

Joost Meuwissen, 'Preface', Sculpture City. The electronic fusion of art & architecture. Edited by Ilona Lénárd, Kas Oosterhuis, and Menno Rubbens, translated by John Kirkpatrick (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1995), 0203.

Preface

Joost Meuwissen

Sculpture City, the name of this exhibition, is not about sculpture in the city, not about art in public space, nor about architecture in public space. Rather it concerns public space in art, without the need to distinguish art and architecture; architecture, the art of building, is art too. It is about the medium of art, not about art in the media.

The way these objects, this virtual reality, relate to the material reality of public space in the city is in the very materiality of that space, in how it is given material shape. Looked at in this light these works are in effect already in operation (and not a moment too soon) – which does not mean that there is no need to realize them in situ. On the contrary, the image of the open volume beside the flat, contained volume by Wim Quist along the waters of Oude Haven is convincing. Quist's building, an enclosed volume with an open fold, asks to be complemented and this image convinces utterly in this; Quist's closed volume with an open fold requires complementing with an open volume with a closed fold. The sooner Rotterdam puts this project into practice, the better for the city.

Closed fold may seem a vague notion; it is certainly no metaphor and I shall return to it later. This space – the space of the city where these programmes will be allocated or rather specified – does not consist of space, for what is space in fact? A vague notion if there ever was one, an indistinct category, a metaphor for the insubstantiality that it almost never is. This space, Kas Oosterhuis says, consists not of space but of air; and this air has a density, is a material thing that expands yet has a certain density too, a degree of expansion. This air moreover has a quality that every Rotterdammer knows from experience. Finally, there is something in that air, and that is what this exhibition is about. It is something that points to itself, that makes its presence felt, though is not present in a natural or naturalistic sense, not there in the landscape of the urban environment, in the urban landscape. Urban landscape: itself a metaphor flogged to death that yields little and says little too. This object is not present as a boulder, nor as art in public space that looks at best like a boulder, nor as something encountered, discovered or overlooked. But then what is it?

Public space is all of what we used to call streets and squares, and Oude Haven, and alleyway, in an entire jargon of typological specifications – if it was big it was a square, if long and thin a street – a jargon of discrimination, and by now politically incorrect for that reason alone. Streets and squares should be called by other names.

There is a resemblance between the position of this built volume on Oude Haven and the other possibilities Kas and Ilona have studied in Rotterdam, at the foot of Abe Bonnema's Nationale Nederlanden slab in the concourse before Central Station, and at the foot of Professor Eikelenboom's Bouwcentrum across from there. In all three cases Sculpture City is in a setting where the third dimension or rather the height of the city is more important than its length and breadth; a side-on denial, as it were, of this length and breadth, of this typological fixing of street and square. It makes you wonder how they would have gone about it in New York or Hong Kong.

In a sense these projects contain criticism of the space where they are set, this being that the great material density of these tall buildings expresses height merely as a plane, a line even, as in Quist's diagonal fold, without redefining length and breadth in these excessive measures and arriving at a greater density in three dimensions – a greater density of the air, if you like.

This critical side is for me a new aspect of their work, since, say, the Paris projects at the end of the eighties, published in *The Open Volume*, Wiederhall no. 12. By and large, of course, this is a work in progress. These works and this exhibition add up to a work in progress, from Kas' XYZ series and Ilona's *Folded Volumes*, accompanied by her by now historic statement that the computer mouse has superseded charcoal and paper. And is this mouse making progress? It is.

For those who saw the *Synthetic Dimension* exhibition at the Zonnehof, Amersfoort a few years ago as well as the results of the *Global Satellite* workshop and the displays at Delft University of Technology, these 'clouds' as they are called are completely new. In all previous projects – the *Folded Volumes* as much as the Paris projects – the volume was still part of a broader three-dimensional space; for though there was a difference conceptually between the three-dimensional virtual reality of the computer and the so-called three-dimensional material reality of the air in the city, volumewise the forms with their inflections, curves and folds remained open to expansion in

that space. That is, the curves, like those of Oscar Niemeyer or of the Baroque, presented a bend or fold in a theoretically infinite line, and though the fold or inflection did constitute the middle of the line or volume, as would seem also to be the case in these 'clouds', they were nonetheless dominated by the 'line-ness' or 'volume-ness'. Much like Quist's fold is governed by the taut volume that folds itself. As the name says – it was the Volume that was Folded.

However – and this is new, a complete innovation; there are computers manned the world over, but absolutely nothing of the forms we have here have ever been seen in Boston or New York – in these cloud sketches the point of inflection set in the remarkable center that they all have in common, is freed from the thing that is bent, or that folds itself. The point of inflection is no longer a point of dissent, as in the Baroque or in the Folded Volumes, but a point of return, a focus that proclaims that each movement has a tendential three-dimensional significance but only on the basis of repetition, of motion as repetition and not something spatial. Time, then, rather than motion.

Thus the link between three-dimensional virtual reality and three-dimensional material reality has now been broken formwise, making way for all manner of two- to three- to two-and-a-half-dimensional stages in between. So the dilemma facing the essence of these sculptures is whether their three-dimensional structure should be rigidly geometrical or whether it should be able to 'give'. The actual nature of their structural grids is a point for further discussion.

What you see here is new, something you have never seen before; no-one has ever seen it before. This exhibition is quite without precedent and so it gives me great pleasure to declare it open.