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Essay
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"And" Anarchitectures

ABSTRACT: Architecture and Philosophy are so deeply entangled with each other that the "and" between them at once splits and rejoins a single common fabric. This enigmatic joint, and the mutual jealousies, clumsiness, and blindness it puts in motion, has a very long history. The interdependency it shapes made possible the emergence of both discourses in Ancient Greece. Architecture appeared as an exemplary theoretical art, yet already subordinated to the discourse of Philosophy that is covertly dependent on it. This essay explores the anarchitectural ecology that made both discourses possible, along with the implications for contemporary theory, and possible unexpected architectures.

KEYWORDS: *arkhitekton*, anarchitecture, joint, jealousy, contingency

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The word "and" is never simple, stable, or innocent. But how to look at its complexity, mobility, and transgressions in the seemingly collegial formulation "Architecture and Philosophy"? We cannot treat it either architecturally or philosophically without a hesitation, a lingering question that can never be resolved. After all, the most obvious operation of the word here is to mark Architecture as something different from Philosophy, literally spacing them apart, even as it binds them together. It simultaneously separates and joins, but also sequences. "Architecture and Philosophy" is not the same as "Philosophy and Architecture," or anything like it. The implication is a concern for the future of Architecture rather than Philosophy, for what happens when something is added to it. This trajectory is already written into the two terms with the usual association of Architecture with projection and Philosophy with reflection. In a simplistic but deeply resonant sense, Architecture is seen as projecting things forward and the question here is what happens to its throw with the addition of reflection. Neither term seems troubled by this formula.

But what is it to start from Architecture, to put Architecture first, or act as if it is already there? More precisely, what is it to do so when Philosophy cannot start itself without thinking about architects? What if Philosophy depends on the idea of the architect meditating on and through structure? Philosophy thereby continually constructs itself out of something seemingly outside and before it – as if only able to see itself in a mirror fashioned out of another material, something other because it is material precisely, and only able to be itself in such a mirroring, or that possibility. Likewise, the discipline of Architecture needs Philosophy in order to invent itself, subordinating itself to the reflecting it made possible. Neither simply precedes the other.

To speak of "Architecture and Philosophy" then is to speak of entanglements rather than an addition, or to rethink addition. Inasmuch as Philosophy is reflection on the ground of things, on that which allows things to stand, to be present, to be, then perhaps it is never concerned with anything other than the possibility of Architecture, or sees everything other in its terms. Yet the "and" also suggests that philosophers see architectures differently than architects, or simply see something different. The most obvious promise is to add their other way of thinking to enrich, refine, critique, extend, or clarify. Philosophy as some kind of gift to Architecture.

The sentence "Architecture and Philosophy" remains in this sense routinely philosophical, the very promise of Philosophy even. But this doesn't mean that its only proper reading is philosophical. On the

contrary, the "and" also invites, even demands, an other than philosophical reading. There is at least the call to read the sentence architecturally, to consider its surprisingly convoluted architecture, or even the possibility that the word Architecture always refers to a certain kind of convolution, albeit disguised, Architecture as the disguising of structural convolution. In at once spacing and binding, the "and" is essential to both yet exceeds them. Its capacity to stage a kind of collegial diplomacy takes advantage of a mobility and a geometry that cannot be tamed by either side. The "and" offers the promise of going beyond the conventional limits of both, to alternative modes of thought that are neither architectural nor philosophical in any conventional sense but might paradoxically lurk within each.

The sentence "Architecture and Philosophy" most obviously invokes two disciplines, two distinct departments in most universities, for example. One is usually seen to be a professional school, because directed towards engagement in the material-technical-political-economic world. The other seeing itself to be tied to very origin of the university around the 12th century by being seemingly disconnected from that material world as a scholarly mode of mediation and reflection with no fixed abode. These disciplines appear to be pushed apart by the most classical of chain of binaries: material-ideal, action-reflection, object-word, practical-theoretical, applied-pure, interest-disinterest, and so on. But the formula "Architecture and Philosophy" invites consideration of the internal complications of this chain, starting with the architecture congenital to the discipline of Philosophy and the philosophy congenital to the discipline of Architecture. That is, the architecture that makes Philosophy possible and the philosophy that makes Architecture possible, the hidden infrastructural ties that secretly cross any campus and might even allow Philosophy to survive there today when the inside of the university is a concentrated form of its outside rather than a theatrical detachment from it – a space defined more by worldly engagement than reflection.

In fact, the "and" in the middle actually comes first, preceding the Architecture-Philosophy binary it shapes. It could even be a kind of tool, slicing one multi-veined or woven material to stage a sense of distance between what are then thought to be distinct disciplines only to stich "them" back together. This surgical operation of cutting and joining is the defining skill of the *τέκτων*, the ancient Greek figure of the craftsperson skilled with hard materials like wood and stone that preceded the roughly 6th century BC invention of the figure of the *ἀρχιτέκτων,* the chief of the *τέκτονες*, that not by chance paralleled the invention of

so-called Western Philosophy. The defining attribute of the *ἀρχιτέκτων* for philosophers is theory. The architect is by definition a theorist, crafting theory in conceiving, constructing, and explaining work. Theory is invested in the work, produced during the work, and retroactively applied to the work. Newly articulate builders are entangled with articulate buildings in a vibrant ecology of theory that doesn't allow for a simple binary between theory and practice.

Plato's late dialogue *The Statesman*, a text on politics that is already concerned with the built environment inasmuch as its goal is the excellence of the city based on principles, immediately divides expert knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη)* into practical and theoretical. The building arts are the first example offered of practical knowledge necessarily embedded in the physical. The newer figure of the *ἀρχιτέκτων* is then identified with purely theoretical knowledge not necessarily embedded. The architect is a first and foremost a theorist:

> Stranger: Every architect (*ἀρχιτέκτων*), too, is a ruler of workmen, not a workman himself.
> Younger Socrates: Yes.
> Stranger: As supplying knowledge (*γνῶσιν*), not manual labor.
> Younger Socrates: True.
> Stranger: So he may fairly be said to participate in intellectual science (*γνωστικῆς ἐπιστήμης*).
> Younger Socrates: Certainly. (Pl. *Polit*. 259e–260a)

It makes no sense then to refer to a recent turn to theory by architects since theory is the very mark of the architect. We cannot even speak of an originary turn to theory in Architecture since Architecture is only itself in being theoretical, and the category was not yet invented when Plato was speaking. The canonic form of the rebuilt Parthenon completed around 70 years earlier, for example, which would become and remains the very exemplar of Classical Architecture, was strictly speaking not a work of Architecture. It was the supervised work for 15 years of its lowly paid official architects, Iktinos and Kallicrates, who were in turn supervised by the sculptor Phidias. Iktinos reinforced the idea of architect-as-theorist by co-writing a now lost treatise on the proportions of the building that influenced the codification of a discipline of architectural theorizing 400 years later. Yet the building could only be retroactively treated as Architecture by that discipline.

There can of course be turns to or away from specific theories or ways of theorizing, with the history of theory in the architectural discipline being a plural history of multiple theories in diverse interactions. The mutual fascination of architects and philosophers with the interdependencies of their disciplines in the 1980s did reorganize potentials for new kinds of thinking about architecture and new sensitivities to existing and historical architectural thinking. But even then, architectural turns to alternative modes of theory, turns that pose an ongoing challenge to disciplinary assumptions, are never simply turns outwards to Philosophy, or something recognizably philosophical. If anything, they are turns inwards to those repressed qualities in architectural discourse that might elude, confuse, offend, or disinterest philosophers, yet also mark and even organize their discipline.

Having straightforwardly opposed the *ἀρχιτέκτων* to the *τέκτων* as theory to practice, Plato's dialogue immediately complicated the binary. The architect has a specialized form of theoretical knowledge that doesn't need to be embedded in the physical and yet is embedded through the medium of those that build. The responsibility to coordinate a diversity of multiple skilled others in a way that maintains an overall objective requires a flexible relationship with what is learned in the multi-dimensionality and unpredictability of ongoing material, economic, and social transactions. The new figure of the architect had been invented to deal with the growing multiplicity and heterogeneity of elements in public buildings. It was a salaried civic appointment to give ongoing orders in the face of complexity and contingency. The ever-shifting complications could not be synthesized into a single order or fixed set of general principles. Yet the theoretical skill of the architect was to conceive a geometry and system of ornamentation that conveyed principle, order those carrying it out, and dynamically respond to the specificities of all contingencies in a way that sustained the coherent conception. The work of the architect, and the object it forms, is an active veiling of complications, incompatibilities, gaps, uncertainties, and instabilities. It is the model in Plato's dialogue for the political leadership that paradoxically is philosophically rigorous in its resistance to predetermined formulae and is finally understood as a form of weaving of heterogeneous elements into a singular shared fabric.

This sense of an interactional architectural ecology of theory, or more precisely, an anarchitectural ecology inasumuch as it makes the idea of architecture possible, was captured in the ten scrolls of the military

engineer and architect Vitruvius in the time of Augustus Ceasar that drew on Greek sources to establish the discipline of Architecture in a way that is still directly echoed in the syllabi of most schools of architecture today. Vitruvius constructed the figure of the architect as an intellectual positioned at the intersection of *ratiocinatio* (theory-reasoning) and *fabrica* (practice-craft) and traced the mutually interdependent co-production of knowledge before, during, and after construction, in conceiving, making, and explaining a building or city – but equally in attacking or defending them militarily.

The word *architectura* had only recently been used by Marcus Tullius Cicero in *De officiis* to name an art worthy of a higher social status because, like Medicine, it requires "a higher degree of intelligence" and confers "no small benefit to society" (Cic. *De off*. I, 151). Cicero had written in defense of a foundational "liberal arts" education, but implied a certain limit to the elevation of these two more arts, affording them a kind of in-between status. The text was contrasting the arts appropriate for a gentleman (*liberales*) to the vulgar ones (*sordidae*) that are not. Architecture and Medicine "are proper for those whose social position they become." It is as if Architecture elevates the architect above the vulgar arts (which have their own hierarchy) but is not fully proper to the gentleman. An upgrade then rather than a full promotion. A decade later, the extraordinarily prolific scholar Marcus Terentius Varro, another older contemporary of Vitruvius, went the crucial step further by adding Architecture and Medicine to the set of seven essential disciplines that Plato had specified for a properly philosophical education after ten years of primarily physical education. Each student in the Platonic scheme was understood to be on an upward journey from the material body to the immaterial soul. The figure of the philosopher was always embodied, but rigorously trained at great length to pass up through and beyond its own body, and all forms of body, to bodiless ideas. In his now lost encyclopedia *Disciplinarum libri IX*, Varro introduced the seemingly bodily art of Architecture into that core philosophical training. Architecture was not just a discipline, but an integral part of the disciplining that incubates rational thought.

The two seemingly more materially oriented newcomers would eventually be removed from the set of thinking arts that formed the core of "higher" learning. Yet the demotion was never as straightforward or complete as it seemed. The canonization of the resulting set of seven as the basis for centuries of higher education is credited to Martianus Capella,

whose early fifth-century AD *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (or *De septem disciplinis*) was the standard textbook of the liberal arts up until the 15th century. It presented them as seven bridesmaids at a wedding between Mercury, the immortal messenger of the gods personifying eloquence, and the "extremely learned" maiden Philology. Philology, who is made immortal by the gods during the ceremony, personifies learning, a form of continuous exhausting questioning that has already uncovered all celestial secrets and so is destined for immortality. Learning is a form of transit between material and immaterial that is not simply located within either. Even Mercury has tried to make himself more attractive to Philology by taking the seven disciplines "into his household" to educate himself. His wedding gift is to offer them to her as servants. Each gives an extended discourse on their subject at the celestial ceremony. The maidens Architecture (*architectonica*) and Medicine (*medicina*) have also been invited to the event and expect to speak but are symptomatically asked to remain silent. They "are concerned with mortal subjects and their skill lies in mundane matters". (Mart. Cap. *De nupt*. IX, 891). The invitation had acknowledged their claim to be part of the elevated and elevating world of learning but only to emphatically exclude them. They should not speak in the highest company of deities, even if it is expected that "they will be examined in detail later by the maiden herself." Architecture and Medicine will serve learning. They will be uplifting but not uplifted.

It is as if the material bodies of buildings and humans somehow contaminate or constrain the forms of knowledge devoted to them in a way that the philosopher's own body does not. The institutions of higher education were premised on this definition of their own lower limit. And the body of buildings was seen to be even more earthly than that of humans. Medicine would be admitted into some of the first universities in the 12th century while Architecture was excluded for another seven centuries – despite a sustained campaign to elevate it by reviving the Vitruvius argument.

This complication already organizes the text of Vitruvius and its belated yet astonishingly extended influence. He drew extensively on many of Varro's texts and refers to the book on architecture as one of his sources, without citing it directly. Architecture is described in terms of the interrelationships of different forms of knowledge. The first chapter of the first book of Vitruvius lists the moral qualities that Philosophy imparts to the architect. Philosophy is one of the many disciplines (*pluribus disciplinis*) that the architectural intellectual needs to be educated

in, and emulate in prescribing and describing buildings (Vitr. I, 1, 1). The architect needs to be "a diligent student of philosophy" (*philosophos diligenter audierit*) (I, 1, 3). The architect is defined as an explainer rather than a maker, or a maker of explanation. But the knowledge required to make things, and the knowledge gained through making, is equally crucial. Practice is itself a form of *meditatio* and building is seen to generate theory as much as demonstrate it. Vitruvius codified the still ongoing discipline in which Architecture is not a certain kind of thing but a way of thinking about and through things, a vibration between thinking about and thinking through.

Vitruvius formulates architectural intelligence as the ability to accommodate diverse and often incompatible forms of knowledge. His scrolls have the double, seemingly antithetical, task to promote architecture as a unique form of object more in tune with the immutable harmonies of the universe than anything found in the natural or human-made world, and at the same time to give the architect license to negotiate with all the contingent material, legal, political, meteorological, and personal forces in any project. In a kind of echo of Plato's argument, the sense of the ideal is preserved by real-time improvisation in the face of the contingent, even constructed in the bed of material contingency. Indeed, the double expertise in theory and practice that defines the architect, understood as two modes of intellectual reflection, ultimately treats theory as another material effect. Philosophical texts can even be one of the contingent materials for the architect, a way to improvise, invent, and sustain certain concepts.

This wider ecology of theory is alluring to philosophers as an environment in which Philosophy itself can be found or framed. Yet philosophers find it difficult not to patronize architects and architectural scholars, even when trying to warn themselves against doing so. Architecture is treated as a kind of colony, a source of invaluable material to extract, while disciplining-educating-restricting the local population. Philosophers are surely capable of unique insights about architecture as a mode of thinking but more often than not dispense crudities, confusions, simplifications, and blindness that is overlooked since the very idea of philosophers being unthoughtful about architecture has been preempted. Architects and architectural scholars on the other hand are routinely treated as pathological, emotional, ambitious, confused, and inherently compromised. It is as if the discipline of Philosophy cannot imagine, let alone face, its own compromises, jealousies, ambitions, blind-spots, and repressions – let alone the thought that Architecture acts as their own pathological trigger.

The clumsiness of architectural readings of Philosophy are mirrored by the clumsiness of philosophical readings of Architecture, yet only the architects are made to feel clumsy, to internalize that subordination and await reeducation or simply invite the master's voice into their narratives. For Vitruvius, the architect by definition cannot excel in any of the many other disciplines that are indispensable to Architecture yet cannot be "unskilled" in them either, needing at least a "moderate knowledge" of each to understand how their general principles impact architectural judgements. Even the expert knowledge that the architect needs of all the many crafts that contribute to a building is necessarily exceeded by each craftsperson's expertise. Philosophers don't grant themselves the same license to be inexpert in order to curate disciplinary hybridities. The traces of Architecture are to be found everywhere in Philosophy but the endless citations of philosophers in Architecture is not mirrored by citations of architects-architectural theorists in Philosophy. Philosophers are often hosted in Architecture conferences, lecture series, journals, reading lists, and schools, where they are highly appreciated – sometimes even taking permanent positions. Architects or architectural scholars rarely receive the same hospitality and the idea of an architect as a permanent professor in a Philosophy department is simply inconceivable, even in the unlikely event that an architectural scholar would wish such a thing.

The point here is not to imagine a world beyond this asymmetry, mutual clumsiness, confusions, and ancient jealousies. On the contrary, the question is how to learn and think from the psycho-pathological investments – the hidden precision and insight of systemic misunderstandings, and the advantages of different forms of blindness. The ability of certain objects to compel thought is not a product of the precision, clarity, or consistency of the theories used to conceive, construct, and convey them. Similarly, the rigor of Philosophy is not a product of the precision of its invocations of Architecture. On the contrary, philosophers are so dependent on a certain image of architecture that they never look at it. The buildings that keep being redrawn in philosophical arguments without realizing it don't leak, creak, sweat, vibrate, crack, disguise, obscure, repress, confuse, infect, unsettle, sooth, menace, hesitate, terrorize, arouse, or host trillions of micro-organisms that in turn host humans. Philosophy typically sees only an uncomplicated structure, the highly crafted effect of veiling complications, the very convolutions and uncertainties that philosophers are uniquely attuned to in other contexts. It as if Philosophy is dependent on the intellectual labor of architects to

absorb abject, destabilizing, or enigmatic conditions, then inattentive to both the unique form of that labor and what it encloses. If the main work of Architecture is to house certain species of enigma, then adding Philosophy to Architecture must dissect and undo that work, and thereby both disciplines.

After all, for the "and" to do its splitting-joining work it must also internally split-join each side of the Architecture-Philosophy divide. The "and" that constructs a sense of two interiors is already inside what it constructs, with all its complications and their generative capacity. The hidden complexities of adding one thing to another already structures the things being added. This is something like a structural principle, or even the very thought of structure that drives both Architecture "and" Philosophy, drives them into each other. After all, in even its least complicated conception, building is nothing more than a certain choreography of countless "ands," slicing and joining together what will be in retrospect thought as the elements of a building. The theory that renders this architectural presides over nothing other than "ands" multiplied and interwoven to form a fabric that represents stability, even if no "and" can ever be domesticated. For all the crafted illusion of immobility and singularity, no architecture is simply an object. Architecture is more a question than an answer. No simple line can be drawn between adding material elements to each other and adding theory to that assemblage, or extracting it. The question of "Architecture and Philosophy" is permanent but compelling only inasmuch as both are destabilized. To treat the "and" that organizes this formula as the anarchitectural possibility of multiple unexpected architectures is to think otherwise simply by finally letting the question be asked.

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