

Steal This Place –
The Aesthetics of Tactical Formlessness and
"The Free Town of Christiania"

Steal This Place –

The Aesthetics of Tactical Formlessness and
"The Free Town of Christiania"

Maria Hellström

Faculty of Landscape Planning, Horticulture and Agricultural Science
Department of Landscape Planning
Alnarp

Doctoral thesis
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Alnarp 2006

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae
2006:27

Author's address:

Maria Hellström
SLU, dept of landscape planning
Box 58
230 53 ALNARP

e-mail: maria.hellstrom@lpal.slu.se

ISBN:91-576-7076-5

ISSN:1652-6880

© Maria Hellström, Alnarp

Layout: Cattis Ahlgren

Cover illustration:

Cattis Ahlgren and Maria Hellström

Copy editing: Rolf Hughes

Photographs by the author unless otherwise indicated

Print: SLU Reproenheten, Alnarp 2006

Hellström, Maria (2006) *Steal This Place - The Aesthetics of Tactical Formlessness and "The Free Town of Christiania"*.

Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae. Doctoral Thesis No 2006:27

ISSN:1652-6880 ISBN:91-576-7076-5

Against a background of urban *aestheticization*, the following study addresses questions of urban formation and change. The aim of the thesis is to investigate how an activist urban configuration, in this case the so-called "Free Town of Christiania" in Copenhagen, may affect more general urban planning and design discourse, as well as the aesthetic assumptions behind contemporary spatial practice.

The working hypothesis of the study is that an actualization of expressive urban activist practices will lead to a different conception of spatial development and change than the one presently dominating the field of urban planning. It is also anticipated that the conceptual prerequisites for urban planning and design may be altered through a radical interrogation of aestheticization processes, as they have appeared through a controversial and in many respects illegitimate 'taking of place'. The objective of the thesis has therefore not been the assessment of the specific urban formation as an ideal solution to urban life. Instead the study should be seen as a problematizing interrogation *through* a concrete example of the complex relation between expressive aesthetic action, spatial reproduction and the representational power of form.

The study is undertaken in the conviction that urban formation is an intermediary and composite practice that cannot be understood in isolation from the social, linguistic, material, and political realities of expressive actions. Methodologically, this means that the present work is articulated within the paradigm of *performativity*, theorizing urban locality production from three different perspectives: *the formlessness of the subject*, *the formlessness of space*, and *the formlessness of power*, all of which constitute a *tactical* disassembly of the privileged notion of urban form. As such, the thesis aims at introducing a more elaborate and critically resonant aesthetic discussion into urban discourse, actualizing the creative potential of re-conceptualizing urban planning and design as intermediary *as-if* spaces of social and political interaction.

Keywords:

aesthetics, urban planning, landscape theory, aestheticization, performativity, urban activism, subject positioning, representational critique, spatial reproduction, tactical formlessness, polemological analysis, bio-politics, tactical play

Index

Acknowledgements	9
I. Introduction	14
Main Hypothesis and Objectives	16
Performativity, Landscape, Discourse	17
An Empowering Example	20
Itinerary for Readers	21
II. The Free Town Of Christiania: A History of Representation and Reproduction	28
Split Vision	28
The First Years: 1971-73	33
From Illegality to Fragile Legitimacy	33
The Dream of the 'Ting Place'	41
The Social Experiment	44
A Second Wind: 1973-78	49
Christiania Versus the State	49
Protracting Popularizations	52
Internal and External Threats: 1979-1989	55
Spatial Clashes: The Junk Blockade	55
A New Optimism	58
The Projective Archer	60
Some Steps Ahead: The Møller & Grønborg Plan and its Offspring	63
Normalization from Within: 1989-2000	70
Predictable Turns: The Local Plan and The Green Plan	70
Cinematographic Stories and Ideological Myths	77
The Naturalization Apparatus: 2001-	81
Politics of Preservation	81
From Experiment to Competition	86
Final Plans	90
Christiania – A Formless Re-production of the Urban Landscape	96
III. The Formlessness of the Subject	106
The Subject In-Between	106
Situational Subjectivisms	107
The Movement: Utopian Inversions and Tactical Theft	114
A Philosophical Unfolding	123
Towards an Aesthet/hics of the Sublime	129
Tactics of Subject Re-Positioning	139
Voicings	139
Stagings	147
Bewilderment	155
Interceptions	164

IV. The Formlessness of Space	174
Urbanity: Space De-Centered and Re-Aestheticized	175
Phenomenology and Polemology: Two Spatial Perspectives	182
Phenomenological Interiors	184
Between Ground and Intention	185
Existential Place or Perceived Space	188
No Place like Home?	193
Polemological Excursions	198
Heideggerian Disseminations	198
Spaces of Representational Production: Lefebvre	203
Tactics of Consumption: De Certeau	209
- <i>Scaping</i> the World: Appadurai	219
Liminality and Language	224
IV. The Formlessness of Power	238
Defying Incarceration: L'informe	240
Situational De-Formation as the Know-How of Living	246
Foucault 1: Power and Horizontality	253
Visibilities and Sayabilities	254
Landscape Panopticism	257
Bio-politics: Arts of Governing	261
Foucault 2: Power and Materiality	265
The De-materializing Gaze	266
Aspects of Socio-Matter	270
Playful Counter Tactics	275
Ludic Responsivity	276
Counter Amassments	281
Culture Jam	287
V. Discussion: Critical Aestheticization, Tactical Formlessness and the Dilemma of Planning	298
The Subject Un-done: An Out-reaching Aesthetics	299
Place Un-done: Landscape Activated	301
Power Un-done: Towards an Empowering Urban Jam	305
References	320
Appendix 1: Map over Christiania	310
Appendix 2: Timeline Christiania	311

Acknowledgements

To begin with, I have been writing this thesis as a *traveler*, as a voyager between places, disciplines, and continents. Well aware of the distancing effect, I have also seen the advantages. As American writer Djuna Barnes pointed out at the beginning of the last century, being a stranger and traveler gives you the privilege not only to observe, but to reflect. At home “one looks upon things because one has eyes,” she wrote. In a foreign place “one has eyes that one may contemplate.”¹

A journey along more or less beaten tracks, through more or less densely populated fields, this thesis has entailed so much more than contemplation. Rather, it is a compilation of encounters and dialogues, of convergences and intersections, all along a winding and capricious itinerary. In this sense, the present work should be read as a travelogue, a section of a collaborative work in progress, dependent upon the contribution of many co-travelers – mentors, colleagues, friends and family.

Essential cicerones on this long trip have been my scientific advisors. Both challenging and supportive, they have inspired and supervised my often impulsive and unreflective criss-crossing. Thank you José Luis Ramirez for encouraging me to initiate my doctoral studies and for bringing into attention the rhetorical power of aesthetic agency; thank you Irina Sandomirskaja for your guidance over the plateaus of philosophical argumentation; thank you Kenneth R. Olwig for mapping out the sometimes rugged terrain of landscape theory; and thank you Eivor Bucht for firmly taking my hand past the final mountainous passages of this academic voyage.

My deep gratitude also goes to my former teacher at Malmö Art School Forum, Gert Aspelin, who functioned as an early mentor, encouraging not only my artistic but my theoretical and literary endeavors; to Lennart Nordh, who back in the late eighties first invited me as a teacher to the landscape planning department; to former dean Gunnar Sorte, whose inter-disciplinary determination led to my being accepted as a doctoral student in 1999; and to the present dean Tiina Sarap, whose understanding and supportive attitude enabled me to wrap things up finally.

Special thanks goes to my co-advisor Thomas Binder, studio director at the Interactive Institute’s Space and Virtuality Studio, who at an initial stage was courageous enough to host my project, thereby providing the financial means to make it come true. Under his command, the studio developed into an interrogative and energizing milieu, moreover the scientific mother ship, from where my further roaming has issued. Of great importance in this respect was also the support of Carl-Henrik Svenstedt and Pelle Ehn at the School of Arts

1 Djuna Barnes (1989), “The Hem of Manhattan (1917)” in *New York*, London: Virago Press, pp. 285-295.

and Communication at Malmö University, who initially mediated the contacts with this inspiring research environment.

I also want to thank Massachusetts Institute of Technology, School of Architecture and Urban Planning for taking me on as a visiting scholar, providing the most broadening and rich opportunities for my academic development, furthermore during the turbulent year 2001-2002. Here I would like to thank Stanford Anderson for inviting me, and William Porter and Mark Jarzombek for their valuable sponsorship and advice. I also want to thank Robert Haywood for great art historical tutoring and Hélène Lipstadt for enlarging and supportive discussions. Furthermore, my acknowledgement goes to The Swedish America Foundation for generous financial support, without which this most decisive stay would not have been possible.

At different more or less chaotic stages, a number of people have come to my rescue. I would like to thank Allan de Waal and Katja Grillner, who at different occasions served as engaged lecturers and constructive critics. I also owe a great deal to Rolf Hughes, whose deep acquaintance both with the English language and with spatial discourse compensated for the worst of my linguistic shortcomings. Without his close reading, this thesis would not have seen daylight. Gulli Reimer deserves huge thanks – her detective mind and physical endurance clearing some access in the referential jungle. A thanks also goes to Cattis Ahlgren for so eminently and swiftly transforming academic raw material into a more or less readable book. The fantastic staff at the library in Alnarp also deserves great acknowledgement for their indispensable and indefatigable work, without which I would have been completely lost in space.

10

Many close friends, whose sharp intellects I shamelessly exploited during endless hours of discussions, also deserve my appreciation. My gratitude in this respect goes to Gunilla Lindholm, dear colleague and friend, for spending so many hours helping me to sort out the confusing legends of knowledge and life; to Catharina Gabriellson and Meike Schalk, for sharing with me the hardships of doctoral rock climbing; to Måns Holst Ekström, for always having been a poetic and academic source of inspiration; to Leo Gullbring, for an admirable inquisitiveness and critical insistence; and to Margareta and Frank Melin-Higgins for innumerable, both inspiring and supportive, late hour conversations. Thanks also to Monika Gora, Gunilla Bandolin, Lia Ghilardi, Jennifer Magnolfi, and Tania Ruiz, for many stimulating discussions, and to all my colleagues both at the Interactive Institute and at the Landscape Planning Department.

At this moment of retrospection, my gratitude should also be expressed towards a headstrong Free Town and its creative and determined inhabitants. Articulating in praxis what I have only touched upon theoretically, the alternative community of Christiania deserves my greatest recognition. I would like to give special thanks to Ole Lykke and Nils Vest, who not only shared their deep experience of expressive practice, urbanist activism, and creative living with me, but also so generously opened their historical archives and made their photographic documentation available. I would also like to thank

the Christiania Local Plan Group for inviting me to workshops and former Christiania residents Mikael Fock and Jakob Reddersen for taking interest in my project. Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to my mother and father Rut and Hans-Erik, who brought me up to become a critical and thinking person, without ever questioning my often irrational choices of direction through life. I also want to thank my wonderful and courageous children Åse and Tor, now conscious teenagers, who have accompanied me without complaint on this meandering journey as my most faithful supporters. And, finally, my beloved Bo, the most precious of co-travelers.



Fig. 1 Aerial view from the west of Christianshavn's Ramparts and the Free Town of Christiania.

I. Introduction

I. Introduction

The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari¹

The idea that 'locality makes a difference' has over the last decade or so (re-)gained wider recognition. Despite the massive 'de-localization' (virtualization, globalization) following the electronic augmentation of reality, local manifestation has become an issue. Through what has been called 'gentrification';² the process by which an urban area is rendered more genteel, moderate, middle-class;² 'place' has become a major commodity and a powerful status symbol. At the same time, 'reclaim' has become a slogan, chanted out in hip-hop rhythms or painted in distinct colors at street parties, actualizing the power of locality in a different way. On top of the debris of a collapsed 'anywhere,' an intense – and ever more complicated – interest in the acute 'here and now' of people and places has developed.

14

In this situation, what has caught my interest – as a practicing artist and lecturer in urban landscape aesthetics – is the new relationship between aesthetics, urban planning and design practices. However, although "the aesthetic dimension"³ has now gained wider, more serious consideration, its political and more deep-seated implications often seem to be neglected. An inscrutable, controversial, and highly 'human' aspect of life, 'the aesthetic' is still mostly employed as the perfect argument and pretext for a shifting array of 'place marketing' or 'city

1 "L'idéal d'un livre serait d'étaler toute choses sur un tel plan d'exteriorité, sur une seule page, sur une même plage: événements vécus, déterminations historiques, concepts pensés, individus, groupes et formations sociales." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980:16). All translations by the author unless otherwise indicated.

2 **gentrify**, *verb*, renovate and improve (a house or district) so that it conforms to middle-class taste. *The Oxford Dictionary of English* (revised edition 2004). *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Malmö högskola, 4 March, 2006, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e31023>;
gentry, *n.*, **people of good social position, specifically the class next below the nobility.** *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Malmö högskola. 4 March, 2006. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t23.e22904>.

3 *The Aesthetic Dimension* is the well-known English title of Herbert Marcuse's last book (in German *Die Permanenz der Kunst*, 1977), where Marcuse tried to summarize the emancipatory experiences of the sixties and seventies in aesthetic terms. See Herbert Marcuse (1978).

branding' projects.⁴ And as such it is highly successful. "In fact", writes German philosopher and art theorist Wolfgang Welsch, "if advanced Western societies were able to do completely as they wish, they would transform the urban, industrial and natural environment *in toto* into a hyper-aesthetic scenario."⁵

It is against this background of urban *aestheticization*⁶ the following study should be understood. The role assigned to the 'aesthetic' – its importance in the transformation of cities – is based upon its elevation of the recognizable and familiar, the temperate and mainstream. But what happens if one shifts perspective, and instead focuses on urban aesthetics from a more 'extreme' point of view? What happens if one approaches the city from the perspective of a locality alternatively expressed, a locality that in many regards – aesthetically as well as in urban terms – has been considered aberrant?

Such a locality is without doubt "The Free Town of Christiania" in Copenhagen, an activist community that since 1971 has contested both urban policies and aesthetic conventions. A self-appointed and controversial agent in an urban aesthetic field, the "Free Town" offers an interesting opportunity to investigate the mechanisms and premises of urban aestheticization, as well as the circumstances under which it may be actualized and disputed.

The main aim of the thesis is therefore not to investigate Christiania as a circumscribed object or a physical locality, but as an *agent provocateur* in a wider urban discourse of aestheticization. How has the Free Town been articulated aesthetically, and how has its expressive agency affected the aesthetic presumptions behind contemporary urban planning and landscape design? What does the Free Town of Christiania *tell us* about the role of aesthetics in the development of contemporary urban space?

15

4 The literature on the topic of 'city branding' and 'place marketing' is extensive and frequently quoted in urban policy making. A work that has gained a great deal of attention is the study by Richard Florida (2002), *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, as well as the earlier book by Charles Landry (2000) *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*. For a discussion of the issues of urban aesthetics in the local context of Malmö and the Öresund Region, see the special issue of the magazine *Area* (2001) with the theme "Hela Malmö? En bomässa möter en stad" ("All of Malmö? A Housing Expo meets a City"). This issue was co-edited by Leo Gullbring and myself. See especially Maria Hellström and Leo Gullbring: "Bo enligt Tham" (Live According to Tham) and Maria Hellström: "Gör det själv" (Do it Yourself).

5 Wolfgang Welsch (1997) *Undoing Aesthetics*.

6 Both Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard have employed the notion of "aestheticization" in order to describe the blurred boundaries between real and imaginary, between art and daily life. Originally used to denote a modernist tendency to obscure political conflicts by appeals to High Art, as in the Haussmannization of Paris, aestheticization is in the postmodern sense used to indicate the increasing importance of signs or appearances in increasingly mass-mediated everyday life. Especially applied to processes of *consumption* of objects or commodities, including architecture, urban environments, places and landscapes, aestheticization can be seen as the driving force of an economy of symbolic exchange. For a discussion of aestheticization as a central notion in postmodern discourse, see Mike Featherstone (1991). For a general aesthetic critique of aestheticization processes, see Wolfgang Welsch (1997) *Undoing Aesthetics*.

Main hypothesis and objectives

The study is pursued from a conviction that urban formation is an intermediary and composite practice that cannot be understood in isolation from the social, linguistic, material, and political realities of expressive actions. The Free Town of Christiania will in this respect serve as a relatively non-structured “plane of exteriority”, in the words of post-structuralist writers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari; a propagation, where different means of expressive agency – lived events, historical determinations, concepts, artistic actions, planning proposals, spatial conflicts – may be directly associated with different modes of urban formation. Rather than focusing on Christiania as an isolated composite of phenomena or trying to get hold of the ‘real’ Christiania as experienced from a resident’s perspective, I have approached what I have access to – ‘Christiania’ as a compound of discursive enunciations, unfolding within the framework of a general urban/aesthetic debate.

The working hypothesis of this study is that an alternative understanding of aesthetic practice and activism will lead to a different conception of spatial development and change than the one presently dominating the realm of urban planning. It is also anticipated that the conceptual prerequisites for urban planning and design may be altered through a radical interrogation of official and alternative aestheticizing practices, as they appear in and around the specific urban landscape of the Free Town of Christiania.

16

Articulating the issue at stake in this way, it also becomes clear that the objective of this thesis is not the assessment of Christiania as an alternative or ideal solution to urban life. Instead, the objective is the interrogation *through* Christiania of the complex relation between expressive aesthetic action, spatial reproduction and the representational power of form. I have thus taken the liberty to use the Free Town of Christiania to actualize a larger spatial problematic of urban aestheticization, spatial representation and formation. Apart from discussing concrete cases of aesthetically spurred activism and official planning practices, the underlying presumptions of spatial aestheticization will be interrogated. This foundation includes questions of:

- *subjectivity* and *subject positioning*
- *spatial representation* and *spatially reproductive usage*
- *socio-spatial power* and *socio-material empowering*

Within spatial theory and urban planning research, the latter terms of the above mentioned pairs of concepts are generally the least studied, whereas within the field of interrogative aesthetics, art and philosophy, they have been more thoroughly discussed.

Entering the field of landscape and planning research from the perspective of artistic practice and applied aesthetics, it has therefore been my deliberate aim to develop the agency-oriented perspective implied by the second terms in the

above disposition. In this respect a fundamental question for the investigation has been what a reorientation of spatial aesthetics would mean in relation to the general understanding of urbanity and urban planning. This was also the initial problem I, as a practicing artist, was confronted with when I first entered the field of landscape architecture, planning and design, and it is a problem that subsequently has continued to function as a generative vector in the work on this book.

Performativity, Landscape, Discourse

An important objective in this study has been the problematization of urban aesthetics beyond its function as a *formal* support for urban planning and design.⁷ Methodologically, this means that the present work is articulated within the paradigm of *performativity*.⁸ Based on the theoretical assumption that meaning should not be seen as a given, ontological configuration, but unfolds as a result of an interactive and linguistic act of *theorizing*, the thesis will literally unfold as a spatially performed ‘making sense.’

In aesthetic terms, performativity entails a disjunction of interest from *form* to *agency*, from perceived formal structures to expressive spatial practice. As a result, the spatial notion of *landscape* will play a significant role. As emphasized by among others Danish urban theorist Tom Nielsen, the relation between urbanity and landscape has been subject to reinterpretation. The landscape has in this sense left its marginal role as pictorial backdrop, now actively merging with the city, transforming the centralized metropolis into a proliferating *urban field*. Not only an ensemble of circumscribed places, distinct edifices and tectonic forms, this new urbanity constitutes a horizontal and non-finalized

7 Far from a coherent academic discipline, *Theoretical and Applied Aesthetics*, as a field of study within the domain of planning, architectural/landscape architectural research and education, presents a broad discourse on artistically informed aspects on design practice and theory. In Swedish *Formlära*, which literally translated would be *form theory*, has traditionally represented the domain of design studies, whose major preoccupation has been the theorizing and producing of aesthetic judgments of value. Theoretical and Applied Aesthetics is only one designation for a broad range of theoretical, aesthetic and/or artistic approaches within the spatial disciplines, furthermore not that extensively studied. Focusing on Scandinavia, a search gives at hand that the number of doctoral dissertations amounts to not more than around thirty within this ‘field.’ In Finland, the situation is somewhat different than in the other Scandinavian countries, since there is also besides the academic PhD the possibility to achieve an artistic doctorate.

8 Performativity; a generic term for de-constructivist scientific approaches of ontological and epistemological critique. The notion of performativity has to a large extent come to be associated with the American queer theorist Judith Butler and her appropriation of J.L. Austin’s theories of performativity in language (developed in Austin’s posthumous *How to Do Things with Words* of 1962). Broadly understood, performativity implies a focus on the communicative event as such; thus the situated generation and manipulation of identity and meaning as it unfolds in a localized setting of a specific community. See Kira Hall (2000) and Judith Butler (1997).

“formlessness.”⁹ In this respect, the notion of ‘landscape’ provides both an intermediary dimension and an open narrative, through which contemporary urbanity may be studied.¹⁰ Even though the choice to read the surroundings as landscape can be regarded a kind of ‘tradition’ in modernity, it does also, as Nielsen argues, provide “a means to include general and insignificant things within an aesthetic field, thereby opening the possibility to work with them.”¹¹

Without going astray in the landscape at this early point, I would like to point to the composite role of landscape in this work; on the one hand an aesthetic field of study and on the other a narrative method. In this respect, my situating of the thesis within a landscape context also reflects a more general ‘spatio-aesthetic’ turn within the social sciences and the humanities. Often referred to as ‘linguistic’ or ‘rhetorical,’ this ‘turn’ is however also geographical distributed.¹² My reference to an ‘urban landscape’ should therefore first and foremost be interpreted as a way to mark a shift in attitude towards the city, where, rather than a positive entity, the city constitutes a *discursive field*, a field of expressions and narrations.

In Latin, *dis-currere* signifies a running to and fro over a field; a spatial covering, or an activation of in-betweens.¹³ A change of focus from locations to dislocations, from positions to transpositions, and from properties to relations and actions, a discursive approach also brings into attention the general *context dependency* of a study

9 As for the discussion of the formless within an urban context, I owe a lot to Tom Nielsen and to the inspiration and support for my argumentation that I found in his book *Formløs: Den moderne bys overskudslandskaber (Formless: The Surplus Landscape of the Contemporary Metropolis)* (2001). As for the potential affinity between my arguments and those of Nielsen, including the title, I will have to refer to the play of coincidences, as well as to a similar body of primary sources.

10 Tom Nielsen (2001:82).

11 “At vælge at læse omgivelserne som landskab kan beskrives som et slags ‘tradition’ i moderniteten for at inddrage almindelige og uanselige ting i et æstetisk felt og dermed gøre det muligt at arbejde med dem.” Tom Nielsen (2001:82).

12 In this respect, what I call ‘the spatio-aesthetic turn’ is related to what has over the last forty years been referred to as a “linguistic” or “geographical” turn within social and spatial studies. While the “linguistic turn” would refer to an increased awareness of the linguistic constructedness of the human environment and the “geographical turn” would actualize the spatial, historical and cultural context of this construct, an ‘spatio-aesthetic landscape turn’ would combine these two critical reflections. See Richard Rorty (1967) *The Linguistic Turn. Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*; and Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (2000:xi).

13 I here refer to American historian of ideas Martin Jay, who employs discourse as “the best term” to denote what he sees as “a corpus of more or less loosely interwoven arguments, metaphors, assertions, and prejudices that cohere more associatively than logically”, and where discourse in this usage “is explicitly derived from the Latin *discurrere*, which means a running around in all directions” (1993:16).

of human undertakings. In relation to context-independent 'disciplinary' science, this study will therefore probably appear less fixated and generalized.¹⁴

This shift from object to discourse is not just a matter of an 'upscaling' or widening of the perspective. Instead, it is a matter of deliberately practicing a 'landscape thinking.' As American landscape architect and theorist James Corner has argued, to regard landscape as merely an object is to overlook the aestheticizing or mediating effects of 'landscapization.'¹⁵ In this sense 'Landscape thinking' is a means to avoid such simplifications; a discursive and comparative approach that takes also linguistic relations and social participation into account. What matters here is not a geographical object per se, but the subject's situatedness within a relational setting of differences and 'otherness'.

It is in this sense we should understand this work; as dialogical *reasoning* rather than a product of *logical reason*.¹⁶ Running along communicative paths and expressive sequences, this work could therefore be regarded as a form of critical discourse analysis.¹⁷ Heading off from Michel Foucault's ideas of discourse as operating in relation to a condition of *possibility*, the work builds on the conviction that, more than anything, humans are connective beings, continuously establishing and re-establishing relations with 'others' and

14 In an attempt to interrogate the relation between urbanity, rationality and power, Danish urban theorist Bent Flyvbjerg points to the difference between context-independent and context-dependent knowing. When it comes to concrete human environments, he argues, the accumulation of knowledge does not aim at universality and context-independent *explanation* – at a general answer for all situations – but on the contrary at an increased context-dependency – a sensitivity to particularity and potential *narration*. See Bent Flyvbjerg (1991:24).

15 See James Corner (1999a:155-156).

16 As for this methodological positioning, I rely upon a neo-Aristotelian epistemological critique, where knowledge is defined not only as *episteme*, logical reason, but also as *techné*, practical reason, and *phrónesis*, discursive or dialogical reason. "Dialogue is by definition central to phronetic research", states Flyvbjerg and refers to its etymological definition as *dialogos* (Greek, *dia*, through or in-between; and *logos*, reason); *in-between reason*. ("Dialog er pr. definition centralt placeret i phronetisk forskning." Bent Flyvbjerg (1991:85). José Luis Ramirez also puts an emphasis on dialogue as privileged discursive method; dialogue understood as the practicing of a discursive logos; a *communicative* rather than *cognitive* dimension of knowing. "The dialogue should strictly speaking be understood as 'discourse,' that is, as a reasoning that is actualized through speech, as opposed to the formalized and entirely objectified language that emerges with writing and science". ("Dialogen bör egentligen uppfattas som 'diskurs', d.v.s. som ett resonemang som går via talet, till skillnad från det formaliserade och helt objektiverade språk som uppstår med skriften och vetenskapen." José Luis Ramirez (1995a:283)).

17 The specific "Critical Discourse Analysis" proposed by Lili Chouliaraki and Norman Fairclough (1999) (*Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*) could be described as an articulation of a critical tradition that brings together social theory and linguistics with an analytical framework, setting up a dialogue between them. It emanates from the theory of discourse as developed by Foucault, although focusing on the analysis of the hidden agendas of political speech acts. The critical discourse analysis proposed here to a much greater extent looks to a wider historical framing, bringing in issues such as social narratives, spatial disposition, and structures of power.

‘elsewhere.’¹⁸ Similarly, in this study, the Free Town of Christiania functions as an actualizer of possibilities, an activator of a ‘formless’ discourse, through which to actively roam.

An Empowering Example

This is how I will approach Christiania; not as an object of study, not as a circumscribed place, but as a discursive landscape of utterances, as Foucault has expressed it “in their dispersion as events, and in the instance that is proper to them.”¹⁹ Initially articulated as an eventful *place theft* with a tremendous media impact, Christiania originally presented itself through a questioning of the idea of a *place proper*. Established as a spatial exception – an *as-if* space – the Free Town constituted a challenging and fundamentally interrogative field of study. The Greek word for such an *as-if* dimension would be *topos*; in Aristotelian rhetorics signifying the mental ‘place’ where the matters for argumentation are amassed. *Topos* is in this sense a contextual storage of potential arguments waiting to be released,²⁰ and *topics* consequently, the ‘method’ of its releasing. “Topics is the methodology of problematic thinking”, argues José Luis Ramirez;²¹ it is a ‘methodology’ of embracing a discursive potentiality in all its contextual width.

20

Rather than an *analysis*, this discursive study could therefore be understood in terms of ‘topicalization.’ Neither based upon empirical or participatory investigation, nor on anthropologically inspired observational studies of the specific area and its patterns of life, the study is first and foremost focusing on mediation. Except for a fair amount of visits to the Free Town of Christiania over the years and a limited number of interviews with Christiania residents, the main field of inquiry has been the representational and reproductive expressions constituting ‘Christiania.’ Irrespective of whether mediated through fanzines, planning documents, films, theater performances, newspaper articles or scientific reports, I have approached this ‘Christiania’ as a composite of different *topoi* with an exemplifying relevance also for the urban environment as such.

‘Example’ in Greek is *parádeigma*.²² To say that the Free Town of Christiania in this study acts as an example does not, however, mean that it serves as a

18 See further discussion in Maria Hellström (2006).

19 “...il est constitué par l'ensemble de tous les énoncés effectifs (qu'ils aient été parlés et écrits), dans leur dispersion d'événements et dans l'instance qui est propre à chacun.” Michel Foucault (1969:38).

20 See José Luis Ramirez (1995a:265).

21 “Topik är namnet på det problematiska tänkandets metodik...” José Luis Ramirez (1995a:262).

22 José Luis Ramirez (1995a) *Skapande mening. En begreppsgenealogisk undersökning om rationalitet, vetenskap och planering* (Creative Meaning: An investigation of the Genealogy of Concepts of Rationality, Science and Planning), p.258.

guiding paradigm or a normative ideal. Instead, the example should be understood in rhetorical terms, as *telling*. In Bent Flyvbjerg's words a both extreme and paradigmatic *case*, the example constitutes a specific problematic, which may function as a metaphor for the field of knowledge that the study concerns.²³ Furthermore, the example is *strategic* insofar as it recognizes and takes into consideration also the epistemological consequences of its own discursive interference.²⁴ In this sense the example is not randomly chosen but chosen from the point of view of a specific context-dependency, a specific interpretation as well as a specific expectation of a transformative impact. Accordingly, Christiania did not just happen by chance to lie across my route to a doctoral degree. It was an eye-opener for me personally in my relation to urban planning and design, and my hypothesis is that it will have a revelatory effect also in a more scientific context.

Another aspect of the example of Christiania is its actualizing of what Foucault called "the radical pluralism" of discourse, its *inter-disciplinary* and *polemical* character, spatially articulated by French anthropologist Michel de Certeau, whose ideas have come to play a significant role in the present study. The most central aspect of de Certeau's rhetorical onset is in this respect his emphasis on the relationship between *structures of power* and *empowering practices*. A tentative and tense in-between, this relationship should be approached through what de Certeau calls a *polemological analysis*.²⁵ In line with this, the strategic does not necessarily produce signification or meaning, but presents itself as an empowering potential; a *heuristic*, or discovering logic of telling conflicts and rivaling usages and figures. A sharpening of the discursive field, the strategic example thus serves as a polemological agent and interrogative guidance, enabling future transformation. My hope is that this holds not only for Christiania, but for this study as such.

21

Itinerary for Readers

What remains of this introduction is simply a brief instruction for the courageous reader of the following deliberations. In concrete terms, the study consists of four main fields of investigation, one of which is the discursive study of Christiania. The other three parts are three *topoi* of great relevance to

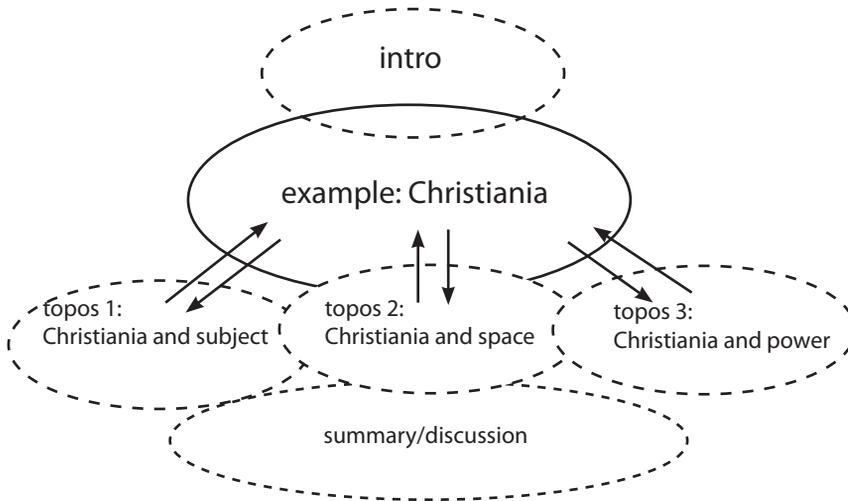
23 Bent Flyvbjerg (1991:149-50).

24 Bent Flyvbjerg (1991:142 and 149). As José Luis Ramirez has pointed out, in a discursive investigation, the example constitutes the rhetorical correspondence to logical induction. From an epistemic point of view it has therefore been regarded a less reliable and too circumscribed a methodological onset. While induction is an indicating of states, the example is a tracing of relations. While induction is an abstraction or disinterested estrangement, the example entails engaged enactment. José Luis Ramirez (1995a:256-262). See also the discussion of the example in Anders Larsson (2004) *Landskapsplanering genom jordbrukspolitik (Landscape Planning through Agricultural Politics)*, pp. 37-39.

25 Michel de Certeau (1980) *L'invention du quotidien: Arts de faire*, p. xliv.

developing urban aesthetics. Schematically outlined, the terrain of the thesis could be described as below:

Fig. 2. The 'terrain' of the thesis



22

The first chapter examines the historical unfolding of Christiania as a contested urban landscape. Presented as *A History of Representation and Reproduction*, this chapter covers the empirical research of Christiania's cultural history, its self-establishment and self-administration, as well as its cultural and political function as an urban agent. An important point of departure is the aesthetic complex of *spatial representation and reproduction*. 'Representation' will in this context refer to the different practices that Wolfgang Welsch has called "surface aestheticization"²⁶ – practices establishing a normative relationship between a representative referent and a 'real.' In such a relationship, the representative is not only seen as a formal and mental substitution, a stand-in for the sensuous world beyond, but also as the intentional or ideal corrective of this world.²⁷ 'Spatial reproduction,' or more clearly expressed, 'production and reproduction,' will on the other hand be used in order to indicate the fact that representative actions also entail a creative involvement, an active and concrete interference. As such, 'spatial reproduction' refers to a more "deep-seated aestheticization"²⁸ with a more fundamental and radical destabilizing and transformative potential, also on the level of consciousness.

26 Wolfgang Welsch (1997:2-4).

27 Raymond Williams (1976/1983) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, pp. 266-267.

28 Wolfgang Welsch (1997:4-5).

The aggregate ‘representation *and* reproduction’ will in this sense constitute an aesthetic point of departure, indicating a reciprocal interdependence between on the one hand attempts to *describe* or *form a knowledge* of the world, and on the other attempts to *appropriate* or even *ex-propriate*, and thus actively *perform*, a *knowing*. As such, the focus on spatial representation and reproduction, as filtered through the Free Town of Christiania, will indicate a critical entanglement of epistemological and aesthetic questions.

This account of Christiania will then provide the foundation for a continuous spatio-aesthetic or topical ‘disassembly’; a further unraveling of the aesthetic, spatial, and political strands that have appeared in the close study of the Free Town. The first of these topical unfoldings, *The Formlessness of the Subject*, will deal with the question of subject positionality²⁹ from the point of view of both the anti-utopian and the anti-avant-garde currents that inspired Christiania to be established. Relating the emergence of Christiania to the anarcho-libertarian drifting of Situationism and the international hippie movement, I will discuss the politicization of subjective aesthetics, and the corresponding aestheticization of the political subject. This discussion also traces the re-interpretation and transgression of normative aesthetics and the adjacent decentralization of the subject as it has been formulated from Kant onwards. The decentralized and thus ‘formless’ subject will then be reconsidered in relation to a number of discursive enactments as they have appeared in Christiania. These include the manifestation of the subject in relation to oral and scriptural practices, its manifestation as staged event, its manifestation as spatial bewilderment and its function as interceptive spatial disturbance.

23

The second topic, *The Formlessness of Space*, will deal with the notion of formlessness from a more explicit spatial perspective; first and foremost as a critique of idealist aesthetics and its dependency upon an eidetic or essentialist idea of beauty. This critique will proceed from the Kantian category of the sublime, which in distinction to the notion of beauty is constructed performatively. This distinction will then lead to a discussion of two spatial approaches, here referred to as *phenomenological re-centerings* and *polemological exteriorities*, both of which are relevant in relation to the discourse on and around Christiania. In this part, the discourse on *space*, *place* and *-scape* plays a central role, providing a platform for a ‘polemological’ interrogation, first and foremost of phenomenology as it has developed within the spatial disciplines. Through this polemological approach, distinctions between different spatial tactics and

29 The idea of *subject positionality* emanates from Michel Foucault, and his definition of discourse as “a field of regularity for various positions of the subject” (“un champ de régularité pour diverses positions de subjectivité”). Rather than a simple phenomenon of expression (verbal translations of previously established syntheses), discourse should be understood as “a totality, in which the dispersals of the subject and his discontinuities with himself may be determined” (“un ensemble où peuvent se déterminer la dispersion du sujet et sa discontinuité avec lui-même”) See Michel Foucault (1969:74). For a critique, see David Harvey and his interrogation of the idea of subject positionality in *Justice, Nature & the Geography of Difference* (1996:77).

aesthetic perspectives will unfold, differences articulated and developed first and foremost in the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Arjun Appadurai.

The third topic, *The Formlessness of Power*, constitutes a return to the Situationist problematic of performativity, now pronounced in relation to a macro-landscape of governing moral presuppositions and political ideologies. In the case of Christiania, this has been most explicitly staged under the appeal of *normalization*. Here, I will relate Christiania's concretely articulated critique of urban formalization to the Surrealist and Situationist rejections of "lexical prisons"³⁰ or enveloping "isms."³¹ While George Bataille was seeking emancipation in the raw materiality of *l'informe*, the Situationist critique of Raoul Vaneigem was constructed around the spatial play-tactics of *savoir-vivre*; the 'formless' art of living. These critical aesthetic practices will then be related to the *microphysics of power* as formulated by Michel Foucault. Discussing Christiania in relation to the critique of Foucault's concept of power, I will approach the question not only of how power is being executed and distributed through space, but also of how it is counteracted on a material level through the principle of *tactical play*; through a conscious 'formlessness' challenging every extension of spatial power.

24

The last chapter finally consists of a discussion of the relationship between a critical aesthetics and the discursive landscape of tactical formlessness as enacted in and through Christiania. The final discussion will further recapitulate the different aspects of formlessness around which the thesis has circled. As such, the dilemmas of planning and spatial design will be actualized, as well as the problems associated with formal aestheticization and a place-related or placial³² identity production.

An inter-disciplinary study, the literature referred to has been derived from a number of fields and a number of linguistic spheres, with the main emphasis put on art theory, architectural theory and philosophy, including philosophical and critical studies from other domains such as urban sociology, social anthropology and cultural geography. More than anything, this work could therefore be seen as one of translation; an intermediary undertaking, not only in between languages (a task which, unless otherwise indicated, has been pursued by the author), but in between disciplines, fields of knowledge and

30 See Denis Hollier (1989:60-61).

31 "Le monde des *ismes*, qu'il enveloppe l'humanité toute entière...", Raoul Vaneigem (1967:16).

32 Not part of a standard English vocabulary, the neologisms 'placial' and 'placiale' are nevertheless used in spatial discourse, among others by Edward S. Casey, who in his philosophical history of place uses the notions in order to further emphasize "the deep differences between earth and world – differences that have their own placial and spatial determinations." (1997:266). I will occasionally use 'placial' as the adjective form of 'place' referring to that which is 'of place' or 'related to place.'

scientific perspectives, all of which represent different ways of making sense. Yet, with Christiania as a living and instructive example, I hope to be able to give a fair enough an account of the multifaceted and composite story, which is that of expressive and conflictive urban formation.