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EQUATING THE UNEQUAL: ARCHITECTURE AND PHILOSOPHY

ABSTRACT: This essay examines statements from the fields of architecture and philosophy concerning identity, difference, and change. Through close reading, etymological analysis, a hermeneutics of entanglement, and an investigation of the text-as-echo-chamber, initially parallel statements and restatements of architecture and philosophy (and architecture in philosophy and philosophy in architecture) “swerve.” Of special interest is the way both disciplines distinguish between (and conflate) the concepts of “difference” and “change,” as well as attempts to locate architecture’s origins in either change or the unchanging.

KEYWORDS: architecture, philosophy, change, theory, history

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[W]hen the atoms move straight down through the void by their own weight, they deflect a bit in space at a quite uncertain time and in uncertain places, just enough that you could say that their motion has changed. But if they were not in the habit of swerving [*clinamen*], they would all fall straight down through the depths of the void, like drops of rain, and no collision would occur, nor would any blow be produced among the atoms. In that case, nature would never have produced anything.¹

In the beginning was the change, barely perceptible (“a bit,” “just enough”), uncertain yet habitual, less fact than rumor, not “just enough that their motion *has* changed,” but “just enough that *you could say that* their motion has changed.” Change a matter of swerving but also of saying. The primordial order of the parallel. *Clinamen*, from *dino*, meaning, less to “collide” than “to bend, incline, or lean towards,” more nudge than collision.² “Habit:” “to be inclined towards.” The “habit of swerving” then an inclination towards inclination. The will to turbulence, and with it effect, event, history.

Parallels abound. Article 1.1.1 of the American Institute of Architects “General Conditions of the Contract for Construction” establishes a process of “modification” based upon the infamous “change order.”³ “Modification,” i.e. “a change made,” is in fact the first term defined in and by the Contract, preceding terms like: “The Work,” “The Project,” and even “The Drawings.”⁴ Duplicitous intent: order-changing and change-ordering. In the beginning was the change—a change preceding what it is a change of, or in, or to.

Parallels abound. Vitruvius, Lucretius’s contemporary, writing his own origin, of how “men born like wild animals” came to construct the first shelters. Vitruvius, Lucretian in his description of change’s primacy. “It was then,” he writes, “that some of them from these first groups began to make shelters of foliage, others to dig caves at the foot of mountains and yet others to build refuges of mud and branches in which to shelter

¹ Lucretius, “On the Nature of Things,” in B. Inwood, L. P. Gerson (eds.), *The Epicurus Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1994, pp. 65–66.

² C. T. Lewis, C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1879, s.v. “*dino*.”

³ The American Bar Association defines “change order” as an amendment to a construction contract that changes the contractor’s scope of work.

⁴ American Institute of Architects, AIA Document A201-2017: General Conditions of the Contract for Construction, 2017, p. 9.

in imitation of the nests of swallows.”⁵ In the beginning was variation, and the inclination towards variation, its only guide the animal life which “these first groups,” bird-brained, had perhaps yet to transcend. Aristotle: “imitation is natural to man [...] one of his advantages over the lower animals.”⁶ But what of man’s imitation *of* the “lower” animals: “Imitate:” “to counterfeit.”⁷ “Counterfeit:” “to feign.”⁸ Man: featherless biped.

“Naturally imitative and quick to learn,” but also “proud of their own inventions,” Vitruvius’s first men “observed each other’s shelters and incorporating the innovations of others [...] built better huts day by day [...] progressing from vague and imprecise ways of thinking to the ascertainable rules of modularity.”⁹ Desire (for can there as yet be a question of need?) gives change direction (the “better”) and technique (prideful invention, envious incorporation). The proto-Darwinian selection of variants, the importance of which, Darwin wrote, “consists in the great effect produced by the accumulation in one direction [...] of differences absolutely inappreciable.”¹⁰ Change, hinged upon the apprehension of inappreciable differences (“a bit,” “just enough”). The appreciable alone opens itself to the appraisal of selection. “Culture is the outcome of an effort of selection. Selection means discarding, pruning, cleansing.”¹¹ “Culture is [...] discarding, pruning, cleansing.” Darwinian “difference” vs. Lucretian “change.”¹² What relation must pertain between differences such *that you could say that* a change has occurred? Darwin could not say. “The amount of difference considered necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be defined.”¹³ “Varieties cannot be distinguished from species,”¹⁴ because “varieties are species in the process of formation.”¹⁵ At the

⁵ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Penguin Group, London, 2009, II, 1, 2, p. 38.

⁶ Aristotle, “Poetics,” in J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, 1448b1, p. 2318.

⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “imitate (v.),” <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1664294335>, (accessed March 2024).

⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “counterfeit (v.),” <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/7511014518>, (accessed March 2024).

⁹ Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, II, 1, 3; II, 1, 7, pp. 38, 40.

¹⁰ C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, P. F. Collier & Son, New York, 1909, p. 19.

¹¹ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007, pp. 183–184.

¹² Whereas Lucretius’s translators use the word “change” to translate “*clinamen*,” Darwin, in his more precise moments, avoids the perhaps hasty attribution of a “change” by employing the term “difference.”

¹³ C. Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, p. 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

origin of species lies the inclination towards inclination, not forms, but processes of formation. In the beginning was the change—a change preceding what it is a change of, or in, or to.

“The amount of difference considered necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be defined.” And yet, speciation occurs. *E pluribus unum*, “discarding, pruning, cleansing.” From the selection of variants (too-quickly called “innovations”) Vitruvius’s first men move to “rules of modularity.” “rules” rather than Rule—several, many, all-too many, a scandalous irreducibility. Have the modules modulated the various variants? Or has the *clinamen* produced its antithesis? *Anti-clinamen*, entropic, the inclination towards equilibrium, stasis, sameness, species. Amidst the atomic swerving, patterns dimly (“a bit,” “just enough”) “ascertained.” Constellatory, “progressing from vague and imprecise ways of thinking.” “The amount of difference *considered* necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be defined.” Darwin means: *since* the amount of difference considered necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be *ascertained*, *it must be defined*. It is a matter of saying.

“At a quite uncertain time and in uncertain places,” not forms, but processes of formation incline towards speciated *anti-clinamen*: Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, etc. “Culture is the outcome of an effort of selection.” “And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.”¹⁶ Perhaps only now does “difference” claim the status of “change.” To think the change is to “think the part of the change which is not changing.”¹⁷ Change, then, less a *kind* of difference or *relation-between* differences than a *negation* of difference. In difference, change ascertains an entity which undergoes, yet subsists through, the difference. It is a matter of saying, of distinguishing, of extinguishing processes of formation. Amidst the shelteric swerving, Orders dimly (“a bit,” “just enough”) ascertained. “If the thing changed, it is in some sense *the same thing which changed*. If it is not the case, we have only successive beings which are different.”¹⁸ “The amount of difference considered necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be [ascertained].”

Contra Vitruvius, Piranesi ascertains a Lucretian *clinamen* at the origin of the Orders. Not only does “no one ancient building [have] exactly

¹⁶ Genesis 2:19–20, King James Version.

¹⁷ A. Badiou, *The Subject of Change: Lessons from the European Graduate School*, Atropos Press, New York/Dresden, 2013, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Emphasis mine.

the same proportions as another,” but “[...] there is not a single column, intercolumniation, arch, or whatever that has the same dimensions as another arch, intercolumniation, or column in the same structure.”¹⁹ “Not a single [...] whatever [...] has the same [...] in the same.” “If the thing changed, it is in some sense *the same thing which changed*.” The same: differences feigning. “Every concept emerges through equating the unequal.”²⁰ Each “whatever” already several, many, all-too many, a scandalous irreducibility. It is a matter of appearance, of apprehension. “An order, whatever it may be, whether Tuscan or Doric or Ionic or Corinthian or Composite, for all the diversity of dimensions and ornaments, is *in appearance* no different from another order.”²¹ That is, no different in its being an ordered appearance of apparent order. It is a matter of appearance, “*per*,” through, “*capio*,” to capture, seize, understand.²² Like Lucretius’s void, Piranesi’s “whatever” offers neither resistance nor directive. René Magritte, writing to Michel Foucault: “things do not *have* resemblances [...] only thought resembles.”²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, writing to himself: “there are no durable ultimate units, no atoms, no monads [...] beings are only introduced by us.”²⁴ Paradox: the “being” of change. “And how could what becomes have being, how come into being, seeing that, if it came to be, it is not, nor is it, if at some time it is going to be?”²⁵ “We think the part of the change which is not changing.” “Presented with the idea of diversity [...] the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations.”²⁶ Species, elements, Orders, “whatever:” the unwarranted postulates of our inner *anti-clinamen*. Disavowed metaphysics. “The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”²⁷ “Presented with the idea of diversity [...] the imagination is apt to feign” an ordered appearance of apparent order. “The intellect, as a means for

¹⁹ G. B. Piranesi, *Opinions on Architecture: A Dialogue*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2002, p. 108.

²⁰ F. Nietzsche, quoted in G. C. Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” in J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2016, p. xli.

²¹ G. B. Piranesi, *Opinions on Architecture*, p. 108. Emphasis mine.

²² C. T. Lewis, C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “*per-cipio*.”

²³ R. Magritte, “Magritte to Foucault, May 23, 1966,” in M. Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1982, p. 57. Emphasis mine.

²⁴ F. Nietzsche, quoted in G. C. Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” p. xiv.

²⁵ Parmenides, *The Fragments of Parmenides*, Parmenides Publishing, Las Vegas, 2009, p. 70.

²⁶ D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 145.

²⁷ Hebrews 11:1, King James Version.

the preservation of the individual, unfolds its chief power in dissimulation.”²⁸ “These first groups began to make shelters [...] in imitation of the nests of swallows.” Survival of the feign-est.

Parallels abound. Raphael, writing to Pope Leo X, describes an epochal change. Whereas imperial Rome had possessed a “perfect and beautiful” architecture “built by the worthy ancients,” with the fall of the empire “Goths and other barbarians” introduce buildings, which, “completely lacking in any grace whatsoever, have no style and are different from those ancient and those modern.”²⁹ Paradise Lost. Forgetful of architecture’s graceless, styleless, inhuman origins, Raphael asserts: in the beginning was the change “perfect and beautiful.” “What do we understand by beauty? Complete perfection.”³⁰ Difference now construed as loss. “As for the buildings of the Goth period, they are [...] different.”³¹ “The amount of difference considered necessary to give to any two forms the rank of species cannot be [ascertained].” It is a matter of discarding, pruning, cleansing. Raphael suggests the remains of antiquity should be surveyed so as to recuperate their unchanging “style” and “theory.” Survey: technique of apprehension. Bodies exchanged for lines, parts exchanged for wholes. The drawing, infinitely reproducible, feigning eternity. “Every concept emerges through equating the unequal.” “In architecture, rule is the method of measuring ancient monuments and following the plans of ancient structures in modern buildings.”³² *Counter-clinamen*—a new, “modern” style, “very clever and very closely based on the style of the ancients.”³³ It is a matter of feigning. Forgetful of its turbulent origins, architecture inclines towards equilibrium. Indeed, its inclination towards equilibrium enables the recuperation of ancient “perfection.” Antiquity’s atoms fall straight down through the depths of history, like drops of rain, and no collision ever occurs. Spatially and temporally orthographic, the primordial order of the parallel. In this, architecture is, so to say, unparalleled. As Raphael explains, “despite the fact that literature, sculpture, painting and almost all the other arts had been for a long time in decline and deteriorating [...] nonetheless architecture

²⁸ Nietzsche, quoted in G. C. Spivak, “Translator’s Preface,” p. xl.

²⁹ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” in V. Hart, P. Hicks (eds.), *Palladio’s Rome: A Translation of Andrea Palladio’s Two Guidebooks to Rome*, Yale University Press, New Haven /London, 2009, p. 182.

³⁰ A. Loos, *Ornament and Crime: Selected Essays*, Ariadne Press, Riverside, 1998, p. 63.

³¹ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” p. 182.

³² G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 277.

³³ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” p. 182.

was respected and good theory was maintained, and building was executed *in the same style as before*.³⁴ “In the *same* style as before [...]” Modern = ancient. Now = then. Change, then, less a *kind* of difference or *relation-between* differences than a *negation* of difference. “Every concept emerges through equating the unequal.” “Presented with the idea of diversity [...] the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations.”

Piranesi, feigning, asks how the imitation of antiquity leads to anything other than “unendurable monotony [...] always exactly the same.”³⁵ Eternal recurrence of the same. “Architecture suffers in routine.”³⁶ Yet, in claiming “good theory” had been “maintained” in and through ancient building, Raphael does not deny difference. “Very frequently,” he writes, “edifices underwent rebuilding at the hands of the ancients themselves—for it is written that upon the very site where Nero’s Golden House once stood, Titus’s Baths, his house and amphitheater were subsequently built.”³⁷ The ancients, “those first groups,” cultivators of difference for difference’s sake (for not only were Nero and Titus of the same generation, but one house replaces another). And yet, unlike the barbaric Goths, the ancients express their inclination towards variation under the authority of the unchanging. The ascertained pattern, once dimly viewed, asserts its primacy. Antiquity: always one, “all of the same theory,” species of species. Titus’s Baths replace Nero’s Golden House, yet both “constructed in the *same* style and with the *same* theory as other buildings *even more ancient* than Nero’s time as well as those contemporary with his Golden House.”³⁸ Infinite regress. Time, “the number of change,” extinguished in the eternal now of “antiquity.” Necessarily so,

³⁴ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” p. 183. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ G. B. Piranesi, *Opinions on Architecture*. On p. 108, Didascalio asks Protopiro, “Now if, over the centuries, among all those countless practitioners, the experience of the totality of architecture to date has failed to produce what you are looking for, then how can we avoid concluding that, if everything you dislike were removed from architecture, we would be left with buildings of unendurable monotony?” On p. 107, “Didascalio: [...] You call me excessively severe, on the grounds that I am going too far by taking you back to huts in which people have no desire to live; but you would yourselves be condemned for monotonous buildings that people would detest just as much. Protopiro: Monotonous? Didascalio: Yes, monotonous, architecturally always exactly the same. As architects, you think yourselves extraordinary, but you would soon become utterly ordinary.”

³⁶ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, p. 147.

³⁷ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” p. 182.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 138. Emphasis mine.

“for time is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is the number of change, and change removes what is.”³⁹ “It would appear that time, envious of the glory of mortals [...] worked in concert with fate and the wicked, infidel barbarians who, in addition to time’s gouging file and poisonous bite, brought the fierce onslaught of fire and steel.”⁴⁰

Parallels abound. Plato, imitating Socrates imitating Diotima: “[The beautiful] always is and neither comes to be nor passes away [...] it is always one in form; and all the other beautiful things share in that, in such a way that when those others come to be or pass away, [beauty] does not become the least bit smaller or greater *nor suffer any change*.”⁴¹ Change, once sought, now suffered. We think the part of the change which cannot change. Beauty, “one in form,” always exactly the same, apprehendable, ascertainable. Beautiful *things*—different, various things, varying things, no one exactly the same as another. “Every concept emerges through equating the unequal.” The varying variety, the atoms’ habitual swerving an impediment to a mind bent on thinking the part of the change which is not changing. “It is quite possible to project whole forms in the mind without any recourse to the material.”⁴² “The architect, through the *ordonnance* of forms, realizes an order that is a pure creation of his mind [...] it is then that we experience beauty.”⁴³ “Realize:” to become aware of, to cause, to give form to. An ordered appearance of apparent order. “Presented with the idea of diversity [...] the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible.”

Parallels abound. Alberti: “Beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse.”⁴⁴ “Take care [...] that everything fits together so well, in terms of dignity and grace, that were you to add, change, or take away anything, it would be to the detriment of the whole.”⁴⁵ Architecture: the art of the unchangeable, inclining towards equilibrium. Avoidance of the “worse” replaces pursuit of the “better.” “I believe that beauty is some

³⁹ Aristotle, “Physics,” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995, 221b1, p. 374.

⁴⁰ “The Letter to Leo X by Raphael and Baldassare Castiglione (c. 1519),” p. 183.

⁴¹ Plato, “Symposium,” in J. M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1997, 211a–b, p. 493. Emphasis mine.

⁴² L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1991, p. 7.

⁴³ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture*, p. 85.

⁴⁴ L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, p. 156.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

inherent property, to be suffused all through the body of *that which may be called* beautiful.”⁴⁶ It is a matter of belief. Architecture, beautiful by definition, yet beauty unchanging, neither coming to be nor passing away, always one. Whatever changes is not beautiful, whatever is not beautiful is not architecture, whatever changes is not architecture. “And how could what becomes have being, how come into being, seeing that, if it came to be, it is not, nor is it, if at some time it is going to be?” “What was has always been. What is has always been. What will be has always been.”⁴⁷ Beauty is the part of the change that is not changing.

Parallels abound. Claude Perrault’s “positive” and “arbitrary” beauty, the former, essential, thus unchangeable; the latter, accidental, thus changeable.⁴⁸ Abbé Laugier ascertains the essence of architecture in the “primitive” hut, thus, the primitive hut is beautiful, thus, all buildings obliged to imitate the primitive hut.⁴⁹ It is a matter of feigning. “I believe that beauty is some *inherent property*, to be suffused all through the body of *that which may be called* beautiful.” Not “suffused all through the body of that which is beautiful,” but “suffused all through the body of *that which may be called* beautiful.” It remains a matter of saying. If beauty suffers no change, does *that which may be called* beautiful nevertheless swerve? What relation must pertain between the parts of a body such *that they may be called* beautiful? Alberti could say. “It is the task and aim of *concinnitas* to compose parts that are quite separate from each other by their nature, according to some precise rule, so that they correspond to one another in appearance.”⁵⁰ Correspondence theory of beauty. *Concinnitas*: “skillfully joined.”⁵¹ The parts, “quite separate,” co-responding, echoing one another’s reasoned and resonant harmony. Separate “by their nature,” yet it is nature who most skillfully joins. “Neither in the whole body nor in its parts does *concinnitas* flourish as much as it does in Nature herself [...] it molds the whole of Nature.”⁵² And nature as a Whole. Whole: the “always one” of beauty. The ordered appearance of apparent order. “The substance of things hoped for, the

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁷ L. Kahn, *What Will Be Has Always Been: The Words of Louis I. Kahn*, Rizzoli, New York, 1986, p. 243.

⁴⁸ C. Perrault, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns after the Method of the Ancients*, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 1993.

⁴⁹ M.-A. Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture*, Hennessey & Ingalls, Los Angeles, 1977.

⁵⁰ L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, p. 302.

⁵¹ C. T. Lewis, C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “*concinnitas*.”

⁵² L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, pp. 302–303.

evidence of things not seen.” “Form is that which deals with inseparable parts. If you take one thing away, you can’t have the whole.”⁵³ You can’t have the whole. The whole is the part of the change that is not changing. $1 - n = 0$ (where n is barely perceptible, a bit, just enough).

Parallels converge. Swerving towards equilibrium. “Observe the process by which time (the great author of such changes) converts a beautiful object [...]. First, by means of weather stains, partial incrustations, mosses, etc. It at the same time takes off from the uniformity of its surface, and of its colour; that is, gives it a degree of roughness, and variety of tint. Next, the various accidents of weather loosen the stones themselves; they tumble in irregular masses upon what was perhaps smooth turf or pavement, or nicely trimmed walks and shrubberies; now mixed and overgrown with wild plants and creepers, that crawl over, and shoot among the fallen ruins.”⁵⁴ “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”⁵⁵ Entropic *finale*, reasoned and resonant harmonies replaced by the stochastic hum of the always one. Atoms deflect at quite uncertain times and in uncertain places. Collisions occur. Blows are produced. But nature never produces anything. Change, changed utterly: a terrible beauty is born.

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⁵³ L. Kahn, *What Will Be Has Always Been*, p. 13.

⁵⁴ U. Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque*, Printed for J. Robson, London, 1796, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Genesis 3:19, King James Version.

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