

carpet tapete

HOW TO QUOTE THIS TEXT: DELL, C. Systems tilt: from the atonal logic of the urban. In VIRUS. N. 3. São Carlos: Nomads.usp, 2010. Available at: URL. Accessed: MM/DD/YYYY

Systems tilt: from the atonal logic of the urban

Christopher Dell

Musician, Master of Arts in Human Resources and Organisational Development, visiting professor at the Master Program in Urban Design at Hafencity University, Hamburg, Germany.

At first glance the relation between music and architecture is that of mere difference: while architecture is immobile and concrete, music is ephemere and abstract. This fact holds true for a certain perspective: the epistemological question of music and architecture are different. But when you shift towards the performative, the ontology changes. When you ask for what architecture does, then implication with music come into play, especially the diagrammatic aspect: how to organize action in time. This also implies a new systems approach.

To analyse the complexity of today's city, you cannot assume a black box that can be controlled via input and output. The performative way of how city comes into play needs an approach that also includes the transformation of the observer. Architects that work on today's city will change themselves. Or how David Harvey formulates: "The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city." To get to that point, design itself has to change radically: before we try to start solving problems, we need a thorough understanding of the city. But not only in fragmented epistemological bits but also as performative field, as "sociology happening" as Rem Koolhaas puts it. That means to observe tendencies rather than forms, situations rather than objects. Koolhaas again: "What has to be done is a very precise analysis of what is happening and, if possible, why. Then a retroactive concept could be extrapolated, or form the basis of a forward-looking extrapolation." [1]

At this point, the question of notation comes into play. If we want to pin down the performative aspects of the city, maps are not enough, because they are descriptions of what things are. But only notations say something about what things do. In that respect, musical notations and

especially the strategy of graphic notations of the 50s and 60s can be inspiring. These notations work diagrammatically. But what does that mean?

A diagram is formed, in this way, by the performativity of its strategic qualities – the processes of passage and variation found on the same plain – which, from this topology of points, establish a nexus of contiguities which, while temporary, is also manifold and heterogeneous. Manifold because it is structurally open, rather than a system. Deleuze describes this phenomenon as an atonal logic. [2]

What does this mean for the conception of the city? We begin from the basic assumption that representational expressive forms as notations and conceptions are no longer adequate to discover how organization functions. Contemporary forms of city organization begin to explode, because their movements have already exploded. Our thesis suggests that a focus on the figurative object of organization is no longer helpful in this respect. Rather, it is much more helpful to focus on the process of organization. Process in Marx is considered in opposition to industry and nature. Industry takes natural raw materials out of nature and returns it as waste. This process divides into the spheres of production, distribution and consumption.

Marx suggests here that the basis of the distinction is constituted not only in capital and the division of labour, but also in the false consciousness, created by capitalist actors in and for themselves. Deleuze and Guattari stress, however, that "...in truth, there is no such thing as relatively independent spheres or circuits: production is immediately consumption and recording process (enregistrement), without mediation. The recording process and consumption accord directly with production, although they do so within the production process itself. Hence everything is production." [3] To take this a step further: "There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other, and couples them together." [4] From this, Deleuze and Guattari deduce that "process" signifies "incorporating recording and consumption within production itself." The exercise lies then in "making them the production of one and the same process" [5], so that: "...there is only one kind of production, the production of the real." [6] Which is to say: new meanings attach themselves to the recording of the process as movement.

To this end, it becomes necessary to invent a new form of non-homogeneous notation and to reconceptualize it as a writing of the real itself, as "a succession of characters from alphabets in which an ideogram, a pictogram, a tiny picture... suddenly make an appearance." [7] The structures to be revealed only make sense when shown in their functioning, for they are either representations or the bearers of relationships of people. They are components of abstract machines and indicate a production process and relations of production that, because they are not recursive on representational inscriptions, are primordial. The diagrams of the city we seek represent nothing 1:1; they are not directly representative. Rather, they are the bearers of relationships and the distributors of agents, but the agents shape no identities as relationships are also not static. It is necessary to describe the complex of relations from the point of view of the recording of city as process, and in terms that correspond properly to it – including their effect on the process itself (feedback). To "describe" here means to take a cross section of reports, together with creative production in notation itself. In this respect the intersection of music and architecture is not intended to interpret city as music but has rather to be seen as an exercise to introduce musical thought into the analysis of the urban as performative process.

Why should we use such an approach? Maybe one thought might be helpful: if you take the definition of system as "a set of interacting elements and the qualities emerging from these interactions", then you say that you can trace the qualities as they are, after the system has "done" the interaction, or you try to define parameters that you insert into the system so that its elements

will interact accordingly to reach that or that quality. But you don't really know anything about the interaction itself and the contingency of its processing.

In planning this means that you are either too late or you plan something that has nothing to do with what is really "happening" in the city. In the approach I have described above, the mode of working is different: the aim is to get into the performative process of interaction itself. It is about developing a reflective practise, that enables us to create and constructively play with experimental situations as relational practise. That implies to make the nonlinearity of the design process instrumental rather than transforming it into a linear endeavor. In that way, the performative elements of urban situations can be recombined, movements reused, changes anticipated, disjunctions, culminations, breaks and reunions are reintegrated to generate new design possibilities. If we take the assumption seriously that city is more and more becoming a performative process rather than an object or a form, then these aspects of relational work become important. This also proposes that this way of design-making can be closer to what the city really is, namely by concentrating on what it does.

We then also need to read the material arrangements of the city, which gives us a glimpse of urbanity in the making. To serve the immediate practise of design, they have to be interpreted not as passive objects but understood in their performative role as organizational devices used to enact further design steps. City is not planned and then constructed, it happens. City is not only an (epistemic) form and not only a system as 'a set of interacting elements and the qualities emerging from these interactions' but also a reiterative performance manual through which new knowledge is gained and practise is inspired.

Referências

[1] Koolhaas, Rem, Conversations with Students, Houston 1996, p. 47

[2] Deleuze, Gilles, Foucault, Frankfurt 1992, p. 10. (german)

[3] Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Penguin, 2009, Trans. Lane, Hurley, Seem, Minneapolis, 1983. p.4

[4] Op. Cit. p. 2

[5] Op. Cit. p. 4

[6] Op. Cit. p. 32

[7] Op. Cit. p. 3