of the changes today cannot be fully understood with these two concepts alone. The elaborate human constructions become overlaid, interpenetrated and reconstituted with a 'third nature' of an informational cybersphere or telesphere, he argues. As a new concept we might want to see this in a Deleuzian way of a contour, a configuration, a constellation of an event to come. It will also have more and more implications for the way we deal with architecture and urbanism. Architectural and urban design are deeply involved in 'third nature'. Until recently, design was involved in first and second nature, but with digitalization it has entered a third nature. This is not only a question of the 'means' of designing, it has - and will - influence our ways of seeing and experiencing architecture.

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On the other hand, Peter Eisenman writes, architecture traditionally was place-bound, linked to a condition of experience.³³ Eisenman refers to the comparable notions Luke is writing about, mediated environments challenging the givens of classical time, the time of experience. Writing about his Rebstock Park project for Frankfurt, Eisenman writes that architecture can no longer be bound by the static conditions of space and place. To his mind architecture must deal with new conditions like the 'event'.³⁴ Rebstock is seen as an unfolding event – events like a rock concert where one becomes part of the environment. Yet architectural theory has largely ignored this idea. Instead, theory has focussed on notions of figure and ground, according to Eisenman. There seem to be two ways of dealing with this conceptual pair; one leading to contextualism, and one leading to a tabula rasa such as the modern movement imagined. With architectural modernism there is no relationship between old and new, or between figure and ground. Ground, or territoriality in Luke's terms, is seen as a clear neutral datum, projecting its autonomy into the future. I think both Luke and Eisenman are right in detecting a 'third nature', but where it will lead is still not clear.

Critical Theory in Brief: the Aesthetic Mode of Writing. Theory has to be grasped in the place and time out of which it emerges. These situations are constantly changing. In that sense, Scott Lash's use of 'allegory' is an interesting thought that I would like to pursue for a moment. He distinguishes two types of modernism in social theory: on the one hand, positivism, and on the other 'Lebensphilosophie'. Positivism he understands as structured along the lines of 'system', and Lebensphilosophie along the principle of 'symbol'. The forerunner of positivism, whose paradigmatic system building figures run from Rousseau/Condorcet, through Comte, the late Marx, Le Corbusier and more recently Habermas's later work, is French humanist classicism. Lash refers to the not unproblematic opposition of 'Zivilisation' and 'Kultur' in Norbert Elias' work.³⁵ Lash's main reference here is Simmel, who worked more in the idiom of symbol than system. Simmel also began to work in a different register, the register of allegory. Lash describes it as a deepening of Goethe's notion of symbol in contrast to French classical allegory which was superficial and ornamental, as it was associated with the salons and the manners of court society. Lash shifts the notion of symbol from the classical to the baroque allegory, from French court society to Spanish absolutism and thus to baroque allegory. For Lash it consists of a completely different register from the original juxtaposition of symbol and allegory, it has to do neither with Zivilisation nor Kultur. Concepts seem to partially lose their original meaning here, in fact Lash is laying out a different 'plane of immanence' in the Deleuzian sense.

Second and third nature as newly established concepts would need a different laying out of the plane that holds them together. Classical allegory proffers a point for point homology between two narratives; his baroque version posits a significant absence, a 'hole' in the underlying narrative. If the original, 'true' story somehow is not quite right, then the point to point homology between the second narrative and the first is no longer possible. Baroque allegorists such as Nietzsche, Simmel, Benjamin, Adorno and Karl

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Krauss write in the form of an essay, Lash maintains. The essay might well look 'wissenschafflich', but instead emerges in an aesthetic mode – serious and at the same time superficial, light, ornamental.

Baroque allegory is, in fact, opposite to a Marxist explanation. Michael Hays refers to Louis Althusser, the French Marxist, with regard to his idea of 'relative autonomy'.³⁶ At the other end of the line, then, might be the Frankfurt School of Horkheimer and Adorno. In the American debate on 'critical', the term is used many times by different authors with often divergent meanings, but it might be good to remember that Parisian Marxism in the sixties and seventies was never interested in a 'critical' but in a Marxist 'scientific' way of proceeding. My first two books on the architectural body, were written as an essay in that aesthetic mode to which Lash refers – a seemingly 'light', sometimes 'ironic' architectural critique as in my analysis of Rem Koolhaas' Downtown Athletic Club and Duchamp's Large Glass.³⁷ Yet the allegorist is, while looking ornamental, simultaneously deadly serious. In Lash's formulation, the allegorist is the father of the illegitimate child of modernity's other.

Conclusion. With many of the contemporary architectural electronic imaging techniques and communication technologies, we are in the end loosing all ground. My claim is that we need more ground and permanence in architecture instead of 'folds'. Seen from an architectural perspective, it means that blobs and folds take the city as an additive texture without any coherence; they consume too much space since they want to stand on their own imagined pedestals. They reinforce urban sprawl. Instead of more compact building, they spread out. There is indifference to the environment, grounding is no issue. I think I can agree with Lash's critique. Although I do not think his critique works in the instance of Koolhaas as he suggests, it does work very well for digital architectures: speed supersedes space as indifference supersedes difference.

The source for these digital designs is third nature. Third nature here is largely penetrating first and second nature; it dissolves any notion of ground or context. It is here where my doubts for a possible application to architecture and urbanism begin. Like second nature, third nature is no doubt a social product. Eisenman's Rebstock Park shifts the notion of figure/ground to one of assumed Deleuzian folding. This shift has direct consequences for the grounding of design. We should realize that all spaces are constructs and real, including our digital worlds. Virtual space in Deleuze's sense is not an unforeseen possibility in the design, to be realized in a certain framing. It is about a question that will open up new uncharted territories. First and second nature do not have more materialized substance; it is indeed more than a collective hallucination restricted to the symbolic domains of social superstructures. It has an immense material base in communication satellites, and fibre optic networks as Manuel Castells has analysed.³⁸

In architecture and urbanism, we cannot do without 'ground', nor can we do without critical thinking. I think Deleuze and Guattari are very right in saying that thinking takes place in the relationship of

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territory and earth. If we lose first and second nature, we lose the very notions of gender, sexuality, ethnic diversity, uneven distribution of wealth, and class. Too easily, the shift from harsh reality into the seemingly endless possibilities of the computer programmes is made, made without much interest for these categories. The location of most of Lynn's constructions is nowhere; they might be anywhere. Just like the complexity of movement in Koolhaas' international airports, they are for the greater part interchangeable. In architecture and urbanism, we can never lose ground; third nature won't be enough. Thinking, in the end, always takes place in relation to territory and earth. We need first and second nature too.

Footnotes:

- 1_Speaks, Michael; 'Design Intelligence and the New Economy' in **Architectural Record** (01-2003) p. 72.
- 2_See for example, Harvey, David, **The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change** (New York: Blackwell, 1990).
- 3_Harvey, David; **The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change** (New York: Blackwell, 1990) p. 171.
- 4_Halal, William E.; **The New Capitalism** (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986).
- 5_Lash, Scott and Urry, John; **The End of Organized Capitalism** (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).
- 6_Swyngedouw, E.; 'The Socio-spatial Implications of Innovations in Industrial Organization'. Working Paper no 20, Johns Hopkins European Center for Regional Planning and Research (Lille: 1986).
- 7_Boeri, Stefano, Lanzani, Arturo and Marini, Edoardo; 'Ambienti, paesaggi e imagine della regione Milanese' in **AIM**, Associazione Interessi Metropolitani (Milan: Editrice Abiare Segeta spa, 1993).
- 8_Graafland, Arie; **The Socius of Architecture: Amsterdam, Tokyo, New York** (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2000).
- 9_Pérez-Gómez, Alberto, 'Charles-Étienne Briseux: The Musical Body and the Limits of Instrumentality in Architecture', in **Body and Building: Essays on the Changing Relation of Body and Architecture** edited by Dodds, George and Tavernor, Robert (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002) pp. 164 ff.
- 10_ *ibid.* p. 164.
- 11_Lash, Scott and Urry, John; **Economies of Sign and Space** (London: Sage Publications, 1994).
- 12_ *ibid.*, p. 132.
- 13_Baudrillard, Jean; **Simulation and Simulacra**, translated by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
- 14_Leach, Neil; **The Anaesthetics of Architecture** (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).
- 15_Speaks, Michael; 'Design Intelligence' in **A+U** (2002:12 December) p. 12.
- 16_ *ibid.*, p. 12
- 17_Latour, Bruno; 'Why has critique run out of steam? From matters of fact to matters of concern', in **Critical Inquiry**, Winter 2004, p. 226.
- 18_Cf. Latour, Bruno; **Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory** (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005).
- 19_Graafland, Arie; **op. cit.**
- 20_Baird, George; 'Criticality and its Discontents', in **Harvard Design Magazine**, Rising Ambitions, Expanding Terrain, Realism and Utopianism (Fall/Winter 2004).
- 21_Baird, George; **op. cit.**, pp. 16ff.
- 22_Hays, K. Michael; **Modernism and the Post Humanist Subject** (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
- 23_See Jameson, Fredric; **The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act** (New York: Cornell University Press, 1981) and 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in **New Left Review** 146 (July-August 1984) pp. 63ff.
- 24_Tafuri, Manfredo; **Theories and History of Architecture** (London: Granada Publishing, 1980).
- 25_Hays, K. Michael; 'Critical Architecture, Between Culture and Form', in *Perspecta* 21, **The Yale Architectural Journal** (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1984).
- 26_Baird, George; **op. cit.**
- 27_Graafland, Arie; **op. cit.**
- 28_Tafuri, Manfredo; 'L'architecture dans le boudoir', in **The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes and Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s** (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) pp. 267ff.
- 29_cf. Foucault, Michel; **The Archaeology of Knowledge** (Great Britain: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1972), and **The Order of Things** (Great Britain: Tavistock Publications Limited, 1970).
- 30_Luke, Timothy W.; 'Simulated Sovereignty, Telematic Territoriality: the Political Economy of Cyberspace', in **Spaces of Culture**, editors Featherstone, Mike & Lash, Scott (London: Sage, 1999) pp. 28ff.
- 31_Harvey, David; **Spaces of Hope** (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000) p. 215.
- 32_Sennett, Richard; **Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization** (New York, London: Norton & Company, 1994).

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33_Eisenman, Peter; 'Unfolding Events: Frankfurt, Rebstock and the Possibility of a New Urbanism', in **Unfolding Frankfurt** (Ernst & Sohn, Verlag für Architektur und Technische Wissenschaften GmbH, Germany 1991) p. 9.

34_Eisenman's critique is on architecture theory's neglect of the **event structure** in architecture. He might be right there, but I think it is not only a question of addressing the topic of the event structure, but also the way we write about it. It is not only about an open mind for fleeting events, but very much about a fleeting way of writing about these events. For a large part, architecture history has been focused on what Eisenman calls the figure-ground relationship. Events however go further than just the 'function' of a plan. Events go deeper into the structure of a plan; indeed, they form it for the most part as I tried to show in my Versailles analysis. See my **Versailles and the Mechanics of Power. The Subjugation of Circe. An Essay** (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003) p. 54, and note 86.

35_Daniel Gordon in his **Citizens Without Sovereignty: Equality and Sociability in French Thought, 1670-1789** (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) draws attention to the influence of Thomas Mann's criticism of French 'civilization'. In his **Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen** of 1918, Mann makes the same distinction Lash makes between 'civilization' and 'culture', whereby Germany for Mann was more subjected to the latter and France to the former. Gordon's book deals with the to his mind uncritical antithesis as used by Elias to argue about cultural history. Gordon shows that Elias's 'spatial axis' – the difference between France and Germany – is not convincing. See my **Versailles and the Mechanics of Power. The Subjugation of Circe. An Essay** (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2003) p. 54, and note 86.

36_Hays, Michael K.; 'Ideologies of Media and the Architecture of Cities in Transition', in **Cities in Transition** edited by Arie Graafland & Deborah Hauptmann (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2001) pp. 263ff.

37_Graafland, Arie; 'Artificiality in the Work of Rem Koolhaas', in **Architectural Bodies** (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1996) pp. 39ff.

38_Castells, Manuel; **The Informational City: Information technology, Economic Restructuring and the Urban Regional Process** (London: Blackwell, 1989).