METROPOLIS
Saturday October 23, 1:30–3pm

Business with Pleasure
Jesse LeCavalier, ETH Zürich|University of Michigan

Illicit Protocols and Cognitive Infrastructure
Michael Chen|Jason Lee, Pratt University

Megaformal
Neyran Turan, Rice University

Who's Afraid of Ludwig Hilberseimer?
Daniela Fabricius, Princeton University

Megaformal

NEYRAN TURAN
Rice University

For more than two decades, architecture has been expanding, amassing, and absorbing; at the same speed, it has been contracting and specializing.

Situated within a much broader discussion of architecture's relation to new scales of contexts and areas of knowledge (infrastructure, ecology, culture, politics, geography, economy, technology, etc.), two complimentary paradigms have emerged in relation to contemporary architecture and urbanism. First has been the paradigm of Endless Space— the accumulation of unlimited flows, field conditions, soft systems, and ever-larger territorial expansions.[1] Parallel to this formation of Endless Space has been the proliferation of Bounded Form— urban islands of detachment, exception, and fantasy, where general laws of exteriorities are suspended.

Enabled and triggered by the dispersing qualities of urbanization and the widespread effects of globalization, Endless Space favors the smooth and formless space of urbanism, celebrating the interdisciplinarity of architecture and the dissolution of its boundaries. Underscoring an immersive attitude within external forces, it has suggested an architecture that is engaged (socially, ecologically, technologically, or politically).

With its displacement of postwar contextualisms and emphasis on the expanding horizontal surface of the city, Endless Space foregrounds logics of organization, programming, systems, and processes, expanding architectural and urban thinking. As the world was announced as "flat," and urbanism as "splintered," it made perfect sense for architecture—at least for a while—to re-conceptualize the built environment as a seamless ground of networks.[2]

In contrast, Bounded Form marks the singularity of architecture: that is, architecture as a self-contained aesthetic object. As Endless Space has brought an expanded dimension of space into architecture via absorption (e.g. analytical

tendencies of design as research/mapping, everyday urbanism, landscape/infrastructural urbanism, explorations via territorial/transnational polity, etc.), the Bounded Form continuously shrinks into various spheres of specialization (e.g. autonomous iconic landmark, New Urbanism, theme park urbanism, etc.).

The initial work disseminating from infrastructural and landscape urbanism imagined the notions of surface, script, and the matrix as operative; flexible scenarios were proposed for the vacant airfields, polluted waterfronts, or obsolete landfills of the post-industrial urban landscape. In parallel, as the contemporary city was conceived as one evolving from uncontainable social and economic forces, architects were forced to understand the inventive and clever maneuvers of the built environment and its emergent evidence. Accordingly, retroactive manifestoes mapped the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary city with novel cartographic techniques and documentation. If emphases on meaning and place had brought the dominance of urban form over Modernist space (New Urbanism), the Endless celebrated the re-emancipation of space for a "city without architecture."[3]

Endless Space and Bounded Form have also made each other's existence necessary and relevant. After all, the autonomous islands of the Bounded Form (either at the scale of an architectural object, atrium interior, shopping mall, gated community, or free trade zone) are to be understood as part of a "post-architectural landscape of highly charged nothingness."[4] As the Endless Space has become more seamless and generic, the Bounded Form gets more shiny and specific, leaving architecture within an accumulated numbness of information and objects.

Appearing merely as a story of large-scale, the dichotomy between the Endless and the Bounded marks an important moment in relation to the disciplinary positioning of contemporary architecture
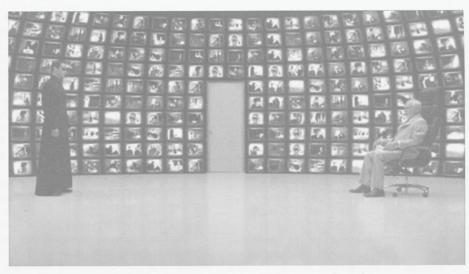

Fig. 1 *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)

and urbanism (singularity vs. multiplicity). Resembling Neo's intricate decision dilemma at the pivotal scene of *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), the ambition of the architect oscillates between saving architecture (for Neo, saving Trinity) or the world.

The dialectic between architecture's singularity versus its total immersion in external forces has always been paradoxical and has generated a broad spectrum of discussion within architectural history. What makes our current moment special in this respect is the existence of an advanced awareness about the impossibility of resolving such contradictions and a renewed interest in exploring their further interrelationships. Similar to philosopher Jacques Rancière's writings that situate the aesthetic object in its political and social context without disintegrating its singularity, our current situation inspires a renewed understanding of disciplinary agency for architecture, one that respects expansion but also insists upon an equal status for architectural specificity.

Although it risks oversimplification, the framework of the Endless and the Bounded is helpful in marking the growing

split between architecture (object) and urbanism (infrastructure). At the midst of the expansionist tendencies of the Endless and the introverted inclination of the Bounded, it is clear that alternative theoretical trajectories are urgent and relevant. Rather than a denial of the object on the one hand (where the object is substituted with the management of flows, circulation, and processes and seen as a passive consequence of ever-expanding contingencies or contracting specializations (i.e. sustainability, social and political issues, technology, etc.) or a denial of infrastructure on the other (where infrastructure is seen as a redundant background to the object), how can we speculate on new trajectories for an architectural framing of the city? After an era of fantastic absorption (of both objects and urban analyses), our current situation is an opportunity that might inspire a renewed understanding of disciplinary positioning for architecture. Instead of seeing the "expanded field" of architecture as exaggerated depictions of emergent realities and territories, how can we speculate on an architectural dimension within urbanism?

Rather than a limitation, the battle

between architecture and urbanism might present us a useful opportunity to identify new directions for architectural thinking. In this context, the paper postulates an alternative theoretical trajectory through the articulation of the notion of Megaformal, in which disparate forces contend and converge. Projecting on contemporary architecture's constant interaction and engagement with the wider world (publicness, audience, collectivity) through the recasting of architecture, the framework of the Megaformal aims to speculate on a more direct confrontation between the political and the formal.

Before getting into the specifics of the Megaformal and its potentialities, outlining its historical lineage brings together certain pivotal moments within architectural history where architecture aimed to frame or shape larger contexts while positioning itself as the concrete measure of the city (rather than merely responding to it). Situated within a lineage that extends from New Monumentality discussions, to Fuhimiko Maki's Collective Form, Kenneth Frampton's Megaform, the Italian neo-Rationalists' "typological piazza," O. Mathias Ungers's Grossform, and Rem Koolhaas's Bigness, Megaformal stands out as a framework whose ambition has been to confront—and offer coherence to—the dispersive qualities of the city as well as architecture. At the same time, Megaformal always aims to keep a certain relation—and sometimes contrast—with megastructures, "environment," expressive networks, and biological metaphors of growth.

Careful analysis of this lineage of projects also illustrates useful contradictions. Although they aim at an architectural framing of the city, it is nothing but the constellation of these projects that has created the split between the Endless and the Bounded in the first place by leaving us with ruins of: contemporary monuments that have lost their new monumentalities, expressive aggregate-objects unconnected to their networks, neo-contextualist

infrastructures that see the object as a symbiotic intensity/extension, or neo-modernist non-figural boxes waiting to land anywhere. It is not surprising, for instance, that Frampton's Megaform has been taken as a reference for its emphasis on symbiosis and neo-contextualism (horizontal continuation of the surrounding topography for the landscape urbanists) rather than its promise of legibility (distinction from megastructure).

Beyond resorting into the old dilemma between the "false empiricism of program" and the "false idealism of paradigm,"[5] how do we rethink and project new architectural urbanisms now? We might focus on the projective dimension of the megaformal as articulated through a set of provoations: Thick-Flat, Specific Objects, Collective Form, and Territorial Legibilities. Megaformal is about symptoms, histories and projects—all speculatively real.

ENDNOTES

1. A lineage of seminal texts/publications provides a helpful framework for the emergence of the Endless Space paradigm within contemporary architecture and urbanism: Sanford Kwinter, with M. Feher, eds., *ZONE 1/2: The Contemporary City* (Zone Books: New York/MIT Press: Cambridge, 1986); Sanford Kwinter's "Landscapes of Change: Boccioni's 'Stati d'animo' as a General Theory of Models," *Assemblage* 19 (1993); Alex Wall, "Programming the Urban Surface," in *Recovering Landscape*, ed. James Corner (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999): 233–249.

2. Steve Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition* (London: Routledge, 2001); Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005).

3. According to Andrea Branzi,

'City without architecture' is the city whose functions no longer occur through the devices of architecture, but now occur through systems of electronic instruments, products, information, and above all through the componental approach to interior design, which permits the refunctionalization of its interior spaces in real time. This is, therefore, a city whose external image no longer