

Networked Culture

Political conflicts, humanitarian disasters, wars and migrations – we live in an age of global unrest and discontinuity. The worldwide movement of populations, burgeoning social mobilizations and the incessantly changing form of the neoliberal economy are generating the energies of a new world order in which we are all constantly challenged to negotiate reality and make deals. Amidst this disintegration of traditional orders, access to networks and the development of connectivities are assuming an ever greater significance for the way we inhabit and configure our environments: as processes in which contours emerge and gradually take on form. Against the background of this structural transformation, networks have also become one of the most prominent concepts relating to the search for new forms of social cohesion and solidarity. The question as to what forms such connectivity should take is not only theoretical in nature but above all a question that points to the self-induced multiplicity of spaces that is continually generated by connectivities throughout the world and that in the process changes our own spaces of action and continually generates them anew.

Networks both structure and constitute an operational field for these proliferating global entanglements of people, places and interests. They become incorporated in space in different ways: in the form of translocal zones of action, community support structures, expanded spheres of influence, spatial superimpositions and intensive contacts and contaminations. However, these expansive forces are accompanied by tendencies to violent segregation and a global dynamic of the fragmentation of living spaces. Top-down visions of the planning and control of environments thus impinge on the bottom-up realities of pulsating metropolises and experimental structures of networked self-organization. This development is generating geocultural tensions, conflicts and clashes everywhere and is investing the task of designing architectures of connectivity with a particular political urgency.

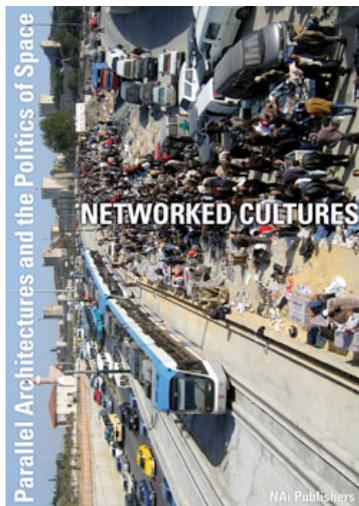
While official reactions in terms of cultural and planning policies for the most part consist in the search for means of stabilization and restraint, the dynamics of deregulation are giving rise to a situation characterized by global parallel systems in which we seek out separate connectivities: parallel architectures, parallel societies, parallel lives. The engagement with these developments on the part of art and architecture in recent years has resulted in a new form of praxis founded on collective production, process-guided work and transversal project platforms. Such a 'disciplineless' praxis of unsolicited intervention in spatial contexts renders legible the dysfunctional rules of planned spatial and cultural containment and creates an avenue for generating new forms of circulation amidst the political efforts to conceal this failure. It makes use of existing networks, expands and changes them, gives rise to new circuits and thereby sketches a mobile geography of self-determined utilizations of space and culture.

Our project *Networked Cultures* aims neither to present this development as a contained movement nor to localize it within the particularities of a specific geographic or institutional context. We are far more interested in its propinquity to a plethora of other self-authorized structures, regardless of their scale – grey markets, informal commerce, alternative economies and migratory practices as well as the innumerable, minor, barely discernible attempts to establish self-determined sociality in the midst of the reconfiguration of our environments. Such an idiosyncratic propinquity confronts us with the fundamental construction of the modalities of cultural and social experience - with spatial production that is unsolicited and unlimited and that opens up an experiential sphere outside prescribed forms of political representation. These projects exert an effect - albeit one that is difficult to classify - in the realm of political reality, but at the same time they also open up an exterior space that allows for a redistribution of roles and activities beyond the conceptual frameworks commonly applied to discourses of education, planning and societal organization. What forms of cultural interaction and what social environments emerge in the context of such a new mode of production of space, politics and knowledge?

Networked Cultures interrogates the meanings of this change together with the meanings of artistic, architectural and cultural engagement in these dynamics. First, attention is focused on

the phenomenon of network creativity by following the routes of networks laid out by artists, architects, urbanists, curators and activists. The site that is hereby opened up marks an arena of engagement with the relationship between space and conflict and leads to an interrogation of contested spaces across Europe and beyond, examining the architecture of conflict, and discussing models of geocultural negotiation. Investigating their *modus operandi*, the focus then shifts to governmentality and self-government by examining the organizational matrix of black markets, informal settlements and the accompanying parallel economy. Responding to these global realities, the parallel worlds of mobility and migration, 'traveling' communities, digital worlds and other counter-geographies are discussed in relation to a politics of connectivity and the emerging 'archipelago of the peripheries'.

During our exploration of these questions we had the very good fortune to encounter numerous dialogue partners ready to share their work and experiences with us. These interactions generated a complex form of connectivity which found its way into the structure of our project and which we have endeavoured to express in the structure of the book *Networked Cultures – Parallel Architectures and the Politics of Space* (NAi Publishers 2008). Its contributions have thus been conceived of as a collection of dialogues that aim less to deal with a predefined object than to form new objects collectively. This goal has been pursued, on the one hand, in a series of conversations on urban interventions, public art projects and architectural experiments, which we conducted with architects, artists and curators over a period of two years and, on the other hand, in a series of essays that offer specific perspectives, narratives and interpretations which help to open up the thematic sites of this book. Building on the network logic of this project and the new spatial creativity of globalized realities, the *Networked Cultures* project has also utilized and will continue to utilize other platforms. These include a compilation of the conversations with our dialogue partners in the form of a film archive enclosed in the book as a DVD, a website comprising a database, images, texts and dialogues (www.networkedcultures.org), and not least the ongoing manifestations of the project in institutional and public spaces.



Peter Mörtenböck and Helge Mooshammer

have collaborated on a range of art, architectural and curatorial projects as well as on academic research and writing that engages with the spatial and cultural effects of geopolitical transformation. Since 2005 they have been working on the *Networked Cultures* project, an international research platform based at Goldsmiths, University of London. They have contributed to many exhibitions worldwide, including the 7th and 8th Venice Architecture Biennials (2000 and 2002). Their most recent books include: *Die virtuelle Dimension* (2001), *Visuelle Kultur: Körper-Räume-Medien* (ed. 2003), *Cruising* (2005) and *Networked Cultures* (2008). Through their work they have been involved with numerous universities and art schools. Currently, Helge Mooshammer is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Art and Design, Vienna

University of Technology, and teaches visual culture at Goldsmiths, London. Peter Mörtenböck is Professor of Visual Culture at Vienna University of Technology and Visiting Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London.