

# Contesting Neoliberal Urbanization.

## The Return of Politics in Architecture\*

### Beyond Mapping

Today many intelligent exhibitions map the city with the help of advanced mapping techniques mediating all kinds of surprising and problematic facts. The problem with many of these exhibitions on the city is that they celebrate nothing but the collection; the archive of fascinating urban data. They bring complex heterogeneous elements together in a collection, whereby all the parts exist next to each other without any ideological or hierarchical distinction. Those collections are an attempt at charting the details of our collective world and its history without judgement. The Venice Architecture Biennale “Cities. Architecture and Society” (2006) curated by Richard Burdett, mapping and showing the city<sup>1</sup>, is such a recent example. The equality of all the parts - universal statements, economic facts, demographic data, photographs, advertising, film, architecture, journalism, interviews, etc. testifies to such a permissive heterogeneity. The new global order of late-capitalism was left unquestioned, as an almost divine institution whose authority derived from the mere fact of its existence. This and other kinds of collections are not capable of inciting a debate that unlocks a secret, neither do they offer resistance. Nor does it deal critically with the chance that new relations arise between the different parts. No position is assumed – the political correct questions at the end of the Venice exhibition on the City proof this – the arrangement of the material is not based on a particular thought or way of political acting. There is no direction conducted from a chosen point of view, nothing could be more boring, further from our human condition than an exhibition which represents just results, trying to describe what a city is with generic questions in green at the end of the exhibition.

The problem with the passion for the real in many exhibitions and research is not that it takes the extremes of our reality as a topic of research, but that it is a fake passion whose ruthless pursuit for the real behind appearances is the ultimate datascape to avoid confronting the real. Instead of repeating the present infinitely, or as postmodernist used to say: “the present plus more options”, we need to develop new agenda’s in the face of the urgencies the city has to confront. The mass produced individual took precedence over any idea of community in our market driven society. The power of the market led inexorably towards a passive and atomised society where the citizen turned over into a client.

Adriaan Geuze – who curated the second International Architecture Biennale of Rotterdam in 2005 – already proofed that just collecting data makes no sense. As curator you should take a stance in relation to the urgent problems of today and tomorrow. Geuze and his Biennale team understood that architecture should stop its incestuous navel-gazing and should be operative again in the face of the many problems the urbanized landscape is facing. In his article “The betrayal of the

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\* This is an extended draft version of a shorter article published in the catalogue of the International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam which was curated by the Berlage Institute in 2007.

<sup>1</sup> We have to acknowledge Burdett's brave endeavor to sidestep the celebration of the architecture object by bringing the city to the Venice Biennale.

babyboomers”<sup>2</sup> Geuze explained how the ideal of freedom and solidarity of the generation born after the Second World War shifted under the influence of globalization of intellectual freedom into a freedom of choice as consumer. Geuze showed that “The spirit of the babyboom generation got lost in a boring consumption addicted society full of decadent behaviour”<sup>3</sup>. With the babyboomers, procedures became more important than visions. Society has simply become to complex according to the babyboomers to define a coherent vision. The famous visionary planning and infrastructural projects of the past in the Netherlands often converging with the fight against water, as developed by professionals in the name of the public, are overruled today by endless meetings generating a landscape consensus full of compromises where nobody takes the responsibility for the end result. What you see from your window when you drive through the Netherlands is the result of endless meetings. The consequences for the Netherlands are devastating says Geuze. “Blind for reality and deaf for critique, the babyboomers let suburbanization happen, without even first empowering the city. (...) The urban middleclass was sucked into the lowlands of the polders, while the elite stayed on the high grounds and in the canal houses, and the immigrants and subsidy dependent people were abandoned to the most problematic neighbourhoods.”<sup>4</sup> This generation without pride or shame, Geuze remarked, will never answer why it failed to create a new promised land. She will keep repeating that we need better procedures, more transparency, more decentralisation, more research and above all the forces of the free market. “The *laissez faire* policy of just one generation has caused a flood, bigger than all Tsunamis together,” remarked Geuze<sup>5</sup>.

With the third International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam “Visionary Power” the need for a critical stance towards the status quo will be continued: exposing and proposing alternative visions by addressing the total urbanization of our global reality. Besides trying to give an insight how power generates its own urbanity of excess and why it does so, this Architecture Biennale – through a series of different experiments contesting neo-liberalism in world cities – showcases fourteen political perspectives trying to counter the vicious circle of the neoliberal system.

## The Right to the City

From all sides – even from projectdevelopers and investors in the Netherlands – the call is heard today<sup>6</sup> that the terror of neoliberal urbanization, resulting in a total splintering land- and cityscape – should be put on hold. The paradox of this moment in history is that instead of trying to define what it could mean to be modern almost everybody embraces nostalgic ideas that never existed, out of fear for the unknown knocking at their door. They are realizing what the philosopher Frederic Jameson calls a ‘nostalgia for the present’. A world is reconstructed which we never actually lost. It may look like the past, in reality it is nothing other than nostalgia without memory. They idealize a world that never existed, which in real only exists in the

<sup>2</sup> Adriaan Geuze in “Polders! Gedicht Nederland”, editors Adriaan Geuze and Fred Feddes, NAI Publishers, 2005, article “Het verraad van de babyboomers”. Page 24 – 28. 400 pages with articles in Dutch by different writers including many maps, and historical material of the polders including references how the polders influenced Dutch high and low culture.

<sup>3</sup> My translation from the Dutch (see note 1). This malaise in The Netherlands has been described by me in English with the title “Lost in Paradise” and can be found in the Architecture Yearbook, 2001 – 2002, NAI publishers, edited by Anne Hoogewoning, Piet Vollaard, Roemer van Toorn and Arthur Worthman, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> My translation of the Dutch see note 1.

<sup>5</sup> My translation of the Dutch see note 1.

<sup>6</sup> “Lelikhheid spotten vanuit de privéjet” Verontrustende vastgoedondernemers vliegen over Nederland met een sombere boodschap: Nederland wordt steeds lelijker. In de Italiaans privéjet van projectontwikkelaar Rudy Stroink wordt aan politici, voorzitter Elco brinkman van de Bouwend Nederland en aanwezige architecten getoond dat nederland – na de rampzalige gevolgen van privatisering, een sterke overheid nodig heeft om de nachtmerrie van de verommeling te stoppen. Zie Volkskrant 27 Januari 2007.

here and now. “Experimentation and irony have disappeared in favour of a traditional Style” says Winy Maas<sup>7</sup>, and he continues: “ The crucial building projects in the Netherlands suddenly go to calming down [geruststellende] retroarchitects such as Kollhoff, Krier and their followers”. After the fall of the Berlin wall the consequent onslaught of neoliberalism, and the abuse of 911 to close public space by bureaucratic legislation, surveillance and policing has brought the total suburbanization of our life, living in gated communities, camps, playing and shopping in surveilled space. Instead of the often heard r’apple d’orde – “cleaning” up the mesh par example by fenced of nostalgia castle houses with golfcourse in between<sup>8</sup>, this Biennale reseaches what it could mean to be modern in our global urban age in the face of further modernization.

In his article *The Right to The City*<sup>9</sup> Henri Lefebvre explains that the City should be understood as an *oeuvre* – a work in which all its citizens can participate in the public sphere. That publicity in the city needs a thick heterogeneity, the constant attraction of new immigrants and spaces of density. The city is where difference lives and were the struggle over with one another over the shape of the city, the terms of access to the public realm, and even rights of citizenship constantly have to be renegotiated. Out of this struggle; the city as a work – as a *oeuvre*, as a collective if not singular project – emerge new modes of living, and new modes of in- and cohabitation are produced. In the bourgeois city the *oeuvre* is alienated says Lefebvre. Capitalism’s totalitarian demand to individualize everything results in the breakdown of social relations; not knowing how to keep individuals together as collective. Now that the individual has taken precedence over the community and the fittests prospered this has devastating consequences on the vast majority of people everywhere as explained by the different curators in this Biennale catalogue.

In fact - as David Harvey has shown<sup>10</sup> - the reorganization of international capitalism should be understood as a political project which wants to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites. The interest of this dominant neoliberal class and its sets of economic interest is not after making the city a site for the cohabitation of differences<sup>11</sup>. As Margaret Thatcher declared famously: there is “no such thing as society, only individual men and women” – and she subsequently added, their families. All forms of social solidarity were to be dissolved in favour of individualism, private property, personal responsibility, flexibility and family values. “Economics are the method, but the object is to change the soul”<sup>12</sup>. Neo-liberalism seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market. More and more spaces are made *for* us and not *by* us says Don Mitchell<sup>13</sup>. And its “creative destruction” remarks Harvey destroys not only prior institutional frameworks and powers (even challenging traditional forms of state sovereignty) but also division of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to

<sup>7</sup> Architectuurbulletin 02, jaargang 2006

<sup>8</sup> Zie ook Haverleij, Den Bosch, Soeters Van Eldonk Architecten.

<sup>9</sup> *Writings on the Cities*, french 1968 *le droit a la ville*, english translation 1996

<sup>10</sup> *A brief history of Neo-Liberalism*, David Harvey, 2007

<sup>11</sup> The traditional idea of the city no longer exists. Under pressure from the neoliberal market economy, the idea that architecture can serve the public interest has been undermined. Economic and private interests are rated more highly than cultural and collective values. Not only does the economic logic of property developers and investors determine the city’s landscape, the city council, too, acts as property developer and investor. In so doing, the government follows the market regime and the public task becomes a derivative of market-orientated thinking. While the Modern Movement sought to improve the world with its architecture primarily from a social perspective, today it is about plans that attempt to give the city a better competitive position vis-à-vis other cities in the world. And superarchitects – preferably with star status – are engaged in order to promote the economy of a city with a stunning design.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>13</sup> See also Don Mitchell *The right to the city or The politics of public space*, Neil Smith, Setha Low

the land and habits of the heart. “A contradiction arises between the seductive but alienating possessive individualism on the one hand and the desire for a meaningful collective life on the other”, remarks Davis Harvey.

According to Lefebvre people have the right to the *oeuvre*. Moreover, this right is related to objective needs, needs that any city should be structured toward meeting: “the need for creative activity, for the *oeuvre* (not only of products and consumable material goods), the need for information, symbolism, the imaginary and play”.<sup>14</sup>

Lefebvre remarks that the right to the city is the right to urban life, to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and the complete usage of moments and places. The right to inhabit, use value free from exchange value. The right for appropriation way beyond ownership, the right to housing in opposition to right to ownership, etc.<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre wrote his article in 1968 since then a lot has changed, but his claim: The right to the City is more urgent than ever in our urban age. The task for everybody who is involved in creating our urban environment today is how we can re-invent an idea of the city in opposition to the endless chaos neoliberal urbanization prefers to advocate.

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<sup>14</sup> (lefebvre, 1968, 1996, 147

<sup>15</sup> See also Don Mitchell *The right to the city* or *The politics of public space*, Neil Smith, Setha Low

## **Against Urbanization.**

### **The Return of Politics in Architecture**

Talking about the Right to The City concerns a politics in space that is about struggle, debate and dissonance in the public sphere. Architecture cannot, of course, conduct parliamentary politics. Spatial constellations can deliver no advice on how to vote or convey messages about social and political problems. Architecture is political precisely because of the distance it takes from these functions. But architecture can be political in the way in which, as a space-time sensorium, it organises being together or apart, and the way it defines outside/inside relations within the city. Architecture is political in the manner it makes reality visible by means of its own organization and form, and gives social direction. After all Architecture influences our sensorium of being, our experience of a spatial constellation, how we move through space, what we imagine a city to be.

Many neoliberal cities today – such as the Corporate City, and The Spectacular City with its Hidden City full of informal creativity – do construct conditions full of contradictions that bring about heterogeneous combinations, but these do mobilize any emancipatory political agenda. Every collective situation in the Spectacular and Corporate City is objectified and therefore no longer makes a difference, no secrets are unlocked or new possibilities opened, neither does it lend itself to a polemic about our controversial reality. Neoliberalism is not interested in politics, but after policing. Or in other words trying to normalize everything as quickly as possible, avoiding any kind of disagreement or discussion. What has been lost is the fact that a system replete with heterogeneity can also raise urgent matters without consensus, without already wanting or being able to provide the ultimate answer. Citizens come to the city to be free, cities are messy. And freedom is messy, and often dangerous. The alternative is bureaucratic order, which raises the question whose order? Many architects, bureaucratic institutions and politicians want the urban experience to be cozy, tidy, green, and designed without any form of dissonance or challenge. Although the sprawl of urbanization today is full of unintended heterogeneities it doesn't propagate anxiety, while a true city is full of anxiety: contradictions which stimulate progression, like in William Blake's "Proverbs of Hell": "Opposition Is True friendship."

In the Architecture Biennale of Rotterdam 14 architecture offices together with the 5 City curators will show that the cohabitation of juxtapositions existing in our extreme reality can be a starting point for the establishment of new social political connections. Instead of the closed city (urbanization) dominated by private interests, fear and order, a world full of gated communities, desert and camps, the urban and architectural proposals in this International Architecture Biennale opt for porous (mediating) collective systems in which the power of neoliberalism is exposed, contested, and relations between strangers become possible through different formations of dissent (dissonance). The problem they face is not political architecture – the grand-narrative of neoliberalism – but how to make the architecture of the city politically again.

## The Architect as Public Intellectual

Although the number of free elections and elected governments in the world is increasing, it does not diminish the fact that the public electoral debate is engineered with precision by a strictly controlled and staged spectacle. The majority of the population plays a passive, quiet, apathetic role, and can only respond based on the signals dished out to them. Behind this spectacle of the electoral game, politics is actually shaped in private by the interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent the interests of the free market and big business. The real question is where the world of politics stands. Are we sliding down farther toward a post-democratic model as analyzed by Colin Crouch<sup>16</sup>? Is politics disappearing under post-democratic conditions in the air-conditioned business lobbies of the privileged elites? Or is there a role to play by the architect as public intellectual?

According to Edward Said<sup>17</sup> the intellectual is an individual with a specific public role in society that cannot be reduced simply to being a faceless professional, a competent member of a class just going about her/his business. The central fact, says Said, is that the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty to representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public. And this role has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of being someone whose place is it publicly raise embarrassing questions, to confront orthodoxy and dogma (rather than produce them), to be someone who cannot easily be co-opted by governments or corporations, and whose *raison d'être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the carpet. Traditional intellectuals of academia uphold eternal standards of truth and justice that are precisely not of today's world. Architects in pursuit of practical solutions cannot be traditional intellectuals, but are organic intellectuals<sup>18</sup> who work inside a discipline, able to use their expertise, organize space through their material practice.

The curators and architects in this exhibition are public intellectuals trying to speak the truth to power because they cannot be mistaken for an anonymous functionary or careful bureaucrat. Their fresh perceptions involve the capacity to continually unmask and to smash stereotypes of vision and practical intellect with which the modern communications swamp us.

All architects involved in this International Architecture Biennale Visionary Power try to operate as public intellectuals – they may disagree about how to reach their goal, apply different expertise's and operate in different locale; they do have the following in common:

- Once you know who's side your on, you also know who your enemy is. The architects in this exhibition not only know their enemy by heart, but also show its true faces it prefers to hide. In neoliberalism the search for truth goes on as an endless conversation from which the force of power (the enemy) is absent and where reason and persuasion seem to prevail. Political and economical conflict are transformed into a matter of opinion: the story is told that the better you are informed and more "enlightened"

<sup>16</sup> Post-Democracy, Colin Crouch, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Representations of the Intellectual, Edward Said

<sup>18</sup> After Antonio Gramsci: The prison Notebooks: Selections, 1971.

the public is, the closer it will come to the truth. Knowing your enemy means that you decide whose side you're on, it is not just a matter of collection date and opinions. Being a public intellectual is based on awareness that proper political questions always involve decisions, which require making a choice between conflicting alternatives<sup>19</sup>.

- Facing marginality – escaping the corruption of the real – or accepting the conventions of commercial practice is not what a public intellectual is after. Contemporary cities and urban structures – from Dubai to Mexico City – demonstrate that the complex interactions of desire, density and commerce that characterizes the urban field will consistently exceed the predictable expectation of critical discourse. Public intellectuals are curious about another degree of deviance right from within the system: a “Cheating in the mix”<sup>20</sup>. That is why all research includes mapping; a kind of projective mapping that is based on matters of concern: data that help mobilize the progressive agenda. Complicity and negotiation with our extreme reality is seen as the only option for change. After all the space of the city is in continual flux, dynamic and self regulating. Not for nothing does Roberto Unger assigns a specific role to the uncovering of the wild contingency of the city: “If the triumph of certain institutions and ideas was relatively accidental, their replacement can also be more easily imagined as realistic.”<sup>21</sup>
- Instead of celebrating the paradigm of difference, the public intellectuals in this exhibition look for truth; a multiple truth that engages the urgent issues of contemporary society. The urgent question being asked is: how can you make a city democratic again in the face of total individualization. Not again culture as entertainment but the politics of space is what's at stake; an urban and spatial politics mobilizing the history of the civil city, its contemporary dynamics and possibilities from within its local territory under global influences.
- Instead of prioritizing the pure, solid, functional and objective qualities of the self-referential architectural object they explore what kind of experiential qualities their formations in space activate by means of its aesthetics and organization.
- The question this Architecture Biennale raises is not: is populism bad or good (its in all of us) but what kind of political logic<sup>22</sup> of the popular – the one of the public sphere – can be constructed in our contemporary cities? For many of us the popular has a negative connotation. Populism is depicted as anti-elite, cheap, irrational, folkloristic and dangerously superficial. But what we share as group is of essential importance for every society. Whatever political system you choose, a democracy or dictatorship, they all have to deal with a certain idea of the collective, how that could be a leading principle for the city.

<sup>19</sup> See Carl Schmitt: the Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy and Chantal Mouffe: On The Politics

<sup>20</sup> Keller Easterling, Enduring Innocence. Global Architecture and its political masquerades.

<sup>21</sup> Roberto Unger

<sup>22</sup> Ernesto Laclau. The Populist Reason, 2005.

## One World City

Not a collection of data on cities – such as densities, sustainability, population figures, and other statistical material directs this Architecture Biennale – but five essential neoliberal phenomena which dominate and influence our urban environment have been selected to show the true face of urbanized world. Together these five – often invisible – keyphenomena make up the political map of our urban world environment.

Once you understand these five neoliberal city phenomena you discover how these dominant powers arrive at several cities (14) worldwide and how these dominant powers can be redirected through different architecture practices which operate politically.

The global powers permanently active at the foreground are the ones of spectacularization, the zones of corporations and the one of capital cities. Less known – of the radar, hidden from view – are the so called backstages of urbanization which are essential to let the foreground city be success. In this Biennale these cities are called the Hidden (secret) and the Informal City of world urbanization. Together these five powerful phenomena make up the One World Neoliberal City map in which the 14 cities documented search for alternative routes as advocated by the young architecture offices selected. In short this International Biennale of Rotterdam exposes the unknown City of urbanization or what Bruno Latour has called the “unconscious of the modernization”, the space of mediation we experience with every move we make without any idea of the political today, while we need to become citizen again.

Instead of explaining all the 14 projects in detail and what the five curators have written on their Spectacular City, Hidden City, Corporate City, Capital City and Informal City (see elsewhere in this catalogue) I will indicate what different positions have been taken in redirect neoliberalism through a specific political agenda.

## Different Political strategies

When the architect operates as public intellectual – contests neoliberal urbanization by advocating progressive alternatives for the city – that doesn't tell you as yet which political strategy a practitioner prefers or which method (and expertise) according to the architect is most effective; that again depends on certain beliefs and the specific urban territory the architect operates upon. Let's look into some of the Biennale architecture projects, and their curators, to better understand which political strategies have been developed and how they believe neoliberal urbanization could be contested by conjectures which install an idea of the city which reconfigures the notion of the *citoyen* against the superindividual consumer cocooning in gated communities.

For the sake of clarity imagine a continuum which shifts from institutional authority to guerrilla tactics, with in between the political position of the pirate. Within this spectrum you can locate all the different ideological positions of the 14 projects on the City contesting neoliberalism. Some approaches hold on to the power of form: the authority of architectural monumentality; an absolute idea of architecture<sup>23</sup>, others are not interested in the image nor form of architecture, they concentrate,

<sup>23</sup> Pier Vittorio Aureli, unpublished dissertation “The Possibility of Absolute Architecture” – a study on architectural form from Bramante to Mies. Ph.D TU Delft/Berlage Institute, 2006.

from the ground up, on participation and invent complex empowering systems of self-organization; sometimes against, or elsewhere cheating in the mix. Let's look to a few of them<sup>24</sup> to better understand where they stand and what they produce.

### **1) Counter-Intsitutinal Architecture. Negative Critique**

With their plea for Para-architecture the curators of the Hidden City Lieven De Cauter & Michiel Dehaene research how architecture and urbanism can respond to the rise of the hidden cities such as camp-like situations, detention centres, refugee camps, and for instance transit camps. With their para-architecture they look for imagined heterotopias from where the existing status quo of neo-liberalism can be put under fire. They look for a kind of paper-architecture that exposes and makes legible the extremes of our neo-liberal society. This approach is most evident in the Border Polis designed by Kersten (etc) at the city of Cueta. With the Centro Direzionale in Turin by G. Polesello, A Rossi and L. Meda, in mind of 1962, they designed a camp/prison/sanctuary of horrific beauty. Fortres Europe shows its true face: defending its Western privileges against all "strangers". It is an architecture that tells the truth to power knowing that it cannot solve the tragedy of exclusion. Instead of celebrating the foreground of the Spectular City or Corporate Zone, with its middleclass "paradises" fetishizing individual desires, De Cauter & DeHaene dismantle the good looks (lifestyles) of suburbanization and show the true face – the backstage and the consequences of the dominant neo-liberal powers – by exposing what normally stays hidden from view in the Western urban landscape or the media. Instead of hiding or resolving conflicts they believe that architecture under control of neo-liberalism should tell the truth to power by a kind of messiac non-participation, suspension, reversal, even standstill. The advise of the philosopher Theodor Adorno's that, if the everyday world is corrupt, there is only one thing that the aesthetic experience can do: to distance itself from reality so as to guarantee a pure aesthetic promise exposing the real contradictions. Such a negation of reality – by means of a strong – almost absolute - easthetic gesture in architecture – is meant to arouse resistance and rebellion in the political field.

### **2) Institutional Architecture. The City as Political Form**

While De Cauter & Deheane tell the truth to power – shelter the oppressed, expose and represent its horrific face in the hope that one day the neo-liberal city will be overthrown – Pier Vittorio Aureli - with his Capital Cities research – investigates how architecture as urban artefact – by its intrinsic architectural discourse – can counter the neo-liberal culture of individualism where any idea of *civitas* has been lost. What ever happened to our metropolitan consciousness, the city as theatre of political debate and class conflict? Why should we celebrate a generic habitat of absolute individualism – a culture of sprawl of only incidents – based on the supremacy of mobility? It are these questions the Capital Cities research tries to answer by investigated how true form – the one of monumentality representing power and the idea of the horizontal plane (platform) for collective action – can generate a civic space of appearance and confrontation. The research on Moscow investigates how through prefabricated housing projects for the masses an collective idea of the city can be generated. While in Moscow the easthetic order of monumentality is tested in mass housing, the project in Beirut researches with different means (rotating festivals, cedar evolution, a thick infrastructure of tents,

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<sup>24</sup> When I was writing this article most of the projects where far from finished, my analysis can therefore be only based on the text they had submitted beforehand.

rotating festival, etc) how the enactment of conflict by activities on different platforms in the open city of Beirut – in opposition to appeasing strategies such as the one of disnification and mediterrization – could turn the city in a political form.

Both Counter-Institutional and Institutional Architecture challenge the market and declare that it should be over. They both favor monumental, often monochrome (black or white), severe, empty and void spaces where only life itself is allowed to be colorful, human and joyful. The institutional architectural poetry promoted by De Cauter & Dehaene's embody the trauma of our existence: the impossibility of the real. The invisible walls and fences between the have's and have nots get physical in all their horrendous truth. Aureli is not so much after exposing power in all its negativity, his politics is of another kind. He looks for redemption instead of exposing trauma. It is of no coincidence that he looks for spaces of co-existence and cohabitation in which the different powers come together and fight their battle of life. Instead of choosing a side, the City can be nothing else than a battle field of different voices. That is the only democratic and public truth architecture can represent and make appear. Aureli's city architecture is not after overthrowing power, having a new world in mind such as De Cauter & Dehaene do, but gives the different powers - present in the city - the right to the city. They can write their oeuvre in all their purity, anger, honesty and vulnerability in relation to each other. All this on the basis of an almost eternal architectural truth: an architecture of formal rhetorics, monumentality, type and abstraction; how urban design can be the prime contributor to the form-ations of the city, acknowledging the limits of architecture that it never bring revolution on its own.

In most cases true transnational economical and political power<sup>25</sup> is hidden from view – there are no representations of truth, platforms of public presence for debate or demonstration– our collective desires in neoliberalisms are redirected into endless individual lifestyles and persuaded by beautiful designed architectural experiences. Both De Cauter & Dehaene and Aureli show us neoliberalpower true face. De Cauter & Dehaene are after breaking consent: they oppose the neoliberalism city, while Aureli institutionalizes disagreement overcome the distatorship of individualization in the city. Instead of setting up a discourse which tries to set up a we against *them* Aureli and De Cauter & Dehaene are after a vibrant democratic culture where a Left and Right politics expose their ideology and fight their battle.

### **3) Guerilla architecture. The Power of the Immediate**

The curators Alfredo Brillembourg & Hubert Klumpner – working in the poor living areas of Caracas – don't fight the neoliberal system with conventional architecture; through the authority of the design of the drawingboard, legitimate architecture histories or the expertise of a planologic department. Instead of such an institutional approach – believing in the “truth” of the formal language of architecture, or the power of institutions – they use the tactics of the guerilla. Guerilla tactics are not a regular force. It is a method of unconventional combat which operates from within informal culture, empowering local populations without the need for any uniform style. It is based on the reflexive capacity of the immediate, the inventive power of people, manipulating and negotiating existing conditions. As Raymond Williams has noted that however dominant a social system may be, the very meaning of its domination involves a limitation or selection of the activities it covers, so that by

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<sup>25</sup> The grand narrative of neoliberalisms

definition it cannot exhaust all social experience, which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project. What seems guarded in this guerilla tactics is immediacy, the unknown, that untreated bolus of direct experience, those line of flights that cannot be reflected by any dialectical opposition as we have seen in the projects of De Caeter & Dehaene and Aureli. So freedom is not something you have to establish outside reality – by being critical towards society – but can also be developed through practice experiments in a world divided between privilege and poverty. In their work the border between urbanism, architecture, design, art, film and social work blurs. They care less how they are called, as long as their projects do improve the reality of the poor, the one of the everyday. Even when their work consists of physical objects it are at most tactic manipulations of political landscapes. Their built work is after changing the political status quo in such a way that more things become possible in our actuality. They employ a micro-tactics with a macro ambition, identifying small projects, working with communities and their intelligence: reusing, adapting, and modifying existing infrastructures making them more viable and affordable.

In fact two kinds of humanity are activated in the informal City projects by for instance Teddy Cruz in the San Diego/Tijuana zone. On the one hand there is the focus on the city as a place for equal opportunities, urban culture, and policies in the service and the well being of the citizens. On the other hand the informal city research by Teddy Cruz shows that the informal city provides answer how we in the field of housing can overcome the problem of cocooning worldwide: in others words how we can de-individualize our many gated communities. What Cruz discovered on the microscale of the neighborhood, are micro heterotopias that are emerging within small communities in the U.S., in the form of non-conforming spatial and entrepreneurial practices, defining a different idea of density and land use, setting forth a counter form of urban and economic development that thrives on social encounter, collaboration and exchange. The trans-border urban dynamics at play across the most trafficked checkpoint in the world has provoked the small border neighbourhoods that surround it to construct alternative urbanisms of transgression. With the research of Teddy Cruz we come very close to what we can call Piratical Architecture.

#### **4) Piratical Architecture. Cheating in the Mix**

“A piratical architecture” according to curator Keller Easterling, “does not evaluate the integrity of expression or the regrettable urge to reform. It intervenes in the patterns of believers and cheaters, evaluating the ability of masquerades to leverage change.”<sup>26</sup> According Easterling architects are well trained to pirate in their own career: they have multiple voices, tactics, and a political craft to deploy selfpromotion, but for the rest the discipline reinforces the boundaries of its own world—its autonomy as an art form within which to write mologues that preserve its integrity. Aureli, De Caeter & Dehaene proof that institutional architecture – the convention of form – can expose and even confront power on the urban scale of the city. Speaking the truth to power is not what Guerilla Architecture is after. With Guerilla architecture the intelligent nature of the informal – the anarchistic survival system of everybody beyond the normative of the institutional – is mobilized to survive the terror of the status quo. No symbolic fight, but direct humanitarian

<sup>26</sup> Enduring Innocence. Global Architecture and its political masquerades. Keller Easterling.

action, repairing what is destroyed even if the means are minimal. With piratical architecture – a cheating in the mix – we have to do with an attitude that tries to find luck on the sea. Liberation and convention, liberation and commodification can travel together in piratical architecture. Institutional Architecture looks for truth, either the one of justice against neo-liberalism or the political Form of the City. Guerilla Architecture is a kind of “Médicins Sans Frontières”, whatever the system, it fights with the people for survival and primary justice through immediate action. Pirates do not only manage to survive any system but are also able to play the system and even enjoy its extravaganza. They fight the system with its own means, its own schizophrenia, without regretting its often corrupt attitude. What they share with the guerilla is its anti-authoritarian nature. Their weapon is the multitude, the one of immanence, while Institutional Architecture opposes the multitude through the institutional authority of architectural form and the alternatives it could shelter under its institutional roof (which could include pirate and guerilla action!).

When Rafi Segal and Els verbakel showed their research on New Jersey for a Future Urbanism they screened the raw openings (probably a handycam) stills from the American television series *The Soprano's*. We see New Jersey from the carwindow of Tony Soprano who tries to be a good family man on two fronts – to his wife, kids and widowed mother – and as a cape in the New Jersey mob. New Jersey is sprawl City par excellence – the backyard, garden city making the Corporate Zone a success. Instead of ignoring the suburban setting of New Jersey altogether, Segal and Verbakel read, interpret, and intervene like pirates desecting, recombining, synthesizing what progressive spaces could emerge from within suburban City New Jersey.

Institutional and Guerilla Architecture would shy away from the power of spectacle within place. Any spectacle is political incorrect, too corrupt or just not to the point according to them. But as John Urry correctly remarks “spectacle-isation is necessary in order for places to *enter* the global order, to somehow to be “recognized”<sup>27</sup>. Places depend upon performances, such as *flâneurie*, photographing, running, shopping, swimming, sunbathing, talking, reminiscing, reading, playing or listening to music, surfing, eating, partying, drinking, collecting, climbing and so on. Piratical Architecture doesn't ask herself the academic question if spectacle-isation is good or bad. The question is not defining the truth – as public intellectual you cannot afford yourself that kind of luxury when you have to change reality. The question is what kind of spectacle-isation you can construct given a certain situation. How you can reimagine the idea of heritage beyond disnification for instance. How tourism can be the unexpected motor of cityness in Rome as ....., or how you can make a better World Heritage City by escaping the regulative power of the UNESCO in Innsbruck, overcoming the risk of freezing a city in a history that never happened in the first place.

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<sup>27</sup> See John Urry in this catalogue *Cities of Spectacle*.

## **From Political Cities to making Cities politically**

The political practices shown at this International Biennale Rotterdam Visionary Power are not so much after a practice of dissent – an element that has the function to express an a-priori discontent and dissent – but rather use confrontation and dissonance within the neoliberal system as a “method” to affect our imagination and the real social conditions in order to change the real conditions of life. As Michael Hirsch has remarked: “We have to liberate ourselves not only from the “positive” idea of the conquest of power, but also from the negative idea of the contestation or provocation of authority”<sup>28</sup>.

To make political cities is not that difficult. Even when you are blindfolded – are in love with fashion or autonomous architecture – you are still a child of your time and its political and ideological implications, but to make cities politically means that you have to develop a vision which reaches further than the power of now; the one of the market. All architects in this Biennale of Rotterdam see the architect as a public intellectual; are concerned with how our cities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can be a place for the world citizen in. It is not a vision which rejects reality, but one concerned with different realms of emancipatory politics that tries to develop alternatives based on what we urgently need in our contemporary society. Neoliberal individualism has to be contested.

Roemer van Toorn

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Hirsch, in *Did Someone Say participate?*, edited by Shuman Basar and Markus Miessen, article title: The space of community: between culture and politics.