

*Future Fields for a Dissensual Architecture: Excursion 1 – Blasphemous Special Economic Zones*

The presentation will briefly delineate the first case study of the thesis project; the possibility of a blasphemous Special Economic Zone. The main purpose of the thesis project is to investigate how architecture can be an instrument for defining new kinds of publicness *within* post-fordist capitalism but *outside* the traditional comfort-zone of the discipline of architecture – in the new production fields and urban systems of the global economy, what is here referred to as “infrastructural wilderness”.

In order to set up an empiric testing ground, the research project propose to investigate the Special Economic Zone (SEZ), one of the most prominent examples of new forms of spatial production on a global level. As Keller Easterling points out, the phenomena of the SEZ can be seen as an example of a “nexus of global infrastructure” providing a possibility “to track [...] power networks and find the dials and toggles for adjusting them”.<sup>1</sup> If the older, free-trade zone represents an enclosed kind of “worldlessness of labor”,<sup>2</sup> not much different from the factories of early industrialism, the Special Economic Zone on the contrary is an all-encompassing world in itself, a “*place*, imagined and lived.”<sup>3</sup> The SEZ is a doppelgänger of the ordinary city, and as such it seems to forebode the death of the city, as we know it.<sup>4</sup> In the light of this, is it possible to think of a *tinkered* Special Economic Zone that could instigate a suspension of the habits of neoliberalism and generate *other, blasphemous Special Economic Zones to come?*

An architectural and speculative precedent for a different kind of zone can be found in “Exodus, or the Voluntary prisoners of Architecture”, the thesis project of Rem Koolhaas, Madelon Vreindorp, Elias Zenghelis and Zoe Zenghelis, presented at the AA School in London, 1972. The “Exodus”-project proposes a wall-enclosed zone in central London, “a landing strip for the new architecture of collective monuments”, separating the city in two halves. The zonal conditions of the Exodus-project reconstitute existing elements of architecture into new and possibly blasphemous (or what Koolhaas refers to as “hedonistic”) assemblages. The citizens of the Strip are voluntary prisoners, deliberately going into exile to expose themselves to “the hedonistic science of designing collective facilities that fully accommodate individual desires”.<sup>5</sup>

The Exodus-project suggests one possible way to think about a blasphemous Special Economic Zone. Through a negation of the suppressive features of the traditional borders, the Strip is a demilitarized zone turned into a “condenser of social behavior”. In the spaces and programs of the Strip, fear and exuberance amalgamate into an intensified form of life that breaks with the bourgeoisie moral of the outside. This zonal “blasphemy” can be compared to Donna Haraway’s use of the term as that which “protects one from the Moral Majority within, while still insisting on the need for community.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Keller Easterling, “Disposition and Active Form” in Katrina Stoll and Scott Lloyd, *Infrastructure as Architecture : Designing Composite Networks* (Berlin: Jovis, 2010), 97.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Frampton, “The Status of Man and the Status of His Objects: A Reading of the Human Condition,” in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press), 369.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Bach, “Modernity and the Urban Imagination in Economic Zones,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 28, no. 5 (2011): 99.

<sup>4</sup> Keller Easterling, *The Action Is the Form: Victor Hugo’s Ted Talk.*, (Moscow: Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture and Design, 2012).; Bach, “Modernity and the Urban Imagination in Economic Zones,” 106.

<sup>5</sup> Rem Koolhaas et al., *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large : Office for Metropolitan Architecture, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau* (New York, N.Y.: Monacelli Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Jeanne Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980’s,” in *Feminism - Postmodernism*, ed. L.J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), 190.