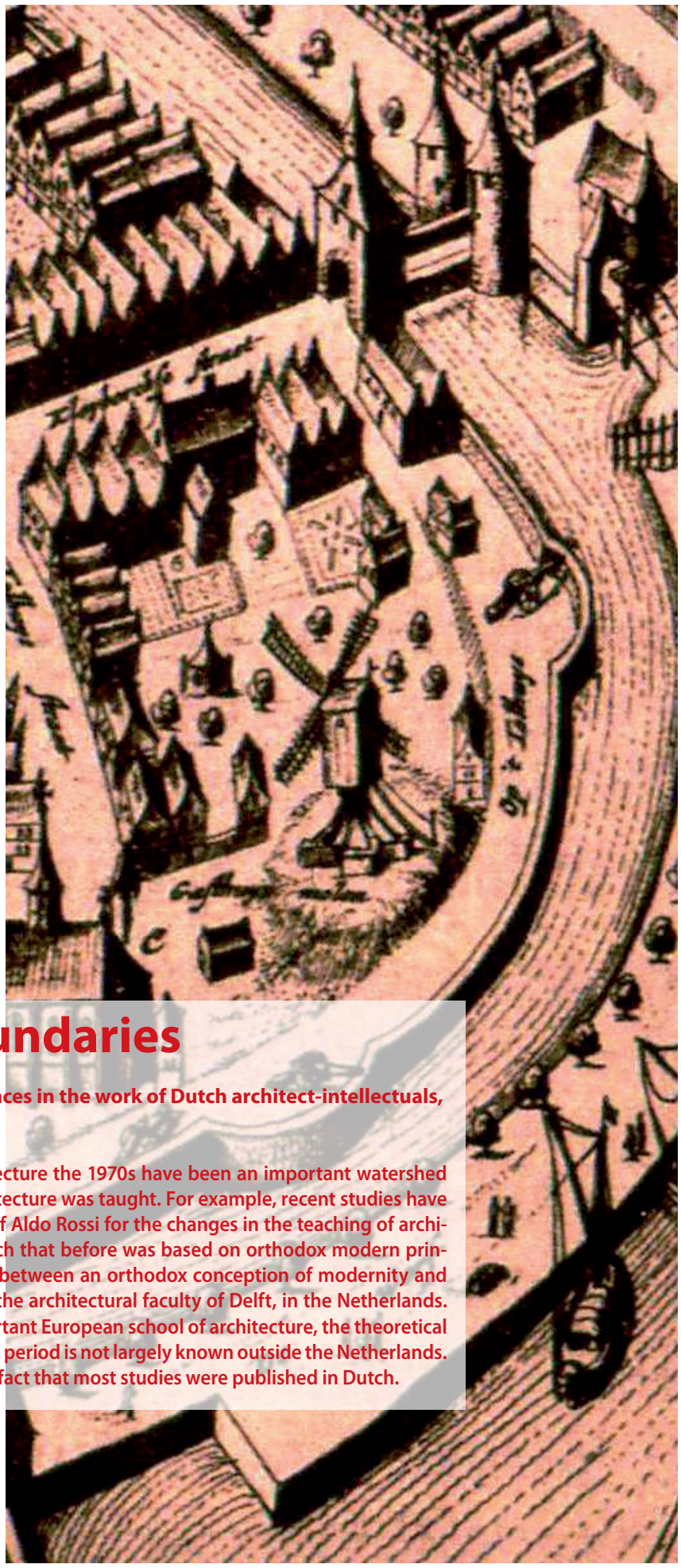

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Dutch boundaries

Poststructuralist influences in the work of Dutch architect-intellectuals, 1960-1990

In many schools of architecture the 1970s have been an important watershed for the way in which architecture was taught. For example, recent studies have stressed the importance of Aldo Rossi for the changes in the teaching of architecture at the ETH in Zürich that before was based on orthodox modern principles.[1] A similar struggle between an orthodox conception of modernity and its criticism took place at the architectural faculty of Delft, in the Netherlands. Although Delft is an important European school of architecture, the theoretical work produced during this period is not largely known outside the Netherlands. This is perhaps due to the fact that most studies were published in Dutch.

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With this article, I intend to make the architectural theory developed during this period known to a larger public. The article describes the intellectual journey made by Dutch students of architecture in the 1970s and 1980s. This was the quest to receive recognition for the intellectual substance of architecture: the insight architecture could be a discourse and a form of knowledge and not only a method of building. Specifically, the work of the architectural theoretician Wim Nijenhuis is highlighted. However, as I point out in this article, the results of this journey also had its problematic sides. This becomes clear from the following sentence taken from the dissertation of Wim Nijenhuis: "*The search for metaphysical fiction and the tendency towards a technological informed absolute through fully transparent and simultaneous information, should be contested by a fantasy dimension, that does not wish to 'overcome' a given situation and that does not rely on 'creativity' (that would still be historical and humanistic).*"[2] Texts like this have a hermetic quality that is not easy to comprehend for an architectural public. Even more, there is an important debate looming behind these sentences. As an important outcome of their quest the architectural students in Delft asked themselves: how do we give form to architectural theory once its claim to truth is exposed as an illusion? For Nijenhuis, the discourse about architecture is a mere 'artful game with words': a fiction, besides other forms of fiction like poetry or literature. The question is then if we have not entered the realm of total subjectivity and relativism with this position. From what can the discourse of architecture derive its authority after the death of God?

Dutch boundaries

A boundary is usually understood as a real or imaginary line, which marks an edge, an outer side, such as, is the case in territorial boundaries. In a more abstract way, the boundary appears as a line of demarcation separating two areas with different characteristics: the old and the new, the past and the present, the known and the unknown. In this article the phenomenon of the border is understood in terms of the borders of orthodox teaching and work in architecture that - in the time dealt with in this article - has been focused on design. In the architectural faculty of Delft in the late 1960s and 70s there was a battle going on between students and professors. This struggle was based upon two irreconcilable conceptions of architecture and architectural work. In this way, we may say that the boundary is at work as a watershed separating two radically different interpretations of architecture. However, what makes this history so unique is that at the same time the boundary became the point of departure for the rewriting of urban history. In the Netherlands, the intellectual history of the architectural discipline received a vital impulse in the 1970s. In those years a group of young architects and planners exchanged the exclusive focus on design for an intellectual position, which considered architecture first and foremost as a source of knowledge. The architects discussed in this essay rebelled against the traditional boundaries of their discipline and at the same time reflected upon the role of the boundary in history. In this way, they historicized their own position: they took their own endeavours as a point of departure for a rewriting of history. In this essay I will especially highlight the work of the Dutch architect-intellectual Wim Nijenhuis (*1948).[3] For Nijenhuis, the adoption of a different identity as an architect and urban planner resulted in years of intensive intellectual labour that among others in 1991 crystallized in the article "City Frontiers and their Disappearance", published in the journal *Assemblage*.[4] This article was the result of long preoccupation with the work of the poststructuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the cultural theorist Paul Virilio. In it, Nijenhuis took the "*current nostalgia for city frontiers and the melancholy caused by the loss of urban form*" as the point of departure for a rewriting of urban history.[5] Nijenhuis detects a constant tension between the fixed and the movable in history: between the stability of urban form and the uprooting forces of traffic and speed. In this way, he wrote a history that starts with the gradual disappearance of the boundary as a constituting element of the city from the Renaissance

Giacomo Balla: Automobile in corsa, 1913. (Source: Pontus Hulten: *Futurismo/Futurismi. Venice* (Palazzo Grassi), 1986. P. 85.

onwards. From this time there is a constant agony among city planners and city dwellers, torn as they are between two opposing forces of mobility and non-permanence versus the order of place and fixed urban form. As history progresses, so analyses Nijenhuis, it is the force of mobility that wins – and with that the boundary gradually disappears as a constituting element of cities. This leads to a situation in which the city today is a "global object". However, so concludes Nijenhuis, the boundary has only seemingly disappeared from our lives. It makes an unexpected comeback in our ways of dressing, or even in the surface of our skin: using make-up, or a certain way of dressing, can be understood as marking the boundary on the level of the body. Clothing for instance protects you while you wrap yourself up in it. This is why, according to Nijenhuis, the history of the city cannot be described as a revolutionary history: it is rather a history of metamorphosis, of the slow transformation of one structure into another.[6]

In the following text I will trace the formation years of this intellectual: I will analyse how a student of architecture turned to writing, letting go of the engagement with architectural practice as the principal goal of architectural study.[7]

Formation Years: Beyond the Orthodoxy of Design

The scholarly career of the architectural theoretician Wim Nijenhuis started in the year 1970 when he entered the Technical University of Delft as a student of architecture. Immediately after registering as a student he took a decision that would determine the course of his life: he decided not to follow the official curriculum as offered by the university. Instead, together with his fellow students, Nijenhuis composed an individual study program made up of the subjects he considered worthwhile studying. Literally, this decision implied breaking out of the boundaries of the architectural faculty. Nijenhuis visited other universities, following historical and philosophical courses, in addition to subjects such as geography and sociology. This was a highly unconventional step, implying that Nijenhuis saw the disciplines of architecture and planning in a whole new light. It meant a broadening of these disciplines, opening them up to neighbouring disciplines, while at the same time stressing their knowledgeable, intellectual character. In fact, as Nijenhuis states, for him this alternative study trajectory was part of a struggle to take distance from the dominance of architectural design as the main focus in the study of architecture.

This was an important theme for the rebelling students in Delft: they criticized the architectural faculty for being no more than a training school for designers. Much to the distress of the architecture professors, Nijenhuis and his friends were of the contention that studying architecture equally implied talking about architecture and writing books about it. As Nijenhuis states: "*… we thought architecture was not only a matter of doing, but equally a matter of talking, looking, writing, and so on.*"[8] Nijenhuis and his colleagues thus gave a whole new meaning to being an architect: they introduced architecture and planning as fields of study and not only of the realization of buildings and city plans. Nine years after entering the university as an architecture student and without having followed a single lesson of the official curriculum, Nijenhuis graduated. His thesis project caused a sensation: Nijenhuis was part of a group of students who, for the first time in the history of architectural faculty, graduated on the basis of a book instead of a design. The book, written with two other students, was called *Meten en regelen aan de stad* - Measuring and organizing in the city (translation Rixt Hoekstra).[9] The book was a huge success: the 1500 printed copies were sold out just a few months after their release. This was the first official product of the "new" Delft, the face of its new, rebellious identity so to speak. However, at the same time this thesis project remained highly contested, especially among design professors. As Nijenhuis recalls, during the graduation ceremony they even went as far as to throw chalk and paper at them. For these professors, it was outrageous what was happening. The rebel-students were people without balls, lacking the courage to do what they were actually trained for: realizing buildings and city plans.

However, the controversy caused by Nijenhuis, De Graaf and Habets was not only caused by the theoretical character of their final project. *Meten en regelen* also became the platform from which to ventilate a harsh critique on the humanist movement in Dutch architecture in the 1970s, created as an attempt to overcome technocratic modernism. The book pretended to expose the practices of influential humanist architects like Van Eyck and Hertzberger as useless illusions. In this way, in *Meten en regelen* many themes figure that were also dealt with by Van Eyck and Hertzberger: planning for city centres for example, or participation, traffic issues and de-concentration. However, instead of arguing in favour of a progressive, enlightened solution for these issues as did the humanist architects, Nijenhuis, De Graaf and Habets set out to write its critique.

The authors of *Meten en regelen* were fascinated by a certain theory of power: this became the perspective from which they wrote their criticism. Architectural and planning issues now became part of a battlefield where forms of power and counter-power were fighting each other. This is the insight that Nijenhuis and his friends gained while writing *Meten en regelen*: both the modernist establishment and its progressive alternative are in the end just different forms of power. In the end, both power and counter-power – establishment and opposition - are necessitated by the "functional apparatus" of the capitalist city: to survive, the capitalist system needs positive and negative, confirmation as well as opposition. The authors thus exposed the humanist discourse of architects like Van Eyck and Hertzberger as deceitful: in the end, their opposition was just as much part of the system as the ideology they attacked. With this thesis, the authors of *Meten en regelen* gave a harsh blow to the ambitions and dreams of progressive humanist architects. The authors wrote:

"*Despite these oppositional strategies with which architecture constantly charges itself, it can be nothing else than a part of the chain of machinery that confiscates the human body…*"[10]

Despite its claims to reform and improve the system, in a cynical sort of way the humanist discourse was swallowed in the end by capitalism. In *Meten en regelen* the critical strategy employed was to first of all analyse discourse as that which gives meaning to practice. Words from the progressive humanist vocabulary were exposed as means to discipline and force the masses into the straightjacket of capitalist life. At the same time, *Meten en regelen* is marked by the absence of

Bookcover *Meten en regelen aan de stad*. Nijmegen, 1981.

any clear structure. As the authors explain in the introduction, there is no clear theme that starts at the beginning and leads to the end. Such logic and coherence is exchanged for a scattering of arguments: as the authors explain in the introduction, *Meten en regelen* is like a map that can be read from many points of view; many readings and intellectual itineraries are possible.[11]

Meten en regelen can be viewed as the first written result of the intellectual activities of the students from Delft. In general, there were three themes that were dominant for them. First, the students were fascinated by different forms of social critique. This fascination resulted in the awareness that social phenomena could be viewed in a critical way that went beyond the usual explanations and truisms. The students were especially critical towards the dogmas of leftist politics and of 'progressive' forms of modern architecture. In contrast to the naïve and sugary discourse of humanism, the students started to study heavy German literature on Marxist planning methods, revolutionary city planning and so on – at the time, all taboo subjects at the university. Second, architectural history gained a new relevance – we will talk about this later on in the article. Third, the students became convinced that architecture, besides its obvious material character, was also a form of language; a way in which ideas and notions become accessible to us. For them, buildings were not mere bricks and mortar: they are also part of a discourse, as words placed in the large text of West-

ern civilization. Looming large over the activities of the students in those years was the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926-1984). At the start of the 1970s, Foucault's' The *Order of Things* had just been translated into Dutch and was particularly influential among the rebelling students.[12] As Nijenhuis remembers, the students were carrying around this book on the streets and during the occupation of the universities they sat on the floor reading it. It was thoroughly studied. Foucault was also clearly present in *Meten en Regelen aan de stad*. From a political point of view, this book was written as a critique on traditional left-wing politics: on the practices of the Dutch *Partij van de Arbeid* – the Labour party. Especially, the critique of the students was aimed at the practices of urban renewal in the 1970s. Under attack was "responsible" social-democratic inner city regeneration: the students criticized what was going on in cities like Groningen and Rotterdam, where left-wing city governments had a pioneering role in coming to a democratic form of inner city redevelopment. In *Meten en Regelen*, the students now took the totally unexpected step to analyse these practices as if they were radio stations: that is, from the point of view of communication theory. This was the consequence of their focus on discourse and on critical views: the offices for inner city regeneration became stations for the transmission of messages. This broadcasting of messages was, according to the students, of much greater importance than the actual work done by these offices: the clearance of slums and the improvement of houses. In *Meten en regelen* the city was thus analysed not as a material substance but as a discourse:

"I*n this chapter we focus on the appearance of the city in the field of representation, which is to say we attempt to chart the discursive field in which the city appears as a theoretical field and as a field of intervention. We regard the city as an imaginary product created by the relation between knowledge and power: an idea.*"[13]

The essence of the critique on the practices of the political left-wing was that their opposition was false and illusionary. Just like the so-called critical attitude by the side of enlightened, progressive architects, they should all be regarded as forms of false consciousness. According to the authors, there was no real critique and no real proposition for an alternative: the discourse of humanism was a form of delusion meant to serve the powerful machinery of capitalist city planning. Ultimately, both the establishment and its critical interlocutors were part of the same strategy to make the ultimate technocratic control over the city acceptable for the masses.

As mentioned before, a central point of reference was the French philosopher Michel Foucault. This philosopher was important for a number of reasons. First, in *The Order of Things* (1966) the students found a history that was not based upon the grand narrative of progress. Foucault showed what an alternative history might look like: he thus depicted a history that did not contain a single, steady line of progress; instead, it was a history of ruptures, of long and short periods, of initiatives and failures, of continuities and discontinuities. In this history, modernity was for Foucault just another *episteme*: far from being the climax of progress, it was a mere structure that exists for a period in the discourse people use. The students in Delft were fascinated by this way of history writing. With it, they took a distance from both the orthodox-modern and critical-modern architects, who shared an absolute faith in progress and the conviction that architecture could contribute to a better world. What also fascinated the students in Delft was Foucault's focus on discourse and language. Foucault was very much interested in speech: for him, the past was an endless sea of talking heads, of words and language used by people in various situations. However, in this past there was no logic of steady improvement to be detected. What most of all attracted the attention of the students was Foucault's theory of positive power.[14] Where traditional theories saw power as the force of oppression exerted by a ruler upon other people, there Foucault analysed power as a universally present system of relations, working from the smallest corners of society – what Foucault indica-

Wim Nijenhuis in discourse with students, 18.04.2011. Film stills of a video documentation by the author.

ted as the "capillaries" of power. Over there, stated Foucault, power works in such a subtle way that the participants in the social process are not even aware of it. In other words, power is everywhere: it is this insight that permitted the students to regard architecture and planning in the broadest sense as means of power. To make power in this capacity visible Foucault did not analyse power as a command from the top down, but as an element permeating society in all its aspects. The students in Delft were convinced that also architecture and urban planning were part of this machinery of power. However, this did not mean that the students rejected power as such: after Foucault, they considered power to be a productive phenomenon, a force that both structures and constructs society.

In *Meten en regelen* the history of the city thus became the history of powerful discourse:
"*Often power is represented as something that can be possessed (for example by the bourgeoisie) or something that can be localised (for example in the state machinery) or as something that can be shared (by way of democratisation). We left this field of understanding....During our work we gained the insight that notions and representations are part of power dispositions, which let us live by their functioning.*"[15]

Power, for the authors of *Meten en Regelen*, was an immanent force; they saw society as a biological system penetrated by it. Power, they wrote, even functions on the level of the human body, where it works as a norm, a conscience and a code of behaviour. As mentioned before, this had as a consequence that the history of the city became a battlefield where "*strategies of power and counter-power*" fight each other. This fight was part of a larger, discontinuous development of a:
"*...series of machineries that have as their goal to produce discipline, to make people act under compulsion and to install rituals. In short, to normalise.*"[16]

The authors of *Meten en Regelen* thus set out to analyse the place of architecture and city planning in a society structured by power.

However, there was another point of inspiration for the students that was perhaps even more fundamental than the prior points. What the students noticed was that Foucault was subtle in this analysis of power; in comparison, Marxist literature seemed coarser and less refined. Also, Foucault seemed to be less straightforward in condemning social phenomena. Instead, Foucault used a certain irony based on a fundamental ambivalence with respect to social phenomena. What impressed the students was that for Foucault something could be wrong but it could also be all right: his criticism was always mild and accompanied by an attempt to see things in perspective. Ultimately, it was language that played a role in Foucault's irony: for Foucault, language was not a transparent window fully disclosing the reality behind it. Rather, it is the *episteme* in which we live that decides how we see reality and even the objects we detect in reality. For instance, where fifty years ago people in Europe would see a plane, there someone from New Guinea would probably see a large bird. What the students learned from Foucault was that the relationship between language and truth is fundamentally complex: for Foucault, there was no such thing as a single truth. Also history writing was for him not a process of establishing the truth. Importantly, the book The *Order of Things* was originally published as *Les Mots et Les Choses* – The Words and the Things. For Foucault, we use words to express truths about this world; however, these words never totally refer to the objects they intend to indicate. Ironically, sometimes the sentence you pronounce expresses something different from what you intend it to express; there is a gap between the words and the things. History can therefore not be viewed as a factual and unproblematic account of the past. For a theoretician like Wim Nijenhuis, this became the point of departure for the writing of history.

In Delft, introducing irony and the critique of progress meant referring to an intellectual horizon that was totally at odds with the design philosophy of influential architects such as Van Eyck and Hertzberger. These architects saw themselves as trailblazers of a new future and as prophets of a new truth in architecture; for them, these notions could only appear as an attempt to tone down sacrosanct design values.

The Encounter with Tafuri

Michel Foucault was not the sole point of reference for the students of Delft. To be sure, there was a certain architectural historian from Venice who soon captured the imagination of the students. The Italian student Umberto Barbieri, who had come to the Netherlands to study architecture, introduced Tafuri in Delft. For the students Tafuri soon became an important point of reference in the expansion of their theoretical horizon. Tafuri was an example, somebody "*who knew it all*". He was a professor at the university of Venice and at the same time an advisor of the Communist Party in Italy. However, for the intellectual development of the students not only the encounter, but also the subsequent detachment from Tafuri was important. The break with Tafuri was just as decisive for their intellectual position as the embrace of French philosophy. Tafuri was also one of the most contested intellectuals in Delft. Like no other this intellectual was able to stir up bad blood among the design professors, who resented his work. As Nijenhuis recalls:

"*By mentioning Tafuri the entire audience went mad; doors were closed everywhere. Those thoughts were absolutely forbidden!*"[17]

Tafuri was thus excellent material to provoke the establishment. At the same time, Tafuri was important for the rediscovery of history as a relevant subject matter. As Nijenhuis remembers, in the 1960s architectural history was practically non-existent in Delft: there had not been a professor in history for many years. Also for most art historians architectural history was not an exciting subject, it was taught more or less perfunctory. Marxist thought was introduced in the faculty of architecture, but mostly the students studied Marx in relation to such themes as urban politics and economics.[18] Tafuri now made clear that Marxist thought was equally relevant for the study of architecture and history: in Delft, these were two forgotten

subjects in the struggle for innovation. Marx could be use to revitalize architectural history and to make history once more a relevant subject for architects and urban planners. In his books, Tafuri spoke of architecture in an intellectual and severe manner; something which fascinated the students. The students noticed how his histories did not have the simplicity of straightforward Marxism; at the same time, Tafuri showed that architecture could never be reduced to a strictly formal problem, that it was always part of a social constellation, together with other art forms, such as literature or art. Tafuri was also attractive because he was an intellectual who made clear statements. Tafuri had a provoking vision about the future of architecture and with that he could be used to fuel a debate, to get something going in the university, also beyond the revival of architectural history.

At an ideological level, Tafuri became an important touchstone in the struggle between humanist design professors and the rebelling students. While the students reproached these architects with being too moralistic and involved in left-wing ideology, the professors thought it was unforgiveable to leave behind architectural design as the core of architectural study. While the professors tried to prevent the graduation of some of the rebelling students, the students tried to gain power so that they could appoint different professors and get rid of the existing ones. Ultimately, Tafuri was the figurehead in the struggle between two conceptions of architecture: with the books of Tafuri in their hands, the students demanded a scientific architecture, an architecture based on research. They thus created a rupture with respect to a longstanding Delftian tradition, going from the Catholicism of the Delft School to the adepts of the Modern Movement and its critical interlocutors: they all considered design to be a personally based, intuitive matter and they all combined this with a discourse that was as passionate as it was ideological of nature.[19]

However, while spending long hours studying translations of *Progetto e Utopia* and *Architettura Contemporanea*, doubts began to grow. As Nijenhuis remembers, he read Tafuri together with German Marxist literature on the city, books with titles such as Fundamentale *Ökonomie der Stadt*. It was hard work, starting at eight o' clock in the morning with a lot of coffee, and than slowly struggling one's way through the pages of these books. Collective study groups would start on Monday morning nine o'clock and end Friday evening; sometimes the students did not even have time for a holiday.[20] At a certain point the students grew tired of all this hard work; moreover, they stumbled upon an intellectual whose work seemed, from many perspectives, more attractive. Where Marxist theory would tell you what to do, would be full of commands and instructions – Be an activist! Enable revolution! – there Foucault was more relaxed. Foucault stated that theory would consummate itself in the act of reading: where for Marxists theory was a prelude for action, there Foucault thought of theory as enough in itself. Simply by reading his books and by gaining his insights, one would catch the virus and be contaminated. Also, compared to Tafuri, Foucault appeared to be more communicative: for the students, Foucault was the intellectual who made an effort to say things in a pleasant way.

Foucault focussed upon an element that was not present in Tafuri's world: he made the use of language in a practical sense into a theme. Foucault stated that reading and writing should be delightful, agreeable activities.[21] Ultimately, with Foucault the students entered a different universe: one where sweeping statements about the future of architecture had less value. For the students, the point of conflict between Foucault and Tafuri was present in the relationship between language and truth. What ultimately convinced the students was that Foucault used language in a non-representative way. Foucault pointed towards the gap between the words and the things. Words are never fully truthful, because they never succeed in fully representing the object they pretend to describe: there is no adequatio between statement and case. Gilles Deleuze, an-other poststructuralist philosopher, spoke of the so-called "discursive subject" in this context: a philosophical pro-

position is never pure because there are always unintended associations that are attached to the statement that is made. For instance, when we speak of an athlete we usually refer to a person who is good at sport; however what may unconsciously also be present in our communication is the original Greek meaning of the work, the askètès, meaning both athlete and asceticism. We are never totally in control of the statements we make; there is always the discursive subject which acts as a jamming station upon the pretension to know exactly what one is talking about.[22] The speaker does not consciously attach these connotations to the words, but they simply exist in our collective memory and they do their work, whether the speaker likes it or not. Foucault now accepted this reality: the impurity of discourse was for him given and unintended meanings were welcome. For Foucault, the non-representative character of language held as a consequence that language had an autonomous status, working on itself and by itself. Moreover, for Foucault, rhetoric was a powerful element also without describing the truth. Therefore, and this is what the students learned from Foucault, texts should be written with felicity of expression, they should be able to seduce the reader.

Parting with Tafuri and embracing Foucault as a new point of reference meant that the students actively began to think about the question, what history and criticism would look like without a claim to truth. For them, this meant that history and criticism should be artful games with words, focussing upon the art of writing itself. Studying Foucault also meant that they became aware of the power of discourse. For them, this was the consequence of the gap between the words and the things: language becomes a creative principle and a means to control and manipulate reality. That is, language is not a passive principle but something with which we work on reality and even change it. For the students in Delft, this insight actually offered an opportunity: language not only reflects reality but creates it and may thus be a tool for the bringing about of change.[23] Where Marxist intellectuals saw language as part of the superstructure and thus as a deduction from social-economic relationships, there Foucault granted language an autonomous status as a factor that constitutes reality. Compared to Tafuri's bleak perspective regarding the future of architecture, Foucault's theory was more positive and even liberating. Power was not only a matter of repression – as proclaimed by Herbert Marcuse – but also an opportunity to shape the world according to our wishes and desires. Dedicating one's life to discourse did not mean a withdrawal into the isolation of the library but a means to actually change the world.

Writing History

In this way, in a time when this was all but self-explanatory, the architect Wim Nijenhuis became a theoretician. Moreover, after years of intense struggle in the university rejecting the traditional boundaries of architectural study, Nijenhuis embarked on a grand historical project to rewrite the history of Western urbanism. It was a creative and speculative outlook that Nijenhuis was aiming at; for this, he was in constant dialogue with a series of philosophers and cultural thinkers, looking for sources of inspiration to further develop his arguments.

Nijenhuis became convinced that the slow fading of the boundary was central to Western urban history and to our present culture at large. Nijenhuis thus wrote, among others, about the systematic demolition of strongholds, fortresses, city walls and city gates. For him, the erection of the Berlin Wall in the 1960s was, a late reminder of the medieval attitude to defend the city through the construction of walls.

According to Nijenhuis our modern era is marked not so much by increasing influence of technology, the instability of the capitalist system or by climate problems, but by a general loss of frontiers.[24] The disappearance of the frontier, so states Nijenhuis, is the effect of a constant struggle running through history between the "*stabilitas loci of the inert fixation to a place*" and the forces of journey and travel.[25] Urban history is the history of the confrontation

Piet Rook. "Muur van Berlijn" from: J. de Graaf, D. van Dansik: *De muur*. Rotterdam, 1984. Copyrights photo Piet Rook.

between two orders: that of place, characterized by a stability of form, and that of speed, characterized by communication, trade and contact. For Nijenhuis, this struggle puts a great pressure on architecture and urban planning: they are the disciplines of "presence" and "appearance" in a world dominated increasingly by the very opposite movement.[26] In fact, so argues Nijenhuis, the rise of urban planning as a discipline in the nineteenth century was essentially an attempt to rescue the city from the dominating process of the loss of urban frontiers, provoking the loss of the "Gestalt" of the fortified city.[27]

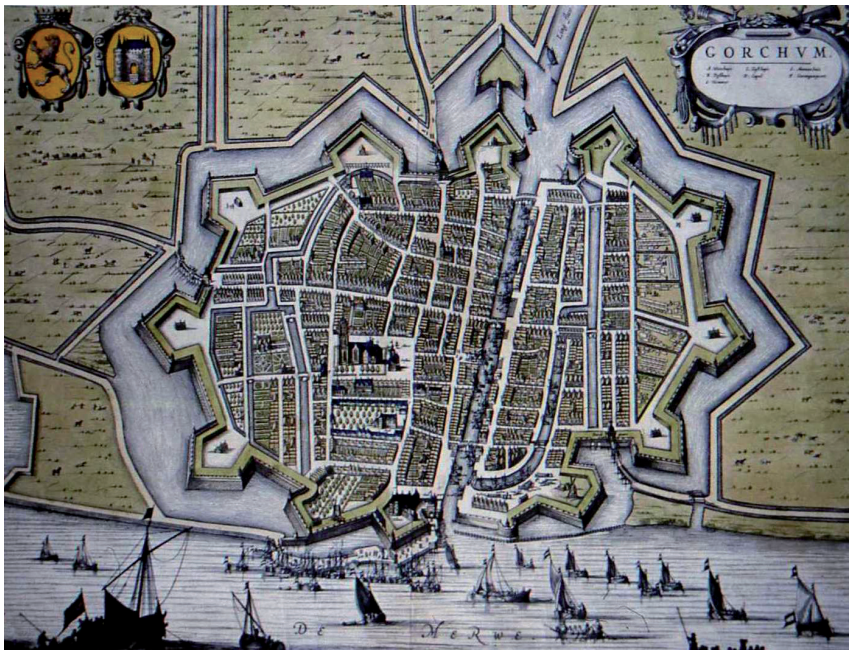
To describe Western urban history as a history centred on the growing force of speed and the gradual disappearance of boundaries is the challenge Nijenhuis sets for himself. That is, Nijenhuis wants to make plausible that urban history can indeed be written in this way. The question is to what extent Nijenhuis was influenced by his experiences as a student in writing this history. There are a few themes to be mentioned here. First, Nijenhuis displays a strong inclination to challenge authority and to write an alternative history that is contrary to the *doxa* of urban history. This challenging of authority already starts when Nijenhuis analyses the genesis of urban settlements. Contrary to "humanistic myth" which points to the erection of defensible spaces in an open field as the first forms of fortified settlements, Nijenhuis states that the beginning of urbanity occurred in a quite a different period and in quite a different context.[28] Around 2000 and 1700 BC the chariot was introduced in the steppes of what is now Iran: this invention stood at the basis of the very phenomenon of the city, so argues Nijenhuis. The first urban settlements were not so much erected as "jealous" attempts to defend treasures such as grain: ra-ther, they were the consequence of the introduction of speed, bringing with it a principal differentiation between slow and fast pace.[29] Nijenhuis thus introduces a totally different parameter into the discourse: he explains the com-ing about of urbanity from speed rather than from the wish to settle. In the wake of the invention of the chariot, so he writes, a different social class emerged: besides the nomadic tribes, who

Chariot, rock graffiti from the Sinai, 1500-1200 BC. (Source: Bruno Borchert: *Mystiek*). Bloemendaal, 1989. P. 64.

were limited in their movements by the pace of sheep and herd, an elite of warriors came into existence marked by the ability to gain a higher speed. What follows is that urban history is not only the history of speed but also the history of the rise of a military class. Urban history, so writes Nijenhuis, is the history of cities erected as "*emblems of territorial conquest*".[30]

Nijenhuis' history is provoking of character. It is challenging for architects and urban planners, who now see their discipline explained as defensive mechanisms against the forces of their time, but equally for academic historians, who are now confronted with an entirely different explanation of urban history. For Nijenhuis, the city is essentially a paradoxical phenomenon.[31] It seems like the city has a clear form created around the opposition between centre and periphery, or city and countryside. However, this is only seemingly so: in truth, the city is an unstable entity because it is organized around the effect of speed. The city is the product of the differentiation between inertia and speed, between traffic and staying in one place. The power of the city depends upon its ability to manipulate the flux: to supervise and control the stream of people, goods, and money. "*Throughout history, the power of the city equals its authority of traffic*", so writes Nijenhuis.[32] The city for Nijenhuis is essentially an interrupter, a singular point on an endless trajectory, a momentary fixation that promises welfare and stability to those living inside, in contrast to the people who are condemned to endless travelling. The most important part of the city it its gate, so writes Nijenhuis: this is the point of control over who enters into prosperity and who does not. The city is the police and the polis.[33]

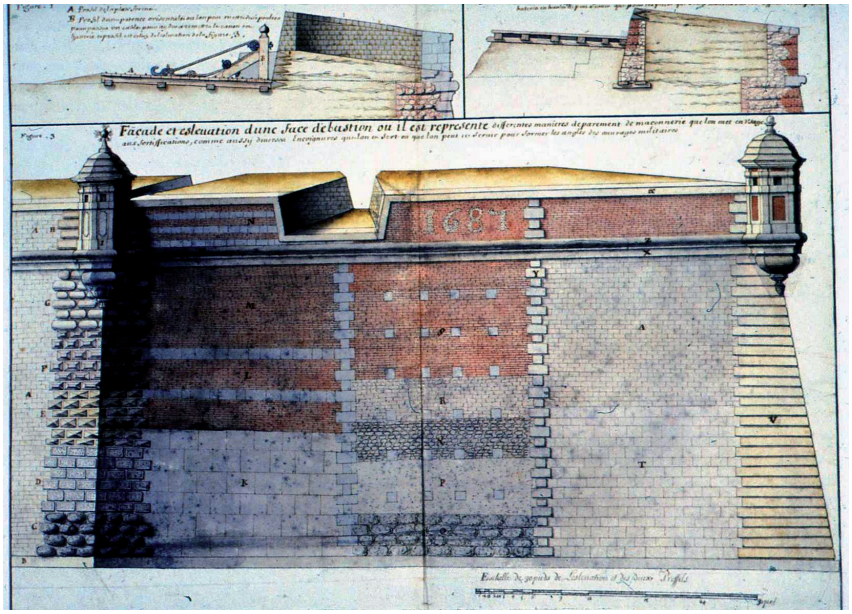
In writing an alterative history, Nijenhuis was influenced up to a great extent by philosophy: almost as if philosophers were the true historians. It is through the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio that Nijenhuis became convinced that the force of military action and the force of speed are the two decisive factors in the coming about of cities. Another philosophical concept is the "machinic arrangement" as developed by the French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.[34] These philosophers developed a theory of machines in which the machine is viewed as something larger and more encompassing than just the technological apparatus. The technological machine is only one kind of "mechanisation", in addition, there are also political, social, economical and aesthetic machines. To describe the city as a "mechanic arrangement" enables Nijenhuis to stress its inclusive and heterogenic character. The functioning of the city is dependent upon a great number of factors: urbanity in other words does not only consist of houses, streets and squares but encompasses many elements, some visible and some not. During the middle Ages, so writes Nijenhuis, the mechanic arrangement of the city consisted of both technology and semiotics.[35] This collective regime of signs,



J. Blaeu: Map of Gorcum. About 1610. (Source: Gemeentearchief Gorcum, cat.nr. 382 A7).

so explains Nijenhuis, does not only consist of for example the placards and documents placed near the city gate.

More in general, it is the sum of signs produced by the semiotic machine and which somehow affects the consciousness and behaviour of the inhabitants. Most of all, the semiotic machine was marked by its power of selection: as Nijenhuis writes, its effect is the quanta of bodies "[…] *that every evening at the gate were divided into citizens and non-citizens, 'strangers' being excluded from the city by the lash of the whip; or the tortured criminals displayed at the city gate to affirm a territory of justice.*"[36] In this way, Nijenhuis stresses the power of words and texts not only as a way to describe urban history, but also as a serious component of history itself. We may notice the influence of Foucault here: Nijenhuis stresses the constant process of division that takes place through language. That is, according to Foucault our culture organizes its epistemic conditions – its ability to speak the truth – through a constant process of splitting up, between reason and madness, between normality and pathology, between life and death in medical science or the self and the other in philosophy. Nijenhuis now applies this concept to the urban history of the middle ages: in addition, he defines a place where the semiotic machine functions at its height. It is the city gate, so he writes that functions as



Claude Masse: Etude de parement d´un bastion, 1687. (Source: Bruno Fortier: *La Métropole Imaginaire*. Liege, 1989. P.27.)

a point of selection, deciding over who can pass and who cannot, who is accepted and who is cast aside as an unwelcome alien. As a consequence, the most important part of the city is not its centre but its margin. "*The city does not radiate from the centre, but is formed from the boundary*" as Nijenhuis writes.[37]

Nijenhuis has the ambition to write a "total history" encompassing past, present and future. His history stretches out from 1700 BC until the present. In this process, the coming about of modernity is for Nijenhuis not so much a point of rupture, but an important link in a chain connecting past, present and future. Modernity is most of all connected to a revolution in communication technology: in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, so writes Nijenhuis, the city is no longer ruled by the "*economy of delay*" and no longer has the character of a momentary fixation in an endless journey. Rather, as Nijenhuis points out, strategies are now developed to liberate the flux of people, money and goods and to "*bring everything in contact with everything else.*"[38] It is not so much that telephones and telegraphs and so on are invented, so argues Nijenhuis, but most of all what the effect is of these systems of communication: distance is now eliminated and the circulation of information without obstruction is accelerated.[39] With the rise of modernity time takes the place of space: the territorial frontier becomes a frontier in time, as the capitalist system makes use of time rather than of space. "*The regime of information, power and speed is a regime of time.*"[40] This also has as a consequence that the city becomes a potentially uncontrollable entity, a "*labile and mobile whole*" that has the tendency to develop itself endlessly: architects and city planners are now called upon to rescue what they can from this process and secure a minimum of secure urban form. Modern society is marked by the absolute rule of mobility as the order that controls and enables movement. In our modern society everything becomes mobilized, which ultimately leads to the dissolution of the city as a stable form. The city becomes a "global object" with no outside, only an inside. Urbanity is all around. As Nijenhuis writes:

"*Dromocracy has fragmented the city frontier into an endless series and dissipated it over the surface of the earth. It turned it inside out, brought it into our living rooms* […] *By this proliferation and delocalisation of the frontier, the new machinic arrangement of the diffused frontier, shapes the city into a global object where everything is always inside, with no outside.*"[41]

In our modern society, we may conclude, the forces of speed and mobility have developed up to such an extent that the city itself, as a stable and permanent form, has seized to exist. What has taken the place of the city is the condition of urbanity, as a situation that has no qualities and no form, that is all encompassing and from which we cannot escape.

Conclusion

In the 1960s in the Netherlands a group of young architects aspired to reconnect the domains of architecture and knowledge. In fact, if today we speak of the "theoretical delirium" of the 1970s and 1980s, than this craving for theory can be traced back to the ambitions of these architects. Today, this period is over and exchanged for a much more pragmatic attitude. As part of the post-critical and the post-theoretical debate many of the insights formed during these days are under attack. What is still of value in the history writing produced by these architects?

In general, we may say that during the 1970s and 80s the architectural discipline in the Netherlands lost its theoretical naivety: the belief that there are only facts and no interpretations and the conviction that the world can be viewed in only one way. In fact, as a consequence of the engagement with fascinating thinkers such as Foucault Nijenhuis learned to be sceptical towards the pretension to tell the truth about the past and to write a history based on facts. Traditionally, urban history answers questions like: what has been designed by various architects and urban planners in the past? How can their designs be characterized; did they work from a certain intention? Such a descriptive history is often based on what may be called a naïve repre-

sentation theory of history: the notion that the historical narrative is a projection of the past, much like a map is a projection of a certain part of the earth. The theoretical history of Wim Nijenhuis demonstrates that such a realism is misplaced. It shows that depending on theoretical outlook many forms of urban history can be written. The estrangement *vis à vis* those notions in urban history that have become so familiar as to appear automatic and "natural" is very productive. In this way, we learn that the city centre is not necessarily the most crucial part of the city, just like urban history does not only consist of the history of houses, streets and squares. Words and theories are just as important as city plans and designs for buildings. In this way, the value of Nijenhuis' history writing is that it teaches us to look beyond the clichés of existing historiography. At the same time, Nijenhuis does not bury himself in fragments of the past. He asks himself: what is the evolution that we may recognize in the tendencies of the past? How are the past, the present and the future connected? Such a history is especially relevant for architects and urban planners, who are given a historical perspective for the situation at present.

Nijenhuis' history also has its weak points. For example, it is hazardous to explain the entire history of urbanity from just one principle, just one "motor" of history; in this case, the introduction of speed and mobility. Also, the preoccupation with these themes may be explained as a form of anachronism. Speed and mobility are crucial notions in the modern era, but the past should not be judged with the help of criteria derived from modernity; it should be measured according to the standards proper to the historical period itself. Also, it may be said that Nijenhuis texts are not easy to access and sometimes wilfully difficult: this is especially so for an architectural public. With notion of urban history as an "*artful game of words*" Nijenhuis has distanced himself radically from the apologetic histories of Pevsner and Giedion. Far from being engaged in the re-creation and narration of historical "reality" it is the aim of Nijenhuis to create a theoretical space that might actually provoke something, have a certain effect in society. History is not a means to chart the path of progress or a source from which general laws can be derived; rather, history is an endless process of reading and interpretation of the signs of the past. At the same time, Nijenhuis' history raises the question how far we want to take this poststructuralist outlook. Should all notions of an objective historical reality outside the text be considered as quicksand? Is the idea of progress a socially harmful fiction and a linear history chimerical? How much Derrida and how little Pevsner do we want in our histories?

As Nijenhuis remembers, surpassing the boundaries of the architectural discipline was not an easy step to take. As a consequence of the publication of book like *Meten en Regelen aan de stad* friendships came to an end, especially those students who after their graduation decided to work for the offices of inner city regeneration and who could not understand the critique on their practice. For them, the attack on the humanist discourse was shocking: it rebuked what they had always stood for and believed in. Studying the kaleidoscope of fascinating thinkers was, so recalls Nijenhuis, an intoxicating activity: at times, he almost felt drunk with theory. It was a unique, unrepeatable episode in architectural history. Today, the lasting merit of Nijenhuis and the rebel students from Delft is that by stressing the value of knowledge for architecture they offered us insight in different interpretations of the past and how this affects our functioning today.

Notes

1 See: Ákos Moravánszky, Judith Hopfengärtner (eds.): *Aldo Rossi und die Schweiz. Architektonische Wechselwirkungen*. Zürich 2011.

2 Wim Nijenhuis: *Een wolk van duister weten. Geschriften over Stedenbouw Geschiedenis*. Technische Universiteit Eindhoven 2003. P. 461.

3 Jan Willem Nijenhuis (*1948). Important publications by this author are among others: Wim Nijenhuis, Jan de Graaf: *Machinaties: mobilisatie van de zwijgende meerderheid*.

Nijmegen 1981. Wim Nijenhuis: *De diabolische snelweg. Over de traditie van de mooie weg in het Nederlandse landschap en het verlangen naar de schitterende snelweg in de grote stad.* Rotterdam 2007. See also Nijenhuis' dissertation: Nijenhuis 2003, see note 2.

4 Wim Nijenhuis: "City Frontiers and their disappearance". In: *Assemblage: A Critical Journal of Architecture and Design Culture*, 16, December 1991. P. 201-212. This article was also published as: Wim Nijenhuis: "City Frontiers and their disappearance". In: *The Periphery Architectural Design Profile* 108. London 1994. P. 13-17.

5 Nijenhuis 2003, see note 2. P. 459.

6 Nijenhuis speaks in this context of a large coat that is like your own private city. A source for these ideas is: Anne Cauqelin: "Les portes de la ville". In: Paul Blanquert: *Les Portes de la Ville.* Paris 1983.

7 Besides secondary sources, this essay is based on two oral sources. First, there is an interview with Nijenhuis held by me and second there is a registered lecture by Nijenhuis on youtube. See: Rixt Hoekstra, Interview with Wim Nijenhuis, Deventer, 5th of June 2011 (audiocassette). Wim Nijenhuis, deel 1, 2,3. www.youtube.com/watch?v=02MEohqPMgs.

8 Wim Nijenhuis, deel 1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=02MEohqPMgs.

9 Jan de Graaf/ Ad Habets/ Wim Nijenhuis: *Meten en regelen aan de stad.* Nijmegen 1981. Architektuur cahier Sunschrift 170.

10 De Graaf et. al. 1981, see note 9. P. 14: "*Want ondanks de verzetspretenties waarmee de architektuur zichzelf steeds belaadt, kan zij niets anders zijn dan een onderdeel van een keten van apparaten, die beslag leggen op de lichamen. . .*" Translation Rixt Hoekstra.

11 De Graaf et. al. 1981, see note 9. P. 15.

12 Michel Foucault: *Les Mots et Les Choses, une archéologie des sciences humaines*. Paris 1966. Translated into English as: Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things. An archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York 1970. Translated into Dutch as: Michel Foucault: *De woorden en de dingen: een archeologie van de menswetenschappen*. Bilthoven 1973.

13 De Graaf et. al. 1981, see note 9. P. 35: "*In dit hoofdstuk richten we onze aandacht op het verschijnen van de stad in het vlak van de representatie, dat wil zeggen we pogen het discursieve veld, waarin de stad als theoretisch objekt en objekt van ingrijpen verschijnt, in kaart te brengen. We beschouwen de stad als een door het macht-weten-komplex geproduceerd imaginair objekt: een idee.*"

14 Michiel Karskens: "Filosoferen zonder theorie.". In: Paul Laurent. Assoun (eds.): *Hedendaagse Franse filosofen.* Assen 1987.

15 De Graaf et. al. 1981, see note 9. P. 13: "*Vaak wordt macht voorgesteld als iets, dat bezeten kan worden (bv. door de bourgeoisie), of gelokaliseerd (in de staatsapparaten) of als iets gedeeld zou kunnen worden (d.m.v. demokratisering). Wij hebben dit veld van voorstellingen verlaten...Tijdens het werk brak het inzicht door , dat deze uitspraken en voorstellingen onderdeel zijn van machts-dispostieven, die ons van hun werkingen laten leven.*"

16 Ibid. P. 14: "*...een reeks van apparaten, die tot doel hebben discipline te fabriceren, dwang op te leggen en gewoonten in te stellen. Normaliseren dus.*"

17 Wim Nijenhuis, deel 1. www.youtube.com/watch?v=02MEohqPMgs.

18 Rixt Hoekstra, Interview with Wim Nijenhuis, Deventer, 5th of June 2011 (audiocassette).

19 Wim Nijenhuis: "Tafuri en de kritiek", personal email. June 16 2011.

20 Rixt Hoekstra, Interview with Wim Nijenhuis, Deventer. 5th of June 2011 (audiocassette).

21 Not everybody appreciated Foucault's style in the way Nijenhuis and his comrades did. For example, the Dutch philosopher Frank Ankersmit writes: "*Foucault's style is horrible; luckily, it improves through translation, therefore it is pleasant that most of his work was translated in English.*" Frank Ankersmit: *Denken over geschiedenis, een overzicht van geschiedfilosofische opvattingen*. Groningen 1986. P. 261.

22 As explained by Nijenhuis. In: Wim Nijenhuis, deel 1, www.youtube.com/watch?v=02MEohqPMgs.

23 Ankersmit 1983, see note 21. P. 255-261.

24 Wim Nijenhuis: "City Frontiers and their disappearance". In: *Assemblage: A Critical Journal of Architecture and Design Culture* 16 (December 1991). P. 201.

25 See also: Wim Nijenhuis: "The passion for the hiatus". In: *Oase* 75 "25 Years of Critical Reflection on Architecture" (2008, introduction by Frank Sturkenboom). P. 168.

26 Ibid.

27 Nijenhuis 1991. P. 201, see note 19.

28 Ibid. P. 202.

29 Ibid. "*Yet...even before the*

conception of territory changed the character of nomadic culture, there existed the differentiation of speed. . .The first city-states, then, came into existence behind well-equipped fortress walls that were erected as emblems of territorial conquest based on the initial differentiation of culture according to speed."

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid. P. 203. On page 202 he writes: "T*he city exists, then, through traffic in all its forms. While the anthropological thesis of differentiation according to defensible territory is not untrue, it is misleading because it suggests the possibility of an autonomous space that receives its quality from itself.*"

33 Ibid. P. 203.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.: "*The technological machinic arrangement of the frontier is a regulator of power and the producer of qualifiable quantities. Here the second component of the machinic arrangement enters the game, namely, the semiotic machine, or the regime of signs.*"

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.: "*Just as the city frontier is a machine, the city itself is also a machinic arrangement that emanates from the city frontier.*"

38 Ibid. P. 204.

39 Ibid.: "*The loss of the economy of delay in a system that eliminates distance and accelerated circulation without obstructions eliminated the territorial frontier as a principle of wealth and security.*"

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid. With the term "dromocracy" Nijenhuis refers to the French cultural theorist Paul Virilio who invented the word "dromology" to indicate that modern technological society is ruled by the logic of speed. "Dromocracy" is than a contraction of "democracy" and "dromology".