TransUrbanism
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In retrospect, one can say that the term “postmodernism” had something reassuring about it, like all “post-” terms. “Post-” means nothing more than that something is undergoing rapid change with an unknown destination. No terms, or no new ones, yet exist for the outcome, so we have to identify the process by reference to its predecessor. However, what went before – modernism as in “postmodernism,” the city as in the “postmetropolis,” and industrial production as in the “postindustrial society” – indeed, all that is past, becomes in turn more comprehensible and tangible the further we move beyond it. It also grows more glamorous. Yet the clearer the past becomes in form, the more shapeless the present gets. All “post-” terms are by nature backward-looking and hence tend toward nostalgia; at their best they lead to cultural criticism and deconstruction, and at their worst to desperation and a politics of “letting someone else do the dirty work.” The maxim that he who does not remember the past is condemned to forever repeat his mistakes has a new counterpart here: he who knows only the past is condemned to endlessly repeat the same tale of loss.

And this is why it has been bon ton for more than 40 years now among architects and urbanists to say that the city is disintegrating and vanishing because of new means of transport and communication. The four urban functions of working, living, leisure and transport which Le Corbusier once so elegantly deployed in his model of the city can no longer be separated from each other either spatially or socially. Living and transport have become practically identical (viz. Paul Virilio’s account of the rail commuter who meets his friends and acquaintances in the train and merely passes the night in his dormitory-city home). Insofar as a house still has any function beyond a place to sleep, it derives from the theme
Grumbling about the disintegration of the city always contains an implicit reference to what the city used to be. There are two idealized archetypes that have some currency. The first is the medieval variant, the city as a tangle of narrow streets and little neighborhoods, grouped around a central market square with a cathedral and a town hall – business, religion and politics – entirely surrounded on the outside by a wall marking the boundary between town and country. The other archetype is that of the late-nineteenth-century, semi-industrialized, boulevard-and-parks city, in which the old impenetrability and rigidity of the urban mass has been broken open, and the boundaries between inside and outside and between politics and business have not so much been erased as blurred. The medieval city is associated with a pre-architectural era: no architect or town planner was ever involved in shaping it. The nineteenth-century city belongs to the heyday of planning and targeted architecture – the former being military in character, the latter scenographic. The street pattern of the medieval city follows the logic of the labyrinth, and that of the nineteenth-century city the logic of the grid. And so on. Once the ideal has been invoked, it becomes possible to portray the decline in vivid colors; to depict how the urban fabric has been torn and fragmented by the introduction of railways, cars, air transport, TV, computers, the Internet; how the antithesis between the market square and the town perimeter has been replaced by one between the city center and the suburbs; and how non-descript satellite towns then arose, all looking the same but all pretending to be different, while the original centralized city has turned either into an authentic ghetto or a simulated open-air museum.

The best model of the world is the world itself. Reducing the world to a few images, slogans, formulas or lines of development doesn’t make it easier to understand. “The city” never existed in history; there were only “cities.” A city is
not a machine for the production of goods, people and urban experiences. The only kind of change a machine is party to is wearing out or breaking down, after which we replace the faulty parts or consign the whole thing to the scrap heap. That is not how it happens with cities. A city is an unstable system, a living system which is in a state of continual decomposition, but which also continually reorganizes and rearranges itself, which expands and shrinks. One of the actors or “agents” in this process of self-organization is the urban population, including the city’s architects, urbanists and local government officials. Other “agents” include technological developments, the mass media and migrations. What is wrong with the various “post-” terms is that they describe the city from the outside, from the perspective of the past. But every description of a process is itself a product of that process. Every cityscape is a function of the city imagined. If you want to understand a development, it’s no good standing outside the process; you have to wade into it. You have to allow yourself to be developed by the developments. From the outside, you see only the movements: what stands still, what shifts, what disappears. From the inside, you detect the transformations: what direction things are going in, what is changing and what new things are emerging.

Cities have not grown more formless than they were during the last 40, 100 or 1,000 years. There has been no increase in entropy, but rather an ever greater informedness and organization. Cities are growing increasingly complex, increasingly rich in internal and external linkages, increasingly comprehensive and concentrated, increasingly transparent yet incomprehensible. That’s obvious as soon as you abandon the “post-” position and move on to a “trans-” attitude – in other words, when you consciously go along with the developments instead of frantically trying to maintain a position outside them. People don’t change because they wish to do so, but because they allow themselves to be changed and, in doing so, themselves modify the broader process of transformation in which they are being swept along. The variant within postmodernism known as “posturbanism” is urbanism minus the present: a design strategy characterized by the fragmentation of familiar material, by collage, montage and quotation. “Post-” though it may be, there is no escaping the great mistake of modernism – that the built environment, the walls and the ceilings, don’t really matter and must therefore be made as transparent and functional (i.e. invisible) as possible. The spaces created and the movements that are made possible within these spaces are primary. Those movements are informed by act of building; the buildings themselves are low in information. “Transurbanism” is by contrast urbanism plus transformation. Transformation is the multiplication of information.
Transurbanism is a theory of the transition of cities as they are now, towards a design process in which the highly informed character of every built environment is used as a design resource by that environment itself.

Cities have always been places for strangers to visit and live; their presence made it possible for the inhabitants to define themselves as autochthonous. The word “culture” denoted a collection of images, customs, assumptions and peculiarities that were the concrete expression of the autochthony of the inhabitants. A city, a region or a country could be recognized by its building style, costume, festivals and mentality. To paraphrase Johan Huizinga, the culture is where the local population “plays” its identity. The average school today caters for children of 26 different nationalities. Any city around the globe has residents of 95 different nationalities, some of them concentrated in particular neighborhoods but mostly dispersed around the urban area. All those nationalities, and all kinds of subgroups within each which are not always distinguishable to outsiders, “play” their own culture. Sometimes they do so in order to distinguish themselves from one another, but often it’s to reinforce connections or similarities. They each have their own sports, religious occasions, video shops, places to eat, community representatives, music, TV channels, street habits, child-raising methods and preferred vehicles, and these continually cross and intersect with the cultural networks other communities have woven within the city web. Nobody has a single culture any longer; everyone participates in a multiplicity of “cultures.” What was once a homogeneous, low-information monoculture has now become a high-information, heterogeneous cultural process; the continual transformation process of temporary coalitions, collisions, hybridizations and migrations that we call “city life.”

The rule for participation in a culture is that one has to change so as to adapt to existing cultural forms, over and over again; and one has to change the given cultural forms so that one fits in, over and over again. We are no longer present in a single place but continually co-present in many different places – not just when we step outside the house and enter the city context, but when, for example, we turn on the computer or the TV. The low-information home has similarly turned into a high-information node in a network of data and commodity flows. Within a 100-meter radius around a city hall, you’ll find not only Ethiopian, Turkish, Indian, Japanese and American restaurants, but also a greengrocer where in November you can buy Egyptian strawberries, snow peas from Kenya, oranges
from South Africa, etc. The homes of the vegetable and fruit farmers of Ethiopia, Kenya, Turkey, Egypt, India and Japan have moreover become just as information-rich as their counterparts in the West, and their occupants’ imaginations are as stimulated to visit our countries as ours are to go to their countries: migration in one case, and tourism in the other.

As Arjun Appadurai has observed, the power of imagination, charged as it is by the mass media, has become one of the major social and political factors of our time. On the one hand, the media stimulate people to move in search of a better life. The problem of asylum seekers has become a permanent social state. On the other hand, the same media make it possible for migrants, having settled elsewhere for the time being, to maintain contact with their home base – although within one generation the land of origin itself has become a place of the imagination. A city is not really just a network of intersecting information and commodity flows; that would be too meager a representation. The city is still localized as a place or a region, but “locality” now means the feeling of being somewhere, of having a place in a context where your life has some relevance. A city produces a series of “localities.” It’s no longer a single public domain but a concatenation of diaspora-related public domains in which numerous “cultures” or “contexts” are settled but linked via the media to similar cultures and contexts elsewhere. “India” is located not only in India but also in the Gulf States, in London, in the Caribbean and in your street. “America” is to be found all over the world, although less and less often in the United States. A “culture” is a translocal, unstable system that blossoms forth, now here, now there, produces localities, goes into decline, metamorphoses, subsides once more and recovers. Instead of “cultures,” it might be better to speak of “cultural systems” or “translocalities.”

The philosophy of postmodernism recognized the downfall of the grand narratives in which everything was explained as converging towards a higher consciousness of the present and the promise of a radiant future. Nobody believes any longer in progress, in the workers’ paradise, the Christian utopia or the engineered society. There is no ultimate truth; everything is permitted: that’s the way it is. The good thing is that the global restructuring process of postmodernism has now reached the point where it has itself become another narrative in which everything converges, in which everything is explainable as leading to an awareness – sometimes inspiring but otherwise provoking resistance – of where we are going with our lives. The narrative is titled “globalization,” and the translocal cultures are part of it. Transurbanism is urbanism in the era of globalization. The
design challenge for architecture in this context is, instead of trying to create a single public domain, to create an atmosphere for the establishment and coexistence of a diversity of public domains. Transcontextualize. You cannot design a city, but you can help a city organize itself as a living structure – not by breaking down all barriers to the streams of information and commodities, but by allowing specific obstacles, channels, retardations and accelerations to be designed for individual streams, and thus to be informed by the city itself. The apparatus that makes it possible to pursue this kind of design practice has matured in the past 40 years. The technical basis underlying the narrative of globalization is, after all, the computer, the “great communicator,” the “great interactor.”
OMA – Rem Koolhaas
The Lagos Project
See page 161
The images accompanying Andreas Ruby’s essay are taken from Peter Fischli and David Weiss’s book *Sichtbare Welt* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2000) with the kind permission of the artists and the publisher.
Like every term formed with a prefix, “transurbanism” describes its subject indirectly, in a relative way. Rather than defining a concrete stance, it suggests movement, “away from” something and “towards” something else. This movement is not direct and linear, but oscillates to and fro between its poles. The prefix “trans-” expresses, first of all, the will to transgress the subject described in the root noun. Yet apparently this subject to be transgressed is not dispensable, or one could do without it. Thus, transurbanism underlines the necessity of a certain practice of urbanism on the one hand, while making clear on the other that this practice can only take place outside urbanism’s established territory. Consequently, transurbanism becomes the dégré zéro of the discourse on the contemporary urban condition which, according to Rem Koolhaas – perhaps the ultimate urbanist – is confronted with the following dilemma: “How to explain the paradox that urbanism, as a profession, has disappeared at the moment when urbanization everywhere – after decades of constant acceleration – is on its way to establishing a definitive, global ‘triumph’ of the urban scale?”

From a transurbanist viewpoint, this situation does not represent a real paradox, but is, rather, the inevitable consequence of urbanism’s appalling backwardness with regard to its subject. Urbanism is today no longer possible simply because the notion of the city on which it was based ceased to exist some time ago. Given the reality of our urban condition, terms such as “city,” “land” and “landscape” can today only be used if crossed out, as Heidegger did with untenable metaphysical axioms such as “being.” The basic definitions of urban discourse have today become equally axiomatic and can be best understood as “discourse operators,” as defined by Niklas Luhmann: differentiations that allow us to describe the condition and behavior of a system without themselves occurring in any concrete form within that system.

The condition of the system “city” can nowadays adopt very different
forms that illustrate the uneven distribution of social wealth in the world. On the one hand is the development which Koolhaas describes as the “triumph of the urban scale”: the development of megalopolises (cities with over 8 million inhabitants) which are sprouting out of the ground at an ever-faster pace, especially in South America, Africa and Asia. Twenty-seven of the 33 megalopolises predicted to exist by 2015 will be in the least developed countries. In Africa in particular, we can expect an unprecedented flight of the former rural population into these new cities.²

In the so-called developed world, the situation is almost completely the reverse. In a figurative bloodletting that is also without parallel, cities are flowing into what used to be countryside and forming new urban agglomerations. This expansion beyond the historic city affects all the criteria and parameters that were previously used to define city and urbanity. My intention here is to examine these effects and to contribute to a future definition of the transurban city.

While the model of the core city dominated the history of urbanism from the Greek polis to the modern metropolis, nowadays sprawl has become the major organizing principle of urban existence in postindustrial Western society. The tendency is for the traditionally densely populated city centers to empty, and the peripheries, previously only thinly populated, to gradually fill up. In the course of this migratory movement, differentiations such as center and periphery lose much of their meaning. The periphery is building up its own magnetic urban field at a pace matched by the decline of the city’s centrifugal organizational system. The 1990 US census showed that, for the first time, the majority of the population lived in suburbs instead of cities. Because of this, it no longer makes sense to qualify the periphery as suburban: this area is no longer sub-urbs, or subordinate to the city (urbs). Joel Garreau’s concept of the “Edge City”³ is equally
misleading, as the edge has become far more substantial than what it allegedly lies outside of. In order to emancipate “suburbia” from “urbs,” Rob Kling, Spencer Olin and Mark Poster use the notion of “postsurbia,” referring to
regions in which “commerce, shopping, arts, residential life, and religious activities are all conducted in different places on a spider web of interconnected travel paths linked primarily by private automobiles.” Even if “postsuburban” can never be more than a provisional term, it serves to clarify (also by means of its curious string of prefixes) the basic reversal of the Aristotelian differentiation between substans (that which stands fixed) and accidens (that which falls towards). The city, the former substans of what is urban, is today the accidens of postsuburban substans. Once the substance of the urban condition, the city has nowadays become an accidental state of a postsuburban substance.

Posturbanization, for its part, formulates the relationship between city and countryside in a completely new way: As the countryside gets urbanized, the city becomes landscape. This cross-fertilization of typologies and spatial characteristics makes ecology one of the main themes of transurbanism for the occupation of both urban and postsuburban territories. The urbanization of the landscape, paradoxically fueled by the demand for homes amid greenery, leads ultimately to the disappearance of green landscape. The continuous transformation of unpopulated landscape into building sites increases the proportion of impermeable ground surface to an ecologically worrying degree. Since asphalt cannot breathe, the metabolic function of the earth’s surface as a membrane for the exchange of water between air and earth is in question. Hence the omnipresence of the lawn in the front yard as a symbolic planting layer intended to camouflage the actual degree of urbanization of postsuburbia. But what may still work as a marketing invocation of the long-destroyed idyll “just outside town” definitively fails to work as a real biotope for most of the animal species previously resident here; they need a greater variety of vegetation in order to survive. On the other hand, the landscape banished from the countryside has surprising-
ly entered the city. Inner-city Detroit has become the equally sad and surreal icon of this development. In recent decades it has been the scene of a systematic deurbanization. With the automotive industry’s move to the suburbs, the deliberate racial segregation of the population, an increase in drug-related violence and mass arson attacks on apartment buildings, 35 square kilometers of inner Detroit have been gradually transformed into a wasteland by a gradual tabula rasa. Former residential districts have been recolonized by a posturban prairie, with rampant vegetation and growing wild animal populations – an (agricultural) landscape as an interim occupation of urban ground that will exist until the area is entirely cleared of built substance and ground prices have fallen so low that it can be retro-urbanized – at a considerable profit by urban renewal developers, who are already awaiting their chance.

This shrinking of the city and its reincorporation into the landscape it once replaced can be observed in Europe too. In the 1980s, the International Building Exhibition (IBA) in Berlin chose as its decisive strategy for the “Reconstruction of the European City” the increasing of the density of fragmented urban areas; the IBA 2010, being planned by the Bauhaus in Dessau, will be devoted to the shrinking cities of economically underprivileged Eastern Germany. The extensive dismantling of industrial infrastructure in the secondary sector after German reunification (without subsequent reinvestment in the terti-
In the modern history of the city, Berlin after the building of the Wall represented just such a condition. It was systematically examined in the 1960s by Oswald Mathias Ungers, then a professor at the TU in Berlin. For Ungers, the city’s artificial separation into two parts made it a laboratory for new town planning. Ungers brought together his studies in his 1973 urban competition project *Berlin: The Green Archipelago*, which was carried out in his office by the then young Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas. Koolhaas, who went to New York soon after to do research for his book *Delirious New York*, later saw the special value of this project in the fact that Ungers had “taken Berlin as it was as a model for the city of the future, in which the shift between concentration and emptiness was systemized and all subordinate parts of the city could be interpreted as islands floating in a sea of emptiness.”

In this vision of Berlin, which anticipates certain aspects of Koolhaas’ own take on urbanism, emptiness is not seen as threatening but promising. It appears as the city’s true potential, as an urban substance, not as its absence. Berlin showed, as Koolhaas recounted in a 1999 interview, “how entirely missing urban presences or entirely erased architectural entities nevertheless generate what can be called an urban condition. The center of Shenzhen, for example is not a built substance but a conglomeration of golf courses and theme parks, basically unbuilt ...
or empty conditions. And that was the beauty of Berlin even ten years ago, that it was the most contemporary and the most avant-garde European city because it had these major vast areas of nothingness."\(^9\)

Nothingness as a subject of contemporary urbanism could have become the theme of the IBA in Berlin, for which Ungers was nominated as a director along with Josef Paul Kleihues. But Kleihues had already clearly focused the IBA around a retroactive invocation of classicist Berlin, and thereby determined the direction of Berlin’s future development as the capital of a reunified Germany, so Ungers withdrew. The symbolic reconstruction of the city of the past has become since then a permanent mock battle in the field of urbanism (or what remains of it). Cities including Amsterdam, New York, Paris, London and San Diego are competing desperately to transform their old city cores into theme parks in order to establish themselves as unmistakable destinations in the eventscape of global tourism. While cities construct new market identities almost entirely out of the atmospheric vocabulary of the urban past, the infrastructural logics shaping their contemporary “genius loci” are carefully suppressed: Amsterdam identifies with its canals (but not with Schiphol Airport), Berlin with Prussian history (but not with the strip territory of the former Berlin Wall), and Los Angeles with Main Street à la Universal Citywalk (but not with the freeways).

Naturally, the image of an autonomous urban formation suggested by this marketing-fueled renaissance of the local is only a sham. The development processes of the contemporary urban condition push the formation of city alliances, such as the Randstad in the Netherlands, the Ruhr area in Germany and the metropolitan corridors on the east and west coasts of the USA (Boston-New York-Washington and Los Angeles-San Diego).

These postsuburban agglomerations which more and more make up the
real contemporary city lay claim to certain aspects of urbanity that until recently were the exclusive privilege of the old core cities. These include, first and foremost, the spaces for collective events formerly produced and maintained by the bourgeois public of these cities. Although this public no longer exist in the new postsuburban agglomerations, it is precisely there that cloned versions of its former urban forms multiply. This is made possible by the site-unspecific reproduction of “urban” outdoor space inside air-conditioned indoor megaspaces. The city as an iconographic cliché becomes an interiorized condition that can be produced at any required position within postsuburban territory. Embraced early on by Viktor Gruen’s 1956 Southdale Center in Minnesota, the interiorization of urban space seems to have reached its current high point in the Venetian megaresort in Las Vegas. Whereas Gruen’s shopping malls “theme” only an abstract idea of urban space, The Venetian’s urban reference is absolutely concrete and site-specific: Venice. Following the example of Las Vegas’s other megaresorts Paris Paris and New York New York, built shortly beforehand, The Venetian is composed of a selection of spatialized postcard views which produce a deceptively real and yet also surreal pastiche of La Serenissima. These closed city-buildings employ the typological arsenal of urban public space, but how they are used is, of course, completely privately controlled. This schizophrenia remains undercover, with the technology of control seamlessly integrated into the landscape of urban stage sets.
The technological performance of these interior worlds makes it possible to apply the internalization of collective event spaces to landscape as well. A leading practice in this process, one found mostly in Japan, is the artificial production of typical holiday landscapes inside gigantic buildings (“domes”) in order to reproduce the seasonal conditions necessary for certain leisure activities all year long. Outdoor space is reproduced not because of its iconic attractiveness (as is the case in the cloned urban spaces of Las Vegas) but because of its effectiveness in simulating conditions for outdoor sports. One example is the Ocean Dome Seagaia (1993) in Miyazaki on the South Japanese island of Kyushu: itself not far from the seashore, it offers an artificial beach under an enormous sliding glass roof.

Through the incorporation of landscape, postsuburban space ends the
being: the transition from a nomadic to a settled existence. Today a large part of the urban population undoubtedly leads a nomadic existence. The jetset nomads in suits sleep more often in hotels than their own beds. The commuter nomads, due to the long journey to and from work, spend several hours every day in traffic, which becomes a kind of home, while their actual homes function largely as expanded bedrooms, as is the case with some nomadic tribes in Africa. Tourist nomads exist in such large numbers that they easily acquire the status of a transitory population of whatever place they choose to make their (temporary) home.

Finally, there are two types of homeless nomads: the local homeless who live in public spaces in the city (there are 40,000 in Paris alone) and the floods of political and economic immigrants who live as an almost invisible population in developed countries. The current political discourse still seems to see the new nomadic ecologies (in Reyner Banham’s sense) as a temporary aberration. But there is much evidence to suggest that the city of the future will be predominantly populated by these various kinds of nomads rather than by a settled population.

The negotiation of temporary flows will also become an issue for the transurban city in terms of the accommodation of labor. For centuries, productive work was the driving force of urban development, but the postindustrial city is increasingly losing this motor. In the decades after World War II, like the city itself, the industries started to move out of the old centers and distribute themselves across the postsuburban territory. The old cities were forced to produce new dialectic between urban and rural that has been an important element in the definition of the city since industrialization began. While the town dweller could previously take a break from city life in the countryside, today he or she must find this otherness within postsuburban space. Hence “landscape architectures” like the SSAWS Skidome (1993) in Funabashi are not just leisure facilities; they form a new infrastructure of everyday life. The Skidome offers Tokyo office workers the chance to spend their lunch breaks snowboarding under a closed sky on the edge of the city. On the other hand, the “real” landscape is no longer necessarily rural but quite clearly industrialized – either through intensive agricultural use which has made the structure of small villages superfluous or through an equally intensive leisure-time industrialization such as MVRDV examined in Costa Iberica.11

This emerging “complete” landscape engenders a generalized state of mobility which seems to invert the scenario that once made cities come into existence.
economies. The earlier economy of production made way for an economy of consumption, which essentially means shopping and urban entertainment. If work still finds its way into the city, then increasingly it is only as a themed element within this entertainment economy. The Gläserne Manufaktur in Dresden, Germany, is a prototypical example of this phenomenon. Here, Volkswagen produces (in part) and distributes its luxury Phaeton. Located in the center of the historic cultural city, the building combines the atmospheric qualities of an assembly plant, a museum and a showroom. Referring culturally to the Meissener Porzellan Manufaktur (Meissen porcelain manufacture), the Gläserne Manufaktur stages not only the delivery of a car but also, and above all, its production, or more precisely part of it – the “dirty work” of car production is carried out in a normal factory on the periphery. Prefabricated elements such as chassis, engine and interior fittings are transported (by truck along the motorway, and inside the city along a converted city tram line) to be assembled in the “Manufaktur” by white-suited workers at conveyor belts – seven days of handcraft to be admired. In order to enhance the cult of the product, VW steers its customers through the highlights of Dresden’s cultural sights (the Semper Opera, the Gemäldegalerie, the Green Vault). The company clearly colonizes the cultural identity of the city to enrich the scenario of its own product, but this symbolic exchange also works the other way around, as the city of Dresden incorporates the Gläserne Manufaktur in its institutional landscape as another tourist attraction.

In this case, the familiar brand name of a city serves to establish a new product. But Bilbao has impressively demonstrated that a no-name city can just as well make a name for itself by affiliating itself with a familiar brand. The Guggenheim Bilbao (the order of the words renders the balance of power quite
correctly) applies the organizational model of strategic alliance that has become popular with economic globalization (e.g., in international air transport). Clearly both partners profit from the connection between brand and place: as the brand is placed, the place gets branded. The museum can loosen itself from its local roots and, using a calculated media expansion strategy – for which Frank Gehry's spectacular building is of far greater significance than the rather ordinary art collection – build up a global presence. Bilbao itself succeeds in changing its image from one of a down-at-heel industrial city to one of an upwardly mobile site of contemporary high culture. This kind of brand-sharing has become a key strategy of effective city marketing. The example of Manchester shows just how successful it can be. Portrayed in 1844 by Friedrich Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* as a gloomy place of poverty, the city today is known as the home of Manchester United, the world's wealthiest football club (and a listed joint-stock company), which has doubtlessly improved its reputation as a brand. In a similar way, through the construction of a Formula 1 racing track and its acceptance in the exclusive Formula 1 racing circuit, Singapore has taken a share in the world attention economy that makes a city global today. For apart from attracting visitors from around the world, the global city itself incessantly visits the entire world by means of its media presence. This is why it is so difficult nowadays to determine the place of the contemporary city, which is determined less and less by its territory and built morphology. Hitherto defined as the quality of a place, urbanity is transforming into an atmospheric condition which is no longer necessarily bound to place or space. This transurban urbanity definitively steps beyond the chartered territory of urbanism. It can certainly no longer be planned, for it occurs only if we perform it.
5. This development is not restricted to the USA, but also occurs in densely populated regions of Western Europe – for example, in Germany, where the amount of paved surface has almost doubled since 1950 and now accounts for 14 percent of the total surface area. “Each day in Germany, an average of 129 hectares, the equivalent of 200 football pitches, is built upon … The destructive development of the landscape has become a pressing problem for the Bundesumweltamt (Federal Environmental Authority), as the effects are devastating. The losses to species diversity, the difficulty in the renewal of ground water, climate changes, the irreversible degradation of soil and gigantic streams of commuters are the most frequently mentioned side effects of uncontrolled housing development.” Stefan Kuß, “Wer jetzt kein Haus kauft sich Bauerwartungsland” (“Whoever has no house buys land to build on”), *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Oct. 23, 2001, p. 57.
7. Trier, a Roman settlement, shrank in this way. In the early 4th century AD, it was the capital of the Western Roman Empire and had a population of 60,000. After the unrest and raids of the Dark Ages in the 5th and 6th centuries, its population declined to 10,000. The city shrank to a concentric formation which occupied only a small part of the original grided plan of the Roman city. The rest reverted to countryside that was reurbanized in the course of later urban expansion.
8. Rem Koolhaas, talking to Hubertus Siegert, March 16, 1996. From the series “Conversations without a Camera,” held by Hubertus Siegert as a complement to his film *Berlin Babylon* (Germany 1996-2001) and published on the Internet (www.berlinbabylon.de/Pages/bb-koolhaas.html).
10. This double programming of image and control is applied throughout The Venetian: surveillance cameras are built into the shades of "traditional" street lamps. The Carabinieri on the Piazza San Marco are not merely a decorative feature, but are in fact security guards for the entertainment complex.
The Right to Participate in the
Arjen Mulder: In *Modernity at Large* you define a “locality” not as a spatial structure but as a structure of feeling, and you mention a “general technology for the production of locality.” How can this structure of feeling, this locality, be produced in a globalized world?

Arjun Appadurai: The impetus behind what I call the production of locality was, in the first place, to provide a counterpoint to the idea that was still very prevalent in anthropology in the early 1990s: that the local was somehow an inert canvas upon which global or other forces produced changes. This notion leads to all the contrasts between the local and the global that underlie a great many confusions and distortions in the way we analyze globalization. I wanted to unsettle the idea of the local as somehow given, and draw attention to the fact that any form of local social life requires agency, purpose, vision, design. The local is as much a process and a project as anything else.

The second point was to somewhat despatialize the local, and to get some initial distance from the idea of scale and scalar understandings of locality and globality. It’s six years since the book appeared, and now that I’ve thought more about all these issues, I still think the issue of multiple scales, as well as the related issue of scales and forms – social forms, spatial forms – is by no means unimportant, but we shouldn’t start with any mechanical idea of scales, or reduce the problem of the local and the global to a scalar problem. I talk about the local as a structure of feeling – a phrase I borrow from Raymond Williams – to try to slightly dematerialize it.

The final point in this approach to locality connects up with the emphasis in *Modernity at Large*, and in my other work after that, on the idea of the
imagination as a social practice. This is the point on which I like to focus here. In the book I describe the imagination as something more than a kind of individual faculty, and something other than a mechanism for escaping the real. It’s actually a collective tool for the transformation of the real, for the creation of multiple horizons of possibility. The production of locality is as much a work of the imagination as a work of material social construction.

Of course locality has a spatial dimension, a scalar dimension, a material dimension and a kind of embodied dimension, but I want to infuse them with the idea that in the world in which we live the imagination actually can reach into multiple scales and spaces and forms and possibilities. These then can become part of the toolkit through which the structure of feeling can be produced locally. Locality, in the end, may still have something to do with scale and place, and with the body (and without that it loses all its meaning) – but with the difference that the horizons of globality, through media and the work of the imagination and migration, can become part of the material through which specific groups of actors can envision, project, design and produce whatever kind of local feeling they wish to produce. I’m talking here, of course, about the more liberatory sense of the production of locality. There are other productions of locality which are much more confined and confining, but here I’m trying to emphasize the global as a kind of expansion of the horizon of the local.

AM: This brings us to the question of why we as human beings need a locality to live in. The postmodernist philosophers were always talking about being nomads and floating around through the world.

AA: Sure. But the nature of the human concern with intimacy, with friendship, with attachment, with predictability, with routine, and even with what we may call ordinary life, or everyday life, is such that it simply cannot work with entirely abstract, or virtual, or mediated, or imagined communities, to use the Anderson phrase. We seem to need things to which we have access of an embodied type. We don’t necessarily need what used to be called face-to-face communities, but we need communities whose presence we can experience in a material, embodied, sensory manner. That’s the key, rather than the idea that people need roots, which I think is a more dangerous and ambiguous and also inaccurate idea about what the needs here are.

Insofar as we’re not merely actors and subjects, but also embodied or bodily subjects, we feel the need for some kind of sense of social productivity and collectivity whose imagined qualities echo with some sensory qualities. The social group can be very large, but it’s one thing to be in a very large city of which you
may know very little directly, and another to say that you’re a citizen of the world, or a netizen – terms which clearly have some partial metaphoric meanings to them, but don’t resolve the human need for linking intimacy with the everyday. That’s why we need some spatialized local, which cannot in the end be tossed away.

AM: A fascinating aspect of your notion of locality is that cities are no longer one locality, but a complex of localities. This raises a difficult problem for urbanists: how to plan a city that’s no longer homogeneous, but consists of all sorts of groups that want their own locality somehow produced or reproduced?

AA: We know two or three things are happening in this context. First of all, we know that by almost every measure that exists, the population of the world is moving into cities at an amazing rate. We also know that many of these cities are going to be megacities – there’re not going to be hundreds of smaller cities, but a smaller number of very big cities. And thirdly, we know that these cities are going to be, on the whole, sites of dramatic inequalities. These three things, almost everybody agrees, are within the next thirty years non-negotiable probabilities. Of course we’re not in an iron cage, and so there are possibilities to intervene, both in the number and the nature and the size of these cities. People involved in housing issues, in design issues, progressive architects and others are thinking very hard about how not to simply say, “Well, this is going to happen, and what do we do?” and throw up their hands. But the force is there. The fact that as many as half the human population will be living in these huge cities is a reality that’s clearly going to be among the two or three most important social facts of the first half of this century.

So the question of how to imagine cities as a site for the structure of feeling is a challenge, both conceptually and epistemologically and also practically in terms of urban planning and urban design and urban form. It would be a complete fantasy to think of a single design for cities like Bombay or Manila, of the sort that unfortunately still dominates a lot of urban planning. At the same time, activists, architects, planners, academics rightly don’t want to open up a free market and say: “Well, we’ll design something, and then the next neighbor can do what they want.” We’re caught between a top-down, state-like planning approach, and on the other hand a bottom-up, market, laissez-faire approach.

I think the beginning of an approach to this problem is not to reify the idea that cities are collections of subcultures or “multicultures,” each of which needs its own forms and expressions and in a sense its own spaces. In such cases, we hope that those are safe and benign, as they actually turn out to be in some
It’s these traffics that make up the new, huge, complex cities, and the way to read these cities is something like the way I try and read the world as a globalized space. For cities that are expanding, like Mexico City, Bombay, Manila, Lagos (the list is long), as well as cities in the Northern Atlantic zone, which are growing at a very fast pace – thinking of them as “global spaces” may not be a bad idea, in the sense that globalization is about flows, flows of mediated messages and actual flows of bodies. Even in terms of infrastructure, like electricity, sewage and so on, cities are all about movement, flow and transportation, rather than about settlement. This approach puts your attention not so much upon buildings or on the organization of particular neighborhoods, or on housing developments, or colonies, or on particular industrial parks, in other words: chunks of lived space. Instantly it puts you in touch with the circulatory system or the nervous system of the city as the object of planning and design.

This is difficult, however, because it requires an engagement which challenges not only the architectural imagination, but also the geographical imagination, the urban planner’s imagination, and also the social scientist’s imagination, because you have to get away from the distinction between what one might call “sedimented space” and “trafficked (or traversed) space.” Sedimented space is what all our specialties are about; even in social science, research is much easier once a population has precipitated or sedimented itself. But to look at the circulatory system through which forms are moving, through which bodies are moving and identities are moving and material, infrastructural stuff is moving, from electricity to cars to roads and postal services, etc., and then turn to more secure

European cities, either by design or by accident. In Stockholm, for example, many people of non-Swedish origin are living in working-class suburbs solely devoted to non-Swedish migrants. But even when this approach works out very well and there’s no conflict, my feeling is that this isn’t the way to go, because it always carries the element of the ghetto in it, which isn’t consistent with the pluralities, intersections, crossings, traffics that the modern world is capable of producing. In my view we should change our fundamental emphasis to the flows, rather than to the spaces and structures.
locational forms, is difficult.

Again, we shouldn’t go too far with this circulatory, flow-based imagery, because especially if you take the point of view of the urban poor, and the poorest of the poor with whom I’ve been working for the last three years or so, I’m aware that for them something like secure tenure, even to ten feet of land, is absolutely central. So to speak of movement, flows, linkages, etc., may seem a bit remote to them. But if you speak with the poorest of the poor in a city like Bombay, they’re extremely sensitive to the question of trains, the movement to jobs, to not being relocated to areas where they have to go ten miles to work. It’s not that they’re indifferent to movements of traffic, of bodies, of energies, of electricity, for they know about these things. But because they have been victims of unfree mobility, and have been pushed from place to place, they have a different investment in the places, sites and techniques of stability. They want a building, they want a flat, they want a room. They want full rights.

The biggest movement in urban housing today is the global campaign for what is called “secure tenure.” It doesn’t matter where you are, even if you’re living under a lamppost, but you need the right to say, “This is my place, I cannot just be kicked out.” We have rights for tenants, but the urban poor are basically seen as floating material, and they’re asserting a human claim to stability. This comes back to your earlier question: even in a globalized world, we shouldn’t ignore that people want points of reference. If you go to the urban world, it’s very important to take the circulatory image, but negotiate it with the reality for the poorest of the poor: motion alone will not be the key, because motion for them has often been a nightmare. So how to combine these two things, I think, is the central challenge in the world we’re creating.

AM: Let’s move on to another notion in Modernity at Large, the concept of “translocality.” There’s this incredible example of translocality, the Indian call centers that exist in Bombay. The Indian employees there phone Americans in Texas or Alabama to ask when they’re going to pay their bills and loans and so on. Their Indian names are changed into American names like John and Sally, and they
AA: A similar example in Europe is Dublin, which is a great place for these call centers. I was told that the Irish accent was favored in Europe over the American accent. Somehow it has a certain charm. And this is related to the growth of Dublin and Ireland as an offshore service place in relation to the European Union. So we see it not just in India.

AM: Of course this is all possible because today the telephone is so cheap, and basically media are cheap. This is also an important reason why localities in the spatial sense are not that important anymore.

AA: In the Indian context people have used interesting words like “cyberproletariat” or “cybercoolies.” The latter is for people who do not just this work: India has a lot of people who, for example, type and computerize the written notes of doctors in the United States. And they do similar work for insurance companies. In other words, work that would be too costly in the United States is sent to India, where people do it at a much lower price. This work is related to the world of
electronic technology, but in a complicated way: one creates a kind of second or third class of cyber-specialists at the low end, as it were, not the value-adding end. India has been huge in this and similar spheres in the last five to eight years. Now other countries want to get a part of this too, and in places in Pakistan they’re starting this kind of work.

It’s interesting to see that for these countries this is also a way to get into some kind of membership in the global economy. If you’re not in a place where you can play financial derivatives or get into high-level banking, what are you going to do? So this work is in a way a natural tendency: with relatively low investments you can take the thing you already have, which is an educated population, especially the English-speaking part of it, and find a kind of role. And it’s double-edged, because on the one hand you’re at the low end of a highly profitable world economy – hence the idea of a cyber-proletariat – but on the other hand it may be putting you in a better life than you have already.

Now if we take the call centers with their demands for learning American accents, and think about the larger translocality question, there actually are similar examples, but less translocal, or translocal in a different way, like the growth of Domino’s Pizza in Bombay. Here the young men and women are trained very carefully to take telephone orders, to make deliveries on a time schedule that’s dictated by the Domino’s worldwide system, and to perform a whole sort of retail social drama in exactly the way Domino’s thinks is correct.
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer – Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4 (Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, Spain)
Photos by David Quintas. See page 139
They're not dealing with disembodied demands far away: the customers are nearby, they take the order, they get on a motorbike and deliver Domino’s pizzas. But they’re also players in a globalized kind of commercial etiquette, in which they have to learn how to wear a certain kind of hat, talk in a certain kind of way, ask for the order in a certain kind of way, etc.

The reason that I bring up this example is to say that people who get involved in what we might call out-of-body globalized performances are also keenly aware that these are just one thing among many things in their lives. It must always be remembered that when these cyberproletarians go home to a room with fifteen people in it at night, and take the train in Bombay, and buy some food on the way from their job, this virtual world is already quite far away. It must be remembered that these are partial identities, partial explorations. And for that reason I don’t see them as so surreal as they might at first seem, because they’re still part of a set of demands, constraints and requirements in social life, which place them in a more intimate scene of social reproduction.

At the same time, for the people doing these jobs I think it’s quite a demanding and challenging exercise, because they’re inhabiting multiple imaginary spaces. Especially for younger and poorer people, who are struggling for a place in the new economies and urban sociologies, it’s not a single-focus enterprise. They don’t spend the whole day thinking about how to seem more American; it’s no different than learning how to do software, which in a place like India they don’t even think of as alien, because it’s simply what they do. Or to take a more distant example, it’s no more strange than a fifteen-year-old in Holland or Germany who learns to play Bartok. You could say, “How strange” – it’s very abstract, very remote from everyday life – but we don’t worry about it at all. If someone can learn to play Bartok or Webern when they’re sixteen years old and at home, why can’t they learn an American accent? After all, they have a lot of other knowledge about American identity, they see films, they read books. It’s nothing bizarre.

This doesn’t mean we have to say, “This is great, this is the way of the future.” Because I have a position which I’ve been developing in India and in relation to India about the cyberproletariat, the software revolution, and in general about education. I think that a society like India needs to be very careful not to just become what I call the “knowledge fodder” of the world, the fodder for the knowledge economy. But how do you do that so that every day you’re not encountering a new fashion – today computers, tomorrow stock, the day after tomorrow insurance? How do you develop a global agenda for the regional and the local, instead of being pushed into the role of asking what the customer wants (and the customer is somewhere else)? So I think there’s something to be
changed in all this, but in the short run I don’t think that these activities are as
decontextualizing, alienating and artificial as they may at first seem.

Coming back to the translocality question in a broader way, what I
wanted to stress in my book is that because of the degree of media penetration
and saturation – which frequently also means media of many kinds and media
from many places, particularly television, where it’s available – people live, as it
were, in layered places, which in themselves have a variety of levels of attach-
ment, engagement and, if you like, reality. That goes back to my idea that in a
world of migration and mass mediation, everybody is living in a world of image
flows, such that it’s not simply and straightforwardly possible to separate their
everyday life from this other set of spaces that they engage with through the
media, either as receivers, or as workers in call centers, or on interactive websites,
etc. The work of the imagination allows people to inhabit either multiple locali-
ties or a kind of single and complex sense of locality, in which many different
empirical spaces coexist. So one of these call center people is simultaneous living
a little bit in the United States and also living substantially in Bombay. But Bombay
itself, because of films and so on, is not merely empirical Bombay.

In this sense you have a kind of creative, spatial form which isn’t
reducible to its empirical facts. Now those empirical facts – for example, that the
trains in Bombay are incredibly crowded – must be faced at the end of the day.
Even if you’re inhabiting many localities, this one will always be present to you.
But because I do believe in the work of the imagination, I believe your engage-
ment with this empirical world can be somewhat different depending on what
translocalities you inhabit mentally, in and through the imagination. So the train
isn’t the same for everyone, not only because there’s a better part and a less good
part of the train, but simply because the train is only one element of people’s
localized existence. Again I would say, remembering the urban poor, that the rela-
tionship of their experienced spaces to their imagined spaces is always at a dis-
advantage. And this must be changed. But the poor, too, negotiate a relationship
between experienced spaces and imagined spaces. They’re not only living in sheer
experience while the rest of us live in the imagination. that’s my sense of the polit-
ical economy of these spaces.

AM: This brings us to the question of identity. How does an identity come into
being in your view? Is it just a mixture of translocalities, or is it a more
autonomous thing?

AA: I’ve come more and more to prefer the term “identification” to the term
“identity.” Only because identity suggests something fairly formed, fairly fixed,
fairly exclusive, fairly stable. In the classical sense of the word people have many identities, and there’s a large portfolio: some are very recessive, others very active. We know this. But if you move to identification, you move to a kind of process, where people are engaging this menu of possibilities in the work of the imagination. In and through the work of the imagination, they are, as it were, trying out many possibilities – and in many cases they’re forced to try out some possibilities. I’m very conscious right now of the brutal ethnic violence in Gujarat, where there’s a continuing state-condoned and even state-sponsored pogrom which began in late February 2002 and is worse than anything since the partition of Pakistan in 1947. So I’m keenly aware that the identity that goes under the label “Hindu” or “Muslim” is not something most people can explore – they have no choice here.

What we see in Gujarat now, and in many parts of the world, especially since the 1990s, is a coercive politics of identification, in which ethnic plurality, secularism, and cultural hybridity are gradually placed under the pressure of ethnic nationalism, state insecurity and paranoia about migrants, in a way that produces coerced forms of identification. Identities which are the products of forced processes of identification are invariably fragile and mutually hostile.

AM: In *Modernity at Large* you describe the spreading of Indian culture around the globe, focusing on cricket, and you state that this culture is something which exists in a “diasporic public sphere,” in “delocalized transnations.” These spheres, then, have a “cultural dimension,” distinguishing them from other such transnations. Would you define a city as a group of such transnations, as a crossroads of these diasporic public spheres? Or does a city have an identity of its own?

AA: As cities grow bigger and as the world grows more connected in a general, overall way, surely cities will contain more transnations. Also, as cities grow larger, people have begun to talk of them as “city-regions” and even “city-states,” because cities are becoming quasi-independent, with many of the features that we only think of as belonging to the nation-state. That is, they’re great conglomerations of identity, of attachment, of space, and of governance. So in many ways cities have been floating out of national spaces and are becoming something of their own. Now the question is: What are they? Are they global? Are they national? Are they merely urban? Clearly, they’re some of all of these. They are very complex junctions of these different spatialities, of these different zones and regimes of flow.

In them, something like transnations might exist in new and significant
numbers. The point I would like to make, to relate to diasporic public spheres, is that we shouldn’t only focus on transnations in a way that might fall back into thinking of them as separate formed nations, with their own traditions and so on. I want to keep my eye constantly on the interactivity of these transnations. And this brings us to the cultural dimensions. There are two different ideas of culture, which in the book I try to begin to separate. One is a dimensional idea, and the other is a substantive idea that culture is actually a set of traditions, substantive commitments, meanings, values. I want to see culture as a dimension, which is first of all relational – that is, it only takes meaning from another culture, and not only by contrast. that’s an old idea: I can be me only if you’re you. But this isn’t necessarily an us-against-them thing. There’s always a conversation in which cultural difference emerges. Sometimes it becomes a bloody conversation, a violent conversation. But very often it’s not. That, for me, is one aspect of the “dimensional” sense of culture: it’s structural and contrastive, in a Saussureian sense.

The other sense of the “dimensional” has to do again with the imagination, in that culture is the dimension of social life and of collective identity in which the material conditions of actors, of subjects and agents, are constantly transformed by the work of the imagination. It’s in the work of the imagination, I think, that the cultural dimension now really lives. Culture means not that you can simply say, “I belong to this community.” I think it means, “I inhabit a terrain of possibilities, constructed through the work of the imagination, in some social context which I inhabit, which allows me to infuse my life with meaning, with value, with belief.” These are well known features of the word “culture,” but the twist here is that when I talk about the cultural dimensions of globalization, as in the title of the book, in the adjectival form, I somehow try to delink culture from place, and make it more an aspect of practice, of social life. Nevertheless, in the end, no idea of culture or even of the cultural dimension makes sense unless there is difference from something else. But in my approach, that difference is now very much tied up not just with static, spatialized communities but with flows and linkages. The differences are both constructed and reproduced through circulation, through traffic, through exchange and negotiations, rather then through simple exclusivity.

Now this is, again, the utopian side or the positive side of the term. We know that the dystopian side is precisely resisting this, and says: No, culture means something which is single, ethnic, exclusive and which is therefore violent, which requires other cultures to go. We know that this is one of the major trends in the modern world, to invent minorities through whom you can invent majorities, and through whom you can create communities through extreme violence. In a recent book by Philip Gourevitch on Rwanda, he has a great phrase:
“Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community-building.” A truly brutal aphorism, which precisely threatens any tendency moving in a utopian direction. Yes, when I talk about the practices of the imagination as a way in which meaning is infused into urban spaces, translocal spaces and so on, that’s not just a one-way street to more flow, more mobility, more tolerance, more interaction, more peace if you like. It’s frequently a road to the opposite.

Therefore I’m engaged constantly in a double task, which is widening the scope of the positive side, of the imagination as a source of horizons of possibility, while recognizing all the time that globalization produces the opposite of that also. This opposite is an excessive exposure of the racialized roots of nationalist thinking, which go back to Herder and others, and claim that culture is really about soil, space, folk – terms which are precisely, for me, the dark side. In Gourevitch’s aphorism, that’s what he is catching: that in some strange way, under certain circumstances, we can build communities by the extermination of other communities. How do we tackle these kinds of pathological forms of community building?

Going back to our original discussion of the word “locality,” you could substitute “locality” in his aphorism and say that genocide is after all a way of locality-building. Yes, but how do we find other methods of locality-building which are not only different but actually reduce the other tendency? This, to me, is the central challenge, both of global forms of governance and politics, and of governance and politics in megacities. How do you do it without opening the road to purification, cleansing and ethnocide, and instead open the road to something else?

In the end, this certainly has something to do with changing the gradual pauperization of the world’s urban population and the world’s population in general. Without that, all these potentials in the work of the imagination will remain sterile, or limited, or only for the very privileged, and in fact the spaces of the other kind of work of the imagination which Gourevitch is talking about will expand. So how to slow that down, or contest that, or give an alternative to it, may be the central challenge at both levels of properly global processes, flows and politics, and of urban politics, governance, planning, design, which have a powerful set of links, both of connectivity and of resemblance, to the global order. The city is where we have to do some trial and error. I don’t have a formula for a solution, except for one thing. Let’s, in seeking solutions, endorse the following principle: Even the poorest of the poor should have the capability, the privilege and the ability to participate in the work of the imagination. Can we create a politics that recognizes that? There is the question.
Pro-Osama bin Laden demonstration in Pakistan after the attack on the World Trade Center. The posters turned out to contain a portrait of Sesame Street’s Bert. The images are thought to have been taken from the Internet; a picture from the “Bert Is Evil” art site was also used.
Scott Lash was born in Chicago, Illinois. He received a B.Sc. in psychology from the University of Michigan, an M.A. in sociology from Northwestern University, and a Ph.D. in sociology from the London School of Economics. Lash’s first academic post was at Lancaster University, where he became a professor in 1993. Between 1986 and 1991 he spent two years in Berlin as a Humboldt Fellow. In 1998 he went to Goldsmith’s College, London University, to help establish the new Center for Cultural Studies and serve as a professor of sociology. Lash is author of Sociology of Postmodernism (Routledge, 1990); Another Modernity, A Different Rationality (Blackwell, 1999); and Critique of Information (Sage, 2002). He is coauthor of The End of Organized Capitalism (Polity, 1987) and Economies of Signs and Space (1994) with John Urry, and coauthor of Reflexive Modernization (Polity, 1994) with Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. His recent empirical research with Celia Lury, Dede Boden and Dan Shapiro has focused on the biographies of global cultural products and the new media in London. His research interests include information society, global media, continental philosophy, technology and culture, and the problem of “flows.”

Arjen Mulder: In Another Modernity, A Different Rationality (1999), you have a great theory or story about two kinds of modernity – let’s say the two sides of the coin of modernity. On the one hand, there is “Enlightenment,” the control part of modernity, which is about the same and the other, and is symbolized in the grid. On the other hand, there is what you call “enlightenment,” which is about ground and tradition and being, about the difference between this and that, and is symbolized by the labyrinth. In your book you build up these majestic twin towers, so to speak, and then at the end suddenly the information age comes crashing in and the whole construction of modernity collapses and we are left behind in the “age of indifference.” I found that a sad ending to the story, because if you look at, for example, the Internet, in its very structure it has all these characteristics of a labyrinthine, nonhierarchical, flowing system that you give for the other, second modernity with its different rationality. Is Internet or the information age in general not that other modernity, with other means, rather than the end of modernity?

Scott Lash: Interesting point.

AM: The question in this interview is basically how we can ground ourselves in the information age, how we can have or produce a feeling of being somewhere, of belonging. Arjun Appadurai describes how, for example, Indian culture – or cricket as an example of Indian culture – is moving around the globe, using all modern media to stay in contact. For him the media are the new ground for a culture, globally speaking.
SL: I’m probably not pessimistic about the information age. I’ve changed since the writing of Another Modernity; I got really fascinated with information. I just finished a new book called Critique of Information. My argument in the new book is that there’s no other space than the informational sphere anymore. Classical critique has always been through transcendents, whether it’s dialectical or ethical or works through the aporius, like Kant or Derrida. It’s not that they’re wrong, it’s just that all these transcendents are now collapsing into a generalized immanence, so that the critique of information has to come from within the information itself. There used to be an outside, but now there’s probably no longer an outside. First we did The End of Organized Capitalism (1987), which is already about the classical structures breaking down, and then we did Economies of Signs and Space (1994), which is about how what was broken down then enters the flows; it’s talking about a new order of flows.

While writing Another Modernity, which is partly urbanistic but partly more philosophical, all of a sudden I kind of twigged: Oh God, this whole information development is happening now. that’s why the last three chapters almost read like a kind of pessimistic media theory, while the rest of the book is going for the ground.

So to come to your question, it’s really hard to know where the ground is in the information age. It’s tricky. It’s partly a question of flows and stoppages, if you want to use the Duchamp idea of network and stoppages, or of flows and structures, or flows and systems, whatever you want to call it. You always have both: you have the deterritorialized flows and you’re always going to have certain reterritorializations, starting from all the way back, from totems and gifts, to early modernity – the classical industrial society – to the second, or post-, modernity and the information society. Now everybody is saying that there’s a new reterritorialization going on in terms of nonlinear sociotechnical systems. They weren’t all saying that two years ago. It’s partly a new episteme, a cybernetic episteme, a nonlinear episteme. People like Donna Haraway saw what was coming, and architects, biotechnologists, physicists are using that kind of language now. But whether a nonlinear system is a ground?

I got a chapter in Critique of Information on Henri Lefebvre. He talks about the autochthonic and the chthonic, as in chthonic earth goddesses. He talks about chthonic earthly underground forms like the crypt, and he starts with the autochthonic model of the spider reproducing itself in space. Now if you take people like McLuhan and Baudrillard who say we have to go backwards to prehistoric models to understand the information age, the fascinating question is:
how for backwards do we have to go? If you go back before the dualisms, if you go back before the rise of the world religions, if you go back before the rise of a neutral instance of law and the age of empires, you have the age of the gift economy and the age of totemism. They’re both immanentist forms of life, especially totemism as Durkheim and others describe it. So there you have a ground, something that’s chthonic, but without an upper world, without an outside. And people are fascinated with that. How many books are trying to find the transition from that immanent order to the beginnings of the transcendent orders, like the Christian order but mostly the order of the age of empires? Deleuze and Guattari are talking about it, Bataille, Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, and *Moses and Monotheism*.

The interesting thing is that there’s nothing more grounded than totemism. Okay, we’re not in totemism, but the attraction of totemism is that in some ways we’re back in an immanental culture – as distinct from a dialectical or dualist culture – after 5,000 or 7,000 years of dualism. We’re back into an immanental order and the angels and gods and demons are among us again. Okay, it’s different, but nonetheless. Maybe that’s what you’re getting at in your question. It’s not a stupid thing to think about a ground even in an information order that’s an immanental order.

AM: So then the ground in the information age would be like in a gift economy. The Internet is for a large part a gift economy. The attraction of the Internet is in the free flow of information, that is, the free exchange of information. If you write an e-mail to somebody and pose a question, you always get an answer.

SL: I think that’s right. But totemism is an even stronger idea than the gift economy. The gift is a funny concept. With the gift and the sacrifice as described by Mauss and Bataille, you’re giving gifts to the gods or a god, and you’re probably already moving away from the strongest immanence, which is animism and totemism, because the gods are already somewhere up there. Not all the way transcendental, but already a little bit. The gods take on an anthropomorphic form. that’s interesting architecturally too actually, because classical architecture is so anthropomorphic and then in modernity it gets machinic, and now with people like Lars Spuybroek and others it seems like it’s almost back to the earliest nonanthropomorphic forms. And maybe the Internet is about this too. In totemism you share substance with the gods. The god is like the leader of your band, and he’s a god and an animal at the same time. You drink his blood and you eat his flesh in the sacrifice. It’s a sharing of substance, and it’s a lot more
meaning that there are dualisms, there are two separate realms. Derrida and also Lévinas go into the Jew-versus-Greek opposition, where the Judean stands for the unutterability of the name of God, and the Greek stands for cognition, knowledge, the everyday. The Jews then have the messianistic time versus the everyday, etc. This dualism between the Jewish and the Greek is in fact the basis for Western culture. But what I try to argue is that there’s another level, that of sensation, which is different to either the Jew or the Greek attitude. The sensation points to a third, pagan level, which is neither Jewish nor Greek, and maybe it’s grounded in your sense.

AM: I found that part of the book fascinating, because to me it answered to a question I had concerning technical images, like photographs, film, television, etc. I’m always stressing that technical images are not about meaning, unlike painting and other handmade images, which are definitely about meaning. I suddenly realized reading your book that what technical images are about is sensations, and if one wants to come to grips with the technical images one should try to figure out how sensations work in photographs, films etc. Forget about the meaning.

SL: Yes. An indexical image doesn’t work through meaning. It can turn into meaning, but it doesn’t have to.

AM: This brings us back to the question of information. Is it possible to criticize information?
In terms of classical critique it’s not, because classical critique presumes that there’s another level from which you launch your critique, some kind of transcendental, be it dialectical, or nonreconcilable aporetic. Although I must admit I have a little bit of Hegel in me somewhere. In some secret closet I’m a dialectician. I’m not into Kant; I read it all the time, but I hate it. But the critique of information is something that’s got to be immanent. It’s funny. Deleuze has a generalized notion of immanence in his work, but he always seems to be saying: Okay, we’re out there in the real with the flows … I don’t want to sound ironic about Deleuze; I’m heavily influenced by him … but we’re out there with the flows, and all those nasty people are back there in the symbolic, and if they could just get out in the flows with us … Deleuze is a monist clearly, and an immanentist like Guattari, but still, it’s as if you can stand in the flows of information and then launch a critique of surveillance etc. But can you?

Deleuze and Guattari have a notion of control too, but it’s certainly not well developed. So the argument I started in *Critique of Information*, and I want to take it a lot further, is: how does power work in the information age? There is power in the flows too. It’s not just good old flows against dreadful structures. Sociotechnical systems, even nonlinear ones, play an important role in domination. Even without meaning you can have domination. Okay, there’s still some meaning around, but in some ways culture is dominantly operational, rather than a meaning culture. It’s everything Duchamp was talking about: if you go to an art gallery you should be a user of the work of art and complete it, because it’s incomplete, it’s conceptual, and the actual material thing you see is an accident on the way to the concept, and even the concept is a little concept, not a big one. If anybody in an audience is putting forward different interpretations, it’s yet another operational completion. Which is also obviously the case when a microprocessor is put into a TV set: then if it works you have found the right level of operationality.

We did an ICA day in the new Tate Gallery with Rem Koolhaas, and I was supposed to engage in a conversation with him. What occurred to me there was that Castells always says that the city is a regime of meaning, but perhaps we should look at it as a regime of operationality. In a sense that’s always been true, but it
probably is much more true than ever. I was wondering during the conversation: why is Koolhaas mentioning the Roman Empire or the Roman city? Then it suddenly dawned on me that he was looking at all these system writers, you know, urbanists or thinkers who were understanding the city in terms of complex sys-

-AM: But the talk about the control of flows – for example, in migration – is always within the regime of meaning: the old culture is being threatened by the influx of foreigners, etc.

-SL: That’s a good point you’re making. We’ve had an institutional meltdown, except it’s not as melted as some of us want to think. It’s going to go on for a hell of a long time, and therefore it’s important to understand things in terms of the institutional meltdown. that’s what I find a bit distracting about media theory. Media theory pretends: oh, well, it all happened a long time ago, and let’s get on with it. That can be very facile. It’s too easy to do it. But obviously the institutional meltdown and the value meltdown that’s going on has as much to do with the information society as with multiculturalism. It’s quite extraordinary. Have you ever seen Ali G? His real name is Sacha Baron Cohen, so he’s actually Jewish, and white, and from Cambridge, 28 years old. But he is Ali G, he is this guy that’s part Islam and part black, and who says all the time: “Is it becoz I is black?” He has
got all these lines that are absolutely incredible. Ali G is a great symbol, or better, an icon of the value meltdown and multiculturalism in the United Kingdom, and especially in big cities like London, and he’s taking the piss out of the establishment. I was in Havana with my two sons and of course I’m so old they try to sell dope to my kids, and then they say to my sons: “Where’re you from?” And they say: “England, London.” And then these street sellers go: “Oh, Ali G, Ali G.” It was incredible that these fucking Cubans are identifying the English not with Shakespeare, but with Ali G. What was supposed to be value meltdown and multiculturalism is now seen as English.

AM: I liked this quote in *Another Modernity*: “Beyond and more interactive than interaction is inhabiting.” I read this as: Grounding is more interactive than operationality.

SL: I remember. The quote had a rather silly context. We did an ICA workshop in 1998 with all these 3D guys from Nottingham and others. People were taking VR and 3D much more seriously at the time. The idea was then that VR was taking interactivity to another state. But if one now wants to take the notion of operationality further and really develop it, you could imagine that there’re all sorts of architectonic developments coming from it, whether we’re talking about online architecture or real architecture with more complex forms and curves as distinct from modernist architecture, so an architecture in which some information can possibly become participatory in the architectural design. That reminds me again of Rem Koolhaas, who is so obsessed by facts. In all the books he made, there’re all these facts. He doesn’t understand these facts positivistically, but he is not into
There are two things that I find interesting about this obsession with facts. The first is, one can imagine all these facts as part of the information that’s going into evolving nonlinear spaces of inhabiting, and more importantly spaces of exchange, of goods, equipment, information and discourse. The second thing is that facticity is somehow … how shall I put it? In the Tate Modern somebody in the audience asked Koolhaas: “Why don’t you ever talk about ethics?” And Koolhaas answered: “There are a lot of people who can tell you what you should do. It’s not my thing; I want to talk about how things are.” That was a great answer. There’s always a lot of piety in the ethical approach, that’s why I like the paganism or the early Lyotard more than a lot of Derrida’s work, which in its origin is supposed to be Jewish, but it’s Protestant in its origin, because Kierkegaard is the man. It is really Danish. But to come back to the facticity, it’s also the facticity of power. And I think information works as power. If we talk about inhabiting technologies and inhabiting information, there’s power involved as well.

I think power works through an incredible facticity now, and through an indexicality on a very immediate level – although it also works discursively – but it works incredibly indexically in the sense of nonlegitimated power. You know how you read your newspaper: it just hits you with brute facticity, and you don’t think about the arguments. And I think there’re a lot of ways that power works this way in the information age. It doesn’t work so much through consent, but through an indexical violence, and it’s nonlegitimated. But the funny thing about the information age is that there’s an incredible amount of disinformation. The information society is the most informed and the most disinformed at the same time, the most rational and the most irrational at the same time. Sometimes of course the irrationality is the unintended consequence of the greatest rationality. Sometimes the greatest rationality – production for example – is based on a great irrationality. The incredible thing about the information age is that the notion of information comprises the greatest rationality and the greatest irrationality. Even the press works like that. On the one hand you have more ads and more color and more brand names to hit you. But at the same time you have hugely long discursive articles, especially about environmental issues. So I think you have got
this incredible dumbing down and smarting up all happening at the same time.

AM: There’s a recent argument that the information society is an experience society, an experience economy: the products nowadays are not so much material as experiential.

SL: You seem to have this strong notion of experiences as generated by unstable media. But tell me what you mean by that.

AM: Experiences are physical. Your body is basically your prime medium for experiences. You feed your body information, and then it gets into a state that would not have existed if you hadn’t had this information or energy flowing in. So media are means or machines to generate energy that informs the body into an unprecedented state of being.

SL: And higher levels of complexity also mean that there’s more energy for “work.”

AM: Yes, in the Maturana-Varela sense that the more information and energy you put into the system, the more complex the system organizes itself. Basically the idea is to get as complex as possible. If you want to understand anything you shouldn’t reduce it to a few simple sentences, but try to make it more complex.

SL: Experience is a funny word. I tried to argue in Another Modernity that the first modernity had to do with epistemology and the second one with experience. And thinking about experience I kind of met ontology. Husserl wrote a book called Experience and Judgment – judgment is epistemological somehow, you judge from outside of the world, and for me experience is really being in the world.

AM: That’s exactly what I mean. you’re in the system and “working” as a system connected to other technical, social, cultural systems.

SL: So the shift of phenomenology from classical Enlightenment, the Kantian approach, means a focus on experience. Gadamer wrote a big book on that. And once you’re in the world of things, through experience you can somehow have access to some kind of the ontological structure of things. But now that everything is collapsing in the information age, I don’t know if experience is still the same thing. The way I would want to use the “Erfahrung”–“Erlebnis” distinction
is one in which Erfahrung is not just being in the world in a phenomenological sense, but also very much in a traditional sense. It can be phenomenological as an intentional Ego, but also like Walter Benjamin’s storyteller. Benjamin talks about the storyteller who comes from long ago and far away, and he talks about the “Geselle,” the journeymen, who tell stories as they go off through the country and eventually become craftsmen, and they talk while they work. So you have got this wild notion of experience there, the experience from the “erfahrene Geselle.” It’s connected with the day-to-day; it’s not the narrative of a story; it doesn’t have the finitude of death; it goes on and on and on, generation after generation. Next to that you have what Benjamin calls “shock experience.” That last one has a lot more to do with what you’re talking about.

—AM: I guess you’re right. And the experience economy is also about Benjamin’s shock experience.

SL: The only difference is that what for Benjamin really counts is the messianic time that goes up into the “Jetztzeit.” I’m kind of agnostic on that, mostly I don’t believe that there’s a messianic time per se. There probably was, but now we’re having much more an immanent thing in which there’s maybe a disjointed temporality, and “Shockerlebnisse” are much more an empirical thing, without a transcendental. But disjointed at the same time.

—AM: So inhabiting is for you the experience part in the sense of Erfahrung, and interactivity is experience in the sense of Erlebnis, shock experience without transcendentals?

SL: Yes, inhabiting in the sense of Heidegger’s Bauen Wohnen Denken. Maybe we’re both trying to say that inhabiting has to be much more than just a shock experience now too.

—AM: Well, the traditional sense of grounding is “wohnen,” inhabiting. And now in the age of information flows, of migration flows …

SL: Kann man nicht mehr wohnen …

—AM: That is the central question here.

SL: Maybe what we try to get at is that even though there’s no deep ontology anymore in Heidegger’s sense, and even if you cannot “wohnen” in the same
place forever, there’s a form of inhabiting in something like an informational envi-
ronment. And how does that work, when it’s not all shock experience and mere
operationality? Well, I would say it just has to organize itself differently. There
would have to be some sort of stabilizing of your sociotechnical system or what-
ever the hell it is, either your body or your house or your psyche. Stabilizing has
to do, as Prigogine says, with different kinds of communication frameworks:
when there’s a certain density of communication you get a certain amount of sys-
tem stability. Prigogine is trying to understand chemistry in terms of communica-
tion between elements and units, but it’s also true for humans. Maybe you get a
certain kind of stability and stabilization through a density rather than intensity of
communication. It cannot be too intense if it’s dense enough.

If you’re working in the new sectors, as a lot of us do, you move into these proj-
ect spaces, where you then have an intense engagement for eight or nine weeks
and then the group splits up again. In a sense it’s a continued shock experience.
But afterwards somehow the network remains and reactives a year later or
whenever. The network remaining depends on a certain kind of density of com-
munication that needs to be maintained, or else this system becomes entropic.

—AM: The intensity can always recur or die down, but the density is like a struc-
tural need for the network?

—SL: I think so, and maybe that’s a way of stabilizing inhabited spaces that are
informational.
ParisBRAIN – Wool-thread machine in dried-up state
Around the beginning of the 1990s, Frei Otto and his team at the Institute for Lightweight Structures studied what they called “optimized path systems.” Previously, analogously to the chain modeling technique Gaudí used for the Sagrada Familia, they had experimented with material systems for calculating form. Each of these material machines was devised so that, through numerous interactions among its elements over a given time span, the machine restructures, or as Frei Otto says, “finds (a) form.” Most of them consist of materials that can process forces by transformation. Since they are “agents,” it’s essential that they have a certain flexibility, a certain amount of freedom to act. It is also essential, however, that this freedom is limited to a degree set by the structure of the machine itself. Sand, balloons, paper, soap film (including the famous minimal surfaces for the Munich Olympic Stadium), soap bubbles, glue, varnish, and the ones I will be referring to here: the wool-thread machines. This last technique was used to calculate the shape of city patterns, of cancellous bone structure but also of branching column systems. These are all similar vectorized systems that economize on the number of paths, meaning they share a geometry of merging and bifurcating.

For our purposes, we shall take a closer look at the wool-water technique, which follows a three-step procedure:
a. **Figure 1:** Map all the targets of the system (in this case, houses) on a board. For the sake of simplicity these are arranged here in the shape of a circle, which could be on a supporting surface, or on an open ring. Connect each point (or house) to every other using a wool thread. This indicates a basic connectivity of the system: each house is connected to other houses by roads. This system consists only of crossings; it is a typical surface model, a wire frame of lines that neatly make up a surface.

b. **Figure 2:** Give each of the wool threads an overlength of 8%. This is needed since we are always forced to take detours in cities, and since there are hardly any roads that lead straight to a single house, or even more improbable: that connect one house specifically to another house. Of course, this amount of detouring need not be averaged down to a single 8% for the whole. It can be differentiated all through the system.

c. **Figure 3:** Dip the whole system in water, shake it carefully and take it out again. The wet threads will have a tendency to stick together, and as threads start to merge they lose this capacity at other positions, since merging means elimination of available overlength. All overlength is processed out of the system by a surplus of stickiness. Since the paths are coming from all directions, the mergings also come from all directions, which results in a system organized by gaps, by rounded holes, surrounded by thick mergings of threads, sometimes more than eight, and smaller fields of crossings.

While we could call the first step of the system a surface, a system where all directions are equally present, the final stage of the model is much more complex, because it consists of patches of crossings (two dimensions: many directions), mergings (one dimension: single directions) and holes (zero dimension: no directions). The end result is not weak, but rigid and completely tight (when attached on an open ring it comes out of the water horizontally!), which means that it is a strategy of flexible, individually weak elements cooperating to form stronger collective configurations. What emerges is a complex or soft rigidity, which is very different from the top-down, simple and frozen rigidity of the first stage. So we should resist the idea that the first stage is a rigid order and the end result is just a romantic labyrinth or park. Actually the order of the end result is as rigid as the first stage of the grid, but much more intelligent because it optimizes between individual necessities and collective economy. Yet it is not an easily readable and clear form of order, but a vague order; it is hardly possible to distinguish between surface areas that function as linearities and lines that cooperate
as surfaces. Everything between the dimensions is materialized. And though the
dimensions are clearly singularities arranging the system (the mergings into thick
lines are like the ridges of dunes, which orient the sand surface to the wind
forces), it is continuity that makes the order emerge. But though the order is
vague, it should nonetheless be considered very precise, because nothing is left
out. There is no randomness; there is only variation.

The truly amazing feature of this system is that it is in fact structured by holes;
the nesting of holes is the driving force behind its formation, while architects are
always trained to think that holes are, in the end, subtracted from a system. This
machine doesn’t operate on subtraction or addition, but on multiplication, in the
classic sense of early systems theory, which says a whole is always larger than the
sum of its parts. The first stage (when all points on the periphery are connected
with each other) is basically drawn, contrary to the end stage, which is processed
by a machine, calculated. A drawing is always created in the visual field, while the
machine follows a partly blind and informational logic where the image is the end product of the process. And though this technique should be considered as a combination or hybrid of the top-down and the bottom-up, the drawn and the generated, the intelligence of it lies in the fact that nothing is “translated”; the drawn is not “translated” into the real. Actually it is the materialization of the ink as wool beforehand that makes it work. The organizational and informational stage is material, not immaterial, as is so often put forth. It is the material potential, the material intelligence, which sets the machine in motion; it is the stickiness, the hairiness, and the curvability which inform the result. It is impossible to do this in ink. It is an intensive technique within an extensive system, and though the quantities (surface area, number of houses, etc.) are given beforehand, often as the result of analysis, the quality emerges through the interaction and multiplication of different parameters. Generally, the intensive is a deformational property (like heating), but here it also becomes a transformational property (like cooking): the threads restructure and reorganize to “find form.” The degrees of freedom of deformation, which are more like extensive movements within an internal structure, become intensive, qualitative changes of “that” structure.

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**Wet Grid vs. Dry Grid**

The dry, Greek grid is a system that separates movement from structure; the structure is of a solid, while the movement is of a liquid. The wet grid, Frei Otto’s grid, is one in which movement is structurally absorbed by the system; it is a combination of intensive and extensive movement, of flexibility and motion. The organization is wet, while the structure is dry. It implies that extensive, Cartesian, bodily locomotion is only possible when it is intensive first, both in the body and in the system. There is a direct relationship between the system of motion and the internal mapping of movements in the body. In the dry grid the body acts as if it is an archive, constantly picking movements off the shelf, every act a reenaction – the
body itself is a dry grid. The wet grid views the body as a complex landscape of tendencies and chreodes that form grooves (lines) in less defined areas that are surfaces. The dry grid is not very different in its ambitions than, say, the box or the hall in architecture: finding a structure, a tectonics that can absorb life, chance and change, while the structure itself must last and persist over time, to span the unforeseen with the foreseeable. The strategy of the grid and the box have always been to average out all possible events, to be general enough for anything. Our whole question here becomes a study of the relationship between flexibility and movement. In opposition to the cubist position, which states that movement is a deconstruction of form, we state here that nothing is as constructivist, as structuralist, as movement. But then movement must be viewed as information, as pure difference which can be absorbed by a system, which subsequently must be a (analogue) computing system.

In architecture, flexibility has always been associated with a variable usage of space, a multifunctionality that has resulted in an averaging of program and an equalization, even neutralization, of space. A general openness, however, always has the effect of generalizing events and being unproductive, because this type of space is not engaged in the events themselves. General openness is only suitable when all desired events are fully programmed in advance, by strictly organized bodies, as in the case of a convention center or a barracks. It is flexible, of course; it is open, yes; but it is totally passive. It doesn’t engage itself in how events and situations emerge; it is indifferent to that, so to speak. It states that life is made up of decisions that have already been taken, of acts that are repetitions of previous acts, in which intentions are completely transparent. Now, a lot of what we do is planned, and a lot of what we intend is transparent; we script and schedule ourselves; but to engage in the unforeseen doesn’t mean these are just accidents happening to our agendas.

The brilliance of the Frei Otto model is that the flexibility is taken literally and
materially, that real movement of water becomes abstract movement of structure, which means a coherent language of “bending,” “splitting,” “curving,” “nesting,” “aligning,” “merging” and the like. The straight line going from A to B is charged by a whole field of other influences and directions, from C or P or K; the line is taken up in a field of potentials which make it an intensive line, which is simply a curve. A curve is an intelligent, better-informed straight line. A curve is a straight line with more openness, on which one can partly return to one’s footsteps, change one’s mind, where one can hesitate or forget. It is not labyrinthine, causing you to lose your way completely; no, it complicates your path, makes it multiple and negotiable. A curve is a complicated straight line. It negotiates difference; it is differential precisely through connecting, through continuity. The dry grid is always segmented and Euclidean, while the wet grid is always a network, topological and curved. The problem is not so much “to open up space to more possibilities,” but the concept of the possible itself. An event is only ever categorized as possible afterwards. The possible as a category lacks any internal structure that can relate the variations; it doesn’t produce variation by itself – it is without potential. The old choice was between determined functionalism and undetermined multifunctionalism. Between the filled-in grid and the not-fully-filled-in grid. But potential is something else: “Potential means indeterminate yet capable of determination … The vague always tends to become determinate, simply because its vagueness doesn’t determine it to be vague … It is not determinately nothing” (C.S. Peirce). Vagueness comes before the situation; neutrality comes afterward. If it comes before, it will neutralize the forces making up the situation. We must replace the passive flexibility of neutrality with an active flexibility of vagueness. In opposition to neutrality, vagueness works with a differentiated field of vectors, of tendencies, that both allow for clearly defined goals and habits for as-yet undetermined actions. It allows for both formal and informal conduct. But it also relates them. It is a structural Situationism. It allows for dérives and détournements as structural properties: the transparent intentionality of planning and habit is charged by the sideways steps of opaque intentionality. It doesn’t mean the unforeseen is now successfully planned and reckoned with: it is precisely unplanned, but the structuring of the foreseen is now such that it can produce the unforeseen and the new. Why? Because the structure engages itself in the ways decisions are made, it is sensitive and intensive, a vague and obscure continuum between clear and distinct pre-set habits. In a sense the wet grid of Frei Otto is still a dry grid (of course, because that was the initial form of the machine before it was dipped in water) – it still gives alternative choices for anyone on any path; you can still turn, but in the dry grid that turn, that détournement, is a corner, segmented, while
in the wet grid it is a curve, continuous. Flexibility is a charged and directed openness, and to be able to switch between transparent and opaque (in time) we need to materialize their in-between in space, clearly opposing Mies’ empty openness and replacing it with solid vagueness.

For the 2001 exhibition *Expériences d’urbanisme: Visions des Pays-Bas* at the Institut Néerlandais in Paris, we set up an installation that used intensive techniques in an experimental way. The exhibition included works like Constant’s New Babylon, Aldo van Eyck’s orphanage, Piet Blom’s Kasbah, Theo van Doesburg’s Aubette and OMA/Rem Koolhaas’s Yokohama project. We intentionally investigated these historical options and their relation to both early Situationism and contemporary *experience design* in the project *ParisBRAIN*.
Situationisms

For the project we considered the relationship between action painting and psychogeographical mapping as efforts to find intensive techniques of design – or of existence, for that matter. What directly connects the two is that they are tracing methods. Movements leave traces, though the gestural move of a situationist’s “step out of the system,” creating “moving accidents,” is somewhat different in nature from Pollock’s gestural dripping technique. Comparing action painting first with the wool-thread technique, one could say Pollock uses loose ends, a line with potentially “infinite” overlength, though it is not likely to curl up completely and disappear into a point. Pollock’s curvy thread (in which liquid water and black wool are combined into black wet paint, dripped from a certain height) has many structural properties, and in studying his works it becomes clear that the movement of the body around a canvas lying on the floor, in combination with the movement of the arm, elbow and shoulder – and again in combination with the tiniest movement, splashing the paint onto the canvas, creating a tiny intensive curvature around the imaginary larger curve of the arm-arabesque – make up the structure of the work. Movement is contained in movement; the curves that are splashed are contained in the curves that are twisted, which are again contained in the nested, the repeated, the entangled, the meshed, etc. – they are woven together into a larger scale by smaller-scale rhythms of variation. Pollock was making traces into a system of paths, while Debord was trying to get off the path and create a trace. It is quite clear that there can only be a successful relationship between tracing and pathing when the surfacing tendency of paths teaming up is in open connection to the line-forming act of the trace. Moment and memory. Moment-line and memory-sheet. Lines meshing into
sheets, sheets folding into lines. For both Pollock and Debord the idea of landscape is crucial. We shouldn’t forget that Pollock’s canvas starts out as a surface, not an empty sheet on which the traces would just be traces of moments, unable to mesh with others. The pure open horizontalism of the canvas-landscape is a material property, as is the quality of the paint. And for Debord’s city of Paris: if it were considered as the impenetrable solid-void model of building blocks and traffic, it would be impossible to create new traces. The Paris landscape is a mental sheet, a psychogeography (could a term be clearer?) which turns all walls into potentially porous structures. This vagueness, this interdimensionality of line and surface, is essential for creating an intensive continuum of movement.

In our operation, we again used Frei Otto’s technique, but in a slightly different manner than that described above.

**a. Speakscape.** Instead of making a horizontal wool-thread model with an open ring, we chose here to let the moving and merging lines interact with a smooth supporting surface, a sheet of transparent Perspex. The shape of the surface greatly influences the merging and bifurcating tendencies of the wool threads. We vertically deformed the shape of the surface into a landscape that would influence how fast the water ran off as the system was taken out of the tank after dipping.
Its geography was a mapping of collective movements of the people in the area west of La Défense in Paris. To get that information we conducted numerous interviews in Nanterre about people’s language and movements. We categorized people according to their “speak” – language, dialect, accent, jargon or the like – bankers’ language, Arab language, skaters’ language, girls’ language, rap language, shopping language, etc. This resulted in a system of vectors structured between Nanterre University, La Défense, the Park and the center of Paris.

b. **Entangled space** (mega-architecture). We placed a set of parallel wool threads in the direction of the Grande Axe and attached them at the two sides of the Perspex with an overlength of 8%. The intent was to create a big shopping and experience center of airport proportions in the middle of a historic city. The five-by-two-kilometer area would connect to the La Défense area on the east side, and to several highways and a bridge on the west side. We shook the system under water and took it out slowly. Whenever we found merging groups among the wool threads, we tied them up with loose ends of decreasing length. We did this in four steps, organizing the structure mainly through entanglements, spatial knots inserted to structure the “dérivian” experience of strolling and shopping. All threads coming out of this operation were materialized as tubular build-

The installation was presented as a video projected from the ceiling down onto a white canvas suspended horizontally above the floor. The video showed the complete step-wise procedure of interviews, mapping, dipping machine, toward design. The video installation should not, however, be viewed as a presentation of a project, but more as a breeding experiment between existing concepts and techniques.

ParisBRAIN, 2001, NOX/Lars Spuybroek with Kris Mun, Florent Rougemont, Chris Seung-woo Yoo and Ludovica Tramontin.

Thanks to Brian Massumi for discussing vagueness, C.S. Pierce and constructivism. Thanks to Brett Steele for his concepts of brandspace and nano-urbanism.
ings, like a completely curved Heathrow, shops leading not to airplanes but to other shops, and more shops, an arabesque of multiply interlacing brands. The spatialization of brands: complicating their segmentation with structured, threaded, blurring effects of continuity is a necessary step in the atmospherization of space.

c. Dotted space (micro-urbanism). The system of tubular commercial buildings connected to global money flows would have an enormous effect on local land prices. The area between this shopping structure and the edge of surrounding nineteenth-century Paris, we decided, should be a conglomerate of tax-free zones, where local initiatives could develop freely, a terrain vague that would not be filled up immediately by buildings, but by an urbanism that would develop over a certain time span. It follows the idea of the sheet quite directly, because it starts out as an open landscape, to be saturated by economic pressures and desires. To structure this occupational strategy into something more like growth, one needs certain connective or even genetic algorithms. In our case, we chose for minor rules to guide the growth: every building would be round (because of an all-around orientation) and accompanied by an extension of the sewage, electricity, communication and road network, with each of these connections splitting off from previous branches according to certain angles.
ParisBRAIN – Overview
D-tower is a coherent hybrid of different media in which architecture is part of a larger interactive system of relationships. It is a project in which the intensive (feelings and qualia) and the extensive (space and numbers) start exchanging roles, in which human action, color, money, value and feelings all become networked entities. The project – which will be built in the city of Doetinchem, the Netherlands, by early 2003 – consists of a physical building (the tower), a questionnaire and a website. All three parts are interactively related. The building, designed by NOX, is a 12-meter-high structure in which standard and non-standard geometries together make up a complex polyester surface formed by a computer-generated molding technique (CNC milled styrofoam). This surface is very similar to a Gothic vault structure, in which columns and surface share the same continuum. The building is related to the website and to the questionnaire, and the last two are in turn related to each other.

The website is a visual representation of the inhabitants’ responses to the questionnaire, written by the Rotterdam-based artist Q. S. Serafijn, which deals with everyday emotions like hate, love, happiness and fear. Every month the questions become more precise, and the answers are graphed in different “landscapes” on the website. The landscapes will show the valleys and peaks of emotions for each of the city’s postal codes. Second, the four emotions are represented by four colors, green, red, blue and yellow, and determine the colors of the lamps illuminating the building. Each night, driving through Doetinchem, one can see which emotion is most deeply felt that day.

Finally, under the tower, inhabitants of the city can also place their own messages on the emotional landscapes on the website. They can also add a photograph
Fear (general) landscape – Landscapes are computer-generated images in ballpoint style; clickable arrows indicate high-fear areas in the city.
and a short letter to the site; these are linked to the landscape by means of a small clickable virtual flag. To further intensify the relations between all these elements, the tower will send prewritten love letters and flowers from “love addresses” to “hate addresses,” and at the end of each year the tower will present a 10,000-euro prize to the address with the highest emotions. The tower is expected to stay in place for decades, making the visualization of the emotional states of different people on different streets in different neighborhoods especially involving. The city’s different states of emotionality will be archived and made accessible on the website.
Example of questionnaire, a selectively accessible part of the D-tower website – Q.S. Serafijn
HAPPINESS

The tower takes on the color of the most deeply felt emotion of that day.
Arjen Mulder: The city is becoming an unstable system through the process of globalization (or whatever you like to call it). What used to be an infrastructure plus buildings in a network of roads in a landscape is becoming an urban cloud – not just because of the sprawls around cities, but also in the sense that wherever you use your cell phone, you’re in a city. And then there are the economic changes, where parts of cities suddenly become obsolete and other derelict parts suddenly turn into hotspots. Two questions interest me here. How do cities become unstable or “transurban”? And how does one ground oneself in this cloud of urbanity?

Edward Soja: There are two elements in what you’re saying that I have difficulty with or disagree with. One has to do with the notion of the city somehow becoming unstable in this period. I would argue that capitalist urbanism has always been fundamentally unstable, but has gone through cycles of crisis and restructuring and then consolidation and then crisis again. Periodically, over time, the cities around the developed world seem almost simultaneously to become unstable, basically creating a situation that no longer fits a period of expansion. This leads to a period of experimentation and new trends of development, which begin to transform the city into something significantly different.

We went through periods like this in the 1830s to the 1850s, in the 1870s to 1900, during the Great Depression to the end of the Second World War. And...
now we’re going through what may be the most dramatic of these four: a new round of disintegration or, to use more contemporary terms, a deconstruction and reconstitution of what we still think of as the modern metropolis. For the last 30 years the modern metropolis has been breaking down and new forms have been emerging. That’s what I call the postmetropolitan transition. The emerging postmetropolis has many features, all of which are associated with the fact that the old form isn’t disappearing entirely but breaking down from its consolidated and fairly stable state and changing into something significantly unlike what it was. This is a different way of thinking about what you describe as “transurbanism” and “creative instability”; I prefer this broader geographical and historical interpretation.

The other disagreement arises from the different scales and concepts of urbanism that exist within architecture versus those in geography and planning, a real clash in the vision of what a city is. You describe in many ways the core architectural view when you said that a city consists of streets, roads and a built environment located within a vaguely defined “urban cloud.” In this vision, the city becomes a collection of separate cells with built environments compacted together to form an urban mass. This view is radically different from the larger-scale spatial or regional vision of the city as an expansive urban system of movements and flows, of goods being produced and people living not just in built environments but in constructed geographies characterized by different patterns of income, unemployment, education levels, ethnic and racial cultures, housing and job densities, etc. All these things are often pushed aside in the obsession – sorry, the passionate concern – architects have for design. These constructed geographies get lost when the city is reduced entirely to a collection of built forms. As a result, architects either tend to see planning the city as their exclusive domain, as specialists in built form, or else they dissociate themselves entirely from the planning process, seeing it only as imposing constraints on their creativity. The city that the geographer looks at is much more than the built environment. What’s being planned from the geographer’s point of view is a very different kind of city. The emphasis is not on the built environment per se (although sometimes it is), but on a more variegated and larger-scale social environment. Architects aren’t usually educated to think of the city in this way.

After saying this, I should add that, of all the architects in the world that I know of, a large proportion of those who at least try to think spatially on that larger scale are Dutch, with Rem Koolhaas probably the most prominent example. What he is doing – even though I would do it very differently – is sometimes quite like
what I do when I talk to architects. That is, he tries to shatter the small-scale built environment and design vision, to crack it open to an ability to think on multiple scales – local, urban and regional – then to even larger regional, national, supranational and global scales. In this sense, the architect is being encouraged to think a little bit more like the geographer, and especially to think regionally. I just gave a lecture to the Architectural Association on regions, called “Regions on my Mind,” in which I tried to explain this unfamiliar, uncomfortable concept to an architectural audience. Because architects fix their attention to these cells, or clusters of buildings and their typologies, they reduce everything to design and put blinkers on their ability to think regionally about cities. They miss the power of these multiple scales that go from the local to the global, the micro to the macro. They’re pretty good with the micro-scale. Some architects have done excellent work, for example, on the body and bodyspace. But to get up into a more comprehensive multiscalar logic is far more difficult.

AM: You said that the changes in the last 30 years are more dramatic than before, and that there’s definitely something going on different from we’ve seen before. In what sense is it more dramatic or different?

ES: I don’t mean ever before. What I said was that the recent period of change may prove to be the most dramatic in the history of the industrial capitalist city, dating back to the late 18th century and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. What’s happening now seems to be a fundamental breakdown and rebuilding of the industrial capitalist city as we have known it. The instability that you see is particular to the modern metropolis that became the dominant form of the industrial city throughout most of the 20th century. Over the last 30 years, nearly everything about the modern metropolis has been changing, from its built environment, architectural styles, and urban morphologies to many other aspects – social, economic, political, cultural – of urbanism as a way of life. And at the same time, the way we conceptualize and study the city is also beginning to be rethought, because what was relatively clear and understandable from the traditional perspectives and language of architecture, geography, and urban studies 30 years ago is no longer as stable and as clear today.

All aspects of the city are going through a series of what I call de-/re-processes that, taken together, define the deconstruction and reconstitution of the modern metropolis. They include deindustrialization–reindustrialization, deterritorialization–reterritorialization, decentralization–recentralization, and so on. Since these processes are still ongoing, we don’t know for sure, and we probably won’t know
in our lifetimes, what will be the most stable or dominant forms of the new metropolis, or what I call the postmetropolis, that has been taking shape over the past 30 years. Yet within this continuing instability, some degree of consolidation has taken place. We can now see a new and different kind of urbanism, a dramatically transformed modern metropolis, increasing evidence of a postmetropolitan transition.

AM: Can you give some examples of this re-urbanism?

ES: The growth of outer cities comes immediately to mind. We’re witnessing a process that’s creating a much more polynucleated urbanism, the rise of what some call the regional city, the regional metropolis. Part of this is coming about because of the urbanization of suburbia, the growth of cities in what were formerly suburban or non-urban areas. Related to this “peripheral urbanization” is something that I’m particularly interested in, and that’s the resurgence of interest in regions and regionalism. You see this, for example, in the language we use to describe cities in our current age of globalization. We first called these huge agglomerations “world cities,” then “global cities.” Now some are starting to call them “global city regions.” The largest of these gigantic global city regions are centered in Shanghai and the Pearl River Delta and contain around 55 million people. These aren’t cities, nor are they metropolitan regions in the traditional sense. They’re a new phenomenon, a result of new urbanization processes producing regional megacities of a size that would have been almost unimaginable 30 years ago.

Another dramatic change has been taking place with this growth of outer cities. In Southern and Northern California (and perhaps also in the Dutch Randstad?), it’s becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish as easily as we could in the past between the city and the suburb, between suburbanism and urbanism as different ways of life. Our traditional notions of the modern metropolis as consisting of a single central city of peak densities and stimulating heterogeneity surrounded by a relatively homogeneous, low-density, commuter-dominated, and markedly less stimulating suburbia are becoming less and less relevant. Much of this old structure remains; that’s why it’s always important to recognize the continuities within the change. But the old dualistic model of urbanism–suburbanism is no longer the dominant form. The new forms – many of them still not really completely understood – are taking shape as we speak, and they’re creating the need for a new language. Hence the invention of such terms as “postmetropolis” and “transurbanism.”
One indication of just how far these changes have gone in some areas comes from the global city region I know best, Los Angeles. It’s one of these stunning discoveries that make sense after you think about them, but your first reaction is just, “Inconceivable – that cannot be.” I recently discovered that in the 1990 census Los Angeles passed New York City as the densest urbanized area in America. How can this possibly be explained? Well, first, some of the inner cities of the older metropolitan areas have seen a significant reduction in jobs and population – what some call a suburbanization of the city. Manhattan, for example, now has a much lower density than it had 30 years ago. But Los Angeles has been the receiver of 4 to 5 million new immigrants in this same period, most of them densely packed into the center of the city. In addition, Los Angeles has experienced a particularly intense process of outer city development, so that the central “City of Los Angeles” is now surrounded by three or four huge outer city agglomerations, making what used to be called its suburban rings the densest in the country.

Nearby Orange County, a bewildering place, may be the largest outer city in the world today, and perhaps also the oldest, although it’s odd to say that for a place that was almost entirely suburban or rural in 1960. But in terms of these new forms, Orange County is a city, although exactly what kind of city is not clear. Even the U.S. Census office has difficulties in naming the Orange County-City because it doesn’t seem to fit its established categories. Europeans used to come to Los Angeles to see what for them was a completely different urban form. But now Los Angeles in many ways has become more and more like New York City or the European city. But if you go just south of Los Angeles to Orange County you do see a very different kind of urbanism. It’s even strange to me, living in Los Angeles, when I travel to this area. You must call it a city, with 2.5 million people living there. But it’s a city without a single dominant center; it has 15 cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, clustered into what local scholars have termed “postsuburban” California. But even though it has no center, it has a huge industrial complex with a massive concentration of jobs, probably more jobs than there are traditional suburban commuter households. It has museums and concert halls, as well as other typically urban characteristics such as crime, delinquency, drugs, and gangs. It has relatively high densities – not as high as older city centers, but much denser than, say, New York’s suburbs. This is why the urbanized region of Greater Los Angeles, once considered the epitome of low-density urban sprawl, is now the densest (and least sprawling?) in the U.S.
ry of urban crises all over the world. When we look back to this period, it now seems fairly clear that the industrial system that was leading the postwar eco-
nomic boom in the developed countries and had been shaping the growth of
most major metropolitan regions – what we now call “Fordism” – was entering
into a crisis. Many people were left out of the Fordist boom and they were erupt-
ing, creating massive social unrest all over the world. Given the specifically urban
focus of protest, there arose a need to find ways of changing the Fordist metrop-
olis to help stimulate the growth of a new economy and prevent further social
upheaval. It was this urban restructuring process that would drive the destabi-
lization of the Fordist metropolis and the emergence of a significantly different
urban economic system that has been described as post-Fordist, as “flexible cap-
italism,” or simply as the New Economy.

Part of this urban restructuring is vitally linked to globalization. It’s an integral part
of “flexible capitalism” and the New Economy that’s today being consolidated in
major global city regions. Another important factor has been the information rev-
olution, the Internet galaxy and the network society, to use Manuel Castells’s
terms. These are all part of the restructuring processes that have been happening
all over the world in the past 30 years. What I’m arguing is that this restructuring
is resulting in a kind of diffusion – a globalization if you will – of urban industri-
al capitalism in its new form to all of the spaces of the inhabited world, to places
that had never before felt the full impact of advanced industrialization. We are
going suburbs which were not industrialized, which were defined as sleepy dor-
mitory communities, suddenly becoming booming industrial cities. Orange
County is now a major post-Fordist industrial metropolis. On a larger scale, the most widely known term for these new industrial spaces is NICs, Newly Industrialized Countries. The NICs weren’t part of the First World before, because they were excluded from having advanced industrial economies. But now many parts of the former Third World are First World advanced industrial areas: Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, maybe Brazil, maybe Mexico.

Urban industrial capitalism, which was confined for 150 years primarily to the core industrial countries that we called the First World, has been spreading not just to parts of the Third World but also to the so-called Second World. Socialist industrialization and the industrial cities of the Second World are also being transformed by these highly destabilizing processes. I think that the leaders of the Soviet Union saw this global diffusion and restructuring and realized that their economic system couldn’t adapt to or resist these powerful forces any longer. There was little choice other than to open the Second World to urban industrial capitalism, to globalization and the New Economy, to a deep restructuring – or to use the Russian word for restructuring, perestroika – come what may. Here is another example of urban industrial capitalism occupying spaces and places where it didn’t exist before.

This to me is the core of globalization – not finance, not trade, but the globalization of this particular form of capitalist urban industrialism and its concentration in huge global city regions. In a few years, the majority of the world’s population is going to be living in these megacities of more than a million inhabitants. That’s an incredible threshold. Many millions of immigrant workers from every corner of the world have been moving into large cities, in their own countries as well as in the advanced industrial countries. Increasingly what you see is both a “First Worlding” of Third World cities and a “Third Worlding” of First World cities, a very complex and fascinating new development that’s destabilizing, deconstructing and reconstituting older urban patterns, forms, and boundaries. And making all large cities all over the world more and more alike.

AM: If you were asked on which level architects and urbanists should design globalization in the city, would you say this regional level?

ES: I prefer to think and work at the regional scale because it provides a very important entry point into the heart of what has been reshaping cities, that is, the external or exogenous forces of globalization combined with the internal or
endogenous processes associated with the formation of a New Economy. When
I talk to architects – and with some sensitivity to the necessity and the importance
of design – I try to encourage this regional thinking, because I think it’s an effec-
tive way of plugging into a practical and theoretical understanding of what’s hap-
pening to cities. It’s much better than what sometimes looks like wild gropings
into vague new concepts that may sound flashy and appealing but don’t neces-
sarily lead us anywhere. As you can tell, I’m not particularly happy with the term
“transurbanism,” nor would I like “posturbanism.” I use the prefix “post-” a lot
in my work. I’ve no problem in conceiving the contemporary city as postmodern,
as a product of postmodern urbanism. This is what I mean when I use the term
“postmetropolis” or talk of a postmetropolitan transition. But what I refuse to
identify as “post-” are “urban”, “industrial” and “capitalism.” We’re still in
urban industrial capitalism, with a significantly different urban expression but still
fundamentally urban, fundamentally industrial, and fundamentally capitalist.
More than ever before, this describes urban conditions everywhere in the world.
If you don’t understand this to begin with, I don’t think you can really design with
adequate knowledge of the city that you design for. Of course you can design
without such knowledge, the way most architects do, by retreating from social
responsibility into ego-centered creativity alone. But that doesn’t get us anywhere
with regard to improving urban life.

AM: But do you see a role for the imagination in urban design? Arjun Appadurai
says the imagination has become a major social and political fact, and that migra-
tion is driven at least partly by the imagination of the poor being excited by the
mass media.

ES: Well, of course there's room for the imagination in urban design. But the
imagination operates in many different ways and one should never idealize imag-
in ing or isolate the imagination from its social context, especially with regard to
the urban. This is what I think Appadurai means when he says that the imagina-
tion has become a social and political fact. The imagination must be used with
some caution when being applied to cities and urban design, for even the most
individualized kinds of imagining can be socially and politically manipulated, and
not just by the mass media. This is even more relevant today, because over the
last 30 years there has been a radical restructuring in what can be described as
the “urban imaginary,” the ways in which we think about cities and about what
it means to live in cities. People used to think in one way about the modern
metropolis, but they’re thinking in very different ways about the postmetropolis.
And this new postmodern urban imaginary, I might add, seems to be character-
ized by an increasing confusion or blurring of our ability to distinguish between what is imagined and what is real, between fantasy and reality, fiction and fact. This has the effect, among other things, of diverting our attention away from the negative effects of globalization and economic restructuring on cities and urban life, and towards the “enchants,” as some call them, of simulated reality – fantasy worlds that are made to appear, and most people genuinely believe to be, completely real. In other words, the new urban imaginary that’s taking shape can be seen, in part at least, as a form of social control, a way of depoliticizing urban spaces.

AM: Could you give an example of the control you’re talking about?

ES: Take the whole notion of the imagineered city, of theme-parking urban spaces. Many new housing developments in the U.S. are “themed”: that is, they advertise themselves as specialized residential communities that locally reproduce what it is like to live in a Greek village or Tudor England or Cervantes’s Spain. I remember seeing one of these CIDCs, or common interest developments, as they’re called, proudly displaying a banner saying “Welcome to Mykonos!” Where you choose to live today is thus increasingly captured by these simulated realities. When you buy a house you sign a contract, often five inches thick, that promises you will keep up the themed image, using only certain colors of paint, maintain particular kinds of windows and trimming, never add a basketball hoop or put children's play equipment in front of the house, etc. Not only is your private home space being controlled, your sense of social and political responsibility becomes channeled into your immediate built environment, cutting off connections to wider urban issues. Rather than work to deal with problems of urban poverty, you squabble over your neighbor’s garage door or the people down the road who leave a dirty car in front of their house. Politics beyond these little bubbles, these little habitat cells, becomes less important. This becomes even more pronounced in gated and armed-guarded communities, where the wealthy build their “privatopias” to escape from the dangerous city and to virtually secede from urban responsibility.

Something similar is affecting how we create fantasy worlds and popular entertainment. Tourism is now the world’s largest industry and it’s increasingly built on simulated places, sites, cities. Many city centers, for example, are becoming like museums or, even worse, like miniature Disney Worlds where one can visit Turkey, Morocco, Vietnam, China, Mexico. These very real fakes, as Umberto Eco once called them, aren’t coming out of thin air or from new technologies. They’re part
of a broader trend that’s creating a simulated urbanism or what I’ve described as “simcities,” after the popular computer game of city planning. And I argue that one of the effects of this simulated urbanism is increasing social control, a numbing of social consciousness brought about by “imagineering,” to use the Disney term. This reconstructed urban imaginary is a softer and more difficult to see form of social control compared to the hard-edged forms of surveillance and security associated with what I call the “carceral city,” the “fortress city,” typified by the armed-guarded and gated community. In this softer form, the imagination is increasingly being shaped by so-called “spin doctors,” a new profession comprised of people whose entire function is to manipulate the way you think about reality. It doesn’t matter to them what the end purpose of their job might be – these spin doctors don’t have politics. They can go any direction, whatever they’re paid for.

AM: This sounds a bit like a conspiracy theory to me.

ES: It’s really difficult not to make it sound like a conspiracy, especially in a brief interview like this. The main point I’m making is that urban restructuring in all its forms has been driven by something, some purpose that relates to the urban crises of the 1960s and the worldwide economic recession of the early 1970s. It doesn’t require a conspiracy theory to argue that what has been happening over the past 30 years has involved an attempt to restore profitable economic development and, at the same time, avoid widespread social unrest and protest. No one sat back and said “Let’s manipulate the urban imaginary and theme-park the city.” But when one looks back and tries to interpret what has been happening to cities over the past three decades, one can see certain stable patterns emerging amidst all the instability and then try to explain why these particular patterns or outcomes have consolidated and what impact they’re having.

AM: This brings me back to the theme of grounding that I mentioned at the beginning of our conversation. For example, in Orange County, how do people ground in a regional city that has no center? You seem to be suggesting that nowadays one grounds through theme-parking. One chooses a theme and then starts to live that theme?

ES: Yes, this is what I think is happening in the postmetropolis, but it’s certainly not what I would suggest should happen or inevitably has to happen. Making things even more complicated, this theme-parked or simulated urbanism can be very attractive and comfortable. You cannot just say that this is a form of social
control and manipulation and therefore should be stopped entirely. Take, for example, Mission Viejo in Orange County, one of the largest and most successful master-planned New Towns in America. Once just rolling hills and grazing land, it’s now a city approaching 150,000 people. It consists of many of these theme-parked housing developments and gated communities connected together by shopping malls and a large artificial lake. One housing development claims to be a simulation of Cervantes’s Spain, with a Sancho Panza Avenue, a Don Quixote Lane, etc. The whole of Mission Viejo is now owned by Philip Morris Company, which also manufactures cigarettes, beer, and lots of fake food, like artificial cheese. Mission Viejo was originally sold to the public as a community designed for parents who wanted their children to be Olympic gold medal athletes. Ten Olympic-size swimming pools were constructed, along with 15 or so modern gyms, but until recently only one bookstore. The young athletes, after all, had to concentrate on their training. This all seemed rather bizarre, but in the 1984 Olympics, which took place in Los Angeles, athletes from the city of Mission Viejo won more gold medals than all but six countries in the world. So the design worked very effectively, and Mission Viejo continues to churn out unusually good athletes. By nearly all objective and subjective measures, it’s a successful and prospering part of the Orange County outer city and illustrates very nicely what Jean Baudrillard called the whole of Orange County: the primitive community of tomorrow. It can also be described as one of the oldest examples of the new forms of urbanism that, like it or not, are taking shape in many other areas of the world.

There are many positive and negative effects to all the trends I’ve been talking about. The key point is not just to see the bad side and complain, but to understand the trends in all their complexity and try to steer them into more positive directions, for they’re unlikely to disappear in at least the near future.

AM: So you’re saying grounding has become a process of controlled imagination in the context of, or in resistance to, an ever-expanding urban industrial capitalism. You mentioned tourism as the biggest industry on earth now. But tourism is hardly a classical urban industry, is it?

ES: No, but tourism is becoming increasingly industrialized and urbanized, even when it takes place outside cities. One of the hottest areas of current urban research is the culture industries, which consist of the new media technologies, cinema, animation, music, and the whole range of related activities involved in entertainment, leisure activities, and tourism, including theme parks. The culture
industries have become leading sectors of urban economic development in nearly all the world’s major cities. And their growth has been contributing to another blurring of once quite clear categories and boundaries, this time between what we used to call manufacturing industry and what we used to call services. Many of the activities that we traditionally defined as services are fundamentally related to industrial production. Part of my argument about the spread of industrial capitalism is that finance and insurance, real estate, law, legal advisers, accounting, etc., are to a significant degree producer services, and becoming more and more so in the increasingly globalized New Economy. This is especially true with regard to the production of information and cultural commodities. Films are products of urban-based industry. They’re even called The Industry in Los Angeles. Books are also cultural products; Harry Potter is a product. Even McDonald’s hamburgers can be seen as a manufacturing industry. So when I say urban industrial capitalism, I’m also recognizing that what we mean by “industry” and “industrial” has expanded significantly over the past 30 years, and that industrial production continues to be a distinctively urban-focused activity, even when we speak of tourism.

AM: As in the notion of the “experience industry,” where you don’t produce goods but experiences for your audience, as in tourism.

ES: Right. And it’s important that experiences, information, and culture are now seen more clearly as being actually produced. This links the industrial restructuring trend with my discussion of simcities and theme-parking. Tourism is increasingly based on having your fantasies created for you by others, by cultural and entertainment spin doctors. The tourist industry is changing the real and imagined city and forms of urban life to fit its needs. Even if you go to the real places, there are people there who are reproducing packaged experiences for the visitor. Do the real Amsterdam experience! All in one place! And it doesn’t even have to be in Amsterdam!

AM: That’s exactly what I mean by the city as an unstable system. An unstable system is a system you have to produce all the time in order to keep it going, and that’s exactly what is happening now, for example in the tourist industry.

ES: If that’s what you mean by unstable, then I don’t completely dismiss your argument. But whatever you call it, the important thing is where you go with it, what you do and how you interpret this instability.
Seaside, Florida, USA
Project Brand Segments, by R. al Khlaifat, M. al Mansoori. Tutor B. Steele. See page 221.
We don’t go to cities. Cities come to us, stream towards us. To occupy a city today is to surf in a dense array of overlapping media streams. The limit of the city is not the limit of some physical terrain but the limit of its packaging. Cities compete with each other, packaging themselves like any other product, and it is in this self-promotion that the territorial limits of urban space are drawn. This is not simply a characteristic of mass consumer culture or the electronic age of instantaneous global flows. We have always had to be told when we are in a city. There is always a sign on the highway, or a voice on the train or plane, that tells you that you are now in such-and-such a city, and another sign to tell you when you have left. Why do they have to tell you? Because a city is not a physical object. It is a complex package with many different kinds of limit. The signs normally appear in an indeterminate zone, a vague territory that is only understood to be the outskirts of a place when a sign suddenly appears. The sign could easily be moved. There is nothing in the physical environment that confirms what the sign says.

The fact that these signs now appear in diffuse media streams is not such big news. You don’t go to a place like Manhattan by getting on a plane, landing on the coast of a big continent and driving onto a small island covered with skyscrapers. To go to Manhattan is only to go to the hard copy, as it were, of all the images that you know so well, to swim in the source of the flow. And perhaps to discover the paradox that you cannot see Manhattan so well in Manhattan. The famous skyline is only visible from outside the island. In a sense, you have to leave there to be there. As a media capital, New York is of course too easy an example, but the same phenomenon is experienced with even the smallest, most isolated town. When you think of a city, even an obscure one that you might cherish because it seems to have escaped the global economy, escaped

modern even, you think of an image. Cities are experienced in terms of images. Visitors bathe in images before going anywhere – scrutinizing guidebooks, websites, business brochures, videos, airline magazines, friends’ snapshots, and so on – then project these images onto the place, trying to match what they see to what they expected to see. And what is seen is completely shaped by what is expected. Physical form is at best a prop for launching or modulating streams of images.

This transformation of the conventional understanding of the city is usually understood as a threat to the traditional figure of the architect. If the city is no longer a material organization, the architect, as the very figure of the material organizer, would seem to be almost irrelevant. As a result, architectural discourse has been nervous about the contemporary city, and has devoted a whole industry to the threat. There are countless essays, lectures, conferences, special issues, and books on the apparent formlessness of the city. There is even a team of professional superstars that go from conference to conference, publication to publication, reproducing a melancholic despair. The point is always made that cities aren’t cities anymore, and therefore architects can no longer be architects. A much smaller group celebrates the formlessness, declaring it to be the possibility of new forms of practice, but in the end they too try to tame the wild city, transforming the shock into carefully controlled books and artworks.

We could ask architects to stop crying about the city, demanding that they bravely embrace the essential indeterminism, instability, immateriality, ephemerality, gaps, confusion, and strangeness of urban life. We could call for new forms of practice that celebrate rather than resist disorganization. Digital disorder and overload could become the role model – every architect turned into a surfer, riding rather than resisting the flows. But this new form of heroism would too quickly bury the specific expertise of the architect. Indeed, it would erase the figure of the architect completely. Architecture is primarily a form of resistance. Architectural discourse is always threatened by the city. It is built on fear, an expert fear even.

Architects cannot surf. They visit all the exotic beaches, talking about every new wave that rolls in, as if they’re about to jump in. But they don’t, and would quickly disappear if they did. Architects can easily envisage their own disappearance. They’re a permanently endangered species, but so permanently that they have developed a whole lifestyle around the threat, surviving by carefully keeping their distance. In sight of the action, but safely detached from it, they relentlessly scrutinize the contemporary world, interrogating everything except their own pathology.

The unexamined pathology is not simply that of the architect in the end.
No species lives in isolation. The architectural discipline survives because it deals with generic basic cultural fears. The classic role of the architect has always been to provide images of order in a threateningly disorderly world. The stability of a physical pattern offers comfort and control. The dilemma for the contemporary architect is to identify what would constitute such a comforting image in the face of the increasingly digitized city. To monitor their ongoing attempts, we need to be clearer about their basic techniques and strategies.

I want to insist that architects are first and foremost intellectuals. Architects are not builders. They don’t make solid objects. They make discourse about objects. Architects never simply draw. They talk. A lot. Indeed, they talk much more than they draw. Some almost only talk. The rest talk in order to build, and build in order to talk some more. The real construction site is words. And the whole point of all this talk is to persuade us that it is actually the buildings that are talking, that large lumps of concrete, metal, glass and wood speak to us about modernity, technology, identity or whatever. The architect acts like a ventriloquist, coaxing us into thinking that a static object is earnestly chatting to whoever will listen. In the simplest terms, the architect speculates by bonding words to images. Design offices produce large quantities of images and words, then carefully stitch them together. In the end, it is really the stitching that gets designed. The fundamental role of the architect is actually that of the typographer. That is to say: they craft the association between discourse and form, words and objects.

In presentations to clients, juries, and the public, architects have to negotiate this relationship between image and word with their own bodies – endlessly turning back and forth between audience and image, hoping to stitch a narrative so tightly to the forms, or pull the forms off the wall so deeply into the soundtrack, that the two stick permanently together. This crucial typographic performance becomes literal in the case of architectural publications. Text and image are artfully juxtaposed. Each publication has its recognizable look, which conveys much of its attitude. An architectural philosophy is already clear in the layout technique. When designers or theorists publish their own little magazines or books, they usually take control of the relationship, laying their attitude out. There is a long tradition of key collaborations between architects and typographers trying to perfect the right mix. Words and forms are trained to do the right kind of dance with each other on the page.

In these terms, the issue here is a simple one. What kind of typography are architects developing in the face of the contemporary city? If the core of the architect’s intelligence operates through layouts, what is the architecture of our layouts today?
“Order in Diversity: Community without Propinquity.” His point was that the city had been radically dispersed because of the evolving communication systems. Inasmuch as cities are physical organizations that enable people to communicate with each another, new systems of communication allow for different organizations. Physical boundaries become irrelevant and cities become increasingly intricate and widespread networks. Webber argues that this leads to a city organized as a maze of subcultures that interact independently of spatial boundaries. You can be the member of six or seven different subcultures which may have nothing to do with the subcultures of your neighbors or those of anyone else in your city. You are connected to your groups by electronic systems of communications rather than streets.

This doesn’t mean that the physical city disappears. In fact, it continues to grow as a huge physical apparatus. The trick of Webber’s argument is to say that people get together in dense spatial organizations for nonspatial reasons. In other words, they inhabit a space in order to communicate, but communication is not a spatial phenomenon. On the contrary, it is a kind of subversion or destruction of space. So specific spatial systems are set up in order to facilitate transactions that subvert space. Cities are dense precisely for the purpose of dematerialization or dispersal – for the possibility, that is, for bodies and minds to float towards or away from each other independently of spatial barriers.

This sounds like bad news for the architect. The whole tradition of providing comforting images of order seems to collapse. Webber insists that “spatial separation is no longer an accurate indicator of functional relations, and hence mere locational pattern is no longer an adequate symbol of order.” Imagine that students arriving at every school of architecture would be told that physical order was an illusion and that spatial relationships have no connection to functional
relationships. Most of the standard training and faculty could be thrown out. Programs could be trimmed down to that very small part of each school devoted to characteristics of buildings that subvert the traditional mythology of the functional object, devoted, that is, to the irreducible strangeness of buildings. These are perhaps the qualities that secretly fascinate architects the most, but their appreciation is hidden at the very heart of each school, surrounded by a massive defensive infrastructure. Schools work hard to hide the fact that the heart of the discipline is doubt, enigma, paradox, and insecurity.

If architects veil their doubt by typographically associating hyper-confident polemical statements with particular physical patterns, Webber argues that optimum patterns “are likely to be as pluralistic as society itself.” Unable to generalize about society, we cannot generalize about architectural form. Fixed form becomes redundant. Indeed, apparent formlessness can be the sign of a hidden order: “We have mistaken for ‘urban chaos’ what is more likely to be a newly emerging order whose signal qualities are complexity and diversity.”

Webber went on to elaborate the argument in a series of influential essays, including “The Urban Place and the Nonplace Urban Realm” (1964) and “The Post-City Age” (1968). They analyze the city as “a massive communications switchboard,” whose urban quality is to be found in the diversity of information flow it facilitates rather than the organization of buildings. The sense of urbanity can be experienced as much in a dispersed sprawl as in a dense concentration. In terms of information flow, Los Angeles is as dense and urban as New York. Physical density gives way to communication “intensity” and the idea of a unitary place gives way to “a whole array of shifting and interpenetrating realm-spaces (…) continuous variation, spatial discontinuity, persisting disparity, complex pluralism and dynamic ambiguity.” Place becomes a redundant concept. Webber embraces the sense of “nonplace” and the “spatially discontinuous city,” rejecting any association between the spatial form of the city and the form of social life. Space itself becomes a redundant concept. It only had importance in the past because space was a form of “friction” to communication and therefore people had to concentrate in cities, but the latest technologies bypass this resistance. The very idea of “the city” is no longer a useful concept in planning.

None of this argument is surprising today, when so many talk about the absence of place, the radical dispersal of the city, and the multiplication of overlapping media spaces. What is surprising is that we keep repeating the argument so clearly formulated in the early 1960s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are still chanting the same phrases, like religious mantras. Even more embarrassing is that what we are repeating is the claim that suddenly everything is new. We repeat the very same list of novelties and announce that the tradi-
Take the architect’s basic weapon, the plan, as a precise description of the layout of a city or an object within the city. Architects associate the condition of objects with the condition of society, time, motion, technology, and so on. They read plans like psychics read tea leaves and doctors read test results. Not by chance does the word “plan” also refer to the idea of controlling the future, as in a plan for the next decade. This idea is at the base of all architectural operations. A designed object is understood to carry a certain image into the future. A pattern is a pattern because it repeats itself in time. Projects are projectiles. An object is thrown, projected, into the future. But if people gather in spaces for nonspatial reasons, the plan is no longer an accurate indicator of anything.

Webber directly attacked the concept of the physical plan, disarming the architectural discipline. He criticized his own discipline for not abandoning its
historical roots in architecture, and was influential in the radical separation of planners from architects that soon occurred all over the world. Architects became redundant because they obsess about physical objects and don’t understand the immaterial networks orchestrating everyday cultural life. Schools of planning abruptly divorced themselves from schools of architecture, and never reconciled.

For planners, architecture became a vestigial technology, an embarrassing part of their own childhood that had to be abandoned in the great exploratory voyage into the post-space world. But paradoxically, the latest representatives of this split, the self-appointed leaders of “postmodern geography,” keep obsessing about space, and even describe themselves as having gone through an invigorating “spatial turn.” Architects are supposed to respectfully listen to embarrassingly clumsy analyses of space by largely blind readers. Despite their two thousand years of expertise, architects were thrown away, only for some of their thinking to be discreetly reabsorbed. By now they are used to such stays of execution. The redundancy of architecture has been advertised at least since Victor Hugo’s famous 1831 claim that books would “kill” buildings. In fact, Hugo’s point, to be faithfully echoed by McLuhan, was that architecture had actually been “dethroned” by Gutenberg five centuries earlier:

In the fifteenth century, everything changed. The human mind discovered a means of perpetuating itself which was not only more lasting and resistant than architecture but also simpler and easier. Architecture was dethroned. The lead characters of Gutenberg succeeded the stone characters of Orpheus. The book was to kill the building. (…) In its printed form, thought is more imperishable than ever; it is volatile, elusive, indestructible. It mingles with the air. In the days of architecture, thought had turned into a mountain and taken powerful hold of a century and of a place. Now it turned into a flock of birds and was scattered on the four winds occupying every point of air and space simultaneously (…) Let no one mistake: architecture is dead – dead beyond recall, killed by the printed book.

But the rise of the book, like the rise of the computer screen, is not a challenge to the fundamentally typographic art of architecture. On the contrary, the discipline established itself as such during that period. The fetishism of material space might be vulnerable, even suspect, but it is remarkably seductive and resilient. It lives in the media that supposedly displace it. After all, the architect is not simply some peculiar species from a more primitive time. Despite the permanent fragili-
ty of the architect, there is an ongoing, almost ecological, demand for such a figure, even for its fragility. To threaten the role of physical space is to threaten more than the architectural discipline. It is to challenge some of the most generic assumptions around which cultural life is organized. Architects are acutely aware of this and endlessly adjust their layouts in response to each threat.

Learning from Electronics
We should recall what the architects were saying at the moment they were ostensibly discarded yet one more time. Returning again to Berkeley in the early 1960s, we find the architect Charles Moore teaching at the same time as Webber. In 1965, just when leaving Berkeley to become dean of the school at Yale, Moore wrote the remarkable essay “You Have to Pay for the Public Life.” It celebrates Los Angeles for being a non-place place, a “floating world” whose architectural highlights are the freeways and Disneyland. Moore embraces exactly those qualities that architects traditionally despised. The subversiveness of that embrace is harder to appreciate now because in recent years Los Angeles has become the paradigm of how cities are not cities anymore. It has become impossible to be a savvy postmodern critic without an essay or book about Los Angeles, repeating points made so much earlier by a thoughtful architect, but a figure that has not been taken so seriously recently, perhaps because he never seemed to take himself so seriously.

In the same year, Moore’s friend Robert Venturi, who did take himself seriously, published Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture, the extremely influential manifesto. After the much-read main theoretical argument, the book has a rarely studied section devoted to the author’s designs. The last paragraph devoted to the last project ambushes the reader by asserting that Americans don’t need piazzas because they would rather be at home with the family watching television. There is no doubt that Venturi loves piazzas. He is fixated on the glories of Rome. Yet he suggests that the equivalent experience might be found in the United States by sitting at home in a suburban house watching television. The television set becomes the piazza, the center of social life, an argument with extreme consequences.

At this point, Venturi’s thinking was being radically affected by his brilliant partner Denise Scott Brown, a city planner who taught in the same program as Webber at Berkeley in 1965 and ran a studio at Moore’s Yale in 1968 that pushed the argument to the extreme and was eventually published in 1972, in partnership with Venturi and Steven Izenour, as Learning from Las Vegas (with Webber listed in the preface as one of the intellectual influences). The vestiges of Rome were now found in flickering neon billboards towering over the
highway. The book was basically a manifesto against space: “An architecture of communication over space, communication dominates space (...) If you take the signs away. There is no place.”

Both Moore and Scott Brown/Venturi were fully aware of the threat posed by electronics to the traditional understanding of architecture. They even seemed to embrace that threat, yet ultimately they defended architecture against it. They persuasively argued that the fundamental mechanism of architecture is the decorative system, and therefore architecture too is a communication system, a pattern of images inserted into the economy of image flow. If the experience of architecture is the mediated experience of decoration, and not the functional box to which the decoration is added, function, structure and space take a back seat to communication – allowing some kind of collaboration with the world of electronics. Moore says “our new places are given form with electronic, not visu-
al, glue,” and *Learning from Las Vegas* insists that “the relevant revolution today is the current electronic one.” Yet finally the threat was repackaged rather than admitted. The future of architecture was seen to be in electronics, but the material condition of the building was held onto for as long as possible. Some traditional qualities were displaced from solid objects to ephemeral sign systems, but the self-consciously refined object remained.

This work softened up the more radical architectural experiments of the 1960s, the hardcore moves by Cedric Price, Archigram, Superstudio, Archizoom, the Metabolists, Haus-Rucker-Co, Hollein and Pichler, Coop Himmelb(l)au, and so on, who fantasized about cities as computers, about infrastructural information systems, wired mobile body packs, and the inevitable disappearance of buildings. In the hands of these radicals, cities were walking, talking, floating, flying, and exponentially expanding into vast networks. Between around 1958 and 1973, many architects worked on the idea of the city in the age of electronics, which usually meant the radical dispersal of the city. It didn’t simply involve stretching, lightening, and perforating the city so that it could float lightly over the whole planet, with its dispersed elements stitched back together with electronics communications systems. The extreme sense of dispersal was not the loss of density but the thought that density was no longer an issue, the thought that in an electronic world it simply doesn’t matter whether a city is hyper-dense or hyper-expanded. As with Webber, the full force of electronic interaction is to make the distinction between urban concentration and exurban sprawl irrelevant.

Again, this is still treated as the latest news. Running across the bottom of our screens since the 1960s has been the same news flash: “With electronics, the city no longer acts like a city: it is no longer physical, it lacks limits, density is irrelevant. Details at 10.” It is as if the discourse has no short-term memory, like those movies about people who keep waking up at the beginning of the same day. If you look really closely at architectural discourse you can see the momentary glitch when our film jumps back to the beginning of the loop. Or maybe it is like the little wheel that hamsters get addicted to, endlessly running but never moving forward.

It is embarrassing enough to keep repeating the 1960s, but even the 1960s were echoing ideas from the 1920s and 1930s about the dispersal of the city, like Buckminster Fuller’s concept of a flying architecture in which a planetary system of atomized mobile dwelling units would be disconnected from any physical infrastructure but connected to each other through an electronic infrastructure or radio and television. Even more important was the arguments of the Russian “disurbanists.” Miliutin’s famous linear city proposal of 1930 was based on the argument that New York, London, and Paris, as the exemplary models of
both metropolitan density and capitalism, would, like the capitalist system itself, soon collapse in on themselves and be replaced by an endlessly dispersed industrialized countryside. His theory of “disurbanism” was an elaboration of Leonidov’s projects for a dispersed city between 1926 and 1930, which were symptomatically tied together by massive radio transmitters. Leonidov even imagined a kind of proto-television, a system that he called “radio pictures” that would allow people in one place to see live images transmitted from anywhere else.

So the 1960s we keep repeating were themselves a kind of repetition or variation of a long tradition in architectural thinking. The 1960s projects are actually disurbanist schemes for an industrialized countryside. If you look at a lot of the Archigram and Superstudio projects, there is a remarkably agrarian quality to them. They often present an idyllic image that combines sun-kissed nature and high technology, a garden of Eden with portable computers, not so distant from the dreams of the late 1920s, an architecture based on a fantasized electronic revolution to come.

It is not the seductive brilliance of any one of these renderings that counts, but the steady stream of such images mobilized in magazines, books, films, exhibitions, lectures and so on. If architects are primarily typographers, what they design is not simply projects as such, images of the way the world should look. Rather, they organize a kind of graphic flow, the particular quality and characteristic of each image being less important than the aesthetic of the flow. In their overlapping streams of competing images, architects simulate the city of media they are thinking about. The point is not to figure out what to do with the city, but to figure out what the city is. It is always assumed that to know what the city is would already be to know what to do with it. But despite its aggressively unavoidable streaming information flows, the city remains elusive, disconcertingly yet seductively elusive.

In fact, the city is like a foreign territory for architects. They move around urban spaces like outsiders who have developed a barrage of techniques to try conquer the city by representing it – deploying drawings, maps, movies, statistics, photo-collages, aerial photography, panoramas, interviews, surveys, postcards, animations, GPS readings and so on. Each year brings new techniques. And if you are an architect, even an architectural student, you have to use most of them, usually at the same time. The experience of an architectural presentation or jury, with all the multimedia theatrics of the earnest typographers washing over the assembled audience, is something like the experience of the city.

The basic point here is that architects’ visuals evolve but the story stays the same. The words being attached to the images are more or less fixed. Like
about the dispersal of the city? What is it that keeps getting dispersed anyway?

Behind all the talk of dispersal is a singular image, a picture of a medium-sized pre-industrial European city. It’s not any city in particular. It’s a kind of dream city that we supposedly would still be living in if it wasn’t for modernity. Ideally it is a hybrid, a medieval city built over a Roman base, a regular Roman grid that has been twisted by medieval eccentricities, like the image with which Le Corbusier begins his Urbanisme of 1925. It is the image of a city as a clear fixed boundary, a defensive wall defining a secure interior and an insecure exterior. The interior has a center with a church, government and marketplace. A circulation system works itself out from the center, passes through the security points in the walls, then gradually disperses itself across the landscape. It is an idealized image of the domestication of the wild, one that is literally illustrated in so many architects’s books of the twentieth century and conjured up in countless narratives, as in Le Corbusier’s typically romantic formulation: “Placed in the midst of a chaotic nature, man for his security creates and surrounds himself with a zone of protection in harmony with what he is and what he thinks; he needs a retreat, a citadel in which he feels secure.”

The contemporary dismembered city is understood as the loss of that image, the loss of a physical distinction between inside and outside, the loss of distance from the wilderness. Interiority stops being that which is clearly defined by defensive walls and becomes a fragile effect of flows in circulation or traffic networks. The circulation system takes over, becoming more and more complex. It becomes the new interior. People occupy the circulation system rather than spaces connected by that system. Material and geographic specificity, the stable...
quality of place, no longer has any meaning. The city itself becomes undomesti-
cated wilderness. The image of the city as a domestication mechanism, produc-
ing safety and security within its walls, gives way to the idea of city life as inse-
cure, unstable, and only partly domesticated with communication systems – like
the mobile phone that tells you where you are and where the nearest restaurant
is so you can momentarily tame the foreign space of your own city.

This childlike image of the medieval city is twisted this way and that by
each polemicist, but floats there for everyone as a kind of insulation between
what we think the contemporary world is and what we think antiquity or even
prehistory was. The image lies somewhere between us and the distant past. It is
as if we look through the image at the past, reading history in its terms. Even
those who reject the image, starting with the modern architects who insisted that
the medieval city had to be abandoned, only do so on the grounds that it is inap-
propriate for contemporary technologies of communication. Le Corbusier’s attack
on the medieval city, for example, argues that a city designed around the horse
cannot accommodate a culture designed around the automobile. The medieval
city simply belongs to a different time. Yet the modern city has to provide some-
thing to replace the old security system. The city without walls has to create the
same sense of interiority once provided by walls. The medieval city remains a
model, even when being emphatically abandoned. We might not even be able to
think of the city today without this particular fantasy image.

But rarely is the fantasy closely examined. There is little talk about the
psychopathology of medieval times, the fears and pleasures of those who lived in
the idealized image. So the image is not of actual medieval life or even the actu-
al condition of architectural form. We act as if alienation is a modern thing, as if
people only started to get anxious or angry with their parents after Freud. We
pretend that in medieval times everyone fully understood the meaning of the dec-
oration on a Gothic cathedral and knew their place in the world. Yet there is every
reason to think they were as confused as us. The cathedrals, anyway, were not
the idyllic spaces we dream about. They were often very unpleasant places, with
pilgrims, the poor and refugees living inside, eating, sleeping, excreting, and gen-
erating such a smell that it was often hard to breathe, hence the tradition of large
incense burners. The raw sewage running down the streets outside never appears
in our fantasy image. In fact, the whole medieval city was a very dangerous place.
Only during military attacks was life inside the city walls more secure than out-
side them. When we say the sense of place has gone today, the image we use to
represent what has been lost is an extreme idealization of a situation that was
itself just as threatening, confusing and disorienting.

Our pretension is to think that we are the ones who have the right to
be alienated because we experience modernity. Shouldn’t our story have worn
itself out by now? After over a hundred years of saying we are facing all these
destabilizing and disorienting forces of modernization, we might acknowledge
that what we are now saying about electronics is exactly what we said about traf-
ic at the end of the nineteenth century. The identical narrative with a few new
pictures. Our argument about the alienating pressure of modernity is now offi-
cially an antique. We should exhibit it in a museum, rather than in our latest sym-
posia and magazines.

Perhaps the strange reason that our discourse holds on to the image of
the premodern city, the reason we are addicted to that image even while
announcing its necessary displacement, is precisely because there were no archi-
tects for the medieval city. Now this is something for Freud. Architects are always dreaming about a time when they were irrelevant. When faced with the thought that electronics might make architects redundant, we associate that threat with the loss of a place in which there were no architects. Architects are nostalgic for an ecology in which they are irrelevant. In a sense, they are foreign to the city they try to protect, foreign to every city. It is like the science fiction cliché in which a spaceship lands and everyone wonders if the creature that emerges is friendly or not. The architect drops down on the site, scouts around, and acts like a friendly alien, a stranger offering gifts, fabulous images and a persuasive story about a possible future, before flying away.

And each of the stories offered, every theoretical statement, every project, has to reconstruct the figure of the architect from scratch. We can never assume the figure of the architect. It is as if it was never there before. Which is why we are fascinated with the moment before the architect. We like the romantic moment of arrival. If there is this story that we keep waking up and repeating, it starts with chaos on earth; our spaceship lands, and the architects come out holding the magic images and the magic words that reestablish order, then get back on the ship. Then there is a momentary jump in the movie, and the spaceship comes back down again, and again. The looping story always starts with the idea of collapse, the collapse of the city. The architect always lands in a city that is falling apart and offers a way for it to put itself back together. In other words, that which the architects protect is that which doesn’t need them, or needs them only in its moment of collapse. Which means that every architect has to have a theory of the city, and it is always an emergency theory.

The trick is that the city never simply presents itself. It doesn’t appear
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ers can make therapeutic aesthetic decisions. The very idea of the city is itself an aesthetic decision, a decision that has to be continually remade, a decision that shapes the figure of the architect as such. Architects don’t simply design in response to the city. They design themselves by producing images of what cities are.

If architecture is the attempt to define the city, every designer has a slightly different definition, starting out from the commonsense notion that cities involve a certain density or packed heterogeneity — that is to say, formlessness. The city is precisely that which exceeds our capacity to draw or describe it. So we start working against the city exactly at the moment we say we know what the city is. To figure the city out is already to change it. A description of the existing city already constitutes a complete redesign. What might then be said about a particular project is less important. The formlessness of the city threatens the architect, and the architect responds with definitions that constrain it. The architect attempts to domesticate the overlapping forces, taming the city with images of form. The idea of the threat outside the walls gives way to architecture as suppression of the danger within.

After all, architecture is primarily a form of threat management. Originally, this was literal. If cities are classically a fusion of fortress and marketplace, architecture is a fortification, both physical and psychological. Not by chance did Vitruvius, who worked for the military before he retired to write his legendary Ten Books on Architecture, frame his whole argument in military terms. Book 1, on “First Principles and the Layout of Cities,” includes defensive systems.
It starts with the fortified walls, with precise instructions how to set up them up to resist attack, then goes to the roads, public spaces, and building materials before talking about buildings. Buildings are the last in the chain of priority. The final book, Book 10 on “Machines,” ends with ballistics, catapults and siege engines (the specialty of Vitruvius himself when he was a practicing designer), then “defensive strategies.” Architects design both war machines and strategic responses to such machines.

So the construction of the figure of the architect is framed by the military, a role that was reestablished in the Renaissance treatises. The more distant the architect subsequently got from the military (i.e. applied political power), the more the city appears as an anti-architectural force. Architects started doing battle against the city rather than with it. Indeed, architects increasingly fantasize that they are a rival military force, a fantasy that becomes in the twentieth century the fantasy of an architectural avant-garde revolutionizing the urban landscape.

Less obviously, architecture is a form of threat control through the management of time. Architecture tries to be slow. It is always late to the party. This lateness is even part of its self-representation. Take Sigfried Giedion’s official account of modern architecture. It describes the experimental architecture of the 1920s as finally coming to terms with the technologies of steel and glass construction developed in the 1850s. Seventy years late, then. More than the average lifetime of a person at that time. As changes occur faster, the lag is gradually getting shorter. It might be related to the average lifespan of a building. Now that buildings last an average of around twenty-five years, the architectural response time is something similar. Architecture might simply be the name given to a certain lag relative to the speed of change. The faster the changes, the shorter the lag can be.

Architecture is a kind of clock, a slowly moving reference point for the passage of other events, mediating somewhere between religion, the slowest form of movement, if not stationary, and economics/war, the fastest. It domesticates threats by slowing things down. More than physical security, it offers psychological security by maintaining a pattern, installing a visible repetition with which cultural life can synchronize itself. The last hundred years or so, in which a seemingly radical part of architectural discourse has been devoted to speed, mobility, planned obsolescence, and so on, finding its latest versions in discussions about digital space, is actually an attempt to inoculate architecture against those very things. Architects are not into speed as such. Rather, they make slow objects that make speed visible.

In the end, there is only a disingenuous rhetoric of experimentalism or
avant-garde radicalism in architectural discourse. Avant-garde architecture is probably a contradiction in terms. Architecture is precisely the default reference point that allows avant-gardes to be seen as such. Its discourse maintains a constant calculated mixture of a tiny amount of experimentation with a huge amount of conservation that allows for the painstakingly slow evolution of the species. The discourse says what it has to say to enable the species to survive by clinging to its fragile market share in the threat management business.

The rhetoric used in our last century of typography is consistent. Words like “shock,” “defamiliarization,” “displacement,” and “alienation” – the key words for the avant-gardes in the other arts – only appear in architectural discourse as negative terms preceding the reassertion of pattern. The positive words are “order,” “control,” “safety,” “security,” “identity,” “organization,” “balance,” “stability” and so on. The architect is an expert at synthesizing incompatible forms of knowledge, constructing illusions of pattern in the face of diverse forms of disorganization. The architect is at once an artist, engineer, technologist, biologist, statistician, sociologist, psychologist, economist and entertainer. When launching Western architectural theory, the first thing Vitruvius described was the multidisciplinary character of the architect. The second thing he described was the city. The architect has a unique combination of tools to simulate order, using magical powers to conjure up hidden patterns and visualize them as refuges that resist the formlessness around them, vaccines against disorganization. The oldest trick of the architect is to make places in the world that escape the world. In and out of place. In and out of time. Comfort through the dream of escape.

Architectural discourse is dedicated to a regime of comfort, a relentless domesticity in the face of the wild city. Architects are always resisting the city. Every project, no matter how small or distant from the center, is a reflection on the city, a form of urbanism, or, more precisely, a form of anti-urbanity. The discipline of architecture is strangely poised. It exists only as a form of resistance, dependent on the very forces that make it seem redundant. It can only survive with a sense of permanent crisis, governed by a nostalgia for a status it never had, endlessly repeating the same story while slowly changing the images.

It would be naïve to dismiss this tradition and promote a more subversive or contemporary urbanism. To challenge the soft figure of the architect is at once too easy and too difficult – like challenging a marshmallow. On the contrary, the point is to try to understand and respect the perversity of the architect, that nomadic storyteller expertly mixing outmoded technologies into strangely reassuring yet implausible fantasies of security.
Against the
Roemer van Toorn earned a degree in architecture at the Delft Technical University in the Netherlands in 1991. He is a critic, educator, photographer and documentary maker in the fields of architecture and culture. He was co-author of the “encyclopedia manifesto” on contemporary architecture *The Invisible in Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1994). Currently he is head of the Rewriting the (European) City Ph.D. program and head of the History & Theory Program at the Berlage Institute Postgraduate Laboratory of Architecture in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Besides lecturing and teaching internationally, he writes for international publications on film, art and architecture. He is co-editor of *Architecture in the Netherlands Yearbook* published by NAI Publishers. He is also on the advisory board of the Dutch magazine Archis. Currently he is head of the Rewriting the (European) City Ph.D. program and head of the History & Theory Program at the Berlage Institute Postgraduate Laboratory of Architecture in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Besides lecturing and teaching internationally, he writes for international publications on film, art and architecture. He is co-editor of *Architecture in the Netherlands Yearbook* published by NAI Publishers. He is also on the advisory board of the Dutch magazine Archis. Currently he is working on a text, image and documentary Ph.D. dissertation entitled *Fresh Conservatism and Beyond*. It will research the contemporary spatial implications of our “second modernity,” and discuss two kinds of political mentalities of architectural practice that operate from within it. The book will attempt to formulate a progressive aesthetic complex from the perspective of a “radical democracy” within our present situation.

Jean-Luc Godard once said: “The problem is not to make a political film, but to make film politically.” I would like to say the same for architecture: The problem is not to make political architecture, but to make architecture politically. It is this urgent question I will try to address: how to make architecture politically given the new transurban society, where architecture can no longer sustain its profound isolation?

We are living through a transition from one society to another. We all experience and live our lives in the new world, but the morphological, topographical, tectonic, space and time concepts, the panoptical maps and what is conservative (right-wing) or progressive (left-wing), things which helped us to navigate in the past, are no longer of much help in understanding and bringing the laboratory of civilization further.

Yet a very important paradigm shift has taken place in the culture of architecture: we are dealing again with the issues of society at large in all its complexity, shifting away from Cartesian logic, and relating to our everyday mass cul-
The focus of this essay is my concern that an architecture operating in this fascinating condition of transition is in need of a political agenda too. Most designers “just” embrace what is out there without being aware of or willing to develop propositions other than what the market already projects. We are in need of a political stance, a positioning, or a constant becoming, within a project which goes beyond the agenda of global capitalism. This political stance has to be a totally different one than the ones we know from the past.

To venture into the multitude of our society (or the mesh of our second modernity) and to believe in the multitude is what the recent practices of people like Rem Koolhaas and MVRDV demonstrate. In their practices they are searching for a potential field to be liberated. Lefebvre and Debord identified the urban environment as a unique site for contesting the alienation of modern capitalist society, and believed that this alienation could be overcome, rendering individuals whole once again. I acknowledge instead that fragmentation and incompleteness are inevitable conditions for living in our actuality. I do not seek overarching solutions. There is no universal answer to be found, only a multiplicity of responses to specific times and places.

It is this complication that a new progressiveness should embrace, as opposed to the universalism of the neoliberal, as in for instance the Third Way politics of Anthony Giddens and Tony Blair. I believe that when we are enthusiastic and acknowledge the multitude with its retroactive manifest (“just out there”) qualities, we need another insight as well. We need to create a new kind of subjectivity beyond the kinds of individuality and collectivity the multitude of the
market generates. The paradises that the global market generates are rather poor. We need to produce another kind of public and private sphere, where the potentials of the multitude are no longer hijacked by the ideology of Americanization.

The attack on the World Trade Center can be seen as a symbol of what we could call the hijacking of the multitude. An extreme diversity of national, ethnic, and religious communities in New York City – a truly global public sphere in the most concrete sense – is reduced to a purely symbolic image. We could call this practice of the Bush administration, in the words of Susan Buck-Morss, “visual fundamentalism.” Striking is the speed with which every image taken of the New York City disaster was reduced within a week to one image, the American flag, and under it one caption: “The nation under attack.” President Bush is defending a kind of multitude, in fact an oligopticum (a hybridity), which is based on control, violence and surveillance, produced by a culture of the multitude in which the information society plays a dominant role.

Today we no longer live in a society of discipline in which the state or other institutions of gender, class and spatial arrangements dominate our behavior from above. Instead, our reflective capacities as individuals are constantly addressed. We have to choose between different options all the time in order to be in control of our own biographies, without being aware that only very specific choices are offered. In many cases the options are not so much a matter of what is being offered to us, but what is not shown to us at all. We are confronted with the illusion of free choice and the idea of interactivity, while we are in fact controlled through our choices, located in the multitude which media and design produce.

When we jump into the multitude we must investigate – and this is more urgent than ever after 9/11 – if within the current multitude a more ideological position, as opposed to the one of Americanization, or sameness disguised as difference, could be implemented. We have to implement alternative ideas. Within the stoppages of the network we should create allowances beyond the multitude dominated by the market. The theory of retroactive manifesto is not enough for making architecture politically and for overcoming the hijacking of the multitude by the challenges which the market generates.

The problem for me is that the discovery and exposure of the multitude dimensions in our cities by many innovative architectural practices fail to install alternative political propositions – that is why their multitude can be so easily hijacked. What can we do to make the future different from the past? We don’t just have
to map the existing dynamic programs we find within the milieu of the multitude, resample and give them a spatial and temporal expressivity; we have to invent new nonlinear programs on top of it, within and by it, to renew from within, and dare to have a stance (a pro-position) in relation to it, to create other options to choose from besides the ones the market provides.

Collaging the options provided by the market are not enough. A clear example in architecture of the multitude being hijacked by design is MVRDV’s Hannover Expo pavilion. I don’t blame the architects; I appreciate their experiments in working from within our society of the multitude; but there are tremendous risks. In this building the next phase of artificial Dutch “super-traditionalism” is being branded through the multitude. Stacked landscapes with the updated versions of the famous clichés of the Netherlands, like windmills, tulips and the artificial landscape, are being promoted. This architecture promotes a culture of the multitude, where the radical immanent democratic potential of the multitude is cancelled out almost in the same way that the attack on the Twin Towers was hijacked by Americanization. It is of no surprise that the Dutch government celebrated the success of this building.

Without a clear political stance of resistance, the market will hijack the subversive qualities of a talented designed multitude, based on the systematic idealization of data found in our second modernity. The problem with many new forms and concepts like the MVRDV Hanover Expo pavilion is not that they are new, and neither that they are formal or fashionable or fascinated with the everyday and part of our commodity economy, but that they replicate the neoliberal systems of the multitude itself, very much including its needed excitement and freshness. The complication today is that the market operates through open works or qualities of the multitude as well.
I believe that if we want to make sure that a new architecture doesn’t replicate the system with excitement (in my words, creating a “fresh conservatism” which orients itself to the future), then we are in need of something more. Architecture is not just an “image” (representation) of social order; it can also be an instrument in imposing another order. When we are voluntarily and willingly folding into the multitude and aware of the risk of the hijacking of the multitude by certain futuristic conservative powers, creating a fresh conservative design, what then do we need to overcome this opportunism?

The Practice and Theory of Cinema

I believe that the practice and theory of cinema can be a helpful medium in seeing how architecture can move beyond fresh conservatism in our multitude society of permanent transformations. We should understand cinema as a medium not about representing a world we already have, but as a medium capable of creating new worlds, just as architecture can create new worlds. Film and theater are about telling stories (1) and developing scenarios instead of an autonomous object. It is not the construction itself that is the driving force, but how the aesthetic complex can make a narrative unfold and incite the viewer to see, debate and experience the world differently.

Filmmakers are concerned with the kind of “effects” or reflective dialogues they can incite in the audience. Architects often only consider the object as a world in itself without taking into account its unconscious value system and the way it directs certain ideological intentions.
essential, but the motion that leads us from one image to another. And we have
to understand that the visible (information) is contained neither in a single isola-
ted image nor in something external to images, but in a series of edited images,
a path through different views, a course, a formalization, an act of linking infor-
mation.

When architects are more aware of what kind of stories or activities the space is
unfolding, a deeper understanding of the spatial culture they produce can be
gained. The traditional language of architecture is in no way capable of doing
this. In order to tell stories the language of film and theater uses all kinds of visu-
al techniques (2), including mise en scène. It is these visual techniques which
could help architects understand their work in a world which is unfolding more
and more through the culture of the image or the idea of display.

A third aspect is that film always deals with sequences of time or peri-
odicalizations in space (3). Film is capable of creating what Deleuze calls “mobile
sections.” Cinema takes us away from the immobilized sections we impose on
time, to mobile sections. Mobile sections present the moving of movement, not
a movement to be understood as organized and fixed by some static point of
view. It is not so much the point of departure in these mobile sections that is

essential, but the motion that leads us from one image to another. And we have
to understand that the visible (information) is contained neither in a single isola-
ted image nor in something external to images, but in a series of edited images,
a path through different views, a course, a formalization, an act of linking infor-
mation.
I will discuss the film *Celebration* (Festen) by Thomas Vinterberg to make clear that film – as multitude medium par excellence with a long tradition of critique – can help us to go beyond the hijacking of the multitude such as we see in the MVRDV Expo pavilion. Film also opposes the naive belief that the multitude itself already creates enough alternative worlds. I will analyze the film *Celebration* by looking at three aspects applied in the method used by Vinterberg: (1) the narrative, (2) the stance, and (3) the aesthetic devices. All these three elements are simultaneously operative, they cannot be understood separately.

**The narrative**

A grand party to celebrate a father’s 60th birthday unleashes a family drama, with all the lies that conceal the horrendous secrets of incest. The eldest son, Christian, stages a showdown with the popular paterfamilias; his provocative, moving after-dinner speech dislodges all the masks, which finally fall completely as the father-son conflict intensifies with bewildered guests looking on. The structure as well as the performance tells a clear and rich story, specifying complex circumstances and their effect on the human flesh and behavior, playfully and painfully. We immediately recognize our own everyday culture and its almost unconscious banal qualities.

*Celebration* is not a Hollywood film with a happy end full of commodified beauties or anti-heroes. Nor is it a critical commentary on the bourgeois class (such as traditional Marxism would make) – that would be an “accident,” according to Vinterberg. Rather, what defines the authentic speech and action in the film is what defies or subverts representation as a social force.
In this film it is child abuse which is “celebrated” to displace the characters and expose the idealized image of the non-nuclear family. In fact the story rejects the middle-class model of the family in order to provoke other, less commodified and controlled, extended family structures. It opens up other possibilities between family members and produces another public sphere beyond the upheld clichés. Liberation takes place, through and with the clichés, not by disqualifying them.

The structure of the story not only communicates a clear storyline, it is dialogical as well. The Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakthin defines “dialogism” as a world dominated by a “heteroglossia,” where there is a constant interaction between meanings in the story, all of which can potentially influence the others. “Dialogization” occurs when a word, discourse, language, or culture becomes relativized and deprivileged, and is subject to competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language remains authoritarian or absolute. To dialogize architecture challenges the conceptual hierarchy under which most designers operate.

One could say that through the introduction of an absurd element (something unconsumable) – in this film, incest – a certain anxiety and/or alienation is introduced and exposed in order to activate different differences with liberating potential. The disenchanting element of incest introduced in the story is clearly there not to satisfy us, but to challenge us, to liberate us. Vinterberg also stressed that incest was chosen not so much to put it on the political agenda – he is not interested in all the conspiracy and victim stories which judge how bad and horrific incest is – but “used” in the film to allow the multitude of the family, through its clichés, to emerge again, and to free it from its negative entanglements.

The film breaks through the symbolic representation of all the people involved and starts to awaken alternative and liberating becomings which would otherwise stay hidden and impossible. In Celebration we are confronted with a
kind of progressive becoming that allows no one to have an authentic voice, but those who cannot speak, or those made empty and vulnerable by the pain, suddenly find another way, are given another permission to speak and to build a multitude beyond the limits and good manners of the family.
The Guggenheim museums in Las Vegas designed by OMA and Rem Koolhaas try to communicate with banal middle-class culture in the same manner as *Celebration*. Commodification is clearly here the basic condition for creating a deeper social value. The two museums, the Jewel Box and the Big Box, are placed right in the middle of the virtual real of The Venetian in Las Vegas. The margin is not sought to locate resistance; instead the museums are put right in the middle of our pleasure culture. Like *Celebration*, it seeks to activate another creative potential right in the middle of the mesh, in coexistence with mass culture. It makes clear that the old notion of critical distance is outdated, even impossible.

To put a museum, a jewel box and big industrial exhibition box, within the casino labyrinth of slot machines and perfect simulations of Venice, is in another way, like the film *Celebration*, an incestuous act. In the same way that Vinterberg uses incest to break open the family, Koolhaas uses the technique of displacement and alienation to provoke speechlessness to speak again. Or, as Koolhaas remarked, to give the art back “a degree of protection and definition to retain its aura.” Both *Celebration* and the feast of the Guggenheim Hermitage museum thus try to frame a politics of speechlessness.

The museums in Las Vegas, like the film *Celebration*, communicate with the masses and create dialogical conditions within the mesh of the multitude. The viewer and user/visitor start to see different experiences and are confronted with different viewpoints on the trajectory through the spatial and filmic spaces of transformations. The narratives of Vinterberg and of Koolhaas create a genuine two-way street, and feedback. They use the contradictions from within everyday (banal) society, but at the same time allow and energize other voices, because they give the multiplicity a chosen directionality (stance) which is linked to a progressive idea beyond the mesh which is just out there.

As I explained earlier, it is almost impossible to deal separately with all three aspects of (1) the narrative (the programmatic), (2) the stance (or taking a position) and (3) the aesthetic. They operate simultaneously. In fact one could say that the stance is the hidden stratifying factor. Both *Celebration* and the Guggenheim museums try to let the speechless speak again. Both makers argue for a social program that was stripped away in the fundamentalist image of the multitude we find normally in Las Vegas and the family. Suddenly, through the trajectory of the clichés of both the casino and the family, other, radical options start to emerge. Suddenly commodification and liberation can go together.

The stance is not about having an opinion or giving a final answer. This
is why the stance is dialogical. It doesn’t want to be paternalistic or celebrate a better future full of authentic moments and without alienation. It sees alternatives not by going back or stepping out, but precisely by “embracing” the schizophrenic condition of life (even when it is perhaps feared). The work is opening it up, through a positioning in the work, by means of its technique and narrative. The trajectory through space is as important a dialogical device as the imaginary of the materiality steered by the image. But for the sake of argument I focus on the culture of the image of the project and not so much on the trajectory (of materiality) incorporated in the project.

The Guggenheim museums in Las Vegas are a kind of mise en scène, a
The building gives the speechless a voice. Culture is exhibited in the backstage spaces of the entertainment industry, which are normally hidden from view. Hopefully the roughness of these bizarre museums helps the public to experience art and culture beyond the perfect simulation of the Las Vegas strip.

Let’s look at some techniques, or aesthetic devices, which both Vinterberg and Koolhaas use in addressing their progressive stance against the hijacking of the multitude. Here I will discuss just two: aesthetic roughness and “trucage.” The Jewel Box, for instance, with its Cor-ten steel walls remind us of the velvet walls of the Hermitage museum in St. Petersburg, and the volume is indeed a kind of jewel box slipped under the kitschy dresser of the Venetian.

But if you look carefully you see that there is a war going on. The Cor-ten steel is not the same as the velvet of the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. Although the space seems to be a very smooth and traditional museum space, the pivoting and Cor-ten detailing (the floating of the heavy wall above the Las Vegas casino carpet) introduce a certain roughness which goes beyond the simulacrum of the visual. Instead it activates the user, the viewer. The Cor-ten steel acts almost like Barnett Newman’s painting Who’s Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?

In the Big Box we are confronted with almost an industrial hall for machinery, instead of a perfect smooth, neutral white museum space. The space is a degree-zero architecture. After the supervisible world of Las Vegas, we enter an almost non-visible world, where we can really start experiencing again,
beyond the total control of the simulacrum. The museum has almost no façade. In contrast to the Frank Gehry brand-style in Bilbao, we are confronted with nothing but an interior. Like Vinterberg, Koolhaas introduces a kind of war, a conflict which doesn’t destroy the story, but in fact opens up dialogue and communication between viewer and user.

In *Celebration*, Vinterberg used many small handheld digital cameras to get close to the conflictive dimensions of the party. The images are rough and provisional, like the Guggenheim’s velvet Cor-ten steel walls. The roughness of the digital camera, the wild movement and natural light create a blurred focus, an opacity and performability which undermine the finality of the film. The same can be said for the Guggenheim. It is an aesthetic complex where the details do not so much refer to themselves, but are there to activate the stance and narrative to be unfolded.

Christian Metz spoke about the quality of, and need for, “trucage” in film. The trucage in *Celebration* and the Guggenheim Las Vegas can be understood as the undermining of a monumental structure devoted to its own preservation. A delicate provisional framework is proposed instead, open to interpretation. In fact, the roughness introduced by the aesthetic complex in both works introduces a kind of irrationality or absurdity that breaks open the commodity.

Henri Lefebvre pointed out that although experts and intellectuals are embedded in everyday life, they prefer to think of themselves as outside and elsewhere. Convinced that everyday life is trivial, they attempt to evade it. They use rhetorical language, meta-language or autonomous language as “permanent substitutes for experience, allowing them to ignore the mediocrity of their own condition.” Vinterberg and Koolhaas embrace the everyday culture in all its mediocrity, and the bizarre possibilities we all share. They are not against mass culture, but use its hidden qualities in order to create liberating options.

**Towards a New Idea of the Progressive**

In this article I have tried to warn against the opportunistic idea of “simply” embracing the multitude. We must instead allow another culture of the multitude to emerge. We must install different kinds of dreams than the ones the market generates. *Celebration* and the Guggenheim Las Vegas speak a kind of foreign
language, opening other worlds from within the multitude. In the words of Deleuze, they create a kind of stammering of all values and ideologies while they are still in place. They produce a kind of radicalization of our everyday condition while maintaining, not eliminating, communication with the normality of the everyday.

This foreign language, initiated from a clear stance in relation to the multitude, provokes us to speak and to open a dialogue in which those who do not speak can begin to speak. This is a kind of antagonism, socially regulated and controlled, which will subsist under the form of what could be called a “war of position.” Each pole of the conflict will have a certain power and will exercise a certain violence over the other pole.

The paradoxical corollary of this conclusion is that the existence of antagonisms is the very condition of a free society. This is because antagonism results from the fact that the social is not a plurality of effects radiating from a pre-given center, but is pragmatically constructed from many starting points.
Alien Relationships
From August 31 to September 23, 2001, the Schouwburgplein square in central Rotterdam was transformed by one of the largest interactive installations ever made for public space. Over one thousand portraits taken on the streets of Rotterdam, Madrid, Mexico and Montreal were projected on the façade of the Pathé Cinema building using robotically controlled projectors located on towers around the square. The portraits could not be seen when the square was empty because powerful ground-level xenon lights washed them out. As soon as people walked onto the square, however, their shadows were projected onto the building and parts of the portraits were revealed within them. By moving around, passersby could match the scale of a portrait by going toward or away from the building, making their silhouettes anywhere between two and 22 meters high. A camera-based tracking system monitored the location of the shadows in real time, and when the shadows matched all the portraits in a given scene, the control computer issued an automatic command to change the scene to the next set of portraits. In this way the people on the square were invited to embody different representational narratives. Over 50 people could take part at any given time, controlling 1,200 square meters of projections and creating a collective experience that nonetheless allowed discrete individual participation.

This was *Body Movies*, the sixth in Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s (Canada/Mexico) Relational Architecture series of installations in public space in European and Latin American cities. These interactive interventions in Madrid, Linz, Graz, Mexico City, Havana and Istanbul have been exploring the intersection between new technologies, urban space, active participation and “alien memory.”
Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6
(Rotterdam, the Netherlands)

Photo by Arie Kievit
1. The building in darkness

2. Images from the top projectors

3. Bright light from bottom projectors washes out the images

4. Images appear inside shadows of passers-by

5. Shadow tracker detects when all image characters are revealed and triggers next image (after a fade to black, shown here)
Vectorial Elevation, shown in Mexico City from December 26, 1999, to January 7, 2000, is probably the best known of Lozano-Hemmer’s works. It was a telerobotic installation that allowed participants on the Internet to design immense light sculptures over the Zócalo Plaza and the historic city center. Any person visiting the website (www.alzado.net) could make a design to direct the 18 searchlights on the rooftops of the National Palace, the Municipal Government and the Mercaderes Arcade. Equipped with 7,000-watt xenon lamps, these powerful spotlights produced beams that could be seen for 15 kilometers.

Alex Adriaansens/Joke Brouwer: Your work seems to be founded on a rather strong idea of what public interactive pieces should be like and what the modern city is today. How do your public installations affect normal city life? Or, to put it more generally, how do your pieces change the cities in which they’re shown?

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Many people from Cicero to Churchill have been quoted as saying: “We make buildings, and buildings make us.” This is far from true in
our time. Globalization has deepened the crisis in urban representation. The vast majority of buildings constructed today no longer represent local inhabitants or concerns. Instead we see two tendencies. The first is the erection of “default buildings,” that is, generic architecture that represents corporate culture and the optimization of capital. A default building in Montreal will be very similar to one in Mexico City because both are functions of the same formula that seeks a return on investment. The second tendency is toward what the Spanish architect Emilio López-Galiacho calls “vampire buildings,” symbolic buildings that are not allowed to have a natural death, but are kept alive artificially through restoration, citation and virtual simulation. Vampire buildings are forced to be immortal due to “architectural correctness,” a culturally, politically and economically conservative predisposition to assign an identitarian role to a select number of buildings like Vicenza’s Villa Rotonda or Seville’s La Giralda. These two phenomena of default and vampire buildings are flip sides of the same coin.

An important aspect of my work in Relational Architecture is to produce a performative context where default buildings may take on temporary specificity and where vampire buildings’ role of established, prevailing identification may decline. The pieces are usually ephemeral interventions designed to establish architectural and social relationships where unpredicted behaviors may emerge. I want buildings to pretend to be something other than themselves, to engage in a kind of dissimulation. To accomplish this we use large-scale technologies of amplification that are usually reserved for publicity stunts and corporate events.
These technologies are typically used to perform a pre-programmed commercial monologue, and it’s always exciting to exploit them in ways they were not intended. Using projections, robotics, sound, net connections and local sensors, the input and feedback from participants becomes an integral part of the work and the outcome is dictated by their actions.

My work attempts to introduce “alien memory” as an urban catalyst. I prefer to say “alien” instead of “new,” because the word doesn’t have the pretension of originality and simply underlines the fact that “it doesn’t belong.” Body Movies transforms the Schouwburgplein by introducing huge portraits of people only matched in scale by the amplified shadows of passersby. With this piece you see constant realignments taking place. For example, there is the movement in the square to embody the portraits, to “become” the alien representations, which is frustrated by the fact that the portraits change automatically the moment total embodiment happens. Also, there is the encounter between the dominant culture, which is Hollywood films being shown inside the cinema building, and shadow representations of the participants outside in the open space. This makes people look at the cinema building potentially as a membrane where two realities are co-present – an “internal exterior,” as Jodorowski would call it.

The impact of these projects varies widely. In Vectorial Elevation, the installation in Mexico City, we had over 800,000 active net participants in 12 days, plus possibly millions looking at the work in the city and more through the media.
Here in Rotterdam we have probably a couple thousand people participating every night, and the piece runs for 23 days. Of course, it’s easy to determine statistics on participation, but these numbers tell us little about the impact of the pieces, if any, on the creation, perception and occupation of public space, which is what I’m mostly concerned with. The best way to gather this information is to interview participants, and this tends to be one of the more rewarding aspects of doing a project, as one becomes aware of the diverse reactions elicited.

AA/JB: How would you position your work in the artistic context, in the realm of the arts?

RLH: My work is best situated somewhere between architecture and the performing arts. For me it’s a priority to create social experiences rather than to generate collectible objects. The making of a piece itself is closer to developing a performance or a play than a visual artwork. For the most part, I work with my long-standing collaborator Will Bauer, but also with photographers, programmers, architects, linguists, writers, composers, actors or other staff that may be needed depending on the project.

Most of our work has been developed in media arts contexts, and within this I prefer collective experiences rather than using individual interfaces for solitary participation. In 1989 I interviewed Robert Lepage, the Canadian theatre director, about the impact of technology on the arts. He said, “Computers can communicate very efficiently; but they cannot engage in communion.” I think he used the word communion not in its religious connotations but more as the acknowledgement of the human complicity that cannot be shared with computers. I find
this idea very interesting, not because it sounds like an apology for humanism, which is in a well-deserved crisis, but because I think communication as a concept in art is overrated and corporate. What is more attractive is people meeting and sharing an experience, a simple pleasure that composer Frederic Rzewski calls “coming together.” This concept, at least when referring to coming together in the flesh, is becoming more radical as people do it less and less, thanks to telecommunications, urban design, increasing workload demands, and work schedule flexibility, to name a few factors.

I named the series of interventions “relational” in large part because I wanted to avoid using the term “interactive.” This word has become too vague, like “postmodern,” “virtual,” “deconstruction” or other terms that mean too many things and is exhausted. Duchamp said “The look makes the picture,” and if we say that every artwork is interactive, the word isn’t that interesting anymore. Also it sounds too much like a top-down 1-bit trigger button – you push and something happens – which is too predatorial and simple. Of course “relational” is not my term; I read about it in Maturana and Varela’s neurological studies, and also the word has been used since the 1960s to describe cross-referencing databases. The great Brazilian artists Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica also used the term in the 1960s to refer to their user-activated objects and installations. “Relational” has a more horizontal quality; it’s more collective. Events happen in fields of activity that may have resonances in several places in the network.

AA/JB: With interactive installations there always seem to be two approaches for the audience: one can either participate, or one looks at the piece from a distance and reflects on it. Is this true for your work also? How can people reflect while participating in Body Movies or Vectorial Elevation?

RLH: There are two main strategies for collective interactivity. The first one I call “taking turns.” You have one or two sensors and people take turns using them, and the rest are spectators. Examples include Jeffrey Shaw’s Eve, where one person controls the point of view of a virtual world projected on a large dome; Toni Dove and Michael Mackenzie’s Archaeology of a Mother Tongue, where a tracking glove is used to navigate a narrative; and our Displaced Emperors, where a participant wears a tracking system to transform the Linzer Castle. The other popular strategy for collective interactivity I call “taking averages.” This is what you have in interactive cinema experiences and in game shows: a voting interface where input is statistically computed and the majority directs the outcome. This can be very frustrating and democratic; it makes you feel that your
Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4 (Mexico City)
Photo by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
discrete participation goes nowhere. The challenge is how to open a piece for participation without taking averages or taking turns. In a way, *Body Movies* does this, because on the one hand you can have discrete individual participation, as one’s shadow is recognizably one’s own; but there are also emerging collective patterns of self-organization, as people may choose to interact with one another, with the building or with the portraits.

In some pieces action and reflection are not mutually exclusive. I will now make a big over-simplification about approaches to representation. The Italian approach is all about the window on the world. You have a frame and you step back from the subject, from reality, as though looking through a neutral glass. This formula is what informs humanism and virtuality. In contrast, the Dutch approach – I’m specifically thinking of Rembrandt and Van Hoogstraten – is based
on artifice, on acting, on surface aesthetics like the camera obscura, anamorphosis and trompe l’oeil. The Italian metaphor implies that you can look at a subject objectively, while the Dutch emphasis is on foldings or reflections that are already taking place in our own corporeal space, where perception is an apparatus. The two cannot be clearly separated as I suggest, but the Dutch approach illustrates more clearly my preferred understanding of perception, which is that the act of seeing is the act of inventing. Spectators play an active role, not a passive one. You can also say the opposite. People who are participating are in fact reflecting. People aren’t innocent when they activate interactive works in a public space, and this already constitutes a certain ground for reflection. People are participating in these sort of interactive operations with a lot of knowledge and awareness. It’s important for me that they understand the interface of the piece in an intuitive manner so that it doesn’t become too distracting. In *Body Movies* people adopted the shadow interface very quickly, and they definitely played roles, in character, as Rembrandt did when he was doing his self-portraits.

In *Vectorial Elevation* this interpenetration of action and reflection wasn’t so obvious. I received a lot of valuable criticism about the fact that when you look at the light sculptures over the plaza in Mexico City, your experience is one only of contemplation. You see the constant transformation of the lights overhead, but you’re not actively involved in it. Even though we put computers in public access locations, that wasn’t enough to get the more balanced outcome between acting and reflecting that we have here in Rotterdam. In Mexico there was definitely a power gradient, an asymmetry, and now when I see *Body Movies* I think it’s so obvious. I’m looking forward to doing *Vectorial Elevation* again and finding more ways to get people to participate on-site.

In *Body Movies* there’s a brief blackout that happens between the representations as the slides change to show new portraits. This blackout was something I did not want at first – if I had used video there could have been a continuous transformation. But now I’m extremely pleased with this “silence.” It introduces a rhythm and it makes everybody aware of his or her own presence. A kind of Brechtian “noticing of the knots.” This rupture has become a fundamental feature of the piece. It’s one of those technological limitations that becomes a plus: “Oh, it’s not a bug, it’s a feature!”

**AA/JB:** What exactly do you want your audience to reflect upon through the interactivity of your installations in public space?
the Shadow, where he outlines different relationships to shadows in art: the shadow as a metaphor for being (Plato), the birth of representation and painting (Butades’ daughter), the mysterious expression of the self (shadowgrams), and, most importantly, the expression of a hidden monstrosity or otherness (which is depicted in Van Hoogstraten’s engraving). So my initial desire was to use artificial shadows to generate questions about embodiment and disembodiment, about spectacular representation, about the distance between bodies in public space, and so on. It’s clear that those are my obsessions, and most people participating in the piece probably are reflecting on something completely different, which is great.

I want to design anti-monuments. A monument is something that represents power, or selects a piece of history and tries to materialize it, visualize it, represent it, always from the point of view of the elite. The anti-monument, on the contrary, is an action, a performance. Everybody is aware of its artificiality. There’s no inherent connection between the site and the installation. It’s something that people may partake in, ad hoc, and knows it’s a deceit, a special effect. The anti-monument for me is an alternative to the fetish of the site, the fetish of the representation of power.

I draw very careful distinctions between my interventions in public space and the work of artists like Krzysztof Wodiczko or Hans Haacke, who make critical site-specific work. To me, most of their work is an exploration of the underlying power structures of a building, and the deconstruction of these “grands recits.” While I’m a great fan of their work, I’m more interested in temporary, minor histories that can be established with relationships between the site and the public. I like micropolitics. Many times my work derives from an existing special effect.

Body Movies, for example, was inspired by Samuel van Hoogstraten’s engraving The Shadow Dance, which appears in his Inleiding tot de Hogeschool der Schilderkunst. Made in Rotterdam in 1675, this engraving shows a minute source of light placed at ground level and the shadows of actors taking on demonic or angelic characteristics depending on their size. Before proposing the piece I read Victor Stoichita’s wonderful book, A Short History of the Shadow, where he outlines different relationships to shadows in art: the shadow as a metaphor for being (Plato), the birth of representation and painting (Butades’ daughter), the mysterious expression of the self (shadowgrams), and, most importantly, the expression of a hidden monstrosity or otherness (which is depicted in Van Hoogstraten’s engraving). So my initial desire was to use artificial shadows to generate questions about embodiment and disembodiment, about spectacular representation, about the distance between bodies in public space, and so on. It’s clear that those are my obsessions, and most people participating in the piece probably are reflecting on something completely different, which is great.
Sometimes it’s more historically motivated; sometimes it comes from the research of an interface. I’ve no problem saying that my work is effectist. But participation transforms special effects into what I call “special causes and effects.” Through participation, special effects become something that’s more dialogical, something that’s more of an exchange. Depending on public participation is a humbling affair, because the work will not exist without the main protagonist, which is the public as actor.

With very large interventions the question of the spectacular is often raised. When I did the project in Mexico City using searchlights, a technology with terrible connotations derived from Albert Speer’s fascist spectacles of power, I was aware that those theatrics had an underlying quality: intimidation. The message was, “this is big, you are small.” In Speer’s spectacle of power, people were props, just like the searchlights were. I tried to introduce interactivity to transform intimidation into intimacy. That is, the capability to intervene in a space that was already authoritarian by virtue of its scale and meaning, and to be able to participate there at a personal scale, to be able to name it, to make it yours, to feel entitled to it. Most modern day son et lumière spectacles, such as Jean Michel Jarre’s Millennium piece in the pyramids of Egypt, are also suspect in my opinion. That show was completely scripted, it lasted a few hours, a small number of people were privileged to attend, and in the end there was fog so nobody saw anything. More troublesome is the way these kinds of spectacles try to depict the richness of a culture by defining a linear historicist narrative of “representative” moments or actors in history. Each of those narratives must be analyzed in terms of their exclusions, because there can never be a comprehensive, exhaustive nor neutral representation and what is shown is always a profile of the current elite.

There’s a very close connection between representation and repression: elites have always used such narratives to homogenize and control what are otherwise complex, dynamic social fabrics. I think work in public space should destabilize these prefabricated stereotypes and foster a critical rereading of the daily urban performance, opening opportunities for self-representation and intervention.

AA/IB: To come back to where we started, the city and interactive public pieces: Do you want your audience to experience the city they live in more intensely through the alien memory that you bring into their familiar environment? Or do you want to alienate the city dwellers from their hometown and globalize them on the spot? Does it matter if you show, say, Body Movies in Rotterdam or anywhere else in the world? In other words, is the grounding of your work local or global?
“Placelessness” and “multiplace” are terms concerning the condition of the artwork, but also of ourselves, and of architecture. The feeling that you belong to nowhere, and that you belong to many places at the same time. These two things are the same phenomenon. Personally, I live between Madrid, Montreal and Mexico City, and yet I feel like a foreigner in all three cities. I now talk about

RLH: The grounding of my work is not the history of the site, but the participation of the public. My specificity is not to sites, but to relationships. In *Body Movies* I do use local references, like Van Hoogstraten and 17th-century Dutch shadowgrams, but these are tangents, lines of flight to look at the work. They are more like a starting point or a detonator. Almost every culture in the world has a very sophisticated vocabulary and tradition of shadow plays or shadow mythologies. Perhaps the city doesn’t change with my work, but the opposite is clearly true. As I remount a piece in a different city the range of response varies widely, and these variations are very revealing about what constitutes “location.” I’m currently organizing a tour for *Body Movies* and I’m really looking forward to seeing how people’s reactions differ in Seoul, Sao Paulo or Singapore. I think in most electronic artworks what’s interesting is the cross-reference of different behaviors that emerge from showing in different settings.

*Vectorial Elevation, Relational Architecture 4* (Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, Spain)
Photo by David Quintas
“going back homes,” in plural. The sense of continuity and complicity is created through the persistence of connectivity and dialogue with these places. Locality, like identity, is a performance.

Every city is many cities in one, all of them overlapping and coexisting. I think coexistence is a very important concept. Two years ago I heard Edward Said speak about how he doesn’t believe that the separation of Israel and Palestine, a reterritorialization on the basis of identity, will work. He called this approach “identitarian”: that’s the authoritarianism that comes from identity and the definition of who is in and who is out. There’ve been centuries of coexistence of different religions in the Middle East, and Said stresses that these models of coexistence should be reactivated and somehow be made more heroic. I find that very interesting, this possibility that you have in the same time and place intensely different planes of experience. The planes may be very different, but sometimes a small connection is made, either locally or temporarily or post-geographically. There’s always seepage between the different levels. We all live in relational space and time. For me the emphasis isn’t on the fetish of the structure, on what is top and what is down; it’s more on the interconnection, the relationship between two things, between our experience and the outside world of constructed, consensual, sensory experience, if it exists at all. For me, what is important is where these worlds meet.

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The interview was set up as a series of three; at the time of writing only the first had been completed. The interviews were conducted in April 2002, first at my office, NOX, and later at OMA. The other two will follow at a later date.

As we were slowly starting to dream of a “transarchitecture” in the early 1990s, obviously “transurbanism” was already happening. If transarchitecture was an architecture with a theory but without materializations, transurbanism was the opposite: exploding cities, in-between cities, city-regions, city-airports, cities without urbanism, growth without planning, without theory. And as we were cautiously experimenting with wiring up geometries, global networks and global economies were actually producing new cityscapes: not the homeopathic enclaves of new urbanism, but a migration of cities themselves, a migration within urbanism itself. As computing got involved in architecture, media got involved in urbanism. Both saw it as their primary mission to save us from “design,” from the idea that to grow the world needs intervention, either through happy subjectivity or cultural negotiation, through an individual or a collective signature. Nothing is less true: from objectivity to material there are no detours requested,
only machines of production. In that sense, I don’t think that learning Maya 4.0 is very different from going to Lagos.

I have been wanting to interview Rem Koolhaas for a very long time, because he is following this other vector; not so much one of computing, but one of a world which, in a way, designs itself, where the “diagrams” are not taken from other disciplines but are the actual working forces of globalization, of mediated technology and modernization. The plan is a series of interviews of three: the first on the undesigned, the second on the unbuilt, and a third on the unsaid.

The first was basically about his thoughts on matter and materials, on what he has, on many occasions, called “junk,” something that has now begun to alternate between the American junkspaces and the African junkbelts. I am especially interested in how, for Koolhaas, the image becomes a material, how facts become a material through photography (and photos become part of design through Photoshop), and later in Africa, where materials seem to acquire a hold over the image, in a continuous blurring and reprogramming.

And then his clear obsession with product catalogues, which is architects’ main source for materials to use – most of our designing as architects consists of organizing things already designed by others. Some are only half-preformed (half-products like concrete), others are totally preformed (drop ceilings, doors, floor systems), and some are totally predesigned (lamps, door handles and tiles). Realism has never been a style in architecture as it has in the other arts, because although similarity might be an issue with a half-product like paint, in architecture similarity – our buildings looking like someone else’s in one way or another – is a given. The real has a bad name in architecture; reality is always that which prevents an object from coming into being (while in philosophy it is exactly that what makes an object come about), that which resists an idea instead of pro-
ducing it. In this sense Koolhaas is much more a producer than a director: images don’t come out of nowhere, they mostly already exist. His realism isn’t merely a case of old Dutch objectivism; it is an acute sense of technology, of how social systems work together with machines to produce the generic, the standard. For Koolhaas, the cultural act of architectural design isn’t about adding cute idiosyncrasies to an existing stream of materials, but involves a deep consciousness of the technological force field of modernization itself. All desire is channeled through that system. So he is not only more interested in how things are than in what they mean, but also in how they become real, and how the real is brought about. It should be clear to us that modernity has now reached a stage beyond deconstruction, one in which its language has been completely erased in favor of a pure technologism with no progress or ideology. Modernity now means an increase in complexity and dimensionality brought about by more and more net-
The second interview, which will be called “The Unbuilt,” is about his thoughts on concepts, theory, statistics, the potentially very productive separation between AMO and OMA, and how one haunts the other. Theory is not a basis but runs parallel to practice: it is a practice in itself, highly organized, almost more so than the architectural office. People like Sanford Kwinter, Bob Somol, Michael Hardt and Toni Negri are taken aboard not to ghostwrite the production but to become involved in the the production itself. Koolhaas is not against intelligent theory, but he is against the idea that thinking exists only outside architecture and that you must shop for intelligence elsewhere to be able to understand or design buildings.

Generally, theory is a safe haven, a leafy campus where so-called true progress is
made, while building is a sort of half-heroic, half-impotent attempt to get it built. This has always prevented Koolhaas from staying for too long in the USA, where architecture is on the campus and building is in the cities. I think his strategies have often been more about “getting things unbuilt,” pushing the theoretical moment precisely to the threshold at which a design must be accepted by a board, a jury or a private client. This is exactly why he’s so interested in power: pushing a design too far for theory to cope with it, but also making it difficult for juries to fully grasp and discuss it, or making it too hot to handle for clients who are often caught in similar risks. The theoretical radicalism occurs precisely where the object flips into the real, and all his theory concentrates on the mechanisms by which they are tested on their operationality. His “realism” is not a pragmatic way of dealing with radical theories, but a theory of radical pragmatics itself. Koolhaas has one of the most impressive unbuilt oeuvres of any contemporary architect. He has hardly ever accidentally lost a competition; his losing entries have almost always involved the political mechanisms behind production. This is probably why he now always wins.

Of course, if one interview is on materials and a second on concepts, the third would logically be on how to materialize concepts. It will be called “The Unsaid,” because the hinges between Koolhaas’s recording techniques and his production techniques are quite hidden, and often secret. If one organizes theory on one
track and practice on another, that is indeed “a strong position,” as Koolhaas puts it. But naturally, many questions arise, especially about design, because when all thought concentrates around the undesigned and the unbuilt, the question is how these are rechannelled and remobilized into a design practice.

—Lars Spuybroek: First there was the USA, the “badly designed built,” then Asia, the “quickly designed built,” then Africa, the “undesigned built.”

—Rem Koolhaas: [laughs]
LS: Really amazing to go to the US first and then Africa. Baudrillard did it the other way around. The French intellectuals always did Africa first and ended up in the US later. You ended up in Africa.

RK: Well, for now.

LS: Speaking of Lagos, what really interests me is how you gather material. The photos from Lagos are quite different from the ones you did for Atlanta or The Harvard Guide to Shopping.

RK: What do you mean by “different”?
LS. The ones on the US are always at eye level – they show signs. The ones from Africa are from the air – they show structures.

RK: There are also lots of pictures in the Lagos book that are from the ground. I was there with Edgar Cleijne, a Dutch photographer who has been involved in Africa for twenty years and had been traveling there for all those years taking pictures, and I discovered him at a certain point. I started traveling with him from the very first. He really showed me the way. Video by itself often works much better. Photographs are much too confrontational; you’re always creating such a moment. There’s much less paranoia with video. Don’t forget, Lagos is really very dangerous; you feel that every situation has a sort of built-in limit.

LS. And those aerial photographs?

RK. We borrowed President Obasanjo’s helicopter and flew over the city for two days.

LS: Do you write in between? If you’re continuously taking pictures, how do you get around to writing?

RK: I’m always making notes, you know that.

LS: When are you going to finish the book?

RK: I’m going to write this summer. Three times, for three weeks at a time, I’ll take time off to write.

LS: Do you know yet what it’s going to be like?

RK: No, but sort of. Of course I gave some lectures. Lectures are the skeleton, the main structure, but I don’t know yet what kind of tone I’m going to give it. I thought I might make three totally different voyages of discovery out of it that arrive at totally different conclusions, and then a sort of integrative synthesis. It’s going to be something like that. I only know how to do it once I’ve started. I’m taking the next three months off, more or less. And it took a very long time before I understood myself what Lagos was about, but I see it now as a sort of rest stop that is actually very well planned. A number of planners were important: Doxiadis, and Julius Berger, who built the autobahns in Nazi Germany. They went to work there and actually put all the emblems but also the practices into a kind
of infrastructure, and the culture went into a kind of reverse, and became poorer and poorer.

LS: How do you see these self-organizing structures?

RK: They look like self-organizing zones at first, but later I slowly realized that it’s not simply self-organization, because it all takes place within the former infrastructural projects of the modernization project. It is, in fact, a continuation of a culture, and these things would not be possible without that network. All that misused infrastructure enables the society to keep going. In other words, a drive-in would not have been possible by accident, without the best operational strategies of Western planners. To me, that’s what’s fascinating.

LS: I also saw diagrams of those areas around the highways.

RK: Yes, I made other drawings of them too. We called them friction zones. They’re all around intersections, if you look closely, and the crazy thing now is that it’s getting much richer because of that and linking back to that modernity right away. It goes back and forth. When there’s more money it disappears again, and it gets planned, and there’s more public space and gentrification.

LS: Green spaces everywhere?

RK: Yes, but it’s mainly the introduction of the concept of upgrading. Cleaning up public space so there’s simply no room anymore for all those spontaneous phenomena. They eliminate the friction, force it out, and so it’s forced to go to other places. A kind of Potemkin activity. There are massive investments, massive profits from oil. That made possible a really cohesive mobilizing policy, and just at the moment that it’s finished, the whole culture goes downhill because of corruption, and there is a complete evaporation of the public sector and everyone is thrown back on their own resources. So now an endless series of negotiations are necessary in order to survive, and the more poverty, the more of those there are. And the only way that is possible is through the flexibility of the infrastructure. Thanks to the slowing down of the infrastructure, which no longer functions as circulation, but as a kind of area of exchange, a market, in fact.

What’s so fascinating now is that, for example, in some places traffic is moving faster again, and so that chance for exchange is gone again. There is then invariably more crime, because slow exchange is simply no longer possible, and other forms of exchange must be found.
LS: Architecture has become a sort of slow infrastructure. It would be very interesting to study the programmatic cycles of that.

RK: It is a very cohesive situation of self-organization and organization, and precisely because of that, it becomes a kind of mega-organization, which concerned me too in the same way. I think that’s the most important thing, and it’s a phenomenon I’ve felt coming for a few years. First, there was the rhetoric and the whole story that planning was no use anymore, but this clearly needs adjusting, because planning, although it never was as useful as you thought it was, nonetheless in its misuse or other experimental use gets new meaning again. In any case, these situations are unthinkable without planning and the possibility of planning.

LS: How are they reacting to that in Nigeria?

RK: We’re trying to penetrate Nigerian society in all sorts of ways. We’ve been on Nigerian television a couple of times, on a kind of breakfast show. And we’re also
RK: You could be critical and say it’s a cosmetic operation and it’s not authentic enough, but of course it is a kind of racism to deny countries their gentrification. And at each moment it’s so different, there are phases; I find that amazing. For

LS: First you moved along with, photographed with, all the experimentation and friction zones that arose whole, bottom-up, and then you ran into classic top-down interventions again. How do you feel now about all the gentrification there?
four years now, I’ve been going there for a week every three months, and every
time it’s completely different. The total flexibility is amazing. Really amazing.

LS: What you run into there is, of course, what you mentioned when you wrote
on the Lagos project for Mutations: “We think it is possible to argue that Lagos
represents a developed, extreme, paradigmatic case study of a city at the fore-
front of globalizing economy.” Lagos is full of recipes, inventions. It seems as if
you’ve investigated two forms of flexibility. The first is America, stacked stories
and grids, where it’s always a Cartesian choice. And here you describe a system
that is clearly different, open-ended. It is a much more open construction, and at
the same time much more structurally built-in. Almost an urban-planning typolo-
gy. You could argue that this is a new step in your work.

RK: Of course, that was already there, in Melun Sénart.

LS: For me that was too much of a gridded space, where you compose using the
emptiness in the grid. Africa follows much more of a field logic. “The material
logic of Lagos is convincing,” as you say. New spaces are being invented there. The emptiness in Africa stands in open connection to an overloaded infrastructure; in a grid this is necessarily closed off.

RK: I think your arguments are more interesting than mine.

LS: What fascinates you in America at first irritates you later. This is very clear in the junkspace text.

RK: I think it’s a kind of political move, more than anything else. I went to America for the first time in 1972; then it was seen as absolutely scandalous even to go there, and I think the book – *Delirious New York* – was actually a kind of marketing research. For a while it was interesting to see where it would lead, but at a certain point I think a sort of political indignation came across, and also a kind of unease about the lack of control in your own life. I didn’t want to endlessly be singing for the system, and so it was essential to go to Africa in order to develop
more initiative and power in Europe. I think that America was power, and that in Europe you can build up power. No one talks about power. But let’s talk about junkspace. What do you think of that text?

LS: Fantastic – pure Hunter S. Thompson, Koolhaas on acid. But it conveys a fascination with the subject more than it presents a critical argument with respect to junkspaces – which is good.

RK: Do you find it credible that junkspace is described as something that has great influence on present-day architecture?

LS: Yes, of course. The book has been attacked here and there because it supposedly generates no theoretical arguments, it’s not a new *Learning from Las Vegas*. That’s ridiculous; that’s its power. It has enormous influence; at UCLA
suddenly they were all using escalators in their designs. I do the same with my students: first Maya, of course, and spongelike complex spaces of continuity, but after that, they’re populated with Replascapes, escalators, gambling machines.

**Junkspace® and Junkbelt**

How does one get America and Africa together? That’s more or less the question.

It is absolutely clear to me that Koolhaas’s “fact-finding missions” are not just ways to escape overloaded European history, but also part of his cinematic design methodology. His recording techniques for hunting down the undesigned all over the world are not just a kind of architectural war journalism, but a design tech-

This is why Koolhaas’s books are like obese magazines: the essay always appears between hypnotic series of images, and we hardly ever get an image as an illustration to the text. It’s also why most of the architecture has something in common with graphic layout. All segmentation comes from this. All the disparate selections stem from this traveling, this sequencing, this concept of montage, of layout, choosing one material for this façade and one for that, a tree trunk for
this column and a industrial steel beam for that, corrugated sheet metal, chipboard, cor-ten steel, visible concrete, chain link. If “the real” means engaging with the world photographically and videographically, stripping and skinning off its imagery, in the end it means you come home with trophies; you end up a collector, an archivist of the real. As it becomes impossible to remobilize these, design subsequently becomes quoting from the world of the undesigned. It is a powerful message, but a message nonetheless. And it is no longer diversity, variation and endless possibilities that charge an actual moment of experience, but the stacks and rows of the archiving system. At its best, it becomes cultural criticism, highbrow consumerism. One cannot suspend choices by drifting from one image to another, gridding all choices and making hesitation or resistance the most sublime choice of all. The implicit restlessness of a catalogue is totally lost in junkspace: a matrix of choices is not the same as a spatial grid or a box.

Before we dismiss the notion of segmentation too easily, we should realize that during the mid-eighties this sense of discontinuity of materials emerged along with the idea of the continuous surface. Where the images were pre-coded, signified and consumerist, the floor became decoded, vague and activist. This separation between what comes from the floor up and from the ceiling down has always been pervasive in Koolhaas’s work. As the floor slowly lost its architectural definition and clarity, it became an urban field of connectivity where the programmatic wreckage was exposed. The plan was doing everything the elevation wasn’t. All action was continuous and connected, all perception was segmented and interrupted. Basically, America is in the ceiling and Africa is in the floor.

Koolhaas has arguably been trying to move away from this distinction, complicate the two, intertwine them, work more on the complexity of volumes and massing. He is sometimes successful and sometimes not, which is perfectly logical, because organization of materials and material organization are not the same at all. In America, movement is between the images; in Africa, movement is in the images. We must find techniques where material organization informs organization of materials. First comes Africa, then the USA. Africa is the software, not because of its authenticity but because of its empirical computational logic: real-time solutions. The Lagos book is full of organizational structures in which objects and flows of exchanges interact and create complex structures that far exceed the possibilities of the grid. Often they are flexible occupational strategies which can quickly fill an entire space and still connect to existing infrastructures: dotted coddings, stranded affiliations, spiraling alignments, fan-shaped structures, laminations, delaminations, splittings, curlings, detour-
ings, etc. All of them self-organizing figures which, as Koolhaas repeatedly states during the interview, are intricately connected to the modern infrastructures. So it’s not some kind of revisited ad-hocism, or megastructuralist plug-and-play – no, it’s an intensive spilling over of an infrastructural system, all internal border situations, where peripheral effects are successfully adopted at the center of a system. A field logic that blurs boundaries of linear structures. Borders are changed into fields, blurred by continuous reprogramming, and reprogramming is constantly stimulated by erased borders. According to Koolhaas, it is precisely this connection of friction zones to the infrastructural network that makes Lagos exemplary. For that, it is necessary that the structure is provisional – not left open and empty, but a structural overlapping and blurring which is always under pressure, always in a rhythm of redefinition. This Lagos is, in a sense, more structuralist than the Africa that was brought back to Europe by the Forum group.
A few kilometers before Onitsha the road curves in a long arc to the city. Along that arc the cars were already standing still; apparently there was a traffic jam in front of us and we were going to have to wait, especially since the only road to the city from this direction was this one, Oguta Road, which ultimately came out on that famous market, but far from here, much farther. We sat still for a while behind a couple of trucks, in a long line. Half an hour passed, then an hour. The local drivers obviously knew the situation, for they lazed untroubled at the side of the road. But I was in a hurry, for I still had to drive three hundred kilometers back to Port Harcourt that same day. The road was narrow, one lane, and our car was stuck between other cars, with no room to maneuver. So I set out alone to investigate the cause of the unmoving traffic jam. It was hot, as always in Africa in the afternoon; I dragged myself forward, one foot in front of the other. Finally I got there. I was already in the city: on both sides of the street stood low brick houses and shops, covered with rusted corrugated aluminum, in the shadow of the spacious verandas tailors sat at their machines; the women were doing the laundry and hanging it up. In one place the street was completely blocked, and a nervous bustle prevailed. Engines throbbed; it was one big racket, with people yelling and shouting. After pushing my way through the crowd, I saw a huge hole gaping in the middle of the street, vastly wide and a few meters deep. The edges were vertical, and inside was a murky lake of mud. The street was so narrow here that you could not get around the hole, and anyone wanting to enter the city by car first had to throw themselves into that abyss, take a dip in the muddy water and just hope people would help them out of their predicament.

And people did. At the bottom of the hole, half submerged, there sat a big truck, loaded with bags of peanuts. A group of half-naked boys were unloading the cargo and climbing up along the side to the street. Another group was fastening cables to the truck to pull it out of the hole. Others waded around in the water laying planks and beams under the wheels. When someone needed a break, he went up above to rest. There, a line of women was selling hot food:
They had to pull it out gradually, in stages. After each stage a long discussion began about the most effective way to pull. The Bedford skidded and skidded, its engine roaring like the devil and its body listing dangerously. With every car the hole got deeper. The bottom was a watery, sticky mess in which the wheels spun and everyone was splashed with buckets of mud and spattered with jets of gravel. I thought we would have to stay here for two or three days before it would be our turn to take the mud bath. I wondered how much the rescuers would want for pulling us out. But another question was more important: how could we get out of this trap? I was no longer thinking of the Onitsha market, its colorful world, its street literature. I wanted to get out of here; I had to go back. But first I wanted to explore the neighborhood of our jam-packed Oguta Road. See what it looked like. Get to know a little more. Listen to what the people had to say.

It was immediately obvious that the area around the hole had become the center of local life, that it attracted people, made them curious, spurred them to develop initiative and do business. In a place that otherwise would have been a sleepy, dead little street in the suburbs, with the out-of-work dozing before the houses and packs of sick dogs running loose, had unexpectedly and spontaneously, thanks to that unlucky hole, become a dynamic neighborhood, full of bustle and life. The hole gave work to the out-of-work: they formed rescue crews and earned money by lifting cars out of it. It delivered customers to the women who ran the portable kitchens. Thanks to this hole that was stopping traffic and blocking the street, customers appeared in the neighborhood's previously empty shops – the passengers and drivers awaiting their cars' crossing. The street traders had buyers for their cigarettes and soft drinks. On the houses in the neighborhood, I even saw the word HOTEL freshly scrawled in paint, for those who had to spend the night here awaiting their turn. New life was breathed into the local garages, too; the drivers had time to repair their cars, pump their tires, recharge their batteries. Tailors and cobblers had extra work; barbers came around; I even saw quacks walking around peddling herbs, snakeskins, and rooster feathers, ready to cure everyone in a second of all their ills. In Africa all these trades are practiced by people on the move, who travel around seeking customers, and when an occasion like the hole in Onitsha comes along, they all go there en masse. Social life, too, gained more color: the neighborhood around the hole had become a place of meetings, conversations and discussions, and a place for the children to play.

What was a curse for the drivers trying to get to Onitsha was a blessing for the residents of Oguta Road, and the whole neighborhood whose name I do not know. Thus it was confirmed that all evil finds its defenders, because everywhere there are people who are fed by evil, for whom evil is a chance – the basis, even, of their existence.

The people never got that hole filled. I know this because, years later, one day in Lagos I was telling someone earnestly about my adventure in Onitsha, and I received the indifferent answer: “Onitsha? In Onitsha nothing ever changes.”
US Patriot Act Amendments of the Computer Fraud and Misuse Act (Section 1030):

A. Section 1030(c) – Raising the maximum penalty for hackers that damage protected computers and eliminating mandatory minimums

Previous law: Under previous law, first-time offenders who violate section 1030(a)(5) could be punished by no more than five years, imprisonment, while repeat offenders could receive up to ten years. Certain offenders, however, can cause such severe damage to protected computers that this five-year maximum did not adequately take into account the seriousness of their crimes. For example, David Smith pled guilty to violating section 1030(a)(5) for releasing the “Melissa” virus that damaged thousands of computers across the Internet. Although Smith agreed, as part of his plea, that his conduct caused over $80,000,000 worth of loss (the maximum dollar figure contained in the Sentencing Guidelines), experts estimate that the real loss was as much as ten times that amount. In addition, previous law set a mandatory sentencing guidelines minimum of six months imprisonment for any...
B. Subsection 1030(c)(2)(C) and (e)(8) – Hackers need only intend to cause damage, not a particular consequence or degree of damage: Previous law: Under previous law, in order to violate subsections (a)(5)(A), an offender had to “intentionally [cause] damage without authorization.” Section 1030 defined “damage” as impairment to the integrity or availability of data, a program, a system, or information that (1) caused loss of at least $5,000; (2) modified or impairs medical treatment; (3) caused physical injury; or (4) threatened public health or safety. The question repeatedly arose, however, whether an offender must intend the $5,000 loss or other special harm, or whether a violation occurs if the person only intends to damage the computer, that in fact ends up causing the $5,000 loss or harming the individuals. It appears that Congress never intended that the language contained in the definition of “damage” would create additional elements of proof of the actor’s mental state. Moreover, in most cases, it would be almost impossible to prove this additional intent. Amendment: Section 814 of the Act restructures the statute to make clear that an individual need only intend to damage the computer or the information on it, and not a specific dollar amount of loss or other special harm. The amendments move these jurisdictional requirements to 1030(a)(5)(B), explicitly making them elements of the offense, and define “damage” to mean “any impairment to the integrity or availability of data, a program, a system or information.” 18 U.S.C. § 1030(e)(8) (emphasis supplied).
able conditions of proprietary, socially encapsulated software production, it seems more important to confront software-based weaknesses that cause social and political vulnerabilities and chilling effects in the public domain. Irritated actors withdraw into private enclosures to hide, or transform the public domain into absurd security fortresses, stuck in a state of emergency which produces virtual ghettos, amplifies solipsism, and reproduces old forms of centralized power.

At the same time, any actor who does not follow the legal guidelines of the political logic of security immediately becomes a focus for concern. Instead of questioning the disclosing conditions of the public domain, the (increasingly political) concept of security implies the regulation of insecurities in the public domain. Computer systems are understood to be highly vulnerable, but publicly exposing these vulnerabilities easily leads to illegality.

In our current projects, we enter this unstable zone of legal and security network conditions and demand new tactics and agencies in the public domain.

Such new ways of public acting must not fall into the trap of the worn dichotomy of private and public but instead open new possibilities of public agency for domains of the commons and include tactics which have been seen as inappropriate for the contextualization of the public domain in the modern sense. Instead of referring only to the concepts of transparency, visibility and manifestation, we suggest upgrading public agencies with non-representational activities like encrypting, rendering invisibility...
ble, disinforming, hiding, fleeing, tunneling, disturbing, spoofing, and other camouflage tactics.

What we seek is the potential for the production of a different kind of network politics, where a fluid capacity to connect and disconnect through heterogeneous coded enactions is used productively as a kind of degree zero (where power comes from), which it is important to return and relate to.

Such capacity is, in fact in itself not so much neutral as not immediately given. Tactical and coded connectivity allows for difficult or easy communication, for long-term commitments, encrypted and fleeting affairs. It is crossed by conflicts, gives no guarantees of success, and possesses a weird kind of memory, collective, fleeting and yet durable. It demands a sustained effort to redefine, design, and act out the domain of the commons.

What follows is a collage of our recent projects, which are part of an artistic practice attempting to find viable forms of intervention in the legal, technological and cultural construction of social spaces.

Reclaiming the public domain as a site for constructive conflict, not for dialogue and appeasement in the Habermasian sense, and developing forms of tactical operation for the intersections of virtual and physical public environments in a global understanding, are imperatives in the current situation.
de res publica
PRESENCE AND MANIFESTATION in the public domain

Andreas Broeckmann on the public domain: “Possibilities for public actions are on the decrease where symbolic representation, mediated participation and the equation of consumption and democracy have replaced a sense of active presence and involvement in public matters, and where being in public is identified with potential illegality on the one hand, and the danger of personal harm on the other.”
Tiziana Terranova on virtual social movements, in her lecture *The Degree Zero of Politics: Virtual Cultures and Virtual Social Movements*: “In *The Rise of the Network Society*, Manuel Castells has argued that computer-mediated communication interacts with cultural globalization at two levels: Computer-mediated communication potentially both connects (a minority) and disconnects this minority from the majority of impoverished inhabitants of this planet. The timeless space of flows (Castells) causes a cut between the wired minorities and the disconnected majorities. But virtual social movements keep injecting the passions of the local and continuously reconnect that which is separated (by space, time, limited information in the mainstream media, etc.). This scattering, this tendency to disconnect and separate, coupled with that of connecting and joining, presents different possible lines of actualization of a public domain.”

*Minds of concern/Breaking news*

Shown at the New Museum, New York, 2002, as part of the group exhibition *Open_Source_Art_Hack*

“The Internet, as a representational network with its nodes and graphs, seems to be more appropriate to global organizations such as NGOs that rely on stable nodes organized with a view to act on specific issues. Virtual social movements, on the other hand, seem to exceed the network because of the intrinsic mobility of their elements, connected together by a multiplicity of communication channels, converging and diverging in mobile configurations.” (Tiziana Terranova)
What is Public Domain Scanner?

Public Domain Scanner is software which remotely audits the public domain on the Internet and determines whether bad guys (a.k.a. “crackers”) can break into it or misuse it in some way. Public Domain Scanner is a port scanner which examines the available protocols and services on Web servers of the public domain. It then analyzes the available services and protocols for vulnerabilities. Public Domain Scanner is smart and non-destructive. It only asks for version numbers; it does not test login passwords, create a significant amount of traffic, or access or alter any data on a scanned computer. Public Domain Scanner explains how to prevent crackers from exploiting security holes found in the public domain and displays the risk level of each problem found (from Low to Very High). Public Domain Server encrypts identifying information about whose server has been found to have vulnerabilities.

This project, irritating the traditional representational politics of networks, consists of a gallery installation, a Web interface (called Public Domain Scanner) and a free downloadable news ticker. Through the Public Domain Scanner, visitors can select “Minds of Concern” – groups, movements, or NGOs like Oxfam, the Freedom from Debt Coalition and COSATU – that are engaged in critical global activities in the networked society. This list also includes artistic media activists and all artists participating in Open_Source_Art_Hack. Through a virtual slot machine (part of the Public Domain Scanner), visitors “win” one of the NGOs as a target (mind of concern), and can trigger network scans that investigate security conditions on the target’s Internet server and sense whether it is secure or open to hacks. The results are made available on a news ticker that can be downloaded from the project page, visually depicting the strength or vulnerability of a server to people worldwide.

The software processes used in Minds of Concern are dramatically transformed and externalized through light and sound signals in a kind of Alert Zone inside the main gallery space, as well as through textual data flows in the installation. A main feature of this installation is plastic constructions made of Rubbermaid food boxes and trash bins that open up a control space for the network processes and also connote the un/stable structures of everyday life.
Come on!

The
master CRACK
ER

Speak me
again

Check out
your crackin
BK it!

fahlgeschlagen
It suggests codes and protocols of encryption that circulate in self-governing constellations of people, data and cultures. It evokes the idea of very public secrets, of whispers, rumors, prophecies, blandishments, fantasies and calls for insurrection that no one may be willing to speak out loud for fear of being caught but which, nevertheless, everyone is murmuring.

This means that the Public Domain may be the safest refuge for those ideas that are vulnerable because they are the most radical. The ones that need to be most obscure to the censor, and at the same time most understandable in common speech, because they are the closest to lived experience.

The designs of identification and the disguises of anonymity are equally attractive forms of costumes in this domain. In shifting between one and the other, between secrets and announcements, lies the enigmatic attraction of surfing the Public Domain."

Crack it!

XXXXX Connective Force Attack
Produced by the Kunstverein and Kulturbehrde in Hamburg, 2000

An Internet project that took place in the day-to-day urban fabric and provoked innocent individuals and groups to form gangs of crackers cooperating inside zones of manifestation, encryption, trust and mistrust.
Connective Force Attack allowed participants to carry out “brute force attacks” (algorithmic strategies for decoding data – in this case, passwords) on an Internet server. Cracking the password is a question of available time and computing power. A brute force attack’s chances of success increase according to the level of computing power available for cracking the password, or alternatively, the construction of a social computing power: the more people who use the Internet to channel and connect their PCs to form a distributed, shared unit of action (connective efficiency), the more easily the passwords can be cracked.

CD-ROMs containing the Brute Force Attack software were distributed free via the sales points of the Hamburg tube system (people got the CD-ROM as an extra when they bought a subway ticket), and via the computer magazine PC Online. The CD-ROM included information on the project, explained the “rules of play” and supplied the additional tools necessary for intervention.
Using the free software, people could organize themselves in a chat environment in order to subdivide the area being searched for a password. By doing so, they heighten the efficiency of the attack (social connective efficiencies).
Once entry had been gained, the participants could invade four separate action windows and fill them with their own texts. This dataspace would then be re-encrypted, meaning follow-on participants had no means of entry and would have to set about cracking the passwords again. The result is an ongoing struggle to break the code as fast as possible, to invade the information space and then close it off by re-encryption. What happened? The protocol was sniffed in the first project night; hackers re-engineered and optimized the Brute Force Attacks algorithms. Over the next weeks, several Internet servers offered different Brute Force vocabularies to attack our server; several thousand people participated and were riding connective social attacks.

**Security and Public Domain**

Giorgio Agamben on security and terror: “Security as a leading principle of state politics dates back to the birth of the modern state. Hobbes mentions it as the opposite of fear, which compels human beings to come together within a society. Michel Foucault has shown how the political and economic practices of the Physiocrats oppose security to discipline and the law as instruments of governance. Physiocratic officials were not primarily concerned with the prevention of
The TraceNoizer tool of the Zürich-based Label LAN provides a tool that enables users to clone their databodies, multiply their user profiles and thus anonymize themselves online. When the user enters his/her name, the tool begins data-mining all available information on the person on the Internet, analyzes the profile, and automatically generates thousands of new Web pages relating to the person. The databody of the person becomes untraceable by search engines.
In cooperation with LAN, we enacted the clone-it! project, a massive cloning of all participating artists at Art Basel, Switzerland.
Web interface, installation, anonymous databody muttering/ART Basel, Switzerland
Brian Massumi on the economy of fear: “It is simplifying things to say that Western systems have internalized their two catastrophic limits (social revolution and its own collapse). At first glance, the formulation is incomplete, because Western capitalistic systems have internalized other limits as well: Their extensive expansion has internalized the boundary between the ‘First’ and ‘Third’ worlds; their intensive expansion has internalized the boundaries between the reproductive and productive, between consumption and production, between leisure and work, even between life and death. But ultimately, it is the notion of ‘internalization’ that proves inadequate. For if the capitalist relation has occupied all geographical and social space, it has no inside into which to integrate things. It has become an unbounded space – in other words, a space coextensive with its own inside and outside. It has not ‘internalized,’ in the sense of ‘integrating’; it has displaced and intensified, coaching mutually exclusive forms into uneasy coexistence. The ‘Third World’ meets the ‘First World’ in the South Bronx. No dialectical synthesis has been reached.”

Mental imMigration is a collective networked environment which allows Western business people experiential approaches to new forms of global teleworking on a playful level.
Actual teleworking conditions provoke a blind copying of Western cultural logics (workers in call centers imitate Western dialects in providing technology support; transcriptions of texts and programming styles are taught linearly, in a Western style of working and thinking, instead of rearticulating them through a personal confrontation). This enables a digital divide between those who are able to switch virtuously between different cultural and technological structures and those who are not able or willing to do so. The environment of Mental Immigration articulates the working conditions of Indian female teleworkers in the e-cities/e-states or cyberabads of Bangalore, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kerala.

**Definition:** “Mental Immigration requires teleworkers to make a mental, immaterial migration into another cultural logic. This does not imply a traditional concept of migration, i.e. the physical leaving of a “home” caused by political and/or other existential circumstances, or the exterritorialization of a cultural identity. Thus, mental immigration does not require physical travel. A worker’s already existing physical working and living situation stay the same, but the immaterial part of the work (the service) is transferred into another cultural context. (For example, in multinational call centers, service workers in the so-called Third World take over after office hours in the West. These teleworkers are performing a double consciousness, being here and there, a form of consciousness which influences the conditions of language and of gender, and thus infiltrates the roles of education, work, citizen, etc. – one has to play in telejobs.)” (Volker Grassmuck)

This project turns around perspectives as a mirror site. The project was commissioned by a global consulting company as an art piece for its Swiss headquarters. We outlined the project as game for the company’s office workers, enabling them to become slackers during work time: here, Western immaterial workers become mental immigrants in a specific environment with unknown cultural specifics. The environment consists of a collective game territory (with Nintendo GameBoy logic and aesthetics). The territory consists of 30 sub-cells, spaces which represent different living and working situations of female teleworkers in the cyberabads.
In each cell the player becomes represented by a specific female avatar. The avatar stands for different work roles, programmer, service worker, entrepreneur, secretary, etc., and must perform several tasks in the game environment. To solve these tasks, the player must achieve insight into the daily living and working conditions of Indian female teleworkers. To access the game, each player must solve an initial game level, which can also be performed on a special physical Mental imMigration interface.

On solving the initial level, the player receives a password which allows access to the online game and is then ready for Mental imMigration.
Project *Tran Stasis*, by El Muchachito, El Rover, Data Partida. Tutor T. Verebes.
Architects continue to attempt to “explain” their work in relation to the city around them. It is a touching, sentimental gesture – one now wholly outdated, given the rampant, aggressive reconfiguration of global cities into the sorts of media empires, tourist escape domains and corporate marketing extensions that have inverted the impulses guiding global design culture no less thoroughly than the animated advertising surfaces of their global cities.

Accordingly, I would like here to avoid yet another “explanation” of the images accompanying these pages, sampled from design research and proposals undertaken as a part of my brand. SPACE studios at the AA DRL Design Research Lab at the Architectural Association in London, during the past two years. These projects and their related research explore the discrete, local, spatial structures of the marketing-driven logics reshaping the setting for our interventions in London. Today London, like most global cities, consists of freshly renovated historical quarters like the West End, where we happen to work, as well as bizarre, new synthetic extensions like the Bluewater mall, one of our recent sites for research, which was designed and built by an international consortium as a retail machine created to capture as many as 85,000 shoppers per day from the historic center of the city. Some of our recent research has focused on the ways in which these two extremes within cities like London operate in fundamentally similar ways, as carefully crafted image, media and selling machines. The design research behind the proposal images shown here has sought to develop analytic tools able to describe the uniquely serial, repetitive surfaces and spaces within the city, while
also providing the informational models of image-exchange and its hyper-visual properties that in turn are the genuine context for new design interventions able to deflect, adjust, undermine or even accelerate (for those interested in these options) the conditions shaping the visual consumption of all cities today – which, I would like to suggest, drive all forms of urban experience today.

Today’s urbanism is a category of product design, an extension of lifestyle choice and media experience. In this way, the condition we call the “city” is a historical relic: no longer the “site” or context for architectural and urban innovation, this domain operates now as the more physical, less virtual extension of far more aggressive, fluid, interactive forms of media and exchange. Today’s city is trying to catch up to the television or the carefully designed images filling the glossy
pages of this month’s magazines. Today’s city is perpetually out of date, old-fashioned, behind the times; the forces shaping a constant reconfiguration of its spaces are derived from other, newer forms of media able to install sponsors’ messages much faster, at more efficient economies of scale. The spaces of today’s cities are connected, more than ever, by a global image infrastructure that at once makes all places, and all differences between such places, the outcome of artificial design decisions. Accordingly, all forms of architectural space operate as extensions of modern advertising’s single greatest invention: brand name recognition.
The forces shaping global design cultures are driven by a single, relentless logic, the manufacture (and then guaranteed repetition) of artificial spatial “identities”: Gap stores that look mostly like Gap stores, Guggenheim museums that look, first and foremost, like Guggenheim museums. In the uncanny stability of this design culture, we can be as certain that a minimal interior by John Pawson looks like a minimal interior by John Pawson as much as we are that a hotel by Philippe Starck looks like one designed by him and no one else. Despite their differences in outward appearance and their designers’ “theories,” “processes” and “methods,” all architectural spaces today pursue the same elusive universal goal: a complete and total differentiation between themselves and all other projects or spaces. Architectural design is much more than an intellectual property – it is a kind of manifest destiny, an opportunity for all architects to make themselves wholly unique, individual, original. That we are all wearing Prada, Miyake or Gap seems to suggest the inadequacy of more than this desire.

The only exception to this rule of making all architectural projects unique and thus “original” might be the sorts of serial space associated with franchises like Starbucks or Gap; they might offer lessons and not just lifestyle accessories. The self-similar interiors of these stores seek to manufacture architectural difference at a higher, more abstract order than the single, discrete building.
They distinguish themselves at a global level from all competing, equally repetitive product interiors using their systematic distribution strategically (the 23,000 McDonald’s restaurants around the world differ only in the most indiscriminate of
spaces). Spaces like these are repeated as countless “individual” stores able to distribute as single, continuous, architectural space in previously unimaginable ways. The numbing spatial repetition such empires create has created a new kind of architectural experience more akin to surfing through infinite channels of syndicated television reruns than any other category of building. Moving through cities is like living on treadmills, constantly confronting the very same shops of one global collection of companies, outlets, showrooms, restaurants. Consequently, cities have become indistinguishable from one another. Like many other forms of media, cities are all starting to feel alike, thanks in no small way to the fact that they increasingly are – identical franchises line their streets, each one as close as possible a copy of all others in the chain.
The demands shaping new forms of urbanism today align its products with the realities continually manufacturing new forms of celebrity: the common goal of all design has become that of inventing differences between new places or projects and the ones that are already well known. It is a vicious, never-ending cycle.
seeking above all the capturing of consumers’ limited attention spans – getting
them to look twice at an otherwise unremarkable surface or space for purposes
of yet again transmitting images of a company’s product, logo or celebrity
spokesperson. Within this global economy of constant image exchange, cities
must now compete with sites and destinations they were formerly merely the
context for (by the year 2000, tourist-related industries employed more people
and generated more income than any other single activity). In pursuit of poten-
tial tourist dollars, cities market themselves as if they were multinational banks or
local media outlets. Today cities and urban spaces are thus made utterly continu-
os with, while pitted in combat against, the very products, places and personal-
ities whose advertisements increasingly cover their most prominent surfaces.
More than ever, these surfaces are filled with images and logos taken from the
pages and screens of more familiar media used for engineering product identity.
Traveling across the city today is like flipping through the pages of a glossy mag-
azine, surfing through television channels, or browsing online sites.
Today’s single great infrastructure is imagemaking, the various kinds of image production and consumption associated with advertising and its strategies. These provide connections between people and places in ways unimaginable to the users of previous, far more literal urban transportation systems (it’s no coincidence that today’s image infrastructures are being assembled at a time in which older transportation systems are deteriorating). Thirty years ago, Guy Debord wrote that what we call the spectacle is not any single image, but a constant, worldwide consumption of images. Since Debord’s time, what has changed is the global streamlining of these systems: an exponential expansion which now extends into and is made continuous with the surfaces, signage and images of the city itself. As Marshall McLuhan wrote, during the same decade as Debord, we can be certain of only one thing: that eventually all forms of media come to
emulate those most successful at transmitting their commercial messages. In this way, architecture’s increasingly mediated surfaces record the city’s need to transform itself into ever more successful selling spaces. It’s not entirely surprising that buildings are becoming more and more like television than the other way around. After all, architects now spend their days staring at video screens as the very interface for their projects design.

We should hardly be surprised that in a condition like this buildings are more attention-seeking than ever – it’s the first prerequisite of anything attempting to attract a television audience.
The images accompanying this text provide a sampling of some of the results of our brand.SPACE work in the AA DRL. Like all other categories of image today, they exist on their own, and decisions made by the editor of this book will have as much bearing on their perceived qualities or potential as their original designers’ decisions regarding the choice of software tools that were used to originally generate these graphics. This is not just OK: it is one of the very reasons why architects need to radically rethink not just the basis for their projects, but also the ways in which they account for their work in texts like the one you have just read.

After all, how often does one read a text by an advertiser explaining the ideas or working methods used to create an advertisement (the world’s most carefully crafted messages and images)? That architects continue to try to explain their work this way seems, like their nostalgia for urbanism, hopelessly outdated.
Like an advertisement or a movie, let’s just run the images. Today images, like the artificial surfaces of the city, have a life of their own. Enjoy the view.
Arjun Appadurai

Knowbetic Research

Rem Koolhaas

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

Scott Lash

Arjen Mulder

Andreas Ruby

Edward Soja

Lars Spuybroek

Roemer van Toorn
—, “Dirty Details”, *Archis nr 32001*. Amsterdam: Actar, 2001

Mark Wigley
TransUrbanism is urbanism plus transformation. TransUrbanism is urbanism plus globalization. The city is no longer a clearly localizable spatial unit, but has transformed into an “urban field,” a collection of activities instead of a material structure. Cities today are in a state of continuous decomposition, but are also continually reorganizing and rearranging themselves, expanding and shrinking.

TransUrbanism is a design strategy that allows cities to organize themselves as complex systems, where small local structures incorporate global flows.