

## Repositioning Architecture in the Digital: Introduction

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R. D. Bleeker, Bankgirocentrale Rekencentrum Algemene Bank Nederland in Leusden, exterior photo, 1975

Dirk van den Heuvel (TU Delft, Head of Jaap Bakema Study Centre)

# Repositioning Architecture in the Digital

## INTRODUCTION

This year's conference of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre aims to critically explore the interplay between architecture and digital culture since the 1970s. How has the emergent data society materialized in architecture? What new typologies have been developed? And what role did architecture play in the emerging discussion about artificial intelligence?

Due to the pandemic, this year's edition of our annual Jaap Bakema Study Centre conference has to be very different from our previous events. Usually, we announce a call for papers in the spring, but spring this year saw the first lockdown in the Netherlands and many other countries. Now, with the second wave of the virus still gaining momentum, we are in a (partial) lockdown situation once again.

With this in mind, we have decided to organise a series of online workshops and keynotes with invited speakers. Together with Georg Vrachliotis, this fall appointed as full professor of the theory of architecture and digital culture at TU Delft, we have developed a programme around current research questions that probe the interrelations between the digital and architecture. This follows up on the earlier events of the Jaap Bakema Study Centre's Total Space programme.

## TOTAL SPACE

The Total Space programme was started at the time to look into the interdisciplinary exchanges between architecture, planning, systems theory, anthropology, and the emergence of the computer. Key moments in architecture can be situated as early as the 1950s and 1960s, and have evolved into the ubiquitous phenomena of the Smart City and BIM design and construction. The first histories have been written, as well as a continuous theorizing of the impact of computation and digital media in the field of architecture.

Earlier events of the Total Space programme included international workshops and a modest publication, tracing historical moments and rereading received histories and theories, among others with Tom Avermaete, Christine Boyer and Laurent Stalder, while connecting these with current developments in design theory and the digital arts, among others with Benjamin Bratton, Femke Herregraven and Richard Vijgen. An excursion for digital traces as

can be found in the collections of Het Nieuwe Instituut was undertaken at the occasion of the Bakema conference 'Between Paper and Pixels: Transmedial traffic in architectural drawing'. Two exhibitions probed the interconnections between urban planning, ecology, systems thinking and habitat: 'Habitat, Expanding Architecture' in 2018, and 'Animal Encounters' together with Studio Ossidiana in 2019.

#### THE 1970S TO TODAY

In the global history of digital culture, the 1970s are seen as a transitional period: between the dazzling rise and fall of cybernetics in the mid-20th century and before the popularisation of the personal computer and the early critical debates on artificial intelligence and surveillance in the late 1980s. The techno-utopian playfulness in architecture, art and philosophy of the 1960s was replaced by the application-driven technological thinking of the emerging post-industrial society. The focus was now on designing specific tools, digital standards, and automated services for the future data society. The miniaturisation of technology and in particular the development of microchips initiated far-reaching changes not only in natural science, industry and economy, but also impacted architecture and urban design.

We will look at buildings, archives, networks, concepts and visual culture. Long before the famous, formal explorations of Greg Lynn, Kas Oosterhuis, Lars Spuybroek and Maurice Nio, the digital was already firmly inscribed into the discipline. How to assess the various shifts and impacts of the digital in architecture while applying just such a historical and cultural perspective? Attendants and participants are invited to collectively explore these issues in the sessions that we have arranged. The sessions will bring together researchers from TU Delft and international scholars, while the department of Heritage of Het Nieuwe Instituut contributes with a special session 'Behind the Screens' on digital archives, and the department of Research will host the session 'Data Matters together with the Royal Academy of the Arts in London.