

EAAE Conference 2005

Leuven, Belgium, 26-28 May 2005

The Rise of the Heterotopia

On Public Space and the Architecture of the Everyday in a Post-Civil Society

This call for papers aims to provoke contributions focusing on the significance of public space today, in view of, on the one hand, recent discourses that lament the 'loss of public space' (Sorkin) and, on the other, contrasting opinions that advocate new forms of public space located in private spaces for collective use (shopping malls or sports centers) or in alternative spaces such as wastelands or parking lots (Crawford). Whereas there are serious voices warning of the alarming developments in society at large, which seem to threaten the basic assumptions on which democracy and the welfare state are founded, others tend to take a more optimistic position in accepting the challenge to design for new programs in the realm of leisure, sports, shopping or transportation.

The concept of the heterotopia - a notion introduced by Michel Foucault in the late sixties, however very conspicuously underdeveloped in his own work - takes on a new urgency and relevance in light of contemporary developments and the ensuing debate on public space. The concept of heterotopia seems to offer the opportunity to both recapitulate and redirect the ongoing debate.

The rise of the network society: place and non-place

Michel Foucault introduced the tentative term heterotopia to point to various institutions and places that interrupt the apparent continuity and normality of ordinary everyday space. In contrast to utopia that inverts the normal existing society but does not exist as such, the heterotopia refers to a set of really existing inversions. Because they inject alterity into the sameness, the common place, the topicality of everyday society, Foucault calls these places hetero-topic - "des espaces autres". When we review all the examples mentioned in his lecture - the school, military service, the honeymoon, old people's homes, psychiatric institutions, prisons, cemeteries, the stage, the cinema, libraries and museums, fairs and carnivals, holiday camps, hammams, saunas, the motel, brothels, the Jesuit colonies, the ship - we get an idea of the vastness of the concept. Foucault's concept of heterotopia opens up a new field, a simultaneously archaic and modern way of organizing space. In the introduction to his

unpublished lecture, Foucault evoked a history of space and pointed clearly to the rise of network space. Today Foucault's analysis reaches its obvious conclusion. Within the network space the heterotopia has to a large extent changed its function. Rather than interrupting normality, heterotopias now realize or simulate common experience of place (common place, everyday topicality) in the non-place of the space of flows. In other words, a first layer of the heterotopia is the tension between topicality and a-topicality, place and non-place.

The reinvention of the everyday: the ordinary and the extra-ordinary

The reinvention of the discourse on the everyday, largely coinciding with the English translation of Lefebvre and de Certeau, is inspired by a discontent both with the elitism of contemporary neo-avant-garde architecture as well as with the shameless commercialization of popular culture. At the same time, the discourse on the everyday is an attempt to counter Foucault's emphasis on the extra-ordinary by mapping the vital potentialities of the ordinary (McLeod). The concept of heterotopia is positioned between the ordinary and the extraordinary. The question to be asked, however, is whether the discourse on the everyday does not remain an aesthetization of urbanity and whether any attempt towards an architecture of the everyday does not merely reinforce the ever more encompassing simulation of normality. Or, in other words, can the everyday survive today outside of the heterotopia.

The privatization of public space: oikos - agora

The polis, the ideal of the city/state, tries to realize the good life via an equilibrium between oikos (private sphere, household, hence economy) and agora (public sphere, the place of politics). 'Economization' is the erosion of the distinction between these constitutive terms of the polis, as is clear in the term 'privatization'. It is a sure sign of a crisis of 'politics'. The rise of the term 'governance' instead of government is a symptom of this crisis, and 'management' its apologetics. In this context the evident embrace of governance within urbanist discourse appears far less innocent.

In spite of its relation of alterity and deviance, the heterotopia is part and parcel of the polis and of the characteristic set of negotiations between the private and the public sphere, between nature and culture, *zoé* and *bios*, by which the polis is defined. Even the 'heterotopia of crisis' (e.g. the elderly home, the hospital) and the heterotopia of deviance (e.g. the prison) or any heterotopia one can imagine - the beach, the brothel, the cinema, the theater, the mall, the theme park - all of these heterotopias contain a moment of 'catharsis' with respect to the *nomos* of normality (such as the brothel is the natural counterpart to marriage, or the clinic the counterpart to our sporting life). Most heterotopias could be compared to rites de passages and in this function they reinforce the coherence of society. While often particularly exclusive, heterotopias belong to the inclusive character of the polis. In the post-civil society (Jameson), the heterotopia resurfaces as a strategy to reclaim places of otherness on the inside of an economized 'public' life.

The post-civil society: the camp as paradigm

After the proliferation of heterotopias that provided normality in the (atopic) network space, we now see a proliferation of camp-like situations. Traces of a growing awareness of these new realities are beginning to appear in contemporary theory, architecture and urbanism. The camp, however, we encounter before and after the polis. Before the polis: the encampment figures as the forerunner of the city and indeed of all human settlement as such. After the polis: the camp appears where the polis or civil society is suspended or dissolving, as we witness in the concentration camp, the refugee camp, the transit camp for asylum seekers or illegal immigrants. The camp is, according to Giorgio Agamben, a space outside the *nomos*, a space that is not like a prison an extension/institution of the law, but rather a space that is extra-territorial to the *nomos*, a space where the law is suspended. While the encampment emerges out of the nature state and moves towards the city, and therefore fulfills a proto-political role, the camp announces the relapse into the nature state and marks the disintegration of society in the state of exception.

The camp is, in other words, the situation in which the division between private and public is suspended. It is the space where the city is annihi-

lated and the citizen reduced to bare life. Today, we see such situations arise around us in the figure of the illegal immigrant, the people roaming around the closed centre of Sansgate and in the extralegal/post-human-right status of the inmates of Guantanamo. In the urban landscape we observe the rise of similar 'terrains vagues' and twilight zones, such as the camp sites where fourth-world people dwell in a 'permanently nomadic' situation. In that respect both camp and heterotopia are two phases and faces of the after life of the (welfare)state. Integral urbanism was an attempt to control the tools for welfare within the state under the aegis of the plan. In the network society, 'splintering urbanism' has to rely on the creation of heterotopias to sustain its integrating gesture. The camp, in contrast, is the symptom of a postcivil urbanism, which follows the disintegration of the (welfare)state and the economization of politics.

A call for cases

In this colloquium we hope to explore the question of public space, taking the concept of the heterotopia in order to articulate the utopic/dystopic dimension of public/private, topic/a-topi, ordinary/extraordinary contemporary spaces. The notion 'heterotopia' offers a device to reorder the different strata of the current debate and to cut across the deceptively stable divisions that structure these strata.

We invite papers exploring various cases showing the heterotopic and camp-like logic manifest in the contemporary urban landscape. Besides such diagnostic case studies, we welcome more therapeutic approaches. Can architecture and urbanism take a critical stance vis-à-vis tendencies such as the increasing privatization of formerly public spaces, or vis-à-vis the marginalization or even exclusion of certain groups (refugees, immigrants)? How does the profession deal with phenomena like gated communities, transit zones, refugee camps and other effects of globalization? Can the tradition of an emancipating project that fueled so many discourses on architecture and urbanism in the past be sustained under the growing pressure of capitalist and neo-liberal forces? What is the place and status of gating and gated communities at the crossroads of heterotopia and camp, in the making and breaking of the polis? Is the new fortified architecture a heterotopia or a camp? In short:

what is the role of architecture and urbanism in a post-civil society, in a world where the welfare state and the state in general are dissolving?

We would especially welcome papers exploring some of the following (hetero)topoi:

- **The museum - the theme park**

Are we heading for the 'all-in-heterotopia' where the museum is becoming a theme park, and the theme park a museum, the mall encapsulating both theme park and cultural center?

Under the aegis of fashion, every space becomes exhibitionist space (see Koolhaas' Prada). On the other hand, the museum has proved to be an almost magic lever to revitalize entire neighborhoods, even cities, with Bilbao as its ultimate icon.

- **Squares and terraces**

The mediterraneanization of the city is by now a well known phenomenon. Although it is fashionable amongst academics/intellectuals to look down on this process, one cannot deny that the reclaiming of squares and the blooming proliferation of terraces has injected a new sense of conviviality into formerly derelict areas of the city. There seem to be two schools: those who favor a grand style and often grand gesture modern/post-modern design and others who choose for a nostalgia low brow renovation of squares and street corners.

- **Parks**

Since Frederic Law Olmsted, parks have been used as decompression machines and space of convivial social control, exposing the urban masses to the socializing effect of civilized leisure and recovery in artificial nature. The claim that the days of the park are over (Geuze), seems to be defied by the park as the success formula of contemporary urban design.

Furthermore, landscaping is the one happy branch of urbanism (deserving its own name 'landscape urbanism'). As Koolhaas states: "While architecture has to fight hard for every square meter, landscape stretches out over acres. Three dimensional megalomaniac stories that have become dubious in architecture are, as inscription on a patient and tolerant terrain, respectable and plausible."

- **The airport/the terminal**

Not only are cities more and more resembling airports - without center, identity or history, airports also seem to have the ambition to become cities or at least malls. Is this tendency a desperate attempt at arresting the space of flows by overloading its nodes and terminals with the rituals of place or is it the natural evolution of an alienating eerie non-place, so much invested in the mass of people passing through, that it needs to become a place to stay. Yet another 'all-in-heterotopia'?

- **The fortress**

There is a deep rooted logic of gating and fortressing in our society, caused both by the sharp dualization of society as well as by a tendency to individualism and social distinction. Moreover, beyond the well known phenomenon of gated communities, we see the rise of the aesthetics of the fortress both in individual houses (metamorphosis) as well as in housing complexes. Gating as social defense is redressed with the attributes of disneyfication. In a society in which marketing -the selling of dreams and simulations- is all pervasive, it seems inevitable that dwelling will take on heterotopian overtones.

- **The camp**

There is nothing to be found for architecture in the camp, besides a gruesome confrontation with its abject underside. Even if we are fully aware that there is no way to make the camp, properly speaking, the object of architecture and urbanism, one of the challenges of the twenty-first century might nevertheless be to think how architecture and urbanism can respond to the rise of camp and camp-like situations, detention centers, refugee camps, transit camps, etc. If we find the camp both before and after the polis, architecture should always try to go beyond the camp - but how?

Timetable

- Submission of abstracts: **1 October 2004**
- Notification of acceptance: **15 November 2004**
- Submission of full papers: **1 March 2005**
- Colloquium: **26-28 May 2005**

This conference is jointly organized by:

OSA – Onderzoeksgroep Stedenbouw en Architectuur, KULeuven, Belgium

Capaciteitsgroep Stedenbouw, TU-Eindhoven, the Netherlands

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