

Gabu Heindl: "The Everyday: Wandering, Wondering. Re-Positioning Architecture, Spectacle and Everyday Life", in: Markus Bogensberger, Gabu Heindl (Eds.): *position alltag. architecture in the context of everyday life*, Graz: HDA Verlag, 2009, p. 10-26

The Everyday: Wandering, Wondering. Re-Positioning Architecture, Spectacle and Everyday Life

Gabu Heindl

Walking the City

The ordinary becomes beautiful as a trace of the true. And the ordinary becomes a trace of the true if it is torn from its obviousness in order to become a hieroglyph (Jacques Rancière¹)

How can the ordinary, or the everyday be torn from its obviousness? A tearing-from as an aggressive act in Rancière's sense: let us tentatively place this gesture in a relation of comparison to the kind of "poaching" within the everyday which Michel De Certeau advocates. De Certeau describes the practice of walking the city as a deviant usage, out of which a changed understanding of cities becomes possible: if city walking is itself poached and approached not pragmatically, for the purpose of reaching a goal, but rather by way of immersion and intentional *dérive*, then everyday practices turn into innovative forces of production.²

Flanerie sets the environment perceived in walking free from a teleology of the "from A to B" type; it turns the environment itself into a telos, a goal – and also into a problem, a question. In this way, walking vision becomes an (experimental) form of knowledge; the subject of vision becomes reflective; flanerie becomes *productive*. With regard to the formation of the city in its everyday environment, there is a whole genealogy of conceptual evaluations of walking to be reconstructed. This lineage ranges from early Dadaist excursions to the "deambulations" of the Surrealists, and from Situationist *dérive* zu Lucius Burckhardt's *strollology*, which is also a "promenadology", a science of and through walking.³ (One might even go back to the ancient Greek peripatetics – a school of thought which focused on the qualities of learning by walking about.)

¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. [2000], London, New York 2004, p. 34.

² „Das Alltägliche setzt sich aus allen möglichen Arten des Wilderns zusammen“, Michel de Certeau: „Gehen in der Stadt“, in *Kunst des Handelns*, Berlin (Merve) 1988

³ Lucius Burckhardt: *Wer plant die Planung? Architektur, Politik und Mensch*, Jesko Fezer, Martin Schmitz (Hg.), Martin Schmitz Verlag, Kassel 2005

The Everyday and *site qualities*: A Change in Dimension

There are those plans which are created solely within the architecture studio, in a scale of 1:500, with colored sections attributing programs to large urban areas. In contrast to such "megalomania", the "close usage" of cities by walking through them is a potentially alternative way of building or rebuilding them. Every usage of the city is, implicitly, an act of building. This is true insofar as every agent within a city modifies the latter's relational space, but also insofar as deviant walking acts as an empirical research tool for urban design. For the immediacy of walking creates a close relationship to and also an intense look through the city which is quite distinct from the god-like vision of master-planners with their clean surfaces (*tabulae rasae*) on paper. Walking the street leads to the emergence and appearance of qualities of urban space that cannot be reduced to abstract lines on paper. The relationship between top-down programming in modernist urban design on one hand, and the programming of urban space which is always already there, on the other hand, is thus constantly to be negotiated.

site vs. program

In discussions of urban planning, everyday life in the street, understood as "dirty", uncontrollable reality, has featured frequently as a model case for the criticism of clean, controlled modernism. One could cite the critical positions taken by Team 10, who opposed the quantification and normalization of the everyday in modernist urban design, especially with Le Corbusier. Instead, Team 10 integrated everyday life's rhythms and qualities of specific urban spaces (especially pedestrian spaces) into their program. There are Peter and Alison Smithson who, in their Robin Hood Gardens (1968-72), blended the typology of housing into the street by having the street enter into the building. Or one could think of the way in which Victor Gruen and Jon Jerde drew their planning strategies for the architecture of large shopping malls from urban social experiences, while Venturi/Rauch/Scott-Brown propagated learning from Las Vegas Boulevard according to Venturi's „Isn't Main Street almost perfect?". And it was Jane Jacobs who cautioned against the death of great American cities. Under the headline "The Use of Sidewalks", Jacobs – some of whose positions are still echoing today – wrote on the sidewalks in the streets of Greenwich Village, emphasizing their safety, their role as zones of social interaction, and their suitability for children.⁴

⁴ See also: John Kaliski: „The Present City and the Practice of City Design“ in: *Everyday Urbanism*, John Case, Margaret Crawford, John Kaliski (Ed.), New York (The Monacelli Press), 1999

What about contemporary theories of the city? The "Michigan Debates on Urbanism" offer three categories up to discussion: first, a New Urbanism, which unfolds between Main Street and Garden City; second, a Post-Urbanism based on Rem Koolhaas's Generic City; third, an Everyday Urbanism designated as „grass-root and populist“. ⁵ This list can be contrasted with Françoise Fromonot's more subtle view, which is informed by negotiations of programs and site qualities. In an „urbanism of negotiation“, ⁶ mediating and distributing between program and site, Fromonot sees a potential that is especially promising today, after modernism with its *tabula rasa* giving priority to the program, and after postmodernism with its manifests generated out of pre-given conditions on site.

Walking the site

A slow walking – not past, but along the ephemeral: this was what the Graz City Walks initiated by the HDA Graz during the program that focussed on “position everyday” were about (see separate section in this book). Following various routes and lines of questioning – architectures of control, changes within the world of labor, the “publicness” of public space, etc. – the qualities of the street, situations of everyday life, and also the “minor” dimension of urban space were placed center frame.

Walking perception sharpens the sense for details of the aesthetic of urban everyday life – and, alternately as well as simultaneously, a sense for the absence of any details, as it becomes evident in the super-modernism of „big architectures“. The „city of small things“, which contrasts with the latter, is not just an issue of scale: Koolhaas' notion of „the problem of the big“ ⁷ is developed further in Irénée Scalbert's concept of „the advantage of the small“: „The argument for the rehabilitation of the small, it should be pointed out, is not an invitation to make everything cute or domestic, to transform our homes into doll's houses and our cities into NIMBY, cosy celebrations of themselves. To the contrary, the city of small things is vast and infinite. It is vast in direct proportion with our ability to see and define smaller and smaller elements in the field of experience.“ ⁸ If we read Scalbert's “small things” through the conceptual optics of the “minor(itarian)” in Deleuze and Guattari, the opposition of the small on

⁵ Douglas Kelbaugh: „Preface”, in: Everyday Urbanism, Rahul Mehrotra (Ed.), Michigan Debates on Urbanism, New York 2004

⁶ Françoise Fromonot: „Death and Life of Great Urban Theories?”, in Condak, Heindl, Schmidt-Colinet, Seraji (Eds.): Review VI. Five Platforms, Five Ecologies, Salzburg (pustet), 2008

⁷ Rem Koolhaas in: S,M,L,XL. New York (The Monacelli Press) 1995

⁸ Irénée Scalbert: „The City of Small Things”, Building Material (Dublin), Nr. 12, Autumn 2004

the one hand to a chauvinist “Not Into My Backyard” (NIMBY) mentality, the desire for seclusion on the part of cozily housed city dwellers, on the other becomes even more salient. An explicit reference to the Deleuzian “minor” is made by Joan Ockman, who speaks out in favor of a „minor architecture”: „A minor architecture is necessarily political; it is always minor *in relation to* a major architecture, which in turn serves the interests of a dominant system of power.”⁹

In a slightly displaced perspective, a kind of becoming major(itarian), a becoming normal, of Situationist practices comes into view. Has Situationism turned conventional? Well, in any case: feeding consumption back into production is a routine gesture nowadays. Deviant usage tends to becoming usual, and playful walking/seeing turns into playful urban flaneurism. Ultimately, this could prove to be an approach to the city that endlessly delays any decisive, interventionist planning activity or abandons it altogether. What’s more, such a position can amount to „laughing the professional field of urbanism out of existence”, as Rem Koolhaas puts it.¹⁰ Therefore, perhaps one should use the concept of deviant usage itself in a deviant way. This, in its turn, implies the issue of translating vision into action, of image into usage.

Spectacle vs. use

Consumption turning into production; the everyday turning into innovative knowledge; making use of usage – these headlines confront us with phenomena that are cyclic, are about a “turning into”, about creative abuses as per-versions (in a general sense). What these notions congeal into is a kind of noetic-kinetic space of conceptual “pirouettes”. These dance-turns are performed by interrelated discourses of re-evaluation (and even transvaluation). In his 1967 book „The Society of the Spectacle”, Situationist chief theorist Guy Debord defines spectacle as „capital accumulated to the point where it becomes an image”.¹¹ In 2002, Hal Foster gave this famous remark another twist pirouette-style: quoting Guy Debord and criticizing the Bilbao Guggenheim museum, Foster turns Debord’s equation of capital to image around: „With Gehry and other architects the reverse is now true: spectacle is ‘an image accumulated to the point where it becomes capital.’”¹²

⁹ Joan Ockman: „Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture“, in: Architecture of the Everyday, Steven Harris, Deborah Berke (Eds.), New York (Princeton Architectural Press) 1997

¹⁰ Rem Koolhaas: „What Ever Happened to Urbanism”, in: S,M,L,XL. New York (The Monacelli Press) 1995

¹¹ Guy Debord: „The Society of the Spectacle“ (1967). Quoted in Hal Foster: Design and Crime, New York (Verso) 2002

¹² Hal Foster: Design and Crime, New York (Verso) 2002

So, have we now, finally as it were, arrived at the kind of “Bilbao-bashing” that was to be expected given the topic of the everyday? Well, what’s more important here is the twist in the relationship between spectacle and use value which Foster conceptualizes in regard of Bilbao, and which is hinted at in the title of a reader that carries on from Foster’s critique of Bilbao (with Foster himself writing in it): „Architecture between spectacle and use“.¹³ Bilbao is frequently referred to by way of a hasty conclusion that opposes an architecture of the everyday to spectacular architecture, valuing the useful architecture of daily life as spectacle’s more relevant counterpart. Such a logic, which argues that Bilbao is pure spectacle, pure image, is, however, is, however, already suspended by the (re-)turning of image into capital mentioned before. To put it slightly differently: Spectacle does not only have the exchange-value and attention-value of a glamorous commodity, but, in this case, it also has use-value. Its use-value are the useful effects and indirect returns in the city’s everyday life that are subsumed under the notorious term “Bilbao effect”. Therefore, Foster’s critical remark „Gehry does indeed design out of the ‚cultural logic‘ of advanced capitalism, in terms of its language of risk-taking and spectacle-effects“¹⁴ is quite apposite here. Foster is right in diagnosing a cultural logic of late capitalism – not only in the conventional sense of the usual complaints about the totality of marketing (as it concerns, among other things, the “art of building”), but also in the sense of pointing to the culturalization of economy, in the direction of a logic which runs through the following connection: “spectacular architecture” – “city of intense experience” – “hip location for investment” – “higher standards of living”.¹⁵ In short, one should not simply apply the labels “(architecture of) spectacle” and “(architecture of) use”, but rather focus on their mutual translations. Moreover, the context of Bilbao – and especially the equation made above which intimates a trajectory leading idyllically, harmoniously and straight from spectacle to higher standards of living – poses the eminent question of whose use we’re talking about. This is the issue of the distribution of goods and uses, of whose profits and well-being the whole process results in. At this point, another aspect of Foster’s critique of Bilbao comes to the foreground: contrary to what the official self-image of Bilbao architecture propagates, the latter is not public or free at all, but rather exclusive and private (just as is the star architect’s world itself); it produces exclusions and unequal distributions.

¹³ Architecture between Spectacle and Use, Anthony Vidler (Ed.), Massachusetts (yalebooks) 2008

¹⁴ Foster: Design and Crime

¹⁵ In Bilbao, for more than twenty years infrastructural projects were carried out in an abandoned industrial area: underground train stations by Norman Foster, the airport extension by Santiago Calatrava, a train station by James Stirling, etc.

Mediability vs. use

In the same reader “Architecture between Spectacle and Use”, Beatriz Colomina offers a different perspective on the opposition of spectacle to use: based on her research on the mediatization of architecture, she sees buildings as being in tension with their media images – a relationship which, as she asserts, became paradigmatic already in modernism. For modernism is (as has often been proved) not always functional – in spite of the term functionalism – but is from the outset oriented towards the image. “Modern architecture becomes modern [...] by engaging with the media: with publications, competitions, exhibitions.”¹⁶ An expert on Loos, Colomina quotes from Adolf Loos, who criticized not least those architects who planned their buildings with an eye on how they would look good on photographs.¹⁷

So, now we have the opposition of the high-gloss photograph to the house. In a slightly different perspective and context, Loos opposes the artwork to the house: “The house has to please everyone. This is its distinction from the artwork, which has to please no one. The artwork is the artist’s private business. The house is not. [...] The artwork is responsible to no one, the house to everyone.”¹⁸ Again, there is the question of where architecture is positioned in this constellation, especially if the opposition is rephrased as one of “art pleasing no one” to “architecture responsible to everyone”. In this relationship, the world appears as still being in good order, so to speak: the modernist separation between objects with art-value and (architectonic) objects with use-value is still a categorical one and, above all, intact.

Three remarks on this issue: First, Le Corbusier will, quite soon after Loos, take up a position that mediates between art and architecture of use by emphasizing the necessity of adding the essential surplus-value of art to the efficient work of the engineer.¹⁹ Second: Loos is critical of architecture that is built for the purpose of looking good on beautiful photos; today, however, it should be evident that a good photograph of architecture (even a “beautiful” one) does not necessarily have to be a picture on which the building appears as “purged” from all traces of its use. Architectural photography is not condemned to sending the inhabitants “away on vacation” for the duration of the taking of their house’s pictures. Also, the question if the photo renders visible the soiling and the wear and tear of a building, or perhaps

¹⁶ Beatriz Colomina: „Media as Modern Architecture”, in: Vidler (Ed.): Architecture between Spectacle and Use

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Adolf Loos, in: „Architektur“ 1910; transl. of quotation: Drehli Robnik

¹⁹ Le Corbusier, Toward a New Architecture, 1923

some “non-ideal” weather conditions, or even (synaesthetically) the smell and the acoustics of a building, or if it does not give visibility to such phenomena, – this is a matter of specific photographic decisions (not a given of the “medium”).²⁰ Third, from the “formulas” discussed so far, a rather curious conclusion can be drawn: To Loos, use is opposed to art; to the Bilbao-critics, use is opposed to spectacle. Should we therefore, seen from the point of use and under the aspect of their distance to use – hold spectacle and art as conceptually becoming one and the same? Over such an equation, many would voice some disagreement.

Autonomy vs. use

A number of questions are connected to what has been said so far. There is, for instance, the question of the running room left to architects – between turning down a purely spectacular architecture and, at the other extreme, the fetishizing of the everyday. One can rephrase this relationship in terms of spectacle as foreground and the everyday as background: “...historically, ‘ordinary’ environment was the background against which architects built the ‘extraordinary’...”, as N. John Habraken writes.²¹ Architects build the extraordinary – and this is, by definition, “not much”. Seen from this point of view, it comes as no surprise – at least not to Marc Wigley – that these few buildings require strong acts of mediatized staging and performance: “those celebrating or condemning the cult of the spectacle in architecture overlook the huge effort devoted to creating the backdrop against which images appear“, Wigley writes in “Toward a History of Quantity”. In this text, we also find the almost formulaic half-sentence: “architecture is the surplus added to everyday life”.²²

One can also see an opposition of architectural autonomy to the life-world here. In the collection of essays “Autonomy and Ideology. Positioning an Avant-garde in America”, Peter Eisenman writes about the necessity for an autonomy of architecture which results, on one hand, from differences to other arts (from what other arts are not capable of). “Unlike other arts, specifically painting, what constitutes the autonomy of architecture is always conditioned by a certain form of social practice [...] When similar formal characteristics are found in architecture, they have always been inextricably linked to its social function: shelter, accommodation, symbolism, etc.” At first glance, Eisenman’s point seems to amount to holding social spatiality to be the specificity of architecture. Eisenman, however, goes one step further: he sees

²⁰ This was the topic of the exhibition „architektur 24/7 – eine alltägliche Beziehung“ (“architecture 24/7 – an everyday relationship”). See this book: p. 108 - 169

²¹ N. John Habraken: Structure of the Ordinary Form and Control in the Built Environment. MIT, USA, 1998

²² Marc Wigley; “Toward a History of Quantity”, in: Vidler (Ed.), Architecture between Spectacle and Use.

the becoming-autonomous of architecture in its avant-garde gesture of abstracting from the social, which he addresses as “function” and “zeitgeist”. Architectural autonomy, therefore, is “trans-gressive of its time and place, thus counter to any idea of the zeitgeist”.²³

Eisenman decidedly sets his conception apart from the one proposed much earlier by Manfredo Tafuri. With Tafuri, we have a genuine counter-position to Eisenman’s view: he welcomes the discipline of architecture to its reality. He does so by calling up architects to actively deal with their field’s economic or technical conditions of production and thus to move from “form” to “reform” (even within all the bureaucratic frameworks of organization relevant in this context). Architects should do so because architecture is “an altogether negligible phenomenon” – the rather sobering lesson from its reality. According to Tafuri’s critique of ideology, it is the very intuition of and worrying over this marginality of architecture which has architects invest all their energies into a maximum of formal terrorism which can serve as a comforting/compensating signifier of their potency and freedom.²⁴

In contrast to this, Tafuri sees possibilities of meaningful self-initiated architectural action (or activism) in confronting and questioning real sites of the improbable (the city) and joining into processes of shaping urban structures of organization. This should be done in accordance with an understanding of “the Architect as Producer”, which means: without any pretensions of keeping a distance, and in urban planners’ rather than social workers’ fashion.²⁵ We have now placed Eisenman and Tafuri in a constellation to each other into which Roemer van Toorn can be inserted with some conceptual gain: “What I am looking for is a specific kind of negotiation between two constitutive politics of aesthetics: the one of the life-world and the one of autonomy which installs and allows permanent disagreement in a system”.²⁶ There is no talk here of a middle course or compromise between life-world and autonomy; much rather, there is an emphasis on “confrontation” and “disagreement” (following the Rancie rian notion of “me sentente”) within the systemic life-world.

²³ Peter Eisenman: “Autonomy and the Avant-garde. The Necessity of an Architectural Avant-garde in America”, in: R.E. Somol (ed.), *Autonomy and Ideology*, New York 1997

²⁴ Manfredo Tafuri: “L’Architecture dans le Boudoir”, in: K. M. Hays (Ed.): *Oppositions Reader*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1998, p. 310

²⁵ See also: Joan Ockman: *Toward a Theory of Normative Architecture*, in: *Architecture of the Everyday*

²⁶ Roemer van Toorn: “Aesthetics as Form of Politics”, paper presented at the research workshop “architecture meets life”, TU Graz, 2005

Shifting Focus

With an eye on the relationship between the everyday as background and spectacle as foreground, I suggest a re-focusing, a shifting of the focus from the foreground to the background: a re-evaluation, a rendering visible of the invisible by way of a disturbance of forms which aims at rupturing the categorical differentiation that separates the everyday as unimportant from architectural importance. To put it in more concrete terms: What about everyday architecture which is formally advanced and challenging? – To this, the follow-up question must be: are there not many examples of this already? Looking at Zaha Hadid's Tyrolean Hungerburgbahn train station, or at social housing with deconstructive design, one can see how global signature architecture subverts any simplistic attempt to a-priori attribute a foregrounding of style to types of building adequate to it. Today, everything can be (potentially is) what once only churches, palaces or museums could be: landmark architecture, ranging even to bus stops. In this respect, as far as the attribution of forms goes, a kind of aesthetics of indifference – which implies a hunch of equality – has certainly been achieved. (This almost takes us back to the argument-pirouette which Foster performs with Debord: capital turns into image – image turns into capital – distinction (exchange value) turns into use-value. Investing in architecture depends on investors and their goals, not on building typology.)

Let's return to the disturbance of forms: advanced forms are not identical to sculptural expressionism, and they do not necessarily mean to translate excessive materials into spectacular images. Rather, shifting the focus makes it possible to produce cases of the visibility of injustice, to "build" arguments, as it is being done by Laura Kurgan and her Columbia University studio. They are working on visions for rebuilding New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, and in contrast to Dutch architects planning iconic buildings supposed to signify hope; Kurgan opts for architectural images that turn an injustice into an exemplary case of dissensus. Her studio investigates and maps the undersupply with kindergartens and schools among the (predominantly black) population in the most affected areas.²⁷ Once more: this is not about emergency architecture providing replacements or doing social work. Much rather, the form of representation chosen by Kurgan – a specifically architectural, diagrammatic type of drawing – is nothing but spectacular as a sight. The same goes

²⁷ Kurgan's project was exhibited in the USA Pavillon of the 2008 Venice Biennale; See also: Yates McKee : "Hounded Housing: Eco-Vanguardism, Eviction, and the Biopolitics of Sustainability in New Orleans", in: Greyroom 30

for the schools that are to be built (given the lack in infrastructure): they are conceived of as architecturally, stylistically challenging. It goes without saying that this practice of making visible is preceded by the production of “immersive”, “situated” knowledge, by research “in the streets”, by walking that implies talking to people on site. (This contrasts strongly with the very “masterplan perspective” that, in this specific case, became iconic with the television images of President George W. Bush flying over New Orleans.)

Taking Position (in the) Everyday

So, what’s at stake is taking position. This book’s title, “Position Everyday”, points towards two architectural conditions that are in productive conflict with each other: position as defining a spatial situation on one hand, and as attitude-towards on the other. Which can be rephrased as: the localization of urbanism and architecture on one hand, the question of their relevance/insistence/urgency on the other. The ever-insisting issues of planning (and non-planning) take us back to the street as a site of knowledge, as a site of visibility and invisibility, as a life-world (and there is no need for us to get neo-provincial or communitarian about this). Focusing our attention on the city, we confront the political “reality” of economy, of bureaucracy, of the market, as well as the extent to which urban life is in process – a permanently changing life-world and (re-)negotiation of normalized phenomena that are highly complex. What blocs any process-oriented approach to negotiable, communal spaces, however, is the present circulation of pre-fabricated, stereotypical images that conceive of the city as being “exclusive” (in the double sense of luxury and keeping people out), as being obliged to progress or to global competition between urban areas.

And then there is the position that is to be taken critically. With Hannah Arendt one can say that only by taking position (not just “in the street”) a public sphere, and thus public space, is created. In extreme cases, taking position can mean causing a break, a rupture, for which an “I would prefer not to” in the manner of Herman Melville’s *Bartleby* is exemplary. Whether confronted with the question if one would like to build for an undemocratic regime (e.g., in China), or any another speculative building in any Central European street, there is always the possibility of saying no. “To do almost nothing becomes the most powerful intervention. Yet architects are so used to hearing the word ‘no’ that they are afraid to use it themselves”, Marc Wigley writes in his contribution to the “History of Quantity”. Knowing about the necessity for architects to gain recognition, he adds that in the future we should not exclude the option of gaining credit for doing nothing. In this respect, Wigley points to the way in

which Cedric Price evaluated and chose his commissions (morally and politically) and thus managed to turn the very “inactivity of the architect” into an “activist challenge”.

It is not only because of the economic crisis and because of issues of sustainability, but probably with inspirations owing to these factors, that a redefinition of „less is more“ is at stake. Also at stake are critical evaluations of projects and new alliances, very much in Martin Reinhold’s sense. This is how Reinhold puts it: “[t] he need to engage directly with messy realities called for by some post-critics is indeed urgent. the question is which realities you choose to engage with, and to what end. In other words: what’s your project? This also means avoiding the elementary mistake of assuming that reality is entirely real – that is, pre-existent, fixed, and therefore exempt from critical re-imagination. For this, alliances are necessary”.²⁸ One should add that – contrary to what post-critics believe – the capability for criticism remains a precondition essential to working on the concept of a “minor architecture“.

If on the one hand we have the “no”, then on the other we have the possibility to self-initiate new planning projects and to position oneself – not, however, in the market and according to its parameters of what “goes well” (another case of “going around” understood as circulation). Much rather, one should keep in mind that there are planning projects which no one commissions because those who are concerned by them do not have the necessary (financial) means. There are fields of activity for architects, the spectrum of which extends from unsolicited architecture – entirely self-initiated projects – to defining priorities within projects. The latter task involves the question if either aesthetic or social contents of architecture are emphasized, and also questions pertaining to the just distribution of space and of possibilities to claim speech in the context of negotiating space.

The intimate relationship between architecture and the everyday is, however, (and this is to sum up) all too easily confused with a kind of compensating “social (workers’) architecture”, or with the hands-on realism of contemporary neo-pragmatists. In view of this confusion, it may do some good to return to Henri Lefebvre’s critical position, for instance to the claim which his 1968 essay “The Right to the City” raises already in its title. This plea is not to be taken as advocating “nursery”. Much rather, in the light of David Harvey’s reading of Lefebvre, it is about a right to access not just that which already exists, but also a right to changing the city – especially so since the capitalist city is, not least, a permanent production-site of

²⁸ Reinhold Martin: „Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism“. in: Harvard Design Magazine, Number 22, Spring/ Summer 2005

inequalities.²⁹ Thinking in a similar direction, one should recall that Situationism did not focus on affirming or celebrating the everyday, but on criticizing it and on revolutionizing existing conditions.³⁰ At this point, one could follow the trajectory laid out by Roemer van Toorn, who questions the life-world by introducing “disagreement” into it, and who opposes politics – conflict and debate – to a culture of “police-imposed” consensus. This trajectory ultimately leads to Jacques Rancière’s political and aesthetic theory.

To Rancière, politics always involves a break with usage and with what is usual, the latter two subsumed under the name “ethos”. Ethics, as the thought pertaining to ethos, is the clinging to the usual/habitual that is (or is supposed to be) adequate to a life-world. In this Rancièrean sense, ethics is a culture of non-decision and avoiding disturbance, which, in our context, also means avoiding planning; such avoidance allows you to remain cool and free of ideology and to stick to walking flaneur-style. Rancière’s conception of politics is paradigmatic for opposing the ethical stance by emphasizing the decision, the positing, which can always be disputed, inherent to architecture. This is about making a break that is not a-priori secure and guaranteed, but rather renders an injustice visible. This is, roughly, what is meant by tearing the everyday from its obviousness.

²⁹ David Harvey: Abstract of “The Right to the City“. in: International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, vol. 27.4, 2003

³⁰ Anselm Jappe: Zur Aktualität der Theorie von Guy Debord, in: Krisis 20, 1998
<http://www.krisis.org/1998/politik-des-spektakels-spektakel-der-politik>