

- of Modernism', in Michael Osman, Adam Ruedig, Matthew Seidel, and Lisa Tilney (eds), *Mining Autonomy*, a special issue of *Perspecta*, 33, 2002, pp. 72–7.
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- 14 Hans Aarsman *et al.*, *Reflect 01: New Commitment in Architecture, Art and Design*, Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2003.
- 15 See www.32bny.org (accessed 15 August 2006).
- 16 Martin, 'Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism', p. 105.
- 17 Heynen, 'Modernity and Domesticity: Tensions and Contradictions'.
- 18 Rem Koolhaas, 'Fragments of a Lecture on Lagos', in Okwui Enwezor *et al.* (eds), *Under Siege: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasha, Lagos*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002.
- 19 See Jennifer Sigler (ed.), '109 Provisional Attempts to Address Six Simple and Hard Questions About What Architects Do Today and Where Their Profession Might Go Tomorrow', special issue of *Hunch* 6/7, 2003.
- 20 See Hilde Heynen, 'Coda: Engaging Modernism', in Hubert-Jan Henket and Hilde Heynen (eds), *Back from Utopia: the Challenge of the Modern Movement*, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2002, pp. 378–99.
- 21 See the publisher's website: www.hatjecantz.de/controller.php?cmd=detail&titizif=00009090 (accessed November 2004).
- 22 Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders, and Rebecca Zorach (eds), *Embodied Utopias: Gender, Social Change and the Modern Metropolis*, London: Routledge, 2002.

Militant Architecture

Destabilising architecture's disciplinarity

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Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant.

(Michel Foucault, 'Preface', in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983, p. xiii)

The American architectural discourse has been in a special sort of turmoil for the last few years, one that bluntly challenges the accepted disciplinary boundaries of the field. This is on account of three primary factors: first, a quantum growth in the power of computational technology; second, a discursive engagement with theoretical concepts that problematise architecture's relationship to culture; and third, an interrogation of the ethics, on cultural and political terms, of architecture's operations (this last as a result of, on the one hand, new evidence of the symbolic power of architecture through the destruction and proposed re-creation of the World Trade Center, and, on the other, an increased cultural awareness of environmental pressures). These three factors have led many to propose a new potential for social engagement in architectural theory and practice. However, as I will indicate in what follows, the theoretical modes that have attempted to articulate new terms of architecture remain, despite their claims to the contrary, resolutely invested in familiar disciplinary assumptions.

In the United States, this new theoretical trend goes by the name of 'post-critical' architecture and theory, and has been developed most prominently by Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, though other theorists and practitioners, including Stan Allen, Sylvia Lavin, and Michael Speaks, have made significant contributions.¹ Though different in their specific articulations, post-critical positions maintain the same basic principles, as follows: first, the post-critical rejects the concept of 'critical architecture' as reliant on a rigid conception of disciplinary autonomy and on a resistant stance towards cultural norms. Second, the post-critical sees indeterminate processes and multiplistic interdependencies as generative of a more flexible disciplinarity. It asserts that a theory of complexity – based in an interpretation of the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari – allows for a productive engagement with technology, and together

these allow new relationships between architecture and culture. Thus the discipline, the post-critical proposes, is more adaptable, its operations more malleable, its engagement with society more multifaceted. Third, the post-critical proposes that the result of these new relationships is the possibility of new, non-oppositional concepts of social engagement for architecture. The architect can now absorb multiple inputs, produce complex systems, and manage networked relationships in order to productively engage economic, cultural, and social conditions without sacrificing disciplinary integrity.

This post-critical discourse, especially its emphasis on the productive potential of technology, has come to infuse many conferences, journals, design studios, and theory courses throughout the United States. Where there is discussion of networks, production systems, or mass customisation, a theoretical position rejecting an architecture of resistance is often not far behind. Of course, this needs to be seen in the context of a culture of practice and theory dominated for decades by the 'critical' potential of formal operations; 'critical architecture' proposed that an architecture of autonomous formalism could disrupt social norms by producing defamiliarising spatial conditions, thereby creating a space for reflection upon consciousness.² In general, the North American discourse has welcomed the post-critical disruption to the critical imperative.

In what follows, I will argue against the post-critical position without recourse to the claims of critical architecture, asserting both the continued necessity of, and the new possibilities for, architecture as a cultural practice that opposes the status quo. I will argue on theoretical terms, rejecting post-critical theory's limited reading of Deleuze and Guattari and the impoverished concept of 'social engagement' it produces. In doing so, I will show that the post-critical claim for disciplinary flexibility is, in fact, merely a re-inscription of disciplinary autonomy oriented around a slightly expanded concept of design. I will then outline a political interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari, one that has been largely ignored in architectural theory, and indicate the relevance of this interpretation to a resolutely political, environmental, and activist resistance in architecture.

This other interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari reads their theoretical concepts as expanding the political relevance of architecture. Conceiving of the world in terms of networks, as this reading maintains, is an epistemological shift of historical significance, one that provides productive access to the chaotic interconnectedness of social and natural processes. Such a shift allows for an architecture that embraces the dissolution of its disciplinary boundaries and the radical contingency of its activities in order to maximise its ability to destabilise regimes of exploitation and oppression. This architecture, a militant architecture, takes advantage of complexity theory to find opportunities for social and political resistance everywhere.

I adopt the term 'militant' following Antonio Negri, who uses the term to describe the activity of being inside history, of 'doing, making, constituting history'.³ Militancy, in this sense, is not based on duty and discipline, on fidelity to an ideal plan, but instead on the insistence that social conditions are constantly constructed with and

by our everyday actions and formalised practices. Within architecture this concept has particular relevance: every project is based in specific social, political, and environmental conditions. The work of the militant architect is to identify and respond to these specific conditions rather than conform to a pre-existing model, to extract from these conditions the political goal most relevant to them. Militancy is the organisation of constituent power, power from below, 'capable of crossing all borders and reaching everywhere'.⁴ This is the potential of complexity technology and theory, militancy as vigilant attention to the possibility for resistance in the radical singularisation of conditions.

The post-critical argument is not, it turns out, based on a rejection of the critical per se. Rather, post-critical theorists argue on the terms of autonomy and disciplinaryity. Their attempt to surpass criticality is based in a de-legitimisation of the concept of architectural autonomy that has, for the past 30 years, provided the possibility for the critical model. As Somol and Whiting write in their article 'Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism' (2002): 'If critical dialectics established architecture's autonomy as a means of defining architecture's field or discipline, a Doppler [post-critical] architecture acknowledges the adaptive synthesis of architecture's many contingencies.'⁵ Similarly, in Michael Speaks' introduction to his series of 'Design Intelligence' interviews (2003), he opposes the twentieth-century vanguard – reliant on the certainty of architecture's autonomy – to the twenty-first-century post-vanguard, for whom disciplinaryity is always in flux, and who are therefore 'better suited to prosper in the uncertainty created by the new global reality'.⁶ Flexible disciplinaryity is the foundation of the post-critical position.

This position has been articulated, in almost every case, through discussion of two concepts developed by Deleuze and Guattari: the *diagram* and the *virtual*. Somol and Whiting's 'Doppler Effect' article, arguably the best-known formulation of the post-critical position, will serve as my primary example here. Somol and Whiting define the diagram as the 'tool of the virtual',⁷ referencing Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* as follows: 'the diagrammatic [...] does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.'⁸ The claim for social engagement in post-critical discourse is based in the positive potential of the new. Complexity and multiplicity create, for Somol and Whiting, 'surprising plausibilities'⁹ by organising 'the effects and exchanges of architecture's inherent multiplicities';¹⁰ the diagram generates new relationships between architecture and the social.

But what are these relationships, and how are they generated? How, precisely, does the diagram organise multiplicity towards a 'real that is yet to come', and thereby allow the discipline of architecture to become more flexible? Somol and Whiting provide a coded glimpse into a response to these questions by proposing that post-critical architecture, through the diagram, creates a new realm of aesthetic effects, a realm they identify as 'qualities of sensibility, such as effect, ambiance, and atmosphere'.¹¹ Somol and Whiting's claim for new social engagement is in terms of the potential for 'qualities of sensibility' to impact culture in new, non-oppositional ways.

It is left unclear in the 'Doppler Effect' article why these qualities of sensibility are generative of the new, and why they have a positive social function. Somol and Whiting appear to have based their theoretical position on an article written by Brian Massumi for *Architectural Design (AD)* in 1998. In this article, 'Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible', Massumi outlines an interpretation of Deleuze based on the latter's writings on Henri Bergson, quoting Deleuze's assertion that 'architecture is a distribution of light before it is a concretisation of forms'.¹² Massumi then proposes that, in considerations of architecture, 'the separation between "primary" sensations (i.e. depth and forms) and "secondary" sensations (in particular colour and lighting) is untenable'. In other words, the atmospheric effects of a building – qualities of sensibility – are equal to formal qualities. Given this premise, Massumi wants to 're-entertain questions about perception, experience, and even consciousness that have been anathema for some time now to many in architecture'. Qualities of sensibility, or, in his terminology, 'fogs and dopplerings', are, according to Massumi, produced through a diagrammatic design process, and are significant to perception and social experience.¹³

The diagram, in Massumi's reading, is a visual representation that places heterogeneous and conflicting registers on the same plane. The diagrammatic design process, he suggests, requires intuitive leaps between these registers; these leaps have analogues – specific impacts – on the concrete manifestation of the new spatial condition, though they are not manifest in any representational way.¹⁴ These leaps Massumi identifies as 'the virtual', the unidentifiable 'newness' of spatial experience that results from processed complexity – the 'surprising plausibility' that captivates Somol, Whiting, and their colleagues. 'Fogs and dopplerings', disorienting perceptive experience of new spatial arrangements, are thus 'traces of the virtual', and demonstrate that 'the potential of a situation exceeds its actuality'.¹⁵

Many may recognise the basic formulations of the critical model on slightly different terms. Rosalind Krauss, in an essay on Peter Eisenman written in 1977, proposes that Eisenman's reading of formalism on linguistic terms allows him to produce architecture as a 'cognitive object [...] that had the power to cause in its reader or viewer reflection upon the modes of consciousness'.¹⁶ Somol and Whiting produce a digitised formalism on the same terms, and with the same goals. The diagram and the virtual create new spaces and new spatial experiences, and in this experience of newness they, following Massumi, see new possibilities for architectural engagement with society. What I want to emphasise is that post-critical theory interprets Deleuze and Guattari exclusively as a theory for the production of new perceptual effects and that in this interpretation they demonstrate a reliance on a definition of design and its aesthetic products as the essence of architecture. In other words, the post-critical continues the project of an autonomous architectural formalism. Rather than using the diagram to destabilise architecture's disciplinarity, they use it to draw new boundaries around the field based on a slightly expanded concept of design. 'Design', they write, 'is what keeps architecture from slipping into a cloud of heterogeneity'; and further:

When architects engage topics that are seemingly outside architecture's historically-defined scope – questions of economics or civic politics, for example – they don't engage those topics as experts on economics or civic politics but rather as experts on design, and on how design may affect economics or politics.

(Somol and Whiting, 'Doppler Effect', p. 75)

The diagrammatic process is the tool through which the post-critical maintains architecture's consistent internal integrity, re-inscribing the position that it is *only through this internal integrity* that architecture can impact 'non-architectural issues'.

Somol and Whiting simply propose that the growing capacity of architecture to engage a broad range of social, political, economic, material, environmental, and other issues – the potential of complexity – results in the diachronic replacement of cognitive form with ambient effect, the de-familiarising space of the critical with the disjunctive fog of the post-critical. Thus they are repeating, rather than eclipsing, the withdrawal of critical architecture into a reliance on the autonomy of form; the disciplinary agenda inherent in their interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari blinds them to the anti-disciplinary force of this theory. In focusing on relationships *within* architecture, they have missed the more compelling opportunity, that of destabilising the relationship *between* architecture and its outside.

The other possible lesson of complexity theory is that the assumptions of autonomous disciplinarity that infuse architectural theory – critical, post-critical, or otherwise – need to be rejected. The task for architectural theory is to adjust the register of architectural activity from the autonomous realm of aesthetic effect to an expanded realm of multiple and unstable engagements with the social. The task for architectural practice is to find available openings to destabilise current regimes of production – continuously. The vigilance of this position requires a militant approach, finding opportunities everywhere for realising social desire in the production of the built environment.

There is, in other words, a politics of sensibility, a social relevance to the production of disjunctive experience, which the post-critical ignores. The theoretical concepts of Deleuze and Guattari are embedded in a philosophy of social formations, in which the experience of the new produces, precisely, an experience of, and the conditions for, the possibility of resistance. The diagram is thus a tool of the virtual because it creates a distinct alliance of forces, one that does not ossify into a regulated power structure but is defined by and only relevant to its moment of instantiation. Specific connections are organised towards specific purposes, allowing the capacity for radical difference to be inserted into material practices. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari lament the lack of recognition of the productive political potential of these connections: 'We lack creation,' they write, 'we lack resistance to the present.'¹⁷ The virtual is the 'future form' of social relations; and the diagram is the tool of resistance, the projective realisation of that future in the present.

There are many Deleuzo–Guattarian concepts that emphasise the development of connections across and between heterogeneous registers, and that are available as conceptual tools for a militant architecture. The rhizome is perhaps the most familiar, a concept that describes relational systems with no centre. I want to briefly outline three concepts relevant to discussions of the diagram and to anti-disciplinarity as the politicisation of architectural processes: these concepts are the abstract machine, transversality, and micro-politics.

The multiplistic relationships of the rhizome are connected at a given time and towards a given purpose as an abstract machine, for which the diagram serves a piloting function. An abstract machine is a theoretical, technological, social, and material construct; a collection of individuals, techniques, tools, and processes that perpetually transforms itself to produce social relations. A machine is nothing more than the connections it makes; there is nothing essential to it, nothing to protect it from a 'cloud of heterogeneity' except its temporally and contextually defined purpose. Deleuze and Guattari insist that society is literally machinic; it is not *like* a machine but functions *as* a machine, and its problems and contradictions need to be addressed on these terms. An abstract machine coheres and maintains direction through the force of social desire. The diagram, in this sense, is the map of desire, the 'pilot' of a machinic assemblage, organising the capacities and directions of the assemblage. It does not, however, ossify into a permanent state, but perpetually re-scans and re-adjusts itself based on feedback and possibility.

The second concept is transversality, which elaborates on the scope of the connections on which the diagram and the abstract machine operate. Transversality is articulated most clearly in Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*, where he outlines three systems of processes with interpenetrating relationships: the personal or psychological, interpersonal social relations, and the processes that connect society to the 'external' processes of nature. There is an ecology within each set of systems, and an ecology between and amidst the systems. The task of political work is to think or act transversally, to propose connections between and through these three systems.¹⁸

The architectural production of qualities of sensibility and the individual experience of the new are relevant to social and political organisation; individual experience impacts thoughts and actions within and through these multiple registers. At the same time, prioritising specific issues in a built project itself produces sensible experience of the space, creating culture in terms of politics. Transversality insists that the production of built space is a significant personal, social, and environmental act.

The third concept is micro-politics. Micro-politics is articulated through the related concept of 'singularity', which emphasises the uniqueness of a given situation. Micro-politics proposes to singularise political goals in terms of the specifics of a given condition, rather than on the macro-political terms of, for example, 'socialism', 'feminism', or 'environmentalism', macro-models that lead to the replacement – rather than the destabilisation – of power structures. Micro-politics asserts that power is produced from below, 'within the very tissue' of social relations; it is distributed through network relations, and strengthened by virtue of the destabilisation of pre-existing distinctions.¹⁹ Abstract, desiring machines, and the diagrams that pilot them, gain power from the

specific qualities of a given condition rather than through conforming to preconceived organisational regimes.

The limited post-critical interpretation of complexity theory, coupled with the popularity of post-criticality within the current North American scene, threatens to restrict the potential of Deleuze and Guattari for architecture. It is on these terms that I have made this theoretical intervention, first demonstrating the restricted concept of architecture endemic to the post-critical position, and then briefly outlining other possibilities. What I hope to have demonstrated instead is that the theory of complexity allows us to reconsider the position of culture and society relative to architectural discourse. Rather than a prescriptive theory of architecture, Deleuzo–Guattarian concepts allow us to develop a theory of social formations relative to architecture, creating new models for architecture's interaction with a multiplicity of fields and concerns. In this context, the post-critical is nothing but regressive distraction.

The potential of indeterminacy and multiplicity, read through the abstract machine, transversality, and micro-politics, is to exaggerate complexity, to radically destabilise a stable disciplinary identity. Technological, theoretical, and ethical positions for architecture need to be negotiated on these terms. Architecture is already dissolving into practices with disparate professional and social emphases, from product design to Internet environments to urban planning; such a dissolution, albeit with the caveat of an insistence on architecture as design, has been crucial to the development of the post-critical notion. What is of concern is not this recognition of flexibility, but what is done with it; in this sense, relative to the anti-disciplinary potential of diagrammatic practices, the rejection of the critical is arbitrary.

The political reading of Deleuze and Guattari shows that the function of the diagram is to manifest what Paul Patton has called 'the permanent possibility for piecemeal social change',²⁰ a potential for which architecture, as an abstract machine prone to active experimentation across multiple disciplines, is well suited to actualise. In order to do so, architectural theory after critical architecture needs to dismantle, rather than reinforce, architecture's autonomous condition. Obsessively focused on the politics of sensibility – on the insistence that social and material conditions are constantly being constructed – militant architecture takes advantage of complexity theory to assert the resistant potential of its practices.

Coda: environmentalism and the diagram

Since this text was written in the summer of 2004, the characteristics it describes have not substantially changed. If anything, the post-critical wave has gained strength in North American architecture schools, at the same time that it has increasingly become clear that a misrecognition of the critical is at the heart of much of this popularity.²¹ The question that arises, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, is: 'have we ever been critical?' If so how, and to what end? If these recent debates have contributed to architectural discourse, it has been in terms of highlighting deficiencies in our understanding

of the critical project, of identifying the precise ways in which architecture, historically, has been a symptom of a series of impingements on political subjectivity, and how, in its present practice, it often attempts to – also symptomatically – remove itself from political considerations altogether. Without recourse to the design tropes or theoretical frameworks of ‘critical architecture’, then, we are left with a set of more general questions regarding the role of culture in political practices. Perhaps the post-critical has been a necessary phase to arrive at the urgency of these disciplinary interrogations.

Because of an enlarged post-critical scene in the schools, the third set of pressures mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, ‘an interrogation of the ethics, on cultural and political terms, of architecture’s operations’, have significantly increased: the continued problems of rebuilding the World Trade Center, the failure of architects (aside from, of all people, the New Urbanists) to provide tangible proposals for rebuilding the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, and the increased awareness of environmental pressures that are now more explicitly debated in terms of national security. The post-critical position has, in this light, even more similarity to the critical practices it rejects, practices such as those of Peter Eisenman and Mario Gandelsonas who, in the 1970s, sought to insulate architecture from the vagaries of the social turmoil of that decade while, in effect, moving the theoretical discourse of the field away from its implication in emerging political concerns.²² Post-criticality, then, emerges as a sort of pre-emptive strike against the productive possibilities of architecture’s disciplinary diffusion, coupled with aesthetic practices and design tropes that claim ‘contemporaneity’ as a cover for their increasing social irrelevance.²³

To return, then, to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, the question for architecture has become: ‘what is its diagram of operations, and how can productive interventions be made to re-organise these alliances?’ Despite the intellectual fantasies of critical and post-critical writers, architecture is already a radically anti-disciplinary field, spread across traditional boundaries with connections to economic structures (funding, fees, liability), political forces (codes, civic buildings, urban plans), resource management (HVAC systems, materials use and transportation, site planning), and cultural expression (built form, urban form, memorials). Architects can take this organisational diagram as a primary object of their design practice in order to design, in effect, their participation in the world; a practice that necessarily refuses the accepted boundaries of professional fields, academic disciplines, etc., and instead proposes alliances that serve specific social and political – and environmental – needs or desires.

It is perhaps through a rethinking of ‘environmentalism’ that architecture can gain social and political relevance. Organising environmentalism as a discussion about changing social conditions, rather than about preserving ‘nature’ per se, allows for a reading of complexity in architecture that disrupts assumptions about culture/nature divisions and produces new mechanisms for politically relevant practices.²⁴ If an environmental crisis is a crisis of social and political conditions, and if environmental architecture is the development of new mechanisms for the realisation of new social formations, regardless of the disciplinary boundaries that would traditionally prevent the development of such strategies, then the determinant of architecture’s

diagram, in any given practice or for any given project, is based on an ethics of environmental action. It is this possibility that seems to justify a continued search for the new and innovative, a contemporaneity that organises new forms of production rather than adds a theory of disjunctive affect to the old ones – a ‘neo-criticality’, perhaps, or a ‘critical environmentalism’ that eclipses both the critical and the post-critical in attempts to generate social relevance for architectural practices.

Notes

- 1 For a description of the various players in the post-critical landscape, see George Baird, ‘“Criticality” and its Discontents’, *Harvard Design Magazine*, 21, Fall–Winter 2004, pp. 16–21.
- 2 See, for example, K. Michael Hays, ‘Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form’, *Perspecta*, 21, 1984, pp. 14–29; and Rosalind Krauss, ‘Death of a Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman’, in Peter Eisenman (ed.), *Houses of Cards*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 166–184.
- 3 ‘N for Negri: Antonio Negri in Conversation with Carles Guerra’, *Grey Room*, 11, Spring 2003, pp. 86–109, p. 94. It should be clear that I am identifying militancy as a tactic to achieve goals; in no way does this use of militancy imply or condone other goals that are currently associated with the term.
- 4 ‘N for Negri’, p. 102.
- 5 Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, ‘Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism’, in Michael Osman, Adam Ruedig, Matthew Seidel, and Lisa Tilney (eds), *Mining Autonomy*, a special issue of *Perspecta*, 33, 2002, pp. 72–77, p. 75.
- 6 Michael Speaks, ‘Design Intelligence, Part 1: Introduction’, *A+U: Architecture and Urbanism*, December 2002, pp. 10–18, p. 17.
- 7 Somol and Whiting, ‘Doppler Effect’, p. 75.
- 8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p. 142; see also Somol and Whiting, ‘Doppler Effect’, p. 75.
- 9 Somol and Whiting, ‘Doppler Effect’, p. 77.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 57.
- 13 Brian Massumi, ‘Sensing the Virtual, Building the Insensible’, in ‘Hypersurface Architecture’ special issue of *Architectural Design*, 133, 1998, pp. 16–25, p. 20.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 16 Rosalind Krauss, ‘Death of a Hermeneutic Phantom: Materialization of the Sign in the Work of Peter Eisenman’, in Peter Eisenman (ed.), *Houses of Cards*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 166–184, p. 168, written in 1977.
- 17 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 108. They continue: ‘the creation of concepts [such as the diagram] in itself calls for a future form, a new earth and a people that does not yet exist.’
- 18 Felix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, New Brunswick: Athlone Press, 2000.
- 19 Deleuze, *Foucault*, p. 37.
- 20 Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political*, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 7.
- 21 See Reinhold Martin, ‘Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism’, *Harvard Design Magazine*, 22, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 104–109.

- 22 In 1975, Gandelsonas defined an autonomous architecture as one that 'transcends history and culture; an architecture which is a force in itself, a language that speaks about itself and does not communicate ideas other than its own'. See Mario Gandelsonas, 'Neo-Functionalism', *Oppositions*, 5, 1975, p. 8. See also Daniel Barber, 'Is it Simple to be an Anti-humanist in Architecture?', *thresholds*, 30, pp. 3–9.
- 23 See Sylvia Lavin, 'The Temporary Contemporary', in Jeffrey Kipnis *et al.* (eds), *Mood River*, Columbus, OH: Wexner Center for the Arts, 2002.
- 24 See David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996, p. 147.

Architecture's Critical Context

The Athens activist experiment¹

Maria Theodorou

Introduction

This chapter presents the historical background and the conditions in which architectural activities focused on the city of Athens were envisaged and implemented in the form of a four-year project, running from 2000 to 2004. These events, only two of which will be presented here, aimed at testing architecture's capacity to 'function' in a critical mode, where critical meant both 'interrogative' and 'in crisis', and indicated a state in which architecture acknowledged its full entanglement with contemporary social, cultural, economic and political conditions. Architecture's critical task, in the case of the Athens activist experiment, stretched beyond the confines of the discipline: to acknowledge its historical background, to understand emerging conditions, and to point out the potential of localities and act upon cultural stereotypes. This was, in fact, an activist plan whose framework was shaped by a critical context, that is, by a context in crisis.

A critical context

The circumstances of the four-year architectural events project cannot be dissociated from the crisis of identity that Greece has experienced since the 1990s, a crisis due – among other factors – to the disruption of a mono-cultural society by an influx of immigrants. During these years, reverberations of the Soviet Union's collapse were felt as a massive wave of immigrants from Eastern-European countries flooded Greek territory. Athens, whose population was 3.5 million, was the destination of 500,000 Albanians in 1992–3 alone. The case, however, was not unprecedented.