

Los Retos de la Urban Activismo en el Nuevo Contexto Neoliberal

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Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es investigar los retos que enfrenta el activismo urbano contemporáneo en el nuevo contexto neoliberal. Este contexto típicamente occidental se caracteriza por una creciente atmósfera de consenso que es 'post-política' y 'post-crítica'. En la práctica artística, la 'política' y la 'crítica' han sido más y más olvidado por varias 'vueltas éticas'—que han sido continuamente recuperado para servir el dictado neoliberal de la omni-economización. Mecanismos de recuperación cada vez más astutos—como la incorporación de artistas y activistas en la reestructuración de operaciones de aburguesamientos—se han aprovechado de los efectos intrínsecos de despolitizar a la más reciente "vuelta ética".

La definición de Jacques Rancière de lo "político" como una reconfiguración disensual del statu quo es fundamental para calibrar y conectar a tierra la dimensión política del activismo urbano. Además, su definición de 'democracia' justifica los desafíos políticos que pudiesen interrumpir a tecnocrática "buen gobierno".

Para situar la más reciente "vuelta ética", movimientos y tendencias históricas dentro de las disciplinas del arte, la arquitectura y el urbanismo son investigados con respecto a sus ambiciones políticas, componente utópico y de los procesos de recuperación que se han convertido a menudo instantánea e incluso preventiva.

Ciertas disposiciones fundamentales se recomiendan para el activismo urbano dentro de un enfoque pluralista. La definición de Rancière de "lo político" es la base para la articulación de activismo tanto conceptual como táctico, mientras que el 'utopismo dialéctico' de David Harvey sugiere un modelo para la integración de la utopía. La máxima de Francis Alÿs 'a veces' ilustra el potencial de la ambigüedad inherente a los enfoques artísticos. Estrategias contemporáneas de disenso, sobre-identificación, oscilación y entrelazado y espacialización pueden ser eficaces. Y, mientras que una disposición holístico transdisciplinaria es una brújula esencial, la disciplinariedad se puede emplear estratégicamente.

La eficacia marginal del activismo urbano es una condición estructural y no debe distraer la atención de la amenaza mucho mayor de despolitización. Esta amenaza se ve agravada por el aumento de la sincronización de los dominios, los objetivos y los intereses de los capitalistas neoliberales, los tecnócratas, los artistas, los profesionales alternativos y los 'creativos'. Para mantener una actitud crítica y resistir a la recuperación, activistas urbanos pueden combinar las claras definiciones de Rancièreian de "lo político" y de "la democracia" con una sofisticación tanto en la disposición como en la estrategia a través de integraciones híbridos de utopismo dialéctico, la ambigüedad, la ambivalencia, el disenso, la 'sobre-identificación', la autonomía y la espacialización disciplinaria, teniendo cuidado de centrarse tanto en lo residual *como* en el núcleo de la sociedad.

Palabras clave: activismo urbano, despolitización, vueltas éticas, la política, la recuperación

The Challenges of Urban Activism in the New Neoliberal Context

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges faced by contemporary urban activism in the new neoliberal context. This typically Western context is marked by an expanding 'post-political', 'post-critical' atmosphere of consensus. In artistic practice, the 'political' and the 'critical' have been increasingly forgotten by various 'ethical turns'—which have been continually recuperated to serve the neoliberal dictate of omni-economization. Increasingly shrewd recuperation mechanisms—such as the embedding of artists and activists into gentrifying restructuring operations—have exploited the depoliticizing effects intrinsic to the most recent 'ethical turn'.

Jacques Rancière's definition of the 'political' as a dissensual reconfiguration of the status quo is critical in gauging and grounding urban activism's political dimension. Further, his definition of 'democracy' justifies political challenges which might disrupt technocratic 'good governance'.

To situate the most recent 'ethical turn', historical movements and tendencies within the disciplines of art, architecture and urbanism are investigated with respect to their political ambitions, utopian component and to recuperative processes which have become often instantaneous and even pre-emptive.

Certain fundamental dispositions are recommended for urban activism within a pluralist approach. Rancière's definition of 'the political' provides the basis for articulating activism both conceptually and tactically while David Harvey's 'dialectical utopianism' suggests a model for integrating utopianism. Francis Alÿs' maxim of 'sometimes' illustrates the potential of the ambiguity inherent in artistic approaches. Contemporary strategies of dissensus, over-identification, oscillating and interlacing and spatialization can be effective. And, while a holistic transdisciplinary disposition is an essential compass, disciplinarity can be strategically employed.

The marginal efficacy of urban activism is a structural condition and should not distract from the much greater threat of depoliticization. This threat is aggravated by the increasing synchronization of the domains, aims and interests of neoliberal capitalists, technocrats, artists, alternative practitioners and 'creatives'. To maintain a critical disposition and resist recuperation, urban activists can combine clear Rancièreian definitions of 'the political' and of 'democracy' with a sophistication of both disposition and strategy through hybridized integrations of dialectical utopianism, ambiguity, ambivalence, dissensus, over-identification, disciplinary autonomy and spatialization, taking care to focus on both the residual *and* the core of society.

Key words: urban activism, depoliticization, ethical turns, the political, recuperation

1. Introduction.

A great disciplinary convergence is underway. Artists are increasingly intent on achieving an immediate social impact, at times submerging their work into life itself. This "post-studio artist" may be mistaken for a researcher, anthropologist, social worker or 'knowledge producer'.¹ Meanwhile, a growing body of architects, urbanists and planners, like-minded in their desire to "actually practice [their] criticism" spatially², embarks on an often coinciding path of 'alternative practice'. An 'urban' dimension is bound up with entering the social and spatial arena of public space. But the transformative, activist potential of these practices is threatened internally and externally by an expanding depoliticizing atmosphere of consensus and recuperation. This paper aims to investigate the challenges faced by contemporary urban activism in this new neoliberal context.³

2. Consensual Times.⁴

Pervading our times is a "hegemonic consensus"⁵ on the essential claim of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis: that the union of Western liberal democracy and free market capitalism represents the inevitable 'end point' of society's evolution and political organization.⁶ Over its 30-year rise, neoliberalism has redefined politics into "a series of technologies of governing that fuse around consensus, agreement and technocratic management"⁷ submissive to the globalization of 'free market capitalism'⁸.

Insisting politics is defined by "debate, disagreement and dissensus"⁹, Jacques Rancière, Chantal Mouffe and others¹⁰, find the *absence* of politics in the consensus approach, leaving it both 'post-political' and 'post-democratic'. Conceiving a 'post-political' city requires uprooting its historically political nature¹¹, twice annulling the concept of 'urban activism'.

2.1. The Political.

Democracy is the institution of politics as such, of politics as a paradox.¹²

Key to Rancière's definition of 'the political' is his framing of democracy's double bind by excavating to a more "radical paradox": "the ultimate ground on which rulers govern is that there is no good reason as to why some men should rule others." This equalitarian right—of the 'unqualified', the *demos*—to govern, is the "anarchic foundation of the political" and transcends technocratic repression of democratic demands, even those "[resisting] good policy".¹³

In Rancière's framework, 'the political' is defined by a 'dissensus' process, a "reconfiguring [of] the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community".¹⁴ This disruption to the consensus on an existing social and/or spatial order is justified as an "equalitarian challenge"¹⁵ and must be "re-enacted ceaselessly" to 're-open' the space "that the practice of ruling relentlessly plugs".¹⁶ The selectivity of political demands and new "framing[s] of a we"—and the autonomy implied—constitutes the 'aesthetics' of politics for Rancière, whose work interrelates the two by interrogating the 'ethical turn' in each.¹⁷

Mouffe distinguishes the politics of agonistic struggle between adversaries from extreme Schmittian politics of "defining the enemy"¹⁸. The 'consensus' missing in the latter is a common agreement "on the rules of the game" and mutual respect.¹⁹ Besides the autonomy inherent in dividing, this sense of commonality is shown by Eric Méchoulan to be connoted by the original French *partage* ('distribution/sharing') in Rancière's definition.²⁰

Strict consensus creates an illusion that power can be "dissolved"²¹, masking power relations—which *cannot* be eliminated, only *reconfigured* through politics. That today's "structure of mistrust" has made unmasking these relations so effortless points to the potential in Rancière's philosophy of "fundamental confidence".²²

2.2. The Stylish Post-Political.

...the end of history will mean the end, among other things, of all art that could be considered socially useful, and hence the descent of artistic activity into the empty formalism of the traditional Japanese arts.²³

Waves of renewed social commitment or 'ethical turns' have reacted against Fukuyama's forecast. Though hypothesized as manifestations of "bourgeois boredom"²⁴, the thesis is eluded by an "increasingly chaotic and barbaric"²⁵ world reality, better characterized by intensifying bifurcation and stratification of 'post-historical' space over the historical—amidst looming ecological catastrophe.²⁶

Yet, post-history suffuses new modes of 'stylized' criticism. In contemporary art, Charles Jencks detects, in 2007, the "Angry Serene". Noting the decline of the *anger* mode, dominant since the 1950s, Jencks attributes its cooling to widespread scepticism and resignation towards *never-ending* problems. A new mode of nonchalance, enabled by virtuosity of presentation, illustrates that the critical "need not be the choleric".²⁷

...[It] depends for its charge on presenting the nastiness and horror of the modern world with an unruffled professionalism. No wonder these artists look to Renaissance *sprezzatura*...²⁸

BAVO highlights how a similar stylized mode of "simulated activism" is used to facilitate Dutch neoliberal urban development. The "seemingly subversive character" of artist interventions embellishes while draining energy from existing and prospective resistance. When artists do address conflict, "the sting [is taken] out" through aestheticization.²⁹

A related phenomenon, described by Roemer van Toorn in 1997 as 'Fresh Conservatism', "presents the normally discrete character of conservatism in a spectacularly fresh fashion, as a work of art"³⁰ under the motto:

Whatever you do, do it cool.³¹

An avant-garde of architecture, art and film flatters our egos with optimism, openmindedness, desire for newness and enough superficial "subversion and radicalism" to keep us entertained and "out of mischief". Long-term projects of deregulated capitalism, consumerism and "superindividuality" thus advance less encumbered.³² An emblematic hue of the post-political is found in Dieter Lesage's reading of Rem Koolhaas's 'barcode flag' design for the European Union (2002) (Fig. 1), which strikes him as cleverly calculated by Koolhaas who realized "that for the left, the market may become acceptable through its aestheticization".³³



Fig. 1

2.3. Repression of Activism.

Neoconservatism can be considered as the armed wing of neoliberalism.³⁴ Working jointly with 'soft' mechanisms repressing activism are ratcheting 'hard' pressures. Compounding admonitions for consensus and *stability*, a neoconservative atmosphere of securitization and fear permeates the new neoliberal city. This "climate of antiterrorism"³⁵ reached fever pitch in the post-9/11 era with the "War on Terror"—also a "war on difference"³⁶—and shows signs of resurgence with increasing "intolerance towards", even criminalization of activism and protest.³⁷ The panopticism of the 'surveillance state' and its distressing corporate alliances³⁸ exacerbates self-censorship.

2.4. Instrumentalization in the New Neoliberal City.

There is no such thing as society, only individual men and women...and their families.³⁹ Margaret Thatcher is quoted by BAVO to illustrate the paradox Immanuel Wallerstein noted in the "dependence of capitalism on non-capitalist social formations for its reproduction"⁴⁰ and the remedial role depicted in Pierre Bourdieu's two-handed system of "soft, social sectors" which reliably dress the wounds inflicted by the "hard, economic sectors".⁴¹ In assessing the state of urban activism, Margit Mayer emphasizes this "flanking mechanism" of the social sector during the historical process of neoliberalization.⁴² More extreme and more dissimulated, this compensatory relationship (also providing a "purely symbolic" hope-giving role⁴³) is becoming *operative* through ever shrewder recuperation. Consequent to the rising pressure of global intraurban competition, the neoliberal city gradually 'hijacked' and moderated "(sub)culture, local flair, and even [activist] movement practices" to fashion their 'brand' and feed the "growth machine". Mayer shows that progressive discourse was recast in a "politically regressive, individualized and competitive direction" and softened: e.g. "combat[ing] poverty" became "fighting 'social exclusion'".⁴⁴ More superficial understandings of 'activism' led to what Miguel Robles-Durán terms "instant activists". Though socially-minded, they neglect the language of historical activism ("struggle, confrontation, justice, politics, conflict, urgency, necessity and survival...") and, lacking "any political or critical position", are easily absorbed into the latest fashions and urban development schemes.⁴⁵ This fleetingness, when stirred with post-Fordism in the 'network society', can be dizzying. Pascal Gielen opens a window onto a contemporary 'art scene' of "global nomads" who retain their mobility by being "relatively free of obligations" through the "freedom of temporary and flexible relations" of the 'scene'.⁴⁶ Their mobility folds into the "hyperkinetic frenzy of total mobilization"⁴⁷, and acts out that of the capitalist entrepreneur, who must perpetually mine new markets. Post-Fordist hyper-individuality negates society, atomizing it to the point that "everybody is or acts like a firm, every individual a mini-corporation"⁴⁸. Naturally, and via policy, 'creativity' became conflated with individualistic entrepreneurship. Claire Bishop shows how Dutch cultural policies c. 2005-2006 emulated those of the UK's New Labour Party which emphasized "the role of creativity and culture in commerce and the growth of the 'knowledge economy'". Promoting an "openly instrumental approach", teaching creativity in schools became important because:⁴⁹

the population is increasingly required to assume the individualisation associated with creativity: to be entrepreneurial, embrace risk, look after their own self-interest, perform their own brands, and be willing to self-exploit.⁵⁰

But how to capitalize (literally) on this bottom-up energy? Mayer finds the "hallmark of the roll-out neoliberal city" to be integration of "increasingly professionalized, formerly alternative community-based organizations" into urban

renewal policy.⁵¹ Developers and municipalities have discovered that by pre-assimilating artists and activists, the financial costs of community resistance can often be averted. Robles-Durán's study of five years of the discourse of "pro-market international organizations", finds "one constant key recommendation":⁵²

the need for persuading citizens in adopting new patterns of behavior in favor of public-private urban investment and redevelopment, emphasizing that careful attention should be taken as this must not be seen as being imposed from outside.⁵³

Over the same period, he notes: "the [urban redevelopment] market has made a great leap in incorporating the 'activist' into its daily life operations". Doing so can, further, rehabilitate 'brand identities, "masking [them] as 'democratic', ecological and socially responsible"⁵⁴, even while the grunt work of raising real estate values⁵⁵ proceeds. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2

Though essentially just a slippery, scientifically dodgy 'manualization'⁵⁶ of the preceding, Richard Florida's 'creative class'/'creative city' theory has had a devastating effect on urban discourse and policy. In spite of recent debunkings⁵⁷, its massive influence is ongoing. It claims that a very broadly-defined socioeconomic 'class' of 'creatives' are now "primary drivers of economic development"⁵⁸, and, that cities must attract them by re-branding themselves as 'creative cities'.⁵⁹

"Just what do you see as the political role of the creative class? Will they step up to the plate and help lead this society in a better, fairer direction?" Florida was stumped.⁶⁰

Worse, Florida admits that the 'haves' ('creatives') are dependent on the existence of an army of 'have-nots' (implicitly, 'uncreatives')—low-paid service workers—while dangling a libertarianesque carrot that 'creativity' is latent in everyone.⁶¹ The insecure lifestyle of 'creatives' is glamorized⁶² and conflated with innovation and ultimately entrepreneurialism:

The subject of the Creative City is not *Homo Ludens* as imagined by Nieuwenhuys, but the entrepreneur in all its guises, for the creative city is an entrepreneurial city.⁶³

Friedrich von Borries and Matthias Böttger propose that "boundaries between marketing, criticism and participation are blurring. While marketing strategists have long since recuperated "classical forms of criticism", the process, once taking generations, is now near-instantaneous. These conditions, in an increasingly tenuous economy, lead many to see themselves as "cultural self-marketers" and express new willingness to collaborate—even *initiate* projects—with the "avant-garde of global marketing". Referencing *Comme des Garçons'* 'guerrilla stores' in Berlin, they uncover this new "structural phenomenon" of "voluntary neoliberalization".⁶⁴

3. [Recuperated] Ethical Turns.

To put today's critical and political dimension in a clearer historical context, this chapter surveys a genealogy of recuperated 'ethical turns' within art, architecture and urbanism. Crucially, Rancière considers the latest 'ethical turn' a "joint suppression of both aesthetics and politics".⁶⁵ Lucas Verweij and Ton Matton, pointing to its seamless integration into the façade of consensus, parallel the "double agenda" of today's profit-motivated corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies with the logic of mid-nineteenth century living and working condition improvements, which aimed to *increase productivity* by bettering health.⁶⁶ Similarly, Merijn Oudenampsen shows how the new neoliberal city, in the case of Amsterdam, conceives of itself as a business, mimicking a market strategy of "invest[ing] in culture as long as it adds value to real estate"⁶⁷.

3.1. From Modernism to Postmodernism.

Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided.⁶⁸

The quote above can be read counter to Le Corbusier's intended sense: avoid revolution by relinquishing architecture's ambition of political change. This is easier and, historically, has been the rule. Mary McLeod, in 1989, traces architecture's diminishing political claims across multiple variegated strains of postmodernism. She qualifies her analysis, noting the inherent limitations of architecture's critical power⁶⁹, particularly the easily recuperated ambivalence of its "formal reception".⁷⁰

McLeod demonstrates that the *first* motive of the modern movement was to tackle social issues by changing the architectural production process, and that therein lies architecture's political potential, unique among the arts.

Form was generally seen as *reflecting* changes in production, not as an autonomous "critical or utopian tool" in itself.⁷¹

Early postmodernists, disillusioned with the modern movement's failed social program, alleged that its mute formal language, appropriated as "routinized corporate [and militaristic] modernism", was linked to its urban failures: bleak public housing and destruction of city cores. But, after the failures and recuperations of two early responses, the populist participation and "visionary architecture" movements of the 1960s and 1970s⁷², postmodernism—aside from some left-wing critics⁷³—retreated further into 'resistive' politics of preservation. Coinciding with the dominance of conservative economic and political forces⁷⁴, postmodernism's elitism, and particularly its populism, became complicit with consumerism:

Architecture became trendy, part of a lifestyle consciousness, and thus more and more streamlined in order to meet the demands of the trendsetting class.⁷⁵

Reprising the modern movement, it quickly became "the new corporate style"⁷⁶. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3

A descent into "formal hermeticism" through negation and hyper-individualistic subjectivism marked the poststructuralism and deconstructivism of later postmodernism. Though effective in exposing earlier frauds, McLeod finds, in its "endless textuality" and annihilation of the 'author', master narratives and utopian dreams, dangers of "total relativism" and aversion to collectivity:

Regardless of epistemological questions, some values, however provisional, and some notion of collective identity are probably essential to political action and social betterment.⁷⁷

The "death of the author" is even more problematic for her as it undermines "emergence of alternative voices" by undermining autonomy of 'voice' itself.⁷⁸

McLeod is most concerned by the acceleratingly quick and overwhelming recuperation by an "increasingly commercialized society". Modest approaches—e.g., 'regionalism as resistance'—were drowned out by the "homogenizing forces of mass media and the increasingly multinational scale of finance and the construction industry".⁷⁹ The impotence (and appropriateness⁸⁰) of sharper approaches is also noted: "Any sensation, pleasurable or painful, instantly becomes fodder for both high culture and mass consumption."⁸¹ Already, she finds the 'cycle of appropriation' nearly instantaneous and quotes a characterization of the avant-garde as a "kind of research and development arm of the culture industry".⁸² The associated ever-growing sense of futility led to the "complacency of the 1990s"⁸³.

3.2. The Post-Critical.

To 'solve', not to 'problematize', marks the new 'post-critical' approach: the ideal of autonomy as a precondition of architectural 'criticality', which distances itself from building, is replaced by an immersion into practice.⁸⁴

The emergence of 'post-criticality'⁸⁵ tells one story about the crisis of architectural criticism. Despite embracing new complexity, the concerns of post-critical practices ("realism, pragmatism, and professionalism") and their proposals are set in stark opposition to the impenetrability and arbitrariness of late postmodernism, whose discourse and forms required an "'explanation' by the professional critic". Presentations of often simple buildings are simplified using "diagrams, slogans, logos and new media" to "recognizable icons, core messages, or brands", to encourage quick comprehension and an "intensive experience or atmospheric 'feeling'".⁸⁶

While also stemming from the "collapse of actually existing socialism and the crisis of the European left", Ole W. Fischer highlights the post-critical's "proactive" embrace of economic globalization, under the self-interested reasoning that "critical thought, intellectual resistance and elaborate theoretical constructs" were counterproductive in a "competitive global market of architectural design".⁸⁷

Van Toorn finds the post-critical emanating from the American 'projective practice' movement, which bypasses the predictable pain of politics and utopian dreams—and the strenuousness of criticality—by simply no longer bothering. Instead, it "surf[s] the turbulent waves" of the market as Western affluence ("computerized production,

technological and genetic applications, and commercial and cultural entertainment") allows reality to "seem more exciting than dreams".⁸⁸

More recognized by its *method* than its result, projective practice's "addiction to reality"⁸⁹ leads it to unearth "all kinds of latent beauties, forces, and possibilities" which are mobilized and "where possible, idealized". The "distancing of critical theory" is traded for hands-on managerial and technical dispositions. Though "utopian moments" *might* result, the design—founded on *technically-augmented* reality—aims primarily at functioning "interactively" with the users, themselves typically immersed in the 'hyper-reality'⁹⁰ of the "global middle class".⁹¹ Van Toorn classifies three strains of praxis. 'Projective autonomy' and its "meticulously crafted forms"—mild, minimal and abstract—*assure* rather than subvert. The 'interaction' invited by its more caricatured forms constitutes little more than passive amusement reinforcing the "branding game".⁹²

The unpredictable forms of "projective mise-en-scène" result from intense 'neutral' investigations into "extreme reality" (accepted as *given*), often taking "Dutch pragmatism to absurd, deadpan extremes". Users are choreographed as "leading actors" in a process dramatizing the "mutations" of the everyday.⁹³ The obsession with process marks a "new paradigm" for Van Toorn, who characterizes the attitude towards built form as the "putatively cool 'Whatever'".⁹⁴

Glorifying the sophistication of self-organization (as found in "geology, biology, and even history"), 'projective naturalization' gratifies our senses' "craving for the accidental" by translating notions of ever-changing open processes into "smooth and fluid" forms using the latest technology. As it "allows flows of consensus to follow their trajectories", Van Toorn finds its aims *procedural* rather than political.⁹⁵

Though approaches which reveal hidden qualities certainly have potential, simply magnifying existing realities often worsens them. While underscoring that an apolitical tone in itself "sets a political and social direction [of consensus]", Van Toorn further argues that "utopian dreams"—far forgotten—could "provide frames of reference for political action".⁹⁶

The post-critical in urbanism and planning is identified by BAVO as 'post-planning'. Constant appeal to the city's vast complexity—which is said to thwart any willful attempt to shape it—and the 'inevitability' of its development, rationalizes its reduction of politics to repressive (neoconservative) and technocratic (neoliberal) management. Even slight attempts to act politically are to be "exorcized as the specter of the modernist idea of the malleable city, a nostalgic belief in grand narratives, and/or rigid thinking in long bygone ideological schemata", making way for the "prime mover" in the city: the neoliberal market. Symptomatic are discourses characterizing the "urban process" as:⁹⁷

a (business) negotiation between different actors, a computer game, an acupunctural treatment, a military operation, etc. In short, one is encouraged to act upon the city in all kinds of ways *except in strict political terms*.⁹⁸

3.3. Art's Autonomy Dissolved into Life.

While a wealth of new creative opportunities issued from art's transcendence of disciplinary boundaries into the 'expanded field'⁹⁹, so did vulnerabilities to instrumentalization. The shift from standalone sculpture to the site-specific works of the 1970s required the "continual relocation of one's energies"¹⁰⁰, prefiguring the nomadism of the post-Fordist artist. Conservative 'place-making' campaigns applied new interest in the *process* of art "production, presentation and reception"¹⁰¹ while "institutional critique" gave way to populist "art for everyone" in the 1980s. A significant "turn to the ethnographic"¹⁰² emerged in the 1990s as conceptions of 'site' further dematerialized and artists tackled difficult public-interest issues.

But, in the late 1990s, Nicolas Bourriaud described emerging 'relational art' as public interest¹⁰³, functioning as a *sanctuary* and laboratory for experiments in re-establishing authentic human relations. His capitulation to larger hegemonic forces is clear:

the role of artworks is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real...¹⁰⁴

Calling it emblematic of "art's new modesty" and its post-utopian disposition, Rancière's finds Bourriaud's 'micro-utopias' (such as "talking to your neighbor"¹⁰⁵) barely distinguishable from 'ordinary life'. Something is lost in the attempt to merge art with life. He describes it as the *tension* between the autonomy of art—what he calls "art as resistant form"—and 'art as life', in the "dialectic of the 'apolitically political' work".¹⁰⁶

While relational art is derided by BAVO as "perhaps the ultimate, hidden reference behind the embedded cultural production in the Netherlands"¹⁰⁷, the lineage of artist instrumentalization tracks back to the 'place-making' campaigns of the 1970s which charged artists to be "'useful' in the physical sense"¹⁰⁸. And, today's 'experience culture' finds art used to fuel consumer capitalism's 'culture industry', with museums increasingly catering to the wishes of "art consumers" by providing "mere experiences", hollow of contemplation (Fig. 4).¹⁰⁹ Rudi Laermans finds newly 'engaged' art increasingly indistinguishable from consumerism.¹¹⁰

Further, as art's "'self-criticality' turns inwards", Rancière notes that its playful "procedures of delegitimization" become almost "indiscernible from those spun by the powers that be".¹¹¹ Finally, by merging with real life to restore the "social bond" through communitarianism, art echoes the restorative aims of postmodernism while abandoning the critical potential of its autonomy.



Fig. 4

3.4. The 'New Commitment'.

The 'new commitment' was as a clear reaction to the frivolity and banality of postmodernism's long-festering political apathy (recurring in the post-critical).¹¹² Already, in 1989, McLeod notes that "advocacy architecture and pro bono work are almost dead", warning of extreme shifts in the architect's image ("from social crusader and aesthetic puritan to trendsetter and media star") and in architectural education.¹¹³

In the 1980s most schools stopped offering regular housing studios; gentlemen's clubs, resort hotels, art museums, and vacation homes became the standard programs.¹¹⁴

These conditions drifted into the 1990s, paralleled by vigorously growing concern for the negative effects of globalization. Rene Boomkens notes that deconstructivism's fragmentary narratives were traded for a "new universalism, or a new *engagement*, for new seriousness" as key influential thinkers shifted to engage "serious political and ethical questions".¹¹⁵ Lieven De Cauter credits the 'alter-globalization' movement—staunchly against the "new neoliberal world order"—with putting "social criticism and involvement [...] back on the agenda".¹¹⁶ And, with the monumental shocks of 9/11 and the 2008 financial crisis and continuing turmoil worldwide, there is growing rejection of the 'end of history' thesis.

Yet, there are already signs of recuperation. Boomkens warns of parallels with the "radical individualism" of 1960s existentialism, which held that "'living is rebelling'"—"engagement" being a kind of mood, "gesture" or "attitude". Citing Michel Foucault's reading of Kant, Boomkens argues for a more collective and durable framing of 'commitment' that "transcends the individual" and "one-off *decision[s]*". Foucault argues that Kant found "the *enthusiasm* of the more or less passive bystanders and spectators"—sparked by "a radical event"—to be the "most important indicator of the historic importance of the [French] revolution".¹¹⁷ The shock effect of Kant's 'radical act' disappears as artists engage participants in "comfortable consensus". Stefan Hertman notes that a consensus atmosphere, created by "pressure of popularization", has led to "simply advocat[ing] commonsense perspectives and then describ[ing] this as commitment".¹¹⁸

Vagueness in "*buzzwords*" like "criticism, protest, activism, commitment, resistance, etc." is shown by Karel Vanhaesebrouck to put the 'new commitment' at risk of becoming a "fashionable, meaningless category [...] incorporated with amazing ease into the post-Fordist rhetoric of the 'creative society'".¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, artists and a promotional 'culture industry' wield this discourse in a manner wildly out of proportion with the efficacy of their efforts. Vanhaesebrouck suggests the art system is not only burdened by guilt over its commodification, but, more severely, fails (or is unwilling) to "imagine change as a real possibility at the theoretical as well as practical level, let alone a revolution".¹²⁰

4. Conceiving Urban Activism.

The regular accumulation of recuperations repressing the political suggests a structural condition facing urban activism. Rather than exchanging politics for ethics in response, counter-structural dispositions—grounded in 'the political', democratic right and the dialectical use of utopianism—can form the basis for hybrid approaches which tactically integrate various strategies.

4.1. Dispositions.

Amidst the fluctuating heterogeneity of contexts, tactics and efficacies, certain superstructural dispositions can provide guidance in guarding against the pitfalls of apoliticism, steering the choices of projects and by acting as a reference plane for experimentation.

Holding to a Rancièrian conception of the political, the urban activist must realize that simply raising awareness is not necessarily a 'reconfiguration of the sensible'. *Articulated* rather than general approaches promise to rise above what Rancièr calls the "law of a global situation"¹²¹ under which general denouncements (e.g. against consumerism) become self-parodies "since it is very difficult to find anybody who is actually ignorant of such things".¹²²

A collective dimension is crucial. Rancièr's framework transcends the individual and enacting 'the political' is often a "speech situation", made up of "new forms of collective enunciation".¹²³

Negation alone *could* constitute 'politics', but Rancière's terminology ('reconfigure', not 'defigure') implies a constructive dimension. And, because making bold demands—that may be 'unreasonable' or 'impractical' to the pragmatic 'real'—is justified by equalitarian democratic right *and* is often an effective negotiation tactic, a utopian disposition further beckons.

No wind helps him who does not know to what port he sails.¹²⁴

To confront a chronic lack of political imagination in providing any alternative to escalating inequalities, David Harvey proposes 'dialectical utopianism'. It integrates an 'either-or' dialectic confronting that of the purely 'both-and' (typically Leftist) which "refuses specific recommendations", eschews universalism¹²⁵ and attempts to "endlessly" evade the issue of closure:

to materialize a space is to engage with closure (however temporary) which is an authoritarian act.¹²⁶

His analysis finds that 'utopias of spatial form' and 'utopias of social process' inevitably stumble in trying to escape from, or by failing to compromise with, the other. He synthesizes them into what he calls a "spatiotemporal utopianism", where utopian dreams and *existing* social processes engage in an endless dialectic of 'either-or' *and* 'both-and'.¹²⁷

Though extensive engagement with 'closure' is proposed, investing *too much* in either closure or intentionality risks forfeiting the potential critical efficacy of ambiguity and ambivalence.¹²⁸ Critical art's success, according to Rancière, stems from the contradiction, ambiguity and tension inherent in interlacing and "shuttling between" 'art as art' (autonomy) and 'art as life' (heteronomy) across the "aesthetic cut" that "separates consequences and intentions".¹²⁹

Sometimes something poetic becomes political
and

Sometimes something political becomes poetic.¹³⁰

Cuauhtémoc Medina contends the "relationship between poetics and politics [is] contingent, contextual and historical", citing the axiom above from Francis Alÿs' 2003 re-enactment of *The Leak* (1995) to suggest that Alÿs' "gentle concept" of 'sometimes' *also* implies "'almost'" by indicating that the "timing of the relation between art and politics [is] conditional: neither 'never' or 'always'; nor 'must' or 'shouldn't'".¹³¹

4.2. Strategies.

To navigate the contradictions and tensions inherent in politics and aesthetics, a general pluralistic disposition, flexible and willing to employ hybrid approaches (e.g. Fig. 5), is essential. Hilde Heynen advises the 'new commitment' to integrate *design* in hybrid with social engagement while Fischer notes that "a new critical theory in architecture will involve reflective and projective modes, contemplative and active intervention".¹³² Though hybridizations must be realized in 'moments of closure', one can preserve openness by conceiving them as *procedural*—temporary and experimental.



Fig. 5

Tactically utilizing the tension between 'real life' and the autonomy provided by disciplinarity also works against the predictability of stubbornly consistent strategy, which, especially in art, tends to "[neutralize its] political potential".¹³³

Besides its mechanical role in 'the political', dissensus might be elevated as a virtue in itself (politically and culturally), as well as strategically canalized. Against the totalizing nature of plans "without contradiction, without conflict", James Holston proposes paradoxically integrating dissensus into the consensus process of "state building" it works against.¹³⁴

And, because the "terms of dissensus" form a conduit through which art and politics might connect¹³⁵, even an apparently indifferent aesthetic movement could, in turn, disrupt an existing social order as the "freedom of the aesthetic" is based on:¹³⁶

the equality of all subjects—the once scandalous fact that ordinary things, let alone the lowly people, can comprise the main subjects of a book.¹³⁷

Targeting political art's crisis of efficacy, BAVO proposes to build on a strategy of 'over-identification'¹³⁸, in which artists, facing today's immense recuperative power

strategically give up their will to resist, capitulate to the status quo and apply the latter's rules even more consistently and scrupulously than the rest of society.¹³⁹

Its *positive* and *negative* prefixes exaggerate either the target of critique's expressed ('lip service') or repressed (exploitative) intention, respectively. The logic thus 'laid bare' often induces the embarrassed target's denial and subsequently moderated position, while galvanizing bystanders to take a position.¹⁴⁰

But, this play with sincerity, BAVO notes, is not nearly as effective strictly applied as hybrid approaches which, oscillating between and/or interlacing modes, can resist "easy recuperation" while provoking *both* the Right and the Left. Christoph Schlingensief's mode of "artistic resistance" aims to "produce the contradiction", or as another described it, he "creates situations that not only are not clear, but also *cannot* be made clear". This 'cognitive friction' undermines consensus, preparing the ground for potential political reconfiguration.¹⁴¹

As our energies and time are more and more relocated to cyberspace, the already limited political potential of real form and space is further diluted:¹⁴²

Our activism has been reduced and confined to the square inches of our computer screen. [...]

We express our dislike of what's happening in the real world with a like.¹⁴³

To the extent that spatial reconfigurations can be *twinned with* specific political actions and motivations, a spatial strategy can be effective. Yet, an overkill of focus on residual spaces has revealed a susceptibility to recuperation via the 'patch-up' function provided. While these interstitial spaces are essential—for experimentation, incubation, even real political action—the historical evidence on recuperation calls for a multi-theatered approach *also* focused on the core of society.

5. Conclusion.

The marginal efficacy of urban activism, essentially a structural condition, should not distract from the much greater threat of depoliticization. Driving this threat are ever more contrived recuperations and the consensus mechanisms of the 'ethical turn' in politics and in art. Aggravating matters is the increasing synchronization of the domains, aims and interests of neoliberal capitalists, technocrats, artists, alternative practitioners and 'creatives'. To maintain a critical disposition and resist recuperation, urban activists can combine clear Rancièrian definitions of 'the political' and of 'democracy' with a sophistication of both disposition and strategy through hybridized integrations of dialectical utopianism, ambiguity, ambivalence, dissensus, over-identification, disciplinary autonomy and spatialization, taking care to focus on both the residual *and* the core of society.

Notes

1. DEBBAUT, Jan, Monique Verhulst and Pieter Vermeertel (eds.). *Out of the Studio!* (proceedings of the symposium 'Out of the studio!' held in Hasselt, Belgium on 26 - 28 October 2007, a symposium on art and public space). Z33, 2008.

2. MIESSEN, Markus. *From Written Word to Practiced Word* (Markus Miessen interviewed by Brendan Cormier & Arjen Oosterman). In Volume #36: Ways to Be Critical. July 2013, 101.

3. Given the explosion of discourse and practice related to both 'socially-engaged' artistic practices and urban issues, this work offers a limited perspective gravitated toward the *Reflect* series of the Netherlands Architecture Institute (NAI), which detected the phenomenon of the 'new commitment' in 2004, and manifested it in three primary research sources: *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design* (2004); *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City* (2007); and *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization* (2011). The influence of the Dutch context is also explained by its relatively vivid relationship with 'creative class' theory, as it exhibits both pioneering extensions to and heavy criticisms of the theory against a more complex background of welfare state erosion. In contrast, applications of 'creative class' theory in the U.S., where it has faced much less critical scrutiny, have been timid and tame.

4. As it turned out, this title also formed part of that of a collection of articles by Rancièr: RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Chronicles of Consensual Times* [*Chroniques des temps consensuels*]. Steven Corcoran (tr.). New York, Continuum, 2010 (2005).

5. SWYNGEDOUW, Erik. *The Post-Political City*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 65.

6. FUKUYAMA, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. The Free Press, New York, 1992. For a lineage of 'end of history' constructs going back to Hegel, see: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Afterthoughts on Posthistory*. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 213-219.

7. SWYNGEDOUW, Erik. *The Post-Political City*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 59.

8. 'Free market capitalism' continues to be a euphemism for what is really a cognitively dissonant mix of deregulatory libertarian rhetoric with regulatory policies designed to preserve 'monopoly' or 'plutocratic capitalism'. John D. Rockefeller, American industrial titan (Standard Oil) and the first billionaire (1916) is said to have throughout his life repeated the mantra: "Competition is a sin."

9. SWYNGEDOUW, Erik. *The Post-Political City*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 59.

10. E.g., Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, among others.

11. See: AURELI, Pier Vittorio and Martino Tattara. *The City as Political Form*. In DE BAAN, Christine, et al. *Visionary Power: Producing the Contemporary City*. Nai Publishers, 2007, 17; 27; and: SWYNGEDOUW, Erik. *The Post-Political City*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 59.

12. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 50.

13. *Ibid.*, 43; 45; 47; 49-54.

14. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Steven Corcoran (tr.). Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009 (2004), 25.

15. CORCORAN, Steven. In RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 5.
16. *Ibid.*, 54.
17. *Ibid.*, 141.
18. DE CAUTER, Lieven with Patrick Deboosere. *The Rise of Rogue States: The Construction of an Enemy After the Cold War*. 2006. In DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 29.
19. MOUFFE, Chantal. *The Return of the Political*. Verso, London and New York, 1993, 94.
20. MÉCHOULAN, Eric. *Introduction: On the Edges of Jacques Rancière*. In *SubStance*. #103, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2004, 4.
21. MOUFFE, Chantal. *An Agonistic Model of Democracy (excerpts)*. In JAHN, Marisa. *Pro+agonist: The Art of Opposition*. Northern Lights.mn, Walker Art Center, Spring 2012, 41.
22. Méchoulan notes the absence of the term 'defiguration' in Rancière's discourse. Instead, he consistently uses 'reconfiguration'. MÉCHOULAN, Eric. *Introduction: On the Edges of Jacques Rancière*. In *SubStance*. #103, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2004, 4-5.
23. FUKUYAMA, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. The Free Press, New York, 1992, 320.
24. LESAGE, Dieter. *Discourse as Resistance: Digression on Documenta 11*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven, Rubben de Roo, Karel Vanhaesebrouck, (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 65.
25. DE CAUTER, Lieven. *The New World Disorder*. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 9.
26. Refer to: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *The Capsular Civilization: The City in the Age of Fear*. Reflect #3, NAI, Rotterdam, March 2005; and DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Afterthoughts on Posthistory*. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 213-219.
27. JENCKS, Charles. *Why Critical Modernism?* In *Architectural Design*. Vol. 77, 2007, 140-145.
28. *Ibid.*, 142.
29. BAVO. *Democracy & the Neoliberal City: The Dutch Case*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 223.
30. VAN TOORN, Roemer. *Fresh Conservatism: Landscapes of Normality*. In *Quaderns 215*. Barcelona, 1998, <http://www.roemervantoor.nl/freshconservatis.html> [accessed in March, 2013], 1.
31. *Ibid.*, 2.
32. *Ibid.*, 2-3.
33. LESAGE, Dieter. *Cultural Resignation Today: On Over-Identification and Overstatement*. In BAVO. *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification*. Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 88-89.
34. DE CAUTER, Lieven. *From Ground Zero to Tahrir Square: The Post-9/11 Era Explained to Children*. 2011. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 18.
35. *Ibid.*, 16-17.
36. GÓMEZ-PEÑA, Guillermo and Tim Miller. *After 9/11: Two Veteran Performance Artists Swap Stories On Flying in Times of War*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven, et al. (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 59.
37. Lieven De Cauter provides a number of recent examples from the Belgian context in: *From Ground Zero to Tahrir Square: The Post-9/11 Era Explained to Children*. 2011. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 17. Also: BURGARDT, Tom. *Pentagon Rebrands Protest as 'Low-Level Terrorism'*. In *Dissident Voice*. 19 June 2009, <http://dissidentvoice.org/2009/06/pentagon-rebrands-protest-as-low-level-terrorism/> [accessed in June, 2013].
38. AHMED, Nafeez. *Pentagon bracing for public dissent over climate and energy shocks*. In *The Guardian*. 14 June 2013, <http://m.guardian.co.uk/environment/earth-insight/2013/jun/14/climate-change-energy-shocks-nsa-prism> [accessed in June, 2013].
39. Margaret Thatcher quoted in: BAVO. *The Freedom Not To Have a Wal-Mart: Contemporary Anti-Capitalist Documentary and Its Enlightened Critics*. In HOFMEYR, Benda (ed.). *The Wal-mart Phenomenon: Resisting Neo-liberalism through Art, Design and Theory*. Jan van Eyck Publishers, Maastricht, 2008.
40. *Ibid.*
41. BAVO. *Always Choose the Worst Option: Artistic Resistance & the Strategy of Over-Identification*. In BAVO (eds.). *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification*. Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007.
42. MAYER, Margit. *Urban Activism Today*. Keynote, 22nd International Network for Urban Research and Action, Tallinn, Estonia, 18 June 2012, http://inura2012tallinn.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/mayer2012_tallinn-talk_urban-activism-today_fin.pdf [accessed in April, 2013].
43. BAVO. *Always Choose the Worst Option: Artistic Resistance & the Strategy of Over-Identification*. In BAVO (eds.). *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification*. Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007.
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45. ROBLES-DURÁN, Miguel. *The Rise of Instant Activism, and How it's Transforming Architecture, Urbanism and the Way Our Cities are Built*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al., (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 184-190.
46. GIELEN, Pascal. *Art Scene – Control Machine*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al., (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 86.
47. Peter Sloterdijk quoted in: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 61.
48. DE CAUTER, Lieven et al. (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 15.
49. BISHOP, Claire. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. Verso, London and New York, 2012, 15.
50. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
51. MAYER, Margit. *Urban Activism Today*. Keynote, 22nd International Network for Urban Research and Action, Tallinn, Estonia, 18 June 2012, http://inura2012tallinn.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/mayer2012_tallinn-talk_urban-activism-today_fin.pdf [accessed in April, 2013].

52. ROBLES-DURÁN, Miguel. *The Rise of Instant Activism, and How it's Transforming Architecture, Urbanism and the Way Our Cities are Built*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al., (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization. Reflect #8*, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 185-186.
53. *Ibid.*, 185.
54. *Ibid.*, 187.
55. In the sense of artificially stimulating the 'natural' process of gentrification.
56. Peck refers to the broader "burgeoning business of manualizing local creativity strategies". PECK, Jamie. *Struggling with the Creative Class*. In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 29, 2005, 766.
57. Critics have shown that Florida regularly confuses causation with correlation as he attributes the cultural scene of economically prosperous cities to an influx of 'creatives' rather than recognizing it as a by-product of economically prosperous cities. See: OZIMEK, Adam. *Richard Florida Is Wrong About Creative Cities*. In *Forbes*. 23 May 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/modeledbehavior/2012/05/23/richard-florida-is-wrong-about-creative-cities/> [accessed in April, 2013]; and: MORETTI, Enrico. *The New Geography of Jobs*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.
58. PECK, Jamie. *Struggling with the Creative Class*. In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 29, 2005, 740.
59. FLORIDA, Richard. *Cities and the Creative Class*. Routledge, New York and London, 2005.
60. MARKUSEN, Ann. *Urban development and the politics of a creative class: evidence from a study of artists*. In *Environment and Planning A*. Vol. 38, 2006, 1921.
61. "He reminds his readers that they depend on an army of service workers trapped in 'low-end jobs that pay poorly because they are not creative jobs' while pointing soberly to the fact that the most creative places tend also to exhibit the most extensive forms of socio-economic inequality." PECK, Jamie. *Struggling with the Creative Class*. In *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. 29, 2005, 757.
62. Also see: GIELEN, Pascal. *Art Scene – Control Machine*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al. (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization. Reflect #8*, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 87-88.
63. OUDENAMPSEN, Merijn. *Back to the Future of the Creative City: Amsterdam's Creative Redevelopment and the Art of Deception*. In LOVINK, Geert and Ned Rossiter (eds.). *MyCreativity Reader: A Critique of Creative Industries*. Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2007, 174.
64. VON BORRIES, Friedrich and Matthias Böttger. *False Freedom: The Construction of Space in Late Capitalism*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City. Reflect #6*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 137-138.
65. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Steven Corcoran (tr.). Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009 (2004), 105.
66. VERWEIJ, Lucas and Ton Matton. *Engagement has become everyone's friend*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 167-168.
67. OUDENAMPSEN, Merijn. *AmsterdamTM, the City as a Business*. In BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City. Reflect #6*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 119.
68. Le Corbusier, quoted in: McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 25.
69. This structural condition is examined specifically in: FISCHER, Ole W. *Architecture, Capitalism and Criticality*. In CRYSLER, Grieg C. et al. (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*. SAGE, London, 2012, 56-57.
70. McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 25.
71. *Ibid.*
72. Discussed in: HEYNEN, Hilde. *Intervention in the relations of production, or sublimation of contradictions? On commitment then and now*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004. Also refer to Heynen's discussion of Constant's New Babylon in: HEYNEN, Hilde. *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique*. MIT Press, Cambridge and London, 1999, 173.
73. McLeod cites Tomás Maldonado, Kenneth Frampton and Martin Pawley: McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 27.
74. Political conservatives, led by the Reagan administration, launched an all-out assault on the social, deeply cutting funds for public housing (by 90%) and social programs which "virtually eliminated [architectural] commissions oriented toward the poor and minority groups". McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 29.
75. HEYNEN, Hilde. *Intervention in the relations of production, or sublimation of contradictions? On commitment then and now*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 45.
76. McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 29.
77. In a footnote, McLeod references Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "strategic essentialism" as an seemingly appropriate concept. *Ibid.*, 51. Also see: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *A Plea for Cosmopolitics*. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster. Reflect #9*, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 160-164.
78. McLeod is referring to the lack of diversity within the profession, as the dominant voices of the time were "almost always male, white, and middle class". But, if 'the political' is the forming of new collective voices, her concern can be applied broadly today. *Ibid.*, 53.
79. *Ibid.*, 34-36.
80. "Are radical formal statements necessarily the most appropriate means to shelter people whose lives are already filled with the disruption and frustration that deconstructivist architecture celebrates? Would scarce resources...be more appropriately spent...than on structural acrobatics?" *Ibid.*, 54.
81. *Ibid.*, 53.
82. A characterization by Thomas Crow. *Ibid.*, 54.
83. HEYNEN, Hilde. *Intervention in the relations of production, or sublimation of contradictions? On commitment then and now*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 46.
84. FISCHER, Ole W. *Architecture, Capitalism and Criticality*. In CRYSLER, Grieg C., et al. (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*. SAGE, London, 2012, 58-59.
85. Fischer also terms it 'post-theory'.
86. *Ibid.*, 56-60.
87. *Ibid.*, 58-60.

88. VAN TOORN, Roemer. *No More Dreams? The Passion for Reality in Recent Dutch Architecture...and Its Limitations*. In SAUNDERS, William S, (ed.). *New Architectural Pragmatism*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, http://www.roemervantoor.nl/Resources/Toorn,%20van_%20No%20More%20Dreams.pdf [accessed in March, 2013], 1.
89. *Ibid.*, 9.
90. A term borrowed from: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 66.
91. VAN TOORN, Roemer. *No More Dreams? The Passion for Reality in Recent Dutch Architecture...and Its Limitations*. In SAUNDERS, William S, (ed.). *New Architectural Pragmatism*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2007, http://www.roemervantoor.nl/Resources/Toorn,%20van_%20No%20More%20Dreams.pdf [accessed in March, 2013], 2; 8.
92. *Ibid.*, 4-5.
93. *Ibid.*, 5-7.
94. Here Van Toorn paraphrases Dutch writer Harm Tilman: *Ibid.*, 2.
95. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
96. *Ibid.*, 9.
97. BAVO (eds.). *Urban Politics Now! Re-Imagining Democracy in the Neoliberal City*. Reflect #6, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 7; 11.
98. *Ibid.*, 8.
99. Art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss's seminal article mapped the various paradigm shifts which redefined sculpture: KRAUSS, Rosalind. *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. In *October*. Vol. 8, Spring 1979. Pieterel Vermoortel analyzes the subsequent literature regarding the relation between art and public space in: DEBBAUT, Jan, Monique Verhulst and Pieterel Vermoortel (eds.). *Out of the Studio! Z33*, 2008.
100. KRAUSS, Rosalind. *Sculpture in the Expanded Field*. In *October*. Vol. 8, Spring 1979, 42.
101. Here Vermoortel cites Miwon Kwon: DEBBAUT, Jan, Monique Verhulst and Pieterel Vermoortel (eds.). *Out of the Studio! Z33*, 2008, 14.
102. FOSTER, Hal. *The artist as ethnographer?* In *Return of the Real, Art and Theory at the End of the Century*. 1996. Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 15.
103. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
104. BOURRIAUD, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les presses du réel, Paris, 1998, 13.
105. Stretcher. *Nicolas Bourriaud and Karen Moss* [interview]. In *Stretcher*. 18 October 2002, http://www.stretcher.org/features/nicolas_bourriaud_and_karen_moss/ [accessed in July, 2013].
106. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Steven Corcoran (tr.). Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009 (2004), 21; 42; 51.
107. BAVO. *Neoliberalism with Dutch Characteristics: The Big Fix-Up of the Netherlands and the Practice of Embedded Cultural Activism*. In BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (ed.), Marlene Dumas and Aernout Mik. *Citizens and Subjects: The Netherlands, for example*. JRP-Ringier, Zürich, 2007.
108. Miwon Kwon's *Once Place after Another; Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002) is quoted in: DEBBAUT, Jan Debbaut et al. (eds.). *Out of the Studio! Z33*, 2008, 14.
109. DERCON, Chris. *I speak on behalf of myself*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 94; also: BISHOP, Claire. *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*. In *October*. No. 110, Fall 2004, 55.
110. LAERMANS, Rudi. *The engaged city*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 66.
111. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Steven Corcoran (tr.). Polity Press, Cambridge, 2009 (2004), 52; 54.
112. This theme forms part of the book's opening essay. BOOMKENS, René. *Engagement after progress*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 15.
113. McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 38.
114. *Ibid.*
115. E.g., Jacques Derrida. BOOMKENS, René. *Engagement after progress*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 15.
116. DE CAUTER, Lieven. *Beyond postmodern melancholy: Critical pessimism versus 'glocal' panic—the 'new commitment'*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 32-33.
117. BOOMKENS, René. *Engagement after progress*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design*. Reflect #1, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 18-22.
118. HERTMANS, Stefan. *Aesthetics as a Service Club: A Few Thoughts on Commitment in the Arts*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al. (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 57-60.
119. VANHAESEBROUCK, Karel. *As Dead as a dodo? Commitment beyond Post-modernism*. In DE CAUTER, Lieven et al. (eds.). *Art and Activism in the Age of Globalization*. Reflect #8, NAI, Rotterdam, 2011, 21.
120. *Ibid.*, 21-22.
121. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 192.
122. *Ibid.*, 144.
123. *Ibid.*, 6; 139.
124. Roberto Unger, quoting Michel de Montaigne, is quoted by David Harvey in: HARVEY, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000, 188.
125. As McLeod and others have found, any serious alternative to the status quo will have to embody—at least in an interim sense—some common values, some notion of what 'port' we should aim to sail to. De Cauter's plea for an "ecological and global" 'cosmopolitics' illustrates a contemporary appeal to a degree of universalism. Harvey contends that the "contemporary 'radical' critique of universalism is sadly misplaced" and should rather direct itself on the institutions which "translate between universality and particularity rather than attack universalism per se". The dynamic aspect of the 'utopia of social process' can work to keep these mediating institutions "as open as possible". See: DE CAUTER, Lieven. *A Plea for Cosmopolitics*. In *Entropic Empire: On the City of Man in the Age of Disaster*. Reflect #9, nai010 publishers, Rotterdam, 2012, 160-164; also: HARVEY, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000, 242-243.
126. HARVEY, David. *Spaces of Hope*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2000, 183.

127. Ibid., 174. See Chapter 8, *The spaces of Utopia*. 133-181 and Chapter 9, *Dialectical Utopianism*. 182-198.
128. From a strategic perspective, 'commitment' is problematic because it "does not readily allow space for ambiguity and ambivalence". HEYNEN, Hilde. *Intervention in the relations of production, or sublimation of contradictions? On commitment then and now*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 42; 44.
129. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 115; 132-33; 149; 151.
130. MEDINA, Cuauhtémoc. *'the 21st century has just begun'...beyond the poetic and political divide*. In DEBBAUT, Jan et al. (eds.). *Out of the Studio! Z33*, 2008, 198.
131. Ibid., 198.
132. HEYNEN, Hilde. *Intervention in the relations of production, or sublimation of contradictions? On commitment then and now*. In *New Commitment: In Architecture, Art And Design. Reflect #1*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2004, 46; also: FISCHER, Ole W. *Architecture, Capitalism and Criticality*. In CRYSLER, Grieg C. et al. (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Architectural Theory*. SAGE, London, 2012, 68.
133. The polarized positions of art theorists Claire Bishop and Grant Kester are convincingly critiqued by Kim Charnley from this perspective, Charnley finding that by insisting on rigid 'consistency' (Bishop on the autonomy of art; Kester on ethics) both end up "neutralizing the political potential" automatically by 'expelling' the tension in the contradiction. CHARNLEY, Kim. *Dissensus and the politics of collaborative practice*. In *Art & the Public Sphere*. Vol.1(1), 2011, 37-38.
134. HOLSTON, James. *Spaces of Insurgent Citizenship*. In *Cities and Citizenship*. Duke University Press, 1999.
135. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 140.
136. For Rancière, aesthetic dissensus is a "paradoxical form of efficacy" of art because there is a "principal of indifference" created by the "aesthetic rupture", 'cut' or 'distance' which prohibits a predictable, direct connection between the intention of the artist, the "sensory presentation" of the work and the effect on the spectator or community or their "way of making sense of it" (the political dimension). Ibid., 15-16; 193.
137. RANCIÈRE, Jacques. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Steven Corcoran (ed., tr.). Continuum, Bodmin and King's Lynn, 2010, 16.
138. "This term was coined by Slavoj Žižek to denote the unique subversive strategy of the Slovenian avant-garde group Liabach in communist Yugoslavia of the eighties." BAVO (eds.). *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Over-Identification*. Episode Publishers, Rotterdam, 2007, 6-7; 28.
139. Ibid., 6.
140. Ibid., 30.
141. In this regard, BAVO cites Christoph Schlingensief's action in Vienna, *Bitte liebt Österreich! [Please Love Austria!]* (2000). Ibid., 34.
142. The spread of 'non-places' was already analyzed by Marc Augé in 1995. See: AUGÉ, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Verso, London and New York, 1995.
143. Dadara's *Likefest* is a artistic cultural critique of Facebook's 'like' button. See: DADARA. *Likefest*. Like 4 Real, 2013, <http://like4real.com/en/likefest> [accessed in June, 2013].

Fig. 1. Left: Rem Koolhaas's 'barcode flag' design for the European Union. Right: OMA project image. OMA. *EU BARCODE, NETHERLANDS, ROTTERDAM, 2001*. <http://oma.eu/projects/2001/eu-barcode/> [accessed in August, 2013].

Fig. 2. FREEE (art collective). *The Economic Function Of Public Art Is To Increase The Value Of Private Property*. 2004, <http://freee.org.uk/works/the-economic-function-of-public-art-is-to-increase-the-value-of-private-property/> [accessed in February, 2014].

Fig. 3. A selection of images used by Mary McLeod in her article. McLEOD, Mary. *Architecture and Politics in the Reagan Era: From Postmodernism to Deconstructivism*. In *Assemblage*. No. 8, February 1989, 22-59.

Fig. 4. Artist Carsten Höller has installed several playground-inspired tube slides of various configurations in art galleries. HÖLLER, Carsten. *Untitled (Slide)*. 2011 (at the New Museum), <http://underscoreg.com/art-review/experience-is-not-art> [accessed in August, 2013]; http://www.artnet.com/magazine/news/corbett/carsten-holler-at-the-new-museum-10-26-11_detail.asp?picnum=4 [accessed in August, 2013].

Fig. 5. Hermann Knoflacher's 'Walkmobile' is a hybrid critique utilizing spatialization and over-identification. KNOFLACHER, Hermann. *Gehzeug [Walkmobile]*. 1975, <http://urban-activism-eng.blogspot.be/2009/09/walkmobile.html> [accessed in March, 2013].

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Biography

Jon Geib es un urbanista, arquitecto y, ahora, un PhD investigador en el Departamento de Arquitectura de la Universidad Tecnológica de Chalmers en Gothenburg, Suecia. Originalmente se formó como arquitecto en los EE.UU., recibió una maestría en urbanismo y planificación estratégica en Lovaina, Bélgica. Motivar a su investigación es una crítica interdisciplinaria de la supresión de la percepción de "exceso" (por ejemplo, el ornamento, el desorden, complejidad) a través de inexpresividad, homogeneización, aplanamiento o alisando. Preocupaciones relacionadas incluyen: los cismas con la historia y la artesanía; enfoques poéticos y utópicos; la hegemonía del pensamiento econométrico y el tamaño (y el reglamento correspondiente), y perspectivas humanistas especialmente preocupados con la escala humana. Dentro del proyecto de 'Marie Curie Actions', 'TRADERS' ('El entrenamiento de arte y diseño en la participación de los investigadores para el espacio público'), su proyecto de tesis doctoral, tentativamente titulado "Texturizar la participación mediante el diseño de disensual diálogos", tiene como objetivo desarrollar diversos métodos de diálogo disensual través un espectro de procesos de diseño "participativos", diseñado para volver a abrir los espacios de la imaginación [político].

Jon Geib is an Urbanist, Architect and, currently, a PhD researcher in the Department of Architecture of Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, Sweden. Originally trained as an architect in the U.S., he received a masters degree in urbanism and strategic planning in Leuven, Belgium. Motivating his research is a cross-disciplinary critique of the suppression of perceived 'excess' (e.g., ornament, disorder, complexity) via blankness, homogenization, flattening or smoothing. Related concerns include: the schisms with history and craft; poetic and utopian approaches; the hegemony of econometric thinking and size (and corresponding regulation); and humanist perspectives especially concerned with human scale. Within the Marie Curie Actions project, 'TRADERS' ('Training art and design researchers in participation for public space'), his PhD project, tentatively titled "Texturing Participation Through the Design of Dissensual Dialogues", aims to develop diverse methods of dissensual dialogue across a spectrum of 'participatory' design processes, designed to reopen spaces of [political] imagination.