

>> Towards an urban Space

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[David Hume] constituted a multifarious world of experience based upon the principle of the exteriority of relations. We start with atomic parts, but these atomic parts have transitions, passages, 'tendencies', which circulate from one to another. These tendencies give rise to habits. Isn't this the answer to the question "what are we?" We are habits, nothing but habits – the habit of saying "I". Perhaps there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self.

Gilles Deleuze (1989)¹

This book is the first in a series which aims to present two related aspects of recent work of Spacelab: on the one hand some of our thinking on the urban as a contemporary condition – here paying particular attention to the formational of the urban and a formational, generative urban space – and on the other, design projects which have been developed in the context of, and influenced by, such thinking. It is not in the nature of the subject to provide a definitive closure in one book, and the point here is to raise questions and suggest directions as much as to provide answers. We see each of the series therefore as being part of a continued engagement with emergent themes and directions in the work of the laboratory, and conclusions as provisional. The series will try to approach the study of the city from a perspective which is different to the normative and reformative one which has dominated planning since its beginnings. It will concern itself less with the question of what the Good City *should* be and more with the one of what the city *is*. It will be less concerned with normative prescriptions for the city as an organizational support for assumed and 'already assembled' societies and economies, and more with the 'city itself', as a movement and as a form. It will try to see the city as fully imbricated with the socialities that enliven its spaces, trying perhaps to see it as another being, innocent of cities and societies and of our investment of ideas in them, might see it if they were to encounter it for the first time.

The position we begin to develop in this publication, and will try to develop further in publications to come, is related strongly to our interest in the local – and related to the urgent need we see, to develop an effective conceptualization of the local in a powerfully globalizing world. To this end we must, we feel, deal with an urban space which is global in its scope. The object is not to develop a dichotomy between the global and the local – which seems in fact to be the dominant position today – but rather to develop a view on how the local is constructed or assembled in this global-in-scope space. The local, in the view we begin to develop, is not a given, it is an effect – and one that we as urban designers have it in our power to influence: to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct through the manipulation of a global-in-scope field. Because we are urban designers, we try also to construct diagrammatic reductions of this space in order to understand how we may manipulate it. We look for instruments which help us trace the drifts, shifts and tendencies generated out of the fluid processes of a global-in-scope urban – equivalent, though opposite in

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effect of course, to diagrammatic instruments used in the past to freeze our built environment into a static anti-urban order in the names of 'neighborhood' and 'community'. We seek our neighborhood and community not in a partitioning of the urban landscape, but rather in the way places are constructed as meaningful and social through the way they figure in, and coordinate, the performance of multiple worlds lived within multiple scales, networks and horizons in urban space. The local becomes in fact something other than purely singular or purely multiple. It becomes one of those fractional realities – more than one and less than many – introduced here in chapter 6.

Seeing the urban; seeing *in* the urban

It sometimes seems to us that it is not so much our cities that are in crisis as our images and imaginaries of the urban. At a very instrumental level things go on: the technicalities and politics of city building are carried out, cities are being built at often explosive rates all over the world – but we clearly have difficulties seeing clearly and *recognizing* the products of all this widely distributed effort. And its not as if we don't *have* an image of the city; in fact, the image of the city we carry with us can be strikingly clear, as if burnt into some kind of vague but insistent collective longing or disposition – only its an image of a city that isn't clearly ours! This image can be precise about how the city should be and what we expect it to do, but this precision doesn't translate in any clear way into strategies for *making* it that way – in fact those strategies which claim to deliver our desire for community and a public of belonging usually end up producing grotesque parodies of these qualities, in manipulative commercial stagings, or by way of a gross and cynically expedient exclusion.

Meanwhile city-building goes on at pace, without a widespread critical reflection on what it is we are building. This is not helped by the fact that a critical discussion is not in general promoted; city-building is prone to high-powered and self-congratulatory declamations of its own successes, tied as it is to a politics that has to assemble resources and popular and commercial endorsement, and tied as it too often is to the service of political ambition. Projects beget projects in rounds of competitive global positioning in which architectural branding and glossy accounts of success underwrite escalations in image-wars of boosterism. Grandiose projects establish spectacles on a global level in the name of urban renewal, without achieving the long-term local spin-off the hype always promises. We can, it seems, orchestrate and manage huge urban statements and stagings, tied to national imaging programs and global events, but we find it difficult to sustain a continuous production of ordinary urban places that settle into and enrich the lives and doings of ordinary people. We find it difficult to produce an *ordinary* urbanism, capable of supporting ordinary everyday lives as well as engendering new life patterns and livelihoods in the ways urban environments did at many points in our past.

In fact it sometimes seems we have given up on this hope, distaining a vision of a sustaining and negotiated social place as romantic in these fast and connected times, and rubbishing as naive and mystical, a faith in the creative and sustaining power of overlaid webs of co-present sociality and an urban of co-presence and co-visibility. The bureaucratic and 'practical' alternative to this vision of a distributed negotiated sociality in the everyday is a regime of atomization, regulation, rationalization and control, which assumes middle-class sensibilities and powers and into which the bulk of the worlds population is unable to be, and resists being, shoehorned.² One could certainly make a case that this regime, in its attempt to gather everything under its universalizing vision, to some extent *creates* the climate of 'risk' we live under today.³ This regime clearly fails to adequately account for and recognize either the marginal or the novel, and is itself today under pressure from the energies and forces of an increasingly complex and dynamic world. Nor does it recognize the *corporeal* of the social (political) body or its need for visibility and an image of itself.

Attempts to think a more open and negotiable and responsive frame for social urban living can quite clearly never ignore the changes brought to contemporary societies by modernity, but we would argue that real places and spaces have always had a capacity for openness, presentation and responsiveness, and have always been capable of accommodating and even generating a certain 'excess' of marginality and novelty. We would argue that this capacity and 'excess' can be seen as a possible character of the local in its relation to a wider world and that *the urban* becomes a frame which needs to be explored further for the way it may engender a place that is connected and accommodating at one and the same time, and grounding of the social body. This would be a place that is what we would describe as social, that is also political in the way Aristotle uses the term,⁴ and inserted into the real urban spaces of today and tomorrow. Our ultimate goal must be an emplacement of a politic of the human community in the connective spaces of our contemporary world. The urban is today often characterized as a place of disintegration, segregation and violence – but it is also built according to a technocratic rationality which divides in order to control. Meanwhile, some of the best places of our cities are also characterized by a diversity, connectedness and openness which generates enlivening spaces and socially lubricating juxtapositions of dissimilars. These spaces are often a source of novelty and stimulation, challenging fixities of ideas and disposition, and providing an anchor for alternative performances of lives, livelihoods and identities. It is yet possible, we feel, that an *urban* situation, embedded in dynamic contemporary processes, may signal pathways to sustaining and sustainable and open social futures.

If we look back at the origins of many of our social and political institutions, these are inseparable from a life assembled in urban settings – these settings themselves clearly so much more than neutral backdrops to forms of social and political being. And we cannot claim that this was true only at the point of origin of these institutions, which are now fixed and immutable; we see social forms being changed today in new modes of communication, inter-subjectivity and social identification. It is not our intention in this book to deny the distance between our lives today and those of the past, nor to propose a return to a community locked into local place; we wish rather to begin an exploration into the ways a concrete and connective urban environment can support lives and livelihoods sustained in webs of inter-subjectivity and inter-identification. We wish to explore the way lives in local place depend *also* on a connective engagement with the world – and its conflicts and differences – for their viability and for conditions of enablement and even justice. As I write this in the autumn of 2005, the suburbs of Paris and Lille and Lyon are burning. Everyone knows that the anger spilling out into the streets of these mean and isolated social holding enclosures have to do with issues of opportunity and its denial. Everyone knows that the important choices to be made are political and legislative and to do with changing a regime of access and enablement in a society which has neglected to notice the way conduits of access have failed to be extended beyond established networks of privilege and power. But there is also another kind of politics involved: the issue is as much about the way lives are recognized and represented – honored and presented in positive and affirming ways – in the spaces of our societies and cities.

It is perhaps therefore not just a matter of the realization and enactment of opportunity and of just access to the benefits of society, though this is rightly the first concern; it is also about the way peoples are recognized and represented in the spaces of that society. It is perhaps not an accident that the city that has most escaped the current round of anger and violence is Marseilles – also the major French city where ethnic minorities and their cultures are most positively visible.⁵

Urban origins and the contemporary urban

Patrick Healy takes us back to the assembly of a politics of our being together, and of our talking (of it), in the ancient Agora. He shows us that the Agora is an improvised place where “one could be *agorazonta*; at the site of flows, of people, commodities and information.” The city becomes “a place of chatter” and “an imbroglia in the rhetoric of its own name and naming.” In contradiction to Mumford, here is no system with internal coherence, “nor is it a social spatial conglomerate with its own internal coherence; embodied, it is everybody’s business; *to koinon*, or, *Res Publica*.”

The concept ‘*koinonia*’ (‘society’ or ‘community’) is used to denote any form of association; of human beings, the crew of a ship, a band of soldiers, an association of tradesmen, and stresses people and a government of the *demos* above territory. In fact community is a result of talking before it is any belonging to deme or clan, certainly before any blood-bond to territory, and the Agora is the “place of recognition” where the terms of such belonging are constructed and negotiated and where the presence of strangers salt the fellowship of community. All *koinonias* are subject to the all comprehensive *politike koinonia*, which is the *polis*. The concept of community is therefore one of the most significant connotations of *polis* and Healy begins to show how *to koinon* and *polis* are manifested in a space of presentation and representation, and how space can be a primary diagnostic for the social.

Healy poses the possibility of a material ‘physiology’ of the city in *agorazonta*; in an ecology of presence, in the presence of others and in exchange of ideas, desires and things. The city is a thing of circulation and communication whose tendencies give rise to habits. We need, he suggests, to consider carefully what the ‘res’ of *Res Publica* means: the problem of the thingness of *res* makes of the city a false object, things thrown together rather than understood as the gathering and scattering interactivities of dynamic and kaleidoscopic processes. The objectness of the city needs to be dissolved, opening up an understanding of the way affects and intensities are mediated by the imaginative: “Within the view of the assembly or assemblage, the issue of effect / affect, intensities and movement is crucial, and the role of mediatizing becomes of enormous consequence.”

Deborah Hauptmann goes back to one of our primary inspirations, minutely interrogating the Lefebvre of *Urban Revolution* on the nature of urban space and ‘*the urban*’. The city, according to Lefebvre, is no longer recognizable as a totality or singular entity. Urban reality manifests as fragmentary, shapeless, and the ‘urban phenomenon’ locates itself at a *point of articulation* of widely, even globally, dispersed processes. ‘City’ becomes ‘the urban’ he says – we have left behind, or are in the process of leaving, a city we can clearly delineate in relation to its surroundings and its functions, in favor of ‘the urban’, a condition, global in reach, which subsumes all lives. “Society has been completely urbanized.” He uses the concept of ‘rupture’ to emphasize the discontinuity of ‘the urban’ with what before was understood as city, adding that this rupture “simultaneously introduces and grounds a *form* of knowledge, a field... similar to logical form and almost as abstract and active as that logical form which is associated with language...”.

It is a ‘form without content’ he says – the city creates nothing; rather the city “centralizes creation” in that it affords the form, or we would say, the *situation*, for exchange and proximity to take place. The urban “is a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity”; but, this form has no specific content for it accumulates all content; it is an abstraction, “but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction... it is pure-form.” At the same time, Lefebvre tells us, we act and react ‘blind’ in the face of this new urban phenomenon. We ‘see’ the new phenomena of the urban between processes of thinking and urban happening, and what we see is an “effect of process”. We construct “verbal layers [which are] unable to attach themselves to

a 'philosophical subject' or a 'privileged object' or a 'historical totalization'." Urban theories and practice continue to utilize the tools and language of a past period and as such must be understood as "*reductive* of the emerging reality." Whether this reduction is in terms of the medieval or the industrial or any other kind of city of the past, it is *form* today, Lefebvre is saying – and we agree – which works on the creation of urban realities.

Hauptmann expands on this notion of form by drawing on Foucault's idea of the Panopticon and the way the diagram of the prison becomes extended to schools, factories, etc., which then supports the end functions 'education', 'production' etc. The distributedness of power relations and their availability for multiple final functions appears to be part of the power of form to generate new realities. Power relations move; they shift from one point to another, and "their medium is the field of all forces (pure force)." In Deleuzian terms, they constitute 'strategies' which are anonymous, blind and mute since they "evade all stable forms of the visible and articulable." Power relations, and their affects, are actualized and stabilized through their integration into formalized structures. The 'institution' which results is understood not as an entity but as a practice, not as productive but as reproductive of the very relations which it presupposes. But "[t]he city and its subjects not only act, they are acted upon," Hauptmann concludes, "and this ceaseless push and pull, this folding of forces, must be comprehended; understood epistemologically and situated ontologically if the architect, the sociologist, the practitioners of socio-spatial practices are to 'act' as opposed to continually 'reacting' to the multiplicity of forces at play."

In a new wave of spatial thinking we are becoming aware that the powers of agents and sites lies in their very particularity and *situation* – we are becoming aware of the methodological impasses inherent in the placeless generalizations we have constructed and applied as normative recipes for urban problems and in thinking of urban development processes. In fact, one could say it is this methodological problem, and the problem of the waning power of our normative instruments, which motivates the search for another conception of urban space and society in our work. In a different space (of particulars and situations) a different logic operates. Equilibria and symmetries can be captured only as temporary conditions. We render snapshot views of *particular action* in its *particular medium* in the structure of a spatial analytic. We are finding similar insights through the notions of 'hybridity' and the 'actor-network'⁶ but Hauptmann shows us that these insights were always there for us in Lefebvre's work.

Lefebvre's legacy is settling – we find we understand him better from a broadening base of spatial thinking, and alongside the thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze and Bergson, Hauptmann uses to expose the delineations of his thinking – thinkers he was already familiar with of course, but still relatively new to us in the English-speaking world. The once powerful ideological bracketing of these different thinkers seem somewhat overstated and doctrinaire today, and it is the complementarity of their thinking that Hauptmann employs to help us open Lefebvre's thought.

A machine of visibilization

Lefebvre's thinking helps us begin to understand why our familiar urban surroundings never cease to surprise us – why they can seem known and unknown at the same time, and why we sometimes feel we are encountering the city as something radically new and not quite 'of us'. The city seems to show no end to its ability to transform in ways which leave us without a clear view of what it is or where it came from or where indeed it is going to – and the papers authored by Gerhard Bruyns and myself begin an attempt to diagrammatize a space of *the urban* as opposed to a space of the city of our preconceptions.

This distance of the contemporary urban from the city of our (mainly industrial city and medieval city) preconceptions, doesn't only generate confusion, it generates also much of the edginess and unpredictability we perceive in contemporary and especially global cities – their alien and over-scaled, bigger than, *other* than human qualities. It's an urban edginess which stimulates and excites – and has spawned movie and literature genres – but it seems also to pose questions about *our* place, and the place of our subjectivities and societies, in this urban world. What we miss or misunderstand about the city has perhaps to do with problems of perspective, and of seeing too clearly what we project on the city while not seeing what the urban imposes on us. It comes from seeing the city as perhaps rather *too* human, *too* social, *too* much our own – object of our own construction and reflection of our rationalizations of our collective being – rather than a product of a thoroughly spatial dynamic; concrescence and becoming and 'body' in its own right. We try to begin to reverse certain assumptions about our built environment, which see the city as constructed *by* us in a form *reflecting* us and in our human measure. Our concern becomes the city as 'given' and not necessarily 'ours'; how it comes to be the form it is, through a dynamic which *imposes* itself on us – as certain forms in nature may impose themselves on us – and only *then* how it comes to be ordered and intelligible *for* us. We will eventually try to make this link back to the human through 'perception as form' because we take from Merleau-Ponty that our perception may be a necessary corollary of this urban 'form for itself' in its process of becoming.⁷

We take urban form and order therefore to be a product of a generative, *spatial* dynamic, and will try to understand the form and becoming of the urban so that we can use this knowledge to help us eventually deal better with the form and transformation of the human and social city. We will attempt to deal with forces and intensities and *tendencies* so that we can eventually deal better with the city of our social and architectural concern.

It is one of the most remarkable facts about the city that it is so well-known to us as we traverse and use it in everyday life, while it seems to be so little known on its own terms. Another question of perspective, and of visibility / invisibility, seems to us to lie at the root of this puzzle. When we consider the city from the perspective of the subject, mapping his or her movements and perceptions, what we map is a personal space, a space of everyday habits, routines and distractions, but it is a space which also crosses with the spaces of others, finding those crossings in urban space as already there and given. Are not these crossings, more than personal spaces, what locate the subject in the socialities of urban life? We can't however easily see how and by what processes those cross-links between subjective perspectives are established and we need to create an *extra*-subjective perspective in order to do this. We leave the perspective of the subject, looking for a view which will reveal an order in another dimension, an order to which the subject is subject – and enter of course realms dense with folded layers of rather hidden power.

These are layers of power affecting the role of the planner in modernity and that of the processes of consumption and of spectacle in post-modernity, and we need to be aware and beware of this, but there is still, it seems to us, a strange gap in this story of spaces when it comes to how we eventually distribute the active principle in it all. What and who pushes who and what around in the city? Are the powers of space, and the spaces of power, to be attributed to vital agencies (what do we call them? – social? economic? or just plain repressive?) which mould passive material, including the human material of the city? Or can urban material have agency of its own? – a 'delegated agency' as Latour might say, or even agency which it generates entirely on its own account? Can things, also the thing of the city, also exert a force which moulds subjects? And what about the socialities of subjects as they are subjected to this molding? Could the agencies of objects indeed, as Bruno Latour

suggests, be *constitutive* of our socialities, of our subjectivities? Could objects comprise, as he asks, the “missing mass” of our societies?⁸ And further: are there *other* spaces even; those of the ‘things themselves’, spaces of objects and ‘bodies’, and especially objects and ‘bodies’ in a dynamic process of formation or becoming, which attest to the vital power of their *own* agency? The question we pose therefore is whether there is not also *another* space, that is a space of the ‘city itself’, or the urban, in its becoming. This space may also be one of *our* action and engagement in the world, because the force of these, seen from afar so to speak, and at the level of involved and busy populations, may also turn out to be part of what the city *is*. The concern of Bruyns and myself therefore is to try to begin to outline and diagrammatize a space of becoming of the urban, a space of *urbanization* which may eventually be shown to have complex links to spaces of our perception and socialization and tie us into a circle of immersion of us in the urban and the urban in us.⁹

In fact, our conventional conceptions of space and form are far too narrow and geometric. A form is at its simplest level an intelligible something, but when we interrogate our own experience of the city, as users rather than as planners, we have to recognize that the experience of *architectural* form (or urban form seen as architecture) comes rather low down in our everyday priorities as engaged people just getting on with our lives. When people go to work or to their shopping street they don’t go to a configuration of buildings and street furniture; they engage in movement with a particular configuration and intensity of activities. And this is something that is perfectly intelligible; it is a form. This form is tied very directly to the lives of the human subjects immersed within it – and it makes those lives intelligible as Merleau-Ponty has pointed out – but the existence of the form (or a good part of it) also precedes in a very obvious way the experience of our subject. It is not simply that the subject *creates* the form as a ‘mental map’ or representation. The form as perceived is a consequence of his or her activity (as a subject) but this perceived form may also be a product of another organization or ‘gathering’ which precedes it (as a production of the generative space we try to begin to outline).

There is clearly a different point of view at work here; this is not Kantian. As Whitehead said: “For Kant, the world emerges from the subject; for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world – a ‘superject’ rather than a ‘subject’.”¹⁰ It seems to us that to take on a world which is by its nature dynamic and transformative – which is also to say generative – is to commit to another viewpoint; a viewpoint which values things differently because these things may also impose their own ‘emergent’ values on us, a viewpoint which is fundamentally historical, attentive to the evolutionary becomings of things over time, and to the (relatively durable) ‘events’ or forms emergent from these historical processes of assembly. This other space we are thinking about, a space of the ‘city itself’, would be a space of evolution and of *involution*, of history and of generation, rather than an arrangement; it would be *organization* rather than a composition. It would be an *epigenetic* space of the urban as a form and as a ‘body’. In this time of forceful and barely contained change, could it not perhaps be this evolutionary-involutionary and generative space we will need to understand if we are to fathom the potentials for both oppression and liberation our cities offer?

It is to the spaces of the planner, and to those of modern and post-modern consumption and spectacle that we have customarily looked to understand the dimensions of power. What sorts of power do we think of when we talk of spaces of becoming? Perhaps we talk less here of power to begin with, and more of ‘forces’ seen from a (perhaps too neutralizing and abstracting) distance, and of vectors and tendencies driven in time – though of course only the most naive would forget in all this the power of dominant viewpoints to bend forces and tendencies to their own ends, and even to drive them. Christine Boyer rereads Foucault’s ‘Of Other Spaces’ and finds

the most compelling image drawn by Foucault here to be not the 'heterotopia' but the 'mirror'.¹¹ Boyer reads the reflection-projection in the mirror as being all about subjectivity, and proposes that this subjectivity is "imaginary, a fantasy construction or idealization." But we need to take care; Foucault's mirror delivers more than a reflection or an image composed in the imagination, and more than a pure subjectivity. The mirror is, according to Foucault, utopia, place without a place, as well as heterotopia, a place outside all places that is nevertheless localizable. Before it is an image it is a *space* which doubles visibilities, locating and emplacing subjectivity, allowing us to see ourselves (or something else presumably), past a point of virtuality, from a perspective that defines who we are in relation to a vision of *where* we are. Foucault says of the mirror: "In it, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up potentially beyond its surface; there I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself ... The mirror ... has a kind of come-back effect on the place that I occupy: ... I turn back on myself, beginning to turn my eyes on myself and reconstitute myself where I am in reality."¹² The mirror is testimony to the ambiguity and ambidexterity of space, simultaneously objective and subjective, of the world and of our projections onto world. It attests to the circle of awareness created of self in place by virtue of being there – it attests to the fact that we are embodied in a material and resistant world and not angels, and that being there is a condition of any knowledge at all in the first place.

The city reflects back to us who we are, what we are – but not as a simple reflective surface. Foucault's self-visibility is tightly constrained, the surfaces of the city are absorbed into a larger machine, more occupied volume, more immersion and labyrinth than surface – and this machine is not just a collection of images, to be variously assembled, constructed, reconstructed, interpreted, misinterpreted to multiple perspectives; it is itself a knowing (knowing-through-our-knowing, knowing-through-our-moving) couple with, constructor of, our dispositions and habits and inclinations; manipulator and locator of our life patterns and the images (and virtual viewpoints) which go with them. There is a 'knowing' here that locates us before representation. The spaces of our dispositions, and the images these spaces project in sequential arrays and coordinated with our movements, reinforce each other and locate us, *constructing* subjectivities: "under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies. We are much less Greeks than we believe. We are neither in the amphitheatre or on the stage, but in the panoptic machine."¹³

The city is constructive of subjectivities – but it is prison as well. This is as true today as it has ever been – and it is still a question of what is visible through the mirror, and to who. It is about a distribution of a power of 'knowing in place' and of seeing for different people, differently able to inhabit the machine profitably and to their own ends. The malls, airport departure lounges, supervised enclaves, and centers, are variably available, accessible – but also variably reflective and supportive of the subjectivities they locate. The same localities may enable some and open them to a world of possibilities, while they trap others in dreary and dispiriting routines, depending on the variable personal spaces they inform. They mean different things and are differently *situated* in the labyrinth-mirror-machine for the temp-work cleaner in the airport departure lounge than they are for the business-class traveler. What we seek are the means to spaces that open the possibilities of the constitutive world; which facilitate the performance of lives and identities in place that open the subject to a dynamic engagement with the forces of its own constitution.

Knowledge and projection in a 'hybrid world'

Shifting our attention from the subject to the generative object – concentrating on habit, on form, on vectors and tendencies, on a dynamic *momentum* – does in fact two related things. It shifts profoundly, in the first place, the terms of our understanding of issues of subjectivity and locality, and of the visibilities and situationalities which underpin these. These terms take on a new meaning in a framework in which “the subject emerges from the world”; they become events, or located conditions, which emerge from an underlying turbulent world, rather than being pegs which fix the turbulence and hold it, or attempt to hold it, in a frame centered on ourselves and on a place we can regard as given. The city in which we see our lives reflected, is no longer a simple mirror; this self itself is as much mirror to a world which shifts as we move through it. It becomes of course also a world which adjusts to force and dominant movements; to certain tendencies more than to others, accommodating to certain lives more than others. It is here that we again talk about power, at the point where spaces serve subjects or subjects serve spaces.

And these differences may emerge without us being able to attribute them to a central power; power is distributed, naturalized though a machine as much organism and growth directed by its own vectors and momentums as it is a straightforwardly human or social construction. There are clearly agents in all of this which exert power over others but it would be a mistake to attribute the distribution of power in the city to some grand Manichean system. “Foucault shows that power ... is less a property than a strategy, and its effects cannot be attributed to an appropriation ‘but to dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings’; ‘it is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the privilege acquired or preserved of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions.’ ... In brief, power is not homogeneous but can be defined only by the particular points through which it passes.”¹⁴ The fact that power is distributed also means that battle can be engaged on multiple fronts, and as I have already pointed out elsewhere in talking about Amsterdam, there are multiple points, in the real world of particular places, where the play of power can be negotiated, and where the lives of ordinary people can be situated in enriching and enabling ways.¹⁵

The second thing the shift from the subject to the generative object does is open up a treasure trove (or can of worms for some) of a ‘hybrid’ world, where our naturalized divisions between what is social and what is natural, between subjective and objective, between the technological and the biological, between human and machine, become less certain, more open;¹⁶ where questions of value and of meaning can be negotiated and renegotiated, and where we can rediscover some of the extraordinary openness and availability to invention and intervention which is still a character of particular places of our world. There are dangers as well as opportunities in this of course, and questions of value become more rather than less critical; we see this already everywhere today, as the realm of science and of facts, previously understood as pure and objective, crosses increasingly with the political and with the ethical. But – and this has everything to do with perspective and ways of seeing – a hybrid world also offers a fresh perspective on change and is capable of orienting us more positively and experimentally to a future which is *not* already determined, which is in fact much more open to alternative performances of our realities than we seem most of the time to imagine. The breach of the boundaries doesn’t mean the dissolution of a self that is in any event dependent on crossings for its constitution – and it also throws up a proliferation of unexpected associations and contaminations, opening up, if we are willing to take up the challenge of considering them, fresh and liberating opportunities for human and social expression and identification.

A notion of the ‘agency’ of matter and the breach of the boundaries between the natural and the social; a loss of certainty in a singular set of *true* ideas as the struc-

ture of reality: these signal a different kind of relational, associative, spatiality of an immersive, fluid and mutual existence of us and our ideas, objects and worlds. A hugely interesting study and literature has emerged on our relationship with technology and the influence of *mediation* itself – of the way communication in its broadest sense – constructs worlds. “Atomic parts”, as Deleuze says, “have transitions, passages, ‘tendencies’, which *circulate* from one to another ... [and] give rise to habits.” This understanding of a world made of ‘habits’ constituted in circulations and communications and transitions has provoked a trans-disciplinary discussion about the way our knowledges, subjectivities and socialities are constructed and reconstructed in communicative and technologically mediated milieus. John Law introduces us to a spatiality of a world of circulations without foundations, to a vision of ‘systems’ and ‘networks’ nothing like the functionalist and technocratic versions of these ideas which were current in the fifties and sixties, and still are in the engineering and management sciences today.

He talks of the breakdown of the clear distinction between the human and the non-human in an erosion of fixity already explored, albeit in other terms, in the work of Karl Marx (with his ‘solid’ melting into air) and Michel Foucault (in his explorations of the modern episteme). The ‘actor-network theory’ he describes is a method (or sensibility) that explores relations and relationality, and where all entities achieve their significance by being in relation to other entities. Nothing that enters into relations has fixed significance or attributes in and of itself, instead, the attributes of any particular element in the system, or node in the network, are defined only in relation to other elements or nodes. It is then the analyst’s job to explore how those relations, and the entities they constitute, are brought into being. We arrive at a logic which dissolves fixed categories; humans and non-humans, technical and social, content and context, macro and micro – all tend to dissolve in the logic of the system or the ‘actor-network’. “If differences exist it is because they are generated in the relations that produce them. Not because they exist, as it were, in the order of things.”

But how should we react to the dissolution of fixed categories? In the logic of the sociotechnical, the distinction between the human and the non-human gets eroded to the point where they are rendered into functional and practical matters rather than resting in morality, politics, ethics or theology. Law confronts the ethics of the dissolution of ‘the human’ as a foundational category, and argues that our challenge today is not to wish away a condition of fluidity, uncertainty and ‘risk’, but to imagine ‘humane’, progressive and creative forms of politics, ethics, aesthetics and enchantments that do not rest on essential distinctions between the human and the non human but are instead relational. He warns of the tendency of systems and networks to reproduce the ways in which the current orderings of the world like to represent themselves, and poses the question of social criticism in a world without foundation – a point also taken up in a very public way recently by Bruno Latour.¹⁷ Might we not, through networks, end up representing the world in a way that is not simply uncritical, but even colludes and helps to reproduce the way in which the world is already being made? Might we not end up adding plausibility and power to instrumental, functionalist and managerial assumptions about the way the world works? When we describe the world we tend also to help perform it as we are describing it, so that no description is ever innocent. Analyses of how things are put together strategically reproduce that functionalism and perform it into being. “Every description is ... performative. Every description, however subtly, tends to help bring into being what it describes.”

Law argues though that the non-foundational logics of semiotic analysis do not have to hitch their wagons to functionalism. It is possible to imagine relational orderings which perform other logics, logics which produce different kinds of politics, and different kinds of persons – persons that are not subjugated to logics of means

and ends, projects and goals, which come to us from an instrumental and strategic network relationality. He cites the cyborg of Donna Haraway, a technological-biological hybrid that performs a feminist, non-racist, and non-violent technoscience into being. It is a hybrid which lies between science fact and science fiction that is not to do with drawing things together and ordering them into a single vision, but rather imagines the performance of technologies, of worlds and of persons where vision is heterogeneous and multiple.

What we are looking for is a non-foundational but material relationality that is not functionalist – that connects the political and the technical, and that opens up possibilities for thinking about and performing alternative realities, alternative versions of the good. We are looking for a relationality that is sensitive to the possibilities of a world which is not rigidly consistent or centered, but that enables fractional and shifting coherences. “[T]he failure of an entity (a person, a technical arrangement, a set of rules) to cohere in a single and functional manner is neither treated nor experienced as a failure but, instead, as an analytical and experiential reality – and one with possibly liberatory consequences.” A commitment to relationality is not necessarily a commitment to functionalism. We can work projectively and experimentally, imagining different versions of the world which are also different versions of the good, bringing together, and making explicit, political and technical choices. “ If we can separate the dissolution of all that is solid from the singular logic of functionalism, a new version of analysis and politics opens before us. One that accepts responsibility for its participation in and performances of the world.”

Our city becomes a hybridizing apparatus or machine, a distributor of visibilities and an active manipulator of perspectives (often blind to its own manipulations) rather than a passive focus of multiple viewpoints. What about the tendencies to which it doesn't adjust, the viewpoints it doesn't allow? Does it become the producer of docile bodies as with that other manipulator of visibilities, the Panopticon. In many cases we will have to admit that the answer is yes, but in taking on this space of the urban we attempt to understand also the *liberating* potentials of the machine; the potentials for enablement in contemporary spaces – including those we call 'virtual'; the potentials for alternative performances of community and subjectivity. The machine can be more or less enabling, more or less liberating, more or less grounding of the human spirit – in the end the fact of us being prisoners of this machine reflects only that we are not angels, that we are by necessity part of and immersed in a material, and today *urban*, world. We participate in this world through our performances and projective imaginings, and the city becomes a stage for enactments of the social politic, for whose outcomes we are always responsible. We join with a contemporary discourse on the potentials for enablement in contemporary space, but we will try to do this through understanding these potentials *within* a moving equilibrium of the machine and its processes. We follow Gregory Bateson in believing that a consequence of living in a forceful and dynamic and *real* world is that “freedom comes from recognizing what is necessarily so. After that is recognized, comes a knowledge of how to act.”¹⁸

Endnotes

- ¹ Gilles Deleuze (1989), *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas, Columbia University Press, New York.
- ² The proportion of taxpayers in the adult population of Indonesia remains well below 10%.
- ³ See: Ulrich Beck (1992), *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage, London.
- ⁴ See Patrick Healy's paper in this publication.
- ⁵ Marseilles' natural borders – steep hills to the north, east and south, with the sea to the west – have forced it to build HLMs, or high-rise council flats, in the city centre. This is in contrast with most French cities, which have housed their poor immigrants in outer-city suburbs – the infamous *banlieues* – physically and psychologically excluding them from the bourgeois city centers. A few minutes' walk from the tourist restaurants around the old port, Marseilles becomes a vibrant and colorful melting pot of cultures, where the sights, sounds and smells of the Maghreb mix with French and other Mediterranean cultures. As other French cities burst into flames, Marseilles stayed calm. At the peak of the riots, about 35 cars were burnt a night in the city, hardly more than the pre-riots average of 5 to 10 a night. *Text from the Financial Times (London) of 12th November 2005.*
- ⁶ See the paper by John Law in this publication
- ⁷ See: Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1983), *Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh Penn.
- ⁸ See: Bruno Latour (1992), "Where are the missing masses? The sociology of a few mundane artifacts", in: Wiebe Bijker and John Law (eds.), *Shaping Technology/ Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.
- ⁹ See for example: Murray Bookchin (1992), *From Urbanization to Cities*, Cassell, London. The following quote is taken from pp. 60-61
"We not only confuse urbanization with citification, but we have literally dropped the city out of the history of ideas – both in terms of the way it explains the present human condition and the systems of public governance it creates... The elusive citizen who surfaced historically in the assemblies of Greece, in the communes of medieval Europe, in the town meetings of New England, and in the revolutionary sections of Paris must be brought to the foreground... For without his or her presence ... any discussion of the city is likely to become anemically institutional and formal."
- ¹⁰ A.N. Whitehead (1979), *Process and Reality*, Macmillan, New York, p. 172.
- ¹¹ M. Christine Boyer (2005), "The Way Things Work: City Maps and Diagrams", paper presented at the 5th Space Syntax Symposium, Delft University of Technology, Delft.
- ¹² Michel Foucault (1986), "Other Spaces", in: *Lotus International*, 48/49, Gruppo Electa spa, Milan.
- ¹³ Michel Foucault (1991), *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Penguin Books, London, p. 217.
- ¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze (1988), Foucault, trans. Seán Hand, Athlone Press, London, p. 25.
- ¹⁵ See: Stephen Read (2005), "Amsterdam – Beyond Inside and Out", in: Read et. al. eds., *Future City*, Spon Press, London.
- ¹⁶ See: Bruno Latour (1993), *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.
- ¹⁷ See: Bruno Latour (2004), 'Why has critique run out of steam?: From matters of fact to matters of concern', in: *Critical Enquiry* 30,2 (Winter 2004) pp. 225-248
- ¹⁸ Gregory Bateson (2002), *Mind and Nature*, Hampton Press, Cresskill NJ. p. 205