In his essay "Looking into the Folds", Arie Graafland drew attention to what he identified as loss of ground in then current theorising in architectural and urban discourse. In one sense his appeal was not about some return to order, but a strenuous and concerted effort to rethink 'grounding' and 'framing'; to rethink action and agency for contemporary needs. Graafland's primary concern was with the loss of a theorising that can make social life intelligible, and with the impulse to make social life better. Specifically, his focus was urban and architectural discourse which, he argued, become in effect placeless because of a twofold move: one the collapse of architectural theory into design discourse alone, and thus the positing of a fatal autonomy, and secondly a loss of ground that was ultimately indifferent to location, to the social. It is clear that the contemporary theorists with whom Graafland is most directly engaged, in the sense of an Auseinandersetzung, are Ole Bouman, Michael Speaks and Greg Lynn. It is also clear that the petering out of post-modernist and deconstructionist positions in architecture had left a vacuum in which new agons for discourse dominance would be enacted. Bouman's arguments in his introduction to Kas Oosterhuis's work argued that the task of architecture was no longer capture of space but a creation of situations that became malleable, reflecting social tendencies. Speaks had drawn on the work of Deleuze in Difference and Repetition (especially Chapter IV) in responding to Lynn's Folds, noting the distinction between realisation of the possible --which operates by principles of limitation and resemblance, where ultimately nothing new occurs, essentially a constant recombination of elements-- and 'actualization of the virtual' which operates by difference, divergence and creation. Graafland considers the stakes in the argument and concludes the way of stating the question is ultimately too abstract, and that in discussing architectural practise we also have to mediate philosophical thought to more concrete forms of human practice and experience. What was it that initially motivated Graafland's concerns? It would be fair, I think, to suggest that he was suspicious of the way in which visibility and the non-tactile had through the screen effect of the computer shifted discussion away from the embodied experience, and increasingly treated philosophical reflection as a mere ancilla to operative and formal procedures, which were content to register the forces of the social without any conception of ideological critique or actual resistance. The remarkable overlap of this point echoes, even if unwittingly, the extraordinary exchange between Callicles and Socrates in the Gorgias, which is as much a dialogue about the relation of art and technology as it is about the life of the philosopher and the relationship to the political, which for Callicles is a mere version of 'might is right', and which for Socrates becomes the question specifically addressed to architecture, as to whether it made the city any better:

Socrates: Let us suppose, Callicles, we are going to engage in public life, and were encouraging each other to achieve architectural feats, the building of important edifices, walls or docks, or temples; ought we first to examine ourselves and discover if we do or do not understand the art of building, and elicit the identity of our teacher? Should we, or should we not do this?

Callicles: Of course we should. Socrates: Then, in the second place, we should consider this point, whether we have ever had the occasion to construct a private building for ourselves or for any of our friends and whether this building was beautiful or ugly. And if after consideration we found that we had sound and famous teachers, and that in collaboration with them we had built many
beautiful buildings, and even after gradu­ating from their tuition we had continued
to erect numerous works on our own ini­tiative -- under these conditions we might
sensibly proceed to public structures. On
the other hand, if we were unable to point
out our instructor, or if we could point
out no building at all or only a number of
worthless edifices, then it would surely be
folly to attempt public works or to urge
each other on to their perpetration. Shall
we or shall we not accept these conclu­si­ons? (Gorgias, 518)¹

In his own work Graafland had pointed to a
way in which a fruitful productivity with tradi­tion and contemporary theorising could move on, and take responsibility for social and polit­i­cal agency without surrendering the specific values of the architectural and urbanistic
discourse to the role of acting as a spatial
therapy for problems beyond the reach of
politicians and concerned social actors. He
also provides a concrete corrective and cri­tique to theorising that stems from a reading
of Deleuze which fails to engage with the
historical and contemporary Deleuze may
not have, of course, been well served by the
reading of De Landa, as it eclipses the prob­lem by a kind of descriptive fiat of how vecto­ral fields are to be construed away from the
more consequent issue of genesis and image
in material reality. Again the application
within architectural discourse contents itself
to think of the architectural as a capture, in
this instance of forces and energies.⁵

The loss of ground identified by Graafland
was not just the indifference to location or
place, but also a deep loss of the three-fold
body of world, the social and the human. It
is this loss that challenges all theorists to
reconsider whether it is not that the emperor
has no clothing, but rather that the human
being has neither body nor place. In ways
which he freely acknowledges, Graafland
draws from the work of David Harvey and
Michael Hays to establish what he calls a
‘critical thirding’. It is both a critique and
working method.⁶

Critical thirding takes the architectural impe­rative as the work of forming and its capacity
to identify the formless which it frames, in
the sense that it opens up by the realisation
of the limitation of production the ‘hidden
sublime’ within the object, site, place. This
is for Graafland an aesthetic affect of the
aesthetic ideological instance, in the sense
of Althusser, where everything in science
and art is ideology, and art is how the ideo­logical delivers the affect in the forms of
seeing, feeling, and science in the form of
concepts. Thus, in considering the shelter
project discussed in his book The Socius of
Architecture, Graafland shows that the design
is an example of the ‘critical thirding’. For
Graafland the realisation of the possible and
the actualisation of the virtual are always
related and suggest that the semi-autonomy
of the different spheres of the economic and
political order at the time in Manhattan might
be able to generate some insight into the
aesthetic effects of the proposed building.⁷

What this means in practise is his accep­tance that architecture does not have dis­tantial relations to the objects of its thinking,
because it is really in the technologies of
power which they are immersed and out of
which they deal with specific forms and for­mations. Further, in considering cities one
may say that the city and the bodies within
it constitute the living part of it, but are not
compatible entities, which he has shown in
his consideration of the homeless in New
York and the day labourers in Tokyo, which
exposes in its resistance the city as transpa­rency and a branding event.

Without raising his voice into polemical
falsetto, Graafland is dead set against the
branding and experience industry pandering
of an architecture which affirms sponsors
and advertising exigencies, and accepts the
dictatorship of other cultural forces such as
information and entertainment technologies.
The thrust of this critical position is found
also in Hays. But, critical thirding is really an advance on, and via Althusser’s notion of instances, where the condition of the production and absence is the limit case of the aesthetic affect of the aesthetic/ideological event. The instances enjoy relative autonomy, thus economics is not treated as the main relevant category; rather there is an horizontal structure in the economic, political and aesthetic/ideological, instead of a dominant vertical relation as base/superstructure. Instances are thus relational and temporal categories. In such a view processes are more fundamental than things. The city must be read as a layered process of urbanisation and, it might be added, a constant reworking of the problem of storage and security. Spatial forms are not to be privileged over social process. Graafland pleads for a practical humanism and ground for social values in which the false autonomy of design does not eliminate the real production processes of the body of the planet, of the social and the individual.

Critical thirding is a plea also for ground. It is then of some consequence as part of the studio work of the Dessau/Delft group represented in this publication in the dimension and configuration of the tasks in hand. The project becomes a genuine testing of the limiting case that Graafland had in mind in his essay and further a real testing of how architects and urbanists can today take a position towards the complex of problems which needs to be outlined and understood.

The question that faces students in approaching urban analysis and proposing any or no intervention remain clearly tied to the paradigm shifts taking place and of which their work is inevitably a part; in other words, the shifting of the anomalous to challenge the hegemony of the normal view taken by any and every community of researchers as the intellectual ‘common ground’. Another consideration is whether analysis is capable of being systematic or remains symptomatic. Working today, it is really crucial to identify at what time the awareness entered that urbanism had become ideological. By this I mean what Lefebvre had in mind when commenting on the experiments in ‘unitary urbanism’ of the Situationists, whose activities he saw as a direct response to his published research concerns in Critique of Everyday Life. In a sense the Situationists were taken by Lefebvre as having abandoned the idea of unitary urbanism and the task of intercommunication for different parts of the city; abandoned because it had meaning for historic cities that had to be renewed or transformed, but could hardly take account of cities in which there had been explosions into peripheries, literally wild extensions, or sprawl developments and suburbs as in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Lefebvre reports animated discussions with Debord, who had said urbanism was becoming an ideology: ‘He was absolutely right. I think the urbanism codes dates from 1961 in France, and that’s the moment urbanism becomes an ideology’. If one reads for example the response of Debord and the use of dérive as an instrument of research, then this way of exploring architecture and developments in the urban --the technique of rapid passage through varied ambience, the playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects, since this is crucial in Debord’s view, namely that cities have psychogeographical contours with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones--, then the dérive was random, and required at best small groups to ‘drift’ so that ecological and psychogeographical dimensions would open up the study of terrain and give place to an emotional disorientation. At a maximum level one could study the city and its suburbs, and at a minimum level a neighbourhood or even a block of houses. Debord had noted that what counted was, however, the spatial field as a point of departure, which entailed establishing bases
and calculating directions of penetration. For this the study of maps was essential, along with the addition of ecological and psychogeographical maps and new kinds of mapping.

Lessons drawn from the dérive would enable a drafting of the first surveys of the 'psychogeographical articulations of a modern city'. Because it was possible to posit psychogeographical pivot points, one could measure the distances that were actually separating regions of a city, which might have little relation to their actual physical distance, and draw up hitherto lacking maps; a mapping which Debord claims would result in a means to delineate changing architecture and urbanism. Debord insists on geography, even in an expanded conception of ground, which becomes the identification of psychic atmosphere. He insisted that geography was the study of the law and effect of environment on the individual, because even the slightest 'demystified' investigation reveals that the qualitative and quantitatively different influence of diverse 'urban decors' cannot be determined solely on the basis of the historical period of architectural style, much less on the basis of housing conditions. The shock and displacement in psychogeography resulted in the understanding of the city not as the great object but as the zone of psychic atmosphere.

In his text of 1955, Debord had noted that the sudden change of ambience in a street within a few meters, the evident division of a city into a zone of distinct psychic atmosphere, the path of least resistance that is obvious in aimless strolls and that has no relation to the physical contour of the terrain, the appealing or repelling character of certain places, were all phenomena he claimed had been neglected. Debord was in search of a conception of seduction and aesthetic placement to found a new way of life, to harness latent revolutionary potential. Again there is the question of historical perspective. One can point to the search for a new conception of urbanism directly to a Dutch exemplar. Further, one can point to the main stumbling block to such a development, until the late modern period, as the problem created in Descartes' view of the relation of planning and the city. With regard to a notion of the city as a place of radical enlightenment, Jonathan Israel has shown that in the Theological Political Treatise of Spinoza, his understanding of the city was anti-monarchical, democratic and tolerant, where the value of free speech mediated between all contesting interests. Spinoza's text is viewed by Israel as an effort to strengthen individual liberty and liberty of thought in Dutch society through the weakening of Church authority and lowering of the status of theology. Spinoza, Israel argues, sought to reinforce individual liberty and freedom of expression by introducing a new kind of political theory, strongly influenced by Hobbes and Machiavelli, by arguing for a distinctly urban, egalitarian and commercial type of republicanism to mobilise a challenge to the nature of the State, and what it is for. Spinoza has theorised with a view to a State of Israel, as announced in the Preface and directly argued in chapters 18, 19 and 20. Descartes has inscribed a much more rigid functionalism in his understanding of the city. This has been studied by Cambier, who briefly shows that from a consideration of comments in Discours de la Méthode Descartes has a stated preference for a master-builder and a good engineer, resulting in a city that is essentially mechanical, where every element is thought of as exterior to every other, and juxtaposed in an abstract space. Cambier suggest that the urbanism of Cedra is strongly influenced by Descartes, as also the work of Baron Haussmann, Major Pierre-Charles l'Enfant, and Le Corbusier. Descartes shows no interest in the 'ethos' of the population, on the analogy that you do not have to be a master linguist to speak, and so too in the case where you wanted to invent a new architecture. [OP Paris, Dunod, 1070 n.20]. Cambier thinks that a descriptive - empirical method
is unable to propose an alternative for the city. The creating of a counter-city cannot be raised in such an analysis. The question of how the abstract voids left in the wake of functionalist conviction can be re-appropriated, without the street being reduced to a mere vector of movement. Graafland's 'thir­ding' is really a very developed answer to this question.

In one sense the very abstractions towards which the utopic lead result in disorientation for inhabitants. The extreme of mystified modernism, the vast machinery of urban mystifications, can be seen in Las Vegas and Disneyland --the result of the kitsch dream world of commodities in Benjamin's sense, mobilised by image and tourism-- where interior and exterior are dissolved in assuring the subject as being available for the game of mercantilism and consumption. Some of these points are very much in line with Hays and Graafland.

Cambier sees that Utopias requires heterotopias, a critical emplacing where an elsewhere is found in a here. Graafland's negotiating of the 'absence' and resistance within the urban, especially through the projects he develops, also takes a similar view. Cambier is more optimistic, because he thinks that a city can develop an open horizon, even if there is a theologically dense skyline, which intensifies the experience of living and dwelling. The simple example of chronotopia would be libraries, museums, monuments, because they are 'open' to other times. In cinema and theatre there is an opening out to the latencies of possible experience, and with train stations and public parks an opening to geographies and a simulacrum of nature; this also reminding us that our needs for cultural and symbolic expression are a 'second nature'.

Local quarters can express the heterotopia of the intimacy of the village: neighbourliness replace blood filiations. The neighbour is the one who is near, in terms of personal feel­lings. The city is a horizon, and its complex interweave of meanings can, in this utopic vision, facilitate participated orientation and difference. The city becomes a space of senses, the senses making sense; it exemplifies its meaning as lived immediacy. Cambier calls this process a 'dépli du sens', which in a contemporary city may well just mean the vital reactivation of the resources of democracy, where sociation, as Graafland has it, comes again to the heart of all discussions bearing on the city, either ancient or now in the making. It seems as if the theory of the city that emerged in that place, known as 'makom', 'the place', and mooted by Spinoza, is still, and certainly vis-à-vis the reflec­tions of the group working on the Dessau Jerusalem project, under the guidance of Professor Jacoby and Prof. Graafland, have begun a fruitful and complex work where thinking still matters.
[Endnotes]

1 For this see Arie Graafland "Looking into the Folds", in The Body in Architecture, ed. Deborah Hautmann [Rotterdam: O10 Publishers, 2006], pp. 139-157.


3 Arie Graafland, art. cit. He further emphasises the need for historical and contemporary context, see p 142.


7 The arguments in this section are largely taken from the published interview with Henri Lefebvre, conducted and translated by Kristin Ross, printed in: October, 1979. It should also be mentioned that Nieuwenhuis had been fascinated with the work of the Dutch historian Huizinga, and indeed the study of the "Narration", The Ship of Fools, is an important source for the "ludic", as in the work of Erasmus, In Praise of Folly.


9 For arguments and citations here I am drawing on Alain Badiou, Qu'est-ce qu'une vérité? [Paris: Vrin, 2005].