The Fourth Wall
of Architecture

PROMOTIONAL BROCHURE

THOMAS MORE

DEVELOPMENT GROUP

The Fourth Wall
of Architecture

MASTER DISSERTATION PROJECT

Bart Decroos

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Academic promotors:
    Thierry Lagrange
    Nel Janssens
    Dimitri Vangrunderbeek

Copromotor:
    Annelies De Smet

KU LEUVEN

"The simulacrum is never what hides the truth – it is truth that hides the fact that there is none.

The simulacrum is true."

– Ecclesiastes

Contents

Prologue

"Constant (and illusory) passion for applying to every phenomenon, even the merest, not the child's question: *Why?* but the ancient Greek's question: *What does it mean?* The fact must be transformed at all costs into idea, into description, into interpretation, in short, there must be found for it *a name other than its own.*"[1]

The Fourth Wall of Architecture starts with the same question as the one that haunts the work of Roland Barthes, *What does it mean?* It is a work that concerns itself with the question what it means to build, and more importantly, what it means to build in this or that particular way. What does it mean? What does it refer to? What does it signify? What associations, ideas, values or ideologies structure the built artefact? What follows is thus an attempt at questioning the physical environment we live in, specifically in relation to its function within the dominant discourses of our society, through which it receives its multiple meanings. This questioning is not merely analysis, however, it is developed through the creation of new spaces, or rather, through the recreation of existing spaces. By recreating these spaces in a different way, this work tries to create buildings that question the meaning of these spaces in the physical experience of the space itself.

At the centre of this work are three short stories, each dealing with a different type of architecture. The stories attempt to combine certain general ideas of various architects, philosophers, sociologists and writers within a specific architectural setting, while tracing

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1   Barthes 2010 [1975]: 151

the effects these ideas have on the architectural setting of the story. The tracing of these effects is developed through the actions of the characters within the spaces they inhabit, and the conversations they have about these spaces.

These short stories are juxtaposed with architectural drawings, which try to trace these same effects on the level of the physical space itself. These drawings are thus not conceived of as merely illustrations of the stories, but try to detect the effects these ideas and thoughts have on the construction of the specific types of architecture itself.

These three episodes are based on three different projects that have been developed during my training as an architect. They are situated in different contexts, answering to different needs, but are nonetheless still connected by the same question already mentioned, *What does it mean?* By bringing them together in this work, I hope to demonstrate how this question can be dealt with in different ways through the practice of architecture.

The first episode – 'The most photographed suburban neighbourhood' – is a short story based on a dialogue from Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. The story focuses on the architecture of the suburban single-family home, which is sold as the ultimate middle-class dream house by real estate developers. The main theme is the relation between the everyday reality of the inhabitants of a suburban neighbourhood and the imagined idyllic scenario of the real estate developers that build these neighbourhoods.

The second episode – 'The homeliness of hotel rooms' – is a detailed description of a fictional hotel and follows the sequence of a tourist arriving in his hotel room. The scenario deals with the architecture of generic hotel rooms, which is seen as a simulation of homeliness in a place where the inhabitant (the tourist), by definition, is not at home. The design of the hotel room focuses on establishing the expected atmosphere of homeliness while at the same time confronting the tourist with the falseness of this atmosphere. This is achieved by recreating an existing hotel in which crucial details have been altered in order to undermine the atmosphere of homeliness.

The third episode – 'The reality effect of an office building' – is a short story also based on a dialogue from Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. It develops the idea of the decreasing relevance of the physical building in the system of representation and identification in relation to corporate architecture. It explores the situation of a multinational company in a globalized context that is characterized by a free flow of capital and people, which renders the idea of locality and identity in the discourse of the company problematic. The space of a typical office building is here recreated through interventions on a structural level, which has consequences for the way the facades, suspended ceilings, raised floors and emergency exits are integrated into the building.

The general focus of these different episodes is to conceive of a physical space, where, in the experience of the space itself, the subject is confronted with the function of the space within a larger discourse. It is a way of trying to critically engage the subject with the space he inhabits, while at the same questioning the meanings the space develops through its use in various discourses. In the end, it is an attempt to create a form of architecture that questions its own reality.

The result is a work that explores a number of themes in relation to the state of architecture today and its role within society. It tries to develop a method of grasping a complex reality while at the same time proposing a specific practice of architecture as a tool of questioning this reality.

1. The most photographed suburban neighbourhood

Fig. 1a: The copy without original - day

Nobody remembered when the first tourists started roaming our streets. One day they were there, and ever since it has been impossible to imagine our neighbourhood without them.

That morning, I stood in the doorframe, watching the woman I lived with.

"I saw one of those tourists again," I said, "right outside our front door, taking photographs of our mailbox." [1] (Fig. 1a, Fig. 1b)

She was at the kitchen sink, washing her cereal bowl, using a soapy bare hand to scour the edges. The radio was playing in the background, one advertisement after the other.

"Available for a limited time," the radio said, "Only with optional megabyte hard disk."

"Mega-byte-hard-disk," Charlotte said. [2]

Our daughter sat at the breakfast table, talking to no one in particular. She was almost four, and had recently started to repeat voices on the radio or television.

"I know, I saw him too, at Rem's house," she said, "I almost felt pity for him, trying to level his tripod with his bare fingers in this cold weather."

I watched Jane place the cereal bowl back on the shelves, before she approached me and squeezed herself past me through the doorframe, almost touching me. (Fig. 2)

After a marriage of six years, we had decided to divorce. We still shared the house, for financial reasons,

[1] The act of reducing the front door to its image refers to the notion that the representational function of the front side of the house today becomes increasingly undermined by developments in communication technology: "Before the introduction of the mobile phone and the virtual mailbox (the e-mail address), fixed physical places were necessary to contact each other. These fixed places (the place where people lived and worked) or addresses had a significant social role, they were the anchor points of communication: the places where you could go see someone or wait for someone. The mobile phone, wireless internet and the miniaturization of the archive (the memory stick) make it possible for people to be contacted at any moment and to have all information at all times. The developments in communication technology resulted in a disconnection of the house from the public, which ultimately undermines the representational

Fig. 1b: The copy without original - night

for our daughter, for convenience. Jane kept the master bedroom and I moved into the guest room, which was planned to be the bedroom for our second child. We made agreements about the use of the bathroom, about visiting friends, about the fact that one-night-stands couldn't have breakfast, and about Charlotte. [3]

Later, when I went back upstairs, I saw the tourist again through the window at our front door. He saw me as I stood staring at him. He smiled and started walking along the side of our house, towards the garden, undisturbed. We were the characters in the story he was here to photograph, nothing more. (Fig. 3)

Our house was built as part of a large development plan, designed by one of the bigger real estate developers around. We had received brochures about the project through the mail, showing images that promised the bright and sunny future of the single-family houses that were for sale. (Fig. 4)

When we went over to the real estate developer's office to sign the contract, we were seated in a waiting room together with a few other young couples, all of them waiting their turn to go in and sign. The chairs stood lined up next to each other, facing a white wall with several framed advertisement posters. The posters showed the same images all of us had seen in the brochures, all smiles and sunshine.

function of the house." See Verschaffel 2010 [2006]: 146–147. [Eng. Trans.: Bart Decroos]

[2] The character of Charlotte is used to emphasize the continuous presence of mass media in Western society and the role it serves in (unconsciously) establishing a worldview. The words and phrases are references to DeLillo's *White Noise*, which explores the pervasiveness of mass media more in detail. See DeLillo 2011 [1985]: 131.

[3] The housing situation of a divorced couple in a suburban single-family home introduces a script error in the clichéd scenario of the happy family life, depicted in the advertisements for this type of housing.

17

Fig. 2: A doorframe for two people with emotional tension

In the waiting room we met our future neighbour, Rem K., seated among the young couples, the only person in the room who was on his own. Rem was a journalist, but he mainly wrote books about architecture. He had had a brief success with a publication about New York, but that was a long time ago.

"Your wife couldn't be here?" I asked, assuming only stereotypical couples with clichéd names lived in the suburbs.

"I'm not married," he said, "and I'm not particularly interested in the marital lifestyle. I am here to do a study on the theoretical implications of living in a suburban environment, where each plot is at the same time identical and unique; where each plot is comprised of the same elements but differently combined in an attempt to differentiate themselves from their neighbours, while knowing this will inevitably fail; where each plot is aimed at creating unity and identity, but in doing so only creating sprawl and sameness." [4] (Fig. 5a, Fig. 5b, Fig. 5c, Fig. 5d)

I decided to stare at the wall.

Somebody called Rem's name. It was his turn to go in.

"Do you really think we will be that happy, Tom?" Jane asked jokingly, pointing to one of the posters.

"Of course," I said, trying to imitate one of those broad smiles, "we're not here to buy a house, we're here to buy happiness."

[4] The character of Rem K. is used as a device to introduce comments on the architectural setting the characters live in. Out of an architectural point of view, the suburban house can be characterized as the indivisible, basic building block of the suburban environment, analogous to, and at the same time sustaining, the concept of the nuclear family. The paradox of the suburban home is the presence of a bourgeois logic of identification and representation in the typology, while making use of a generic architecture producing the effect of sameness throughout the suburban environment.
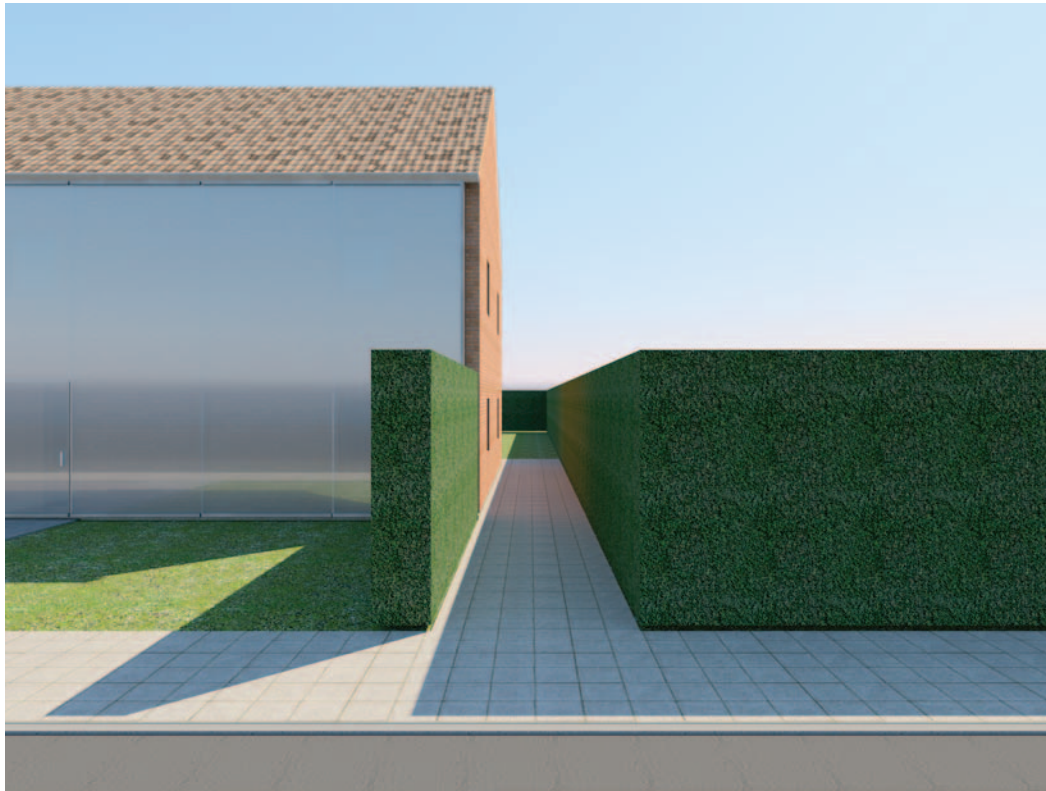
Fig. 3: The act of going around to the back as a stranger

When we were seated in front of the salesman at his desk, I wondered why we were still here, well knowing that those images were nothing more than marketing stories. [5]

The divorce had changed the house. Not so much the building itself, but the movement through the house had changed, the traces that were left behind through time.

There was the family bathroom we shared, with two sets of towels and a key in the lock. There was the absence of family pictures in the living room. There were the two different brands of coffee on the shelves, and the two different coffee machines on the counter top.

There were the empty glasses of wine on the coffee table in the morning, when Jane her new boyfriend had come over. Other nights I left the guest room, by invitation, and spent the night with Jane. It still felt like the guest room.

There was the photo album, stored away on top of the closet of the guest room. After signing the contract, the salesman had advised us to keep some sort of photo diary of the construction progress. We would feel more involved, he said. [6] Whenever we could, in the weekends and after work, Jane and I drove to the construction site, taking photographs of every new development, and updating the album late at night in

[5]   The cynical attitude Tom and Jane have towards the advertisement scenario while still buying the product is an illustration of Žižek's definition of ideology: "If the illusion were on the side of knowledge, then the cynical position would really be a post-ideological position, simply a position without illusions: 'they know what they are doing, and they are doing it'. But if the place of the illusion is in the reality of doing itself, then this formula can be read in quite another way: 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it'." See Žižek 2008 [1989]: 30.

[6] The photo album of the house introduces the idea of the 'sujet supposé savoir', formulated by Lacan: "Such a displacement of our most intimate feelings and attitudes onto some figure of the Other is at the very core of Lacan's notion of the big Other; it can affect not only feelings but also beliefs and

21

Fig. 4: It's always sunny in the real estate advertisement

bed, when we still slept together. On the cover of the album we had taped one of the brochures, showing a rendering of the front side of a house, similar to the one being built for us. There was some kind of suspense in tracking the construction development in relation to that faked-up scene on the cover. (Fig. 6a, Fig. 6b)

Little more than a year later the house was finished and we could move in.

When I drove home that evening, I noticed a new sign had been put up at the edge of our neighbourhood. THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED SUBURBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD. An arrow pointed roughly in the direction of our street. When I drove further in the direction of the arrow, I noticed two tour buses parked on the side of the road, a few meters from the corner of our street. As I made the turn, I had to manoeuvre through a crowd of tourists walking in the middle of the street, and eventually I had to park my car a bit further down, as the crowd was blocking all access. I got out and started walking home. Almost there, Rem K. appeared at my side.

"No one sees the homes," he said. [7]

"What do you mean?"

"The tourists, they don't see the homes. Once you've seen the signs about our neighbourhood, once you've read about it in the tourist guides, it becomes impossible to see the homes."

knowledge – the Other can also believe and know for me. In order to designate this displacement of the subject's knowledge onto another, Lacan coined the notion of the subject supposed to know." It is through the album and the images within (an external object determined by the Other) that Tom and Jane become involved in the house built by the real estate developer. It is not them who define the meaning of homeliness and family life, but this object to which these notions are displaced. See Žižek, 2006: 27.

[7] The following dialogue is based on an excerpt from Delillo's novel *White Noise*. Delillo describes in his novel 'The Most Photographed Barn In America' and a dialogue takes place between the characters Jack Gladney and Murray Jay Siskind. The conversation can be seen as a commentary on tourism and the role of the image in the development of the meaning of

Fig 5a: The showroom-house - kitchen

Unsure what he was talking about, I stared in the direction of my house, where a small group of people with cameras and tripods was just leaving the driveway.

"They are not here to capture an image, they're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. They see only what the others see. They've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colours their vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism. They are taking pictures of taking pictures."

He did not speak for a while. We listened to the incessant clicking of shutter release buttons.

"What was our neighbourhood like before it was photographed?" he continued. "What did it look like, how was it different from other neighbourhoods, how was it similar to other neighbourhoods? We can't answer these questions because we too have now read the signs, seen the people snapping pictures. We don't live in our homes anymore, we now live in pictures of our homes." [8] (Fig. 7a, Fig. 7b)

He seemed immensely pleased by this.

I went inside.

When the house was finished, we also finished the photo album. The last photo we took was an imitation of the brochure on the cover. We had placed the tripod in the middle of the driveway, framing the front door and part of the garage, the side of the car visible on the left. I stood in the doorway, playing the role of

cultural heritage, which has been adapted here in the conversation between the protagonist and his neighbour, in order to discuss the suburban type of housing in the same way. See DeLillo 2011 [1985]: 13, 14, 15.

[8] According to Jean Baudrillard, the substitution of mediated images for their physical reality has progressed up to the point that the signs of the real, which are being used in the system of mass media, have overtaken the real itself. The image of the real has replaced the real and has become a new reality, or as Baudrillard calls it, a 'hyperreality': "It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes." See Baudrillard 1994 [1981]: 2.

Fig. 5b: The showroom-house - dining room

the stay-at-home dad, waving, while Jane held the car door halfway open, somewhere between arriving and leaving. The photograph shows our fake, broad smiles, almost breaking because of our restrained laughter.

We were happy.

Fig. 5c: The showroom-house - living room

Fig. 5d: The showroom-house - bedroom

Fig 6a: The fiction of space and the reality of its image - outside

Fig 6b: The fiction of space and the reality of its image - inside

Fig. 7a: The decorated shed, or,
"We now live in pictures of our homes"

Fig. 7b: The decorated shed, or,
"We now live in pictures of our homes"

APPENDIX: PLANS
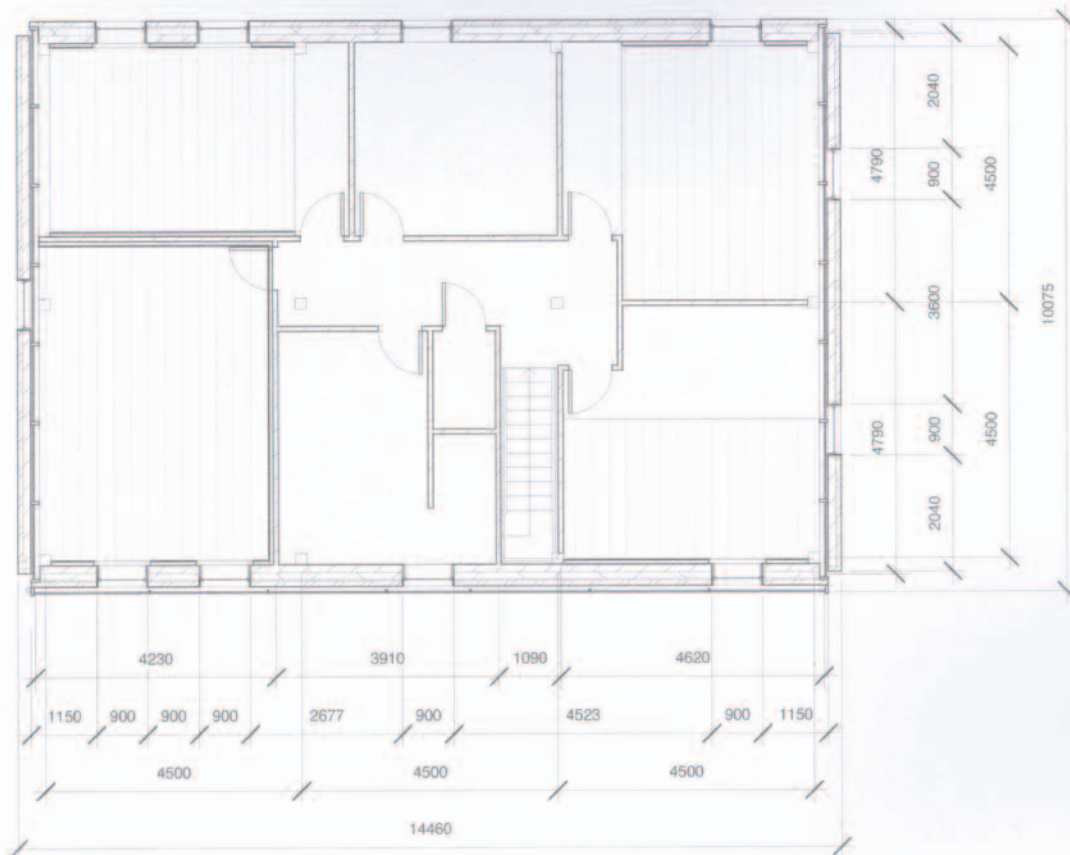
Level 1

1 : 100

1. The copy without original
2. A doorframe for two people with emotional tension
3. The act of going around to the back as a stranger
4. It's always sunny in the real estate advertisement
5. The showroom-house
6. The fiction of space and the reality of the image
7. The decorated shed, or, "We now live in pictures of our homes"

THOMAS MORE
DEVELOPMENT GROUP

http://www.thomasmoredevelopmentgroup.eu/

The most
photographed
suburban
neighbourhood

Plan - Level 1

Plan - Level 1		
Project number	0003	
Date	18/06/2015	01
Drawn by	Residential	
Checked by	TM Scale	1 : 100

18/06/15 11:24:22

Level 2

1 : 100

Dimensions (right side, top to bottom):
2040
4790
900
4500
3600
10075
4790
900
4500
2040

Dimensions (bottom):
4230 · 3910 · 1090 · 4620
1150 · 900 · 900 · 900 · 2677 · 900 · 4523 · 900 · 1150
4500 · 4500 · 4500
14460

2. The homeliness of hotel rooms

Fig 1: Welcome home!

"Ray Queneau once called the horizon the universal castrator. And I still think he was right. The belle-vue, the panorama, stupefies. Michelin and other guides string the tourist routes together by means of panoramas. The ultimate Grand Tour condition (absolute stupefaction) is not to get out of the car, but secure in its cocoon − the same all over the world; no type of home ever managed that − to enjoy the panorama, the point de vue, from the car's non-space." (Cuyvers 2005: 62.)

1.

The long corridor, which connects the different rooms with each other, resembles a quiet street, with numbered rooms instead of numbered houses. During your stay your address is substituted for your room number, which is given to you upon registration at the reception. Room 403. The key opens the door to the room indicated by the number: the door gets unlocked and swings open, the suitcases are hastily pushed inside, clumsily you step across them, and behind you, you hear the door slamming in the lock. Finally home. [1]

[1] The doors to the rooms have been installed on the wrong side, causing them to swing outwards, instead of inwards. This mirroring also causes the peephole to look into the room, instead of into the hallway. The safe, homely hotel room where the tourist tries to isolate himself is now exposed to the stranger on the outside. (Fig. 1)

2.

The central window on the opposite side of the room illuminates the space. A room with a view, perfect. Before the suitcases are unpacked, and the room really becomes a home, you walk to the window to admire the view.

41

Fig. 2a: The window-triptych

The view opens up to the city, the sea or the green landscape, just as expected. It is exactly what you wanted, what you asked for and what was promised: the idyllic view as image and preview of the perfect, sunny, safe and planned holiday. The first photograph is already history. [2]

3.

The separately wrapped pieces of soap and different bottles of shampoo, together with the freshly washed towels, create the illusion of a brand new and never used before bathroom. The soap and shampoo are available to refresh yourself immediately after the tiring trip, in this private, intimate space: just like home. [3]

4.

Now that you refreshed yourself, it is time to unpack and appropriate the room completely. The unpacking calls to mind a vague feeling of moving in: the presence of clothes in the wardrobe becomes a sign that the room is inhabited, that someone has settled there. [4]

5.

The atmosphere of homeliness is enforced by the presence of the framed pictures on the wall. Because of the impossibility to frame family pictures of the guest, the frames are filled with those other clichéd images: soothing pictures of nature, replicas of picturesque

[2] The framing of the window is done in the same way as the framing of a triptych: the two outer windows swing open inwards (or rather, close inwards). The framing calls to mind the image of a painting: the view becomes a painted view. The outer glass sheet in the window is produced as cast glass, instead of float glass, causing the window to give a slightly distorted image of the view. The promised view is transformed: it is exposed as an artificial image. (Fig. 2a, Fig. 2b)

[3] An indoor window is placed inside the bathroom. In the corner, up against the ceiling, a part of the wall is executed in glass blocks, which reminds of the indoor windows of old townhouses. There they were used to draw light inside dark rooms through other rooms lit by daylight, here they are used to draw in the presence of the other, into the most private space of the room. (Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b)

43

Fig. 2b: The window-triptych

landscapes or abstract colours, emphasized by the soft lighting in the room.

6.

Lying down on the bed, you can see the television screen. The presence of the television set establishes the illusion of homeliness completely. Regardless of the brand, type or size, every television set offers the same pastime as home: the familiar sofa is replaced by the alien double bed, but the atmosphere of homeliness stays.

7.

Freed from all household chores, which are a necessary inconvenience back home, the hotel room only offers physical rest on the double bed and mental peace by watching television. The hotel room becomes the pinnacle of homeliness: to come home, the tourist apparently needs to go on a holiday.

[4] The wall between the two wardrobes is removed, or rather, not built, which places the wardrobes back to back. In addition, the wardrobes are just too small for the opening in which they are placed, causing a small crack between the wall and the side of the wardrobe, allowing a look nto the other room when the doors of both wardrobes are open. The wardrobe, which is the place where the tourist appropriates the room the most, becomes thus a place where the boundary between the rooms disintegrates. The sound of the neighbour opening his wardrobe in the morning, echoes through the room and disturbs the peaceful sleep of the tourist. (Fig. 4)

Fig 3a: The presence of the other

Fig 3b: The presence of the other

Fig. 4: Moving in

APPENDIX: PLAN

3050   1060   3050   19

2245   1865   1865   2245

2

4

5

1

Level 1

1 : 50

No.	Description	Date

85 1200

2245 1865

3

4110

2546

2110
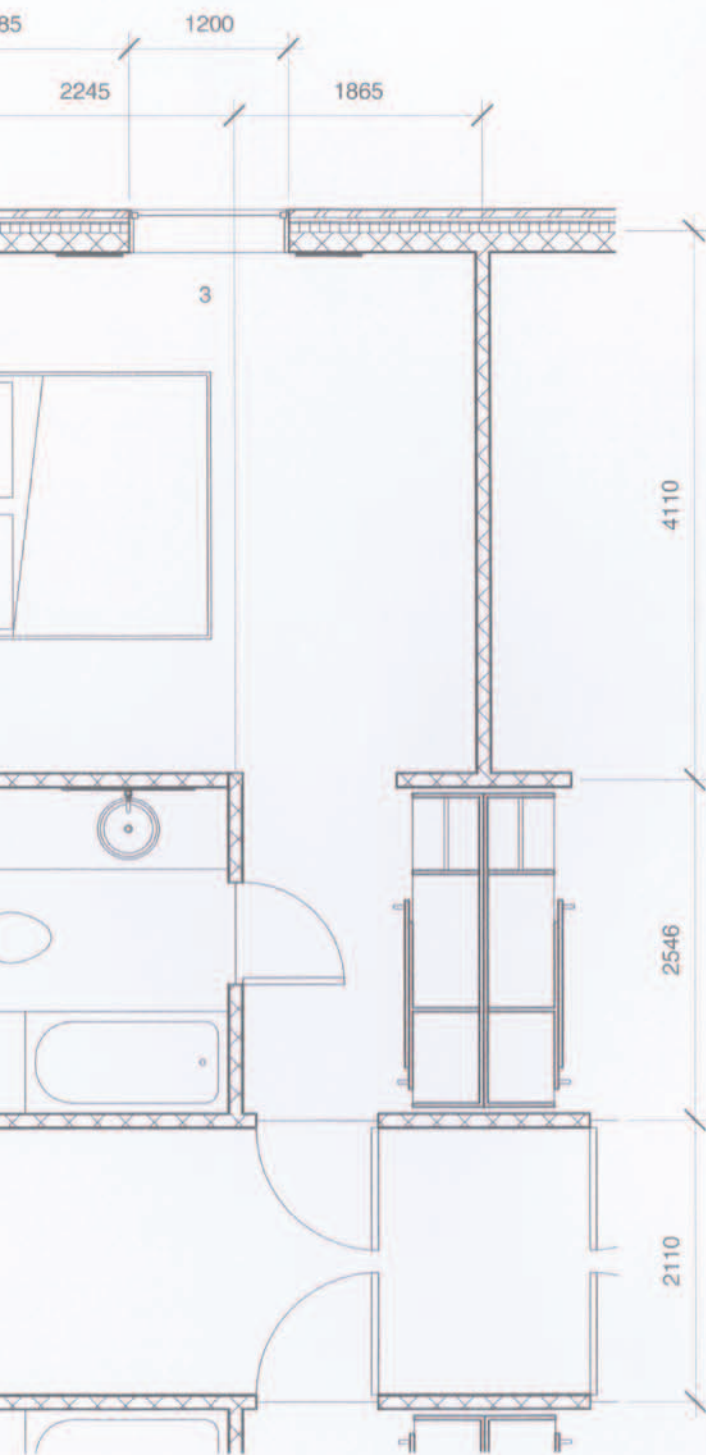
1. Welcome home!
2. The window-triptych
3. Camera obscura
4. The presence of the other
5. Moving in

The homeliness of
hotel rooms

Plan - Level 1 - Fragment

Project number	0001		**06**
Date	18/06/2015		
Drawn by	Commercial		
Checked by	TM	Scale	1 : 50

18/06/15 11:24:22

3. The reality effect of an office building

Fig 1a: The PO box address - front

Almost top floor, in an office with floor to ceiling windows and a minimalist desk with corresponding chairs. On the one side, a tax consultant, designer glasses, his office, on the other side, a representative of a multinational corporation, Italian suit, visiting.
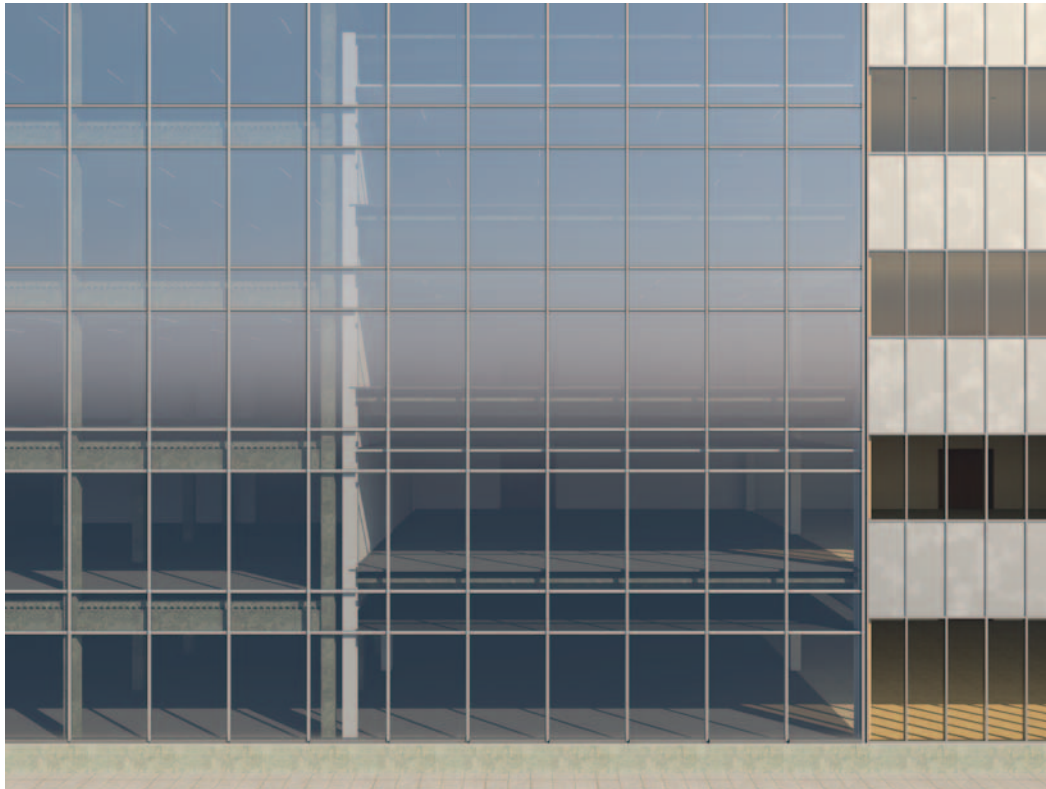
"We will take care of everything. All you have to do is sign," the tax consultant said.

"And what if this becomes public?" the representative asked.

The consultant smiled.

"It won't. That's why you came to us. We have numerous clients of your size, and nobody notices. Their headquarters are registered here, the post office forwards all mail to London, to New York, to Singapore, wherever, and all phone calls are already transferred to call centres in India or Malaysia, so there's nothing to worry about." [1] (Fig. 1a, Fig. 1b)

The consultant paused and smiled.

The silence was broken by the faint sound of a fire alarm that started ringing in the hallway. The representative glanced in the direction of the door, then back to the consultant.

"Probably an exercise," the consultant said, "Another drink?"

•

After the evacuation a man with a clipboard came around asking questions about the tone and frequency of the fire alarm, which had announced the danger an hour earlier. Over the left sleeve of his light blue shirt he wore a green armband bearing the word SIMUVAC.

Somewhere between the 3th and the 5th floor, at a time

[1] In 2014 the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists published the results of a journalistic investigation into tax rulings in Luxembourg, set up by PricewaterhouseCoopers for its clients. The publishing caused a public scandal since it was revealed that hundreds of multinational companies had made custom tax deals with the government of Luxembourg to achieve tax advantages. This dialogue is a reference to the fact that it was discovered that hundreds of companies had settled their headquarters in Luxembourg in order to achieve these tax advantages, while having little economic activity in the country. One address even housed more than 1,600 companies. See Wayne 2014.

55

Fig. 1b: The PO box address - side

when most people left their desks for their coffee break, there had occurred a significant smoke development, filling the open office space with a hazy fog. The smoke detectors had been triggered, the sprinkler installation had soaked tables and chairs, and the fire alarm had sent everyone down the stairs to the parking lot behind the building.

The few people that were still at their desks when the smoke started to spread had been brought down with minor respiratory problems and were being treated in an improvised medical post.

I always thought that disasters brought people together. I thought that they sparked cooperation and communication. We stood in the parking lot, as isolated individuals, barely recognizing each other, staring up at the floor where the smoke was supposed to be.

The man with the clipboard approached me.

"How long would you say the alarm was ringing before you heard it?"

Somehow the question contained a logical error, but seeing this man in front of me, with his clipboard, his armband and its cryptic message, carrying with him an aura of expertise, I felt compelled to just answer.

"A few seconds, I guess."

Looking satisfied he noted my answer on his clipboard.

"That's quite an armband you've got there," I said. Standing here in the parking lot, surrounded

Fig. 2a: The polishing of the real

by strangers, in silence and anticipation, I was happy to talk to someone. "What does SIMUVAC mean? Sounds important." [2]

"Short for simulated evacuation. A new state program they're still battling over funds for."

"But this evacuation isn't simulated. It's real."

"We know that. But we thought we could use it as a model."

"A form of practice? Are you saying you saw a chance to use the real event in order to rehearse the simulation?"

"We took it right into the action."

"How is it going?" I said.

"The insertion curve isn't as smooth as we would like. There's a probability excess. Plus we don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. In other words we're forced to take our victims as we find them. We didn't get a jump on computer traffic. Suddenly it just spilled out, three-dimensionally, all over the building. You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see today is real. There's a lot of polishing we need to do. But that's what this exercise is all about." [3] (Fig. 2a, Fig. 2b, Fig. 2c, Fig. 2d)

A half hour later, when the man had questioned everyone, we could go back to our desks. Whether or not the smoke was gone seemed irrelevant.

[2] This dialogue is an excerpt from DeLillo's novel *White Noise*. In the scene the dialogue takes place during the evacuation of a town under threat of an 'Airborne Toxic Event' caused by a chemical spill from a rail car. In both *White Noise* and in this story the dialogue is used to discuss the discrepancy between the reality of the disaster and the simulated models used to control it, and the accompanying urge of human beings to adapt reality to their own invented scenarios. See DeLillo 2011 [1985]: 162.

[3] This remark is a reference to the ideas formulated by Jean Baudrillard in his *Simulacra and simulations*, in which he argues that the society we live in has progressed up to the point where reality is substituted for the signs of reality: "The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. […] In fact, it

Fig. 2b: The polishing of the real

"I want to thank all of you on behalf of Advanced Disaster Management, a private consulting firm that conceives and operates simulated evacuations. We are interfacing with the fire brigade and the local authorities in carrying out this advanced disaster drill. The first of many. The more we rehearse disaster, the safer we'll be from the real thing. Life seems to work that way, doesn't it? You take your umbrella to the office seventeen straight days, not a single drop of rain. The first day you leave it at home, record-breaking downpour. Never fails, does it? This is the mechanism we hope to employ, among others. As long as we keep doing these simulations, we'll be safe from the real thing." [4] (Fig. 3)

Since the smoke incident, the management had decided to run a series of fire drills in order to optimize the procedures of evacuation. The weeks that followed the incident, there were daily exercises with each time new instructions being issued by a computerized voice through the speakers of the building.

Every morning we received new plans with different escape routes, altering between spreading and concentrating the flow of people. They tested our reaction time on different moments of the day, when there was a high density of people in the building and when there was a low density. In the parking lot we had to answer questions about the intervals between the start of the alarm and hearing the alarm, between hearing it and recognizing its message, between understanding

is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. […] By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials." See Baudrillard 1994 [1981]: 2.

[4] This speech is an excerpt out of DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, and further develops the need to match reality with simulation. See DeLillo 2011 [1985]: 235, 236.

Fig 2c: The polishing of the real

the situation and the moment of reaction. Each time different people were randomly assigned the role of victims, receiving instructions on what injuries to suffer and where to fall down.

The series of simulations was carefully recorded via the security cameras and sent somewhere for analysis.

"What's your injury?" she asked. A woman seated at her desk stared at me.

"I was on my way to rescue some people who were trapped in a conference room, but got caught in the smoke and passed out."

I was lying on the floor, waiting for a man with a clipboard to pass by and take notes of my situation. I had received a message this morning announcing the exercise of the day, giving me the role of a primary victim. They had made a classification of victims according to the relation between the injury and the disaster. People who were injured as a direct result of the disaster were primary victims. Injuries as a result of the evacuation itself were secondary. Those who suffered psychological implications were tertiary victims.

"You?" I asked.

"Panic attack", she said, rotating a full circle on her revolving chair. The woman sat a few meters away from me at her desk. "I have a feeling these simulations are becoming increasingly stereotypical, as if the real disaster will adjust itself to their computer models." [5]

[5] This remark tries to problematize the relation between reality and simulation and the way both systems interact with each other. The remark is a reference to the way Baudrillard problematizes this relation in his work *Simulacra and simulations*: "Organize a fake holdup. […] remain close to the 'truth', in order to test the reaction of the apparatus to a perfect simulacrum. You won't be able to do it: the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with real elements (a policeman will really fire on sight; a client of the bank will faint and die of a heart attack; one will actually pay you the phony ransom), in short, you will immediately find yourself once again, without wishing it, in the real, one of whose function is precisely to devour any attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to the real – that is, to the established order itself, well before institutions and justice comes into play. […] [But] if it is practically impossible

Fig. 2d: The polishing of the real

I had never seen her before, but being here together, cast in the role of a hero and a woman in need, made me feel deeply connected with her. This wasn't some random encounter. We had been brought together by an all-knowing, all-controlling mind. Our meeting had been planned ahead, engraved in the flow of time, as an inescapable event. We had been given a role to play. We had left behind our individual and contingent identities, and had become part of a greater, collective experience, connecting us on an existential plane. It was our symbolic roles, the masks we wore, that connected us. (Fig. 4a, Fig. 4b)

"I've never seen you before on this floor," I said, "do you work here?"

"Sometimes," she said. "I work for the Northeast Group, we change offices every few months. We are mostly based in New York, Delaware, London, Athens, Cairo, Beirut, Ukraine, Moscow, Malaysia, Singapore and China, but we tend to move around."

She reached in her bag next to her chair and handed me her business card. Associate Director Risk Analysis, it said. On the back of the card was a photograph of a skyscraper, with the logo of the company printed in the bottom right corner. (Fig. 5)

After the man with the clipboard had left, we returned to our desks. The simulation was over. We had played our roles. We were strangers again.

to isolate the process of simulation, through the force of inertia of the real that surrounds us, the opposite is also true (and this reversibility is also part of the apparatus of simulation and the impotence of power): namely, it is now impossible to isolate the process of the real, or to prove the real. This is how all holdups, airplane hijackings, etc. are now in some sense simulation holdups in that they are already inscribed in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their presentation and their possible consequences. In short, where they function as a group of signs dedicated exclusively to their recurrence as signs, and no longer to their "real" end." See Baudrillard 1994 [1981]: 21.
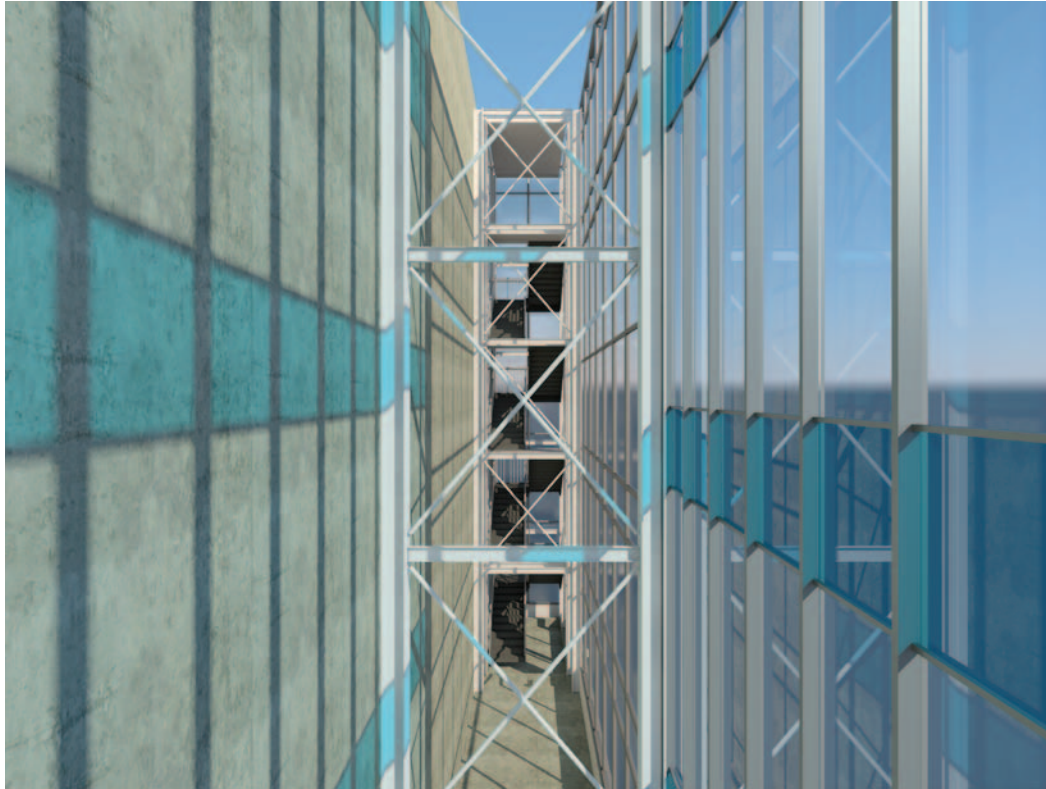
Fig. 3: The mechanism of simulation

Three weeks later the smell of smoke drifted in through a ventilation duct. A pause, a careful thoughtfulness, seemed to settle in the open space. People started looking up from their desks, glancing around to see if anyone left, but avoiding looking at each other directly. There was no sign of official action, no sound of an alarm, no men with clipboards and armbands. An irritating sting in the nostrils, a taste of burnt plastic on the tongue. As time passed, the will to do nothing seemed to deepen, to fix itself firmly. There were those who denied they smelled anything at all. It is always that way with odours. There were those who professed not to see the irony of their inaction. Everyone had taken part in the SIMUVAC exercises but no one was willing to flee now. There were those who wondered what caused the odour, those who looked worried, those who said the absence of technical personnel meant there was nothing to worry about. My eyes began to water.

About two hours later, the scent suddenly lifted, saving us from our formal deliberations.[6]

[6] This paragraph is an excerpt from DeLillo's *White Noise*, which serves to demonstrate how the simulation has overtaken and suppressed reality, and has become a reality in itself.

See DeLillo 2011 [1985]: 311.

•

"Isn't this illegal?" the representative asked.

The question had nothing to do with moral concerns. Not because the representative was an immoral man, it just didn't occur to him that this could have something to do with morality. Moral concerns belonged in his private life. In this room he represented a

Fig. 4a: The encounter with the other

multinational corporation, a structure that transcended any kind of personal morality. The question was just a simple pragmatic consideration, an attempt to calculate the risk in relation to the benefits, nothing more.

"When you operate at this kind of scale, the question of legality becomes irrelevant," the consultant said, "It is only a matter of applying the rules in such a way that they benefit you, and outsmarting your opponents while doing this."

They remained silent.

"Take this," he said and gave the representative a brochure lying on his desk. The cover of the brochure was an image of the neo-classical façade of a small building. "In there is an overview of the results you can expect. Recalculate everything and then call me back to sign the deal." He smiled.

The representative took the brochure and looked at it.

"Where is this?" he asked.

"Nowhere. It's not a building, it's an image." [7]

The representative looked around him.

"That image has nothing to do with this reality, or anywhere else where we might work or live. The image of the architecture is only there to give the company a stable identity, it compensates for the endless flow of people and money the company is built on. It makes the company tangible. The architecture lends the company an aura of stability and continuity. It's a fictional architecture, it's there to make it easier to believe." (Fig. 7)

In the hallway the fire alarm kept ringing.

[7] The excessive usage of images of architecture in corporate brochures, on business cards, in news articles about companies etc. can be explained in the same way Roland Barthes explains the usage of superfluous details in literature. In literature these superfluous details don't relate to the plot of the story but are there to signify reality as such, they are used to create a reality effect, to convince the reader of the reality of the fiction: "Semiotically speaking, the 'concrete detail' exists out of the direct and secretly coinciding of the signifier and the signified. […] when 'reality' as a denotative concept is removed from the realistic speech act, it returns to it as a connotative concept; because precisely at the moment that details are ought to signify reality directly, they only function as a sign of reality and nothing else. […] in other words, the actual shortcoming of the signified in respect to the signifier becomes in itself the signifier for

69

Fig. 4b: The encounter with the other

reality: a reality effect occurs." The architectural images in corporate publications can be viewed in the same way: they are there to give the abstract and instable identity of the multinational company a tangible dimension. See Barthes 2004: 111. [Eng. Trans.: Bart Decroos]

Fig. 5a: The building and its logos

APPENDIX: PLANS + SECTIONS + ISOMETRIC

Level 1

1 : 250

4000   6000   6000   6000   6000   500   6000   6000

81000

No.	Description	Date

6000   6000   500   6000   5500   500   6000   6000   4000

6000   6000   500   6000   37000   6000   500   6000   6000
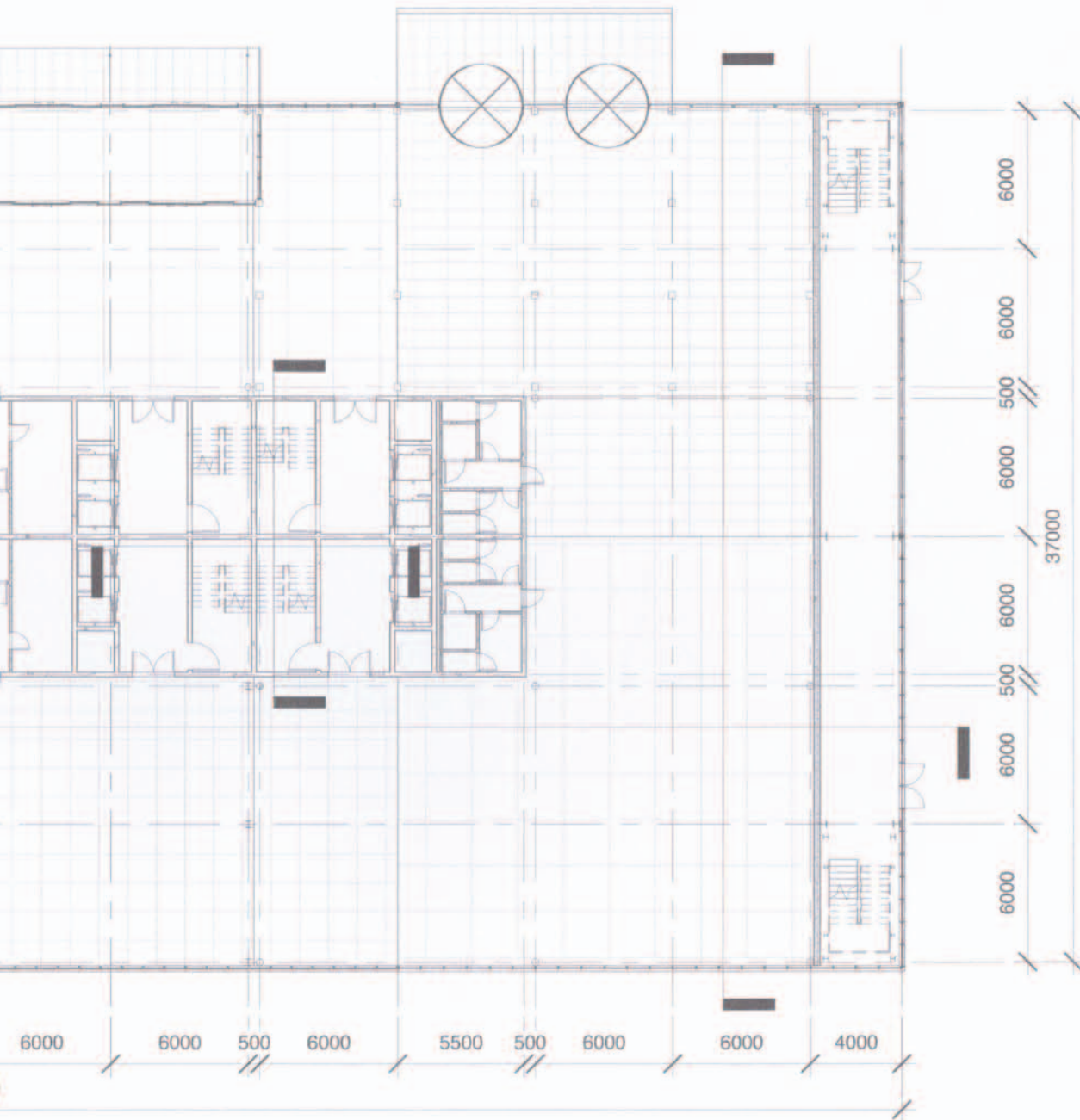
The reality effect of an office building

Plan - Level 1

Project number	0002
Date	18/06/15
Drawn by	Corporate
Checked by	TM

01

Scale	1 : 250

Level 5 - Structural Plan

1 : 250

4000   6000   6000   500 5500   6000   500 6000   6000   6000

81000

No.	Description	Date

6000

6000

500

6000

37000

6000

500

6000

6000

6000 500 6000 5500 500 6000 6000 4000

The reality effect of an office building	Structural Plan - Level 5		
	Project number	0002	10
	Date	18/06/2015	
	Drawn by	Corporate	
	Checked by	TM	Scale 1 : 250

18/06/15 11:24:22

Longitudinal Section

1 : 250

Transversal Section

1 : 250

No.	Description	Date

Level 6 - III
18750

Level 5 - III
15000

Level 4 - III
11250

Level 3 - III
7500

Level 2 - III
3750

Level 1
0

6 - III
8750

5 - III
5000

4 - III
1250

3 - III
7500

2 - III
3750

evel 1
0

The reality effect of an office building

Sections

Project number	0002	
Date	18/06/2015	12
Drawn by	Corporate	
Checked by	TM	Scale 1 : 250

Section Staircase 1

1 : 100

Level 6 - III	18750
Level 5 - I	18000
Level 5 - II	17000
Level 5 - III	15000
Level 4 - I	13500
Level 4 - II	12750
Level 4 - III	11250
Level 3 - I	9000
Level 3 - II	8500
Level 3 - III	7500
Level 2 - I	4500
Level 2 - II	4250
Level 2 - III	3750
Level 1	0

THOMAS MORE
DEVELOPMENT GROUP

http://www.thomasmoredevelopmentgroup.eu/

The reality
effect of an
office building

Section Staircase 1

Project number	0002		
Date	18/06/2015	**13**	
Drawn by	Corporate		
Checked by	TM	Scale	1 : 100

18/06/15 11:24:22

Level 6 - III
18750

Level 5 - II
17000

Level 5 - I
18000

Level 5 - III
15000

Level 4 - II
12750

Level 4 - I
13500

Level 4 - III
11250

Level 3 - II
8500

Level 3 - I
9000

Level 3 - III
7500

Level 2 - II
4250

Level 2 - I
4500

Level 2 - III
3750

Level 1
0

Section Staircase 2

1 : 100
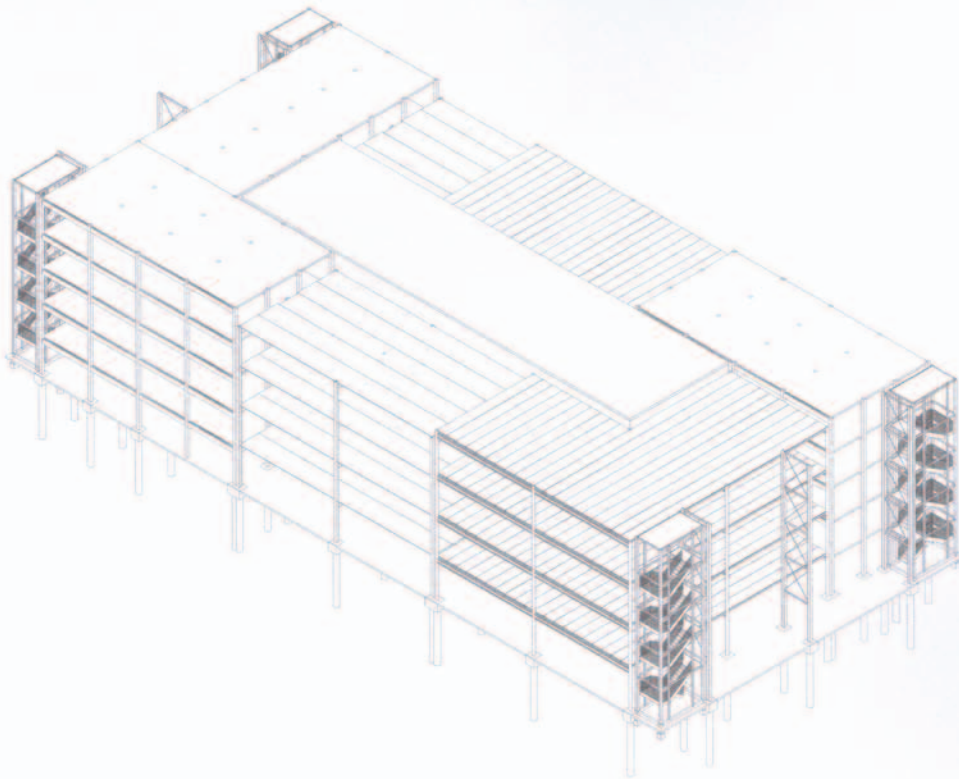
Structural Isometric

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The reality
effect of an
office building

Structural Isometric

Project number	0002	
Date	18/06/2015	11
Drawn by	Corporate	
Checked by	TM	Scale

18/06/15 11:24:22

Postscript

1. CONDITION

The Fourth Wall of Architecture *takes as its starting point the postmodern condition of the 21ˢᵗ century, late-capitalist, Western society, which is regarded as a condition that estranges the inhabitants from the bigger picture. The inhabitants have all become strangers to their own culture, or rather, tourists within their own culture. Unlike Camus' stranger, whose estrangement from reality is characterized by resistance[2], the estrangement of the tourist is characterized by a form of stupidity.*

1.1 *La condition touriste*

The stupidity of the tourist is a lack of knowledge about the strange world he visits, but accompanied by a willingness to accept anything he might learn without passing judgment:

"To be a tourist is to escape accountability. Errors and failings don't cling to you the way they do back home. You're able to drift across continents and languages, suspending the operation of sound thought. Tourism is the march of stupidity. You're expected to be stupid. The entire mechanism of the host country is geared to travellers acting stupidly. You walk around dazed, squinting in fold-out maps. You don't know how to talk to

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2   "I summarized *The Stranger* a long time ago, with a remark I admit was highly paradoxical: 'In our society any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death.' I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game." See Carroll 2007: 27.

people, how to get anywhere, what the money means, what time it is, what to eat or how

to eat it. Being stupid is the pattern, the level and the norm."[3]

The tourist's detachment from his surroundings make it possible to accept any cultural

tradition without being offended, because in his experience it doesn't concern him. This

is exemplified by the fact that most tourists learn to speak a strange language by adopting

insults, curses and other profanities, without experiencing them as vulgar. The touristic

detachment suspends every moral involvement with the world around.

1.2 Ideology

According to Jean-François Lyotard, the postmodern estrangement of the bigger picture

can be described as a loss of metanarratives[4]. More precisely, this is a loss of the belief in

the metanarratives, but not a loss of the metanarratives themselves. Only now they live

on as cultural traditions, customs, anecdotes etc. We have all become tourists in the face

of history, detached from the truths of the metanarratives, but willing to accept them

without moral judgment. It is in this sense that Slavoj Žižek's formula of ideology can be

understood:

> "The most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from
>
> Marx's Capital: '*Sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es*' – 'they do not know it, but they are
>
> doing it'. […] The cynical subject [however] is quite aware of the distance between the
>
> ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask.
>
> The formula, as proposed by Sloterdijk, would then be: 'they know very well what they
>
> are doing, but still, they are doing it'. […] The fundamental level of ideology, however,

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3   See DeLillo 2011 [1982]: 50,51.
4   "The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great
goal." See Lyotard 1984 [1979]: xxiv.

is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. […] if the place of the illusion is in the reality of doing itself, then this formula can be read in quite another way: 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it'."[5]

This is how *la condition touriste* functions. We don't believe in the metanarratives anymore, but we still act accordingly. Truth has become a historical fact, determined by archaeological research, etymological references, historical analysis, sociological framing, always held at a distance, as some kind of anecdote in a tourist guide, but it still functions as truth. The only difference is that now the belief in a truth has been relegated from the subject to different objects. The individual doesn't believe anymore, but the things themselves believe in his place and keep the metanarratives in this way alive:

> "This seems to be a basic Lacanian proposition, contrary to the usual thesis that a belief is something interior and knowledge something exterior (in the sense that it can be verified through an external procedure). Rather, it is belief which is radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people. It is similar to Tibetan prayer wheels: you write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it automatically, without thinking […]. In this way, the wheel is praying for me, instead of me – or, more precisely, I myself am praying through the medium of the wheel."[6]

The question is then, through what kind of objects do we still believe? What kind of objects still keep the metanarratives functioning, not as actively lived truths we still consciously believe in, but as truths held at a distance, passively experienced and still structuring our acts?

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5   See Žižek 2008 [1989]: 24-30.
6   See Žižek 2008 [1989]: 31-32.

1.3 Architecture

The process taking place here, is a process in which a certain knowledge or belief is lost, but, as a compensation, the objects supporting this knowledge or belief are obsessively restored and preserved in archives, in museums, in vaults. A displacement of knowledge and belief takes place in this way:

> "Such a displacement of our most intimate feelings and attitudes onto some figure of the Other is at the very core of Lacan's notion of the big Other; it can affect not only feelings but also beliefs and knowledge – the Other can also believe and know for me. In order to designate this displacement of the subject's knowledge onto another, Lacan coined the notion of the 'subject supposed to know'."[7]

These objects release the tourist from his responsibility and can then be accepted without judgment as historical artefacts or cultural traditions:

> "'I do not really believe in it, it is just part of my culture' seems to be the predominant mode of the displaced belief, characteristic of our times. 'Culture' is the name for all those things we practice without really believing in them, without taking them quite seriously. This is why we dismiss fundamentalist believers as 'barbarians', as anti-cultural, as a threat to culture – they dare to take their beliefs seriously."[8]

Is it possible that architecture, in certain places, has assumed the role of, in Jacques Lacan's terminology, this *sujet supposé savoir*? Is it possible that the physical environment we live in is still structured by certain truths and beliefs we don't actively hold anymore, but still passively accept through our experience of this physical environment? And if so, is there

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7   See Žižek 2006: 30-31.
8   See Žižek 2006: 27.

a form of architecture possible that can break this unconscious acceptance and again actively engage us in the way we live our everyday lives?

2. SIMULACRA

The idea of the simulacrum introduces a split in the practice of architecture. On the one hand there is the physical environment of the architectural artefact itself, the everyday life, the functionality, the flow of people. On the other hand there is the simulacrum, through which the virtual image of the architectural artefact disconnects itself from the physical reality and becomes integrated in a larger discourse as a separate object, in which its function is to fix meanings, beliefs or knowledge, something rarely experienced explicitly in the physical environment itself.

2.1 Representation

The classic relation between architecture and power is one of representation. This means that the function of architecture within an ideological discourse is to represent the power structure that produces the discourse. In other words, architecture gives a concrete, tangible dimension to an otherwise abstract entity in order to establish the power of this entity. Kings, dictators and religions thus relied heavily on architecture to establish their power, and have for this reason produced some of the most remarkable architecture.[9]

Developments in communication technology, however, have diminished the relevance of physical space (proximity is not a condition for communication anymore, e-mail and

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[9] Georges Bataille already formulated this view on the discursive function of architecture in 1929: "Architecture is the expression of the true nature of societies, as physiognomy is the expression of the nature of individuals. However, this comparison is applicable, above all, to the physiognomy of officials (prelates, magistrates, admirals). In fact, only society's ideal nature – that of authoritative command and prohibition – expresses itself in actual architectural constructions. […] The fall of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of things. This mass movement is difficult to explain otherwise than by popular hostility toward monuments, which are their veritable masters." See Bataille 1929: 117.

mobile phones have rendered the physical address useless) and transferred the function of representation from the field of architecture to the field of mass media (the house doesn't represent the inhabitants anymore, instead their social media profiles do).[10]

2.2 Simulation

According to Jean Baudrillard, this substitution of mediated images for their physical reality has progressed up to the point that the signs of the real, which are being used in the system of mass media, have overtaken the real itself. The image of the real has replaced the real and has become a new reality, or as Baudrillard calls it, a 'hyperreality':

> "The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control – and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these. […] In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. […] By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials."[11]

The consequence for architecture is the disconnection between the physical architecture and its representational function. On the one hand because the physical architecture has

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10   In his essay 'Bad Dream Houses', Bart Verschaffel explained the consequences of these developments in communication technology: "Before the introduction of the mobile phone and the virtual mailbox (the e-mail address), fixed physical places were necessary to contact each other. These fixed places (the place where people lived and worked) or addresses had a significant social role, they were the anchor points of communication: the places where you could go see someone or wait for someone. The mobile phone, wireless internet and the miniaturization of the archive (the memory stick) make it possible for people to be contacted at any moment and to have all information at all times. The developments in communication technology resulted in a disconnection of the house from the public, which ultimately undermines the representational function of the house." See Verschaffel 2010 [2006]: 146–147. [Eng. Trans.: Bart Decroos]
11   See Baudrillard 1994 [1981]: 2.

lost its representational function and is replaced by its virtual image (as an image, a statistic, a calculation), and on the other hand because this virtual image of the architecture doesn't signify the physical architecture anymore, the representational link between the sign and the real is broken:

"Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a gigantic simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. […] Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference."[12]

The idea of architecture and representation is thus replaced by the idea of architecture and simulation. What occurs here is a split between the architectural artefact and its virtual image: both live on separately in different realities. The everyday reality of the physical building has little connection anymore to the virtual image of the building used in the system of representation.

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12   See Baudrillard 1994 [1981]: 5,6.

3. DISCOURSE

The simulacrum of architecture develops its meaning through its use in various discourses, while the various discourses rely on the simulacrum of architecture to fix certain meanings important within the discourse. Besides its functional requirements as a physical artefact, the architectural building thus also develops a discursive function through its virtual, disconnected image.

3.1 The discursive function of architecture

As a virtual image within the system of mass media, the discursive function of the architectural artefact becomes explicit. Freed from its functional requirements of program, sheltering and stability, the imagery of architecture develops a purely discursive function. Whereas in the physical reality the architecture's discursive function is obscured by these other requirements, within the system of mass media its discursive function is isolated and rendered explicit by the use of accompanying text, slogans, logos, messages etc. This function of architecture within certain media is aimed at supporting the broader discourse in which it is integrated.

3.2 Nodal point / *Point de capiton*

The image of architecture develops its explicit discursive function by assuming the role of a 'nodal point', a signifier that anchors certain values that are important within the discourse:

"In the process of articulation, it is possible to fix meaning by means of nodal points, literally 'anchoring points' or 'quilting points'. A nodal point is a signifier that assumes a central role in the complex of meanings in a certain discourse."[13]

In the case of the architectural simulacrum, it doesn't signify its physical counterpart anymore, but uses its image to signify certain abstract values or to make associations with other discourses, events, history etc. This notion of the nodal point is similar to Lacan's '*point de capiton*':

"The *point de capiton* is thus the point in the signifying chain at which the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of the signification and produces the necessary illusion of a fixed meaning."[14]

The *point de capiton* is necessary to (partially) fix meaning within a discourse, it is the central anchor point around which a discourse is organized and established. In this sense the architectural imagery becomes *symbolic* at the point where the discourse relies on the imagery to fix certain meanings.

3.3 Metaphor and metonymy

This functioning of the architectural image as a *point de capiton* can further be elaborated by Jakobson's definition of 'metaphor' and 'metonymy', adopted by Lacan in contrast to Freud's notions of 'condensation' and 'displacement':

"Jakobson pointed out that metaphor is an act of substitution of one term for another [...]. Metonymy is a relation of contiguity, in that one term refers to another because

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13   See Montessori 2012: 174.
14   See Lacan 2001 [1970]: 303.

it is associated or adjacent to it [...]. Lacan saw in Jakobson's structural model of metaphor and metonymy a direct correspondence with Freud's processes of dream work: condensation and displacement. Condensation designates the process whereby two or more signs or images in a dream are combined to form a composite image that is then invested with the meaning of both its constitutive elements. [...] Displacement describes the process through which meaning is transferred from one sign to another."[15]

The architectural image develops its symbolic function through these mechanisms of the metaphor and metonymy. On the one hand by condensating abstract values in the image of architecture: the image starts to embody these values in a concrete and seemingly tangible object. On the other hand, by displacing people, institutions and other entities to buildings, of which as a result the image of the building becomes a signifier for these entities.

4. REALITY

Although the virtual image has disposed itself of its physical counterpart, the building isn't destroyed. This physical reality of architecture lives on as a kind of surplus, a leftover, which is at the same time excluded from and simulated within the system of mass media.

4.1 Blind spot

The physical reality of architecture is constitutive of the discursive function of architecture, but is at the same time excluded from the discourse. This brings Bataille's notion of the blind spot to mind: a place that is constitutive of the whole edifice, from where the edifice originates, but which at the same time is excluded from the edifice:

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15   See Homer 2005: 43.

94

"[The blind spot is] the point of this totalization-revulsion of the intellectual edifice: the point of this edifice that, on the one hand, is part of it, but a part that, on the other hand, completely embraces it. The result is that the part as such is greater than the whole: it goes beyond it, exceeds it, transgresses it. […] "There remains a point [the blind spot] that always has the sense – or rather the absence of sense – of the whole.". […] To have a sense, for Bataille, is to be constituted by that which negates one. Nothing is more meaningful, nothing makes sense, until confronted by its negation (See "Festival is the negation of actions, but it is the negation that provides a sense for actions [as death provides a sense for life.]")"[16]

This idea of the blind spot can also be found in Žižek's definition of the Marxian symptom, by which he characterizes the criticism of ideology as detecting this point of breakdown heterogeneous to a given ideological field, but which is at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure:

"[…] the 'symptom' is, strictly speaking, a particular element which subverts its own universal foundation, a species subverting its own genus. In this sense, we can say that the elementary Marxian procedure of 'criticism of ideology' is already 'symptomatic': it consists in detecting a point of breakdown heterogeneous to a given ideological field and at the same time necessary for that field to achieve its closure, its accomplished form."[17]

The 'architectural symptom', in both the Bataillan and Marxian sense, is thus the negation of architecture, the absence of architecture, and at the same time the constitutive element of architecture.

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16   See Hollier 1992 [1974]: 97.
17   See Žižek 2008 [1989]: 16.

Viewed in regard to the discursive function of architecture, the symptom can then be seen as the point where reality shimmers through, where the physical reality of the architecture disturbs the discourse in which it is used, and thus contaminates the discursive function of architecture. The physical reality of architecture is repressed by its integration in the discourse, but returns as a symptom, a fissure in the network of symbolization.

4.2 The position of the architect

Architects can be seen as responsible for their architectural creations (its stability, functionality, impact on its environment etc.) but are rarely responsible for the integration of their work into the larger discourse. The architect has little control over the way the image of his or her creation is being used in the system of mass media. In this work the question is posed if architects can consciously exploit the symptomatic return of the physical reality in the discourse, in order to undermine, influence or change the discourse.

5. THE PARADOX OF ARCHITECTURE

The split between the physical experience of the architectural artefact and the discursive function of its virtual image, results in the creation of two separate realities. The transgression of this separation, of this limit, can result in a Brechtian Verfremdungseffekt *questioning both the meaning of the physical environment and the discursive function of its image.*

5.1 Paradox

The split between the discursive function of architecture and its physical reality can maybe shed new light on the paradox of architecture, formulated by Bernard Tschumi:

"[…] the strange paradox that seems to haunt architecture: namely, the impossibility of simultaneously questioning the nature of space and, at the same time, making or experiencing a real space."[18]

Tschumi argues that it's impossible for the conceptual questioning of a space and the physical experience of this space to coincide. In this sense it could also be argued that the discursive function of the architectural simulacrum and the experience of the physical reality of the architectural artefact are two separate realities that don't coincide. In the same way Tschumi then argues that a rare moment is possible in which the experience of space becomes the concept of the space, this work tries to develop a practice of architecture in which the realities of the physical architecture and of its discursive function do coincide.

5.2 The moment of architecture

In relation to the paradox of architecture, Tschumi defined the moment of architecture as this moment when the experience of space becomes its own concept, the moment when real space and ideal space converge:

"[…] it is my contention that the *moment of architecture* is that moment when architecture is life and death at the same time, when the experience of space becomes its own concept."[19]

Viewed in regard to the opposition between the architectural simulacrum and the physical reality of architecture, this moment of architecture can be defined as the moment where the discursive function of architecture becomes *explicit* in the physical experience of the architectural artefact. In other words, when the split between the physical architecture

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18   See Tschumi 1996: 67.
19   See Tschumi 1996: 74.

and its simulacrum is transgressed in the physical space itself. It's in this way that the architectural transgression that Tschumi proposes, can be understood:

> "Architecture seems to survive in its erotic capacity only wherever it negates itself, where it transcends its paradoxical nature by negating the form society expects of it. In other words, it is not a matter of destruction or avant-garde subversion but of transgression."[20]

It is this architectural transgression that defines the moment of architecture, the moment when the experience of space becomes its own concept.

5.3 Transgression

Tschumi's ideas about the moment of architecture and its transgression draw of course from Georges Bataille's work on eroticism, in which Bataille formulates this transgression more poignantly:

> "Transgression opens the door into what lies beyond the limits usually observed, but it maintains these limits just the same. Transgression is complementary to the profane world, exceeding its limits but not destroying it."[21]

The architectural reality that wants to undermine the discursive function of its simulacrum needs this point of transgression in its physical space. This means that the physical architecture needs to be based on the limits and expectations the discourse demands from it, but needs to employ these limits and expectations in such a way that it undermines and negates them, but without destroying them. In doing so, the architectural artefact becomes a tool to undermine a certain discourse from within.

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20   See Tschumi 1996: 78.
21   See Tschumi 1996: 65.

5.4 *Verfremdungseffekt*

This undermining of limits and expectations can also be found in the work of Bertolt Brecht and his definition of the *verfremdungseffekt*:

> "[…]playing in such a way that the audience was hindered from simply identifying itself with the characters in the play. Acceptance or rejection of their actions and utterances was meant to take place on a conscious plane, instead of, as hitherto, in the audience's subconscious."[22]

Brecht explains that to achieve this effect "the artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him [...] The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place."[23] This *verfremdungseffekt* could be interpreted as a tool to achieve the moment of architecture described by Tschumi. This would result in an architecture that constructs spaces that try to break this fourth wall separating the physical space and the discourse, resulting in a veritable *verfremdungsarchitektur*.

In short, Brecht achieves this *verfremdungseffekt* by breaking through the wall that separates fiction and reality, that separates the play on stage and the unseen spectators in their seats, not by eliminating the fourth wall, but by making it the subject of the play and thus making it explicit. Through the *verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht makes the concept of theatre the subject of the play itself, and thus the concept of theatre becomes experienced in the space of the theatre, achieving Tschumi's moment of architecture.

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22   See Willett 1964: 91
23   See Willett 1964: 91.

6. FICTION

The transgression of the split between the physical space and its discursive function is an attempt to actively engage the audience with the ideology that structures the physical space. This transgression can also be described as a transgression of the split between fiction and reality, and it is in this sense that the application of two literary concepts proves to be useful, namely, metafiction and script error.

6.1 The fiction of architecture

In Brecht's theatre, the fiction of the play is not exposed as fiction in order to expose some other, true reality. It is exposed as fiction in order to prevent the audience from subconsciously identifying with the characters in the play, which should become a conscious, critical act. The fiction that needs to be exposed is thus not the content of the play, but the conditions in which the theatre takes place: the condition that the theatre is experienced as real (in the sense of the subconscious identification of the audience with the characters), even though the audience knows that it's fictional. This brings again to mind Žižek's formula of ideology already mentioned above:

> "But if the place of the illusion is in the reality of doing itself, then this formula can be read in quite another way: 'they know that, in their activity, they are following an illusion, but still, they are doing it'."[24]

Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* can be seen as a way to make this knowledge explicit in the activity itself, thus undermining the ideology still active in the act. This undermining of the ideology is achieved by breaking the fourth wall of the theatre, of which as a result the audience is estranged from the conditions in which the theatre takes place and is thus

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24   See Žižek 2008 [1989]: 30.

confronted with the ideology structuring the theatre.

This estrangement could then be seen as a transition from the estrangement of the tourist to the estrangement of Camus' stranger. Whereas the audience of the theatre was formerly an audience of tourists, passively following the rules of the game, they are now an audience of strangers, confronted with the ideology that structures the rules of the game:

> "I summarized The Stranger a long time ago, with a remark I admit was highly paradoxical: 'In our society any man who does not weep at his mother's funeral runs the risk of being sentenced to death.' I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game."[25]

The practice of a *verfremdungsarchitektur* is thus a form of architecture that tries to confront its inhabitants with the ideology that structures their everyday life through the built environment. It is a practice of architecture that tries to confront the subject with the space and its discursive function. It tries to convert the passive presence of the subject into an active, critical presence. The architectural fiction that needs to be exposed can be defined as the fiction of the discourse. This is the whole of meanings and conventions fixed within the discourse and presented as natural and universal, but which is always contingent and temporal. The exposing of the fiction of the discourse can perhaps then best be understood through the concepts of two literary devices, which are used in the field of literature to break the fictional dream of a story.

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25   See Carroll 2007: 27.

6.2 Metafiction

Metafiction refers to the meta-level of the fiction, it is the place where the fiction shows itself as fiction, it is the place where the methods of construction of the fiction become the subject of the fiction itself:

> "Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text."[26]

Applying the device of metafiction to architecture means stepping outside the fiction of the architectural artefact. This means that in the physical experience of the artefact a distance between the subject and the artefact is created, in order to make it possible for the subject to step outside of the reality of the architectural artefact, while this 'outside' is still part of the architectural artefact itself.

The device of metafiction is a tool to undermine the fiction of the discourse supported by the architectural artefact by providing the perspective of an outsider.

6.3 Script error

The script error is a device that is applied within the fiction, it is the point inside the fictional scenario where inconsistencies arise, where the fiction stops making sense. Applying the device of the script error to architecture means introducing inconsistencies at crucial

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26   See Waugh 1984.

points in the physical architecture.

The device of the script error is a tool to undermine the fiction of the discourse supported by the architectural artefact from within the discourse, by introducing inconsistencies.

7. THE FOURTH WALL

The transgression of the separate realities of the physical space and of its the discursive function results in an architecture that questions its own reality. This transgression causes fixed meanings and conventions to slide, it undermines expectations, it problematizes the everyday life. It is a way of questioning the specific meanings of specific spaces, but perhaps it is also a way of questioning the very foundations of our own existence and everything we believe we know about it.

7.1 Masks

The practice of a *verfremdungsarchitektur* is a way of creating architecture that questions its own reality. It poses the question if this reality is not merely a fictional construction. And if so, what then is the reality behind the fiction?

A possible answer can be found in Žižek's notion of the mask, in which he argues that the mask, or the fiction, is more true than any so-called reality, the mask is maybe the only reality we have:

"From the 1950s, social psychology varies endlessly the motif of how, in public life, we are all 'wearing masks', adopting identities which obfuscate our true selves. However, wearing a mask can be a strange thing: sometimes, more often than we tend to believe, there is more truth in the mask than in what we assume to be our 'real self'. Recall the proverbial impotent shy person who, while playing the cyberspace interactive game, adopts the screen identity of a sadistic murderer and irresistible seducer - it is all too

simple to say that this identity is just an imaginary supplement, a temporary escape from his real life impotence. The point is rather that, since he knows that the cyberspace interactive game is 'just a game', he can 'show his true self', do things he would never have done in real life interactions - in the guise of a fiction, the truth about himself is articulated."[27]

It is at this point that reality and simulacrum converge, intertwine, and in the end, pose the question if there is ever a possibility of experiencing reality. In this sense it is perhaps the fiction itself that is real, but only when experienced from a conscious, critical position.

7.2 Abyss

In the end, the practice of a *verfremdungsarchitektur* maybe comes close to Aldo Rossi's definition of architecture when he describes a room with an abyss:

"In this summer of 1977 I was staying at the Osteria della Maddalena when I came upon an architectural definition in the course of a conversation that was otherwise not very memorable. I have transcribed it: "There was a sheer drop of ten meters from the highest point of the room." I do not know the context that this sentence refers to, but I find that a new dimension was established: is it possible to live in rooms which drop off so suddenly and precipitously? Does the possibility exist of inventing such a project, a representation which lies beyond memory and experience? […] For many reasons this void is both happiness and its absence."[28]

Following the interpretation of this description by Wim Cuyvers, it can be argued that this room with an abyss is a physical space that confronts the subject with his own mortality:

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27   See "A Cup of Decaf Reality", Lacan 2015.
28   See Rossi 2010 [1990]: 24.

"Knowing that Rossi knew *Le bleu du ciel*, I also know that when, in his *Scientific Autobiography*, he refers to a room with an abyss, he could not have meant a room with a lifting platform, but had the same abyss in mind as in Bataille's *Le bleu du ciel*. Rossi's question to architecture, which he, as an architect in search of happiness, was unable to answer, was how architecture could accept that abyss, how it could be contained in a room: a room in which the blue of the sky falls into the decaying earth, in which the stars lie beneath you like an abyss, an abyss in which heaven and earth coincide (co-inside): a room which formalizes and interiorizes acceptance of total nothingness, a room in which the sky falls into the grave."[29]

Rossi's room with an abyss can be considered as a physical space that confronts the subject with the absence of space, with the absence of life, with the absence of meaning, and with the contingency and temporality of the subject's own existence.

Maybe the practice of a *verfremdungsarchitektur* is then not only a confrontation with the fiction of the discourse, but also with the fiction of our own lives. It is not only a way of questioning the specific meanings of specific spaces, but perhaps also a way of questioning the meaning of our own existence, the very foundations of our own existence and everything we believe we know about it.

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29   See Cuyvers 2005: 39.

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