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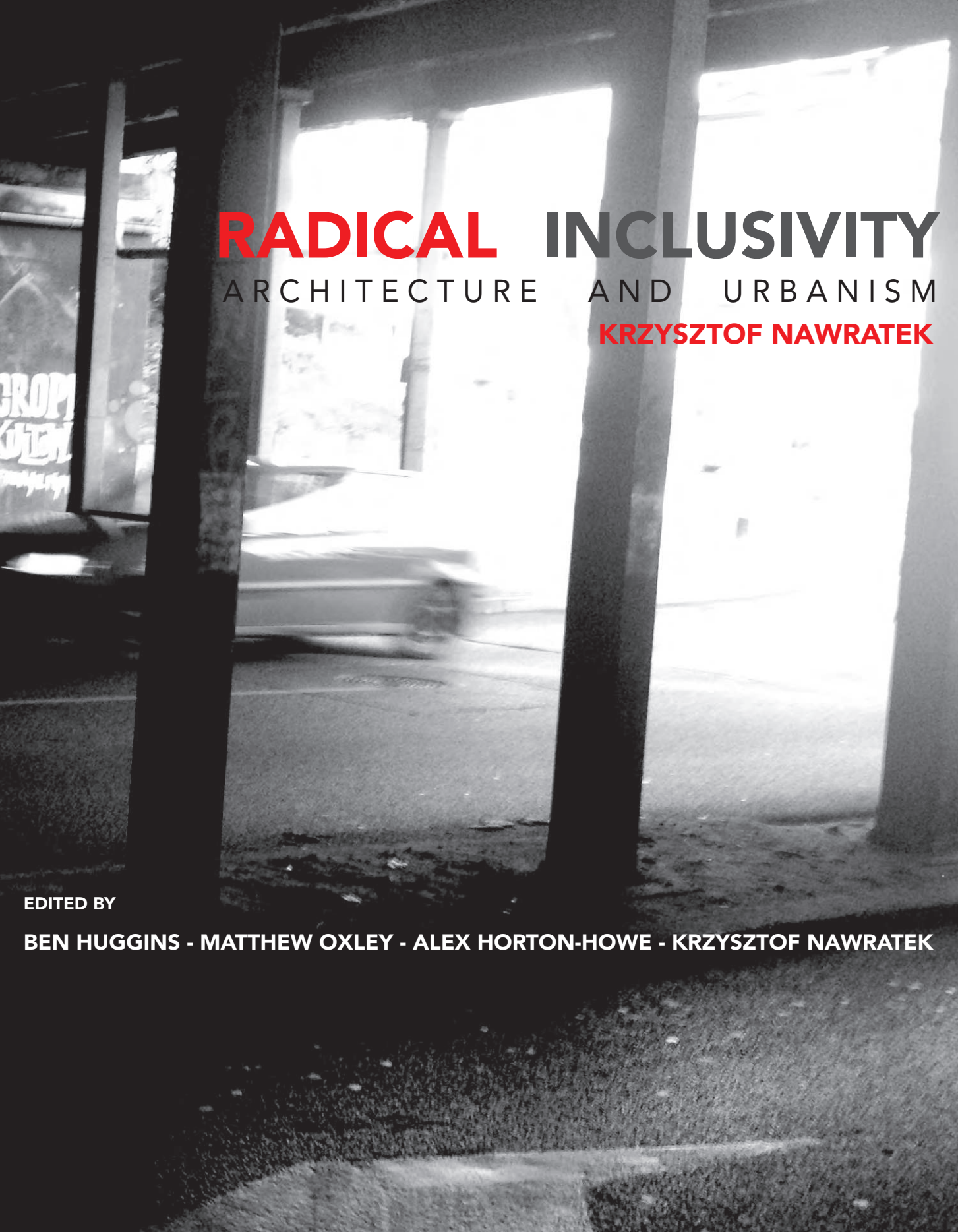

RADICAL INCLUSIVITY

ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

KRZYSZTOF NAWRATEK

EDITED BY

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RADICAL INCLUSIVITY

ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM

KRZYSZTOF NAWRATEK

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Radically Inclusive Architecture and Urbanism

Modern politics is defined by two perspectives. On the one hand, the neo-liberal, post-political technocracy that camouflages any class conflict with the "we are all in this together" slogan. On the other hand there is the Schmittian language of conflict which divides the world into "*us*" and "*them*" and becomes an elite stimulated (or even simulated) conflict of the civilizations, a cultural and religious war. These two perspectives may seem contradictory but in fact they are two sides of the same coin, the coin of language currency used by the richest handful and their multitude of servants to corrupt the world.

These two perspectives also shape our cities. Post-politics creates aseptic public spaces whose main purpose is servicing the adjacent commercial functions. The Schmittian language of conflict gives us gated communities, private streets and introverted shopping centres.

The contemporary populist Left, (this is not meant as an insult, but rather as "listening to the people") tries to restore the class dimension of the conflict using Schmittian ideas. It is a difficult task in a world of broken social ties, tribal politics and precarious employment. In our opinion, the real strength of today's protest movements, what makes SYRIZA and PODEMOS successful, is not conflict, but a reclaimed solidarity and newly rebuilt sense of community. The real "we are all in this together" of people losing their homes, jobs, life savings and those who know how easily they can succumb to similar misfortune.

In the face of adversity, the sense of community is reborn together with a selfless impulse to help. 'Empathy' and 'inclusiveness' become key words. A new community and the language it establishes emerge in cooperatives and movements working

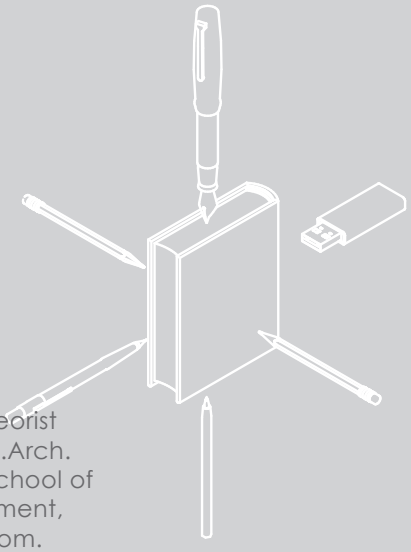
for the common good. Acting together we may still be weak, but we believe we can fight capitalism with our bare hands.

In this book we imagine the architecture and urbanism of this emerging community. We ask, how we are supposed to be together, with all our differences and arguments. How do we avoid the danger of an authoritarian, homogeneous unity while rejecting conflict and hatred? It is because we fear that our bare hands will not be enough, that we need institutions, houses, tools and machines. But they all need to be re-imagined as completely new entities, created by the community and acting as its active members.

We hope that the texts and projects in this book will be our humble contribution to this new, better, and shared world.

Krzysztof Nawratek

Bio



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KASIA NAWRATEK

On the Frustrating Impossibility of Inclusive Architecture

KRZYSZTOF NAWRATEK
KASIA NAWRATEK

How to design radically inclusive space? It seems an impossible task, when even imagining it, proves a challenge. What would that space look like and how would it work? What would a radically inclusive building look like? The difficulty we're facing here stems from the way we're conditioned to think about space in architecture, because to think about architectural space is to think about limitations. In architecture space is not an abstract and infinite entity, it exists as a physical separation, a fragment that begins and ends somewhere. Following this thought, we can say that there is nothing more exclusive than a building or the city, because they were created as a result of radical separations – between the Polis people and the barbarians, between culture and nature, between what's inside and what's been banished to the outside. A radically inclusive city or building is then a kind of impossible object, even a contradiction to what a city or a building is in essence.

However, one of the most fascinating features of the contemporary city is its openness to diversity. The *"Mongrel City,"* [1] an affectionate term coined by Leonie Sandercock describes this well. In contemporary architecture, this openness and embrace of diversity is reflected in the design of multifunctional buildings. There is an interesting tension that we can observe here: between declared and intentional openness, flexibility, diversity and physical limitations within which architecture and urban design operate. But before I discuss the physicality of architectural space, I would like to briefly look at inclusiveness in a more general way.

The absolute and radical inclusiveness which I would like to discuss in this text emerges from two sources, both rooted in the Christian tradition. This doesn't mean that other, non-Christian inclusiveness

is not possible, it is merely because I find the Christian perspective interesting as it allows us to face one of the major challenges of the European universalism – the attempt to reconcile the freedom and autonomy of the individual with the idea of a collective political subject and the idea of community.

Christianity, being a monotheistic religion, declares that everything must come from God. Therefore, it could never fully accept the existence of hell [2] because it is a kind of a remnant, separated from the God himself, undermining and questioning his omnipotence. The existence of hell justifies incomplete inclusiveness and is the admission that God is not absolute. From this perspective, if we want to think the radically inclusive space in which everything can be contained and everything can happen, we need to reject the existence of hell. That is an impossible task for both Christians and architects.

The most obvious thinker, and of course not the only one, to turn to at this point is Origen and his idea of Apocatastasis. We must remember though, that Apocatastasis assumes no automatic return of all creation to God, but is rather a long – and painful – process. [3] Simply put – no one is rejected, but the re-integration can only happen under very specific conditions. You can plug into a whole, but you can only be integrated through a specific / appropriate connection.

In this model, hell still exists, but it's temporary. Perhaps the temporality of hell is not very comforting in itself however; it introduces the element of time to the discussion of inclusive architecture. It is extremely important as – at least in some sense – it allows us to overcome the limitations of physical space by which architecture and urban design are bound.

Another thinker who followed a similar path to Origen: Teilhard de Chardin and his idea of 'Point Omega'. [4] The 'Point Omega' is identical to that of Apocatastasis but with Christ but we can assume a more general perspective and recognise it as a point of maximum concentration of the consciousness. It is simply fullness – the ultimate end of evolution. Its singularity and reduction are, to a point important here, because it is an obvious challenge to the concept of space itself. Architecture cannot be reduced to a point. 'Point Omega' in architecture or urban design is not only an impossible project, but also exposes a totalitarian temptation in inclusive thinking – as a reduction and compression, where everything is compressed into one.

The Last Judgement - *Hieronymus Bosch*

One of the most avant-garde architects of the twentieth century, Paolo Soleri built his fascinating vision of architecture around the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin. Soleri was aware of the impossibility, and the dangers of trying to directly translate the thought of de Chardin into architecture: *"Omega is not an attractor because it does not exist. The Omega Point of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, for instance, is at most an anticipation: the meaninglessness of the origin anticipating meaningfulness— a word game for the "time" being."* [5]

As we can see, Soleri appreciated the element of time too and 'Omega Point' as urban planning horizon has its very specific consequences: *"The gist of arcology is the reversal and inversion of urban sprawl toward the inner limits of compact logistical efficiency. Arcological thinking halts the movement of dispersal that is the essence of sprawl and throws it into reverse—into implosion—retaining but radically shortening all the vital interconnections between people, places, and things. This urban logic shrinks massive cities into intensely interconnected, densely populated, three-dimensional forms on a tightly zoned footprint."* [6]

Soleri in his vision calls for density and miniaturization (understood as the maximum shortening of distances), but recognizes the impossibility of excessive reduction - space is a fundamental concept for him and it cannot be reduced to the point: *"Anything—large or small, newborn or old, animated or inanimate—is in, and only in, space; spatiality is the sine qua non of reality."* [7]

Teilhard's thought, especially in the interpretation of Soleri, is surprisingly 'flat', (in the sense of the word as it occurs in the 'flat ontology'). [8] Spatiality seems to, at least partially, invalidate any essentialism. The relationship between spatial entities is important to Soleri, but not necessarily those entities themselves. Origen inspired inclusiveness would then be based on the process of creating appropriate terminals – both on the side of the building (that being an obvious over-interpretation of Origen's thoughts) and the user. This inclusiveness would be simply a slow process of learning and adjusting different beings/entities to each other and in the infinite time horizon, the integration of those beings/entities would be complete.

Soleri took the thought of Teilhard as an inspiration, not the solution. In case of Origen's thought we can assume, that in the finite time horizon, various beings/entities will not be fully integrated but their surfaces / interfaces will be compatible.

Apocatastasis is the process of adapting an imperfect being/entities into the coexistence with the Absolute, it assumes the existence of a certain immutable core, the actual essence of being. Its surface / interface has to adapt and change, but in its core, it will still be the same being/entity. This mechanism allows us to avoid the danger of a total absorption and focus only on defining the mechanisms of the plug-in.

Teilhard's thought in the interpretation of Paolo Solieri directs us towards a different model of inclusiveness where beings / entities do not have an essence; they can only be defined by their position in networks of relationships. It is much easier to apply the concept of universal salvation to such relationship constituted beings /entities and seemingly, it would be a less brutal process than for the essence constituted beings / entities. In this scenario nothing is rejected, only the network is reconfigured. The obvious problem here is that in case of relation constituted beings, a change in relationships changes the beings themselves. Again – we shouldn't try to take Teilhard's thought as a recipe for architectural design, but treat it as an inspiration for a mechanism in which a change of the position and relationships of individual elements in the network allows them to become parts of a larger whole.

If Origen's model is static and steers us towards technical considerations, Teilhardian model is dynamic and has identifiable spatial dimension. It's also worth noting that they both allow for manipulation of time of access. If technology and space are elements used by architects with ease, then time belongs to the urban designer's toolbox. However, it should be noted that some contemporary architects focus more on the process than the actual building.

"... If technology and space are elements used by architects with ease, then time belongs to the urban designer's toolbox ...

Origen's thought can be also used for a radically inclusive revision of postmodern architecture. (An important caveat here: postmodernism in architecture only to a certain extent reflects the richness of the postmodern philosophy). In postmodern architecture, it's interesting how it tried to double, and in many cases, multi – code buildings. For example, in a postmodern building, we can find references to popular, as well as sophisticated high culture.

Postmodern architecture was an attempt of ironic inclusive language based on pluralism devoid of prejudices. In postmodern architecture everything is acceptable, more is more (instead of less is more), there is no 'either - or', everything is

allowed. Postmodern buildings rediscovered colour and ornament, historic references were back, pop culture used as a new point of reference. In urban design, it was on the one hand Aldo Rossi's ambition [9] to defend the autonomy of the building, on the other buildings were always regarded in context allowing us to see them and interpret in various ways. "*Collage city*", regarded as a manifesto for postmodern urbanism [10] postulates fragment urbanism and local narratives.
The danger hiding in postmodern architecture is, firstly, its complacency with the world the way it is, therefore rejecting a dream of a better world (which according to Habermas critique [11] leads to conservative and even reactionist political positions). Secondly, it rejects architecture's spatial character in favour of architecture as communication. These charges are well founded, but they shouldn't overshadow what is worth saving from postmodern architecture. Its inclusive character and pluralism resembles Origen when he speaks of Christ, drawing our attention to his multiple names. [12] What we have here is a kind of interface – in this case it's the language – various names of God, which touch his various surfaces but still lead to the same essence.

Let's consider architectural space using four following perspectives:

1. Technical, focused on the user / building interface (all kinds of 'flexible spaces', allowing to alter the features of space, for example: a bed hidden in the wall, adjustable shower height, sliding walls, etc.)

2. Spatial, focused on the dynamic manipulation of space or on "diagonal geometry" (Archigram's theoretical projects[13], Oslo Opera House[14] by Snohetta, Delft University Library by Mecanno[15])

3. Temporal, focusing on the process of using space (various activities at the same location but at different times)

4. Linguistic, as used by an architectural object to communicate with users (for example, postmodern double coding).

> ... To redefine the surface so that not only it acts as a support and protection, but how it can become a membrane, an interface allowing to plug into the building (both from the inside and from the outside) for different actors, but not forcing them to reconfigure themselves in the process ...

Each of these perspectives, to a lesser or greater extent, touches the problem of the surface (interface). It would be difficult to think of architecture and avoid the surface. In our lives most of the time we are surrounded by surfaces: floors, walls and ceilings. However, we can (and should) discuss how to cross or reinterpret the surface – and this is the very challenge for the radically inclusive architecture: To redefine the surface so that not only it acts as a support and protection, but how it can become a membrane, an interface allowing to plug into the building (both from the inside and from the outside) for different actors, but not forcing them to reconfigure themselves in the process.

From famous buildings, two clearly show, in however limited way, the direction in which inclusive architecture could develop. One is Oslo Opera House by Snohetta and the other Delft University Library by Mecanoo. In both cases a simple but effective solution was used: a surface (a roof) on the one hand creates semi private space - separate and autonomous. On the other hand, it creates public space, becoming a public square. This is a very clear departure from the modernist dream of overcoming the inside-outside separation and at the same time it's a decisive rejection of the postmodern linguistic turn in architecture - the

postmodern typology of a duck building and a decorated shed [16] becomes redundant.
In the case of the two aforementioned buildings we are not interested in what those buildings are, we are interested in what they do. The idea of the building as an actor in a wider spatial and social context is close to the field theory [17] as presented by Stan Allen. His idea is an interesting post postmodern attempt to apply Deleuzian rhizome thinking to architecture. Allen directly associates architecture with institutional context in which it is created and calls it its 'field condition'. Locality and fragment have impact on the whole – the process of building and then changing of what's been built is constituted by a set of rules, not one pure and singular idea. What's interesting, even though Allen distances himself from modernism, one of the examples he uses is a project of a hospital in Venice by Le Corbusier. This project illustrates well, what could be the proposed by Allen architecture of the field. Le Corbusier operates using basic functional modules (hospital room, treatment room, etc.) repeating them and overlapping, resulting in a building with no identifiable centre and blurred boundaries smoothly merging with the surrounding urban tissue. The 'Field condition' blurs the building into the city – but not like a collage, as suggested by Rowe and Koettler (by forgetting about the building itself and dealing with urban systems) but more on the basis on the (unlimited?) accumulation combined with local mutations.

If then post-modernism was content with local, autonomous logics, 'Field condition' questions the autonomy of a fragment and the homogeneity of the whole. Allen's thought is also, as well Soleri's, based on thinking in relationships, there is no room for an interface, it is however interesting mainly because of its persistence in materialising the immaterial (rules and regulations) and the open formula for the proposed architecture.
Allen is interested how architecture is created and its evolution, but not necessarily with the final product. Paying attention to the process, not the product, allows for a safe distance from all errors and imperfections as they are and the building itself – only temporary. On the one hand, it allows for constant improvement and evolution, on the other – it relieves from the responsibility for what's here and now. Architecture of radical inclusiveness is an impossible task, but perhaps it can serve as a horizon for thought and action. If we try to formulate a set of guidelines to reach this ever receding ideal, we should return to those four perspectives I introduced earlier and try to treat them as stems within one narrative. The key question while designing radically inclusive

... Paying attention to the process, not the product, allows for a safe distance from all errors and imperfections as they are and the building itself – only temporary ...

“... The key question while designing radically inclusive architecture is: How else can we use every space, every part of the building? ...

“... For example, a multistorey building is not only an attempt of multiple capitalisation of the same plot of land but it can also be a successful attempt to satisfy, an impossible as it would seem, claim of many people to the same space ...

architecture is: How else can we use every space, every part of the building? The horizon for this kind of thinking would be a kind of ‘Omega point’, some kind of ‘absolute multi-functionality’, where Soleri’s ‘miniaturization’ is understood as a radical efficiency combined with radical flexibility. However, we are not only dealing with the network of relationships, a ‘field’, but rather trying to think structure of wave-particle duality where individual parts of the building, and the building itself would have their autonomous logic, but also operate in a larger field of tides and relationships. This larger field should be understood both physically - as the urban context for architecture, as well as the social, political and cultural environment. The urban whole is made of diverse, sometimes completely alien and in some cases - hostile to each other - elements. The city handles those antagonisms by simple manipulations of space or time of use. For example, a multistorey building is not only an attempt of multiple capitalisation of the same plot of land but it can also be a successful attempt to satisfy, an impossible as it would seem, claim of many people to the same space. So when I speak of a building-interface, what I mean is a possibility to use the building in various ways, by various users, human and not human actors. Every element of infrastructure which serves an egoistic interest of a building can also work for others and therefore participate in creating common good. Building walls become then ‘interfaces’ mediating between what is private and what is shared. Synergy and co-operation become the key rules. All buildings, including privately owned, become interfaces and elements of social infrastructure. As in the case of industrial ecology dealing with closed processes and the use of waste as a raw material, also in architecture, we can think of buildings that are capable of being much more than just packaging for function. A building can also become much more than just a postmodern game of coded messages and so much more than a container for features and technologies. It can become a plug-in zone, allowing for technological, social and political experiments to happen. It can become a universal socket, and there’s no reason why it couldn’t be mass-produced and replicable, allowing us, the users, to create our own prototypes.

Time manipulation, one of the techniques allowing us to approach the absolute inclusiveness (the same space being used by different users for different purposes at different times) is what can liberate us from the boundaries of here and now. To introduce time to architecture opens it both to the question of origin, and to the question of consequences. Origin in architecture is understood

here as the provenience of materials, education of the participants of the design and building process, their work standards and conditions, whereas the question of consequences deals with the costs of maintenance and finally demolition, as well social and environmental costs of architecture.

Radically inclusive architecture is then a programme of revolutionary change aiming to free the architecture form the clutches of the neoliberal paradigm and the logic of short term profit. It could free architecture from being a mere by-effect of land speculation. I don't claim that architecture can bring about political and social change on its own, but I believe, that it can help it emerge and also strengthen it. Architecture and urbanism of radical inclusiveness can be key parts of a new political project for new post neoliberal world, and in this wide and – let's admit it – ambitious perspective, it should be seen and judged.

“... **Radically inclusive architecture** is then a programme of revolutionary change aiming to free the architecture form the clutches of the neoliberal paradigm and the logic of short term profit.

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15. See: http://mecanoo.nl/Projects/tabid/424/project/27/Library-Delft-University-of-Technology?t=0 (accessed 29 September 2014)
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