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LUDGER SCHWARTE, *PHILOSOPHIE DER ARCHITEKTUR*,
WILHELM FINK VERLAG, PADERBORN, 2009.

In his introduction, Ludger Schwarte discusses the concept of architecture, which he understands as “constructing possibilities.”¹ Architecture is being reflected with respect to the original meaning of the term ἀρχή as beginning, principle, source, foundation of the world, as understood in ancient Greek philosophy. Thus, Schwarte’s starting point is the incipience, originality of architecture, preceding language itself. Language is not the place of the beginning, but rather space provides room for language to even appear. In this sense, architecture can be considered the condition of possibility of language. According to Schwarte, punctuation is the architectural structure of language – the cracks and voids enabling its expressivity.

Schwarte differentiates between theory of architecture and philosophy of architecture. While the former’s objective is determining relations between means and purpose, the latter focuses on legitimizing the very form of building. It is not concerned with the premises and maxims of the practice of building and is not, like architectural theory, part of the “ideology of planning:” “Philosophy of architecture, on the other hand, posits a more extensive and less certain concept of architecture; it does not take as a given that the essence of architecture is planning and constructing buildings. In order to understand how architecture forms the environment, one must attain insight not only into the basic skills of building and interacting, but also into the negation of building, if not fully negative architecture, which in the end also encompasses the removal of mental blockades.”² Schwarte sets upon the task of not only determining precisely such a concept of architecture, through detailed analyses of historical public spaces, but also of “possibly developing an

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even more comprehensive and less certain concept of architecture.”³ By doing so, he wishes to address the previous approaches within philosophy of architecture, which have primarily dealt with aesthetic, linguistic and spatial issues, and expand them to questions of politics, analogous to Foucault’s analysis of architecture as a technology of power, but specifically focusing on its role as a dispositive of emancipatory and liberational political movements.

Elaborating on his introductory considerations about architecture as principle, tenet, Greek *ἀρχή*, and Husserl’s *Urstiftung*, Schwarte puts forward the concept of anarchy and introduces the term anarchitecture (*Anarchitektur*). Namely, every thought and act based on principle is fundamentally anarchic. The beginning arises from anarchy, the lack of *ἀρχή*, which is in fact constitutive for any beginning and principle. “Every act of architecture is necessarily anarchic.”⁴ Architecture turns out to be the negation of architecture, perceived as a tool of the powers.

Considering the genesis of public space, Schwarte emphasizes the key significance of the architectural basis of political agency and power. The architectural basis here figures also as material *a priori* that transcends even the intentionality of architects themselves. It is an attempt to understand public space as the product of a specific shaping of architectural space. In doing so, those approaches that link the origin of public space to spaces of communication are being recognized as “uncritical.” Contrary to that, political action, especially revolutionary practice, should be considered a recomposition or destruction of architectural solutions that decide who is included or excluded from the process of making political decisions. Revolutionary events destroy “spaces of control,” and show that the media of crucial societal changes are not discursive but spatial in nature, which means that they generally take place at specific locations, in materially determined spaces:

In order for revolution to happen, it is necessary to break the chains, disempower architectural constraints and (rather “non-symbolic”) forces, some doors have to be kicked in. For acts of liberation to have a chance, we cannot content ourselves with redistributing ownership of or access to (media of communication): the very architectural basis of the system of power has to change. Hence, instead of

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

differentiating between technical, political, economic, cultural and other kinds of public, the approach of philosophy of architecture attempts to show the tight connection between spatial structures and options of perceiving and acting.⁵

Consequently, Schwarte demonstrates how John Dewey ignores the true nature of the architectural dispositive. Taking perception as the organizational principle, Dewey places publicity in a sphere which eludes collective intentionality. With that in mind, political action is understood as something that does not completely overlap with the intentions of the planning and expertly competent subject. The public figures as “the blind spot of sovereignty,”⁶ that which eludes identity. According to Schwarte, Dewey does not take into account the architectural conditions to this kind of organization of public space, which is neither cosmological, nor causal, nor evolutionary in origin. What applies to the public, the prerequisite of social relations without necessarily being part of them, is equally valid for public spaces, which cannot be completely included into the representation and the functioning of political systems.

Aiming to transcend Foucault’s concept of power, Schwarte points to the phenomenon of anti-power, which establishes itself as a counter-pole to the actualization of power in the public. The author of *Philosophie der Architektur* finds it necessary to consider that any power is also subject to someone’s perception and reception; based on this fact, in the same public an anti-power is being spatialized, which has the same architectural means of action at its disposal: limiting, appropriation, arranging, representing, identifying, organizing and directing.⁷

Schwarte also shows how representative democracy can be observed in terms of its architectural conditions of possibility. For instance, how can the architectural configuration of the parliament, with its capacity, arrangement and accessibility, address the challenge of adequately representing the will of the people. Through an exhaustive historical overview, Schwarte first notes the transformation of parliamentary buildings from open places of gathering to closed structures. The key here is the constitutive role of architecture, which in a sense becomes a subject of

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

forming political life, at the levels of its material enabling and symbolic designating.

The architectural combination of enabling and symbolizing, in particular characteristic of scientific institutions, is also applied to parliamentary buildings. Thus the anatomic theatre with its spectator rows arranged in a semicircle around the dissecting table served as model for the arrangement of parliamentary seats and speaker podiums, attempting to fully represent “societal anatomy,” in the words of French nobleman and author Mirabeau, as cited by Schwarte.⁸ In this regard, Schwarte will assign the architecture of parliaments a crucial role in shaping political life, which he puts on the same level as the role of the constitution. In a Foucauldian manner, Schwarte identifies the parliament as the disposition of parliamentary communication, illustrating it with the example of the French revolution, namely how the inadequacy of court of Versailles as provisional parliament shows the selective function of architecture in including and excluding individuals and groups from parliamentary activities. Architecture also determines who gets to speak and how, who is in the center and who at the periphery of a debate, as well as whose vote counts. Schwarte shows how the parliament is constructed as a political space separated from public space: the separate rooms of parliament become the place of seeming publicity, i.e., of the so-called public opinion. The architectural equivalent of this illusion of deliberation and publicity is the introduction of auditorium, whose circular shape is supposed to suggest the inclusion of a political public, but in fact excludes the very possibility of direct political participation.⁹ For understanding democracy, including modern democracy, a key factor are the so-called public parliaments that remove the usual boundary between actor and viewer; the auditorium becomes an instance of anti-authoritarian critique. On the other hand, Schwarte points out that not even in a projection of direct democracy would it be feasible to completely remove the boundary between public and political space. This is the double asymmetry of public and political space, meaning that on one side the large majority of citizens is situated in the public, but not political space, and that on the other side, most decisions are made within the political but not public space. The author of *Philosophie der Architektur* says that the democratic nature of a society is premised on the possibility of opening the

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 324ff.

political space towards the public, including the public not necessarily characterized by political agency. The political space thus opening up towards the extra-parliamentary space does not include the latter merely as an instance of control or criticism, but as a complex space comprising different groups with different degrees and modalities of social inclusion.

According to Schwarte, architecture can also be seen as a condition of enabling the phenomenality of things. It does not in fact define, but produces events, is itself an event, creates tensions and rhythms that make possible the appearing of that which is coming, that which cannot be controlled. In this very Heideggerian and Gadamerian part, exhibiting some of the central moments of fundamental ontology and philosophical hermeneutics, Schwarte links architecture to the dynamic of revealing, in which the architectural organization of space is based on the irrevocable principle of openness, the absence of determination and the exposing of alterity.¹⁰ Architectural spaces configure fields of action, they identify, facilitate and make understandable the doings that transpire within. Architecture prevents space from remaining an indifferent, homogenous sequence, creating places of significance for acting, perceiving, confronting. “Contemplating dispersion, locating congregation, giving rhythm to tension, situating, opening and exhibiting all work to spatialize the shaping of events.”¹¹

Finally, Schwarte confronts the architecture of public space with the architecture of power, or the concept of the sovereign architectural subject. Public space is featured as the place of procedurality, situationality, of refuting and overcoming strict concepts and orders. The town square, as a paradigm of public space, exhibits what is crucial to the latter: it is not formed by that which is made, built, material, on the contrary: public space is constituted by the absent, the unbuilt, the immaterial. Schwarte speaks of “creative anarchy” characterizing public space, thus rejecting the functionalist approach. By questioning or deconstructing any kind of order, public space constitutes itself as the “basis of eventful interaction.”¹²

The philosophical interpretation of architecture as the *a priori* starting point, as the enabling that ontologically precedes the causal nexus and practical purpose, raises questions about the constitution of architecture,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 346.

which further in the book pick up some post-structuralist points. This is especially the case with the Foucauldian elements of Schwarte's analyses, allowing a certain analogy between Schwarte's architectural and Foucault's historical *a priori*. However, this narrative of architecture's constitution also overlaps with hermeneutic and existentially-ontological understandings of apriority. We could go a step further and claim that parallels can also be shown with theories that delve into the constitutive nature of technology and the media, even though Schwarte does not explicitly articulate any such thesis.