



+ V  
D I G I T A L U R B A N I S M

R  
T  
U  
A  
L  
  
A  
R  
C  
H  
I  
T  
E  
C  
T  
U  
R  
E

"Information wants to be space" – Erik Davis

Within new media, space seems to be an almost irresistible metaphor. Not only does a spatial structuring of information help us to navigate in the yet-to-be-discovered virtual environments, the data themselves seem to have an ineluctable tendency to structure themselves along architectural principles.

Virtuality, if we follow Elisabeth Grosz's argument in *Architecture from the Outside* (MIT Press, 2001), is characterised by temporality, embodiment and the inclusion of the other. Cyberspace is not some metaphysical pearly gate to heaven, but rather an interval, an in-between space between the built and the un-built. As post-binary structures, virtualities (in plural) are always unfinished, non-dialectical and non-linear in nature, emphasising movement, practice and action. The fluid, unstable architecture of databases, interactive 3D worlds, discursive galaxies of lists, online archives and search engines may seem in sharp contrast to the solid materiality of the known architectural profession.

What is particularly striking about all the emerging 'virtual architecture' practices that we encounter is their open and multidisciplinary character. These are "embodied utopias", in the sense that Elizabeth Grosz has spoken of. What brings the efforts of a variety of artists, theorists and actual builders of real and virtual spaces together is their belief in radical futures. Empowered by critical concepts and a computer, they prove that the world as we know it can be folded inside out, both in our heads, on-screen and in the material world.

Virtual architecture is not an escapist response to the dirty reality of today's megacities, although it is tempting to read these unfamiliar digital spaces as mere representations of baroque opulence. In order to access the techno-imagination at its best, it is of 'tactical' importance to forget about the virtual as an enemy of the so-called real. As others have suggested earlier, instead of pushing reality into virtuality, we could let the virtual worlds bleed out into the three-dimensional physical existence. Marcos Novak calls this occurrence "eversion". Today's generation of architects, theorists, urban planners, using computers, are just doing that. They alter and mutate the space we inhabit.

This section on virtual architecture will hopefully be the beginning of a larger effort to introduce these ideas, engagements and projects into the context of Sarai in order to catalyse an exchange aimed at overcoming the worn-out binary opposition between real and virtual realities.

GEERT LOVINK