... we see social forms being changed today in new modes of communication, inter-subjectivity and social identification. It is not our intention in this book to deny the distance between our lives today and those of the past, nor to propose a return to a community locked into local place; but we do wish to begin an exploration into the ways a concrete and connective urban environment can support lives and livelihoods sustained in webs of inter-subjectivity and inter-identification. We wish to explore the way lives in local place depend also on a connective engagement with the world – and its conflicts and differences – for their viability and for conditions of enablement and even justice.
The Spacelab Series
This book is the first in a series which aims to present two related aspects of recent work of Spacelab: on the one hand some of our thinking on the urban as a contemporary condition – here paying particular attention to the formational of the urban and a formational, generative urban space – and on the other, design projects which have been developed in the context of, and influenced by, such thinking. It is not in the nature of the subject to provide a definitive closure in one book, and the point here is to raise questions and suggest directions as much as to provide answers. We see each of the series therefore as being part of a continued engagement with emergent themes and directions in the work of the laboratory, and conclusions as provisional. The series will try to approach the study of the city from a perspective which is different to the normative and reformative one which has dominated planning since its beginnings. It will concern itself less with the question of what the Good City should be and more with the one of what the city is. It will be less concerned with normative prescriptions for the city as an organizational support for assumed and ‘already assembled’ societies and economies, and more with the ‘city itself’, as a movement and as a form – and, it must be emphasized here, as a ‘virtuality’, or a possible outcome, or set of possible outcomes, to processes of urban becoming. It will try to see the city as fully imbricated with the socialities that enliven its spaces, trying perhaps to see it as another being, innocent of cities and societies and of our investment of ideas in them, might see it if they were to encounter it for the first time.

The position we begin to develop in this publication, and will try to develop further in publications to come, is related strongly to our interest in the local – and related to the urgent need we see, to develop an effective conceptualization of the local in a powerfully globalizing world. To this end we must, we feel, deal with an urban space which is global in its scope. The object is not to develop a dichotomy between the global and the local – which seems in fact to be the dominant position today – but rather to develop a view on how the local is constructed or assembled in this global-in-scope space. The local, in the view we begin to develop, is not a given, it is an effect – and one that we as urban designers have it in our power to influence: to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct through the manipulation of a global-in-scope field. Because we are urban designers, we try also to construct diagrammatic reductions of this space in order to understand how we may manipulate it. We look for instruments which help us trace the drifts, shifts and tendencies generated out of the fluid processes of a global-in-scope urban – equivalent, though opposite in effect of course, to diagrammatic instruments used in the past to freeze our built environment into a static anti-urban order in the names of ‘neighborhood’ and ‘community’. We seek our neighborhood and community not in a partitioning of the urban landscape, but rather in the way places are constructed as meaningful and social through the way they figure in, and coordinate, the performance of multiple worlds lived within multiple scales, networks and horizons in urban space. The local becomes in fact something other than purely singular or purely multiple. It becomes one of those fractional realities – more than one and less than many – introduced here in chapter 6.
Seeing the urban; seeing in the urban

[David Hume] constituted a multifarious world of experience based upon the principle of the exteriority of relations. We start with atomic parts, but these atomic parts have transitions, passages, ‘tendencies’, which circulate from one to another. These tendencies give rise to habits. Isn't this the answer to the question “what are we?” We are habits, nothing but habits – the habit of saying "I". Perhaps there is no more striking answer to the problem of the Self. Gilles Deleuze (1989)

It sometimes seems to us that it is not so much our cities that are in crisis as our images and imaginaries of the urban. At a very instrumental level things go on: the technicalities and politics of city building are carried out, cities are being built at often explosive rates all over the world – but we clearly have difficulties seeing clearly and recognizing the products of all this widely distributed effort. And its not as if we don't have an image of the city; in fact, the image of the city we carry with us can be strikingly clear, as if burnt into some kind of vague but insistent collective longing or disposition – only its an image of a city that isn't clearly ours! This image can be precise about how the city should be and what we expect it to do, but this precision doesn't translate in any clear way into strategies for making it that way – in fact those strategies which claim to deliver our desire for community and a public of belonging usually end up producing grotesque parodies of these qualities, in manipulative commercial stagings, or by way of a gross and cynically expedient exclusion.

Meanwhile city-building goes on at pace, without a widespread critical reflection on what it is we are building. This is not helped by the fact that a critical discussion is not in general promoted; city-building is prone to high-powered and self-congratulatory declamations of its own successes, tied as it is to a politics that has to assemble resources and popular and commercial endorsement, and tied as it too often is to the service of political ambition. Projects beget projects in rounds of competitive global positioning in which architectural branding and glossy accounts of success underwrite escalations in image-wars of boosterism. Grandiose projects establish spectacles on a global level in the name of urban renewal, without achieving the long-term local spin-off the hype always promises. We can, it seems, orchestrate and manage huge urban statements and stagings, tied to national imaging programs and global events, but we find it difficult to sustain a continuous production of ordinary urban places that settle into and enrich the lives and doings of ordinary people. We find it difficult to produce an ordinary urbanism, capable of supporting ordinary everyday lives as well as engendering new life patterns and livelihoods in the ways urban environments did at many points in our past.

In fact it sometimes seems we have given up on this hope, distaining a vision of a sustaining and negotiated social place as romantic in these fast and connected times, and rubbing as naive and mystical, a faith in the creative and sustaining power of overlaid webs of co-present sociality and an urban of co-presence and co-visibility. The bureaucratic and ‘practical’ alternative to this vision of a distributed negotiated sociality in the everyday is a regime of atomization, regulation, rationalization and control, which assumes middle-class sensibilities and powers and into which the bulk of the world’s population is unable to be, and resists being, shoehorned. One could certainly make a case that this regime, in its attempt to gather everything under its universalizing vision, to some extent creates the climate of ‘risk’ we live under today. This regime clearly fails to adequately account for and recognize either the marginal or the novel, and is itself today under pressure from the energies
and forces of an increasingly complex and dynamic world. Nor does it recognize the corporeal of the social (political) body or its need for visibility and an image of itself.

Attempts to think a more open and negotiable and responsive frame for social urban living can quite clearly never ignore the changes brought to contemporary societies by modernity, but we would argue that real places and spaces have always had a capacity for openness, presentation and responsiveness, and have always been capable of accommodating and even generating a certain ‘excess’ of marginality and novelty. We would argue that this capacity and ‘excess’ can be seen as a possible character of the local in its relation to a wider world and that the urban becomes a frame which needs to be explored further for the way it may engender a place that is connected and accommodating at one and the same time, and grounding of the social body. This would be a place that is what we would describe as social, that is also political in the way Aristotle uses the term, and inserted into the real urban spaces of today and tomorrow. Our ultimate goal must be an emplacement of a politic of the human community in the connective spaces of our contemporary world. The urban is today often characterized as a place of disintegration, segregation and violence – but it is also built according to a technocratic rationality which divides in order to control. Meanwhile, some of the best places of our cities are also characterized by a diversity, connectedness and openness which generates enlivening spaces and socially lubricating juxtapositions of dissimilars. These spaces are often a source of novelty and stimulation, challenging fixities of ideas and disposition, and providing an anchor for alternative performances of lives, livelihoods and identities. It is yet possible, we feel, that an urban situation, embedded in dynamic contemporary processes, may signal pathways to sustaining and sustainable and open social futures.

If we look back at the origins of many of our social and political institutions, these are inseparable from a life assembled in urban settings – these settings themselves clearly so much more than neutral backdrops to forms of social and political being. And we cannot claim that this was true only at the point of origin of these institutions, which are now fixed and immutable; we see social forms being changed today in new modes of communication, inter-subjectivity and social identification. It is not our intention in this book to deny the distance between our lives today and those of the past, nor to propose a return to a community locked into local place; but we do wish to begin an exploration into the ways a concrete and connective urban environment can support lives and livelihoods sustained in webs of inter-subjectivity and inter-identification. We wish to explore the way lives in local place depend also on a connective engagement with the world – and its conflicts and differences – for their viability and for conditions of enablement and even justice. As I write this in the autumn of 2005, the suburbs of Paris and Lille and Lyon are burning. Everyone knows that the anger spilling out into the streets of these mean and isolated social holding enclosures have to do with issues of opportunity and its denial. Everyone knows that the important choices to be made are political and legislative and to do with changing a regime of access and enablement in a society which has neglected to notice the way conduits of access have failed to be extended beyond established networks of privilege and power. But there is also another kind of politics involved: the issue is as much about the way lives are recognized and represented – honored and presented in positive and affirming ways – in the spaces of our societies and cities.

It is perhaps therefore not just a matter of the realization and enactment of opportunity and of just access to the benefits of society, though this is rightly the first concern; it is also about the way peoples are recognized and represented in the spaces of that society. It is perhaps not an accident
that the city that has most escaped the current round of anger and violence is Marseilles – also the major French city where ethnic minorities and their cultures are most positively visible.5

**From the Agora to the contemporary urban**

Patrick Healy takes us back to the assembly of a politics of our being together, and of our talking (of it), in the ancient Agora. He shows us that the Agora is an improvised place where "one could be agorazonta; at the site of flows, of people, commodities and information." The city becomes "a place of chatter" and "an imbraglio in the rhetoric of its own name and naming." In contradiction to Mumford, here is no system with internal coherence, "nor is it a social spatial conglomerate with its own internal coherence; embodied, it is everybody’s business; to koinon, or, Res Publica."

The concept 'koinonia' ('society' or 'community') is used to denote any form of association; of human beings, the crew of a ship, a band of soldiers, an association of tradesmen, and stresses people and a government of the demos above territory. In fact community is a result of talking before it is any belonging to deme or clan, certainly before any blood-bond to territory, and the Agora is the "place of recognition" where the terms of such belonging are constructed and negotiated and where the presence of strangers salt the fellowship of community. All koinonias are subject to the all comprehensive politike koinonia, which is the polis. The concept of community is therefore one of the most significant connotations of polis and Healy begins to show how to koinon and polis are manifested in a space of presentation and representation, and how space can be a primary diagnostic for the social.

Healy poses the possibility of a material 'physiology' of the city in agorazonta; in an ecology of presence, in the presence of others and in exchange of ideas, desires and things. The city is a thing of circulation and communication whose tendencies give rise to habits. We need, he suggests, to consider carefully what the 'res' of Res Publica means: the problem of the thingness of res makes of the city a false object, things thrown together rather than understood as the gathering and scattering interactivities of dynamic and kaleidoscopic processes. The objectness of the city needs to be dissolved, opening up an understanding of the way affects and intensities are mediated by the imaginative: "Within the view of the assembly or assemblage, the issue of effect/affect, intensities and movement is crucial, and the role of mediatizing becomes of enormous consequence."

Deborah Hauptmann goes back to one of our primary inspirations, minutely interrogating the Lefebvre of Urban Revolution on the nature of urban space and 'the urban'. The city, according to Lefebvre, is no longer recognizable as a totality or singular entity. Urban reality manifests as fragmentary, shapeless, and the 'urban phenomenon' locates itself at a point of articulation of widely, even globally, dispersed processes. 'City' becomes 'the urban' he says – we have left behind, or are in the process of leaving, a city we can clearly delineate in relation to its surroundings and its functions, in favor of 'the urban', a condition, global in reach, which subsumes all lives. "Society has been completely urbanized." He uses the concept of 'rupture' to emphasize the discontinuity of 'the urban' with what before was understood as city, adding that this rupture "simultaneously introduces and grounds a form of knowledge, a field... similar to logical form and almost as abstract and active as that logical form which is associated with language...".

It is a 'form without content' he says – the city creates nothing; rather the city "centralizes creation" in that it affords the form, or we would say, the situation, for exchange and proximity to take place. The urban "is a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity"; but, this form has no specific content
for it accumulates all content; it is an abstraction, "but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction... it is pure-form." At the same time, Lefebvre tells us, we act and react 'blind' in the face of this new urban phenomenon. We 'see' the new phenomena of the urban between processes of thinking and urban happening, and what we see is an "effect of process". We construct "verbal layers [which are] unable to attach themselves to a 'philosophical subject' or a 'privileged object' or a 'historical totalization.'" Urban theories and practice continue to utilize the tools and language of a past period and as such must be understood as "reductive of the emerging reality." Whether this reduction is in terms of the medieval or the industrial or any other kind of city of the past, it is form today, Lefebvre is saying – and we agree – which works on the creation of urban realities.

Hauptmann expands on this notion of form by drawing on Foucault's idea of the Panopticon and the way the diagram of the prison becomes extended to schools, factories, etc., which then supports the end functions 'education', 'production' etc. The distributedness of power relations and their availability for multiple final functions appears to be part of the power of form to generate new realities. Power relations move; they shift from one point to another, and "their medium is the field of all forces (pure force)." In Deleuzian terms, they constitute 'strategies' which are anonymous, blind and mute since they "evade all stable forms of the visible and articulable." Power relations, and their affects, are actualized and stabilized through their integration into formalized structures. The 'institution' which results is understood not as an entity but as a practice, not as productive but as reproductive of the very relations which it presupposes. But "[t]he city and its subjects not only act, they are acted upon," Hauptmann concludes, "and this ceaseless push and pull, this folding of forces, must be comprehended; understood epistemologically and situated ontologically if the architect, the sociologist, the practitioners of socio-spatial practices are to 'act' as opposed to continually 'reacting' to the multiplicity of forces at play."

In a new wave of spatial thinking we are becoming aware that the powers of agents and sites lies in their very particularity and situation – we are becoming aware of the methodological impasses inherent in the placeless generalizations we have constructed and applied as normative recipes for urban problems and in thinking of urban development processes. In fact, one could say it is this methodological problem, and the problem of the waning power of our normative instruments, which motivates the search for another conception of urban space and society in our work. In a different space (of particulars and situations) a different logic operates. Equilibria and symmetries can be captured only as temporary conditions. We render snapshot views of particular action in its particular medium in the structure of a spatial analytic. We are finding similar insights through the notions of 'hybridity' and the 'actor-network' but Hauptmann shows us that these insights were always there for us in Lefebvre's work.

Lefebvre's legacy is settling – we find we understand him better from a broadening base of spatial thinking, and alongside the thinkers like Foucault, Deleuze and Bergson, Hauptmann uses to expose the delineations of his thinking – thinkers he was already familiar with of course, but still relatively new to us in the English-speaking world. The once powerful ideological bracketing of these different thinkers seem somewhat overstated and doctrinaire today, and it is the complimentarity of their thinking that Hauptmann employs to help us open Lefebvre's thought.