Architectural Deleuzism

Neoliberal space, control and the ‘univer-city’

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For many thinkers of the spatiality of contemporary capitalism, the production of all social space tends now to converge upon a single organizational paradigm designed to generate and service mobility, connectivity and flexibility. Networked, landscaped, borderless and reprogrammable, this is a space that functions, within the built environments of business, shopping, education or the ‘creative industries’, to mobilize the subject as a communicative and enterprising social actant. Integrating once discrete programmes within its continuous terrain, and promoting communication as a mechanism of valorization, control and feedback, this spatial model trains the subject for a life of opportunistic networking. Life, in this environment, is lived as a precarious and ongoing exercise in the acquisition of contacts, the exchange of information and the pursuit of projects. As a form of space, this is consistent with what Foucault described as the mode of neoliberal governmentalities, operating through environmental controls and modulations, rather than the disciplinary maintenance of normative individual behaviour. It also, as many have noted, resembles the ‘control society’ forecast some time ago by Gilles Deleuze, in his ‘Postscript on Societies of Control’, in which the movement of ‘dividuals’ is tracked and monitored across the transversal ‘smooth space’ of a post-disciplinary society. Developed, in part at least, in response to the growth of post-Fordist knowledge economies, so-called immaterial labour, and the prevalence of networked communications media, this spatial paradigm has been theorized through models of complexity, self-organization and emergence. It has also been serviced, as I want to show in what follows, by a self-styled avant-garde in contemporary architecture claiming and legitimizing the emergence of this mode of spatiality as essentially progressive through its particular reading of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari.

What I will term here ‘Deleuzism’ in architecture – identifiable in the projects and discourse of practices such as Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA), Foreign Office Architects (FOA), Reiser + Umemoto, and Greg Lynn, for example – has tended to read the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari with a marked bias towards its Bergsonian and Spinozian (rather than Marxian) registers. Filtering from the philosophers’ corpus any trace of criticality, it has not, though, renounced the political in this process, but rather reframed it as a matter of organization and affect. Transcribing Deleuzean (or Deleuzoguattarian) concepts such as the ‘fold’, ‘smooth space’ and ‘faciality’ into a prescriptive repertoire of formal manoeuvres, Deleuzism in architecture has proposed, through its claims to mirror the affirmative materialism of becoming and ‘the new’ which it has found within Deleuze and Guattari’s œuvre, that it shares with that œuvre a ‘progressive’ and ‘emancipatory’ agenda.

In the main part of the article that follows, I want to explore this supposed agenda through the study of an exemplary recent project: FOA’s design for the new campus of Ravensbourne College (2010) located on the Greenwich Peninsula in London. This is an especially interesting project in this context, not only because of the ways in which it connects with current concerns regarding the neoliberal marketization of education (particularly in the UK), but because of the reputation acquired by FOA, and their central figure Alexander Zaera-Polo, of being at the leading edge of contemporary architectural Deleuzism. Like many other figures from this milieu, FOA initially extracted from the work of Deleuze and Guattari a number of key concepts appearing to lend themselves readily to translation into a set of formal and spatial tropes, but, significantly, they have more recently returned to the question of the political, once denounced by Zaera-Polo as ephemeral to the concerns of architecture, and positioned the building envelope as the organizational and representational medium through which the discipline can now acquire political agency. It is to this turn within
architectural Deleuzism, along with its re-conception of the political and claims to have advanced beyond a supposedly outmoded and regressive politics of opposition and critique, that this article will attend. Before coming directly to FOA and to the Ravensbourne project, however, I need first to trace the emergence of Deleuze’s dominant position within recent ‘avant-garde’ architectural theory more generally.

The new architecture
During the period of its initial development in the 1990s, Deleuzism in architecture was driven, primarily, by readings of the philosopher’s The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque, and the section on the smooth and the striated, from Deleuze and Guattari’s A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Promoted as an architectural device in the 1993 special edition of Architectural Design entitled Folding in Architecture, which featured essays and projects by Peter Eisenman, Greg Lynn and Jeffrey Kipnis, among others, Deleuze’s ‘fold’, with its apparent correlation of Leibniz’s philosophy with the formal complexity of the architectural Baroque, seemed, in particular, to offer architecture an escape route from its entanglement in linguistic and semiotic paradigms, and opened the way for a return to form, as a concern more proper and specific to its own discipline. Eisenman, for example, claimed to have employed the fold as a generative device in his Rebiestockpark project of 1990, a heavily Deleuzian account of which was further elaborated in John Rajchman’s Constructions. Conceptually related to the fold, the schema of the smooth and the striated was originally elaborated in A Thousand Plateaus to articulate the relations between open and closed systems in technology, music, mathematics, geography, politics, art and physics. Smooth space was figured there as topologically complex, in continuous variation and fluid. This was a space – a sea or a desert – through which one drifted, nomadically. Striated space, by contrast, was defined by its rigid geometry, a space carved up into functional categories channeling the movements of its occupants along the pre-inscribed lines of its Cartesian grid. Striated space was standardized, disciplinary and imperial. Again, these concepts, particularly the implicit (though qualified) privileging of smooth space and continuous variation over static geometry, were found to resonate with architecture’s engagement with complex topologies whilst suggesting that its formal experimentation was also imbued with philosophically radical implications. Deleuzean ‘smoothing’ and the pursuit of continuous variation has been referenced in the architectural writings of, variously, Lynn, Reiser and Umemoto, Patrick Schumacher and FOA, for instance, to suggest the philosophical substance of the complex formal modulations that characterize their work.

The usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy was not limited, though, to its provision of the formal tropes of folding and smoothing, but also extended to a conception of the ‘new’ with which architectural Deleuzism could further differentiate itself from the preceding currents of postmodernism and deconstructivism in the 1980s and early 1990s. In Kipnis’s contribution to the Folding in Architecture volume, ‘Towards a New Architecture’, postmodernist architecture was hence cast as politically conservative, even reactionary, due to its ultimate inability to produce the new. In its use of collage and historicism, postmodernism’s ultimate effect, he argued, was to ‘valorize a finite catalogue of elements and/or processes’. For Kipnis, postmodern architecture had enabled a reactionary discourse that re-establishes traditional hierarchies and supports received systems of power, such as the discourse of the nothing new employed by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher for their political ends and by Prince Charles, Roger Scruton and even Charles Jencks to prop up PoMo.

Whatever the truth of this, one further marker of the ‘new’ architecture’s own newness was, in turn, its departure from any semiotic or linguistic paradigm, even the most radically conceived (as in deconstruction), in favour of a supposedly new Deleuzean orientation adopted by its theorists such as Lynn and Sanford Kwinter. These, wrote Kipnis, had turned from ‘post-structural semiotics to a consideration of recent developments in geometry, science and the transformation of political space, a shift that is often marked as a move from a Derridean to a Deleuzean discourse’. The proposition that Deleuze could think the new in terms of ‘political space’, while Derrida was mired in the detached realm of ‘post-structural semiotics’, though unsustainable as a reading of their actual philosophies, was thus mobilized by Kipnis and others in order to distinguish the new architecture from that of its immediate predecessors such as Bernard Tschumi (or the earlier Eisenman). Where such architects had been identified with Derridean deconstruction, a new generation would need to distinguish itself both from its architectural predecessors and from the philosophy with which these had been associated. Yet in order to ratify this new architecture with the same pedigree of philosophical sophistication as that accorded to deconstructivist architecture, a comparable counterpart to Derrida had to be found. Enter Deleuze.
As François Cusset has noted, there was a broader trajectory of transition from ‘Lacanian–Derridean’ to ‘Deleuzean–Lyotardian’ positions during this period in American academia. So, this is far from unique to architecture. But the shift towards Deleuze, in US architectural culture at least, has also to be understood in terms of how the place of the ‘new’, or of ‘becoming’, in the thought of Deleuze could be made amenable to an architecture seeking to establish for itself an image of novelty as its very raison d’être. Indeed, for the ‘new architecture’, the term ‘new’ operated as a convenient conflation of two senses of the term: one identifying it as succeeding the old (deconstructivism or postmodernism), the other as an orientation towards a philosophy of invention itself, putatively derived from Deleuze. At this point philosophy was conjoined to an exercise in academic marketing; the new as invention conflated with the new as the rebranding of an architectural ‘avant-garde’. Exemplary of this mobilization of newness is Reiser + Umemoto’s Atlas of Novel Tectonics, where postmodernism is employed as the foil against which the novelty of their approach to architecture is contrasted. Here Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, are read, above all, as philosophers of matter, emergence and becoming. Through their allegiance to this philosophy the architects thus pursue, they claim, an agenda of ‘difference’ and ‘the unforeseen’: ‘The primary and necessary conceit of this work is that beneficial novelty is the preferred condition to stability and the driving agenda behind architectural practice.’

Where Deleuzism in architecture originally undertook, then, to establish its autonomy from the linguistically oriented concerns of poststructuralism, it subsequently sought to distance itself too, as part of its affirmation of the new – indeed, affirmation of affirmation – from any obligation to engage with critique. Through its alliance with the ‘post-critical’ position emerging, around the same time, in US architectural discourse – marked by the publication of Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting’s now near-canonical ‘Notes Around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism’ in the journal Perspecta in 2002 – it articulated its opposition to critique as a matter both extrinsic to the ‘proper’ concerns of architecture, and as a counterproductive form of ‘negativity’. In an essay of 2004, ‘On the Wild Side’, for example, Kipnis describes criticality as a ‘disease’ that he wants to ‘kill’, ‘once and for all’. For Zaera-Polo, similarly, criticality is anachronistic, and, in its ‘negativity’, allegedly inadequate to deal with contemporary levels of social complexity:

I must say that the paradigm of the ‘critical’ is in my opinion part of the intellectual models that became operative in the early 20th century and presumed that in order to succeed we should take a kind of ‘negative’ view towards reality, in order to be creative, in order to produce new possibilities. In my opinion, today the critical individual practice that has characterized intellectual correctness for most of the 20th Century is no longer particularly adequate to deal with a culture determined by processes of transformation on a scale and complexity difficult to understand … you have to be fundamentally engaged in the processes and learn to manipulate them from the inside. You never get that far into the process as a critical individual. If we talk in terms of the construction of subjectivity, the critical belongs to Freud [sic], what I called ‘productive’, to Deleuze.

Zaera-Polo’s remarks here are significant not only in recruiting Deleuze to the affirmative ‘productivity’ of the new architecture (and in the process eradicating through a crude binary opposition the real continuities between Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari, to be found, for example, in the concept of ‘territorialization’), but also in the proposition that architecture position itself within the complexities of contemporary culture so as to ‘manipulate’ them from the inside. Where Deleuzism in architecture is to be autonomous from any engagement with linguistic paradigms or critical perspectives, through
its engagement with the inventive capacities of its own formal and material practices, it will become ‘progressive’ by making its cause immanent to that of a social culture of complexity.

‘Progressive realities’

This kind of proposition is especially evident in the writings of Zaha Hadid and her partner in practice Patrik Schumacher. Their argument for the progressive and emancipatory character of an architecture informed by Deleuzean folding and smoothing rests upon the apparent correspondence between the complexity of their formal strategies and that of the social reality into which these are projected. As Hadid remarked in her 2004 Pritzker Prize acceptance speech:

I believe that the complexities and the dynamism of contemporary life cannot be cast into the simple plattonic forms provided by the classical canon, nor does the modern style afford enough means of articulation. We have to deal with social diagrams that are more complex and layered when compared with the social programs of the early modern period.

My work therefore has been concerned with the expansion of the compositional repertoire available to urbanists and designers to cope with this increase in complexity. This includes the attempt to organize and express dynamic processes within a spatial and tectonic construct.10

In fact, Schumacher’s description of this new ‘spatial construct’ bears a striking similarity to that used by Deleuze to outline the new conditions of a control society. Deleuze wrote, in his ‘Postscript on Control Societies’:

The different internments of spaces of enclosure through which the individual passes are independent variables: each time one is supposed to start from zero, and although a common language for all these places exists, it is analogical. On the other hand, the different control mechanisms are inseparable variations, forming a system of variable geometry the language of which is numerical (which doesn’t necessarily mean binary). Enclosures are molds, distinct castings, but controls are a modulation, like a self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other, or like a sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point.11

Schumacher, in his Digital Hadid: Landscapes in Motion, writes of

a new concept of space (magnetic field space, particle space, continuously distorted space) which suggests a new orientation, navigation and inhabitation of space. The inhabitant of such spaces no longer orients by means of prominent figures, axis, edges and clearly bounded realms. Instead the distribution of densities, directional bias, scalar grains and gradient vectors of transformation constitute the new ontology defining what it means to be somewhere.12

Between Deleuze’s ‘sieve whose mesh will transmute from point to point’ and ‘gradient vectors of transformation’, on the one hand, and Schumacher’s ‘spaces of enclosure’ and ‘clearly bounded realms’, on the other, the account of a transition from a striated to a smooth space can be followed in parallel across both passages. The movement that can be traced between them, however, when the passages are returned to the frame of their respective contexts, is one from critique to valorization; from Deleuze’s warning to Schumacher’s affirmation. This movement paradoxically turns Deleuze’s analysis of a nascent control mechanism into a prescription for its implementation. Critique is absorbed into the very forms of knowledge and power it had sought to denounce in order to reinvent and valorize their operation.

In this respect, arguably, it has something in common with certain strands of contemporary managerialism and its own preference for networked and ‘self-organized’ modes of operation. Indeed, in what is perhaps the most thoroughly researched and elaborated analysis of this, The New Spirit of Capitalism, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello have argued that the orientation of contemporary managerial theories towards de-hierarchized and networked forms of organization originates, in fact, not in the production process, but precisely in a critique of capitalism which is then appropriated by capitalism. In particular, they note:

autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity, multitasking … conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability and creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to lived experience and receptiveness to a whole range of experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for interpersonal contacts – these are taken from the repertoire of May 1968.13

This liberatory ‘repertoire’, Boltanski and Chiapello continue, originally directed against capitalism, has since been seized upon within managerial literature, and detached from the broader context of its attack on all forms of exploitation (not just those concerning the division of labour and its alienating conditions), such that its themes are then ‘represented as objectives that are valid in their own right, and placed in the service of forces whose destruction they were intended to hasten’.14

In the case of contemporary architecture this process has been historically achieved, first of all,
via a recasting of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘conceptual personae’ of the fold and smooth space as affirmative figures prescriptive of a particular ethos of practice – a process of valorization that is reinforced with reference to the contemporary conditions of fluidity and mobility, to the language of networks, fields, swarms and self-organization, with which Deleuze and Guattari’s terms appear to accord in their commitment to ‘openness’ and ‘complexity’.15 As Schumacher writes in his 2006 essay ‘The Sky-scraper Revitalized: Differentiation, Interface, Navigation’: ‘Dense proximity of differences, and a new intensity of connections distinguishes contemporary life from the modern period of separation and repetition. The task is to order and articulate this complexity in ways that maintain legibility and orientation.’

Hadid’s commitment, in line with this, to what she terms ‘porosity in organization’, to the concept of the ‘open’, is broadly evident throughout her practice, and particularly exemplified in projects such as the Museum of Art for the 21st Century in Rome (2010), the Phaeno Science Centre in Wolfsburg, and the Central Building for BMW, Leipzig (2005).17 Zaera-Polo similarly identifies architecture as a progressive practice of spatial organization due to its capacity to facilitate open and complex systems. ‘The proposition here’, he writes in his essay ‘The Politics of the Envelope’, ‘is that progressive politics today is enabled through dynamic disequilbrium, not static evenness. Rather than a politics of indifference, independence and evenness, progressive politics promote connected unevenness, inducing difference and interdependence.’18 Deleuzism in architecture’s claim to be progressive is thereby defined in terms of an allegiance to a zeitgeist of openness, complexity and difference with which its own practice is perfectly attuned. As such, however, it also tends towards a claim for its progressive status made precisely on the basis of its strategic alliance with more specific tendencies within contemporary culture, such as those of corporate organization and the kind of managerial theory that Boltanski and Chiapello discuss.

This is, again, most obvious and explicit in the writings of Schumacher. Hence, for example, in his essay ‘Research Agenda: Spatializing the Complexities of Contemporary Business’, Schumacher has proposed that the research agenda of a unit taught at the Architectural Association, London, titled ‘Corporate Fields’, constituted an ‘emancipatory project’, founded upon the ‘coincidence of tropes between new management theory and recent avant-garde architecture’. New ways of organizing labour are emerging’, he wrote in this essay, ‘as witnessed in countless new organizational and management theories … The business of management consultancy is now thriving while the discipline of architecture – with few exceptions – has yet to recognize that it could play a part in this process.’

The organizational models employed within the most advanced sections of business represent, for Schumacher, a movement from the rigidly segmented and hierarchical work patterns of the Fordist era towards those that are ‘de-hierarchized’ and based upon flexible networks. Architecture, using such ‘Deleuzian’ formal tropes as ‘smoothness’ and ‘folding’, he argued, might make itself ‘relevant’ by entering into a dialectic with the ‘new social tropes’ with which business organization and management theory are already engaged, thus allowing ‘architecture to translate organizational concepts into new effective spatial tropes while in turn launching new organizational concepts by manipulating space’. Unsurprisingly, then, Schumacher has claimed that, ‘today no better site for a progressive and forward-looking project than the most competitive contemporary business domains’.20

This position is maintained by an insistence that left-wing activism has all but ‘disintegrated’ to the extent that traditional models and spaces of radicalism ‘stagnate’ and ‘regress’.21 More contemporary forms and sites of activism, such as the anti-globalization ‘movement of movements’, within whose broad spectrum of oppositional perspectives might be identified some cause for optimism, are similarly discredited by Schumacher, in so far as their ‘critical’ form lacks a suitably ‘constructive’ or affirmative trajectory: ‘The recent anti-globalization movement is a protest movement, i.e. defensive in orientation and without a coherent constructive outlook that could fill the ideological vacuum left behind since the disappearance of the project of international socialism.’ Only within the business organization, he argues, can the ‘progressive realities’ – such as ‘de-hierarchization, matrix and network organization, flexible specialization, loose and multiple coupling, etc.’ – thus be found to fill this ‘ideological vacuum’. These ‘progressive realities’ are, in any case, not seen as the creations of business itself, but as conditions ‘forced upon the capitalist enterprise by the new degree of complexity and flexibility of the total production process’. Hence they can be bracketed from their neoliberal context, and then pursued, in themselves, as a means by which architecture can locate and pursue a supposedly emancipatory project.

The argument proposed by Zaera-Polo in ‘The Politics of the Envelope’ is remarkably close to that constructed by Schumacher. He, and his one-time partner in FOA, Farshid Moussavi, had, in the creation
of their Yokohama Port Terminal in Japan (2002), with its undulating platforms and pleated surfaces, acquired a reputation at the cutting edge of Deleuzism in architecture. More recently he and Moussavi have turned to emphasize other Deleuzoguattarian concepts, such as ‘micro-politics’ and the ‘assemblage’. Yet, the apparent politicization of architectural practice entailed by this has in fact served, first and foremost, to redefine the ‘political’ so that it is now subsumed within the same concerns for ‘material organizations’, complexity and fluidity that have always been the focus of FOA’s theory and practice. Although then Zaera-Polo evokes the possibility of a ‘political ecology’ that would enable architecture ‘to regain an active political role’, this does not actually politicize ecology, as a concern that must be considered socially or economically, but instead attempts to reframe the political as a purely environmental matter. At the same time, the progressive potential of such concepts as ‘micro-politics’, Zaera-Polo has claimed, is best sought through architecture’s engagement with the market, since it is today ‘the most important medium of power distribution within the global economy’. Not only is the market the ‘most important medium of power’, but, Zaera-Polo argues, it inherently tends, within its own logic, to break down hierarchical power into heterarchical forms. ‘We are witnessing’, he writes, ‘the emergence of a heterarchical order which increasingly constructs its power by both producing and using diversity.’ Compared to older, rigidly bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of power, he proposes, the market ‘is probably a better milieu to articulate the current proliferation of political interests and the rise of micro-politics’.24

FOA’s strategic engagement with the market, as a putatively ‘heterarchical order’, is perhaps best exemplified in their design of the new campus for Ravensbourne College (2010), located on London’s Greenwich Peninsula. Here, according to the ambitions of the college’s directors, creative education is to be released from its artificial enclosures and made immanent precisely to the ‘realities’ of the market. Aligning themselves with this goal, FOA produced for Ravensbourne, specifically in the name of Deleuzoguattarian perspectives and a progressive agenda, an architecture in which education and business are thus made spatially and experientially coextensive. It is therefore worth focusing upon in some detail.

Learning 2.0

Ravensbourne’s relocation to Greenwich in 2010 was, in the words of an internal document composed four years earlier, designed to facilitate and reinforce its institutional adoption of a ‘flexible learning agenda’. According to this agenda, the ‘vision’ for the new Ravensbourne, of which FOA’s architecture was to be a part, was to be one where ‘space, technology and time will work together to create a new and flexible learning landscape that will support ongoing
expansion and change, as well as narrowing the gap between an education and industry experience’. This adoption of so-called flexible learning was driven by broader developments in UK higher education in which the Department of Education Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council for England had recommended the development of ‘blended learning strategies’ to universities. ‘Blended learning’, according to Bishop, Goodyear and Ellis, ‘describes learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources’. These ‘learning activities’ are more flexible not only since they enable the student to ‘time-shift’ education to a time and place of their own choosing – since they enable and incorporate access to electronic learning resources outside of the regulated times and spaces of the educational institution – but because they respond to students’ existing priorities and predispositions, as described by ‘space-planning’ consultancy DEGW in their ‘User Brief for the New Learning Landscape’:

The ability and motivation of students to learn has changed and will change further as economic pressures compound the effects of new media and new attitudes to learning. Today’s students assimilate knowledge vicariously from broadcast and interactive media and through practical application rather than formally from books and many are easily bored by traditional teaching with little visual content. Most expect time-shifted delivery of learning to accommodate the part-time work that helps them manage student debt. Rapid acquisition of fashionable, marketable skills or commitments to intense personal interests (e.g. bands) can take priority over formal achievements in an academic discipline. Future students are likely to rank educational institutions by their ability to deliver employment and to accommodate diverse approaches to learning.

Ravensbourne has thus sought not only to use digital media as a support for traditional learning methods but as a means to interpellate the student and their practice within market-based forms of enterprise and competition. In the internal report on the college’s ‘Designs for Learning Project’ its authors argue that ‘[w]ithin an academic environment, practice takes place in a vacuum, or, rather, an endlessly self-reflecting hall of mirrors’. Insulated from the ‘creative dialectic between creator and client (or public) that exists in the “real world”’ students problematically ‘overvalue individual artistic or creative input, rather than the negotiated creativity of the marketplace’. Students of Ravensbourne are hence required to adopt ‘web 2.0 values’ and use online social networks and blogging in their projects as a means to mediate ‘a renewed connection with the audience, or consumers, of creative products’. This practice, it is proposed, should become ‘a normative component of creative education’. Perfectly exemplifying the neoliberal extension of the market form throughout the social field, and the ‘inseparable variations’ of what Deleuze called a control society, student practice is released from the artificial enclosure of the ‘hall of mirrors’, where the value of creativity was given within a purely educational context, into an environment where its worth can now be valorized according to the terms and ‘realities’ of the market, and through which can be established a continuous feedback loop informing its future development.

As much as the market is posited as the environment through which education is to be modulated, education, in a complementary movement, is proposed as a source of ideas and creativity valuable to the market and its own development. Located on the Greenwich Peninsula, in close proximity to new commercial and business development projects, Ravensbourne was envisaged not only as a receptacle for the surrounding environment’s enterprise-based values but as a contributor to the local ‘knowledge economy’ and as a catalyst for ‘urban regeneration’. Whilst the connections, mediations and feedback loops between education and enterprise proposed in this model utilize digital media as their channels of communication in a so-called ‘virtual’ space, the modulation of physical space too plays a critical role in their realization. In particular, the conventional college building and the university campus are refigured as a ‘Learning Landscape’:

The Learning Landscape is the total context for students’ learning experiences and the diverse landscape of learning settings available today – from specialized to multipurpose, from formal to informal, and from physical to virtual. The goal of the Learning Landscape approach is to acknowledge this richness and maximize encounters among people, places, and ideas, just as a vibrant urban environment does. Applying a learner-centred approach, campuses need to be conceived as ‘networks’ of places for learning, discovery, and discourse between students, faculty, staff, and the wider community.

Following this model, architecture is then employed, more specifically, to produce the spatial complement of a ‘learning landscape’ designed around patterns of circulation, connectivity and informality. In the specific case of Ravensbourne, FOA’s architecture is designed both to articulate the building’s interior as an atmosphere that will inculcate in the student the
requisite connective, flexible and informal modes of conduct, and to render it permeable to its surrounding environment as a mechanism for the integration of education and business.

**The ‘learning landscape’ and the ‘univer-city’**

In plan, Ravensbourne is a chevron-shaped block whose form responds to the outer curvature of the O2 (former Millennium Dome) building to which it lies adjacent. As designed by FOA, the main entrance is situated at the junction of the building’s two wings and opens out onto one of its large atria. This quasi-public space is intended as a bridge between the urban environment and activities of the Greenwich Peninsula and the college itself. Rather than being met immediately upon entry by the reception and security areas that clearly mark the thresholds of other educational institutions, the visitor encounters an informal space which includes a ‘meet and greet’ area, a delicatessen and an ‘event’ space hosting public displays and exhibitions. This internal space, combined with the environment immediately exterior to it, then constitutes what DEGW, in their account of ‘univer-cities’ such as Ravensbourne, describe as a ‘third place’, existing between home and work and combining ‘shopping, learning, meeting, playing, transport, socializing, playing, walking, living’. A place, then, in which the activities of the market appear indissoluble from those of urban life, entertainment and education.

From the atrium the successive floor levels of the college and the connections spanning between the two wings are exposed as if in a cut-away section of a more conventional building. Rather than enclosed in stairwells or embedded between rooms, wire-mesh-sided stairways and passages are cantilevered into the atrium. These elements form a complex series of crossings and intersections across mezzanine levels whose dynamics are further animated by the movements of the building’s occupants. Hence an image is presented to visitors within its public atrium of the college as a hive of activity and movement whilst, to its students to behave as ‘intelligent nomads’.36 The organizational diagram of Ravensbourne, then, precisely reflects that of other spaces designed to accommodate the mechanisms of managerialism, where, as Mark Fisher has argued, “Flexibility”, “nomadism” and “spontaneity” are the very hallmarks of management, and indeed the school’s head of architecture, Layton Reid, reports that he wants his students to behave as ‘intelligent nomads’.36 The ‘Learning Landscape’ is one in which circulation, encounter and interaction are privileged so as to maximize communicational exchange as a source of value. This internal ‘landscape’ is also modelled after the urban environment with its intersecting activities and multiple opportunities for encounter and exchange. Critically, it is, of course, the idealized model of the urban, as the networked and extensive environment of the market form, rather than as a space, say, of social contestation, that is reproduced within Ravensbourne. At the same time, this urban mimesis is intended to render the building functionally coextensive with its immediate environment. The relationship between the two environments, between interior and exterior, is figured as symbiotic: whilst the market is introjected within the space of the building – the business ventures of students are to be ‘incubated’ and ‘hatched’

...
within its architecture—market-negotiated creativity is projected outward as a source of ideas and services for business.

Tellingly, in an early essay from 1994, 'Order Out of Chaos: The Material Organization of Advanced Capitalism', while appearing to engage with a Marxian analysis in drawing upon David Harvey's account of flexible accumulation to model the contemporary relations between capital and urban form, Zaera-Polo immediately circumvents the wider political implications of Harvey's model through the emphasis he places upon the post-Fordist city in terms of its morphological novelty. The 'restructuring of the capitalist space', he writes, 'unfolds a 'liquefaction' of rigid spatial structures'. The 'spatial boundaries' of the city, he continues, lose their importance within the new composition of capital. From this proposition he then infers a consequent progressive tendency within contemporary urbanism since, 'through this growing disorganization of the composition of capital, the contemporary city tends to constitute itself as a non-organic and complex structure without a hierarchical structure nor a linear organization'. In other words the urban now operates as a complex system whose organization, like that of any other complex system with which it is isomorphic, is composed exclusively of local interactions rather than in any way directed by any larger power, such as the capitalist axiomatic and its continual restructuring of urban space in pursuit of value. From here it is but a short step for Zaera-Polo to claim as 'subversive' the part played by corporate capital within the contemporary city: 'The complex formed by the AT&T, Trump and IBM headquarters in Manhattan', he argues, 'not only integrates a multiple programmatic structure, but also incorporates systematically the public space within the buildings: a subversion of the established urban boundaries between public and private'. The urban and its architecture are subsumed by Zaera-Polo and FOA within a model of complexity so that their politics – if, that is, the term can be stretched to this extent – are redefined in terms of their morphological adherence or resistance to 'openness' and the dissolution of boundaries.

If this anticipates the character of the urban mimesis to be observed within the Ravensbourne design, the latter's organizational diagram is also, however, modelled after the 'virtual' space of web-surfing, blogging and social networking. Circulation within networks, flexible movement across and between activities, opportunistic exchange, engagement in multiple projects and self-promotion are the normative standards of online conduct that find their correlate within the physical space of the college. In both spaces, and in moving between them, the student is to be, just as Foucault described the ideal subject of neoliberalism, 'an entrepreneur of himself'. Spatially continuous with the business of its urban environment and analogous in operation to the 'virtual' spaces of enterprise, the architecture of Ravensbourne thus positions the subject of education within an environment whose behavioural protocols further extend the reach of the market form throughout the social field. Yet it is also on the surface of the 'spherical envelope', as well as its interior, with
its ‘gradients of publicness’, that Zaera-Polo and Mousavi locate the potential for architecture’s political performance. The architectural envelope, it is claimed, has placed upon it ‘represenational demands’ which offer architecture the potential to produce a ‘politics’ built upon the Deleuzoguattarian concepts of affect and faciality.

**Facing affect**

Recent developments in building technology, argues Zaera-Polo, have removed from the architectural envelope the necessity for its traditional forms of articulation. ‘Freed from the technical constraints that previously required cornices, pediments, corners and fenestration’, he writes, ‘the articulation of the spherical envelope has become increasingly contingent and indeterminate.’ Citing, as examples of this new tendency, ‘Nouvel’s unbuilt, yet influential Tokyo Opera, Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Future Systems’ Selfridges Department Store, OMA’s Seattle Public Library and Casa da Musica and Herzog & de Meuron’s Prada Tokyo’, he contends that the envelope has now become an ‘infinitely pliable’ surface ‘charged with architectural, social and political expression’. The features of this ‘expressive’ surface, such as geometry and tessellation, have now, he continues, ‘taken over the representational roles that were previously trusted to architectural language and iconographies’. Hence, architectural expression need no longer be channelled through the historical codes of its traditional modes of articulation – such as pediments, cornices and fenestration – but can operate through the supposedly uncoded formal, geometric and tectonic means specific to each particular building envelope. This newly discovered expressive capacity of the envelope coincides historically, claims Zaera-Polo, with a post-linguistic orientation within global capitalism: ‘As language becomes politically ineffective in the wake of globalization, and the traditional articulations of the building envelope become technically redundant, the envelope’s own physicality, its fabrication and materiality, attract representational roles.’ Drawing upon Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of faciality in *A Thousand Plateaus*, he hence models this shift of the envelope as a movement from ‘language and signification’ towards a ‘differential faciality which resists traditional protocols in which representational mechanisms can be precisely oriented and structured’. Further, this faciality is claimed as a political capacity for the surface of the envelope, but one that operates ‘without getting caught in the negative project of the critical tradition or in the use of architecture as a mere representation of politics’. Rather, this faciality operates through affect:

the primary depository of contemporary architectural expression … is now invested in the production of affects, an uncoded, pre-linguistic form of identity that transcends the propositional logic of political rhetorics. These rely on the material organization of the membrane, where the articulation between the parts and the whole is not only a result of technical constraints but also a resonance with the articulation between the individual and the collective, and therefore a mechanism of political expression.

This ‘politics of affect’, as Zaera-Polo terms it, and its ‘differential faciality’, are deemed apposite to contemporary social reality not only since they accommodate its supposed post-linguistic turn, but due to their capacity to articulate the changed social relations between the part and the whole, the individual and the social, by which it is organized. As has been elaborated above, these relations are now considered, by Zaera-Polo, to be principally heterarchical as opposed to hierarchical; to be characterized by ‘assemblages’ and ‘atmospheres’, where ‘the articulation between individual and society, part and whole, is drawn by influences and attachments across positions, agencies and scales that transcend both the individuality of the part and the integrity of the whole.’ Where the use of modular systems in architecture, within modernism, corresponded to an ideal of democracy in which the part was prioritized, as an independent variable, over the whole, differential faciality claims to represent their now more complex, interdependent and mutable relations.

Indicative, for Zaera-Polo, of the affective capacity of the envelope, as a form of contemporary political expression, are the ‘emerging envelope geometries’ which ‘seem to be exploring modular differentiation as a political effect and developing alternative forms of tessellation capable of addressing emerging political forms’. These forms of tessellation are, in turn, exemplified for him in certain of FOA’s projects, such as the Spanish Pavilion for Aichi in Japan (2005), as well as the Ravensbourne building, whose ‘modular differentiation’ is held to produce an ‘atomization of the face’, a ‘seamlessness’ and a ‘body without organs’ expressive of ‘changes in intensity rather than figures of organization’. Such geometries are supposed to have bypassed the linguistically coded representations upon which both hierarchical social orders and their critique are based, and to have arrived at a post-linguistic form of expression appropriate to a newly post-ideological historical condition. Expressive of this putatively
heterarchical order, the once strict organizations of part-to-whole relations are now dissolved into modulations of intensity corresponding to the paradigm of the swarm, and represented in the envelopes of buildings which ‘produce affects of effacement, liquefaction, de-striation’.47

Yet to posit a politics of pure affect is to propose that the contents of its expression cannot be grasped by thought. Any distance between subject and political expression, and hence any space in which this might be reflected upon, conceptually or critically, through a shared language, is eliminated. The social subject is reduced to a mere ‘material organization’ whose affective capacities are immediately joined to those of an environment with which it is supposed to identify at some pre-cognitive level. Such ambitions in architecture are, then, as Ross Adams has put it, ‘little more than the spatial complement of an advanced neoliberal project of creating a subject who, having fully accepted reality, has only to give himself over to his senses, immersing himself in an architecture of affect’.48 This fantasy of architecture as a kind of unmediated signal-processing appears in Zaera-Polo’s claim that ‘the politics of affect bypass the rational filter of political dialectic to appeal directly to physical sensation’.49

Treated as a means to an end, affect becomes reified and is turned to a use opposite to that suggested by Deleuze and Guattari: rather than a path towards the deterritorialization of subject positions imposed by a molar order, affect serves to reterritorialize the subject within an environment governed by neoliberal imperatives.

Yet, whilst FOA may claim to have transcended the representational codes of architectural language in their works, these are not placed, as a consequence, beyond interpretation or critique. In fact, rather than articulating the building’s interior organization, the facade of Ravensbourne expresses a principle of organization consistent with the connective imperatives supposed to be facilitated by its architecture. The smaller openings on the facade, for instance, are clustered within a hexagrid arrangement, resembling the structure of a honeycomb or an insect’s compound eye, which is connotative of both the swarm model privileged in contemporary organizational discourse, and the notion of the college as a space in which businesses can be ‘incubated’ and ‘hatched’. The tiling of the facade is similarly expressive of organizational concepts, such as the production of a coherent whole through the interaction of smaller parts. Composed from a limited palette of shapes and tones, the tessellation pattern unifies the surface whilst implying the cell-like or molecular basis of its emergence through ‘bottom-up’ processes. The composition of the Ravensbourne facade is, though, no less a matter of top-down control and decision making than is involved in any conventional act of architectural design. Whilst the tessellation of the tiles may include, as Zaera-Polo claims, an element of self-computation, the decision to use a tessellating pattern is one consciously made. These are not, of course, solely the decisions of an autonomously operating architect, but ones mediated through negotiation and consultation with the client; one concerned to produce a new model of design education modelled on network principles, in order to facilitate its thorough permeation with the mechanisms of the market. Its significance resides in passing this mediation off as unmediated, as a merely ‘emergent’ process akin to, and at one with, those to be found in the self-organizing materials and geometries of a world whose ‘complexity’ is itself presented as given.

‘Progressive reality’ check
To return, in conclusion, to the question of the larger progressive and emancipatory claims of Deleuzism in architecture, the very basis upon which these are proposed is significantly misconceived. If the ‘progressive realities’ of borderless complexity, networking and
self-organization do not originate in the contemporary production process, as circumstances ‘forced upon the capitalist enterprise’, as Schumacher argues, and if they are not coincidentally but rather instrumentally related to neoliberal modes of managing the production of subjectivity, then making architecture immanent to these powers becomes a very different prospect. As has been noted, that the orientation of contemporary managerial theories toward de-hierarchized and networked forms of organization originates, in fact, not in the production process, but in a critique of capitalism which is then appropriated by capitalism has been powerfully argued by Boltanski and Chiapello, among others. If, then, what the latter call the liberatory ‘repertoire of May 1968’, including many of the conceptual formulations of Deleuze and Guattari, has already been instrumentally subsumed to a neoliberal managerialism, then the proposition that these same formulations are at the same time the best, and in fact the only, means by which architecture can pursue an emancipatory project are seriously undermined.

In fact the projects of Deleuzism in architecture have only succeeded thus far in servicing the production of subjectivities whose flexibility and opportunism equips them for the mechanisms and precarities of the market. FOA’s Ravensbourne exemplifies all too well architecture’s contribution to this cause. The space of education that it specifically fashions from the principles of the ‘learning landscape’ is one made experientially coextensive with the behavioural imperatives of the market. Its strategy of ‘liquefaction’ produces a space in which the subject, compelled towards a nomadic and flexible disposition, is schooled in the protocols of opportunism and the realities of precarity. What is presented as an emancipatory release from the confines of a disciplinary model of spatial programmes operates, in fact, as a means through which former spaces of enclosure are opened out to the market as an uncontested mechanism of valorization. The forced exposure of education to these mechanisms, and the continual displacement of the subject throughout its digital and physical networks, render in advance problematic, if not inconceivable, the spatial logic of, for example, occupation, defence and resistance, on which so much of the recent student protest against the marketization of education has been predicated. More generally, the market is not some neutral or accidentally emerging organizational phenomenon, in which new forms of ‘complexity’ and ‘flexibility’ happen to find themselves expressed, but, as Foucault argued so presciently, a mode of governmentality which aims, globally, towards the production of ‘open’ environments in which all are immersed in its game of enterprise. It is thus difficult to conceive of how any architecture which makes strategic allegiance with the market, and at the same time so vehemently disavows the practice of critique, can be ‘advanced’ or ‘progressive’ – other than to the extent that it advances or progresses the cause of the generalization of the market form itself.

Notes

3. Deleuze and Guattari cautioned against any straightforward notion of smooth space as in itself radical or salvational in A Thousand Plateaus: ‘Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us.’ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, p. 500.
9. ‘Educating the Architect: Alejandro Zaera-Polo in Conversation with Roemer van Toorn’, www.xx4all.nl/~rvtoorn/alejandro.html; accessed 15 December 2008. See also Zaera-Polo’s comment that ‘I was never really interested in Derrida’s work. I find it very obscure and based on its own principles, which are about the idea that reality is made out of the self-referential system of codes and signs. I was much more excited and influenced by the work of Deleuze, precisely because of his interest in material process as the core of reality’. Interview with Vladimir Belogolovsky for Intercontinental Curatorial