

## GLOBALIZATION to renew from within

Roemer van Toorn

When I was asked to moderate this forum on globalization—given the context of Lars Lerup’s thinking and research, and what we, as friends here today, seem to share—I thought that we all look for routes to renew architecture (and with it society) from within. But before I ask the forum members for their opinions, and their answers to my question as to which projects, according to them, are moving either in the wrong or right direction, I would like to highlight a few issues.

Late capitalism in the twenty-first century has become Deleuzian. Disorganization, deregulation, privatization (of property and free time), and the free market economy, together with globalization and the end of the nation state, have generated the critical condition we are in today. Neither linear nor dialectical logics structure our society today; rather, rhizomic and bio-political systems do.

The once progressive Deleuzian idea that the “And” (multiplicity) will liberate us from any totalitarianism has generated a whole other idea: the bewildering interdependence of our times. In fact, a new specter is haunting the world—namely, the specter of the And, of additivity, of a world of cohabitation and intermixing, in short, of And, And, And.... It is true we live

in a disorderly order, not just a bewildering disorder, but this order is also highly interdependent, full of hidden centralities, a network society intermixed with spontaneity and control as a kind of open source ideology.

### The classical object is dead

The good news is that, as a result of this, the classical object has died. I never believed in the classical object in the first place, but in our globalized world, it simply doesn’t work anymore. Understanding the world through either the hard sciences (“matter-of-facts” of the object) or the soft sciences (projections on the object) is no longer appropriate. An object is more than the sum of its technical facts and its aesthetics. Instead of trying to define what an object (or form) is, or what you can project onto it—which is almost impossible today—we have to look at the performance of a thing, what kind of relations it activates and produces in its use, what its agency is.

Until now most architects have been trained to see the objects they create through the lens of either the soft (social) or hard (technical) viewpoint, or both. And indeed, in the *classical* cultural industry—both in terms of domination and resistance—mediation was primarily by means of representation. In determining their audience, architects slotted subjects into topical areas such as the reproductive cycle of capitalism, the nuclear family, the proper place of home, etc. In the *global* cultural industry today, it is the mediation of things that dominates. Products no longer circulate as identical objects that are already fixed, static, and discrete, determined by the intention of

their producers. Instead, cultural entities move and change in their circulation. In this global circulation, cultural entities take on a dynamic of their own: with this movement, value is added.

In the classical cultural industry, production took place as a Fordist and labor-intensive production of identity. In the global cultural industry, it takes place as a post-Fordist and design-intensive production of difference (often with the help of subversive techniques). Goods become informational, property becomes intellectual, and the economy becomes more generally cultural. And the image, previously separated from the superstructure in the industrial age, becomes “matter-image.” Late capitalism in our twenty-first century has indeed become Deleuzian.

In this information society based on difference, hybridity, and mutating conditions, design (and with it architecture) plays a dominant role; in fact, it does so to such an extent that the pun of Henk Oosterling’s, “Dasein ist Design,” has become reality. More than ever—with the help of globalization—we have started to understand that objects are disputed assemblages, or gatherings, thrown into this world. To illustrate what I mean, take a recent project of Rem Koolhaas’s. Koolhaas—and luckily several other architects, too—understands that we live in the global cultural industry. Instead of creating classical objects, these architects create what I call “quasi-objects,” objects that communicate with the world and with the people who use them. What matters to them is not what the object *is*, but how it can *perform*.

Koolhaas’s Prada pavilion in the city of Seoul is perhaps wild and strange, but it is not a spectacular icon of hypnotic beauty. Instead of sitting uncomfortably aloof in its urban context, it invites the public to use it, to occupy it, to activate it. While it accommodates what we, as the public, are familiar with, it also sets us free. It’s an assemblage of four forms that allow and provoke different events, inviting different users to give it meaning and to occupy it, from those in fashion and art, to program-makers and cinema-goers, to passersby. It is not a form you can understand from within its own architectural/technical logic—it is not self-referential, or specially made for and by architects—but it is also not there to represent the Prada brand. It instead becomes operational through the social relations its aesthetic complex allows. Its constantly changing identities give space to human activity. Its image is not intended to fix identities nor to propagate the pure or the absolute, but—like a dialogue—to challenge us to open up new possibilities.

Moreover, the Prada pavilion establishes what we might call a “counter-public” space, a public space that establishes effects of use, as opposed to those public spaces that are run by the world of shopping and ruled by techniques of surveillance. A counter-public space is not driven by consensus and control (through design), but strives to liberate the public from its clichés without disqualifying them. The object is popular in a new way, creating an idea of the public anew. It brings different contradictory spaces together to allow dialogue and exchanges to happen between them and with their surroundings without the need to classify

or to fix the social relations. This building by Koolhaas intimates another idea of democracy in space. The quasi-object is establishing what Lars Lerup found in Houston, namely, an amorous communion full of combat. It is, in my words, a space and place where contesting realities are renegotiated through interdependent “And” formations.

### A Fresh Conservatism is born

When you make shapes, assemblages, or quasi-objects, you are indeed “playing on” the ambiguities of our Deleuzian twenty-first century. Everything moves. But are quasi-objects—with their new grammar and rhetoric—by default always enlightening or consistently bold experiments in what it could mean to be modern in our twenty-first century? I don’t think so. Now that late capitalism has become Deleuzian, we face a complex problem: the birth of a Fresh Conservatism.

Many contemporary heterogeneous constructions (and their situations) do not escape what I have described as Fresh Conservatism.<sup>1</sup> They construct apolitical conflicts that bring about a lot of heterogeneous desire without any directionality beyond celebrating the neoliberal logic of banal cosmopolitanism. When I started to look for innovative practices operating within the real today, I came across the dilemma of Fresh Conservatism, characterized by the following aspects:

1. *The collection or catalogue* in which heterogeneous elements are lumped together, not in order to provoke a critical

<sup>1</sup> Roemer van Toorn, “Fresh Conservatism,” in *Quaderns, (Re) Activa Architecture, No. 219 (Barcelona: Actar, 1998)*.

clash nor even to play on the undecidability of their critical power, but as a positive act of gathering that attempts to collect the traces and testimonies of a common world and a common history. The equality of all items—works of art, private photographs, objects of use, ads, commercial videos, etc.—is here the equality present in the archives of the life of a community.

2. *The joke* in which the conjunction of the heterogeneous elements is still staged as a tension of antagonistic elements pointing to some secret, but the secret no longer exists. The dialectical tension is reduced to a game, playing on the indiscernible difference between procedures unveiling secrets of power and ordinary procedures of delegitimization produced by power itself, the latter a new form of domination by the media, commercial entertainment, or advertising.

3. *The invitation*, which is all about interactivity. Our “one-seater place” is invited to experiment with new relations between community and individuality, proximity and distance, all systematized in the concept of “relational aesthetics,” the art of creating not works or objects, but ephemeral situations prompting new forms of relationships.

4. *The mystery*, which does not mean enigma nor mysticism, but instead sets forth a familiarity with the strange without activating something outside the architecture itself. The Schaulager is a traditional museum with mystery as a front, while SANAA’s Toledo museum and its radical transparency, cutting through the outer layers to reveal the otherwise invisible worlds within, intensifies the

mystery rather than opening it up.

### So what else?

As I have just explained, simply embracing the conventions in a fresh (cool or provocative/contradictory) manner is not enough; generating a certain kind of stammering (or pause) through the use of foreign elements to stimulate reflexive events within a work is not sufficient. Because it is unclear where you are being liberated from, and who and what is being liberated, it is also unclear what kind of situated freedoms are being enacted. I believe we are in need of a more refined approach. You can call it a return of the political or aesthetics as a form of politics. This aesthetics is based on dissensus and equality. Its creation of new subjectives involves a technique of distantiation based on the sensible—what you could call common sense.

It goes without saying that architecture and the city do not lend themselves to parliamentary politics: constellations scattered across space cannot give voting advice, let alone convey messages about the social or political ramifications of a given problem. The organization and architecture of the city, in fact, is political precisely in the distance it preserves from those parliamentary functions. Instead architecture is political in how it frames projects in a certain kind of space-time sensorium that defines different modalities (i.e., being together or apart, organizing inside or outside, operating in the lead or toward the middle). The architecture of the city is political in the way it reveals certain things in its aesthetic and organizational syntax, or conceals them by means of specific articulations (i.e.,

orientation, suggestions of movement, directions and concentrations). The architecture of the city influences the states of being, feeling, hearing, and speaking that together create the sensation of existence as a constellation in space.

Bertold Brecht’s political theatre remains as a kind of archetype in the way it negotiated the relation between opposites—blending scholarly political teaching with the enjoyment of the musical or the cabaret, discussing allegories of Nazi power in blank verse that describes gangsters cornering the cauliflower market, etc. Indeed, the main tactic of politics is the encounter and possible clash of heterogeneous elements. This is supposed to provoke a break in our perception, to disclose the underlying connectivity of things hidden behind everyday reality, and to provide alternative liberating solutions. It furthermore does this on the basis of equality and not through the master/teacher relation postulated by spectacular architecture. Architectural design that is political uses forms of collision or dissensus (forms that put together heterogeneous elements at the level of the images and experiential space) to open new situations of freedom. It does this by continuously playing on the boundary (and the absence of a boundary) between architecture and not-architecture. This involves a continuous process of border crossings between high and low culture, architecture and commodity, etc.

Architecture having this much needed political and ethical stance shares certain aspects:

1. *It aspires to “become popular.”* In our

neoliberal society, there is no public anymore: the people are missing. So rather than address or represent the people alleged to be already there (but are not), we should help in the invention of a people. We give this people a voice by creating imaginary landscapes, structuring the platforms where stories can be told through a nascent public sphere. Just as Brecht's goal was not to *be* popular in box office or television ratings terms, but to *become* popular—that is, to create a new public for a new theatre linked to modes of social life—our focus should be on transforming rather than satisfying desire.

2. *It knows who the enemy is.* One of our greatest enemies is the modern world of stupefying banality, routine, and mechanical reproduction or automatism. The image is not the problem, but rather the cliché is. As designers we have to help people to look again. "If the visual keeps us from seeing (because it prefers that we decode, that we decipher, that we 'read'), the image always challenges us to carry out a montage with others, with some other. Because in the image, as in democracy, there is 'free play,' unfinished pieces, gaps, openings."<sup>2</sup>

3. *It seeks open systems that challenge the status quo and invite the user in.* Through habituation, meaning can be established without a final conclusion; we should opt for such stammerings within a system. Stammerings reject a totalizing aesthetic, one where all "tracks" are enlisted in the service of a single overwhelming feeling.

2 Serge Daney, "Before and After the Image," *Revue des Etudes Palestiniennes* 40 (Summer 1991); reprinted in English translation in *Documenta X catalogue*.

Instead of what architecture is, it should be about what architecture lets us do.

4. *It makes strange the lived social world.* We create stammerings through certain kinds of foreign effects that free socially conditioned phenomena from the stamp of familiarity, revealing them as other than natural.

5. *It overcomes dichotomies.* Entertainment or laughter can be useful—pleasure is not only about consumption—and education (even when it seems difficult) can be pleasurable. Convention (i.e., commodification) and liberation can travel together. It is not a matter of either/or logics in space—the virtual versus the real, the near versus the far, the fictional versus the real, the object versus the subject, dystopia versus utopia—but about being-in-space, which is intrinsically impure, unfinished, and full of conjunctions and relations.

It will take too long to discuss these criteria by examining specific projects. But we should not overlook the much needed ethical directionality a work can enact, one that addresses the urgencies<sup>3</sup> of our time while it creates new forms of liberation. Only by taking such a political stance can we succeed in surpassing Fresh Conservatism.

3 *These urgencies include the looming threat of ecological catastrophe, the inappropriateness of private property and intellectual property, the socio-ethical implications of new techno-scientific developments, and (last but not least) the new forms of social apartheid expressed in new walls and slums.*

## A RESPONSE TO ROEMER VAN TOORN

### the problem of circulation

Curt Gambetta

Globalization calls up images of movement and deterritorialization, pressing on us as a variously euphoric and mundane arrival of the new. "Deregulation, privatization, and the free market economy"—forces that Roemer Van Toorn uses as shorthand for the present—invoke dynamics of circulation and exchange that are not only economic but also social and cultural. The mobility and movement of commodities, representational infrastructures, and people is undoubtedly not an exclusive marker of the present phase of globalization. The "entropic" ruptures of the present provoke transformations that unveil as much the power of mediating forces (such as, to give a recent example, the increasing financialization of all aspects of economic life) as they do the fact that much of our cultural landscape, including architecture, is always already contaminated by alien forces and figures.<sup>1</sup>

Much has been said in both social and

1 Pheng Cheah, "Ground of Comparison," in *Grounds of Comparison: Around the Work of Benedict Anderson*, edited by Pheng Cheah and Jonathan Culler (New York: Routledge, 2003).

architectural theory about the sheer proliferation and movement of things since the 1980s and the concomitant pressures brought to bear upon existing social imaginaries and politico-economic forms such as the welfare state, models of import-substitution industrialization, and so forth.<sup>2</sup> Though economists have long been invested in theorizing circulation in and of itself, architectural discourse and even social theory have until recently read the global experience of circulation through the problematic of meaning and interpretation.<sup>3</sup> Here architectural production and discourse resonates with social theory, not surprising considering the longer history of architecture as a mode of cultural critique. From the 1970s onward, circulation was more explicitly acknowledged by positioning the architectural imagination as a project of cultural translation, invested in the play of signs and the appropriation of anything from the detritus of popular culture to the spoils of historical precedent. The particular project of cultural mediation within architecture had a range of cultural fields from which to draw, whether for documentation or critique, from the vernacular to popular culture to processes of cross-cultural exchange. In the third world, looking from outside (as in transnational architectural festival circuits), this project was staged through questions of identity, vernacular culture, and the looming figure of nationalism.

2 *I focus here on circulation as a largely transnational process, but this does not preclude similar dilemmas taking place within smaller-scale networks, be these national or other. These spheres are inextricable.*

3 Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14 (1): 191–213.

If in social theory, as Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma write, circulation was understood as a process that transmits meaning rather than as a constitutive act or culturally transformative process,<sup>4</sup> architecture has a similar, somewhat unarticulated legacy of seeing circulation as an empty, neutered space through which things traverse. I argue here that seeing circulation in this way, as a mere tool of transmission, belies the role that the dynamic of circulation plays in both mediating architectural production and positioning architecture as an assemblage that translates cultural realities. As a result, we are primarily left with an assessment of images, modalities of building, and other catalysts of architectural production that move and circulate, rather than an account of the effects, disturbances, and mutations that occur through time.

This has had a number of consequences for architectural discourse. One, we are haunted by the dialectic of original and copy (think of all the muttering about the derivative content of architecture being produced in countries such as India and China). Two, the product of circulation is located in the mass-produced, generic city, suffusing its landscape with contradiction and irony.<sup>5</sup> Though an in-depth consideration of the generic is beyond the

4 *Ibid.*, 191–192. My use of Lee and LiPuma's argument is admittedly analogical and leaves aside some of the compelling content of their argument about the emergence of what they call "cultures of circulation" around infrastructures such as the machinery print capitalism (newspapers, novels) or, more recently, financial tools such as derivatives.

5 Rem Koolhaas, "The Generic City," in *S, M, L, XL: Office for Metropolitan Architecture*, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau, edited by Jennifer Sigler (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997).

purview of my comments, I do think that the conceptual frame of contradiction is untenable within the experience of global modernity. For whom is something a contradiction? Might these often ironic encounters and juxtapositions point to other forces embedded within the dynamic of circulation itself? Farès El-Dahdah<sup>6</sup> and Van Toorn raise crucial questions about architecture as a synthetic practice that both affects and is affected by dynamics of circulation, calling into question the authority of these narratives.

If Van Toorn endeavors a contemporary critique, El-Dahdah conducts an effective history of cosmopolitanism by examining the architectural vanguard of Brazil at a particular juncture of nation building and denationalization. Though El-Dahdah's subject is primarily Lucio Costa, he situates Costa's practice in a larger apparatus of research, pedagogy, and discourse so that Costa represents, as El-Dahdah argues, a cosmopolitanism that looks both forward and backwards. The stage is Brazil, just prior to World War II. Lucio Costa has switched camps. Once disposed to a neocolonial style, Costa, then director of the school of fine arts in Rio de Janeiro, declares his new allegiance to a modernist paradigm. From then on, he strikes at the project of neocolonial aesthetics as an inadequate architectural program for Brazil's new epoch.

Though Costa's quick change of allegiance suggests a turning away from the past, the coming body of work and discourse associated with Costa would present a more complicated picture of what it

6 Regrettably, Farès El-Dahdah's contribution to the Kennon Symposium is not reproduced in this issue.

meant to assume a modern imagination in a moment where radical disavowal was unsuited to the preservationist demands of the present. Costa was director of the architectural division of Brazil's federal bureau for historic preservation, founded in 1937 and housed, not without significance, in the iconic Ministry of Education and Health building. El-Dahdah tells us: "The same modern architects who fought for a better adequacy between architecture and new construction technology were busy studying, cataloguing, legislating, and preserving what they saw as Brazil's past. Putting it simply, if historic Brazil looks the way it does today, it is because architects who swore by Le Corbusier spent their time cleaning up eighteenth-century fabric...."<sup>7</sup>

At the same time that Costa and his ilk were working toward a project of preservation of national cultural heritage, Costa, El-Dahdah explains, was arguing for a double project of cosmopolitan nationalism (a solidarity with other nationalities, a commonly held break from habit and custom shared by others) and denationalization altogether. Costa was himself attuned to architecture's responsibility to new forms of circulation, knowing full well their implications for notions of social and cultural collectivity and belonging.<sup>8</sup> One could not avoid the forces pressuring national imaginaries, infrastructures, and economies. In Costa's words, "the extraordinary facilities for swift information and communication, media, plane, cinema

7 Farès El-Dahdah. (Paper presented at Everything Must Move conference, Rice University, March 21, 2009).

8 Here it would be productive to investigate how Costa saw architecture itself as a socially mediating artifact.

and radio [that] abolish the isolation [of] countries and provinces. These are not fantasies, *these are facts that architecture cannot not examine.*"<sup>9</sup>

Though Costa's project appears to register a contradiction of intent (how does one denationalize and construct the nation at the same time?), I read this staging of the modern as the production of a "discrepant modernity" whose terms are not necessarily contradictory.<sup>10</sup> Timothy Mitchell offers us a compelling model: though modernity "reproduces social worlds" through techniques of representation such as the census, techniques of planning, etc., its authority or originality is subject to instability and rupture. "Every act of staging or representation [of modernity] is open to the possibility of misrepresentation, or at least of parody or misreading." Difference is produced by these representational disjunctures: "Every performance of the modern is the production of this difference, and each such difference represents the possibility of some shift, displacement, or contamination."<sup>11</sup> Modernity is thus not a singular stage, as in conventional Marxist teleology, but a staging open to a constitutive instability.

In this sense, the Ministry of Health and Education building was an artifact of disjuncture, conceived through a back-and-forth between Costa's Brazilian team and Le Corbusier's office in Paris. Moreover, Costa's modernism was marked by constant references to Corbusier and oth-

9 El-Dahdah.

10 See: Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity," in *Questions of Modernity*, edited by Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

11 *Ibid.*, 23.

ers, as in a number of domestic and hotel projects that seemed to borrow faithfully from local construction techniques but whose ultimate reference point was Corbusier's work in South America and Europe. Rather than read Costa's cannibalization as derivative, I read his project as one that wrestled precisely with the contaminations and ruptures produced by the circulation of representational technologies such as architecture. Quotations they may be, but when read against the wider pedagogical and architectural project of the Ministry building, they are inseparable from the imagination of a national modernity that has drawn a line of continuity between the historical resources of the past and the technological endeavors of the present.<sup>12</sup>

If El-Dahdah's revisiting of Costa turns in part around an inflection within the architectural object (the consequences more of circulation than of particular circulatory forms in any material sense), Van Toorn's analysis looks to the performativity of the architectural object and to the circulatory forms that animate its presence in

12 It is too easy to dismiss or bemoan the national underpinnings at work here, a tendency in the wider landscape of intellectual culture that presents members of the southern hemisphere with less a choice than a form of blackmail. Partha Chatterjee writes: "For those who cannot say 'my Europe,' the choice seems to be to allow oneself to be encompassed within global cosmopolitan hybridities or to relapse into hateful ethnic particularities." In other words, accept universality or lapse into the exclusions of ethnic nationalism. Given the experience of political movements, such as the Dalit movement in India (Chatterjee's example), that make claims precisely around ethnic identity, this somewhat false choice allows such a movement no space in national politics and elides the formation of political spheres. Partha Chatterjee, "Anderson's Utopia," in *Grounds of Comparison*.

larger assemblages. Van Toorn notes a shift from the representational strategies of the classical culture industry, affiliated with a Fordist and labor-intensive production of identity, to the global cultural industry, in which the movement of goods is accelerated and their dissemination widened as informational content and intellectual property. Though I do not contest in full the performative role that architectural objects increasingly assume, I do not agree that this performativity has eclipsed the problem of "what an object is," as he puts it. Here I would like to conclude my comments by suggesting that it is precisely what Bruno Latour calls the "richness of the object" that recuperates circulation as a problematic. Materials of construction, techniques of production and reproduction, forms of dissemination such as publications, blogs, etc., and architectural festivals all constitute material realms that architecture traverses. Importantly, its circulation in these realms opens architectural production up to the possibility of (often unanticipated) rupture and discrepancy. Whether in countries where labor-intensive concrete construction permeated the architectural landscape in the twentieth century<sup>13</sup> or, say, where new technologies such as iron reconfigured architectural production in a city like Paris, questions of reproduction abounded (largely around the question of style) due to the inherent malleability of new technologies of construction. What kinds of mistakes, errors, or disturbances

13 See, for instance, my own writing on the matter; Fernando Luiz Lara, *The Rise of Popular Modernist Architecture in Brazil* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 2008); and Curt Gambetta, "Cement, Design and the Spectral Architect," *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 56 (March 2005).

occurred on-site, or were negotiated when a particular tectonic or technology traveled and was realized in a different assemblage of concerns, contingencies, and frictions? The dynamics of circulation play a critical role here. What role, for instance, did distance or delay play in the reproduction of particular techniques of architectural production in new geographic or social arenas?<sup>14</sup>

The status of genius, and with it the dialectic of the copy and the original, continues to animate architectural historiography and, to a degree, practice.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, the agency of things, objects, and technologies has been erased or bracketed into a history of technology or "construction history."<sup>16</sup> Though some of these questions might reemerge around architectural production (the interface with the object or technology, viewing the architectural work or system as a force that physically mediates dynamics of circulation, for instance) or historiography (delay or the accounting of material technologies of reproduction), they nonetheless

14 Arjun Appadurai's discussion of commodities is here a relevant reference point. See "Introduction: Commodities and Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things, Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

15 Michael Taussig posed the question differently, drawing from Marx and Benjamin to focus not on copy and original, but on the dilemma of contact and copy. In reference to a particular form of circulation related to the political, his discussion of "The Organization of Mimesis" is especially enlightening. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

16 Timothy Mitchell echoes this sentiment, though his object of concern is not architecture. See Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), especially "Can the Mosquito Speak?"

less bring us back to the question of how circulation as a constitutive force might be taken up as a concern for architectural production and discourse.