

Realizing Differential Space? Design Processes and Everyday Life in the Architecture of Lucien Kroll

By Richard Milgrom

In order to create a type of politics unrealizable at present, we are trying out in advance the different methods which might one day bring about the political situation we have in mind. This is simply a matter of suggesting prototypes...and taking note of their possibilities and drawbacks. We have never imagined that we could bring about revolution with pockets of alternative architecture, which to make a revolutionary impact, would have to infiltrate the existing constraints. The familiar question is: "If tomorrow morning we woke up to find the earth taken over by local authorities, how would we change our way of planning and constructing the built environment?"¹

1. Introduction

Henri Lefebvre argues against the *abstract* space of capitalism, space that tends towards homogeneity and suppresses difference rather than attempting to accommodate the representational spaces and spatial practices of diverse populations.² He suggests, however, that a new *differential* space will emerge, one that embraces and enhances difference. In *Spaces of Hope*, David Harvey notes that Lefebvre leaves few clues as to how this space might be realized — except that it will rise from contradictions in abstract space — or how its physical

¹Lucien Kroll, "Architecture and Bureaucracy," in Byron Mikellides, ed., *Architecture for People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), pp. 162-63.

²Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

manifestations might be configured.³ Harvey suggests that this new space cannot be imagined in the manner of the “utopias of spatial form” proposed in conventional architectural models.⁴ Instead, he calls for the articulation of utopias of space and utopian processes “to build a utopianism that is explicitly spatiotemporal.”⁵

The work of Belgian architect Lucien Kroll provides an example of how utopian processes (or at least thinking about them) might influence the production of urban space.⁶ Rather than starting with abstract ideas about urban space, Kroll starts with the everyday lives of the human populations. Describing himself as a *situationist*, Kroll works in a non-hierarchical manner, addressing concerns as they are identified, rather than assigning priorities to issues.⁷ He suggests that the configuration of urban spaces must adapt to meet the changing needs of dynamic populations and recognizes that design is an integral part of the processes of human habitation that should involve all urban dwellers. The urban forms resulting from Kroll’s work accentuate the differences present in the resident communities and the particularities of local contexts, while inviting change over time.

The genesis of this paper stems from my concerns with sustainability and the particular roles that architects could play in the production of sustainable urban space. I start, therefore, with a brief discussion of architectural visions of sustainable cities. Sustainability, in design circles, tends to be accepted rather uncritically as concerned primarily with ecological processes, and makes few connections between social and environmental conditions. My particular concern here is with the social structures and processes that are assumed in designs that purport to address ecological issues and conditions of human health. I contend that these proposals generally fall into Lefebvre’s category of *abstract* space — overlooking aspects of inhabitants’ everyday lives, suppressing the diversity of the population and assuming a standardized and static social structure. In addressing the possibility of another approach to the design of cities, one that embraces the diversity of urban dwellers and assumes that ever-changing

³David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 183.

⁴*Ibid.*, Chapter 8.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶For a monograph of works, see Lucien Kroll, *Lucien Kroll: Buildings and Projects*, translated by Joseph Masterson (Stuttgart: Thames and Hudson, 1987).

⁷Lucien Kroll, “The Soft Zone,” *Architectural Association Quarterly*, December, 1975, p. 54.

populations continually produce urban space, I place the architectural process within Lefebvre's "conceptual triad" of the production of space. Based on this analysis, I suggest that Kroll's approach to design, atypical in terms of all three of triad elements, represents an attempt to envision differential space that includes the possibility of embracing both ecological *and* social diversity.

2. Design, Sustainability, and Social Diversity

For the most part, in the fields of design, sustainability has been viewed as a physical or ecological problem — the search for urban configurations that promote human physical health by providing access to light and clean air and by preserving the ecological processes that support human life. This is not a particularly new endeavor. Although not specifically identified as such, the iconic city designs of Modernism generally addressed the physical health of urban dwellers. The most frequently cited of these, like Le Corbusier's *Ville Contemporaine* (1922) and Frank Lloyd Wright's *Broadacre City* (1932)⁸ were developed in reaction to the congestion, pollution and poor living conditions that had become common in the industrial cities of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although the term was not in use at the time, they were addressing what would now be understood as issues of sustainability. In hindsight, and from an ecological point of view, these designs were badly flawed. But as Richard Ingersoll notes, Le Corbusier's towers in the park were intended to save land and concentrate services; and Wright's sprawling utopia provided agricultural land for all inhabitants, integrating the production of food into everyday lives.⁹ A generation later, Paolo Soleri provided his own utopian vision of a sustainable city, in which millions would be housed in mega-structures with relatively small physical footprints.¹⁰ While conserving most land for "nature," the ecological feasibility of Soleri's proposals, relying heavily on automated industries and energy intensive construction techniques were just as questionable.¹¹

⁸Robert Fishman, *Urban Utopias in the Twentieth Century: Ebenezer Howard, Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1982).

⁹Richard Ingersoll, "Second Nature: On the Social Bond of Ecology and Architecture," in Thomas Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, eds., *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁰Paolo Soleri, *Arcology: The City in the Image of Man* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969).

¹¹For a discussion of physical versus ecological footprints of urban areas see Mathis Wackernagel and William Rees, *Our Ecological Footprint:*

Building on the environmental awareness that developed in the 1960s and 1970s, designers developed more detailed understandings of ecological processes and the impacts that urban forms have on the environments.¹² As a result of this new knowledge, proposals for “green cities”¹³ and “sustainable communities”¹⁴ have been developed. Green city advocates have laudably made proposals for more environmentally benign technologies to support urban life. But, while addressing issues of biodiversity, they have not addressed the social diversity of cities. And realized examples of sustainable communities — built neighborhoods¹⁵ and “eco-villages”¹⁶ — remain accessible only to those with the capital to buy into the vision.

The most recent discussions about urban form have centered on the possible sustainability of the compact city.¹⁷ Although this discourse encompasses a broad range of concerns, much of its analysis is based on questions of density, distributions of resources, questions of energy conservation, and efficiency of transportation links. This work is valuable as a tool for analysis of existing and proposed forms, but I

Reducing Human Impact on the Earth (Gabriola Island, B.C.: New Society Publishers, 1996).

¹²Much of this improved understanding builds on works like Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature* (Garden City, NY: The Natural History Press, 1969); Anne Whiston Spirn, *The Granite Garden: Urban Nature and Human Design* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and Michael Hough, *Cities and Natural Process* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹³For example, David Gordon, ed., *Green Cities: Ecologically Sound Approaches to Urban Space* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1990); Richard Register, *Ecocity Berkeley: Building Cities for a Healthy Future* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1987); Nancy Jack Todd and John Todd, *From Eco Cities to Living Machines: Principles of Ecological Design* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1994).

¹⁴Sim Van der Ryn and Peter Calthorpe, eds., *Sustainable Communities: A New Design Synthesis for Cities, Suburbs and Towns* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1986).

¹⁵Judy Corbett and Michael N. Corbett, *Designing Sustainable Communities: Learning from Village Homes* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2000).

¹⁶Gaia Trust and Global Eco-village Network, *The Earth is Our Habitat: Proposal for Support Programme for Eco-Habitats as Living Examples of Agenda 21 Planning* (Copenhagen: Gaia Trust, 1996).

¹⁷Michael Breheny, ed., *Sustainable Development and Urban Form* (London: Pion Limited, 1992); Mike Jenks, Elizabeth Burton, and Katie Williams, eds., *The Compact City: A Sustainable Urban Form?* (London: E & FN Spon, 1996); Katie Williams, Elizabeth Burton, and Mike Jenks, eds., *Achieving Sustainable Urban Form* (London: E & FN Spon, 2000).

suggest that it has not generally addressed the broadest issues of city design, failing to deal with the experience of the urban inhabitants. Kevin Lynch argues that “functional theory,” like that found in this discourse, abstracts space “in a way that impoverishes it, reducing it to a neutral container, a costly distance, or a way of recording a distribution....” For Lynch, this type of approach fails to deal with the “rich textures of the city form and meaning.”¹⁸

For some, the idea of the compact city is being realized in the works of New Urbanists.¹⁹ This popular design trend, based on the model of the pre-1940s American town,²⁰ purports to address sustainability by reducing reliance on the automobile and preserving agricultural land by building at greater densities. However, the aesthetic predilection of the designers and developers is culturally (and economically) exclusive.²¹ Many of the realized neo-traditional neighborhoods include aesthetic regulations intended to maintain the appearance of a common culture. While the most widely published implemented cases have been made available as a new consumption choice for the suburban market, the model of development is now also being imposed on inner-city redevelopment, to accommodate populations that have little choice in the housing they can afford. This vision of a homogeneous community, however, is at odds with the increasing cultural diversity of urban areas in North America²² — the social composition of the turn of the millennium city bears little resemblance to that found in the early 20th century.

Clearly the modernist visions described here can be placed with Harvey’s category of “utopias of spatial form.” The spaces that are proposed are not the result of social processes that have occurred over

¹⁸Kevin Lynch, *Good City Form* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), p. 39.

¹⁹Michael Neuman, “The Compact City Fallacy and Beyond: Planning Sustainable Urban Development” (Paper presented at Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning Conference, Chicago, 1999).

²⁰Peter Katz, ed., *The New Urbanism: Towards an Architecture of Community* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, Inc., 1994); Alex Krieger, Andres Duany and Elisabeth Playter-Zyberk, *Towns and Town-Making Principles* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).

²¹Ute Angelika Lehrer and Richard Milgrom, “New (Sub)Urbanism: Countersprawl of Repackaging the Product,” *CNS*, 7, 2, 1996; Ivonne Audirac and Anne Shermyen, “An Evaluation of Neotraditional Design’s Social Prescription: Postmodern Placebo or Remedy for Suburban Malaise?” *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 13, 1994.

²²Leoni Sandercock, ed., *Making the Invisible Visible: A Multicultural Planning History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.)

time, nor do they suggest that form might change significantly if the social profile of the inhabitants changes over time. Harvey is more concerned with:

[the] relationship proposed between space and time, between geography and history. All these forms of Utopia can be characterized as “Utopias of spatial form” since temporality of the social processes, the dialectics of social change — real history — are excluded, while social stability is assured by a fixed spatial form.”²³

For Harvey, the maintenance of the strictly aesthetic vision also risks the imposing of authoritarianism as the price for stability.

Some versions of these utopian forms have been realized — certainly the projects of North American urban renewal are derived from Corbusier’s vision of towers in the park — providing clear illustrations of Lefebvre’s concerns with abstract space:

Formal and quantitative, it erases distinctions, as much those that derive from nature and (historical) time as those which originate in the body (age, sex, ethnicity). The signification of this ensemble refers back to back to a sort of super-signification which escapes meaning’s net: the functioning of capitalismThe dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates...and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there.²⁴

This description mirrors the history of urban renewal and the resulting projects that applied universal design templates to a wide range of contexts and populations. Although there were forces lobbying for the provision of better housing in urban areas, it was the economic concerns of capital, the need to clear slums from inner-cities to maintain a safe environment for investment, that were the deciding factors in the reshaping of inner-cities,²⁵ and the bulldozing of neighborhoods illustrate the violent means employed in these efforts.

²³Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

²⁴Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 49

²⁵Michael Goldrick, “The Anatomy of Urban Reform in Toronto,” in Domitrius I. Roussopoulos, ed., *The City and Radical Social Change* (Montreal: Black Rose, 1982), p. 267.

The strict rules imposed on residents, particularly in public housing projects, also belie the diversity of the resident populations, imposing rules of tenure that do not acknowledge the cultural diversity of the resident populations, and deny them significant roles in the management of the neighborhoods that they occupy.

This critique should not be limited to the modernist visions, however. With rare exceptions, the recognition by some of the need to integrate understandings of ecological processes into the design of cities has not in itself managed to overcome the universal design templates used by city developers.²⁶ Even in cases where green infrastructure has been employed, the need to address social diversity and to accommodate social change is still often ignored. For example, David Dilks, reporting on a workshop addressing sustainability indicators, suggests that the environmental component of urban sustainability “implies dynamic, changing [ecological] processes (rather than a steady state),”²⁷ while the social component “connotes social stability and encompasses equity.”²⁸ While I have no trouble with the idea of equity, hoping to achieve social stability in the near future seems unrealistic and possibly undesirable, if for no other reason than most of the world’s cities are going to continue to grow as the world’s population increases.

Stren and Polèse provide a more satisfactory approach to understanding the social sustainability, taking into account the complexity of urban social relations. Their understanding of human interactions in cities is drawn from Henri Lefebvre’s concepts of the social production of space (see below) and theorists like Jodi Borja and Manuel Castells who argue that policy-makers must accept the multicultural nature of cities. Borja and Castells argue: “Learning to live with this situation, succeeding in managing cultural exchange on the basis of ethnic difference and remedying the inequities arising from discrimination are essential aspects of the new local policy in the new conditions arising out of global interdependence.”²⁹ Stren and Polèse

²⁶Michael Hough, *Out of Place: Restoring Identity to the Regional Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁷David Dilks, *Measuring Urban Sustainability: Canadian Indicators Workshop, June 19-21 1995, Workshop Proceedings* (Ottawa: State of the Environment Directorate, Environment Canada Centre for Future Studies in Housing and Living Environments, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1996), p. 21.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁹Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells, *Local and Global: Management of Cities in the Information Age* (London: Earthscan, 1997), p. 89.

provide their own definition of social sustainability, one that addresses social difference:

Social sustainability for a city is defined as *development (and/or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups, while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population* [italics in original].³⁰

In architectural visions, this harmony and social integration have most frequently found physical expression in the similarity of the accommodation provided for the users — difference is tolerated only in so far as it fits within the overall vision of the designer. Wright, for example, suggested different unit models for different household types in Broadacre City, but all would conform to a common aesthetic.³¹ Implicit in the design is an understanding that the dwellers share a common culture, not only amongst each other, but also with the architect. In Lefebvre's terms, the variety permitted is the "minimal" difference that "remains within a set or system generated according to a particular law"³² — in this case the designer's law.

Harvey also identifies the need to accommodate difference, but defines the "variety of spatio-temporalities" as a central problem for the production of urban space.

[A]ccommodating a variety of spatio-temporalities, varying from that of the financial markets to those of immigrant populations whose lives internalize heterogeneous spatio-temporalities depending upon how they orientate themselves between place of origin and place of settlement.³³

³⁰Richard Stren and Mario Polèse, "Understanding the New Sociocultural Dynamics of Cities: Comparative Urban Policy in a Global Context," in Mario Polèse and Richard Stren, eds., *The Social Sustainability of Cities: Diversity and the Management of Change* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 16.

³¹Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Living City* (New York: Horizon Press, Inc., 1958).

³²Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

³³David Harvey, "Cities or Urbanization," *City*, 1/2, 1996, p. 52.

In this, Harvey is suggesting the need for the coexistence of greater differences encompassing wide ranges of cultural and spatial experience. This comes closer to Lefebvre's understanding of "maximal" or "produced" differences within which "a given set gives rise, beyond its own boundaries, to another, completely different set."³⁴

Rising to this challenge would, for Lefebvre, constitute the production of a new type of space, in reaction to abstract space that "carries within it the seeds of this new space" — differential space.³⁵ Lefebvre writes extensively about the contradictions that exist in abstract space — between, for example, use and exchange values, quality and quantity, production of objects *in* space (commodities) and the production of space.³⁶ He suggests that "inasmuch as abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences."³⁷

3. Architects and the Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre's conceptual triad provides a framework within which to address an alternative role for architects attempting to address sustainability within the field of ecological *and* social diversity. For Lefebvre, space is a social product consisting of three elements: *representations of space*, or "conceived space," which for my purposes includes not only the drawings and images produced by the designer, but the material manifestations of those designs in the built environment (i.e., urban form); *representational space*, "lived space" or the symbolic values produced by the inhabitants; and *spatial practice*, "perceived space" or the ways in which spaces are used.³⁸ These elements are not independent, and it is the interaction between them that results in the production of space (see Fig. 1).

It is important to note, however, that while the interaction of these three elements produces space, they are also produced *in* space. Lefebvre notes that space is a product of and a precondition for social processes: "space is at once result and cause, product and producer."³⁹ This added dimension means that space itself is not a neutral container but plays a

³⁴Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 372.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁶*Ibid.*, Chapter 6.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 52.

³⁸Lefebvre uses the term perceived to mean the "practical basis of the perception of the outside world," the use of the body, the "gestures of work and those not related to work," *ibid.*, p. 40.

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 142.

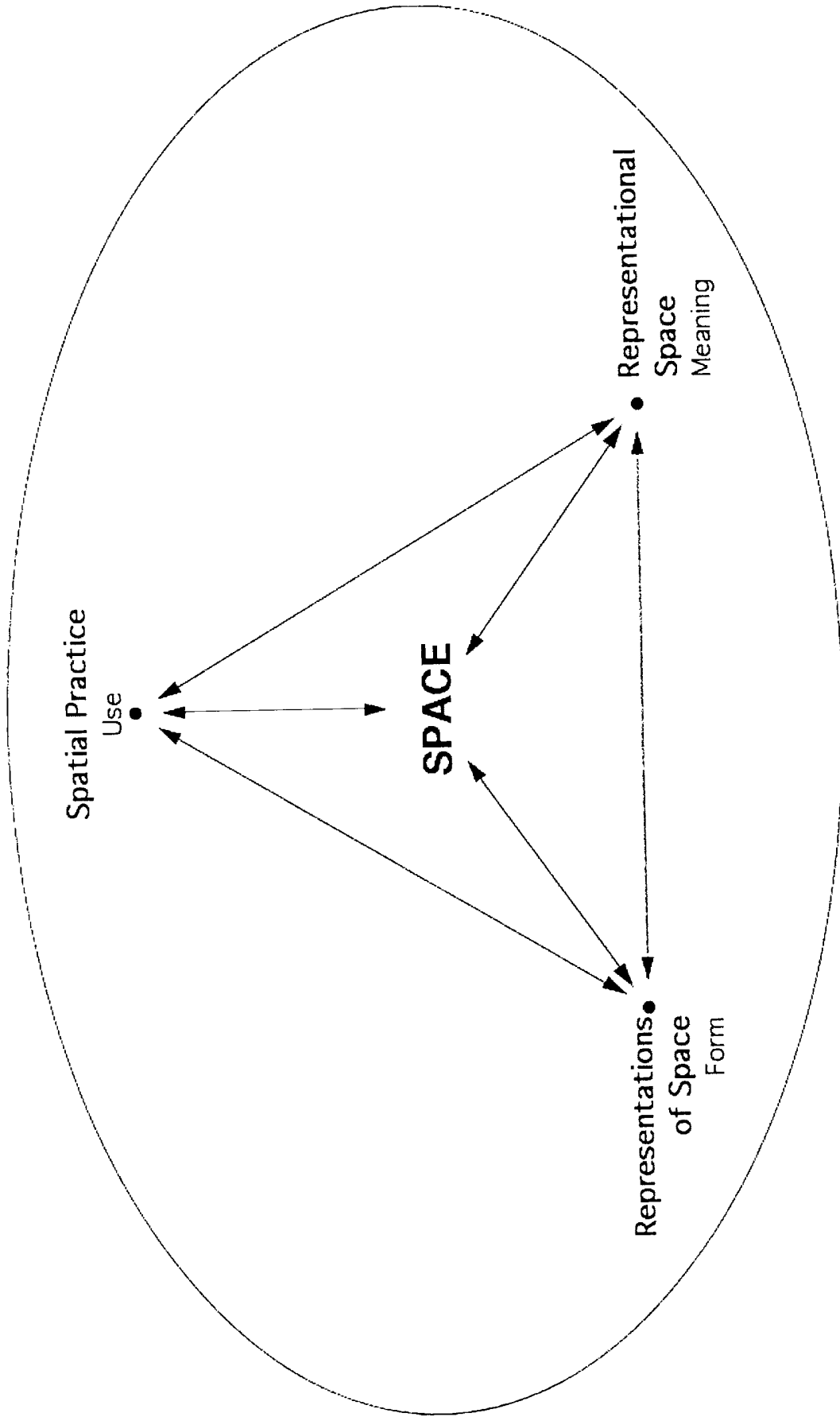


Figure 1

role in shaping the social processes that determine representations of space, spatial practice and representational space. While this appears at first glance to be a circular argument, it is actually an acknowledgment that the production of space is continual process, and that space is always changing as conceptions, perceptions and lived experiences change. This point further explains the “heterogeneous spatio-temporalities” that Harvey refers to as a result of moving from a place (or space) of origin, to a new place (space) of settlement.

In attempting to define roles for architects and designers in the production of urban spaces, I refer to the comments of Peter Davey, made in an introduction to Lucien Kroll’s work. Davey asserts that “architecture *must* have social effects in at least three areas: direction, production and image.”⁴⁰ While he applies rather narrow definitions to these terms, I am suggesting here that they are more or less congruent with the corners of Lefebvre’s triad, and as such can help develop an understanding of architect’s participation in the production of differential space.

Lefebvre designates representations of space as the dominant space in any society. It is the “space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent — all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.”⁴¹ Clearly this is the realm within which the architect is most comfortable. By *direction*, Davey means that the architecture has an influence on how people behave in space (he does not want to fall into environmental determinism, but notes that the form of urban space must have some influence on the way spaces are used). More broadly speaking designs suggest “how people might live.”⁴² The designer’s direction is, therefore, a representation of space — not only is it a prescription for the configuration of urban form, but it makes assumptions about the spatial practices of the users, their understandings of space and the symbolism carrying the designer’s intentions.

Because of the interrelated nature of the three elements of the triad, it is not enough to know that architects produce representations of space. Although designer may place themselves firmly in that corner, their activities are influenced by the spatial practice around them, and

⁴⁰Peter Davey, “The Political Angle,” *The Architectural Review*, October, 1981, p. 203.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 204.

their own understandings of representational spaces. Spatial practice, for Lefebvre, “embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation.”⁴³ For Davey, the second area of architectural influence is that of *production*. Davey’s narrow interpretation here takes in social consequences of the design in terms of those who produce the building from designers’ instructions. While this alone is a spatial practice, a broader interpretation might take into consideration the design process itself, the practice of architecture and the “social formations” involved. Clearly, the nature of these formations has an influence on the designs produced. Thomas Dutton, for example, criticizes “drawing-room” architects who, rather than engaging with social movements, practice an “aestheticized politics” in suggesting alternative urban forms.⁴⁴ In eschewing engagement and maintaining their autonomy, Dutton suggests that this practice “cannot help but generalize and universalize their discourse, in other words, to speak *for* the people instead of *with* them.”⁴⁵ Although the designers in question (Leon Krier and Lebbeus Woods) base their designs on a critique of existing urban spaces, the isolated spatial practice retains an abstract nature.

Representational space, for Lefebvre, is the space of the users. It is “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols....This is dominated space — and hence passively experienced — space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects.”⁴⁶ Davey argues that the architect has a role to play in “their choice of imagery.”⁴⁷ Moreover, he notes that at the time of writing (the early days of architectural post-modernism), clients and architects were just starting to escape from the aesthetic dogma of modernism and a new freedom of image-making was emerging. He is careful to note, however, that these images were often associated with particular lifestyles, and that these choices were political decisions. But while Davey talks about the designer’s choices, Lefebvre insistence that this is the realm of the user suggests it is the interpretation of the choices made that is of primary importance in the production of space. Despite

⁴³Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁴⁴Thomas Dutton, “Cultural Studies and Critical Pedagogy: Cultural Pedagogy and Architecture,” in Thomas A. Dutton and Lian Hurst Mann, eds., *Reconstructing Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁶Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁷Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

the attempts by some theorists, influenced by semiotics, to develop an understanding of architecture as a language that could clearly communicate designers' meanings to the users,⁴⁸ misunderstandings have persisted. It is difficult to imagine how Dutton's "drawing-room" architects can appreciate the spaces of the users if they do not engage with them.

4. Lucien Kroll and the Production of Differential Space

[T]here are two ways of organizing social space. The first aims at a single, predetermined objective. It is authoritarian, rational, and reductive. It corresponds to the desire to control events and people on the part of those whose task it is to conceive, organize, and produce....Some people like this. It corresponds to a wish to manipulate and be manipulated.

The other way of making social space...is a living process which imparts only key centers of activity in a clear spatial configuration and with an intensity of form and meaning that favors (and expresses) what we believe essential: living relationships and activities that spring from diversity, unexpected initiatives, and above all, that something in social man that leads to the creation of community.⁴⁹

There a number of striking similarities between Lefebvre's concerns with the production of space, and the architectural work and supporting writings of Lucien Kroll. The quotes above from Kroll, for example, more or less parallel Lefebvre's descriptions of abstract and differential space. Kroll met Lefebvre, but claims that there is no direct influence.⁵⁰ *The Production of Space* was first published in 1974, while Kroll's best known work, a student residence for L'Université Catholique de Louvain on the outskirts of Brussels was initiated in the late 1960s (see Fig. 2). It appears that the similarities are based more in common concerns, and similar experience of political events and times.

⁴⁸See Geoffrey Broadbent, Richard Bunt, and Charles Jencks, eds., *Signs, Symbols, and Architecture* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1980); Geoffrey Broadbent, Richard Bunt, and Tomas Llorens, eds., *Meaning and Behaviour in the Built Environment* (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons, 1980); Charles Jencks and George Baird, eds., *Meaning in Architecture* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1969).

⁴⁹Lucien Kroll, "Anarchitecture," in Richard Hatch, ed., *The Scope of Social Architecture* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1984), pp. 167-69.

⁵⁰Conversation between the author and Lucien Kroll, May 25, 2000, Brussels.



Figure 2

Like Lefebvre, Kroll was influenced by student uprisings of 1968. In fact, his appointment as architect for the university residence was at the insistence of the students. The university administration's own ideas for the campus were already partially realized — following strict Modernist segregation of functions, an industrial anonymous mass production aesthetic (abstract) and an institutional image. The students found this environment overwhelming and alienating, and “demanded that the project be broken up and mixed in with the functions and families in the adjacent neighborhoods.”⁵¹ The university agreed to the students' choice of architect, thinking that the design team would assume the typical hierarchical role of the expert and that ultimately the university's agenda would be served by the conventional practice of architecture. But Kroll contrasts the results of their work with the “authoritarian, paternalistic order” of the pre-existing institution and its architecture, with his team's approach that moved towards “diversity, everyday culture, decolonization, the subjective, toward an image compatible with the idea of self-management, an urban texture with all its contradictions, its chance events, and its integration of activities.”⁵² (see Fig. 3). He claims that this approach is political rather than aesthetic, and compares his work with the complexity of ecological systems.

There is also a parallel in the connections of both individuals with “Situationism.” Lefebvre's work had a well-documented influence on the Situationists and their concerns with the disruptions imposed by capitalism and modernism on the spaces of everyday life in the mid-20th century. In early days of the movement, the search for alternative urban visions, a “unitary urbanism,” was presented in terms like those used to describe differential space, acknowledging “no boundaries; it aims to form a unitary human milieu in which separations such as work/leisure or public/private will finally be dissolved.”⁵³

One of the methods employed by the Situationists in their interrogation of and interaction with the city was referred to as the “drift” (*derive*). Their search for the valuable elements of the city, those not degraded by capitalism, were undertaken by wandering the city following a spontaneously determined path. Sadler relates Situationist Guy Debord's explanation of this as “playful constructive behavior” that “should not be confused...with ‘classical notions of the journey and

⁵¹Kroll, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³Guy-Ernest Debord, quoted in Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999), p. 25.



Figure 3

the stroll;’ drifters weren’t like tadpoles in a tank ‘stripped...of intelligence, sociability and sexuality,’ but were people alert to ‘the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there,’ capable as a group of agreeing upon distinct, spontaneous preferences for routes through the city.”⁵⁴

Supporting this situationist approach, Kroll argues against the methods of “functional spatial organizers” and their imposed hierarchies with similar vocabulary:

The approach of the “Situationist” in architecture ...consists of pre-occupying oneself with the first object one comes across, at random and carefully noting its personal characteristics in order to be able to integrate it into a general context without destroying it or reducing it to a semi-abstraction....⁵⁵

In this manner, Kroll hopes to embrace differences encountered, rather than ignoring them or placing them in (and suppressing them with) a preconceived hierarchy.

While Lefebvre criticizes the focus on “things in space” (commodities) rather than a broader understanding production *of* space,⁵⁶ Kroll suggests that his practice has “moved far from the traditional role of the architect as maker of isolated objects.” Instead Kroll’s emphasis is on the “relationships between people in space that suits them.... Construction finds its meaning only in the social relations that it supports.”⁵⁷

Kroll insists that his commissions should allow the designers to work directly with the present and/or future users, adamantly believing that the relations of users and the environments of their everyday lives can only be understood if the users themselves are as engaged as possible in the design process. In this engagement Kroll attempts to address one of the fundamental challenges presented by abstract space — i.e., what Lefebvre has referred to as the “silence of the users.” There have been some attempts within the design professions to address this problem, and Lefebvre singles out “advocacy planning” in the United States as an example.⁵⁸ Lefebvre states: “The notion was that... ‘users’

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.

⁵⁵Lucien Kroll, “The Soft Zone,” *Architectural Association Quarterly*, December, 1975, p. 54.

⁵⁶Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

⁵⁷Lucien Kroll, “Anarchitecture,” *op. cit.*, p. 167.

⁵⁸Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-65. See also the “community architecture”

and ‘inhabitants,’ as a group, would secure the services of someone competent, capable of speaking and communicating — in short an advocate — who would negotiate for them with political or financial institutions.”⁵⁹ Although these practitioners were well intentioned, their efforts ultimately fell short because they did not give voice to the silent users, choosing instead to speak for them, interpreting their needs.⁶⁰ Kroll attempts (with varying degrees of success) to work *with* the users, and also to take into account how future users might be involved in producing their own environments, even after the architects are no longer engaged in the project.

In addressing the present *and* future concerns of users, Kroll has drawn heavily on the work of Sticking Architecten Research (SAR) and John Habraken,⁶¹ particularly their research on the concepts of “supports” and “infill.”⁶² Habraken’s approach suggested that a system of key structures could be placed permanently in the urban environment, to support the infill elements provided by future residents. The idea was to provide accommodation that would meet the needs of future generations, as well as those that first occupied the sites, since infill could be changed with no negative effects on the structural integrity of the whole.

One of the best examples of an application of these principles (apart from Kroll’s work) is, surprisingly and maybe inadvertently, in a project designed originally by Le Corbusier. In the 1920s, he was commissioned to design the new neighborhood of Pessac, near Bordeaux. His vision consisted of modernist flat-roofed houses, featuring clean machine-like geometries and an artistic interplay of open and closed spaces. The development is best known, however, not for Le Corbusier’s architectural vision, but for the modifications that the residents have made to the buildings over time. Occupied, the structures bear little resemblance to the original drawings as residents have added

movement in Britain: Graham Towers, *Building Democracy: Community Architecture in the Inner Cities* (London: UCL Press, 1995); Nick Wates and Charles Knevitt, *Community Architecture: How People are Creating their own Environment* (London: Penguin, 1987).

⁵⁹Lefebvre, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

⁶⁰Allan David Heskin, “Crisis and Response: A Historical Perspective on Advocacy Planning,” *American Institute of Planners Journal*, January, 1980; Lisa R. Peattie, “Reflections on Advocacy Planning,” *American Institute of Planners Journal*, March, 1969.

⁶¹Kroll, “Anarchitecture,” *op. cit.*, p. 171.

⁶²N.J. Habraken, *Supports: An Alternative to Mass Housing*, translated by B. Valkenburg (New York: Praeger Paperbacks, 1972).

decorative elements that many architects would claim undermine the purity of the original design. Lefebvre, however, in the preface to a case study of Pessac, praises the residents for their initiatives as well as the architect for designing structures that could so easily accommodate the desires of the users:

Instead of installing themselves in their containers, instead of adapting to them and living in them “passively,” they decided that as far as possible they were going to live “actively.” In doing so they showed what living in a house really is: an activity. They took what had been offered to them and worked it, converted it, added to it. What did they add? Their needs. They created distinctions....They introduced personal qualities. They built a differentiated social cluster.⁶³

5. Conclusion

Kroll acknowledges that his work is utopian. As he notes in the quote at the beginning of this paper, his work addresses “a type of politics unrealizable at present.” But, unlike most other architects, who have been content to conceive new representation of space in isolation, Kroll recognizes that, in order to have any chance at implementation, a new vision must be based in an understanding of the social processes that would be involved in realizing that vision. As David Harvey has argued, utopian visions must be derived from utopian processes, and it is in this regard that Kroll’s work is remarkable. He is perhaps best known for his attempts at participatory design (and has been known to insist on community involvement before accepting commissions), but he also realizes that his desire for full participation, for giving voice to all the users is an unrealistic expectation within current social structures.

Returning to the conceptual triad (as modified by Davey’s architectural concerns), Kroll’s work is atypical in all three areas. His representations of space are different, diversified, complex and maybe even cluttered, yet they appear to invite change. Rather than imposing an order on the built environment, Kroll hopes that a complex ecological order will emerge from the needs and desires (spatial practices and representational spaces) of the users. In this sense, his vision is part of a process rather than the result of one.⁶⁴

⁶³Henri Lefebvre, “Preface” in Phillippe Boudon, *Lived-In Architecture: Le Corbusier’s Pessac Revisited* (London: Lund Humphries, 1972.)

⁶⁴On an ironic note, the university in Brussels has decided that the

Kroll's own spatial practice, that is the design processes he initiates, differ significantly from conventional and modernist architectural practices. His insistence on the participation of users is rare in design fields (but not unheard of), but he has taken involvement further. Recognizing that the future users of the building are not the only people affected by its design, and following Davey's logic that the architect has social effects in determining how buildings are constructed, Kroll's work on the university residence is particularly unusual in that he left some design decisions to the builders. The pattern of the window openings, the changes of wall materials, and the brick sculptures were often left to the discretion of the workers. This involvement of the workers as users makes Kroll's spatial practice still more inclusive and adds yet another layer of complexity to the built environment.

Finally, it is through this inclusive spatial practice that Kroll hopes to address the representational spaces of the users. In most cases, designer and their clients have very different sets of values and understandings of space. Kroll acknowledges and embraces these differences. On the cover of his book *Enfin Chez Soi* (Home at Last)⁶⁵ a garden gnome has a prominent place. He makes this symbolic statement in recognition that the elements that constitute home, the symbolic values of the user, may differ significantly from those of the designer. Kroll welcomes symbolic as well as practical interventions of users.

Unlike most other designers, Kroll acknowledges that difference in environments that humans inhabit and create does not fit into fixed sets. His methods seek these differences rather than working to suppress them, and present the possibility of addressing Lefebvre's "maximal" difference. Lefebvre argues that the resulting "*produced* difference presupposes the shattering of the system; it is born of an explosion; it emerges from the chasm opened up when a closed universe ruptures."⁶⁶ While Kroll does not imagine that his individual projects "could bring

residence, designed to be changed by each generation of students and with the understanding that materials age naturally, is a building of architectural importance and have now started to initiate measures to preserve it. While the designers looked forward to the changes like the weathering of materials, sealants are now being applied to limit further change (Dag Boutsen, Atelier Kroll, comments on tour of residence building, May 24, 2000).

⁶⁵Lucien Kroll, *Enfin Chez Soi...Rehabilitation de Prefabriques: Ecologies & Composants Proposition* (Paris: Editions l'Harmattan, 1994).

⁶⁶Lefebvre, *The Production of Space, op. cit.*, p. 372.

about a revolution,”⁶⁷ his work provides a glimpse of what might happen if the contradictions of abstract space were acknowledged and addressed in the design of human environments.

⁶⁷Lucien Kroll, “Architecture and Bureaucracy,” *op. cit.*, p. 162.