

# Disciplinary 2.0

## Architectural topography between criticality and pragmatism

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### Abstract

In architectural theory, the critical approach appeared in the sixties blending the socio-political assessment of modernity and the aesthetic evaluation of modernism in various proportions. From this combination and partly to increase its effectiveness, critical theory was more or less successfully, also put into practice. However, significant changes in the last two decades, mainly due to the globalization of capitalism, undermined the critical position in almost every field, and in particular the idea of a critical architectural practice. Previously this as a counterpoint, was intended to be the device for the maintenance of disciplinarity against a commercialized mass architecture. Many argue today that instead of criticism that is drawing the lines the 'freedom' of pragmatism is more prominent in the architectural discourse and design. However, this essay rather claims that the struggle between the critical and pragmatist approach no longer makes any sense and argues for a searching of values and meaning in the 'betweenness' that is the topography of the former poles.

### Keywords

criticality · disciplinarity · pragmatism · projective architecture · topography

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### 2 Disciplinarity as Criticality vs. Disciplinarity as Pragmatism

After 2000, a rather odd trans-Atlantic debate began about 'architectural criticality' in the context of articles, conferences and institutions prompted by a mainly younger generation of architects who wanted to put practice in front of theoretical agendas. They stated that although after the Second World War, thanks to the spreading of modernity and its gathering speed, criticism, as a potential intellectual position, was relevant; now a different approach needs to be represented as global capitalism and liberal democracy is engorging all opponents, i.e. their alternatives.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as we are now decades after the initial impetus of global regime change, we see many things differently, and a number of conditions have changed (with perhaps the common example of 9/11 as the most radical criticism).

The problem has become thoroughly chewed over; progressively different intellectual connections leading increasingly further away from the original goals have been established; unclear meanings of notions have been proliferated, and intellectual relations have been created in the magic circles of cloudy, partly academic-authoritarian, myths. However if we look at the subject with a slightly wider perspective, we come to the question as to whether or not to believe today that a building is more than a *product of culture industry* and is still able to convey value and create meaning. Then the debate is rather about this *disciplinarity*: about the nature of architecture between the conceptual poles of a criticality to be superseded and a superseding *pragmatism* which both blames and exploits the circumstances of global capitalism. It is about what kind of possibilities and ways does the *realization of an architectural concept*, even supported by theory, have. Or conversely, from the aspect of practice and construction, taking these permanently into account, how can a concept be created that produces value and meaning. The discourse, from this perspective, is taking place on what tools are available for us, what is the role that we, as architects, could play in the process, and what effect—if it occurs at all—can the implementation of a 'strong' concept, or even

<sup>1</sup>This is 'The end of history', as Francis Fukuyama called it. (Macmillan, New York, 1992)

the discipline itself, have in other areas, such as the social, economic or cultural levels.<sup>2</sup> It should be stressed, however, that in this context even the most extreme practical approach does not manage the building as a mere mass-product for the market, while it is no longer driven by an underlying and lofty, more general and total ideology, but by everyday parameters of which the possible—the easy to control—greatest quantity is used, in the most complex way.

The pragmatic approach, to put it very simply, considers the critical position invalid because it cannot be an outsider of the system, an opposed pair, a negative. Pragmatists suggest that such criticism would not provide effective answers, and a two-front battle is thus launched against it. Pragmatists declared, on the one hand, that *architectural theory* is unnecessary as the maintained domain of critical thinking, on the other hand, that *critical practice* based on theory is inoperative although it played a major role in the western architectural history of previous decades. Accordingly, the discourse has two poles and several specific points of reference have been added to them: defenders of criticality (e.g. K. Michael Hays) name their Godfather as *Peter Eisenman*, the attackers (e.g. Michael Speaks) as *Rem Koolhaas*, and the individual readings are always located somewhere in between.

## 1 Frames

As the New Yorker Eisenman stared at the sparkling, sophisticated, critical intellectual life of Europe in amazement in the early '60s, so did the Dutch Koolhaas, partly introduced by Eisenman, at the vital, stylish, effective American metropolis in the '70s. While Eisenman desired for more limitation, for the real modernization of western architecture, for thinking about 'post-modern' metaphysics, historical continuity and notational systems (let us call it disciplinarity), Koolhaas wanted to get rid of (rigid historical) shackles, to 'express himself' in a different way than a classical European auteur would do, to surf on capital that is construction (let's also call it disciplinarity to be inconsistent with pragmatists). The cradle of both approaches, as well as of architectural criticism, is the East Coast of the USA, where the *ANY conference-series*, challenging and investigating disciplinarity from within, also started in the 90's, and including the Godfathers as protagonists.<sup>3</sup> Although it would be worthwhile to examine whether the continuation of critical theory was spread and propagated all around the world by the travelling conference, and in the other direction, to what extent theory was transformed by multicultural influences, in the following we should rather focus on the various processes that appeared and led towards pragmatism during ANY, as they explain our problem in actuality.

The continuous dynamism of the economy going global occurred naturally in the construction industry and created new conditions for the practically 'unemployed' theorizing-teaching

architects. The change, on the one hand required professionalism and efficiency on their part, and on the other, facing up to *complexity* (and the control and regulation partly resulting from it), to restructuring in the *growing global market* and increasing the volume of buildings as mass products, as well as to problems of the '*second wave of modernization*' worldwide connected to their everyday experiences. The critical theoretical (often aesthetic) considerations *had to* be complemented by several other, more pragmatic parameters. Thus it became apparent that both combining the *deconstruction of architectural theory* with formal experimentation is extremely difficult (semantically, financially, structurally, in communicating with the client, etc.), and *deconstructed buildings*, intended to be critical previously, and since have become popular-spectacular products through their medial unusualness, end in failure. That is, the most critical or most avant-garde architect is forced to join the globalizing capitalist system. The Eisenmanian withdrawn-oppositional approach which focused rather on the theory-based *creation process* instead of the product is also not allowed to operate in such circumstances, according to the pragmatists. However, in the meantime, one example of Michael Speaks is the theorist Greg Lynn, who declaredly attempts to pursue and fulfil the poststructuralist experiments of Eisenman with the assistance of digital devices.<sup>4</sup> Another example is Koolhaas, who worked 'unconsciously' after returning home from America—his Office for Metropolitan Architecture had so much work in the prosperous context of nineties' Holland, that there was no time to theorize—but he established in 1999, exactly for this reason, the architectural research unit called AMO associated with the practical office.<sup>5</sup> Hi (and his followers) goal was to be able to deduce relevant 'great truths' from statistics charts, to find their way around the chaos resulting from the lack of safety contexts, i.e. the critical background, to justify their decisions by these 'quasi-experiences'.

The architectural theory led by (the myth of) Eisenman was fertilized the most by *difference-philosophies* with which, according to the interdisciplinary approach, the boundaries of the architectural territory can be defined by crossing its borders and then looking back to it from 'outside'. The deconstruction of *Jacques Derrida* had been previously used for this purpose, or, more recently, the networked concepts of *Gilles Deleuze*, who actually can be honoured with 'the philosopher of the nineties' prize, also seem to be suitable to this *deterritorialization*. Contrary to mass society and its model of sameness, these critical theories claim that we are all different with different thoughts and needs. The objectivity that had been assumed by the general-totalizing ideological background is false, so the criticism based on this is invalid too, and an immanent personal or singular opinion may be stood instead of it. The so-called factuality and universal relevance are passé, there is no

<sup>2</sup>Cf. such effects of Bilbao Guggenheim to its region.

<sup>3</sup>See [3]

<sup>4</sup>Speaks, A+U (2003) no. 396, p 122.

<sup>5</sup>Speaks, A+U (2003) no. 389, 130.

outside or otherness, *the involvement is constant*, no excuses: in the anthropological sense, by defining the other I create myself too, or, in literary terms, reading—as interpretation—generates new, unique meanings. In other words, defining and continuously positioning the boundaries of both the discipline itself and the ‘critical architecture’ describes the interpreter and his context at the same time: *the method how the critical architecture ‘precluded capitalism’, and how the contemporary does not, or only slightly, is essential to the disciplinary boundaries, to the notion of architecture.*

Based on these, criticizing both modern rationality and clarity and the capitalist position that accepts only quantitative reports, late-critical tendencies appeared in ANY. They were such ‘*dirty theories*’ which—as opposed to the unequivocal rational simplicity of modernism, minimalism or the capital itself—were complex and contradictory, and worked with individual interpretations, dynamic conceptual systems, fictive and interdisciplinary approaches. Besides Eisenman, the peak of this was represented by the writings of Bernard Cache and Greg Lynn.<sup>6</sup> The common feature was that though the theory partly dealt with practical issues, i.e. the nature of *design theory*, it was rather interested in a more general theme of disciplinarity that is building elitist ideal concepts around difference and dirt.

In contrast, for the second half of the ’90s pragmatist oeuvres—i.e. based on case studies—have been established, which were supported by a *quasi-theory* if we used the traditional frames of notions. The UN Studio, FOA, or MVRDV are not American-educated and they are engaged only with a so-called *multidisciplinary* design theory which, moreover, besides extensive construction practices, in the publications only ‘seems to be a theory’. For example, in connection with the Yokohama port terminal, the FOA-chief Alejandro Zaera-Polo no longer talks about ‘disciplinary reasons’ concerning forms, but about the (multicultural) infrastructure of contexts and architecture, about project management and technical feasibility: that is a new kind of rationality clear to all.

*Digital technique*, which has become a fundamental condition for projects like this, seems to be indispensable on the one hand to manage complexity-models, interconnect and operate the multitude of information, change and dynamism, and on the other hand, to realize theoretical—whether deconstructive or pleaded—concepts. For achieving these, high-end technical background is necessary in both the architectural office and the construction site, but the goal is not unconditionally to create a ‘technical building’ that is, by the way, already prescribed by today’s global standards, or, often supposed by the ‘non-standard attribute’. The real benefits are such *complex geometries* that are able to project or manifest the idea of our complex contemporary world.

<sup>6</sup>Primarily: Cache B, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories*, (tr. Anne Boyman), MIT Press, Cambridge, 1995, and Lynn G, *Folds, bodies & blobs: collected essays*, La Lettre Volee, Bruxelles, 1998.

## 0 Classical Critical Architecture – Basic Version of Disciplinarity

The contemporary *post-critical* discourse, as the name suggests, cannot be understood without the preceding critical tradition that has been building from the 1960s. This tradition—although the young are referring to it as a counterpoint—is arbitrarily-shaped, strong points of view have often been omitted inexplicably and unjustifiably (for example, with the case of Kenneth Frampton’s critical regionalism) or new ones are just created (for example, in relation to the often-cited 1984 article of K. Michael Hays).

Furthermore, the originally declared multi-level views around the critical context of *Oppositions*, operated 1973-81, are blurred. (It is sufficient here to mention only the specificity of Eisenman, Frampton or Aldo Rossi.) The journal ‘for Ideas and Criticism in Architecture’, and the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (1967-1984) working behind it and led partly by Eisenman, were positioned after modern architecture through its assessment, especially by means of academic criticism. The request for a cross-disciplinary search can be traced back basically to three inside factors. Firstly, *functionalism* and *tabula rasa* became a dominating ideology that ended up in the homogenization of the colourful modern tradition. Secondly, the radical modern form and method became *ineffective* by turning into mass-production. Finally, the capitalism’s reduction of abstract ideas to only measurability and ‘accountability’, which ‘thingification’ or ‘objectification’ is called *reification* in the Marxist discourse, also became dominant in the field of architecture. Although the critical need contrary to the previous trends can be derived from the discipline, its background was built upon more remote areas, since mostly European structuralist, phenomenological and Marxist (Frankfurt School) intellectual resources were imported or applied to architectural theory. Hence, the voices in *Oppositions* debated with modernity, modernism and also with each other, with the architectural interpretations of the above, taking place far from practical life since, not incidentally, the global economic recession of the era did not make (experimental) buildings possible.

On the one hand, admitting the ‘inoperability’ of both the revolutionary and the utopian-idealistic social changes, or the avant-garde outbreaks, the *total theoretical criticism*, i.e. the reflections of the mind, seemed to be a possible terrain for alternative solutions. On the other hand, since the *culture industry* integrates immediately all counterpoints because an attempt to change—that is criticism—defines itself in relation to the culture industry, the existing system is further legitimized. The original (critical) goal is becoming ineffective, even fashionable, and as such is marketable, and soon turns into a mass-product.<sup>7</sup> While this model of *negative dialectics* had been created by Theodor Adorno, the reference point of critical architecture would be

<sup>7</sup>A radical way can(not) be the *terror* as a critical response: neither the RAF-group in Germany after 1968 nor the fundamentalism of the Millennium as a consequence of the change of systems (the end of history).

*Manfredo Tafuri*. Who, with the disappointment of 1968 in his voice, applied the previous chain of thought, in fact declaring the Last Judgment over modern architecture of which he criticizes all directions, from industrial designers to avant-garde pioneers, discovering only small results in their oeuvres. The only acceptable peaks were a few Weimar / Vienna social housings and the buildings of Mies van der Rohe in America. (Moreover, this will be taken over by Hays as well.) In summary: resisting a mass culture maintained by the reign of capital, or the avant-garde withdrawal conspiring in the bourgeois-elitist boudoir, as Tafuri said, gives invalid responses. Hence, in the discourse around Oppositions, withdrawal and internal critics against it were present at the same time, while the approach of social theories also has to have practical relevance in architecture as a hospitality discipline, precisely because of its features. That is why Eisenman and Koolhaas tried from the beginning, to some extent, with theoretical foundations, to create a *critical practice* and therefore could have become the Godfathers of the young, unlike Frampton or Anthony Vidler of the same context who, as historians or theorists, formed the discourse just from 'outside'.

For the eighties, Eisenman immersed in the examination of formal autonomy and the enrichment of theory with fiction demystifying the Logos, while Koolhaas was in search of the essence and sustainability of architecture in the typicality of the metropolis and of mass culture. Both of them wanted to continue—enlarge, reinterpret—the modern, while they had different ideas about the notion and the discipline itself. Eisenman's *time break* aimed at the 'real modernization' of western architecture within itself and springing from itself, thus transforming disciplinary self-referential systems. Meanwhile, according to the *time break* of Koolhaas, western architecture (history) came to an 'end' with the world-city formation process (as an architectural 'parallel universe' is reached), and the blurring of the boundaries of high and mass culture. Hence his criticism can be understood from this non-architectural (non-canonized historical) position. So Eisenman's denial is manifested in his radical introversion to disciplinarity (this is the purity of autonomy), and Koolhaas' acts likewise, but in an opposite direction, turning outside (to the dirt of the market). Thus, the European Koolhaas taking place in the framework of the American mass-based or popular culture can be a *post-modern architect-alternative* of the American Eisenman, who is taking place in the framework of Europe-based high, academic or elite culture.<sup>8</sup> The former 'history of architecture', differentiating within itself, ends with this as its exclusivity is terminated, the effects have also been widespread in practice, and the boundaries of canon have been shifted.

In an artistic sense, the experimental (avant-garde) was in the critical position with the mainstream facing it. However, in the

<sup>8</sup>It would be worth to expound on this transatlantic move, especially in connection with Adorno (his cultural shock on emigrating to the U.S.) or Reyner Banham (proposing Los Angeles as an alternative to the European city).

case of both architects, and of other members of Oppositions, such ambivalence can be seen that (a social or temporal) *commitment* always stands opposite (a formal or stylistic), striving for *autonomy*. Eisenman deals only with form and gets rid of any other 'disciplinary exteriority' in the name of criticizing the modern, while Koolhaas, conversely, focuses only on these exteriorities (on historicity) and wants to get rid of the shackles of 'disciplinary interiority'. (He did it only seemingly, because while he wanted to forget the official canon, to continue the American capitalist modern, he was citing from the canonical Mies.)

In both cases, disciplinary criticism struggled to relieve the (modernist) form of *ideological background*: Eisenman wanted to be free from the materializing of function or machine aesthetic, as did Koolhaas of formalism of the author, so the goal was common, only the methods leading toward it differed. Eisenman, using post-structuralism and deconstruction—that is the criticism of the criticism of modern (Western thinking)—contests such an idea that all elements of a system can be structured around a central principle or metaphysics. According to him, the philosophical attempts to dislocate former centres (God, Logos, Man, Arché, etc.) were followed by the experiments of dislocating disciplinary dogmas, i.e. ideological exteriorities. Koolhaas, with his '68-attitude and the desire for liberation, rejects identity—as an invalid centre (received as a ready-made sample from the fathers)—and talks about the typical mass instead of it, and so he does this with atypical modern canon and the generic city instead of it. We should discuss these issues today: whether it is possible to succeed in the removal of the absolute centre of ideology, and if this criticism can exist without an ideology (in other words, replacing ideology critically is not an inauguration of a newer ideology)?

### **1 To what extent can we move away from a descriptive critical mode to a progressive, transformative mode for architecture?**

Besides the influences of the dynamism of the globalizing economy, a general *generational change* can be assumed naturally among the causes of pragmatic architecture: the means of revolting against the (critical) old would be the overwriting of the critical attitude. However, this approach is ever so much problematic. The turning against fathers continues partly to be a 'traditional' critical position, partly it is extremely difficult to break out of Eisenman's and Koolhaas's very characteristic schools, for which, moreover, a propensity rather appears in relation to the former (of the theoretical and formalist autonomy). Furthermore, it is not a recent discovery, that applying Tafuri's normative 'external' historiography in practice is at least questionable. From this perspective, there can be two kinds of results. The new generation of architects would become 'understanding' (even self-critical!): they do not see themselves as

<sup>8</sup>Bernard Tschumi, in: Davidson, p. 229.

philosophers or writers of social sciences, and in this sense they do not lay claim to architectural and critical theory. Alternatively, they would reject only the criticisms based on general ideology and set up criticisms with individual perspectives instead which can be connected to singular practical considerations and can contribute to establish these.

In the following, therefore, partly refuting the concept of generational change, and searching for more sophisticated reasons for pragmatism, we are going to examine an alternative from a theoretical point of view, then the shifts in Godfathers' oeuvres themselves.

Although it is unclear whether the *classical pragmatist principles* may be topical today in the architectural field, *John Dewey*, the former alternative to Marx, can be called to help to clarify the relationship with critical architecture. Negative dialectics claimed that in contrast to the promises of the Enlightenment—the individual's own intellectual freedom and *égalité* with others—in modern capitalism and the media-dominated culture industry, we are forced to believe that our needs are the same and we follow ready-made models, we consume standardized mass products, so that both individual thought and aesthetics become inferior in seeking after the profit. But pragmatism thinks positively and not in between extreme values. As Dewey's '*creative empiricism*' said, if the idea is obtained from the actual experience then it is not ideology (i.e. previous methods) that is forced into the present experience, hence the concept of truth and democracy would be evolutionary and not have a general relevance. (This can be referred to as case study-like.) Here we are not guided by ready-received, closed concepts (nationalism, identity, classes or other *types*), but by acceptance, individual freedom and responsibility: according to this individualism there is no collective responsibility, because each individual is transforming itself and thus is *different*. While Marxism as European counter-politics acted against the accumulation of capital, and wanted to change social relations, just as utopian architects did, pragmatism stood up for classical capitalism, and liberal democracy was an already given where, in a self-governing society, the frames and rules must be constantly adapted. Nevertheless, it is obvious that both sides are compromised for now: the dialectic no longer has the critical/communist political counterweight (because of all-engorging late capitalism), while on the pragmatic side, liberal democracy began to deteriorate (for the same reason, political power hid behind capital interest). What is more, both Tafuri and Richard Rorty on the other side talk about the futility of theory: in the former even withdrawing is impossible, in the latter philosophy is unnecessary, its existence can be justified only as literary work.

Dewey was able to *opt for* pragmatism, but today's architects, as they declare, cannot do anything else. According to Dewey, the truth of a thesis is guaranteed by its practical and operational fulfilment, and this is in the *future tense* compared to the declaring of the thesis. "The first *projective architecture*", that was the modern, acted like this, says Jeffrey Kipnis, namely in relation

to the future (and partly to utopia): it believed that, by an architecture embodying from a prior idea, a better (social) system can be created.<sup>9</sup> Yet, contemporary pragmatist architects are talking about such a projection, which would refer to the present: this *real-time planning*, on the one hand, would mean a simultaneous happening with thinking up the idea, on the other hand, it would transform directly the actual. Compared to the presentness of the building, the idea (and the drawing representing it) always belonged to the past, but now, as pragmatists say, compared to the plan (and to the *diagram*), with the assistance for example of file-to-factory or rapid prototyping methods, the back and forth effect is *immediate*. That is why the actuality of projection has no place for ideological criticism and theory, because—in fact following Dewey—(architectural) thinking needs to be *instrumentalized*, as the UN Studio and others claimed heading for 2000.<sup>10</sup> The "architecture as social discursive practice" abolishes the totality of the ideology—taken by the architect—that the decisions in the complex design process, in a specific scenario, can be consensus-based. Moreover, it can be seen that in this multi-aspect course of negotiation-series some sort of critical interest, besides economic, technical or urbanist, can also be represented: only the *exclusivity of criticism in the design is questionable*. (It should be noted however, that from the traditional critical viewpoint, it is rather strange and even unacceptable that within the pragmatist architecture, the overall welfare of individuals would be achieved exactly by the capital—namely lining up the technological, i.e. digital, progress.)

Critical architecture, with the leadership of Godfather Eisenman, also responds to complex problems. Dialectics should not be regarded as operated by simply the totalization of black and white (reduced and fixed) opposites, but as adapting poles—capable of development, or even (self)-contradictory—to individual cases, and all this would not only be interpreted within the architectural history, as it has been done by Tafuri. Therefore, linguistic (Fredric Jameson), sociological (Saskia Sassen) or gender (Elizabeth Grosz) terrains are introduced into the discourse of ANY, where dialectics constantly pops up in the 'fight against oppression', giving further samples to the maintenance of critical architecture. Along the idea of dynamic difference and the method of dynamic dialectics, it can be stated that the extremes of criticism cannot exist without each other, as they are defined in relation to something, and their meaning is constantly changing consequently by current frame and divider boundary, modifying simultaneously the discipline's meaning of the time.

However, in an ambivalent way, Eisenman emphasizes the misty concept of architectural 'expertise' and the operations of 'problematizing' in the turn of the Millennium. The former sets itself against interdisciplinarity and urges the discourse of architects among each other since the direct links between idea and realization, and the operation of projection still remains in-

<sup>9</sup>Steele, pp. 59-60.

<sup>10</sup>van Berkel, B & Bos, C, *Diagrams. Interactive instruments in operation*, ANY Magazine (1998), no. 23, pp. 19-25.

visible. Eisenman's example is the latent relationship between Koolhaas' 'virtuoso' buildings and the research projects preceding them. The same will be true for the young, despite the multitude of their quasi-theoretical books and also for Eisenman himself. The concept can be understood generally, but its motives and embodiment hardly. The other problem with the late-Eisenman, is that he still does not want to solve problems but to theorize them. Unfortunately, what is understandable as an artistic-theoretical project cannot be achieved in the practical terrain; a solution must be produced here as the young pragmatists (the competitors!) often provide a number of different alternatives.

Eisenman as an analyst puts the spectacle (the Bilbao Guggenheim) into one pole of contemporary criticism of which the antithesis are the libraries of Koolhaas<sup>11</sup> and Michael Haneke-films<sup>12</sup>, because in both the viewer has an *active*, self-governing role, just like at Dewey's theory. Today's image-like buildings and reality-like movies make the imagination lazy: following Adorno, they do not create and convey (artistic) values, therefore they do not make the viewer think, which would be the active perception, but they make money and entertain as part of the culture industry, shifting the viewer into passivity. Even if this is true, films (as artworks) can be appreciated as a confrontation of the passive Hollywood-viewer with itself, in the case of buildings, assuming this kind of generative operations, they have much more problems.

Meanwhile, in the example of the Euralille-project, criticism against president François Mitterrand's state-desire for monumentalism was to be achieved by the 'uncritical acceptance' of the—average, banal and typical, i.e. character-free—urban environment in the interpretation of Godfather Koolhaas. Accordingly, the question of autonomy in architecture is 'overestimated' because the architect, in a certain sense, is in a *passive, dependent, powerless position*, even if he or she has own intentions or visions unlike Hollywood-viewers. We have no choice, as Koolhaas says: in order to handle complexity, somehow it is necessary to get over his own legacy of '68 and that "the only respectable position is a critical position[...] It is impossible to make a creative statement that is based purely on criticism".<sup>13</sup>

In the whole discourse and with Koolhaas as well, it is a withheld fact that 'complexity' is infinite and uncontrollable, thus it includes failure, which is not allowed in the history of an investment. So 'experimentation' is possible only among controlled conditions. The other ambivalence concerning Koolhaas' proposition is that he claims that the reason of why we must get rid of the ballast of place, historicity or criticism is because they are in the way of 'creativity'. Although the young will have a propensity for referring to this line of thought later, neither here nor

there is it clear (in contrast to Dewey) what the notion envelops and why is that so prominent at the turn of the millennium. It can be guessed as much that it does not have much to do with the 'pragmatic' creation of the singular-saleable market-product and its communication (that is advertising).

## 2 Towards a 3P architectural practice?

The young use the *3P notions*—pragmatism, projection and *performativity*—to redefine the frames of the discipline. The latter of the three is the result of projectivity: it would have direct effects, so architecture would 'come to life' either literally (by interactive technological experiments) or in an abstract (Haneke-like) sense. Interestingly, both the older and the young forget about the performativity of the Derridean deconstruction: about the acting of writing, the textuality of the text that it is not only content but also a structural, formal, or even a pragmatic game. Critics eliminated the direct, everyday relevance of language games (being fascinated by the transformation of the internal elements of architectural discipline), and pragmatists did the same with the intellectual and lyrical truth of the approach (by their revolutionary desire for technical novelty).

While Michael Hays in 1982 claimed that critical architecture is in an exceptional position between "being a cultural product" and the autonomous value, then *Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting* state that "all architecture now automatically occupies a de facto critical status" in 2002.<sup>14</sup> This premise says that the critical practice has become ordinary, as high culture has been dissolved in the 'over-aesthetized' everyday life, therefore this *easy criticism* differs from the dialectical one, meanwhile none of the extremes, neither autonomy nor the individual—thus uninteresting—lightness are a passable way. Here, the disciplinarity reserved as *instrumentality* is proposed again, which is diagrammatic, atmospheric and cool, and contrasts with the hot avant-garde revolution and dialectics. It is not based on textuality and on operations prescribing meaning, but on the design method and its *effects*. The notion of discipline is not strongly defined and finite, but 'under defined', active and discursive: the meaning is emerged in relation to context and viewer. This interpretative approach can be the extension of Eisenmanian autonomy to the other senses: it is not only optical, say Whiting and Somol, but it influences many more domains. It is not just reading, but "atmospheric interaction". The other factors entering beside formal (disciplinary) understanding or perception are developed from the viewers' lived experiences by their "repetition, coincidence or duplication". However, it is not discussed whether the architects are aware of these processes, how can a building be designed for the singular experiences of a viewer (even for 'all viewers'), or how the cool concept can work in practice. It is also not declared by Somol and Whiting that the main difference between hot and cool discipline is that it was the academic viewpoint of the architect (the critique of ideol-

<sup>11</sup>Steele, pp. 27.

<sup>12</sup>See Eisenman P, *Michael Haneke and the New Subjectivity*, in: Grundmann 124-129. and Bun Z, *Peter Eisenman és a vér nélküli horror*, Debreceni Disputa (2009), no. 10. és 11-12.

<sup>13</sup>Davidson, p. 234.

<sup>14</sup>Somol, pp. 73.

ogy) that was dislocated earlier, since the critical projects also had the freedom of interpretation, but by 3P-methods, the dislocation of the viewpoint of people on the street (the subject's active self-criticism in lack of ideology) is preplanned.

The 'post-critical architecture' is proclaimed almost a trend by *Michael Speaks*: his classification is based on the *managerial* approach of young Dutch with which complexity and reification would be handled (i.e. managed), and globalized capitalism would be interpreted as a new possibility instead of an enemy. Speaks' slogan is '*design intelligence*': let the architectural office work like the CIA, get as many little truths from as many areas as can be available increasingly approaching the mystery of the great complexity. Its tool would be the *research*, he says, which can liberate the architecture from being an artistic expression.<sup>15</sup> But the notion of 'research' and its relationship with architecture is unclear, so it is questionable whether the alleged objectivity of research may substitute for the critical background. Architecture should be protected from being a purely statistical incarnation, however Speaks fails to see, even with his favourite Dutch, the attempts to do so: UN Studio became self-critical, transforming its design methodology when early attempts to design from pure databases had resulted in mechanical, even sterile end-products.

The key in the eyes of Speaks is *innovation* linked to the already mentioned 'creativity', while such issues like space, originality or the search for the new, and the idea of problem-solving, would disappear. While Eisenman announced an infinite, process-like approach facing the discontinuous and 'frantically seeking for a new' attitude of the modern, Koolhaas preferred the typicality of the skyscraper, then the generic features of the metropolis and suburb to the atypical and pre-eminent examples of architectural history. Or so did Lynn—in his natural parallels—with the unique (asymmetrical, disproportionate, distorted) morphology reacting to environmental influences on the assumption of generality (i.e. the species) and its oppressor-evolutionary theory. In Speaks' opinion, this sounds as the following:

"while problem solving works within a given paradigm to create solutions to known problems, innovation risks working with existent but unknown conditions in order to discover opportunities that could not have been predicted in advance"<sup>16</sup>.

Are they not all talking about the same, just from philosophical, urban, biological and technological points of view? That there is never either clear origin or tabula rasa but there is always a multitude of antecedents and random effects? That although a so-called (end-)product is produced for the market, it is part of the constant and consistent development of the architectural of-

<sup>15</sup>In proof he recalls Patrik Schumacher, although it can hardly be argued that the works of the Zaha Hadid-office today would be less form-centric than ten years ago. It is true that the office is well managed, but this is much less to do with 'research-based design' than with Hadid's genius or the professional digitizing of representation.

<sup>16</sup>Speaks, (2002), pp. 6.

vice? Thus, neither theory nor (technological) innovation can exist without criticism, but its driving force, background and means are continually modified.

The proposal that rejects both the extremes of autonomy and the Speaks-like pragmatism defining itself in relation to them, is made by Reinhold Martin as a kind of *utopian realism*. It claims that pragmatism equates "*political critique* (as adumbrated by historians and theorists like Tafuri)" with "*aesthetic critique* (as adumbrated by architects like Eisenman)" blurring the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and architectural ambition for autonomy<sup>17</sup>. The self-contradiction and confusion of the young can be perceived not only about Koolhaas considering him as their Godfather while forgetting his *Paranoid Critical Method* of Delirious New York, but also about *Gilles Deleuze* as their intellectual leader whose position, however, was the same for the late critical-autonomous side. Moreover, as Martin rightly points out, the French oeuvre gets to the proximity of 3P architecture through multiple transmissions and twisting its original intentions. In addition, the roots of the philosopher are linked to European counter-culture while the architects' are rather to contemporary capitalist America. Martin says, therefore, the 3P can be understood as a pilot episode of making an all-out effort to destruct the dialectical idea of radical politics, that is of *any alternatives*, by aestheticization. Maybe we should not give such power into the hands of the young pragmatists, but it can be stated that their deliberate blurring of sources, ideas or goals—all against rigid dialectics—has the great danger of revving the engorging feature of capitalism up even more. Deleuze did not only offer a singular attitude for the consumer deluded and grown increasingly comfortable by the culture industry, but he also represented it. He was critical by not accepting any frame (textual formats, disciplinary canons, etc.), and he was immanent within his own body of thought, which, becoming rhizomatically extended, came into fashion generally, and also in the field of architecture, as such a phenomenon against which it had taken steps. Indeed, in losing its singularity and essence it '*authorizes*' us to *arbitrariness and uncritical acceptance*. If we oversimplify the process: by the time a building has been materialized from the folding theory, nomadology and other philosophical concepts—since we should have no doubt about architects fiercely referring to these in relation to the design—Deleuze's flexible line of thought turns into the merging image of the world as a standardized connecting-metaphor, and this model will operate both the discipline and the role of the architect.

### 3 Backwards from topography

As seen above, today's architectural thinking is characterized by *confusion*. On the one hand, the fuzzy images of action and reaction, reason and criticism cannot be distinguished. The model of criticism, which has always worked as distanc-

<sup>17</sup>Martin, pp. 106.

ing, as setting up a frame, as a division in two, seems to be replaced by hybrids and networks. On the other hand, the traditional enlightening goal—endowing the proletariat with equal rights, then the emancipation of Blacks or women, and most recently of the ‘ex-third world’—is turned inside out, becoming at the same time the means of a global capitalism supposed to be a norm or a common frame. The critical-resistant theories of Derrida and Deleuze were compromised along the idea of equal opportunity just like this, and so was the critical-complex architecture set up against a simplifying modernism. The architecture of deconstruction and then of folding, on the one hand, have become a formal manner (folded simplicity) or a topological bubble (mathematically complex surface), on the other hand it takes into account even less that disadvantages and negatives are also part of the ‘free system’. The architect(-artist) can afford to explore and risk complexity, but the politician and the investor ultimately cannot, as he needs a clear and positive image and is often interested only in profit. The difference can be well-illustrated by the transformation of Coop Himmelb(l)au: while in 1968 their iconoclastic manifests called the lack of confusion and uncertainty to account on architecture, today their tottering forms are sold in series worldwide with an (image of) extraordinary self-confidence.

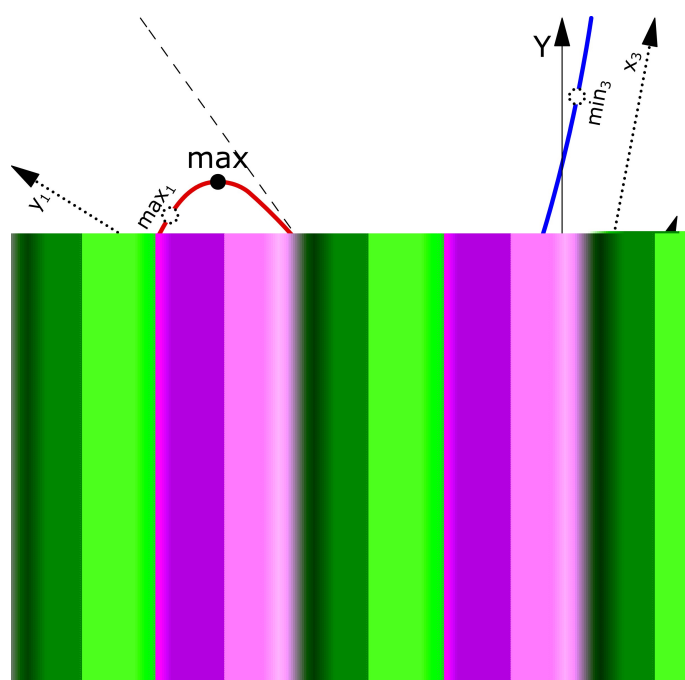


Fig. 1.

In this uncertainty, the boundaries of the discipline are also questionable, but as it can be seen in the outlined discourse, they spread between the poles of criticism and pragmatism. With the assistance of modernity—i.e. removing the external *fixed coordinate or background systems* like grand narratives or styles—unambiguous extremes have ceased in architecture as well, or rather thousands of individual points of view (that is moving coordinates) have been put forward. These are in-

cluded in the *topographic model*, in which in-betweenness so is. It contains the ‘other’ layers of contradictions, its dialectic is dynamic. (In other words, Deleuze has become popular because he did not recommend ‘dialectical’, but topographic criticism.) While post-critics speak about the end of resistance, the question is rather that *the change of enemy and the transformation of the way of resistance* are happening simultaneously. Moreover, pragmatism can be understood as ideology, see Dewey, in the same way as the rigid Tafurian critical project. The return of explicit social sensitivity and responsibility, the gender-culture or the defence of the natural environment cannot provide an ‘alternative solution’ as they are unable to eradicate the greed of capital, but they can give the critical methods a try. If the discipline is not static, if it is constantly adjusting its frames (its coordinate systems) instead of dividing itself between interiorities and exteriorities, relevant and effective responses can be made following these topics and the discipline’s own traditions. And since the theory is the domain which is not necessarily interested in the capital, its continuation is in key position.<sup>18</sup>

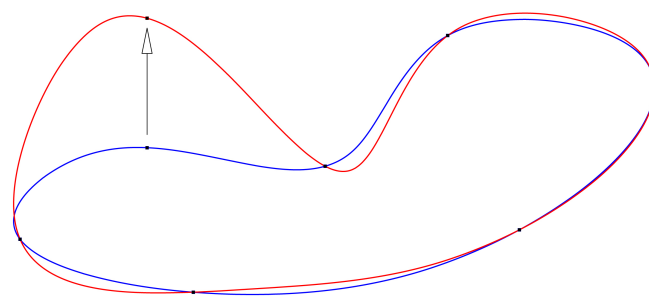


Fig. 2.

The topographic model can operate at several—methodological (diagrammatic), formal (material), functional (role of architect)—levels besides the theoretical-critical one, however this article specializes only in the latter. Even though, for example, a topographic (landscape-like) building form can be interpreted as the criticism of monumental or representative architecture. Criticism is considered here, instead of the generally accepted terms of commentary, as an *interpretative field*: as a reflection of myself and others, both in text and on the street. Maybe the critical consideration makes up only a few percent of the complex architectural design, but if the latter is regarded as a topological spline—extendable to a surface—and the former as the inflection point of the curve, the change in the boundaries of criticality will affect the behaviour of the whole curve or surface (and vice versa: the critical position must also evolve following the other factors.) Thus topography is not licentiousness, but a regulated linkage: a *2.0 version of disciplinarity* (i.e. architectural specificity). It assumes the general problem of modernity and the architectural theory as

<sup>18</sup>The exception is the kind of university research that is strictly technical in nature and requires resources from outside: from the market.



becoming extensive almost parallel with it, the first reactions created as a consequence of and with the help of these, and also that the model is not perfect and definitive, but is to be continuously developed.

By naming the term, the intention is not to make it normative, but rather to describe a situation where pragmatism is not born in the duality of high culture / elite theory and its opposite, the everyday / mass / pop, but between the two. Topography is rather a symptom of the era than a proposed programme, rather a question and not a classification: it does not urge steps 'towards a topographic architecture', but it is stepping slowly backwards by exploring the contemporary background and leitmotifs in order to look for the place of the discipline today.

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