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CONJUNCTION FUNCTION¹

ABSTRACT: This essay begins by taking the syntagma “Architecture and Philosophy” at face value. It spends some time working its way into and around various points of view: the role of conjunctions, the differences between architecture and philosophy, the possibility that the *and* we have been asked to consider has become naturalized and, therefore, no longer open to question. The essay is short, too short, due to what seems like a global lack of time. However, the essay starts again, at its end, to look at a somewhat different path.

KEYWORDS: and, syntagma, constitution, ordering, poiesis

¹ Grammar – Schoolhouse Rock, Conjunction Junction, an animated musical video for children about “hooking up words and phrases and clauses” with and, but, or. The leading character is a train conductor who has these words painted on the sides of the train cars.” Lyrics by Bob Dorough, lead vocal singer, Jack Sheldon, backing vocal, Terry Morrell.

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In taking on this assignment of thinking/writing about *and* in the syntagma Architecture *and* Philosophy, I took what seemed to be the logical first step of looking up the genealogy of the term *syntagma* in order to leverage questions and theories about how philosophy constitutes architecture and how architecture constitutes philosophy, since *syntagma* refers to both the “constitutive” and the “constitutional,” depending on its archaic or modern meaning.²

It would be easy enough to immediately note that architecture needs/uses ideas and philosophy knows something about ideas, *and* philosophy needs/uses structures and architecture knows something about structures. Good bedfellows! But I want to attest to a few obvious, yet certainly contestable, differences in how each of these disciplines establish reasoning and ordering systems that underlie these ideas and structures. Architecture’s reasoning is projective in its paradoxical allegiance to a design process that is, at first, open but gradually narrows in relation to determinative arrangements of materialized space. Philosophy’s reasoning is reflective and vigilant about the management of its arguments (which might qualify as a form of intellectual design) but rarely attempts to represent these arguments graphically or materially. The few cases where philosophy has used political platforms to further its voice have mostly been catastrophic. Which is to say, philosophy, unlike architecture, rarely runs the risk of showing, in a literal and raw sense, what it wishes to convey. This would, in fact, compromise its integrity. However, neither philosophy nor architecture escape ideologies or historical forces that bend their ordering systems to governing systems that are authoritative or traditional.

The constant pressure of limit conditions imposed upon “architectural thinking” – as Jacques Derrida would and would not have it – have always included not only built structures but also, from the beginning, theories of technicity that encourage essentialist and reductive ideas. During periods of empirical (often put forward as “practical”) governance of the discipline and practice of architecture, which are far more common than moments of experimentation, the possibilities of being openly aligned with philosophy are jeopardized. In these cases the *and* that holds philosophy and architecture together becomes more difficult to sustain.

I have written, on occasion, that there would be no architecture without philosophy because philosophy sets the stage for plausible theories

² Oxford English Dictionary, <https://www.oed.com> (accessed March 6, 2023, 10:00am).

and theories that guide the intellectual work of design.³ This might reverse the order of the terms proposed in this assignment to Philosophy *and* Architecture – architecture in the second place, as a receiver. Whether first or second, the relation between architecture *and* philosophy is, if it succeeds, first stitched together by already known and shared concepts – foundation, construction, and spatiality, for example – that are granted various forms of agency, both abstract and materialized. Derrida’s critiques of architecture’s dependence on foundational concepts, for example, opened a new door for architectural theory. Multiple attempts in historiographic work, inspired by these critiques, have used the expanded field of concepts of space and spatiality to cross boundaries between what architecture habitually seeks as the “strictly architectural” and philosophy, not to mention political, economic, technological and social domains. This is a rather crude confession, on behalf of architectural theorists, that the rendering of architectural nomenclature as analogies or homologies that afford consideration in these other domains has been a crucial part of building architectural theory. The main virtue of this expansion rests, I think, in the ingenuity of theorists to both include and transcend buildings (without letting them go) in order to articulate architecture’s complex constitutive relations to culture at large.

If we were to translate the “constitutive” into a document or declaration of governance, thus constitutionalizing it, a whole new kind of alliance between architecture *and* philosophy reveals itself. Constitutional ordering adds administrative costs, apparatuses, and laws to the infrastructure beneath the syntagma of Architecture *and* Philosophy. We would immediately find a commonality not in the content but in the necessity for implicit rules that determine what *counts* as architecture and/or what *counts* as philosophy. It might be here, also, that we would see in architecture what amounts to its litigation and management of metaphysical, psychological, ecological, biological, systems and the gaps and paradoxes that define them: Lacan’s ontological gaps, autopoietic paradoxes, the dilemmas of Canguilhem’s milieu, bio-modern technologies, various genealogies. But now it feels as if I am gaming the terms in the original question too freely, although the presence of governance, laws,

³ C. Ingraham, *Architecture’s Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 2023, p. 2. “Without philosophy, in a general sense, there is no theory, and vice versa. Without theory, also in a general sense, there is no architecture.”

and apparatuses in architecture's *and* philosophy's (lower case) operations are rich with possibilities.

It seems appropriate to dwell for a moment on the small pieces of connective tissue between words, of which there are many. *And*, *and/or*, *or*, etc. Conjunctions. In isolation, *and* can tell us nothing about the duration or importance of its connectivity. It does not let us know where to enter or what scale of inquiry we should pursue in our search for elements that support the assigned syntagma. The spacing between words might also be a small but significant factor. Apparently the separation of words in texts developed in western contexts in the 7th century A.D. to "aerate" the text. This would seem to give the conjunction *and* autonomy and a place to breathe, but it also gives it a job.⁴ It must point, and link, the two sides of the syntagma and thus form a relatively smooth and comfortable relation between architecture and philosophy.⁵ A big job for such a little word. If this syntagma had been governed by *or* – Architecture *or* Philosophy – the job would have been to place this relation in question. It would signal that a choice must be made by fostering something like a "take it or leave it" attitude. A very different set of problems would be posed. As for *and/or* – which prevaricates and places us in the uncertain and suspicious position of "who is to decide?" – the syntagma Architecture *and/or* Philosophy releases the tension that otherwise, rather naturally one might say, lies between these terms and leaves us in a speculative "why not both?" state of mind.

The question of how connective words work in language has been studied by numerous scholars throughout history. Much of this research has concerned itself with the pedagogy of explaining how and why conjunctions are central to the conveyance of knowledge and information. My remarks about these connective words has been quite short and somewhat whimsical. Although whimsy, surprisingly, is lurking in this assignment. Architecture *and* Philosophy. Capital A architecture and capital P philosophy. Two pillars of knowledge, in other words, each with its time-honored flourishes and methods of gesturing. The grandeur of an

⁴ P. Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997. Spacing of words in western contexts is related to how texts were read: aloud or silently; "the separation of words [...] originated in manuscripts copies by Irish scribes in the seventh and eighth centuries but spread to the European continent only in the late tenth century when scholars first attempted to master a newly recovered corpus of technical philosophical, and scientific classical texts." *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ See M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Pantheon, New York, 1970, p. xv.

alliance between these two complex fields of inquiry and practices is always exciting and, to some degree, familiar. Have we not been pursuing this alliance in a probative way for centuries? My question now, according, might be “Where do we go now if *and* has been naturalized into this syntagma?” At the same time, however, the hubris of the capitalized words in this syntagma somehow prompts us to find new evidence and justifications for their conjunctive relation.

In Achille Mbembe’s *Critique of Black Reason*, he makes an obvious, yet shocking, observation regarding the compulsion of capitalism in relation to the quotidian ordering systems that surround us: mathematics, buildings, perspectival representation, grids, horticultural and agricultural systems, pedagogical systems, city streets, property systems, transit, language, history, and so forth.⁶ These systems, Mbembe observes, which we normally treat as neutral systems that we inhabit and teach to our children, have been and still are crucial players in the commodification of peoples and the ontologizing of differences, racial and otherwise. Ordering, which is seminal to life itself, thus enters our discourse about architecture and philosophy, as it has before in different epochs. I mention Mbembe’s observation here to amend my question about what we should do now with a naturalized Philosophy *and* Architecture. Isn’t a syntagma, as “a chain of signs that together create meaning” (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* has it), itself a naturalizing apparatus? A far too general question to end with. But it suggests that we need to pass beyond the syntagma’s passive connectivity and pick up, instead, its creative intentions. Philosophy *and* Architecture has been syntagmatized, with the help of the *and*, to create something. That something might be something new. My impulse here was initially to resort to poststructural tactics by identifying well-known constitutive factors in each of these fields and unpacking the differences. But now I see that what this assignment might have wished to reveal were *new* meanings in the syntagma of “Architecture *and* Philosophy?” Since this syntagma was first thought, time has passed. Much has happened. How has this chain of creation changed? A much more interesting question that, alas, time will not allow me to address here. Fortunately others, having discerned this possibility earlier, will enlighten us.

⁶ A. Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2017.

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