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The End of Architecture

ABSTRACT: Architecture, as an autonomous, theory-led discipline, has ceased to exist. This paper posits the "end of architecture" not as rhetorical hyperbole but as a historically grounded assertion. The discipline has self-dissolved, eroding its intellectual and professional autonomy under the pressures of anti-capitalist politicisation and woke virtue signalling. Once defined by rigorous critical discourse, architectural innovation, and theoretical grounding, architecture has devolved into a fragmented practice now operating on the level of a mere craft rather than a science-based, academic discipline and profession. Academic institutions, biennials, and professional critiques have abandoned their roles as incubators of architectural thought, instead engaging with tangential sociopolitical issues that stray from architecture's core competency.

Although more pessimistic than optimistic for the immediate future, this paper posits the necessity of reasserting architecture's specific social function, of reclaiming agency, and re-establishing its critical discourse to foster innovation aligned with societal progress. It challenges architects, theorists, and educators to reject pluralistic complacency, reinvigorate constructive critique, and refocus the discipline on its core societal responsibility. Only through such recalibration can architecture emerge from its current dissolution and reclaim its role as a distinct and essential function system in the development process of contemporary society.

KEYWORDS: self-annihilation, theory-led discipline, mere building, function system, spatio-morphological framing, politicisation, woke take-over, discursive culture

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We are witnessing the end of architecture, the voluntary self-dissolution of architecture. The usurpation of the discipline by woke ideology is only one aspect of architecture's dissolution, not the full explanation. The self-destruction of architecture as academic discipline, as distinct discourse and as theory-led profession, is already a *fait accompli*. Architecture has ceased to exist. What does this even mean? What kind of statement is this? Is it mere polemic hyperbole? If not, is this meant to be an empirical statement of fact, or a statement stipulating a normative concept of architecture? Obviously, professional firms employing registered "architects" are still designing buildings. However, the resultant structures are no works of architecture, but mere buildings, because the design of these buildings is no longer informed and steered by a living, critical discourse.

A Pertinent Concept of Architecture

What underlies the thesis put forward here is neither a simple empirical concept of architecture—everything in ordinary parlance called architecture or everything designed by a registered architect—nor a normative stipulation like "we should only count as architecture works that meet a set of stipulated quality criteria." Instead, the thesis of the end of architecture is based on a historically grounded, rational reconstruction of a (functionally important) always already operative concept of architecture that will be elaborated upon below.

The term "rational reconstruction" was first put forward by the philosopher Rudolf Carnap, in the context of the philosophy of science. Carnap introduced the concept in his 1928 book *The Logical Construction of the World*, and defined the concept (in the 1967 edition) as follows:

> By rational reconstruction is here meant the searching out of new definitions for old concepts. The old concepts did not ordinarily originate by way of deliberate formulation, but in more or less unreflected and spontaneous development. The new definitions should be superior to the old in clarity and exactness, and, above all should fit into a systematic structure of concepts.[1]

The concept of architecture reconstructed here is based on the widespread intuitive distinction—as all concepts are distinctions—between

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[1] R. Carnap, *The Logical Construction of the World*, Routledge/Kegan Paul, London, 1967, p. v.

architecture and mere building. This distinction—works of architecture versus mere buildings—might be illustrated or exemplified by juxtaposing a prominent building successfully designed and built in accordance with an architectural competition as an exemplar on the side of architecture, with exemplars like a local garage, suburban supermarket, or run-of-the-mill terrace house on the side of mere building. The programme of rational reconstruction now asks for a set of explicit criteria that allow us to assign all buildings to these two categories, resulting in a partition that sufficiently matches our intuitive sorting.

The first aspect to make explicit is that architecture, as distinguished from mere building, is inherently connected to architectural discourse and theory. Theoretical treatises are essential components of the discipline and profession of architecture. Works of architecture therefore always link up with or relate to theories or manifestos of architecture. A second important criterion is that architecture, in contrast to mere building, is also marked by innovation. In the case of important works of architecture, these are original, pathbreaking innovations. For instance, Michelangelo's bold use of the so-called "colossal order"—first but very rarely introduced by Alberti—represents an advancement of architecture from the Renaissance (via Mannerism) to the Baroque. We must also include early adopters of such original innovations and all those who follow and spread an innovation with an awareness of the discourse of architecture. In all these cases, works of architecture are original creations put forward by architects claiming authorship. That all works of architecture are attributable to named (and educated) architects claiming authorship and responsibility is the third distinguishing feature of architecture versus mere building. Innovation questions tradition and requires an argument that transcends the mere concerns and competencies of building. Argument implies theory. In contrast, mere building—the vernacular—relies on tradition and well-proven solutions taken for granted, without authorship claims. The status quo does not require theory, nor a point of reference and responsibility. Beyond marking an important point of definition and distinction of architecture versus mere building, this reflection affords a functional explanation of the emergence of theory as a necessary ingredient of architecture as a discipline and profession with an inherent adaptive forward drive.

That only theoretically and historically informed building design constitutes architecture can be confirmed by every practicing architect who has undergone the rituals of architectural socialisation at university, where

history and theory were, until relatively recently, part of the architecture curriculum, and often enough feeding into design studio discussions.

A theoretically reflective practice can considerably accelerate its progress and its contribution to overall societal development. Innovation calls for theory to substitute for the assurances that were provided by adherence to tradition. Theory thus contributes to modernity's shift from conservation to progress.

Since innovation is a fundamental aspect of architecture, radical innovations that take root are most highly valued and mark out the respective works. Every great work of architecture offers a radical innovation. That is an empirical observation of the way the discipline evaluates itself. Many great architects, as valued within the discipline, are also important architectural theorists. This is another fact of communication. Virtually every architect who "counts" within the history of architecture was both an innovator *and* a theorist or writer. The most striking examples are Alberti and Le Corbusier, but we might also mention Palladio, Soane, Schinkel, Semper, Wagner, Wright, Gropius, as well as Koolhaas and Eisenman, among others. This immediate link between "great architecture" and significant theory is especially pronounced in the twentieth century: virtually all *modernists*, *post-modernists*, and *deconstructivists*, as well as the protagonists of *parametricism*, were theoretically articulate and in lively discursive exchange with each other, as well as with critics and academics. In recent years, however, practising architects are disconnected from architectural theory (critics and academics), as architectural theory has shifted its focus away from engaging with the work of leading architects.

Architecture versus mere building is constituted by virtue of architectural theory, innovation and original authorship claims. That is why architecture proper, as understood here, only begins with ancient Greek architecture, where both architect-authors (Ictinus, Callicrates, Hippodamus, fifth century BC) and theoretical treatises (the sources of Roman theorist Vitruvius) existed. With respect to ancient Rome, we might name Apollodorus of Damascus (second century AD), who is known for promoting innovations like the dome. After the demise of Rome, architecture disappeared and only returned in the Renaissance. The Romanesque is best understood as a *degenerate*, vernacular version of Roman architecture. The high point of achievement before the Renaissance—the Gothic cathedral—is indeed very impressive, but no complete designs prior to construction existed, and no individual authors can be named. In contrast, the names of Alberti, Bramante, Serlio, and Palladio are still

alive within the recursively reproduced memory of architecture's ongoing discourse. There are no equivalent figures from the Gothic epoch.

Most importantly, the essential ingredient that turns tradition-bound building into self-conscious architecture—a public, critical discourse that emphasizes creative innovation and demands arguments for those innovations—is missing in Gothic building practice. There is indeed a big difference between secret guild knowledge and the public circulation of treatises. It is this difference that motivates and justifies the thesis that architecture starts, or rather restarts, with the Italian Renaissance.

The differentiation of a dedicated theoretical strand within the discipline of architecture is one of the defining factors that contribute to the differentiation of architecture as an autonomous subsystem of societal communication. (The characterisation of architecture as function system within modern, functionally differentiated society will be elaborated in the following chapter). This tight link between the existence of architecture as a separate discipline/profession and architectural theory is also empirically evidenced by the historical coincidence of the emergence of architecture as a separate profession and the publication of dedicated architectural treatises. The theory of architectural autopoiesis[2] adds a theoretical explanation to this evidence—an explanation that construes the necessity of architectural theory on the basis of a functional exigency that acts as evolutionary attractor for the differentiation of this function system. This functional exigency is the need to accelerate the innovation of the built environment to an extent that contradicts the mode of evolution offered by the traditional system of guild-based handicraft organisation. In this context, theory replaces tradition. The necessity of architectural theory is thus asserted by the identification of its primary function. The primary function of architectural theory is to facilitate the rapid adaptation of architecture to an accelerated process of technological and socio-economic transformation since the advent of (early) capitalism. Theory must compensate for the lost certainty of tradition, where the appropriateness and functionality of buildings were guaranteed by the fact that new buildings consisted of nothing but the faithful repetition of long-evolved and surreptitiously corroborated models. The validity of traditional practice could be taken for granted and did not require a special

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[2] P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol.1: A New Framework for Architecture*, Wiley, London, 2010; P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*, *Vol.2: A New Agenda for Architecture*, Wiley, London, 2012.

communicative effort to solicit their acceptance. The moment when traditional practice falters is the moment when architecture takes off.

Architecture is a discourse that is geared towards permanent innovation, keeping up with and promoting a dynamic society. The societal need for a permanently updated built environment—inevitably given in a society (since the advent of modernity) that expands and transforms relatively rapidly—is first the evolutionary attractor for architecture's crystallisation (as a theory-led innovation engine for the built environment) and then the selector for architecture's further historical evolution. Thus, the concept of architecture reconstructed here identifies *innovation* as a key criterion, alongside architectural theory explaining the benefits of the innovation, and alongside authorship taking responsibility for the innovative work. However, tragically, innovation at the frontier of our fast-evolving technological civilisation is no longer something that engages the "architectural" discourse in universities, exhibitions, conferences, and magazines. Here, topics like climate change, racism, Eurocentrism, decolonisation, degrowth, etc., abound. These are topics that, if at all, relate only negatively to contemporary architecture. To illustrate: the headline of a CNN article about the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale was accurate: "Racism, activism and climate crisis are on the agenda at the Venice Architecture Biennale."[3]

Architecture's Societal Function

Above, we have focused on the distinction between architecture and mere building. This makes sense in the context of architecture's demise as understood here. However, both building and architecture address a fundamental societal function: the necessary spatial ordering of societal interaction processes. The problem is that under contemporary conditions of societal versatility, complexity, and dynamism, only an academically based, discursively empowered profession, developed via theory-guided research and experimentation, can fulfil, adapt, and progress this societal function of the built environment. When architecture "degenerates" back to a state of mere craft or tradition-bound building, the societal function of the built environment can no longer be fulfilled. Consequently, overall societal progress is thereby slowed down and stunted.

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[3] M. Cerini, "Racism, Activism and Climate Crisis Are on the Agenda at the Venice Architecture Biennale," https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/30/style/venice-architectural-biennale-africa/index.html, (accessed 20 December 2024).

Here is the author's definition of architecture's societal function as first provided in *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*[4]: "All social communication requires institutions. All institutions require architectural frames. The societal function of architecture is to order/adapt society via the continuous provision and innovation of the built environment as a system of frames."

There is no human community without an artificial built environment. It is the built environment—together with all artefacts—that provides cultural evolution with the cross-generational, material substrate it needs and by means of which an advantageous social order can persist and grow. In this respect, it is comparable to the DNA of biological evolution. Human settlements form and accumulate ever larger and more differentiated spatio-material structures as the skeleton for social structures, as it were, that without this substrate would not have managed to attain such a scale, which is indeed unnatural for primates. Moreover, the level of cooperation so important for human productive abilities would not otherwise have emerged, been replicated and advanced. What applies to the beginning of cultural evolution still applies today in relation to the developmental tasks currently facing us. Architecture's fundamental original achievement is not the oft-invoked protection from the elements but a structure-forming achievement: the achievement of order. The built environment organises social processes of interaction and plays a crucial role in the establishment and stabilisation of social order. It also involves ownership, spatial exclusion, and demarcation by means of physical barriers with corresponding rights of access. Yet above all, it involves the spatial distribution and functional configuration of types of interaction or communicative situations, by means of semiological codes, whereby relative spatial positioning is also a means of coding. The built environment structures social situations and provides orientation for the participants in the social processes thus organised, who then find their place of their own accord. It supports and communicates the social structure which is always a configured network of cooperation. While the social structure as a whole can hardly be made visible any longer, each of the local social structures, offerings, and options for communication can still be articulated and made transparent (although this requires a special, dedicated design effort). In short, spaces potentially communicate what is on offer and who can take part.

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[4] P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol. 1*, p. 364.

The author's theory of architecture—the theory of architectural autopoiesis—is embedded in the wider theoretical edifice of Niklas Luhmann's social system theory[5] and theory of society[6]. That any comprehensive, self-reflective theory of architecture should make its underlying premises explicit and therefore must refer to a theory of society should, once stated, be uncontroversial. This has rarely been done, but Alberti referenced explicit conceptions of the good society in his reflections on city form and architecture. Some of the theorists of modernism—for instance, the authors of the ABC group (Schmidt, Stam, El Lissitzky, Meyer)—were firmly and explicitly based on a conception of society in line with Marx's theory of scientific socialism, augmented by an account of recent technological and socio-economic developments. The author's conception builds on Luhmann's theory of modern, functionally differentiated society, augmented by the insights from the post-Fordism debate[7] and integrating more current conceptions of the knowledge economy and network society.

That some coherent account of the technological, economic, and sociological conditions and developmental dynamics of society must underlie any pertinent formulation of architecture's societal task should be self-evident. The author's analysis of contemporary society, in the terms indicated above and further explicated below, should not be controversial. The author's libertarian political convictions are not presupposed here. What is presupposed is that architecture—as architecture versus mere building or craft—should be based on theoretical guidance for its design tasks, based on a broad theory of society that takes account of historically recent conditions, such as the momentous technological transformations (internet, computation, robotics, AI), resultant socio-economic transformations (from Fordism to post-Fordism), and the reality of historically recent neo-liberal privatisation dynamics. All these factors are spurring a further urbanisation drive and a new urban concentration dynamic to which architecture and urban design must congenially respond.

What is, in contrast, not conducive to the ongoing vitality of architecture as an academic field and theory-led professional practice, is the purely negative stance towards these recent and ongoing historical developments. This negative stance, however, has become increasingly

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[5] N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995.
[6] N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Vol. 1*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2012; N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Vol. 2*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2013.
[7] A. Amin (ed.), *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.

prevalent not only in academic circles and architecture-related cultural institutions but also among architectural critics and, indeed, practising architects. OMA's Reinier de Graaf expressed this stance in an article published in *Architectural Review* entitled "Architecture is Now a Tool of Capital, Complicit in a Purpose Antithetical to Its Social Mission"[8] . Taken to its logical conclusion, the irreconcilable, anti-capitalist stance that judges all current urban development activities to be politically and morally compromised—and all architects participating as "sell-outs"—is a key factor in the demise of architecture, as it serves to cut the constructive link between architectural theory and architectural practice, leaving the latter intellectually adrift.

Within modern society, it is functional differentiation that becomes the pervasive and predominant mode of societal differentiation (in contrast to stratification as the formerly dominant mode of societal differentiation). The most striking manifestation of this general tendency is the emergence of the great "function systems" as the major subsystems of modern society: the economy, the political system, the legal system, science, the education system, and the mass media are distinct, autonomous systems of communication that have differentiated according to the indispensable societal functions they perform (emancipated from their former fusion and subjection within a top-down stratified order). An important insight of Luhmann is that these function systems operate via self-referential communicative closure[9], i.e., they evolve highly specialised discourses (systems of communication), each with its own categories, lead distinctions and evaluative codes. These communication structures are idiosyncratic to each function system which in turn implies a discursive incommensurability. These are separate discourses and professions. They are "autonomous" not in the sense of being insulated or unresponsive but in the sense that each is discursively self-steering its adaptation. The subsystems co-evolve, with each observing and adapting to all the others. There is no hierarchical command-and-control structure that could integrate these subsystems. There is no unified control centre in functionally differentiated society. The political system is not such an omnipotent control centre but just one of many autonomous function systems. The attempt to politically control the sciences, the capitalist economy, the justice system, etc., would just spell the destruction of

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[8] R. de Graaf, *architect, verb.: The New Language of Building*, Verso, London, 2023.
[9] N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 9.

science, capitalism, and justice. The totalitarian attempts by figures like Hitler and Stalin accomplished precisely this annihilation. The same logic of "control equals annihilation" applies to architecture. Both Hitler and Stalin did indeed annihilate international modernism—the discourse- and theory-led discipline/profession of architecture of this time—within their territory.

The premise of the author's *Autopoiesis of Architecture*[10] is that architecture is one of the great function systems of modern, functionally differentiated world society: a function system with its own exclusive and universal responsibility for an important societal function that demands independent treatment and promotion by an autopoietic communication system specifically differentiated to focus on this function. The differentiation of a function system, i.e., a specialised discourse and theory-guided professional practice, made functional sense under conditions of accelerated societal development and became part and parcel of this transformative development.

The advent of modernity, involving the spreading of capitalism with its unique dynamism, as identified by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*[11], and the development of science manifesting an equally restless dynamism—first in parallel with and then in mutually spurning interaction with capitalism—implied an acceleration of societal progress and prosperity. All function systems—not only architecture but also the political system, legal system, economic system, and the system of the sciences—began to be accompanied and spurned on by what Luhmann terms "reflection theories"[12], that is, guiding treatises and, indeed, whole critical, theoretical literatures.

A first hint that architecture addresses an indispensable function is the fact that there is no human society without a built environment, just as there is no human society without political institutions, law, an economic system, a system of socialisation, or a knowledge base. As is the case with all the other autopoietic function systems of modern society, the societal function of architecture, in the sense of addressing an underlying reference problem, is much older than the differentiated function system itself, which only emerged as differentiated, autopoietic system

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[10]   P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol. 1*; P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol. 2*.
[11]   K. Marx, F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Merlin Press, Rendlesham, UK, 1998, originally published in 1848, p. 4.
[12]   N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 457.

within the context of modernity. All function systems solve perennial exigencies in new, advanced ways, within the new, increasingly complex context of modern society.

In relation to architecture, we are therefore prompted to ask: What is the societal function of architecture? What is the *raison d'être* of architecture's origin and continuing existence as an autopoietic subsystem of society? The answer is that architecture's unique function is the provision of spaces that *frame* social communication. The societal function of architecture is thus to order (and re-order) society via the continuous provision and innovation of the built environment as a system of spatial frames.

Spatial framing is a necessary precondition of all social communicative interactions and collaborations. The built environment, as a spatial sorting system, distributes and relates activities so that they can concatenate, and it configures the participants in each activity so as to facilitate the purposes of the interactions. The framing system also allows the participants to first of all find one another, to recognise the specific social situation, and recognise each other in their roles. Framing is thus itself a form of communication. It is an important type of communication, as it determines a general set of constraining premises for all further communications that take place within the communicated frame. The author has adopted and adapted the concept of framing/frames from the sociologist Erving Goffman's *Frame Analysis*[13].

The implementation of this societal function demands two tasks that must be distinguished and correlated in the design effort: organisation and articulation. The concept of *order* proposed here—encompassing both social and architectural order—denotes the result of the combined effort of organisation and articulation. Architectural order—symbiotic with social order—requires *both* spatial organisation *and* morphological articulation. While organisation establishes objective spatial relations by means of distancing (proximity relations) as well as by means of physically separating and connecting areas of space, articulation operates via the involvement of the user's perception and comprehension of their designed environment. Articulation reflects the phenomenological and the semiological dimensions of architecture. Thus, to the extent that architecture operates through articulation (rather than mere organisation), it

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[13] E. Goffman, *Frame Analysis: A Essay on the Organisation of Experience*, Harper & Row, New York, 1974.

also relies on engendering an effective semiosis within the built environment. It is one of the fundamental claims of the theory of architectural autopoiesis that the semiological dimension of architecture is of central importance to architecture's capacity to successfully discharge its unique societal function.

Inasmuch as architecture is inhabited by culturally socialised subjects, the ordering effects of architecture rely on effective signification. The effective social utilisation of complex institutional spaces cannot be achieved purely by means of the physical channelling of human bodies. The effectiveness of the spatial order relies upon the active orientation of the subjects, on the basis of a "reading" of the territory. This, in turn, requires articulation over and above physical organisation. Current forms of differentiated office landscapes may serve as an example: The traditional physical demarcation of territory by means of walls is replaced by the subtle coding of zones and the articulation of legible thresholds. This means that the importance of the semiotic dimension of architecture increases.

To grasp the problem of communication and interaction on a deeper level, one might go to Talcott Parsons and his attempt to formulate a general theory of action. When Parsons theorises interaction—i.e., when the object towards which an actor orients their action is another actor—a fundamental theoretical problem is encountered, a "problem" that is nearly always already solved in everyday life. Parsons theorised the underlying problematic under the chapter heading "Interaction and the Complementarity of Expectations"[14]. Parsons describes the basic constellation of interaction between ego and alter—the actors that are oriented to each other—as follows:

> There is a *double contingency* inherent in interaction. On the one hand, ego's gratifications are contingent on his selection among available alternatives. But in turn, alter's reaction will be contingent on ego's selection and will result from a complementary selection on alter's part. Because of this double contingency, communication [...] could not exist without [...] stability of meaning which can only be assured by 'conventions' observed by both parties.[15]

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[14] T. Parsons, *Toward a General Theory of Action*, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1953, p. 14.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Parsons concludes that double contingency requires the normative orientation of action and poses the norms of a shared symbolic system as the means by which the problem of double contingency in interaction is solved. Parsons elaborates:

> A shared symbolic system is a system of "ways of orienting" plus those "external symbols" which control these ways of orienting, the system being so geared into the action systems of both ego and alter that the external symbols bring forth the same complementary pattern of orientation in both of them. Such a system, with its mutuality of normative orientation, is logically the most elementary form of culture.[16]

The theory of architectural autopoiesis proposes that architecture is a fundamental and indispensable part of such culture, and, in particular, that architecture operates and contributes to the coordination of "ways of orienting" as part of what Parsons refers to as "external symbols." The designed built environment thus acts as an anchor or frame that facilitates determination, that is, the definition of the situation, the termination of the indeterminacy and volatility implied in the inherent double contingency of every encounter. Over and above his identification of the problematic of double contingency, it is Parsons' reference to "shared symbolic systems" that makes his work relevant to the attainment of a theoretical formula for architecture's societal function. Luhmann picked up this notion of double contingency and made it a central problematic in his social systems theory[17]. The formula for architecture's societal function proposed in *The Autopoiesis of Architecture*[18] therefore posits architectural framing as a key contribution to solving the problem of double contingency by predefining the social situation.

Above it was stated that the core architectural task of framing communicative interactions can be broken down into two related sub-tasks: namely, spatial organisation (spatiology) and morphological articulation. Articulation, in turn, can be broken down into the sub-tasks of phenomenological articulation and semiological articulation. In each of these three dimensions—spatiology, phenomenology, and semiology— there has been some research-based upgrading of the discipline's and

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[16] *Ibid*.
[17] N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, p. 103.
[18] P. Schumacher, *The Autopoiesis of Architecture, Vol. 1*.

profession's competency. The upgrades in terms of the organisational project started with the work of Christopher Alexander and were pushed forward with big strides by Bill Hillier with his 'space syntax' as configurational science, operationalised with computational analytical tools. The phenomenological project had been advanced by Kevin Lynch, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Kenneth Frampton, Colin Rowe, Peter Eisenman, and Jeff Kipnis. The semiological project has been advanced by Charles Jencks, George Baird, Geoffrey Broadbent, Umberto Eco, Mario Gandelsonas, and Peter Eisenman, among others.

All these efforts to advance the discipline's competency have been left behind for many years. Not even space syntax, the most straightforward and most developed of these competencies, has been spreading, nor has it entered the architectural university curriculum. Indeed, the absence of any shared curriculum within architectural education is one of the symptoms and factors of architecture's dissolution. Only the author has picked up these three discourses (spatiology, phenomenology, semiology), updating, integrating, and operationalising them in the context of a cumulatively advancing parametricism (tectonism), for instance, via the research project of agent-based parametric semiology[19]. However, these efforts take place in splendid isolation. The author is speaking into the void left behind by the disappearance of the discipline.

Architectural Semiology Operationalised

Architecture's social functionality includes its communicative capacity. The built environment orders social processes through its pattern of spatial distinctions and connections that in turn facilitate a desired pattern of social events. The functioning of the desired social interaction scenarios depends on the participants' successful orientation and navigation within the designed environment. The built environment, with its complex matrix of territorial distinctions, is a navigable, information-rich interface of communication. To order and articulate this interface is the core competency of architecture. This core competency accounts for users as sentient, socialised actors who use the built environment as an orienting matrix and a set of instructions within which myriads of nuanced social protocols are inscribed.

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[19] P. Schumacher, "Advancing Social Functionality via Agent Based Parametric Semiology," in H. Castle, P. Schumacher (eds.), *AD Parametricism 2.0: Rethinking Architecture's Agenda for the 21st Century*, Academy Press, London, 2016, pp. 108–113.

All design is communication. Before a specific interaction event can commence, relevant participants must find each other, gather, and configure into a constellation germane to the desired interaction scenario. Their respective expectations, moods, and modes of behaviour must be mutually complementary—they must share a common definition of the situation. It is thus the spatially predefined situation that brings all actors into a conducive position, with their respective complementary social roles. The built environment thus delivers a necessary precondition of determinate social interaction. For this to succeed, the built environment must be legible. The participant can then respond to the spatial communication broadcasted by the designed space, e.g., by entering a space and joining the accommodated social situation. As a communicative frame, a designed space is itself a communication that provides the premise for all communications taking place within its boundaries.

The designed spaces deliver the necessary predefinition of the respectively designated social situation, thereby reducing the otherwise unmanageable excess of action possibilities that exist in our complex contemporary societies. They "frame" social interaction. The organisation and articulation of these framing spatial communications is architecture's core competency. The social meaning of a space can usually be inferred from its location, shape and stylistic markers. The research programme of architectural semiology aims to analyse the active semiological codes that already operate within the built environment via spontaneous semiosis. There is also a design ambition to upgrade the communicative power of the built environment, project by project, through the design of information-rich systems of signification that aid navigation via wayfinding systems and facilitate interaction through the differentiation and nuanced spatio-visual characterisation of interaction offerings.

The success of such an endeavour depends on user uptake. This can be expected in large, complex integrated social environments, such as a university or a creative industry corporate campus, where life is communication-intensive, orientation is non-trivial, and where inter-awareness, knowledge transfer, and ramifying collaborations put a premium on social participation. There is thus motivation to pay attention to the clues and learn the spatio-visual language. The question arises: how might the communicative performance of large, complex designed environments be evaluated? The research project "Agent-based Parametric Semiology"

builds, investigates, and applies a new form of occupancy simulation as an answer to this question.

While every architect has an intuitive grasp of the normative interaction protocols that attach to the various designated areas that the design brief indicates and usually knows enough about the expected and desired user occupancy patterns, such intuitions cannot provide secure guidance on the relative social performance of alternative designs for large, complex environments. Intuition must here be substituted by occupancy simulations that can process thousands of agents interacting across an environment of hundreds of spaces. When quantitative comparisons and optimisation are aimed at, intuition fails, already in much smaller, simpler settings.

The simulation methodology developed under the research agenda "Agent-based Parametric Semiology" is conceived as a generalisation and corresponding upgrade of the crowd simulations currently offered by traffic and engineering consultants concerned with evacuation or circulation. These crowd modellers treat users as physical bodies and simulate crowds like a physical fluid. In contrast, the architectural design considerations of agent-based parametric semiology are concerned with socialised actors who orient and interact within a semantically differentiated environment.

These research and upgrading efforts are pointed out here *not* to claim that architecture comes to an end because these particular avenues of theory-led, research-based capacity development are not being pursued. These particular research efforts are meant to exemplify what this essay means by theory-led adaptive upgrading of the discipline. Another example could be the upgrading efforts spearheaded by the paradigm/style/movement the author named "tectonism," namely the full architectural, spatio-morphological utilisation of recent, computationally empowered advances in engineering science and fabrication/construction technologies.

We witness the end of architecture not because the author's upgrading efforts are not being picked up but because no capacity development whatsoever, with respect to architecture's core competency and societal function, is being pursued or adopted.

The engagement with carbon neutrality, biodiversity, social justice, and inclusion at the margins of society are no substitute for advancing architecture's contribution at the frontier of contemporary civilisation's development. Rather, the usurpation of architecture's internal

and external communication space and air-time by these tangential topics—which only concern the costs but not the benefits of urban and architectural development—is a big part of the problem, a major factor in architecture's disappearance, and certainly no remedy. Even an agenda like wellbeing, which seems to fit into architecture's societal function, in fact offers just another evasion. Is it, as Reinier de Graaf argues in his recent book *architect, verb.: The New Language of Building*,[20] part and parcel of the recently proliferating arsenal of hypocritical, self-alienating but obligatory phrases he calls "profspeak"? De Graaf coined the term "profspeak" in allusion to Orwell's notion of "newspeak," implying vague, euphemistic phrases that sound benign and competent but gloss over anything potentially controversial or difficult. Talking about wellbeing fits this bill and does indeed allow architects to communicate safely with their audience, in ways that allow them to evade that task of innovating within the key dimensions of architecture's societal function (spatiology, phenomenology, semiology), while also allowing them to avoid exposing their actual searching ideas and half-articulate ambitions.

In the Orwellian era of architects' "Profspeak," an arsenal of conveniently indisputable do-good agendas, like sustainability, community engagement, inclusion, liveability and human-centric placemaking, swamps architectural discourse. They sanitise and narrow the discourse by crowding out all difficult and controversial questions. Reinier de Graaf is right in his scathing critique of Profspeak. It binds precious attention unproductively and thereby contributes to the end of architecture.

While academics, educators, and critics altogether turn away from contemporary architecture, contemporary architects trivialise their work by means of the bland, routine euphemisms of Profspeak. The result is the degradation of the discipline of architecture to the status of a craft or vernacular, producing mere buildings, but no works of architecture.

The Politicisation of Architecture from Within

Political and moral issues are increasingly being drawn into our debates at architectural conferences, schools, and biennials. Political and moral issues are also starting to dominate architectural criticism as well as the awarding of architecture prizes. This is problematic, as it threatens to swamp our discourse, overburden our specific competency, and distract

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[20] R. de Graaf, *architect, verb.: The New Language of Building*.

us from our genuine, specific societal responsibility within the societal division of labour.

Politicisation cannot always be avoided, and is, indeed, not always unproductive. Architecture has been politicised a number of times in the last 100 years. The most prominent examples are the early 1920s and the late 1960s. These were revolutionary periods when all aspects of societal life had been politicised. Politicisation was very productive in 1920s and (to a much lesser extent) also in the revolutionary 1960s. Although a lot of energy and inventiveness was spawned in architecture in the 1960s, lasting innovations were not achieved. The revolution failed; it was a historical dead end. The clearest indication that this revolution and dream of a proletarian world revolution were misguided was its infatuation with Mao's disastrous "Cultural Revolution." Although some of the sixties' cultural transformations were progressive and lasting, politically, the project failed. Architecturally, it failed too, as became clear soon enough in the 1970s, as can be gleaned from Reyner Banham's ironic 1976 book title *Megastructures: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*. The real, relevant, productive, and lasting revolution or paradigm shift in[21] architecture happened during the 1980s and 1990s, starting with postmodernism, as the first intuitive attempt to respond to the post-Fordist socio-economic restructuring. This was reinforced by the decisive political reset and victory of neoliberalism in Britain in 1979 (Thatcher) and the in USA in 1980 (Reagan). The initial postmodernist gropings were radicalized by deconstructivism. Both postmodernism and deconstructivism were short-lived, merely transitional styles, paving the way for parametricism (since the mid-1990s) as a sustained architectural answer to post-Fordist network society and thus as viable candidate to become the epochal style for the twenty-first century.

A more recent (wholly counter-productive) wave of politicisation swept through architecture in the years following the 2008 financial crash. While no new real or positive socio-economic/political transformation of society took place, the politicisation of our discipline has festered ever since, with destructive rather than constructive effects.

In 2012, the author published Volume 2 of *The Autopoiesis of Architecture* and, for the first time, put forward the following thesis on the relationship between architecture and politics:

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[21] R. Banham, *Megastructures: Urban Futures of the Recent Past*, Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 1976.

To respond to hegemonic political trends is a vital capacity of architecture. It has no capacity to resolve political controversy. Political debate within architecture overburdens the discipline. The autopoiesis of architecture consumes itself in the attempt to substitute itself for the political system.[22]

According to Luhmann's theory of modern, functionally differentiated society (adopted and extended here), the relationship between architecture and politics is the relationship between two autonomous, self-referentially enclosed systems of communication. Both politics, understood as the system of political communications, and architecture, understood as the system of architectural communications, are functionally specialised social systems. They both belong to the group of the great function systems of society. Each is differentiated on the basis of taking exclusive responsibility for a distinct, necessary societal function. The societal function of the political system is the ordering of social communication via the provision of collectively binding decisions. Architecture's societal function is the ordering of social communication via the provision of spatial frames.[23]

The thesis of autopoietic, self-referentially enclosed systems of communication entails the recognition of a fundamental incommensurability between the different societal function systems. Each function system sustains its own unique discourse on the basis of its own specialised categories, questions, and types of arguments, each treating all the other function systems (economy, legal system, etc.) as a constraining environment rather than as a contribution to a single, unified discourse.

The widespread conception of architecture as a site of political activism must be repudiated. Architecture is *not* inherently political. The slogan "everything is political" was born and spread in the late sixties during a general revolutionary period. In 1968, politics was no longer contained within the boundaries of the institutionalized political system. Generally, during a revolutionary period, all aspects of social life do indeed become political. Nearly everybody becomes involved in a multifaceted political discourse and struggle that questions all institutions, communication

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[22] N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society, Vol. 1*, p. 448.
[23] This is the author's, not Luhmann's thesis. Luhmann did not recognise that architecture—together with all other design disciplines—constitutes an independent societal function system. He had not given architecture/design much thought and had falsely subsumed it within the art system.

structures, and modes of interaction. However, revolutionary periods are exceptional ones and cannot continue for very long. They subside or escalate into a full-blown revolution. In any event, society must eventually move back to a situation where politics is contained within a separate political system that works through some but not all aspects of social life. The revolutionary period of the late sixties peaked in 1968 and receded in the following years. However, the slogan "everything is political" continued to circulate in intellectual circles that found it difficult to accept that the intoxicating ferment of the revolutionary situation had, in fact, vanished. (Revolutionary periods are the intellectuals' great moments of exceptional influence and power.) The slogan lives on but runs idle without any real meaning within architecture or anywhere else in society.

The political radicalism of the late 1960s shook up all aspects of modern society, including architecture. Since then, however, no further exciting and plausible left political projects have emerged. Yet, ever since, the echoes of this shockwave return to inspire, haunt, and embarrass the discipline. Calls for a "political architecture" are raised again and again. An example might be Tahl Kaminer's *The Efficacy of Architecture: Political Contestation and Agency*.[24] The back cover reads as follows:

> Originating in a displeasure with the "starchitecture" system and the focus on aesthetic innovation, a growing number of architects, emboldened by the 2007–8 economic crisis, have staged a rebellion against the dominant mode of architectural production. Against a "disinterested" position emulating high art, they have advocated political engagement, citizen participation and the right to the city. [...] At the centre of this rebellion is the call for architecture to (re-)assume its social and political role in society. The Efficacy of Architecture supports the return of architecture to politics.[25]

The identification of the 2008 financial crash and the ensuing great recession is correctly identified as a turning point or trigger for the recent take-off of the politicisation of the discipline. However, the anti-capitalist outlook of this politicisation—endorsed and shared by Kaminer—implies a stance of refusal, as it hopelessly stands against the grain of history. The economic and political bankruptcy of socialism spells intellectual

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[24]   T. Kaminer, *The Efficacy of Architecture: Political Contestation and Agency*, Taylor & Francis, New York, 2017.
[25]   *Ibid.*, p. i.

disorientation with respect to anything beyond resistance or small local, inherently marginal projects.

These calls for a political architecture' characteristically fail to specify the desired politics with sufficient precision. Instead of offering a political position and programme, the respective authors are lamenting the lack of a vigorous political dimension within architectural discourse. This nostalgic lament is usually expressed via a series of vague phrases that serve as little more than non-committal gestures towards a vaguely progressive politics. They mark the absence of real politics rather than vigorous engagement. For instance, according to the Berlage Institute's theory teacher Roemer van Toorn, architecture should "project alternatives," offer "critical resistance" and "social directionality." Architects are to look for "radical democracies" and "aim at a systematic understanding of architecture as a political palimpsest for alternative social and political hypothesis while itself reanimating architecture as an instrument of social and political invention"[26]. The missing ingredient is the plausible, concrete, generalisable political project, backed up with sufficient political power. Architectural critics and academics can never themselves acquire and project political power. A political project that could give political meaning to architecture cannot originate within architecture itself (nor can it originate in mere political theory). Architecture itself cannot offer effective political direction, or project political alternatives. Here, powerful external stimulation is required—*powerful* in the most literal sense. A second precondition for a politically engaged architecture is the clear alignment with such a powerful political position. Vague anti-capitalist allusions obviously do not suffice to get this off the ground. Such phrases merely paper over the underlying political vacuum and disorientation. They stand in for the missing political dynamic. They symbolise the desire to be energised by a political position without risking the embarrassment of real political alignment. To offer an isolated, marginal political opinion, or an academic analysis from the domain of political theory does not help to inject political vitality into architecture. Architecture can only react with sufficient unanimity and collective vitality to political agendas that have already the real power of a tangible political force behind them.

The key thesis that must be emphasised here is that it is not architecture's societal function to actively promote or initiate political agendas

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[26]   R. van Toorn, *Hunch 5*, Berlage Institute, Amsterdam, 2002, pp. 166 f.

that are not already thriving in the political arena (backed by political groups with a real chance to take power). Architecture is not a viable site for such initiatives. It cannot substitute itself for a missing political agenda.

The paradigmatic examples from the early 1920s and the late 1960s that give meaning to the notion of politically engaged architecture were born in the exceptional condition of political revolution (or pending political revolution). During such periods, everything is politicised: the law, the economy, education, architecture, and to some extent even science and technology. The autonomy of the functional subsystems of society is temporarily being suspended. It is during such a period that Le Corbusier's famous 1920s dictum "architecture or revolution" was coined: "It is a question of building which is at the root of the social unrest of today; architecture or revolution."[27] This kind of revolutionary condition can reoccur, but it is not the normal state of affairs. During normal times, the specialised, well-adapted channels of political communication absorb all political concerns and bind or direct all political energies. Art, science, architecture, education, and even the mass media are released from the burden of becoming vehicles of political action. The more this division of labour consolidates, the more false and out of place rings the pretence of "political architecture." Political architecture finally becomes an oxymoron—at least until the emergence of the next revolutionary situation. During normal times, architecture and politics are separated as autonomous discursive/professional domains. If architecture gives itself over to political debate, which is inherently interminable within architecture, then this spells the end of architecture, just as the political usurpation of architectural autonomy would spell the termination of architecture.

We must repudiate the false pretence of "political" or "critical" architecture. Instead, we must act within architecture's own specific competency. A constructive and effective critique of architecture within architectural discourse can only be architectural critique, on the *sui generis* terms of the discipline, not political critique. The stance of parametricism is sharply critical of current architectural and urban design outcomes, and the author's stance is doubly critical, as it is also critical of many of the shortcomings of "real existing" parametricism. However, the author's stance as architectural researcher and practitioner (as well as parametricism's stance in general) is implicitly affirmative with respect to the

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[27]   Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, Dover Publications, New York, 1986, reprint. Originally published: J. Rodger, London 1931, pp. 269–289.

general societal (social, economic, and political) trends that underlie the criticised current architectural and urban outcomes. This implicit affirmation of the legitimacy of the given societal order is a necessary condition of a constructive professional engagement with the architecture of society. Those who see the political system as the bottleneck for architecture's (and society's) progress and who feel that current socio-economic and political conditions are to be fought and overthrown, and who are therefore unwilling to fulfil architecture's institutionally allocated role, should consequently exit the discipline and shift their activism into the political arena proper. They need to test and win their political arguments within and against political groups rather than within architecture. The currently fashionable concept of a "critical" or "political" architecture as a supposed form of political activism must be repudiated as an implausible phantom.

It is undeniable that political and moral issues are increasingly being drawn into our debates and that this threatens to swamp our discourse, overburden our specific competency, and distract us from our genuine societal responsibility. However, there is another twist in the author's more recent relationship to politics within architecture: Architecture's politicisation has reached a pervasiveness and intensification that can no longer be ignored, contained, or rolled back merely via meta-arguments about architecture's proper domain of competency. The current historical conjuncture makes a head-on substantive political engagement with those who politicise architecture from an anti-capitalist position more and more urgent. The author concludes that political engagement can no longer be avoided. The conclusion is now to engage in this politicising debate with a double strategy:

1. To define the proper relationship between architecture and politics in order to set out the premises and the scope for a viable and productive architectural engagement with politics, argued for from within the framework of a comprehensive theory of society (social systems theory). This entails the task to define and defend a space for an autonomous architectural expert discourse and theory-led architectural design research—the autopoiesis of architecture which co-evolves with rather than being instructed by politics—and the repudiation of "political architecture," which attempts to pursue architectural design as an activist-critical political practice.

2. To engage in the current politicising architectural debate and re-pudiate what must be considered a regressive and unproductive (explicit or implicit) anti-capitalist bias in most of the political and moral positions drawn into architecture by architectural academics and critics, and to confront these critics with a vigor-ous defence of capitalism, pointing to the renewed advancement of the forces of production and the (nearly world-wide) pros-perity boost its recent neoliberal reinvigoration (1980–2008) made possible.

Factors Contributing to Architecture's Dissolution

Architecture as a discipline and profession had long since evolved its specialist competency and responsibility within functionally differenti-ated modern society, entrusted with the societal function of the contin-uous, innovative upgrading of the built environment, in line with gen-eral societal and technological progress. However, in recent years, the protagonists and organs of the discipline have been refusing to focus their discourse on this societal responsibility and have become increas-ingly incompetent with respect to architecture's core competency and specialised societal responsibility. Instead, architecture's leading voices—architects, theoreticians, critics, professors, curators, etc.—are shifting their attention to general "do-good" themes like social justice, or margin-alised communities, i.e., domains where architecture as a discipline has no decision-making powers and next to nothing to offer out of its own resources. What we are left with, therefore, is impotent virtue signalling.

Beyond the refusal of the theoretically-minded, politicised protago-nists of academic architecture to own up to architecture's task of inno-vation—which can only be credibly pursued at the frontier of urban de-velopment in the most advanced centres of world society—architecture, in its mainstream practitioners, remains fragmented and self-indulgent, unwilling to absorb the innovations that have been achieved by the small and isolated avant-garde movement the author has identified and theo-rised under headings like *parametricism* and (more recently) *tectonism*. These two phenomena, the academics' refusal to engage with and lead contemporary architecture on the one hand, and the fragmentation and disorientation of mainstream practitioners on the other hand, are related. They are two interacting aspects of the same process of deterioration.

However, there is a further, independent factor: The incentive of mainstream practitioners to absorb the innovations (that have been worked out by a small, isolated avant-garde) is being killed off by politics via a highly restrictive/prescriptive planning permission practice. (Behind closed doors developers speak about "planning paralysis.") Urban and architectural progress in the mature, advanced centres is blocked by massive political over-regulation, indeed by political prevention of urban development. Where development is still permitted, it is stifled by prescriptive impositions, squashing architectural innovation. Developers and their architects cannot freely compete with innovative solutions and urban service offerings but are just called upon to execute politically preconceived plans. There is, therefore, no need or incentive to innovate. For developers, competition shifts to and remains confined to negotiations about constraints like the exact percentage of affordable housing. For architects, the competition shifts to the plane of political rhetoric. Banal, politically imposed solutions, are being sold back to the politicians via empty, euphemistic slogans like people-centred design, community engagement, wellbeing, inclusive placemaking, etc.

Because of this refusal or self-denial of architecture, society evolves without its evolution being accompanied by congenial or adequate architectural responses. The bulk of architecture designed in 2024 could have been designed in 1974 or indeed in 1924. It is not only stagnant but positively regressive. All styles, with the exception of parametricism (with Tectonism as its most recent and most advanced and sophisticated subsidiary style), are retro-styles: Minimalism, Neo-modernism, Neo-rationalism, Neo-classicism, Neo-historicism, Neo-postmodernism.

The intellectual atrophy within the discipline is by now so pervasive that those serious and sophisticated contributions that have been developed in a tiny but vigorously advancing network of researchers and designers can no longer even be more widely appreciated or absorbed. They are stillborn with respect to their ambition to move the discipline forward. Architecture, formerly an academic, discourse-steered discipline and innovative, theory-led and research-based profession, has contracted back into a craft, uncritically and unambitiously subjecting itself to pre-ordained routines and typologies. In effect, the whole apparatus of the academic discipline—architectural university departments, theoretical journals, conferences, biennals, etc.—might as well be shut down. What is their use if hundred-year-old recipes are the latest wisdom of the profession or craft? What is society getting in return for financing this

massive and costly apparatus? In any event, this apparatus, in its university incarnation, is distracting itself with all manner of woke studies, woke criticism, and woke polemical, artistic-symbolic illustrations standing in for the absent design projects. It is certainly no longer engaging with the task of discursively steering and innovating the built environment that is actually being realised.

Another factor contributing to the disappearance of architecture is a *detrimental tolerance* that destroys all learning in schools of architecture. Here, rigorous debate has been hollowed out in recent years. While criticising society is all the rage, criticising student work is increasingly avoided, seen as disrespectful and regarded as a feature of a now outmoded toxic culture. One underlying factor is identity politics. If ideas are understood to be tied up with identity, then criticism is perceived as attack on those holding these ideas. The response is then indignation, and often explicit *ad hominem* attacks on the critic, rather than argument. The result is a dysfunctional bifurcation into an unforgiving de-platforming of unrelenting critics and an all-forgiving tolerance of all who are communicating within and according to the rules of the "safe space." This logic violates a key principle of discursive rationality, namely, that ideas are to be appraised irrespective of their bearers.

The inhibition of frank critique is thus not only a matter of over-politeness or over-protection (confused with respect) but also a matter of historically motivated (but ultimately counterproductive) "postmodern" philosophical assumptions. At the heart of these assumptions lies a defeatist relativism that considers the human condition—in terms of circumstances, worldviews, values, and aspirations—as inherently fragmented, without any hope of discursive convergence. This theory contrasts with the factual universality of the aspiration for higher standards of living and individual liberty, evidenced by global migration pressures into countries where this universal desire is met better than in the migrants' countries of origin.

The historical experience that global modernisation-for-all is non-trivial and a much more fragile, complex, and uncertain endeavour than initially expected by mid-twentieth century modernisation theories (including Marxism) lies at the heart of the postmodernist "incredulity towards grand narratives." Poststructuralist philosophy injected some necessary loops of reflection into social theory, in particular the reflection on historically and culturally specific discursive formations. These reflections were later absorbed into more complex, subtle, and circumspect social

theories and theories of societal progress, such as Niklas Luhmann's "social systems theory"[28] and "theory of functionally differentiated society"[29] or Jürgen Habermas' "theory of communicative action"[30] and "discourse theory of law and democracy"[31]. These efforts, while engaging with and dialectically integrating poststructuralism's challenges, avoid relativism and re-establish "grand theory" on a new level of complexity. Simultaneously, the trajectory of postmodernism's own discourse mutated into a relativist, defeatist and indeed self-defeating intellectual culture that lacks the confidence to judge, project or steer societal developments. The poststructuralists failed to discriminate and judge the diverse discursive formations they charted and did not recognise the superiority (superior prosperity potential) of the unique lineage of discursive formations postmodernism itself was a part of—namely Modernity, with its unprecedented elaboration of technology and science, including critical social science. They failed to recognise the unique self-transcending thrust of this (lineage of) discursive formation(s) that actively refused and continues to refuse to remain tied to any historical origin, parochial social group, or particular set of societies. While German social philosophy—Habermas, Luhmann, and others—has moved dialectically from the modernist thesis via the poststructuralist antithesis to a new synthesis that recuperates the concept of progress on a new level of complexity, French poststructuralism (postmodernism)—and under its influence much of Anglo-American mainstream academic culture—got stuck with the antithesis to modernisation theory. Thus, unassailable "subjective validity" has replaced the regulative concept of objective (intersubjective) validity.

In architecture the impact of poststructuralist philosophy coincided with the crisis and breakdown of architectural modernism. Indeed, the phrase "Postmodernity" was first coined in architecture (by Charles Jencks) in 1976, and was soon generalised to art, literature and philosophy.

The crisis of architectural modernism was not due to inherent flaws of modernist architecture. Rather, modernism was a very meaningful and successful response of the discipline to the historical transformation

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[28] N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*.

[29] N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, Vol. 1; N. Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, Vol. 2.

[30] J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol.1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1986; J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol.2: *The Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987.

[31] J. Habermas, *Between Norms and Facts: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1996.

from *laissez-faire* capitalism, based on many relatively small companies competing in each industry, to large-scale assembly-line production conducted by a few very large companies in each branch of industry. The result was the new era of Fordism. This technological and economic transformation, after the First World War, was also accompanied by political and social revolutions. Modernism—International Style architecture—was a well-adapted response. That is why it spread throughout the industrial world. However, by the 1970s, a new technological and socio-economic transformation was underway: the transformation from Fordism to post-Fordism. This new societal dynamic could no longer be contained within the strictures of modernist urbanism and architecture and was starting to break out. The well-settled, mature paradigm of modernism was in crisis. A period of search and experimentation ensued, a collective brainstorming. This was a revolutionary period. As in the previous transformation from historicism to modernism, art and philosophy were drawn into the discipline. Rationality was suspended, schools of architecture mutated into art schools, curricula were abandoned, and a new cast of characters—bold, intuitive—appeared on the scene. Rational analytic design discourses that could select from a prior, methodically elaborated solution repertoire, gave way to open-ended brainstorming and generative "artistic" processes of option proliferation, via mutation and recombination. Brainstorming tasked with generating new ideas can only work if the strictures of immediate rational scrutiny are suspended. The whole point of the crisis is that the given criteria of scrutiny and selection are no longer valid. The search is also a search for new values and goals. This atmosphere transformed the discursive culture of the discipline. This transformation was indeed necessary. Adhocism, postmodernist collage, neo-historicism, deconstructivism, etc., emerged from this freewheeling collective brainstorming process as new potential directions during the 1970s and 1980s. Some of these potentials were indeed built upon in the following period. By the early 1990s, a new paradigm started to crystallise out of the experiments loosely gathered under the label "deconstructivism." The new paradigm built on deconstructivism dialectically, by polemically contrasting its own approach, and drawing on the philosophy of Deleuze & Guattari. A whole generation of young architects studying or teaching in Anglo-Saxon elite universities (London, New York, Boston, L.A.) rapidly converged around a decisive new outlook, not unlike a generation of young architects in German-speaking Europe had converged in the 1920s, leaving Art Nouveau and expressionism behind.

As towards the end of the 1920s, towards the end of the 1990s, when the new paradigm had been firmly established as hegemonic within the avant-garde segment of the discipline, art and philosophy receded, and the cumulative development work took over. The 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century achieved a viable new paradigm, the paradigm which the author has since 2007 named and canonised as parametricism. The paradigm was spurned by the real estate boom leading up to the 2008 real estate and financial crash. While the leading protagonists of parametricism kept moving forward with upgrading the scope and effectiveness of the paradigm, the expansion of the movement was halted by the crash. The whole discipline was shaken up and became politicised and more susceptible to anti-capitalist sentiments. The culture of the schools of architecture was still in the mood and mode of the 1980s revolutionary period of brainstorming. Instead of re-adjusting to the new requirements of working through the implications of the new paradigm during the 2000s, the freewheeling model that had been spearheaded at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (AA) in London during the 1970s and 1980s proliferated throughout the Anglo-Saxon world and beyond, just at a time when reverting back to a more systematic, science-like, cumulative working through of the newly discovered solution-potentials would have been much more productive. Instead, art-school-like brainstorming and freewheeling experimentation continued alongside the disciplined, collective and cumulative work of the movement of parametricism. But brainstorming makes no sense if it continues indefinitely, instead of shifting to analysis, selection, and elaboration. While the Bauhaus had been able to shift towards disciplined, cumulative elaboration of the (modernist) paradigm in the latter half of the 1920s, leaving the mystics and artists behind, the AA, as well as Columbia and Sci-Arc, partially continued to free-float and then reverted back in full force to brainstorming, philosophy, art, and politics after 2008, leaving the agenda of a disciplined architectural research increasingly behind. The culture became one where every teaching studio or "unit" is wholly autonomous, operating outside any curriculum and beyond the reach of any effective external criticism. Non-judgmentalism and the repudiation of any shared criteria or agenda of convergence were again the order of the day, just like during the 1980s. This culture of hyper-tolerant "everything-goes discourse"—as long as the language of political correctness is being observed—spread throughout the discipline. This freewheeling culture took over once more, long after it had outlived

its purpose. There was no new paradigm to be discovered because there was no new socio-economic transformation to adapt to. (Post-Fordist restructuring was not exhausted and still is not obsolete today.) In any event, the spirit since then was, and is, a spirit of counterculture, of refusal, of protest, of symbolic resistance, a culture of the indiscriminate celebration of otherness and diversity, a spirit of non-judgementalism. This non-judgementalism lets everything pass, as long as the premise of the apodictic condemnation of contemporary neo-liberal society and all its real-world architectural expressions was not questioned.

During architectural debates the author therefore often feels compelled to shift to the meta-level of critiquing this discursive culture as a necessary preface to articulating positions on substantive issues. This is necessary because the author's quest—namely to ascertain the most promising direction architecture can take to contribute to prosperity and societal progress—is discredited and anachronistic within contemporary architectural discursive culture. Here are the meta-theses that are necessary to reset the discipline's discourse culture:

1. Imperative of convergence: the discipline must strive to define a shared paradigm as *the* (best) way forward. A shared paradigm is a precondition of cooperative, cumulative progress towards a global best practice. A coherent paradigm/goal is required so that simultaneous or sequential designs do not subvert each other and do not undermine the functional integrity of the built environment.

2. Rejection of pluralism: We must accept paradigm pluralism only as temporary historical condition during periods of paradigm shift. Divergences are dialectically productive only if the aim is to resolve and overcome them. We must reject the fatalistic acceptance of a supposedly unresolvable paradigm pluralism in architecture (just as we must reject the related, more general multi-culturalist presumption that all cultures are equally life-enhancing).

3. Benign intolerance: Ruthless criticism is a productive mechanism of convergence. The principle of indiscriminate tolerance makes sense only in a phase of post-crisis brainstorming. If made permanent, this principle denies the comparative evaluation of positions/paradigms and ultimately blocks progress.

The degeneration of the process and purpose of critical discourse is also undermining the important institution of the public crit in architecture schools. Here too, the lack (or denial) of any shared substantive paradigm that could furnish criteria of progress undermines the legitimacy of criticism and judgement. What regulates the crit instead is the principle of indiscriminate, pluralist tolerance. "Crits" no longer aim to critically appraise, debate, judge, and compare the relative validity and worth of projects/proposals, but regress to mere displays of unassailable subjective expressions, soliciting nothing but indiscriminate flattery. Nothing is either weeded out as inferior or marked out as superior. These very notions, and indeed any ranking and selecting, are anathema. But how can progress be made without rejecting failures and selecting successful contributions as exemplars to build upon?

This systemic institutional failure to promote progress does not only stunt the discipline's development but applies equally to individual students' learning curves. Worse, nothing stops the retrogression of students (and of whole academic design studios or entire schools) into ever more indefensible pursuits. Where no pushback is ever expected and no defence is ever required, the indefensible mushrooms. Rigorous critique must be reinstated.

Even the most ruthless criticism of a project, proposition, or even cultural tradition/identity, should never be taken as *ad hominem* attack. No set of ideas (nor any acquired or inherited cultural pattern or identity) represents an immutable characteristic that inherently defines or irredeemably limits any person. To rigorously criticise inferior ideas (or inferior cultures) means to emancipate and empower rather than to disempower the bearer. To politely "respect" ideas (or cultures) one recognises to be dysfunctional is the very opposite of genuine respect.

The Bonfire of Architecture's Self-Destruction: Venice Architectural Biennale

The Venice "Architecture" Biennale is mislabelled and should stop laying claim to the title of architecture. This title only generates confusion and disappointment with respect to an event that does not show any contemporary building designs. Assuming Venice to be not only the most important item on the global architectural itinerary, but also representative of the state of architectural discourse in general: What we are witnessing is the discursive self-annihilation of the discipline. The surreal

event of an Architecture Biennale without showing any contemporary building designs is the most striking manifestation of this self-annihilation, of the end of architecture. The 2023 Biennale further progressed and radicalised a manifest self-destruction which was already evident in several prior Biennales. The Venice Architecture Biennale is, in effect, exhibiting a historical spectacle: the public execution of the villain that is actual, i.e., "complicit," architecture.

Again, in 2023, most national pavilions, including all major European nations like Germany, France, Spain, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway/Sweden, Finland, but also Japan, Canada, Australia, and the USA, refused to show the work of their architects, or any architecture whatsoever. The German pavilion contained construction trash (from the previous Biennale), and the Czech pavilion seemed closed, with a video screen in front of the closed entrance displaying faces talking about architects' low income and long hours of work. The author gave up looking for architecture after finding none in 12 out of 12 pavilions visited.

What does this tell us? That there is no noteworthy new designs or buildings in Germany, France, etc., or anywhere in the Western world? Is the design and construction of buildings only an occasion for bad conscience? Is this bad conscience the driving force behind the refusal (by now pervasive for more than a decade) to display any contemporary architecture whatsoever?

The German pavilion, as hinted at above, was filled with piles of construction material retrieved from the demolition of the previous installation. There was no point in spending more than two seconds in there. A single glance and you get the one-liner message (because this message had been reiterated for years): The message is the supposed moral imperative of material recycling. There was also a very similar one-liner message filling the space (and consuming the budget) a few years ago: don't build, re-use/renovate. In an earlier instance, the German pavilion was filled with documentation of current affairs issues like the refugee crisis. The obvious question of why we should look at documentations of the refugee crisis when coming to Venice for the Biennale, after we have been hearing about the refugee crisis on television every day for months, was apparently never asked. There always seems to be something more important and urgent than showing the most noteworthy designs or buildings being created in Germany. Is there nothing innovative or otherwise noteworthy going on there?

German architecture has been absent in Venice for years. The same applies to British architecture. Why the architects of these countries put up with this seems puzzling. Are they too shamefaced about their work to raise their heads above the parapet? In the case of the German pavilion, the current emphatic absence of architecture was explicitly endorsed by the president of the German Chamber of Architects, in a conversation in front of the German pavilion (filled with the rubble of the previous Biennale). One wonders: what are all these curators expecting an unsuspecting general public coming to visit an architecture biennale to make of this? Are they to witness the disappearance or castigation of a fallen, corrupt, and complicit discipline?

Only the Chinese pavilion showed architecture, plenty of architecture. In the international show, it was again only Chinese architects who showed work: Neru&Hu, and especially Zhang Ke (Standard Architecture), who was showing an impressive suite of projects. The only other exception was the suite of projects by Adjaye Associates, the only sizeable, leading firm invited, probably due to the African origin of its principal. Everybody else invited played along, using their allotted exhibition space for documentary-style intellectual-artistic allusions to moral issues, garnished with pretentious critical-speak, without ever taking the risk of really taking up an explicit position or offering a constructive proposal.

What is the point of all this? Is it meant to inspire conversations? Can we no longer assume that architects and architectural students want to talk about (and see) architecture? Do they now really prefer to learn and talk about decolonising the discipline? Perhaps architectural educators talk about such matters as decolonising the curriculum. Perhaps that is why architectural design has disappeared from most (especially the most prestigious) schools of architecture.

The author has been coming to Venice over and over again, witnessing architects' reactions to several of these anti-architectural biennales. At least the architects the author knows and came across at the Biennale tend to cling to the few exceptional instances of architecture and talk about those, and then about their frustration with the swamping of the Biennale with virtue signalling and conceptual-symbolic installations. Does this mean that there remains hope that the end of architecture is not yet final?

This show was meant to feature at least 50% architects from Africa (at least originally). Without David Adjaye's work—which I would suspect is the only display at this Biennale that would fill a visitor from Africa with pride—there would be no African architecture in the show.

This exhibit was a treat and an occasion to learn that such sophisticated, world-class buildings now exist on the African continent, a significant fact and signal of African development and aspiration. This display was a lucky exception in the Biennale. We owe this lucky exception to the co-incidence that this successful practicing architect is of African descent, a fact which cleared his entry into the Biennale despite his success which would otherwise have disqualified him.

While Western architectural culture (and Western culture in general) seems shamefaced and guilt-ridden, excluding all its urban development from the "Architecture" Biennale, Chinese architectural culture, in positive contrast, was present in full force and self-confidence. Chinese architects and the Chinese national pavilion (including the Hong Kong pavilion) delivered virtually all the architecture (excepting Adjaye Associates) in the whole Biennale. Will architecture end only in the West, while continuing in the East?

No talk about "architecture as an expanded field" can convince us that we are still at an architectural event when the scene is dominated by documentaries, critical art practice, and symbolic installations, while contemporary building designs are nowhere to be seen in 99% of the exhibition space. The engagement with social issues per se is not the problem. Whatever social, political, or moral issues we want to address, the pertinent way to address them at an architecture biennial would be to demonstrate their relevance to architecture via projects that claim to respond to these issues. However, if everything lamentable, or unjust, or any urgent social or political problem in the world is now an urgent, over-riding concern for architecture, then this is not only an absurd overreach, unhinged from architecture's competency, but it spells the very dissolution and disappearance of this discipline.

In academia, in Western schools of architecture, this process has been driven just as far as in the Venice Biennale, namely to the point of total usurpation. Of course, the professional work of "architects" continues, albeit without any support from academia, or without any representation and discussion in any Biennale, be it Venice, or Chicago. The professional work of architects seems to be beyond the pale, either too banal or morally too compromised, to receive a platform in the lofty realm of a critical cultural event. Even professional architects seem to reach this conclusion once they are appointed as curators. They leave their day job, their work and professional competence behind to become dilettante social critics/commentators.

By now the approach of thematising social ills has become the standard, the expected, unassailable, safe, indeed mandatory option. (For the national pavilions it is also easy to organise and cost-effective. Instead of the risky and difficult task of selecting 25 architects, explaining the selection, and deal with them, a single artist can be commissioned (or two to three) to interpret the theme, and be left alone to do so.) For the curators of the national pavilions, this is now the only way to discharge their curatorial burden. It is now not only the most predictable move, it is obligatory. It is a move that squashes the discipline. It is a move that both enacts and publicly displays the end of architecture. There is nothing in sight here that could fulfil the vital function the Venice Architecture Biennale used to fulfil for our discipline. There is a gaping societal vacuum and nothing, no one, to fill it.

The Intellectual Poverty and Creative Bankruptcy of Architecture

Architecture, in the sense of being distinct from mere building, is dead, intellectually and creatively, and has been so for over 10 years. Further, all schools, conferences, biennials, journals, etc., have ended in the sense of having altogether abandoned architecture's calling. They have become something else, something disconnected from the development of the built environment, something running idle. Urban and building development continues, hemmed in and micro-managed by planning bureaucracies, and without the benefit of a coherent disciplinary discourse. The profession remains fragmented, without even any sense that this is problematic, and without the slightest ambition to overcome this fragmentation through debate and discursive convergence. Instead, a non-committal pluralism of values and styles is celebrated. On the one end of the spectrum, the personal predilections of architects are not to be questioned. (How a cacophony of idiosyncratic "artistic" creations should add up to create a functionally integrated city remains a question that is not even posed, let alone answered.) On the other end of the spectrum, the discipline lacks confidence to lead and defers its decisions to lay-communities and politicians, thus denying the discipline's expertise and abrogating the discipline's responsibility.

If architects are no longer informed by a rich, resourceful and cumulative discourse delivering collective learning processes, then they become either (self-indulgent) artists or routine-bound craftsmen executing

client instructions or political instructions. However, neither political power holders nor clients understand how their intentions and interests might be most effectively translated into built form. Both types—artists and craftsmen—populate the ranks of the profession. Both types are incapable of fulfilling the societal responsibility of architecture and end up hollowing out the role and standing of the architect. This intellectual vacuity invites and emboldens both clients and politicians to step into the breach. Both types of usurpation spell the end of architecture.

The longer this post-architectural dilettantism continues and spreads, the more precarious the status of the remaining slivers of a vital and ambitious architectural discourse and practice become. They will soon wither altogether. After the inevitable interim loosening of the curriculum during the period of paradigm shift, a vigorous, searching debate over the direction of the discipline—in order to regain relevance in the new historical era—was required. The brainstorming, including the contestations concerning the curriculum, should have been advanced towards new shared conclusions and resolutions, unifying at least a vital critical mass of protagonists. This did happen during the 1990s and early 2000s. However, since 2008/09—since the prior boom had ended in the financial crash, great recession, and European debt crisis, implying the curbing of work opportunities and the re-emergence of anti-capitalism—these cumulative constructive forces have been swamped by the forces of disciplinary dissolution.

In particular, the transformation of architecture schools into art schools and political debating clubs implies an ongoing (and soon irretrievable) loss of disciplinary knowledge and expertise. While the ongoing, self-confident vitality of the discipline would have required the vigorous, collective rebuilding of a shared disciplinary curriculum, the opposite has taken place: the further loosening and indeed utter dissolution of any shared curriculum conception or intention.

This dismal state of the discipline, and the sinking standards (together with the prevailing woke culture) in schools of architecture, attracts a fitting (or rather misfitting) student population, while it repels students with intellectual ambition who are attracted by sophisticated, demanding, intellectually rigorous fields like economics, business administration, history, sociology, jurisprudence, or computer science. While some of these fields of study have also been softened by woke ideology, their core remains vigorous and continues to progress in exciting ways. That architecture could and should be an equally sophisticated,

demanding, intellectually rigorous field, with exciting innovation opportunities, might be faintly glimpsed within the oeuvre, writings, and research initiatives of the author. These opportunities have been accumulating during the last 15 years without the necessary take-up within a larger collective endeavour, due to the erosion of the discipline's capacity to live up to its societal responsibility. However, it seems unlikely that the ongoing intellectual poverty and creative bankruptcy of architecture—while it implies the further accumulation of untapped opportunities—might attract the talent pool required to overcome this bankruptcy. The continued inflow of a lesser talent pool, with lesser human capital, continuously subjected to an increasingly incestuous academic culture of dilettante distraction and pretence, will only further isolate and dry out the remaining strongholds committed to architectural innovation at the frontier. The works, writings, and research initiatives emanating from this surviving sliver no longer find a receptive audience within the discipline. (While successfully studying architecture one can by now get away without any specialized knowledge whatsoever.) In this sense, what remains of architecture no longer finds any resonance or audience. Architecture is dead because the remaining architects work and speak into a void, are closed into an ever-diminishing echo chamber, isolated by an ever more gaping abyss or suffocating vacuum. Architecture shrinks and becomes a mere message in a bottle, adrift in an ocean of ignorance, hoping to be picked up once more by a future generation.

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