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Phenomenon

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Contents

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James Dodd*

Phenomenon

This issue of *Khōrein* is devoted to the concept of the "phenomenon." It brings together a diverse range of perspectives from classical phenomenology to architectural theory, architectural practice, and the history of both.

The theme invites diversity, arguably even demands it. What are phenomena? In philosophy, as to some extent in everyday life, the term is just another name for "things," broadly construed. Things, but approached from a certain angle. Phenomena are things that have lent themselves or have been led to being seen, thanks to some form of apprehension that conditions their visibility, or even establishes it in the first place. Thus, in everyday discourse "phenomenon" can designate something that appears to be exceptional or extraordinary, as in the "phenomenal skill" of a musical prodigy. In philosophy, the concept is decoupled from the extraordinary or the notable and given a broader range, expressing how things, whether ordinary or extraordinary, are seen thanks to the accomplishments of meaning or lived experience generally. In Kant, for example, the phenomenon is the result of the work of the faculty of understanding, thanks to which our sensuous encounter with things is subsumed under concepts and principles that integrate appearances into empirical, objective claims about the world. In Husserl, the phenomenon is the givenness of the given secured by the accomplishments of intentional life, thanks to which things are constituted in accordance with the universal possibilities of meaning. In Heidegger, the phenomenon is the very self-showing of beings, of being as self-showing (*Sichzeigende*), disclosed in such a fashion that conditions patterns of possible encounter.

Yet in philosophy phenomenon as appearance is only half the story. Time and again the descriptive or theoretical focus on phenomena qua such leads to a realization that in virtually all cases where sufficient

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attention is given to the phenomenality of the phenomenon what shows itself, what is seen, stands in a complicated relationship with what does not show itself, what is not seen. This is not simply a function of the limits of knowledge endemic to finite creatures like ourselves. One need not rehearse Kant's infamous distinction between phenomena and noumena to recognize that anything properly seen or understood invariably unfolds in a horizon conditioned by the unseen, whether in the sense of what has not yet been seen or perhaps in principle can never be seen at all. The visible, as Merleau-Ponty would argue (though here one might just as well cite Plato), is always found to be in an intricate dance with the invisible. We arguably "see" this as well: interwoven with the ordinary and the extraordinary is the presence of modes of being, meaning, and life that, though implicit in phenomenality and constitutive of its conditions of possibility, remain in the shadows as the unseen ground of the seen.

One might hazard that something like this double sidedness of the phenomenon, the embeddedness of the apparent in the non-apparent and the non-apparent in the apparent, of the visible in the invisible and vice versa, represents a universal *a priori* structure of human understanding and experience. One motivation to do so would be the recognition that the question is not simply one of interpretation, or ways of representing the world in a discourse that is capable of both revealing and concealing. It is also a fundamental structure of perceptual experience itself, as explored below by Philip Schauss in his "The Power of the Background: Architecture as Human Infrastructure." The perceived is such only against a background of what steps back from being perceived, setting forth a foreground that provides the basis for appearance. In perceptual life this is best understood as a movement, a dynamic transition from the one to the other, for the distinction is not one of sharp boundaries between things seen and unseen. It is an internal differentiation within the phenomenon-thing itself: something emerges as seen, coming to its own as what shows itself, only out of its own background, which itself recedes from being seen but all the while belongs to the seen as a reservoir of potential encounter. The perceived is in this way a process of emergence, always bringing with it the co-intended of the non-apparent or unseen. Any serious engagement with the idea of the lifeworld, the experience of the horizon of things as a horizon of encounter, must take the implications of this basic structure into account. It is a key theme in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body, as it is Heidegger's analyses of the worldly as a totality of significations (*Bedeutsamkeit*), all of

which were inspired by the rich Husserlian analyses that are the focus of Schauss' essay.

The double-sidedness of the phenomenon is also, Schauss argues, at work in architecture, as it is in the built world generally. Again, on the level of perceptual experience, architecture is at work in both foreground and background, organizing what arrests attention and gaze as well as what slips past or remains implicit. The description of the dynamics of our experience of architecture—a perhaps basic, but important theme of any "phenomenology of architecture"—is arguably situated precisely at this juncture of the play of what is explicitly engaged and what is not. Schauss' interpretation of Rem Koolhaas' concept of "Junkspace" is interesting in this regard: a junkspace is intrusive, yet bland and familiar; it combines a sense of being both pulled and trapped, forcing at least a cursory engagement, often for the purposes of commerce but always aimed at herding bodily comportment in one direction or other. Such spaces often invest an enormous amount into short-circuiting any pull into the anonymity of the background, only to flare out in an overheated superficiality (hot enough to "cultivate orchids") that renders them as ultimately forgettable as they were initially impossible not to see. This and many other formations of the built world can be conceived in terms of an often unsettling skill to manipulate the complex play of presence and absence that make up the meaningfulness, and often the bland meaninglessness of our experience of the built world.

Also drawing from the double-sidedness of the phenomenon is the idea of an "atmospherics" of architecture explored below in "Atmospheric Attunement," a conversation between Alberto Pérez-Gómez and his former student Robert Kirkbride. Here the motivation is rooted in the sense that advanced capitalism and techno-civilization have increasingly rendered architectural spaces devoid of regional specificity in favor of a leveling universality, depth of traditional understanding in favor of instrumentality, a critical sensibility that Pérez-Gómez has articulated in increasingly sophisticated ways since his 1983 *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* and its 2016 sequel, *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science.*[1] The theme of "atmosphere" is meant to draw attention to a dimension of the experience of

[1] See A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1985, and *Attunement: Architectural Meaning after the Crisis of Modern Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2016.

meaning that is not limited to the expression of sense, or to the sense of architecture as either an instrument designed to address a specific end, or an expression social or political that bears a definitive meaning to be communicated. It has instead to do with mood, understood in a Heideggerean fashion as an attunement to the built as a place or site of events, meaning, and history. The seeming subjective ephemerality of the phenomenality of things at play in the attunement of mood belies its central importance: all built spaces are accessible as living spaces only thanks to such attunements. Even when built spaces seem to prevent those opportunities to reflect and linger thanks to which moods become an explicit theme, they nevertheless manifest, or remain manifest within a certain figure of mood, however implicit. To highlight the problems of attunement in this way brings to the fore the basic truth that the world we build is the very space of our existence, even when it is built in such a way that seems to bury this existence in suffocating indifference, often with disastrous existential and environmental consequences.

Attunement is not only a function of the way *space* is manifest, but also *time*, and not only the time of the present, but of the historical past as well. Here, the double play of phenomenal presence and absence can also take the form of the complex dynamic of remembering and forgetting, with the peculiar elusiveness that often entails. This is a dimension not only of architecture proper, but also writing about architecture, whether in the present or from a historical perspective. The intersection of architecture and architectural writing and its historical elusiveness is the subject of Indra Kagis McEwen's "On Doubling the Square and Other Phenomena," an illuminating essay on Vitrivius' embrace of Roman triumphalism that supplements her 2004 *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*.[2] This embrace, McEwen shows, can be discerned through the reconstruction of the often overlooked allusions to Roman conquest that are found throughout *De architectura*, from the association of the Corinthian order with the destruction of the eponymous city to that of the *gnomonice* with the land-measuring *gnomon* and compass as symbolic of the domination of Rome over newly conquered territories, affirming *avant la lettre* the spirit of Ovid's *Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem.* The collective effect of these allusions in Vitruvius' writing, McEwen demonstrates, represents a monument to an historical attunement

[2] I. Kagis McEwen, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture,* MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

germane to a specific time and place, one retrievable from the historical background only given a reconstruction of associations that allow for the education of an ear with which to read Vitruvian prose and the eyes to see the political nature of the architecture that is the subject of his text.

The example of Vitruvius in turn points to a potential risk that accompanies an emphasis on attunement or mood: the uncritical acceptance of a saturation of architecture by meanings that either ideologically conform to predominant social and political regimes of power or occlude their presence, or both. As Joseph Bedford shows in his study "After Affect," this concern for a more fundamental critical positioning of architectural theory in part motivated a turn to *affect* in the last and first decades of the turn of the millennium. Rooted in both a biological reading of psychoanalysis and the influence of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, affect theory in the writings of figures such as Sylvia Lavin, Jeff Kipnis, and Brian Massumi sought to articulate a level of sensibility that is effectively pre-conscious, firmly rooted in the body, and prior to the conditioning of social and cultural production. Given its emphasis on a level of embodied response more basic than consciousness, more basic than understanding, even more basic than culture itself, affect theory was taken to be a position from which to criticize what was interpreted to be an overly conservative posture of phenomenology in architecture, one that all too often seemed to reduce itself to the nostalgia of the *genius loci* or the fantasy of a pre-modern lost paradise in the pursuit of an ephemeral authenticity. Embracing affect seemed to give the architect and architectural theorist the chance to regain the initiative that had seemed to have played itself out in late modernism: the ability to have a direct impact on the flow of power in a society that has proven remarkably successful in the orchestration and manipulation of affects such as resentment, hatred, and the pervasive feeling of powerlessness.

On Bedford's account, this turn to affect has seemed to run its course, proving in the end to be neither all that theoretically coherent nor even that progressive politically. This opens the possibility for a renewed engagement with phenomenology that, in the end, had always remained committed to a non-reductive, expansive understanding of the foundations of meaningful experience. And again, the question of the phenomenon and the cluster of related concepts it brings—understanding, seeing, attunement, even affect itself—retains its vital importance.

Perhaps the most important result of any exploration of the discourses around the concept of the phenomenon is the recognition that

there are many registers of phenomenality. The example of Vitruvius, specifically the relation between architectural writing and the political, points to one such register: the role of what one might call a cultivated manifestation of collective life that is essential not only for its organization, but its endurance and even reality. For the writings of Vitrivius not only document the fact of architecture, but its meaning, its sense that is established in the world thanks to that very documentation itself. Here Hannah Arendt's concept of the "space of appearance," critically revisited in Sophie Loidolt's "Phenomenal Existence and World-Building. Revisiting the Ambivalences of Arendt's Public/Private Distinction and its Relation to the Body," is of particular interest in this regard. The space of appearance is best understood, as Loidolt shows, precisely when it is clearly distinguished from other registers of phenomenality. All things appear—again, the term "phenomena" is on one level synonymous with "things," this is the first register—yet embedded in this universal showing is a second register of appearance, a modality of self-disclosure fundamental to what Arendt calls human plurality: the fashioning of a stage onto which human beings appear as a multiplicity of perspectives in concert, "in between" which the things and affairs of the world are perceived, taken up, understood, acted upon. Such a space is in turn both organized and preserved by a third register of appearance, that secured manifestation that constitutes a public reality, a *res publica* (to appropriate, perhaps violently, an ancient theme), embodied in the full scope of what Arendt in *The Human Condition* credits as the world-building function of *homo faber*: the built world, but also writing and the arts, in which the individuality of perspective enacted in words and deeds is communicated and preserved in an enduring form that projects not only a coherent "world," but its very past and future as an established human reality.[3]

Homo faber preserves and orchestrates, but can also destroy and frustrate, for the spaces we create can also deindividualize, erase, fuse us into a mass in which there is no longer any real valence to the political idea of plurality. Arendt's work is haunted, as Loidolt expresses it, with the specter of what was for her a twin threat to human civilization: the levelling of the anonymity of mass consumerist culture that eliminates the balance between private and public and the possible existential annihilation of nuclear war. Today we would add environmental devastation

[3] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1958, chapter IV.

that renders our planet uninhabitable, but the underlying point is the same: how human beings live, how they fashion for themselves a world, increasingly risks the possibility of creating the conditions for the irreparable disruption of human existence as such. Loidolt makes the strong case that, whatever the limits of Arendt's political perspective, whether it be her Eurocentrism or abhorrence for pre-modern modalities of human co-existence, her phenomenological ontology provides a compelling argument for placing the question of the architecture of collective life at the center of our collective efforts to face the challenges of the economic, social, political, and environmental crises of modernity.

If there is a common thread that runs through most, if not all, the contributions to this issue of *Khōrein*, including those that have not been mentioned here, it is perhaps this sense of crisis. Admittedly, this might raise some doubts about the choice of the theme itself. How can an engagement, whether philosophical or architectural, with the concept of the phenomenon contribute positively to the myriad crises facing humanity today, crises of the political, homelessness, alienation, and ecological devastation? Perhaps only in a very limited way, one might predict. But after reflecting on the contributions in this issue, perhaps one might see in the theme of the phenomenon something indeed limited but nevertheless essential. Any response to the crisis can only be a combination of understanding and action in which we collectively pursue the question of what it means to live together in a shared world. Yet this entails the fact that our capacity to respond is ultimately bound to our capacity to see, to resist the lull of indifference and recognize what calls for understanding and action. In short, response is possible only in a horizon of shared responsibility. Such responsibility rests on our ability to navigate the phenomenal world, not only to find a home but to shoulder the responsibility for making home possible at all. We can be responsible in this way only because we are creatures who see and experience, thus the phenomenon proves essential for any dialogue between the responsible architect seeking to address the burning questions of our age and the philosopher, that perennial seeker of the conditions for responsibility as such.

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Philip Schauss*

The Power of the Background: Architecture as Human Infrastructure

ABSTRACT: Whereas architecture is usually appraised in terms of its outstanding singular pieces, we have yet to find an effective way to describe larger, more unremarkable configurations of the built. In this essay, I provide a phenomenological approach that outlines how things shuttle from the perceptual foreground to the background (and vice-versa), and how architecture, for the most part, provides a baseline of normalcy, against which all of our other concerns can play out.

KEYWORDS: architecture, built environment, perception, attention, background

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1. Introduction

Thomas Heatherwick, in his recent polemic *Humanise*, decries the cold anonymity of modernism in favor of the sculptural uniqueness of architects such as Gaudí. "More than 100 years ago," he writes, "it would have been extremely hard to find a truly boring external urban environment. Today, boring environments are everywhere. We're blanketed in boringness."[1] At first blush, this appears a vast overstatement of the actual, lived influence of architectural modernism, which, notwithstanding its numerous built accomplishments around the world (e.g., buildings, neighborhoods, etc.), remains far more significant as a historical program for building than as a large-scale set of actually built and lived-in environments.

If we take Heatherwick's wholesale preference for the aesthetic individuality of buildings to the phenomenological plane, his observation simply appears wrong-headed: if architecture can at times seem "boring" or unremarkable, that is because it is a vast byproduct of the way we humans access the world, that is, through perceptual experience. "Boredom" or unremarkableness are part and parcel of that access, given especially how undesirable it would be if our built environment were constantly challenging us, perceptually or otherwise. As I will show here, the built is a largely successful reflection of our own sensory makeup, in spite of its frequent failure to meet basic human needs.

Phenomenology allows us to examine our relationship to the built in terms of a negotiation between our perceptual abilities and the kind of objectivities with which we are likely to be presented over a lifetime. A great many of those objectivities will, as Heidegger writes, be "things of the type of buildings," and increasingly so if by 2050 more than two thirds of us will be inhabiting "urban" environments.[2] It therefore seems worthwhile to explore the scope of such "things of the type of buildings," and hence also the breadth of our experience thereof. Since there is already an ample doctrine of what it means to "see" architecture—what makes it worth seeing, or worthy of criticism, etc.—here I will tread a *via negativa* by outlining what enables the built to go *un*seen.

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[1] T. Heatherwick, *Humanise: A Maker's Guide To Building Our World*, Penguin, London, 2023, p. 116.

[2] M. Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper and Row, New York, 1971, p. 154; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Population Division), *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision*, United Nations, New York, 2019, p. xix.

I will approach this phenomenological recalibration of the experience of architecture with reference principally to Husserlian phenomenology, because (indirectly) it provides the strongest, most radical account of the kind of "thing" I argue architecture is. The argument has three steps: in a first step, I will explain the significance of the foreground-background structure for human perception, and, with that, how the tendency of architecture to inhabit that background is largely inbuilt. Then, I examine what it takes for an object to sequester my attention, doing so with reference to designs that constantly aim for the very forefront of human attention. Finally, I will counterbalance the previous section with various ways in which we are able to co-determine what comes to our attention, key to which are the perceptual habits and normalcy we are able to cultivate in and among buildings.

2. The Horizon

How do things emerge from the background? "'To affect'," writes Husserl in *Experience and Judgment*, "means to stand out from the environment [*Umgebung*], which is always copresent, to attract interest to oneself, possibly interest in cognition."[3] Thus, a thing may stand in stark contrast to the things surrounding it (e.g., a Frank Gehry building), bringing it to prominence. Alternatively (or in addition to that stark contrast), I may be seeking out an object *of that type*, actively looking for it. Yet many of the objects surrounding me never do come to prominence: I watch my feet advance along the strip of sidewalk in front of me, in the knowledge that there are buildings around me, yet most often I do not pay them much attention in their particularity (e.g., the ornamental wood carvings above each window of my favorite house on Woodbine Street, Queens, New York).

This foreground-background dynamic of inclusion/exclusion is a natural feature of perceptual life, wherein the constant interaction of both is a source of competitive experiential tension. As James Dodd explains, whatever I happen to be engaged with—absorbed in maybe (or, inversely, terribly bored with)—is always connected to a wider world of potential engagement, a connection that (at least in the case of boredom)

[3] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, pp. 30–1.

can develop into a strong outward pull into the wider, outer-horizonal world, beyond what I physically sense.

> Specific concerns, defining specific activities and experiences, represent a set of foreground immersions that rest against a background of embeddedness in the horizon of the world. As an active being turned towards things of concern, my engagements in turn reflect a fundamental tension between a background horizon of the world in which I find myself and the foreground immersion in the scope defined by a given concern.[4]

For example, as I stand in front of a particular house in my neighborhood, now examining its façade in great detail, there is also an attentional pull from the wider neighborhood beyond it (e.g., from other buildings, friends, bars, etc.), the presence of which, though out of sight, is palpable. Dodd puts this as follows: "Every cogito—every activity, say eating or reading my novel—is caught in that tension between the nascent visibility of an unfolding accomplishment (I am on page forty in my book; dinner is half over; my painting is finished and I can step back and decide whether it was successful), and something 'else' that remains just there on the edge ofwhatever I see in the circuit of its visibility [...]"[5] The potential of such an "edge" to yield a further aspect of the world is not a mere source of distraction—much more importantly, it is testament to our basic openness to being affected by the world. To say that the world has its "edges" means that it always already stands in a lively tension with whatever currently is closest to the forefront of my attention. A helpful example, courtesy of Anne Montavont, is the focused engagement in an activity such as writing, in which I actively "screen out" any environing objects:

> For example: the piece of paper there, before me, is the object of the perceptual act I have carried out; it is my object; the table on which the piece of paper is lying is pre-given to me, even if I do not turn to it at all (or any longer). The table is present to my consciousness; it is there for me, but for which ego (*moi*)? Not to the wakeful ego, the active (*en acte*) ego that is elsewhere engaged (with the piece of

[4] J. Dodd, *Phenomenology, Architecture and the Built World*, Brill, Leiden, 2017, p. 81.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 83.

paper), but to another ego, the dormant ego. Indeed, attention does not traverse the flux of consciousness end to end. It sheds light on singular acts only.[6]

The writing table, while a material support for my piece of paper, is of no interest at this moment, as it amounts only to "inactual or potential lived experience."[7] And yet the table is "there," maybe faintly visible or even palpable. Though its presence may literally be fundamental to my engagement with the piece of paper, I take for granted its material support (until it fails me, e.g., turns out to be wobbly). My inattention to the table, however, is no shortcoming, but a result of our perceptual and cognitive makeup.[8] And so, when the table eventually does come to the fore, showing itself in a particular way (e.g., baring a round coffee stain to its wood top), it always protrudes "from a background of other possibilities" (e.g., the yellow Post-it note on the wall, a walk to the grocery store, etc.), as one edge among other potential edges.

Although our attention can beckon objects into the foreground (like that Gehry building, now from a mirador in Bilbao), as its focus wanes it gradually releases these objects into the perceptual and horizonal backgrounds whence they came. Husserl reminds us that our "being-with" a thing (*Dabeisein*), whether or not it is willed, is always a question of "gradations," of varying levels of intensity.[9] Being with and among objects ought to be understood in terms of degrees "of primary and secondary [and tertiary, etc.] being-there," whereby the object of concern stands in the foreground, with any ancillary objects inhabiting those various gradations of background.[10]

The degree to which we are involved with objects is ultimately a matter of "proximity," though not necessarily in physical terms, for it is possible to be "with" an object even if it is not intuitively present (i.e., horizonal background) or physically close to us (i.e., perceptual background).

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[6] A. Montavont, *De la passivité dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1999, p. 67.

[7] *Ibid*., p. 68.

[8] *Ibid*., p. 72. "Intentional life comprises acts whose true agent is not the ego, which has not actively produced them." Cf. Holenstein, *Die Phänomenologie der Assoziation*, Nijhoff, The Hague, 1972, p. 133.

[9] E. Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2008, p. 359.

[10] *Ibid*. "Die attentionalen Modi sind nicht bloß Modi der doxischen, auf Sein und Sosein gerichteten Akte, sondern aller Akte, auch der wollend-handelnden usw." See also Montavont, *De la passivité dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, pp. 179–180.

The various intensities of being-with things yield, in Husserl's words, "a notion of backgrounds"—plural—in lived experience.[11] There is always fluid two-way traffic between background and foreground, with objects constantly shuttling back and forth. The object at the center of my attention is a case in point, as it is always also seen in relation to the objects around it—"the pencil is *beside* the inkwell, it is *longer* than the penholder, and so on"—and so it partakes in the tension between foreground to background.[12]

No earthly object—no matter how protrusive or edgy—is so singular or remarkable as to explode the foreground-background structure and to operate independently of it.[13] In a continuation of Montavont's earlier example of a desktop, Husserl (himself a forerunner of examples to do with desks) outlines the relation between what lies at the center of attention and what is peripheral to it:

> [S]eizing-upon is a singling out and seizing; anything perceived has an experiential background. Around the sheet of paper lie books, pencils, an inkstand, etc., also "perceived" in a certain manner, perceptively there, in the "field of intuition;" but, during the advertence to thesheet of paper, they were without even a secondary advertence and seizing-upon. They were apparent and yet were not seized upon and picked out, not posited singly for themselves.[14]

The protruding object is always and necessarily accompanied by its background or object field, which, though opaque and indistinct, is as changeable as the object itself. For instance, an object I know lies on the way to Manhattan—say, a particular piece of street art—but no longer appears to be there (having maybe fallen prey to anti-vandalist forces). When I come to notice the piece for its absence, I understand the object not in complete isolation from its environs but as part of a larger whole, the vast bulk of which lies outside my perceptual field. I wonder whether I might be mistaken, whether the piece lies further "along the way to

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[11] If we were talking about the perceptual background, this might equally be termed "a notion of foregrounds." E. Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, p. 359.

[12] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 105–6.

[13] B. Waldenfels, *Sinnesschwellen*, *Studien zur Phänomenologie des Fremden*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1999, p. 155.

[14] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1982, p. 70.

Manhattan" (a proximate larger whole that itself is part of an even larger one, i.e., the world).[15]

While there is always some degree of contrast between objects, there is equally continuity between them, which in part we humans bring to them: Objects can gradually grow together, as any contrast between them progressively decreases (*Ent-fernung*), as does a double gate when it shuts automatically. Objects may share exact features, and connect on the basis of these (e.g., the travertine façades of the Lincoln Center), or they may appear to be a "mixture of very similar elements [...] that allows a new similar element to ensue" (e.g., the many brick garages of southern Queens, bound by their wooden doors or metal shutters, and pre-war ornamentation).[16] That there can be such a degree of continuity between the objects I encounter, and that so many humans can move about the world as "carefreely" as they do, is first the result of our apperceptive capacities, and only secondly an accomplishment of the built world.

3. Interest Receivable (The Power of Objects)

The appearance of objects is, in the end, not entirely a matter of the will. Our actual grasp of things—whatever their nature (e.g. actual, imagined, recollected, etc.)—is changeable, and only ever *more or less* stable.[17] Moreover, our grasp of things does not exclusively or even predominantly depend on our taking an active interest in them, or on knowing them through repeated exposure. Attention can also be "directed," that is, attracted and ushered along by objects I do not specifically seek out or intend to encounter (e.g., by an inflatable flailing tube man outside a liquor store). In a text from 1931, Husserl formulates this in terms of the "movement" or stirring of an object in the background, leading to its protrusion.[18]

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[15] This is what Montavont refers to when she speaks of "the impossibility of a lived experience to be isolated" (A. Montavont, *De la passivité dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, p. 18). Any lived experience is hence open to a multiplicity of other potential engagements with the world, "impl[ying] other lived experiences in the form of a perceptual horizon" (*ibid*.). See S. Geniusas, *The Origins of the Horizon in Husserl's Phenomenology*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2012, p. 184.

[16] E. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, 2001, p. 514.

[17] See, for instance, Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, vol. 2, Routledge, Abingdon, 2001, p. 119.

[18] Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, p. 469.

How can an object be said to "move" within an undefined or at best only faintly visible field of objects? The object might, for instance, emit a form of signal, e.g. where, at night and seen among a larger group of buildings, a second-floor window lights up, causing it (and, with it, the whole house) to protrude from the background, or to emerge from the row of houses. Of course, where there is a strong contrast between foreground and background, the degree of salience of an object is much less dependent on my predisposition to pay attention to that class of thing. There are, in such a case, fewer objects and thus fewer levels of salience between which to discriminate.

Visually, however, only gradual differences separate a voluntary turning-towards something from an involuntary capture of attention.[19] I notice my neighbor's garish new metallic gate and fence combination without expressly intending to do so, yet notice it I do. Waldenfels analyzes such situations in terms of an eventual fusion of what is alien and what is proper to the individual: "What strikes us [*auffällt*] always comes too early; our attending to it too late."[20] We are radically exposed to the world: The shiny gate emerges suddenly from a background of other objects—it has struck me—and only then do I contend with whatever preconceived notions I harbor with regard to domestic fencing (this fence strikes me *as* something in particular, as rather ugly). The attraction and direction of attention is thus not a unidirectional matter of the human will, but subject also to the level of attraction displayed by objects, often human-made ones, whose "relief of salience, relief of noticeability, [...] can capture my attention."[21]

While protrusion in the realm of the sensuous is often due to such "qualitative discontinuities of considerable degree (*großen Abstandes*)," its analogon in the supra-sensuous realm might be a thought that lingers intensely, constantly disrupting my attempts to concentrate on other things.[22] Husserl formulates this in terms of a "confrontation" that leads to the ego "yielding" its attention to the now foregrounded object.[23] Affection is thus a matter of the protrusive "force" of objects, of their varying degrees of salience from surrounding objects.[24]

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[19] A. Schütz and T. Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, vol. 1, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, pp. 253–254.

[20] B. Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 2004, p. 72.

[21] E. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 215.

[22] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 76.

[23] *Ibid*., p. 77.

[24] E. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 197.

> Extremes of contrast are so strong, make such a forcefully efficacious prominence that they drown out, so to speak, all competing contrasts. Thus, there is something like a possible competition and a kind of concealment of active tendencies by especially strong ones. For example, particular colored figures becoming quite prominent affect us; affecting us at the same time are noises like the sound of a passing car, the notes of a song, prominent odors, etc. All of this takes place at the same time, and insofar as we turn to it alone, listening to it, the song wins out. But the rest still exercises an allure. But when a violent blast breaks in, like the blast of an explosion, it drowns out not only the affective particularities of the acoustic field, but also the particularities of all other fields. What otherwise spoke to us, no matter how little we paid attention to it, can no longer make it through to us.[25]

In cases where the contrast is extremely stark, even an active pursuit can be smothered by the salient object (say, a loud bang), its affective force simply overwhelming the former. Yet, even when this does occur, I do not therefore necessarily lose all interest in the object initially pursued. Though I may be irritated by the intrusion of an overwhelming sensuous force, e.g. the sound of that jackhammer, I can still remain determined to return to my work once the noise has passed. Indeed, Husserl makes room for the possibility that affection could in some manner be "inhibited" by so-called "weakening counter-potencies," which is to say that our predisposition to be affected by objects can somehow be dulled.[26] My original intention—to return to work—thus remains "on hold" as a counter-potency to the jackhammer, ever ready to reemerge.[27]This insight as to our receptivity for stark contrast underlies the sort of spaces Rem Koolhaas describes as "Junkspace," with their capacity to attract users through glaring visual stimuli such as LED lights and screens. It is because of our deep familiarity with such cheap, exchangeable environments that the intensity of their light displays requires continuous ratcheting up by the makers and operators of such environments. After all,

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[25] *Ibid*.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 201.

[27] Depending, of course, on the environment we habitually inhabit, we are not always or, with any luck, usually affected to such a great extent. Even in environments in which inhabitants are subjected to such objectively strong stimuli, e.g., a house at the end of a busy runway, the strength of such affections can be tempered through habituation (along with its physical and emotional toll), and the various potential affections lurking in the background gradually regain some of their strength.

the more dazzling the display, the more readily the structure will appear to the percipient or user:

> Superstrings of graphics, transplanted emblems of franchise and sparkling infrastructures of light, LEDs, and video describe an authorless world beyond anyone's claim, always unique, utterly unpredictable, yet intensely familiar. Junkspace is hot (or suddenly arctic); fluorescent walls, folded like melting stained glass, generate additional heat to raise the temperature of Junkspace to levels at which you could cultivate orchids.[28]

Koolhaas identifies and connects two shifts in the history of architecture in order to explain the use of materials in Junkspace. The first of these shifts—a shift from the long-standing penchant for repetition and regularity (which long predates architectural modernism) to the postmodernist emphasis on "complexity and contradiction"—goes in tandem with the second one:[29] Heavy, solid-seeming building materials (modular or not) are replaced with lightweight modules, which can be contorted into unlikely shapes that clad the lightweight frame beneath. This individualizes the user-facing environment through a form of distortion that no longer appears to obey a more traditional, modular style of assembly (even if "under the hood" or structurally it likely still does so). The composition of Junkspace hence *appears* arbitrary, "a domain of feigned, simulated order."[30] This complicates users' understanding of such buildings, which is arguably more used to classical notions of material symmetry (e.g., O-O-X-O-O). It is due to the opacity of Junkspace, due to its refusal to let us see roughly how it hangs together, that those environments attempt—largely successfully—to capture our attention.

> Patterns imply repetition or ultimately decipherable rules; Junkspace is beyond measure, beyond code [...] Because it cannot be grasped, Junkspace cannot be remembered. It is flamboyant yet unmemorable, like a screen saver; its refusal to freeze ensures instant amnesia. Junkspace does not pretend to create perfection, only interest.[31]

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[28] *Ibid*., p. 177.

[29] See R. Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1977.

[30] R. Koolhaas, "Junkspace," *October*, 100, 2002, p. 177.

[31] *Ibid*.

These commercial spaces, writes Koolhaas, are strongly suggestive of dynamism and vitality, yet in the end all that distinguishes one Junkspace from the next is the affective force it can muster. The initial strength of such a display is not memorable per se, and so the designers of such environments conflate the short-term gain of our attention with a longer-term memory or knowledge of the place.[32] These are environments that, through their own movement (e.g., flashes, flickers) suggest that we move towards them, and along, within them (e.g., mandatory passage through an airport duty free shop).[33] Given the manifest lack of opportunity to scrutinize such spaces—to stand still, to attempt to understand their underlying structure—it takes an architect or designer of built space such as Koolhaas to reveal the brittle bones beneath the metal and LED skin, and thereby to shed light on the very crude conception of human perception at the root of Junkspace. While the latter must eventually yield to the things that ultimately move us (e.g., work, sleep, love, etc.), it does not yield to more conventional built environments, those that can accommodate a multiplicity of human pursuits (in addition to conspicuous consumption). These are altogether less absorbing built experiences than Junkspace, and so lend themselves to understanding not in isolation, but within a continuum of other places.

Thus, when I walk past my favorite house on Woodbine Street, and as it recedes into memory, it takes on "the sense of a background, a real space (*Dingraum*), that could be filled with objects or objective forms (*Objektgestalten*)."[34] In slipping back into invisibility, the house is still "there" in my overall conception of the neighborhood, but in far more fluid a relation to the other objects inhabiting the background, such as the deli at the next corner or the station wagon opposite. Casey speaks of this in

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[32] From a business standpoint, it does not matter whether I remember the interior of a duty-free shop, as long as I actually enter it and then, after some time spent looking for it, eventually find the desired article. In many environments, entry into certain commercial spaces has become non-negotiable: While museums force us to exit through the gift shop, airports are increasingly requiring us to enter through the duty-free shop, which is often designed as a meandering passage from the airside-end of the security screening to the departure gates.

[33] They thereby allow little opportunity for detailed scrutiny, and yet, even if they did, the bodily posture of phenomenological scrutiny would likely clash so greatly with the patterns of movement of those functionally engaged with the environment, those travelling and/or shopping, as to seem utterly outlandish. A spatial design that might allow the user to extract themselves from usership could break the spell of Junkspace, making those within and outside it feel as if under observation, and, by extension, making Junkspace itself seem suspect (or, worse still, dysfunctional).

[34] E. Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, p. 469.

terms of the "place-world," a notion that ties "by-places" (i.e., the place where I currently stand or into which I walk) to "middle-range distinct places (for example, houses, parks, whole cities)—and sometimes also more remote places that have been drawn in to my perceptual or actional orbit from the far sphere."[35] Although in practical terms the place-world is the basis for our orientation within an environment, conceptually and specifically it is maybe best described in Husserl's words as a "unitary entanglement" (*Verworren-in-eins*), a coherent but variably well-ordered collection of objects, some of which are visible, while most are not.[36]

Any routinely-acquired environmental or hodological knowledge is rooted within such a complex precipitate of lived experience. Because of its variable and expansive dimensions, an objectivity such as a built environment requires extended and repeated exposure in order even to cohere qua objectivity; in order then for it to be open to recall. For example, to cycle a route from memory, without needing to consult a sequence of directions and street signs, it is necessary to have cycled the route repeatedly. Precisely due to the kind of (large) objectivities they are, environments tend essentially towards the background—they are a form of intuitional background, from which smaller objectivities can emerge—and, as such, rarely come to the fore as a whole. That is, even when I am unfamiliar with an environment, and must follow a set of directions in order to navigate it successfully, I am not therefore more likely to apprehend my environs as such, but only particular elements thereof, such as street signs or landmarks.

Husserl provides a fruitful metaphor for the interaction between the "precipitate" of lived experience and environmental conceptions: we enter a familiar room in the dark—it has therefore, in a sense, become unfamiliar—and attempt to locate the furniture, which is all but invisible. Yet, because of my familiarity with the room, I have a rudimentary notion of its spatial dimensions, and of the arrangement of the objects in that room, which stand in for the dark area before me, almost abstractly so. Add to this only a flicker of light, and the room appears nearly as vividly as when it is fully lit.

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[35] E. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2007, pp. 93, 102.

[36] E. Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1969, p. 57.

> [The object is] not given, but rather, presented in an empty manner. Or like when, having familiar objects in my surroundings before me in the dark, I reach for them, go toward them, but only in exceptional circumstances do I have presentifying intuitions [...] It actually stands there, just that I do not see it, or I only see a little bit of it, only a vague glimmer, like when I have a glimmer in the dark, and what I can make out of the completely appearing thing that is barely discernible in this vagueness here is the wholly determinate and quite familiar desk.[37]

Setting aside the initial disorientation caused by the pitch black, this is not unlike the manner in which familiar environments are encountered and navigated, that is, with a peripheral blindness that is flooded from memory with sedimented detail the moment we direct our attention to its various scales (e.g., to a parade of shops). In the example, the activation of the empty perception is more helpful than the actual intuition of the dark room, and therefore predominates in the interaction between full and empty presentations. This is not necessarily the case when navigating an environment in the course of everyday life, even if its empty perception—a vague built periphery—allows, e.g., for a stronger focus on the path to a destination.

As we have already established, this manner of glossing over an environment is only possible after protracted engagement, only after it has become thoroughly familiar (e.g., after I have furnished and decorated the room; after I have figured out the way to the subway). Only a few points of orientation, a few markers, suffice to let the larger built whole awaken, in part only schematically, but in other parts also in great detail (e.g., I look at the entire harmonica-shaped block on the avenue in renewed wonder).

4. Attention Paid (The Power of Humans)

For Bernhard Waldenfels, the glance (*Blick*) across the desk, the room, and beyond is a fundamentally important way of seeing: it is a way of understanding both the "organization" and "transgression" of fields of vision, whereby certain objectivities tend toward the background, with others in the fore.[38] Which way of seeing one adopts depends, for instance, on the activity we are involved in (writing, walking, teaching,

[37] E. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, pp. 425–426.
[38] B. Waldenfels, *Sinnesschwellen*, p. 125.

etc.), the manner in which we perform that activity (routinely, intensely, elegantly, badly, etc.), and on the role played by objects in the visible and as yet invisible environs (the extent to which they are instrumental or coincidental to the activity). The glance, with its scattershot speed and momentary pauses, scans the surrounding surfaces for points of interest (which are paid degrees of attention, or not). As Casey explains, the glance is an environmental trailblazer, the beginning of a "way in" to what surrounds us:

> In the perception of the world around us, the glance often leads the way, charting out the pathways of attention. These pathways are not independent tracks or trails to be followed *later* by attentional acts; instead, they blaze the trail of attending itself, being its forward fringe: at once the harbinger of the action and part of the action itself. The very insubstantiality of the glance, its mereness and playfulness, aids it immensely in this trailblazing behavior. The glance beckons us to attend; it summons us to pay attention; but it is also integral to attending itself.[39]

The glance is a visual manifestation of our openness to the world, and, moreover, of our willingness to be distracted and to observe our surroundings dispassionately until we find a new resting point for our attention. Once that is found, the glance might scan the objects surrounding that new center of attention, as these may enhance my contextual understanding of it.[40]

Whether we then stay with that object depends on the level of interest we take therein, in the attention we pay it.[41] Upon arrival in a place unknown to me, I am, as Casey puts it, particularly "open to surprise," and thus I cast an "open glance" at my new environs, a glance "that takes in as much as possible."[42] For example, I have just driven into the center of Arezzo, Italy, a place so visually and physically different to my usual stomping ground that I just want to drink it all up. At some point, I stop

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[39] E. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 326.

[40] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, pp. 105–106.

[41] See, for example, E. Husserl, *Ideas I*, p. 197; or E. Husserl, *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2003, p. 219.

[42] E. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 56. The opposite might be just as true, of course: when on the eve of an important work presentation we arrive late at night in a town hitherto unknown to us, our focus may rest squarely on the task at hand, i.e., on reaching the hotel bed pronto.

and look up in amazement at the dozens of highly distinct columns that together compose the tall main facade of Santa Maria della Pieve.

"Any protrusion," Husserl writes, "is an end (*Ende*), and also a transition for the realization (*Verwirklichung*) of the new."[43] The novelty of an experience depends in part on the various ways in which we direct our attention, e.g., with intentional openness, as with Casey's "open glance," through detail-oriented scrutiny of an object, etc. Certain deliberate forms of attentiveness are capable of heightening the likelihood of the new, as Bernhard Waldenfels points out. Attention, in such cases, functions as a reorganizer of experience, as a disruptor of dominant or otherwise obtrusive parameters of lived experience.

> Attention ensures that in the formation of a "relief of noticeability" certain things *protrude*, and others *recede*, as in a relief [...] For the person attending, this corresponds to a preference, a bringing forward (*Vorziehen*), and to a pushing back (*Zurückstellen*).[44]

For architecture buffs, that may mean paying a great deal of attention to their built environs, thereafter letting these slip back into the perceptual background. While it is true, as Husserl writes, that objects always come accompanied by a mode of presentation (e.g., my favorite house on Woodbine Street, as it emerges from the November fog), we are able to make modal interventions by, for example, questioning or tweaking the form in which objects appear (e.g., vaguely, but now more distinctly).[45] The manner of objects' shifting from background to foreground also depends on the way in which we direct our attention (onto them, away, etc.), which in turn is also a function of their faceted appearance (whereby my favorite house is always showing itself in renewed ways).

Indeed, when we are aware of a thing's presence, we are of course not *comprehensively* aware of it, i.e., we cannot have examined the thing for all of its particularities. Experience in its entirety can only ever be understood in terms of its varying degrees of clarity or opacity. Husserl illustrates this in an example from *Thing and Space*, which he begins with a clear focus on a printed word on a page in a book, then moving on to the various peripheries surrounding that word.

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[43] E. Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt*, p. 18.

[44] B. Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit*, p. 102.

[45] E. Husserl, *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, Max Niemeyer, Halle, 1928, p. 485.

> In every adumbration is found a small, undelimited part of the clarity in which the corresponding thingly moment presents itself with relative completeness. This part passes over, without limitation, to ever further spheres of increasing unclarity. I focus, e.g., on a word from a printed page lying before me. It appears relatively clear, and further, within it, a letter appears most clearly, and at the normal visual distance it is completely clear, while the neighboring letters and the more distant ones are already diminishing in clarity. And so it continues: what is by far the most is a vague *je ne sais quoi*, continuously diminishing in clarity as one proceeds out toward the margin of the field of view, where the paper is apprehended in undeterminate generality as printed writing, but is not graspable in its definite individuality.[46]

Things go partially unnoticed, not necessarily due to a lack of attention—or an act of omission—but because intentional rays are directed elsewhere or otherwise. The world is always encountered with variable levels of attention (or inattention), the distribution of which determines the amount of contrast required for an object to come to prominence. Casey speaks of this dynamic of inclusion/exclusion in terms of the "braided quality" of experience, which "at once alleviates and complicates our experience in the life-world."[47]

Moreover, whether or not we become aware of a thing is not merely the result of objective attributes, e.g., of certain shapes, textures, arrangements, or sizes, but also of each individual's predisposition to attend to such attributes, due precisely to the individuality of their life experience. Thus, a person endowed with a knowledge of the history, theory, and practice of architecture is not only more inclined to pay attention to their built environment, but is equally more likely to be struck from the background by a feature thereof. In such cases, "[s]eeing is set into motion through a desire to see (*Sehbegehren*), a *libido vivendi* . . . ," which is to say that things strike us visually, attract our attention, because they rouse our desire to see (and to see such things in particular, e.g., buildings).[48] This aspect of our relation to the world (and to particular regions thereof) can, of course, also be extended to the other senses. Husserl, for instance, points to the example of music, namely to a particularly

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[46] E. Husserl, *Thing and Space*, Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1997, p. 92.
[47] E. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 315.
[48] B. Waldenfels, *Phänomenologie der Aufmerksamkeit*, p. 121.

beautiful motif, in order to illustrate the role of pleasure in our basic openness to the world:

> A melody sounds without exercising any considerable affective force, or if this should even be possible, without exercising any affective allure on us at all. We are occupied with something else, and the melody does not affect us for instance as a "disturbance." Now comes an especially mellifluous sound, a phrase that especially arouses sensible pleasure or even displeasure [...] The particularity of the sound has made me attentive. And through this I became attentive to the entire melody, and, understandably, the particularities thus became alive to me.[49]

Affection, in such cases, is not the jagged objective profile resulting, for example, from the sudden racket of a jackhammer tearing open some pavement. Instead, it is more like my favorite house, which although it stands out—to me at least—from the other houses on Woodbine Street, is objectively not overwhelmingly different (i.e., it is not wildly colorful, unusually large or small, etc.). Indeed, if not for my predilection for the building and its particularities, e.g., its century-old wooden veranda, it would be easy to miss.

Much like a faint or dormant memory relies on the force of lived experience for its revival, the quality of a full, sensuous presentation also depends on a concurrent empty presentation. That is, we tend to encounter objects with and against a precipitate or accumulation of memories of that type (of object).[50] The object stands before me in this manner (e.g., as my favorite house on Woodbine Street) because the empty horizon of past experience has co-shaped its actual presentation, the way in which it now stands before me.[51] Thus, even an encounter with an object or larger

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[49] E. Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, p. 203: "This particularity does not merely become affective for itself in a living manner; rather, the entire melody is accentuated in one stroke to the extent that it is still living within the field of the present; thus, the affection radiates back into the retentional phases; it is initially at work by accentuating [the retentional phases] in a unitary manner, and at the same time it has an effect on the special matters that are prominent, on the particular sounds, fostering special affections."

[50] *Ibid*., p. 446. This is what Husserl means when he refers to the fullness of intuition as the "actualization of the potentiality of constitution" inherent in the empty presentation.

[51] Yet the actual thing never "contains" its empty counterpart in any form, and instead "replaces" it, stands in for it (*ibid*., p. 427). In this, there is a "transition" between the two forms of presentation, "a synthesis through coinciding of the empty presentation and intuition," but never a total overlap (one should not confuse the emptiness of something concealed with the emptiness of something apprehended) (*ibid*., p. 378).

objectivity that is rooted in habituality (e.g., the Queens block on which I live) is anything but a static affair. The "habitus," in fact, resides in the frequent transformation of the memory: "The object perceived retrieves (or, less literally, "repeats" [*wiederholen*]) the memory, "reactivating" and transforming it in the process, thereby contributing to the formation of a "*habitus*."[52] This is no such thing as an isolated memory, and instead an accumulation of previous encounters not necessarily with the same, singular object, but with a wider fabric of similar objects or situations.

For instance, my decade-long exposure to the built environment of southern Queens conditions the choice of my favorite house on Woodbine Street, that is, of what for me constitutes normalcy and exceptionality. In *Experience and Judgment*, Husserl describes how the accumulated experience of individual instances of an object type can yield the non-intuitive notion of a "normal" object:

> For example, a tall man can be present as being tall without, in general, there needing to be people who are short in our field of vision. The man *contrasts* with "normal" men, examples of whom may be vaguely "called up" without an explicit comparison being made. [...] All of these determinations are drawn with reference to a *normality of experience* which can vary from environing world to environing world.[53]

The "normal" object is not physically in the background but informs an "absolute impression" (rather than a "relational determination," where two objects are considered side by side).[54] In other words, it forms a distinct impression that shapes my judgment of similar situations, and so when I ride a cable car up a steep San Francisco street, as a New Yorker I am struck by the sometimes improbable lengths to which central Californian builders went in order somehow to level the buildings that line California Street. A seasoned San Franciscan, however, may in the course of their everyday comings and goings not find their home cityscape all that noteworthy or striking.

We do not for the most part—in everyday life—move through built environments with the curiosity of a tourist. As Frédéric Gros reminds us

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[52] E. Husserl, *Experience and Judgment*, p. 123.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 194.
[54] *Ibid*.

in his *Philosophy of Walking*, everyday practical-minded interactions with the built environment actually rely on a form of selective inattention:

> Usually people walk the streets in a thoroughly practical manner, to go for bread, to the shops, to the bus or subway, to drop in on a friend. Then, streets are just corridors. People walk with their heads down, recognizing only what they need to. They look at nothing, they navigate, perceiving only the functional minimum: turn right at the green pharmacy sign, that big brown gateway means the bakery is on the next corner. Thus the street becomes *a mere tissue of feeble, twinkling signs*, with its spectacle largely extinguished.[55]

This form of inattention is a specific form of access to the world, one whereby pedestrians pay minimal attention to their immediate environment while instead concentrating on events elsewhere, e.g., on whatever appointments they may have on that day, or on the words just uttered by a friend on the street. In phenomenological terms, this relies on the ability to inhabit situations beyond those we are physically inhabiting at any given moment, spreading our attention, with varying degrees of intensity, over several experiential horizons.

The dual force of habit and routine hence can result in a dulling of environmental quality and specificity. This commonly occurs in deeply familiar environments, which after a period of attentive settling in, of acclimatization, soon lend themselves to increasingly edgeless navigation (without the need for the initial levels of attentiveness with which one first navigated). Yet, notwithstanding this partial dulling, habit and routine are also fundamental to the upkeep of knowledge as to the quality and specificity of an environment, even if the latter is no longer encountered with the attention to detail paid to it initially. That is, although I may not actively be familiarizing myself with the buildings and objects that line my walk to the subway, I do still engage with them (e.g., through a form of cursory check) particularly insofar as they are "infrastructural" to that daily walk of mine. In that role, the built world is a successful provider of basic orientation in a spatial, visual, and bodily sense, one that through its historical catalogue of forms lends itself more readily than most other environments to the normalization Husserl speaks of.

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[55] F. Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, Verso, London, 2014, pp. 166–167 (emphasis mine).

5. Conclusion

As I argued here, a broad understanding of architecture—in terms of its pieces and wholes, its products and products' products—is to consider it an infrastructural component of the lifeworld. As such, it is part and parcel of the modern attempt to construct the world in a way that more readily suits human needs and abilities. Over the past two centuries or so, architecture has largely been a wild success story—a story of productive order and regularity—and also a cautionary tale (e.g., in terms of sustainability, social and environmental). And while it also has a long-standing history of seeking aesthetic protrusion, by means of its particularly outstanding pieces, its function as a sympathetic, mostly easygoing frame for human life lay front and center in this essay.[56]

I showed, first, how the horizonal foreground-background structure sets up an experiential tension between a singular focus and the world of things beyond it. The built is exemplary insofar as it is just as much about a particular place as it is about places further afield, all of which are more or less directly tied together by human-made infrastructure. Next, we considered how a background, specifically one filled with "objects of the type of buildings," can suddenly hijack our focus. Architecture, when it confronts us with the dazzling environments described in Koolhaas's "Junkspace," is a hijacker of attention. Finally, and with no small amount of help from Husserl, I laid out how humans co-determine what comes to their attention, creating, based on their everyday comings and goings, their very own conditions for the emergence of singular built things from among a larger whole of built things.

In a strict sense, *which* object exactly (or object type) inhabits our perceptual foreground is a moot point for phenomenology. (Hence all those examples involving desks and coffee mugs.) This has philosophically sound reasons, and yet I felt obliged to force the matter a little here: given a world in which the phenomenon of the "urban" has reached every nook and cranny of the planet,[57] phenomenology is also our best chance to account for expressions and/or experiences of the built that range from the most subtle to the bombastic, from a semi-suburban fence *cum* gate combo to a Frank Gehry masterpiece. That said, we lack examples of

[56] See, for instance, G. W. F. Hegel's understanding of the function of architecture in conjunction with Greek sculpture (*Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 702).

[57] See N. Brenner, "Introduction: Urban Theory Without an Outside," in *Implosions / Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, Jovis, Berlin, 2014.

what it is like to inhabit the built world across all forms of human expression (e.g., fiction, art, cinema, etc.)—among other things, this essay is a call to reverse that trend.

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On Doubling the Square and Other Phenomena

ABSTRACT: *Gnomonice*, the construction of clocks, is the topic of Book 9 of Vitruvius's ten books on architecture. This essay examines his inclusion of gnomonics as a "part" of architecture in terms of the triumphalist context that shaped the composition of *De architectura*, which Vitruvius wrote for Augustus Caesar in the early 20's BCE, arguing that its author's consistent appeal to Greek paradigms such as the origin of the Corinthian capital and Plato's method for doubling the square is meant to enhance the imperial project by dignifying its culture of conquest with credentials appropriated from the Hellenic world Rome had annexed to its own a century earlier.

KEYWORDS: Vitruvius, gnomonics, Caryatids, Corinthian order, Corinth, Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle

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Book 9 of *De architectura,* the ten books on architecture Vitruvius presented to Augustus Caesar around 25 BCE is about *gnomonice*, the construction of clocks. *Gnomonice*, he writes, is the second of the three parts of architecture (Vitr. I, 3, 1). The other two are building (*aedificatio:* Books 1-7) and machinery (*machinatio:* Book 10), which includes the machinery of war. Book 8 is on water, included in *De architectura*, though not a "part" of architecture as Vitruvius defines it.

A preface addressed to the Emperor, his dedicatee, introduces each of the ten books. The preface to Book 9 is an encomium on the importance of learning, for which Vitruvius has been an advocate from the outset, beginning with the opening chapter of Book 1 and its directive that a properly-educated architect acquire familiarity with no fewer than nine different disciplines, ranging from geometry and music to history, philosophy and astronomy—*caeli rationes*, in Latin, the "order of the heavens" (Vitr. I, 1, 3)[1] In his ninth preface, this general advocacy narrows to focus on empirical knowledge whose benefits are specific and, above all useful: knowledge, Vitruvius declares, that underwrites good government as the very bedrock of civil society (Vitr. IX, pref. 2.). In an account whose subtext is a clearly a bid to be considered one of them, Vitruvius asserts that the learned men who are the source of such knowledge deserve the very highest honours. Sages whose writings render them immortal are worthier by far of palms and crowns than Olympic athletes whose fame is as transient as their short-lived bodily strength. So great is their importance to civilisation, he claims, that they even merit the accolade of a triumph, the martial ritual that consecrated Rome's victorious generals in a spectacular parade of warriors, weapons, prisoners and plunder, culminating in the triumphator's ascent to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol. Augustus's extravagant triple triumph of 29 BCE, referred to in the preface to Book 1, is part of the background here.[2] Another allusion, to the deification of Augustus's adoptive father Julius Caesar, also referenced in the first preface, surfaces in Vitruvius's insistence that, like Caesar, his intellectual triumphators have earned nothing less than

[1] His emphasis on the importance of learning underpins the view that Vitruvius made architecture liberal art. See F. Brown, "Vitruvius and the Liberal Art of Architecture," *The Bucknell Review*, XI, 4, 1963, pp. 99–107.

[2] Vitr. I, pref, 1: "When your divine mind and power Imperator Caesar were seizing command of the world [...] and citizens were glorying in your triumph and victory (*triumpho victoriaque tua cives gloriarentur*) . . ." On the triple triumph, *inter alia* F. Hickson "Augustus 'Triumphator': Manipulation of the Triumphal Theme in the Political Program of Augustus," *Latomus*, L, 1, 1991, pp. 124–138.

the ultimate reward of "a seat among the gods."[3] Such references may tend to elude modern readers, but to Vitruvius's Roman contemporaries, his addressee in particular, they would have been obvious. So too, in the triumphal period following the brutal civil war which culminated in Augustus Caesar's emergence as sole ruler of the Roman world, would their rhetorical intent.

In this context, who in fact *were* in fact the men Vitruvius credits with the gift of civilisation and good government? Learned men who, like Pythagoras, Democritus, Plato and Aristotle are the source of useful knowledge he claims as the foundation of "the civilised ways, laws and impartial justice without which no city can be safe or whole?" (Vitr. IX, .pref. 2)[4] Or Roman conquerors who justified territorial ambition in precisely those terms? Vitruvius could not have helped sharing their belief in the civilising mission of conquest—as a citizen of Rome, of course, but more specifically and with firm professional commitment as a designer of siege machinery attached to Julius Caesar during the latter's conquest of Gaul in the 50's BCE.

And if learned men were indeed to be honoured with triumphs as Vitruvius suggests, what prisoners, weapons, trophies and looted treasure could possibly figure in such a celebration? There were rules for triumphs and one, a defining constituent that allowed for no exceptions, was the triumphant general's entry into the city at the head of his undefeated troops.[5] Another required that a triumph-worthy conquest count at least 5,000 enemies killed. How, by that token, would you evaluate an intellectual's victory, identify his enemies, count their corpses? What kind of warriors could conceivably be mustered to march with the victorious intellectual as he entered Rome in triumph? These questions are rhetorical, of course, meant only to heighten how absurd proposing the award of a triumph for intellectual achievement becomes if taken literally. But Vitruvius does not mean to be taken literally. Nor, in my view, is his intention simply metaphorical, with "triumph" a figure of speech

[3] Vitr. IX, pref. 3: *inter deorum sedes dedicandos iudicari*. Vitruvius refers to the deified Caesar's "seat among the gods" in identical terms at I, pref. 2.

[4] All translations of Vitruvius are my own. The Latin text used is that published in in *Vitruve: de l'architecture*, livres I-X, various eds,. Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1969-2009.

[5] On the rules for triumphs, see chapter 6 in M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA / London, 2009, pp. 187–218.

intended to frame, in pointedly Roman terms, the exceptional degree of recognition he thinks is owed to men of learning.

Rome's was a warrior culture, a culture of conquest consecrated in the ritual of the Roman triumph. Vitruvius was a sustaining member of that culture whose terms were bound to dictate his view of how education was to be valued just as inescapably as economic terms now dictate the value placed on education by our own culture's sustaining members. Where the current mantra is that learning is important because—or if—it leads to earning, for Vitruvius learning was important because it underwrote Rome's God-given right to rule the world.

His adherence to imperial norms and his fealty to the Emperor for whom he wrote are evident from the outset. "When your divine mind and power, Imperator Caesar, were seizing command of the word and all your enemies had been crushed by your invincible *virtus*" he writes at the beginning of his first preface, firmly anchoring his treatise in the triumphal period of the early 20's BCE already alluded to (Vitr. I, pref. 1). The military frame of reference, if rarely as clamorously foregrounded as this, remains constant.

At the start of Book I, in his chapter on the education of the architect, Vitruvius famously begins with the declaration that, *architecti scientia,* the knowledge of the architect, is brought into being by *fabrica* and *ratiocinatio*—hands-on practice and the discourse "furnished with many disciplines and various kinds of learning" that explains or "rationalises" the architect's work, accounting for its *raison d'être* (Vitr. I, 1.1).[6] Both are essential. Architects who rely on hands-on practice without the aid of learning, he writes "will never achieve authority equal to their labors, and those who rely only on discourse and learning will appear to have chased a shadow and not the thing itself." But architects who have mastered both, he concludes with a flourish "like men fully armed, will attain their goal speedily and with authority." (Vitr. I, 1, 2)

Vitruvius had served Julius Caesar as a military engineer during Caesar's conquest of Gaul, as already mentioned, but also very possibly during the civil wars and other campaigns that followed, which is to say

[6] For a recent, close reading of this opening, P. Lefas, "Declarative and Tacit Knowledge in Vitruvius: *Disciplina*, *fabrica* and *ratiocinatio* in *De architectura* I, 1," *Khōrein: Journal for Architecture and* Philosophy, I, 1, 2023, pp. 50–62. On the education of the architect, recently (among others) pp. 21–26 in T. Fögen, "*L'architecte engagé:* Education, Morality and Politics in Vitruvius' *De architectura*," *Graecolatina et Orientalie* XXXIX-XL, 2018, pp. 17–46.

for 15 formative years from about 59 BCE, when Vitruvius would have been in his early 20s, up to Caesar's assassination in 44.[7] Whatever the details, there is no contesting that Vitruvius treasured the memory of his attachment to the great general who, thanks principally to his own self-advertising commentaries, was especially known for the speed and authority with which he attained his goals—most famously, the speed of his conquest of Pontus in 47 BCE, summed up in the VENI VIDI VICI inscribed on a *titulus* paraded along with other trophies in the triumph awarded for that conquest, third of the four he celebrated in April 46 BCE.[8] Vitruvius may have been there – as a spectator or even perhaps as a participant. Weapons, including the scorpions and ballistae that were Vitruvius's area of expertise, were a standard feature of the triumphal décor, and Caesar's onetime military engineer may even have contributed as a consultant.

Writing is the first of nine disciplines which, as I noted earlier, are to arm Vitruvius's well-educated architect. "An architect is to know writing (*litteras*) so that he can produce a stronger memory in commentaries," he writes (Vitr. I, 1, 4). *Commentarii* could be any of a variety of written documents, including Vitruvius's own *De architectura* and the sources he worked from, also referred to as commentaries.[9] Julius Caesar too wrote what were (and are) known as commentaries, self-aggrandizing third-person accounts of his military successes in his case, much admired for their purity of style.[10] As a general Caesar worked through messengers; as a writer, from military dispatches, assembling in these commentaries the *litterae* (as they were called) sent to him by legates in the field with those he in turn sent to the Senate at Rome where bulletins of success in battle were greeted as *litterae laureatae*, laureate letters—messengers of victory. The award of a triumph could depend on such reports.[11]

Drawing and geometry are second and third. The fourth is listed history. "Architects," he instructs, "must be able to recall numerous *historiae* because they provide answers to questions that arise concerning the

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[7] B. Baldwin, "The Date, Identity and Career of Vitruvius," *Latomus*, 49, 1990, pp. 425–434. A rough estimate of Vitruvius's dates, which are not known with any accuracy, is 80-20 BCE.

[8] Attachment to Caesar: Vitr. I, pref. 2; *Veni vidi vici*: Suetonius, *Divus Julius*, 37.

[9] I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA / London, 2003, pp. 18–31. Vitr. I, 4; I, 1, 12.; VII, pref. 1 and *passim*.

[10] *Bellum Gallicum* on his conquest of Gaul, and *Bellum Civile* on the civil war against Pompey.

[11] I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*, p. 23 with references.

reasons for using the many ornaments designers include in their works." Like *histoire* in French, or *storia* in Italian, the Latin *historia* can be a narrative account of past events or a fictional "story."[12] This ambiguity is particularly relevance in the present context.

The ability to recall a great many *historiae* makes Vitruvius himself exemplary in this respect. The large number of historical anecdotes he includes in *De architectura* (28 in all) may be explained, in part, by fear of losing his reader's interest, as he writes to the Emperor in the preface to Book 5, where he recognizes that without narrative enhancement architecture can be a rather unengaging topic (Vitr. V, pref. 1).[13] Many of these stories are unique to Vitruvius, raising the possibility that some, in part or in whole, were his own invention. The first of the 28—one of the two meant to illustrate the prescription that architects must know *historiae* to justify their use of certain ornaments – is a case in point. It is a story of conquest and triumph: the capture and destruction of a city, the slaughter of its male citizens, the enslavement and public humiliation of its women.

As Vitruvius tells it, Carya, the Peloponnesian city in question, was sacked by the Greeks for colluding with the Persian invaders—in the early fifth century BCE, we assume, when Xerxes overran much of Greece. Permanent admonitory chastisement of the Caryans' treachery is why caryatids, statues of widowed Caryan women wearing their finest clothes, are put in the place of columns to support entablatures. "So that they might be led in triumph not just once, but enslaved forever as a lesson." (Vitr. I, 1, 5)

But the Persian advance was arrested at Salamis in 480 BCE, and Xerxes' armies never reached the Peloponnese. Although the genesis of the fifth-century monuments of the Athenian Acropolis can indeed be traced to the Athenian victory at Salamis, the Erechtheion caryatids which used, traditionally, to be taken as the ones referred to in Vitruvius' story were in fact called *korai* by the classical Greeks—"maidens"—not "caryatids."[14]

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[12] C. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962, sv. *historia*.

[13] For a detailed commentary on each of Vitruvius's 28 historical anecdotes, see A. Becchi, "Vitruvius' *Historiae* and the Love of Learning," in I. D. Rowland and S. W. Bell (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Vitruvius*, Brill, Leiden, 2024, pp. 627–684. See also B. Koloczek, "Tell me a Curious (His)story. Historical Content in Vitruvius' *De architectura*," *Symbolae Philologorum Graecae et Latinae*, XXII, 1, 2022, pp. 57–78.

[14] The Persians burned down all the buildings on the Athenian Acropolis just before the battle of Salamis. The monuments of the Periclean Acropolis eventually replaced them. On

The term itself originates with Vitruvius as indeed does much of the entire story.[15] But getting the facts right was not Vitruvius's aim. His point was rhetorical, meant to show how closely allied *architecti scientia*, the knowledge of the architect was to Rome's warrior culture, its interests and core values. His second story, also drawn from the Persian wars, reinforces the argument.

At the battle of Platea, the Greeks, led by the Spartans, won their final, decisive victory over the Persian invaders, which Vitruvius says was celebrated "in glorious triumph with spoils and plunder." Triumphs were exclusive to Rome, as already noted—the Greeks did not celebrate them, which makes this a significant misstatement in a story that otherwise adheres more closely to known facts than the previous one, where there is also a misplaced mention of a triumph. A similar one, mentioned earlier, appears in the Greek context of the preface to book 9, where Vitruvius argues for the award of triumphs to men of learning. One way to understand this misattribution is as a form of appropriation which deflects these narratives from their place in the Greek golden age to draw them into the Roman orbit, where indeed the entire Greek world had been orbiting for a hundred years and more by the time Vitruvius wrote.[16]

Continuing his story, Vitruvius goes on to tell how, once back in Sparta, the Spartans used their booty to build what he calls a "Persian portico" as a trophy of their success in battle (Vitr., I, 1, 6). As punishment for the Persians' insolence, the Spartans placed statues of Persian captives wearing their barbarian attire as supports for the roof of this portico which, he writes, was meant to strike terror in the hearts of Sparta's enemies, and stand before its citizens as an *exemplum virtutis*—a paradigm

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the Athenian victory over the Persians at Salamis as the chief and perennial informant of its architecture, J. Hurwit, *The Athenian Acropolis: History, Mythology and Archaeology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

[15] The whole caryatid controversy, with citations and bibliography, is reviewed in *Vitruve: de l'architecture livre 1*, P. Fleury (ed. and trans.), Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1990, pp. 74–80. See also J. Rykwert, *The Dancing Column*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA / London, 1996, pp. 129–138; D. King, "Figures Supports: Vitruvius' Caryatids and Atlantes," *Queaderni ticinesi di numismatica et antichità classiche*, 26, 1998, pp. 275–305; A.. Lesk, "'*Caryatides probantur inter pauca operum*': Pliny, Vitruvius, and the Semiotics of the Erechtheion Maidens at Rome," *Arethusa*, XL, 1, 2007, pp. 25–42; B. Koloczek, "Tell me a Curious (His)story. Historical Content in Vitruvius' *De architectura*," pp. 63-64.

[16] Claims that the Roman triumph originated in the bacchic *thriambos* of the Greeks date from Vitruvius's day, and are largely spurious (Varro, *De lingua latina*, VI, 68; Diodorus Siculus IV, 5, 21; Arrian, *Anabasis*, VI, 28). See M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph*, pp. 305–320 for a detailed discussion.

of *virtus*, the manly courage to which Romans attributed their success as conquerors.[17] That is why one often finds statues of Persians placed as supports for architraves, he goes on, concluding his case for the importance of knowing *historiae* with the assertion that "there are other stories *of the same kind* (my italics) that architects ought to know." (Vitr. I, 1, 6) Stories of victory and enemies vanquished, you are led to conclude. Stories, in other words, which bracket the culture of conquest with an art that, as Vitruvius would have it, provides triumph with enduring *proof* and justifies in unequivocally Roman terms the value of the entire architectural enterprise.

These two aetiological *historiae* are obviously intended to be taken as paradigmatic, appearing as they do at the beginning of Vitruvius's opening chapter on the fundamentals of architectural education. This is not to say, however, that their intent is to limit the architecture of victory to crass displays of dominance that pillory barbarian captives or put the enslaved wives of slaughtered enemies to permanent public shame. Their intent, I would claim, is to introduce the triumphal role of architecture in general by presenting Persian porticos and caryatid porches as its most unambiguous, basic and least subtle expression.

There were Roman ornaments with similar rhetorical intent that was of far greater sophistication and subtlety that this. Vitruvius "explains" the use of what became the most ubiquitous of such motifs in the elegantly-allegorized aetiology of the Corinthian capital he presents in the opening chapter of Book 4, the second of his two books on temples. His origin story concerning this, the most ornate of the three so-called Greek architectural orders is well known. Like the two *historiae* just discussed, its author situates it in the Greek golden age of the 5th century BCE, and like so many of his stories, it is unique to Vitruvius whose invention it could very well be, despite his claiming it a matter of record. He is also the earliest known writer to give the name "Corinthian" to the foliate acanthus capital that was to become a universally recognizable declaration of Roman world rule. The story goes as follows.

> This, so it is recorded, is how the capital was first invented. A virgin citizen of Corinth was just ripe for marriage when she was overcome

[17] M. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness:* Virtus *and the Roman Republic,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge / New York, 2006, pp. 142–149; I. K. McEwen, "Virtù-vious: Roman Architecture, Renaissance Virtue," *Cahiers des études anciennes*, 48, 2011, pp. 255–283 (261–262).

> by disease and died. After she was buried, her nurse filled a basket with things ("pocula:" literally, small cups or vessels) that had delighted the virgin when she was alive, brought it to the tomb, and placed it on top. Then, so that the things in the basket would last longer in the open air, she covered it with a tile. As it happened, the basket was placed on the root of an acanthus plant. After a time, in the spring, because of the weight pressing down on the middle of it, the root put forth leaves and small stalks which grew up around the sides of the basket. Because of the weight of the tile, the ends of the stalks were forced by necessity to curl back into volutes at the corners.
>
> Then Callimachus, called "Catatexitechnos" by the Athenians because of the refinement and skill of his marble-carving, passed by the tomb, and noticed the basket and how tender the leaves growing up around it were. Delighted by the freshness of this new form, he used it as a model to make columns for the Corinthians, established their symmetries, and assigned the rules for completing works of the Corinthian order. (Vitr., IV, 1, 9-10)

Scholarly attempts to account for Vitruvius's story have been foiled at almost every turn by the difficulty of reconciling its details with the historical and archaeological evidence.[18] The *genus* Vitruvius calls Corinthian could not have originated at Corinth, where acanthus does not and did not ever grow, and the 5th century BCE Athenian sculptor Callimachus is unlikely to have had anything to do with the invention of a capital whose form, as Vitruvius prescribes it, dates from the 2nd century BCE, not the 5th, when its earliest prototypes (from Athens, not Corinth) looked very little like the one, current in Vitruvius's own day, here described.[19] Nor indeed has any corroboration of the acanthus plant's funerary symbolism scholars have seen reflected in the story been found in the Corinthia.

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[18] For a review, *Vitruve: de l'archiecture livre IV*, P. Gros (ed. and trans.), Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1992, pp. 75–90. Also J. Rykwert, *The Dancing Column*, pp. 317–349; M. Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, Yale Univeristy Press, New Haven / London, 2000, pp. 136–138; *id*., *Origins of Classical Architecture: Temples Orders and Gifts to the Gods in Ancient Greece*, Yale University Press, New Haven / London, 2014, pp. 150–155; I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius: Writing the Body of Architecture*, pp. 212–224.

[19] The proportions of the Corinthian capital Vitruvius attributes to Callimachus are detailed at IV, 1, 11–12. As Pierre Gros notes in his commentary on the passage (*Vitruve: de l'archiecture livre IV*, p. 89), "il nous semble que le schéma décrit dans ces paragraphes normatifs date pour l'essentiel de la seconde moitié du IIe siècle."

So why Corinth? In the face of so many disparities, can Vitruvius's location of the order's origin in the Greek city of Corinth contribute anything at all to our understanding the significance of this ostensibly tender-hearted tale? The answer is yes if you accept the premise that Vitruvius was a sustaining member of Rome's warrior culture, and recall that Roman conquest of the Greek world (together with the appropriation of *its* culture) can be dated with some precision to 146 BCE and the sack of Corinth by the Roman general Lucius Mummius Achaicus, who razed the city, killed its entire male population and sold its women and children into slavery. Boatloads of plunder—works of art mainly—were shipped back to Rome where the senate awarded Mummius a triumph, celebrated the following year. A century later, profit continued to be gained from the city's destruction through the sale to eager Roman buyers of grave goods known as *nekrocorinthia*, chiefly pottery and bronze ware, looted from Corinthian tombs (Strabo VIII, 6, 23). The conquest was a milestone in the annals of Roman expansion and reverently commemorated as such. Over a hundred years later, Vitruvius's younger contemporary Virgil would celebrate Mummius and his triumph in the parade of heroes that appear in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*: "There Mummius, triumphant over Corinth and famed for his slaughter of the Greeks will drive his chariot to the lofty Capitol." (Verg. *Aen*. VI, 836–837)[20]

Mummius's spoils paid for the temple he built to Hercules Victor as his victory monument in the Forum Boarium where it still stands.[21] It was a round, Greek temple (a tholos) built of Pentelic marble brought from Greece and had a peristyle of 20 Corinthian columns. All of these features, including use of the (possibly) as yet unnamed Corinthian order, were firsts in the city of Rome. It is also possible that its inaugural appearance on a temple celebrating the sack of Corinth was what gave the acanthus capital its name along with its enduring identity as a trophy of Roman conquest in general. How does Vitruvius's *historia* "explain" this?

To begin with, it is important to recall, as I mentioned earlier, that for Romans conquest had a civilising mission. The claim, if specious

[20] Cited M. Loar, "Hercules, Mummius and the Roman Triumph in *Aeneid 8*," *Classical Philology*, CXII, 1, 2017, p. 52.

[21] A. Ziolkowski, "Mummius' Temple of Hercules Victor and the Round Temple on the Tiber," *Phoenix*, 42, 1988, pp. 309–333; M. Loar, "Hercules, Mummius and the Roman Triumph in *Aeneid 8*." Filippo Coarelli thinks the temple was built by an oil merchant called M. Octavius Herrenus: F. Coarelli, *Il Foro Boario*, Edizione Quasar, Rome, 1988, pp. 92–105, but this is unlikely as Loar demonstrates in his recent article.

by any post-colonial measure, is understood readily enough on its own terms when it came to the inhabitants of places like Gaul, Caria, Lusitania, Aquitania and so on whose rudimentary building methods Vitruvius reviews in the chapter on primitive huts that opens Book 2 of *De architectura*—methods which proper guidance and the "certain calculations of symmetries" would eventually lead these barbarians not only to the construction of correctly-built Roman-style houses with foundations, tiled roofs and walls made of brick or stone but also, in due course, to lives of civilisation and refinement.[22]

But how might such claims justify Roman conquest of the Greeks who were definitely *not* barbarians having, as all agreed, invented civilisation, and long led cultivated lives of far greater sophistication than their Roman contemporaries. Rather *too* cultivated, Romans would opine with disapproval. Take Corinth.

Corinth, a seaport on the isthmus that separates Attica from the Peloponnese, had been one of the largest, wealthiest and most notoriously extravagant of Greek cities (Strabo, VIII, 6, 20).[23] Its patroness was Aphrodite Ourania *poliouchos*, heavenly "defender of the city," to whom young Corinthian women were dedicated as sacred prostitutes.[24] In the fifth century BCE, Aristophanes tellingly used the verb *korinthiazomai*, "to corinthiate," as an alternative for "fornicate" (Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 354). Over a thousand prostitutes had been attached to Aphrodite's temple on Acrocorinth, a great attraction to visiting ship captains, apparently, and a major source of the city's wealth (Strabo, VI, 6, 20).

Wallowing in the cognate vices of lust and luxury Romans professed to abhor, Greek Corinth epitomized what the Romans had in mind when they claimed that the Greeks had invented civilisation, but lost it; an exemplar of the kind of decadence for which Roman conquest was to be a moral corrective.[25] Corinth had definitely had it coming.

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[22] Vitruvius 2.1.6-7. I. K. McEwen, *All the King's Horses: Vitruvius in an Age of Princes*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA / London, 2023, pp. 32–33.

[23] See also J. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth: A History of the City to 318 B.C.*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 398–401.

[24] C. K. Williams, "Corinth and the Cult of Aphrodite," in M. Del Chiaro (ed.), *Corinthiaca: Studies in Honor of David A. Amyx*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1986, pp. 12–24.

[25] Roman obsession with morals: C. Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,1993, pp. 5–6 on luxury and lust as cognate vices. Conquest as a moral corrective: G. Woolf, "Becoming Roman, Staying Greek: Culture, Identity and the Civilizing Process," in *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 40, 1994, pp. 116–143; *id.*, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in*

For over a hundred years after Mummius's legions reduced the city to ashes, the site of Corinth lay waste, a public land of Rome under Roman administrative tutelage.[26] In 44 BCE, shortly before his assassination, Julius Caesar refounded it as a Roman colony, renaming it *Colonia Laus Julia Corinthiensis* (the Corinthian glory of Julius) (Appian, *Punica*, 136; Dio Cassius, XLIII, 50, 33).[27] Duly "squared" with a grid layout in keeping with time-honoured Roman practice, the new city, rebuilt under Augustus with a typical Roman monumental centre, became a model of *romanitas* in the Greek East.[28]

Vitruvius's early attachment to Caesar makes his knowledge of and interest in the rebirth of Aphrodite's city as Caesar's "Corinthian glory" a given. Allowing this, and against the background of Rome's relations with Corinth, the aetiology of the *genus* he names Corinthian fairly begs for an allegorical reading.

There was, moreover, a famous Corinthian prostitute called Lais whose grave according to Pausanias was still an attraction in the second century CE (Pausanias, II, 2, 4). Antipater of Sidon immortalized her in an epitaph in about100 BCE, not long after the city was sacked: "I contain her who in Love's company luxuriated in gold and purple, / more delicate than tender Cypris / Lais, citizen of sea-girt Corinth . . ." (*The Greek Anthology* VII, 218)[29] Antipater, who may have been living at Rome when he wrote the epitaph, is mentioned by Cicero in his *De oratore*, a work Vitruvius lists as one of his sources (Cicero, *De oratore* III, 194; Vitruvius IX, pref. 17).

"Had she not made her bed the public slave of gain, Greece would have battled for her as for Helen," writes the poet at the end of his epitaph

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Gaul, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 71. See also N. Petrochilos, *Roman Attitudes to the Greeks* National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Athens, 1974.

[26] Cicero *De lege agraria* 1.5. *Cf*. T. P. Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.- A.D. 267," in H. Temporini (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II, 7.1, 1979, p. 493.

[27] *Cf*. T. P. Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.- A.D. 267," pp. 497–498.

[28] Centuriation of the site: D. Romano, "Post 146 B.C. Land Use in Corinth and Planning of the Roman Colony of 44 B.C." in T. Gregory (ed)., *The Corinthia in the Roman Period. Journal of Roman Archaeology*, suppl. 8, 1993, pp. 9–30. Rebuilding of Corinth: D. Musti and M. Torelli, *Pausania. Guida della Grecia II. La Corinzia e l'Argolide* Mondatori, Milan, 1986, pp. 217–220; C. Williams, "The Refounding of Corinth: Some Roman Religious Attitudes," in S. Macready and F. Thompson (eds.), *Roman Architecture in the Greek World*, Society of Antiquaries Occasional Papers, New Series, 1987, pp. 26–37.

[29] *Cf*. D. Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1990, p. 98.

in a bitter twist that has the young woman and her profession emerge as figures for the destruction of Corinth and the corruption alleged to have provoked it. Lais, the beautiful dead courtesan, is a resonant metaphor for the ruined city, her appeal as an anchor for Vitruvius's allegory reinforced by its marked similarities, both textual and thematic, with Antipater's epitaph. Like the dead prostitute, Vitruvius's dead virgin is a "citizen of Corinth," celebrated like Lais for her delicacy and tenderness.

This makes the Corinthian virgin is Corinth itself, and the disease (*morbus*, in Latin—also "vice") that overcomes her figures the city's decadence the reason for her death, which is Corinth's destruction. Being "just ripe for marriage" put her at the peak of the sexual attraction that made her a choice victim of the rape that routinely featured in the *direptio* of a city when Roman soldiers tore it to pieces in the course of a sack."[30] A Corinthian girl would, by definition, have been asking for it. Rome was the dead city's nurse for a hundred years until her rebirth as Caesar's "Corinthian glory" which flourishes in the acanthus plant that testifies to the regenerative power of natural forces whose divinely appointed agents Rome and the Caesars claimed themselves to be (*inter alia*, Vitr. VI, 1, 11). Even the *pocula*, cups or vessels, source of the virgin's former delight, which the nurse piles into the basket she puts on the girl's tomb resonate singularly with the pottery and bronze *nekrocorinthia* dug out of Corinthian graves for sale at Rome, for Corinth's "delight" in its lifetime had indeed been the pottery and bronze for which it had been famous.

Once named and located, the Corinthian order was no longer just about the rebirth of Corinth, of course, but about Roman renewal of the entire world. In the years after Vitruvius wrote, the foliate capital into which he encapsules the Greek city's rebirth would proliferate in a phenomenon scholars have called "corinthianisation" which included the appearance of acanthus not only in the capital of the columnar order whose use eventually became exclusive throughout the empire but also, ubiquitously, in friezes where it scrolled over stone surfaces with the ferocious tenacity of an invasive species.[31] If Rome was a self-appointed force of nature, corinthianisation became its manifest.

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[30] A. Ziolkowski, "*Urbs direpta,* or how the Romans Sacked Cities," in J. Rich and G. Shipley (eds.), *War and Society in the Roman World*, Routledge, London / New York,1993, pp. 69–91. Rape, writes Ziokowski, was "a gratification at least as eagerly sought as material gains" (p. 87).

[31] Corinthianisation: P. Gros, *Aurea Templa: Rechcerches sur l'architecture religieuse à Rome à l'époque d'Auguste*, École française de Rome, Rome, 1976, pp. 197–242; J. Onians,

And if throughout *De architectura* Vitruvius is at all points concerned to demonstrate the necessary connection of his topic to nature, as indeed he is, his aim in repeatedly calling attention to that connection is not to be taken as an end in itself.[32] His purpose, on the contrary, is to show that being founded in nature mirrors Rome's own naturally-founded right to rule making architecture a necessary accomplice in the fulfilment of that uniquely Roman destiny. "But, Rome, 'tis thine alone, with awful sway, / To rule mankind, and make the world obey . . ." Virgil intoned in what are probably the best-known lines of the *Aeneid*. *Tu regere imperio populous, Romane, memento* (Verg. *Aen*. VI, 847–853).[33] Written between 29 and 19 BCE, the *Aeneid* belongs to the same triumphal period as *De architectura*.

Framed by the terms of that context, Vitruvius's fable about the origin of the Corinthian capital is one of the most penetrating expressions of Roman triumphalism in the entire treatise, infinitely more nuanced it goes without saying than the comparably rather crass *historiae* concerning caryatids and Persian prisoners discussed earlier. Its interest both as an epitome of Rome's conquest of Greece and, through its message of endless renewal, a prophesy like Virgil's of an *imperium sine fine* cannot be underestimated (Verg. *Aen*. I, 278). Vitruvius's genius is to make "empire without end" a story about the power of architecture.

But remarkable as its resonance with the events of Roman history (modern sense) is, more remarkable still is the skill with which its author has transfigured the brutality of these events into a story whose affecting appeal has, as the record attests, seduced modern readers ever since recovery of *De architectura* in the early Italian Renaissance. Although no comparable record exists for its reception by Vitruvius's contemporaries, it is safe to assume that its allure for Roman readers would inevitably have included appreciative awareness of its triumphal intent, further enhanced by the cultural heft acquired by its presentation as a *Greek* origin story

Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988, pp. 41–58; G. Sauron, "Le message ésthétique des rinceaux de l'Ara Pacis Augustae," *Revue archéologique*, fasc. 1, 1988, pp. 3–40; U.-W. Gans, *Korinthisierende Kapitelle der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Böhlau Verlag, Weimar / Vienna, 1992; D. Castriota, *The Ara Pacis Augustae and the Imagery of Abundance in Later Greek and Early Roman Imperial* Art, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995; M. Wilson Jones, *Principles of Roman Architecture*, pp. 138-140; *id*., *Origins of Classical Architecture*, pp. 150– 155; I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*, pp. 212–213, 296–298.

[32] *Ibid*., pp. 47–49.

[33] The English is from John Dryden's verse translation of 1697.

through an appropriative attribution that made it (like Greece itself) part of the epic of Roman conquest. Recent Vitruvius scholarship continues to take the story of these Greek origins as being in fact Greek—the dead virgin, the nurse, the acanthus, Callimachus and the powerful symbolism of death and renewal carried forward in the Corinthian capital he is supposed to have invented. The rather starker Roman story that underpins it, unpalliated by the consummate sophistry with which Vitruvius has soothed generations of readers beginning with those of his own time, lacks the solace of the other but also its illusions and its self-deceit. Appreciation of the Roman source and purpose of his *historia* reveals a narrative both closer to history as we understand it and far more in keeping with current cultural expectations and the general disillusionment of our time, a disillusionment which even scholarly pursuits as arcane as the study of Vitruvius are bound to come to terms with.

Vitruvius's endorsement of triumphalism is unequivocal from outset where, in his dedication to the Emperor, he clearly states that his recognition of how buildings perform as "guarantees" (*auctoritates*) of imperial expansion is his reason for writing the work. Addressing Augustus, whom he credits with personally having "increased" Rome (made Rome greater) through conquest, he writes,

> When I realized that [...] just as, through you, the city was increased with provinces, so public buildings were to provide eminent guarantees for the majesty of empire, I decided not to hesitate and took the first opportunity to set out for you my writings on these matters. (Vitr. I, pref. 2)

Too little attention has been paid to the importance of Vitruvius's profession as a military engineer in assessing this overall purpose. Book 10 on machinery which includes the machinery of war is the longest of the 10 books by far—as long as Books 3 and 4 combined. In keeping with other evidence of the martial bias already noted, it is significant that in his discussion of music, sixth of the nine disciplines he says an architect should know, the very first example he invokes to demonstrate the importance of understanding harmony is the proper "tuning"—by ear, it would appear—of the cables and springs of catapults and scorpions in order to ensure that, when launched, their projectiles fly straight (Vitr. I, 1, 8).

In his recent essay on Vitruvius's *historiae*, Antonio Becchi has noted that, of his 28 stories, ten – over a third – appear in Book 10. Five of these

are about the successes and failures of war machines.[34] Stories of failed war machines take up the entire final chapter of Book 10, and so conclude the treatise (X, 16). An odd way to end the work, you might think, with accounts of the deficiencies of an over-scaled siege-tower at the siege of Rhodes and the inadequate performance of a battering ram at the siege of Marseilles. But mechanical failure is not the point of these stories, of course. For when the machines failed, Vitruvius writes, architects stepped in to save the day with clever strategies that brought these cities victory, testifying to the superiority of the architects' knowledge over the fallible *rationes* of mechanical devices (Vitr. X, 16, 12). *Architecti scientia*, the knowledge of the architect – bringer of victory. The notion has had considerable appeal for architects over the years. Fifteen hundred years after Vitruvius, Leon Battista Alberti would expand on his Roman predecessor's claim, writing in the preface to his *On the Art of Building* that "the skill and ability of the architect have been responsible for more victories than have the command and foresight of any general."[35]

To return, then, to the preface to Book 9 with which I began this essay and Vitruvius's suggestion concerning the triumph-worthiness of men whose knowledge he says is the foundation of "the civilised ways, laws and impartial justice without which no city can be safe or whole." (Vitr. IX, pref. 2) He follows this proposal with a review of discoveries which, being particularly useful to human life, have earned their originators the reward of such honours. Plato tops the list.

From among Plato's many *utilissimae rationes* Vitruvius singles out as exemplary and (presumably) most useful of all his alleged discovery of the method for doubling the square. It appears in the *Meno* where, as Plato presents it, it is not really a method at all, nor especially useful either. Nor even, it would appear, was it Plato's discovery, but that of an unknown geometer of an earlier date.[36] The dialogue begins with a discussion of figures (*schêmata*) in general—the idea of the figure, in other words. Of this idea, the square, a bounded figure, is no longer a *schema* but a *chôrion*, specifically a *tetragônon chôrion*. Its doubling is not a set of instructions to be followed but geometrical knowledge gradually revealed to the slave Socrates questions in order to demonstrate to Meno,

[34] A. Becchi, "Vitruvius' *Historiae* and the Love of Learning," p. 673.

[35] L. B. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA / London, MIT Press, 1988, p. 4 (prologue).

[36] *Vitruve. De l'architecture. Livre IX*, J. Soubiran (ed. and trans.), Presses universitaires de France, Paris, 1969, p. XXIX; nn. 17–18, pp. 45–46.

his eponymous interlocutor, the well-known Platonic theory concerning knowledge as a person's recollection—anamnesis—of what his soul knew before its embodiment at birth (Plato *Meno* 82b-85b).[37] As usual, the first step in the process is to lead the slave to admit that he knows nothing. Onto that tabula rasa of total ignorance, and with the help of a figure (*chôrion*) two feet to a side, drawn (one imagines) in the dust, there eventually emerges the phenomenon of a doubled square, whose generation is remembered knowledge that Socrates' insistent questioning has brought to light in the slave boy's mind.

Vitruvius begins his account by supposing a square piece of land (an *ager* or a *locus*) 10 feet to a side whose area you want to double from 100 to 200 square feet. This *quadratus locus*, as he calls it, sounds very much like Plato's *tetragônon chôrion*, except of course that it is nothing like, beginning with its size. Imagining a real piece of land and supposing a desire to double its area Vitruvius, with intentions clearly very different from Plato's, sets out a geometrical method burnished with Platonic credentials for what—allowing his unwavering imperial purpose—sounds suspiciously like a formula for territorial expansion. It is a particularly telling instance of precisely the kind of appropriative attribution already discussed, even down to the reference to his own now lost figure which he intimates derives from Plato's.

"Squaring" of course and the multiplication of squares was endemic to Rome's appropriation of its conquered territories. And if the manner in which squares were multiplied through centuriation did not exactly match the method Vitruvius here attributes to Plato, the convergence of the "Platonic" method he describes with the traditional practice of Roman land-surveyors is both unmistakeable and rhetorically persuasive.

The second discovery Vitruvius presents as evidence for learning as the bedrock of civil society is one on which each and every act of "squaring" depended: the set square, or *norma* in Latin. Thus for instance, in Vitruvius's description of the famous figure later tagged as Vitruvian Man, the "squared layout" found in the body of a well-shaped male whose height equals his arm span is the same, he writes, as that of "areas that have been squared with as set square."[38]

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[37] Jean Soubiran writes (*Vitruve: De l'architecure livre IX,* 1969, nn. 17–18, pp. 45–46), that Vitruvius probably worked not from Plato directly but from a secondary source, now lost, possibly by the Roman polymath Varro.

[38] Vitruvius 3.1.3: . . . *item quadrata designatio in eo invenietur; nam si a pedibus imis ad summum caput mensum erit eaque mensura relata fuerit ad manus pansas, invenietur*

As Vitruvius tells it, the triumph-worthy hero to be credited with discovery of the *norma* is Pythagoras, whose eponymous "Pythagorean" theorem permitted the accurate construction of 3-4-5 set squares in a simple procedure that bypassed the haphazard methods of artisans and made any set square so assembled failproof: as effective an agent of order (and as powerful) as the Roman army.[39] The discoveries of men like Plato and Pythagoras are not only of everlasting usefulness to mankind, Vitruvius concludes after listing a number of other sages whose work he admires; they also operate *ad mores corrigendos*, reforming standards of behaviour to set people straight (Vitr. IX, pref. 15).

"This book is on the principles of gnomonics," he writes in the last paragraph of the ninth preface, announcing the topic of *De architectura*, Book 9. "In it, I will explain how they were discovered from the sun's rays in the universe, by means of the shadows of gnomons, and how it is that these grow longer or shorter." (Vitr. IX, pref. 18)

Gnomonics, or the construction of clocks is second in Vitruvius's tripartite division of architecture, the other two parts being building and mechanics, as discussed earlier. It is a somewhat arbitrary taxonomy, particularly when it comes to his inclusion of *gnomonice*. Vitruvius is the first known author to make it a part of architecture, and his account is unique in surviving literature.[40] Later Roman writers seem not to have thought gnomonics belonged to architecture either.[41]

Why does Vitruvius include it? The gnomon, a sundial pointer, is essentially the same tool as the architect's *norma*. Both pointer and setsquare are referred to by the Greek word *gnomon* (generically, any upright), from which the Latin *norma* derives.[42] Both, interchangeably, are agents of the "squaring" that establishes the 90-degree relation between

eadem latitudo uti altitudo, quemadmodum areae, quae ad normam sunt quadratae. On the famous passage concerning Vitruvian Man, I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*, pp. 156–183, among many, many others.

[39] Vitruvius 9.pref.6-7. Pythagoras left no writings. For a commentary on possible sources, and other matters relating to the passage see Soubiran's commentary in *Vitruve: De l'architecture livre IX*, 1969, pp. 48–52.

[40] *Vitruve: De l'architecture livre IX*, p. lxx.

[41] At the end of the first century CE, when Pliny the Elder writes of the great sun clock Augustus Caesar had built in the Campus Martius at Rome, he refers to Facundus Novius, the man who devised it as a *mathematicus* not an *architectus*. Pliny *Natural History* 36.72. On the Horologium Augusti, begun in 13 B.C., I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*, pp. 240-250; P. Heslin, "Augustus, Domitian and the So-called Horologium Augusti," *Journal of Roman Studies*, 97, 2007, pp. 1–20.

[42] H. Liddell, R. Scott and H. Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, sv. *gnomon*; C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, sv. *norma*.

verticals and horizontals without which there can be neither sundials nor cities nor buildings, nor indeed the exclusively human upright posture that makes a man in his prime architecture's fundamental human referent.[43] The "squaring," whereby Rome took possession of her conquered territories, entailed the correct deployment of a *groma*—another cognate of *gnomon*—which was the chief tool of the Roman land-surveyor who was called a *gromaticus*.[44]

But the gnomon was only half of a sun clock, of course. The other, equally important half was the analemma.

> The analemma is the pattern obtained from the course of the sun and discovered by observing the shadow of the gnomon as it lengthens to the solstice. It is by means of architectonic principles (*rationes architectonicas*) and the tracings of the compass that the analemma discloses how the universe operates. (Vitr. IX, 1, 1)

What Vitruvius is describing here is the two-dimensional projection of spherical solar order onto a flat surface in order to create the analemma or "face" of a sundial with the analemma, as he presents it, thus becoming a reflection of universal order. In the next paragraph, he goes on to assert that celestial order is in turn "architected" (*architectata est*) by the power of nature – a power likewise governed by "architectonic principles" which therefore direct even the "architecting" activity of nature itself (Vitr. IX, 1, 2).[45]

To take these passages as affirmation of the cosmic dimension of architecture, as many readers of Vitruvius have done since the publication of Rudolf Wittkower's *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism* over 75 years ago, is to forget who Vitruvius was (a sustaining member of Rome's imperial culture) and who he was writing for.[46]

Vitruvius wrote his treatise for Augustus Caesar, the first Roman emperor, whose very name "Augustus," a name never before given to any human, made him an epitome of divine order. As I have argued elsewhere,

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[43] Gnomons and sundials: Vitruvius 9 *passim;* gnomons and the laying out of cities: Vitruvius 1.6. Upright posture: Vitr II, 1, 2; human body as architecture's ultimate referent: Vitr. III, 1.

[44] Varro in Frontinus *De limitibus*, in C Thulin (ed.), *Corpus agrimensorum romanorium*, Teubner, Stuttgart, 1971, p. 10.

[45] I. K. McEwen, *All the King's* Horses, pp. 188–192.

[46] R. Wittkower, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Humanism*, Academy Editions, London, 1988.

the work's ultimate purpose was to show how architecture was the privileged means of giving the "divine" imperial power that now commanded the world real measurable extent through the building, gnomonics and machines that together made Roman world dominion palpable and incontestable.[47]

Thus, to name as "architectonic" the principles that guide the projection of heavenly order onto the earthly realm in the construction of a sun clocks is indeed potently metonymical, but not altogether as generally assumed. Heavenly order is, simultaneously and interchangeably, the order of Augustus and Rome whose earthly deployment through the application of "architectonic principles" endows such principles with crucial political clout. And this, as a result, assigns an equally crucial political role to the person with knowledge of them and of how to apply them – *architecti scientia*, the knowledge of the architect.

Knowledge is key, as indeed is the term "architectonic," whose appearance here is its first ever recorded in Latin. A transliteration of the Greek *architektonikos*, it appears most frequently in Aristotle, who uses it in contexts only marginally related to architecture. As Aristotle famously put it in the *Metaphysics*, the master craftsman he calls an *architekton* is more estimable than the artisans over whom he exercises authority, because the *architekton* knows the reasons for doing things (Arist. *Metaph.* 981a30-b5). His use of the adjective *architectonikos* takes this line of reasoning well beyond the activities of the *architekton*.

Architectonic arts he explains in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, are arts to which other arts are subordinate (Arist. *EN* 1094a4). Bridle-making, for instance, is subordinate to horsemanship, and horsemanship, along with every other military pursuit, is subordinate to strategy. Strategy, the art of the *strategos* or military commander, is an architectonic art because, like the *architekton*, the *strategos* knows the reasons why things are done.

But for Aristotle, the supremely "architectonic art"—the art to which all the other arts refer – is not architecture, although Vitruvius seems to imply that it is when he declares at the beginning of his first book that judiciously exercised, the "knowledge of the architect [...] demonstrates everything the other arts achieve." (Vitr. I, 1, 1)[48] There was in any case no word for architecture in Aristotle's day, and the art of the *architekton*, whose thoughts directed the activities of artisans—this as yet nameless

[47] I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*.
[48] *Cf.* I. K. McEwen, *Vitruvius*, p. 319 n. 88.

art, though doubtlessly architectonic, was not, for Aristotle, the *principal* architectonic art.

This, famously, is how Aristotle begins his *Nicomachean Ethics.* "Every art and every inquiry, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the good is that at which all things aim." (Arist. *EN* 1094a.1. H. Rackham, trans) The *supreme* good, he continues, the good toward which all arts and inquiries must ultimately be directed, is not individual, but collective: the common good, in other words. The common good is the end sought by the most truly *architectonic* of arts—the goal pursued by the master-craft to which every other art and discipline is subordinate. And this, the most authoritative, pre-eminently architectonic of disciplines, declares Aristotle, is *hê politikê*, "the political" in English—the knowledge or science of politics (Arist. *EN* 1094a.25-29). In the Greek context of Aristotle's day, knowledge of political matters, *hê politikê*, had of course to do specifically with the rule of cities—the governance of the *polis*, from which needless to say *politikê* derives.

It would not be wrong to assume that something like an Aristotelian understanding of "the political" underlies the view, voiced at the beginning of Vitruvius's ninth preface, that knowledge is the foundation of "the civilised ways, laws and impartial justice without which no city (*civitas*) can be safe or whole," particularly with Aristotle named along with three other Greek sages as the source of such knowledge. Worth noting too is that Vitruvius calls the city to be so governed a *civitas*, the word Latins used when translating the Greek "*polis*." (Vitr. I, pref. 2) Familiarity with Aristotle's ethics would also account for the sudden appearance of the Aristotelian term "architectonic" a few paragraphs later at the beginning of Book 9 proper. But architectonic principles, in Vitruvius, have nothing to do with the government of cities as Aristotle understood them, for the *polis* that was the purview of *hê politikê* had, in the wake of Roman conquest, long since ceased to exist. In Vitruvius, the architectonic principles that govern the transfer from heaven to earth of cosmic order had an infinitely wider application.

Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem wrote the poet Ovid, famously reiterating an alliterative commonplace that had been current since the late Republic: "the world and the city of Rome occupy the same space."[49] The

[49] Ovid *Fasti* 2.684. E. Bréguet, "*Urbi et orbi*: un cliché et un theme," in J. Bibaux (ed.), *Hommages à M. Renard* I, Latomus, Brussels, 1969, pp. 140–152) cites all the occurrences

"city" whose good government is grounded, according to Vitruvius, in knowledge transmitted by the writings of Greek sages, is not the Aristotelian *polis* but this, the Roman world city. Endowing its cosmically sanctioned imperial command with Aristotelian credentials is another, particularly egregious example of appropriative attributions to Greek culture evident throughout *De architectura*.[50]

But to address Augustus Caesar with a plea vaunting the excellence of the imperial project would of course have been superfluous. Of this the Emperor needed no convincing, nor indeed was it Vitruvius's aim to do so. His ultimate purpose in headlining the naturally founded imperial order ruled by Augustus's "divine mind" is to vindicate the necessary role of architecture as its naturally founded and unrivalled instrument. Making gnomonics one of its constituent parts allows Vitruvius to reveal that this, the art that "demonstrates everything the other arts achieve," is an architectonic art in the most exalted political sense, bound by the set square and the compass to the order of the heavens in fulfilment of Rome's cosmic destiny.

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beginning with Cicero's Catalinarian orations of 63 BCE (pp. 142–145). See also C. Nicolet, *Space, Geography and Politics in the Early Empire*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1991, pp. 111–114; C. Edwards and G. Woolf, "Rome as World City," in C. Edwards and G. Woolf (eds.), *Rome the Cosmopolis*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 1–20.

[50] Similar intentions appear to have informed Vitruvius's extensive use of Greek terms, many with perfectly adequate Latin equivalents, according to a recent article by Pierre Gros who concludes, "C'est finalement une certaine identité grecque [...] qui se trouve ainsi construite et déconstruite, au gré des besoins suscités par la légitimation de schémas latins plus ou moins habilement décrits, comme des montages proportionnels ou géométriques, dont le théoricien espère qu'ils accèdent par ce biais à la dignité de leurs précédents helléniques." Pierre Gros, "De l'appropriation à l'exclusion : statut et axiologie des mots grecs dans le *De architectura*," Vitruvius, *Rivista del Centro Studi Vitruviani*, 3, 2024, p. 24.

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"After Affect"

ABSTRACT: From the late 1980s to the late 2010s, a discourse of affect was advanced by various architectural theorists who aimed to account for the relationship between human beings and their environment and how things in the world appear to them as phenomena, in ways that were more scientifically advanced and politically progressive than similar accounts that had previously been offered by post-structuralism and phenomenology. A particular group of theorists informed by psychology and the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze—including Sylvia Lavin and Jeff Kipnis—argued that it was crucial to focus on the experience of buildings, the sensual effects of their surfaces, the moods that they created, and the seductive power of such things as color, light, and atmosphere, without addressing meaning, language, and culture and without essentializing the body and its relationship to the environment. Furthermore, following the lead of affect theorist Brian Massumi, these architectural theorists often linked these arguments to what they claimed would be a more progressive political position. This paper historicizes the discourse of affect in architecture, analyzes the claims made by affect theorists both in architecture and in general and offers a critical evaluation of its various theoretical and political claims, by drawing upon the mounting evidence about the problematic nature of the original psychological and neuroscientific studies that inspired affect theory in the first place, and upon the mounting critical literature on affect theory that has begun to emerge in recent years.

KEYWORDS: affect, phenomenology, appearances, surfaces, moods

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Affect was a powerful concept that gave new life blood to architectural theory in the late 1990s, one that fueled new design speculations and energized the neo-avant-garde domains of the discipline for over a decade. Yet little has been written on the role that affect theory played as an episode in architectural theory, and certainly little that has engaged its core theoretical claims in a critical manner. In the absence of such a history, the affect moment in architecture has simply lingered on, like the undead, neither thriving nor being fully buried. We still accept many of its intellectual formulations, and the design tropes that affect theory set in motion continue on, while few can recall the philosophical origins of how affect came into being as a discourse in architecture, nor what was originally at stake.

Since the concept of affect is the central focus of the history that follows, we should begin with the question of what we mean by affect. The term simply names a level of physiological experience that is viewed as being instinctive, autonomic, and directly connected to the nervous system, such that it is seen as bypassing the mediations of language, meaning, judgement, and conscious reasoning. To offer some examples, one might think of the way that bodies are moved, seemingly automatically, when individuals are repulsed by rotten food or by the discovery of nests of spiders or snakes. One might think also of situations when individuals yawn, smile, or blush in response to others doing the same. Or one might think of the way that one's muscles tighten in response to the screams and sobs of a crying baby, or the way one's bladder weakens at the sound and sight of running water. The key to understanding affect is that it aims to emphasize the primacy of the biological level of human experience. If psychological meaning comes into play at all, it is of the most primitive and archaic sort.

From the late 1990s to the late 2010s, various architectural theorists sensitive to larger trends in the humanities, philosophy and culture, advanced a discourse of affect within architecture that echoes these larger trends. They included Sylvia Lavin and Jeff Kipnis most especially, but also Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, Jason Payne and Heather Roberge, Mark Foster Gage, Hernan Diaz, Florencia Pita, and their students Ellie Abrons, Andrew Holder, and Michael Loverich. Together, these protagonists of the affect moment in architecture advanced a view that the qualities of architecture were of the utmost importance because of the way they addressed this biological and primitive psychological level of experience. These architectural qualities included the optical

kind such as color, hue, tone, vibrancy, dazzle, luminosity; the tactile kind such as softness, smoothness, roughness, or hairiness; and the formal kind such as sagginess, voluptuousness, fluidity, creatureliness. Such qualities were seen to hold the power to affect people's feelings, moods and behaviors, certainly. Yet more than this simpler claim, that power was seen to be central to how politics in general should be understood, and how the politics of architecture in particular should be understood.

The spark for the affective turn could be seen to be the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, whose quantitative manner of thinking about experience in terms of intensities and amplitudes offered fresh intellectual terrain in the late 1980s after years of structuralist and post-structuralist discourse. Brian Massumi—who, along with his close friend Sanford Kwinter, had been key to bringing Deleuze's thought to architecture in the late 1980s—was perhaps the most central intellectual source for a theory of affect drawn from Deleuze and with a sharp political edge. Yet Deleuze via Massumi and Kwinter was not the only source. Affect theorists in architecture also drew from a psychological discourse less interested in such things as the interpretation of dreams, and much more interested in a materialist, biologistic, and energistic conception of the mind's relation to the body.

In the process of developing what they claimed would be seen as a new account of the human-environment relationship, architecture's theorists of affect attempted to distinguish it from post-structuralism and phenomenology. To do so, they were often critical of both post-structuralism and phenomenology. While one might think affect theory and phenomenology are close to one another because they share a similar rejection of the intellectualist account of reality in which language and concepts determine consciousness and action, and because they share what might appear to be a similar attention to sensations and experience, affect theorists were quick to argue that phenomenology was too essentialized, universalized and timeless and as a result unable to understand the political nature of experience—a critique of phenomenology that displays affect theorist's ongoing debt to post-structuralism. And while one might also think that affect theory and post-structuralism are close to one another because of their shared anti-essentialism, affect theory was also quick to critique post-structuralism because its nominalism had led it to become detached from the real, to withdraw into a purely negative criticality and to become hostile to the possibilities of architectural design.

Affect theory's claims to superiority, then, were multifold. It claimed to be more politically progressive than phenomenology because it considered that its materialistic and physicalist conception of experience had freed it from the romantic and nostalgic yearning for an original holistic experience. It claimed to be breaking out of the ivory tower of linguistic analysis that dogged post-structuralism and to become engaged with the world as it really was. And because affect theory drew upon recent psychological and neurological experiments it also claimed to be more scientifically accurate.

But of the various claims to being a superior discourse, one stands out above the rest; affect held the key to the way that political power was formulated in the postmodern age such that it could challenge postmodern power on its own terrain. Affect theory thus assumed a conception of the disoriented and fragmented nature of public reason and it argued that feelings and moods were most important to contemporary politics, being politically urgent aspects for the left to address.

In what follows, I will historicize architecture's discourse of affect from the 1990s to the 2010s, tracing its path through the writings of this specific group of architectural affect theorists. In the process of doing so, I will critically evaluate this history, as well as the theoretical and political claims made within it, by drawing upon the substantial literature that has emerged in recent years which criticizes it. I will thus draw upon the mounting criticisms of some of the original psychological and neuroscientific experiments that affect theorists like Massumi often evoked in support for their claim that language, intentions, and rationality are secondary to biological instincts in the formation of human actions. I will also draw upon criticisms of the claims that immediacy and anti-intentionalism are inherently politically progressive, and criticisms of affect theory's complicity with an especially neoliberal phase of capitalism.

1. The Ascendency of Affect in the 1990s

Two distinct tributaries in the history of architectural theory fed the ascendency of affect as a discourse at the end of the 1990s. The first one was the gradual translation and migration of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze into the Anglo-American academic world and subsequently into architecture. The second, yet intertwined, tributary was a renewed interest in psychoanalysis. While psychoanalysis was used by critical theorists in architecture as an instrument of what Paul Ricœur once called

the "hermeneutics of suspicion," alongside post-structuralism and deconstructivism, it contained within it the possibilities of more vitalistic and biologistic readings, especially when either referring to the early work of Freud, or the later work of second generation Freudians like Wilhelm Reich who developed electrophysiological theories of the body. I say intertwined because the biophilosophical and materialist dimensions of Deleuze's philosophy primed the more biologistic interpretations of psychoanalysis and psychology within affect theory.

One of the first figures to read Deleuze in architecture was Sanford Kwinter, who was applying a vitalistic, energistic and materialistic philosophy derived from Deleuze to his study of modern architecture during his PhD in comparative literature at Columbia University in New York between 1983 and 1987.[1] A native of Toronto, Kwinter was also a close friend of his fellow compatriot Brian Massumi in these years, and the two men supported each other intellectually as they worked on their respective doctorates at Columbia and Yale in the late 1980s. Massumi would go on to play a central role both by introducing Deleuze's philosophy to the Anglo American world, by translating Deleuze's books, and through his own books such as *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, which Kwinter published through Swerve, an imprint of Zone books in 1992.[2] Kwinter had become immersed in architectural culture as he began his PhD and was by 1984 already close friends with Sylvia Lavin, who was also at Columbia at that point as an undergraduate student. Kwinter had launched *Zone 1-2* with fellow doctoral students Jonathan Crary, Hal Foster, and Michel Feher in 1985, and this lavish magazine already thrust Kwinter into architecture in the way it featured architects Christopher Alexander, Kenneth Frampton, Peter Cook, Peter Eisenman, Rem Koolhaas and Raymond Abraham, alongside Kwinter's own essay on the architect Sant'Elia, and essays by Manuel De Landa, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Zone 1–2* was highly influential and played a central role in introducing a new Deleuzian paradigm that linked architecture and the broader

[1] S. Kwinter, "La Citta Nuova: Modernity and Continuity," in *Zone 1|2: The Contemporary City*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA, 1986, pp. 88–89. Interview with Sanford Kwinter by Joseph Bedford (August 14, 2024). On Kwinter's role in bringing Deleuze's thought into architecture see S. Brott, "Deleuze and 'The Intercessors'," *Log*, 18, 2010, pp. 135–51.

[2] B. Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA, 1992. Other books in the Swerve imprint also included M. DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Zone Books, Cambridge, MA, 1997.

topic of the urban metropolis to the history of science, chaos theory, and theories of complexity and emergence.

The key moment in which the discourse shifted, after which Deleuze was taken up in architecture at an accelerated pace came with "The Strategies of Architectural Thinking" Conference at the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism in 1988. The conference was meant to be the consolidation of a new group of critical theorists fluent in post-structuralist discourse, and particularly deconstructivism. It brought together those involved in the MoMA deconstruction show based at Princeton, with those based at Harvard working on the journal *Assemblage*. The group, which formed at an infamous scene in Jeff Kipnis's hotel bedroom during a conference in Miami earlier that year, agreed to put on the conference in Chicago to demonstrate their shared deconstructivist project in architecture.[3]

Yet no sooner had the project of Deconstruction in architecture been consolidated in Chicago than Kipnis, who had done so much to advance Deconstruction and had masterminded the Chicago conference, spontaneously "jumped ship" to a Deleuzian position.[4] Sanford Kwinter, who had been invited to the conference to serve as a respondent, and who had a passionate disdain for Derrida's philosophy by this point, mounted an attack from the audience after which a tense conflict erupted between Wigley and Kwinter. As Kipnis put it, "what Sanford said [and] the way he formulated it was amazing" and I decided "to side with Sanford." As Kipnis dramatized the scene in recalling it, "everybody looked at me and Mark [Wigley] looked at me and Sanford looked at me, and we [Mark and I] broke, it was amazing."[5] Lynn, who was also there at the Chicago conference has similarly recalled shifting abruptly from being a Derridean to being a Deleuzian at that conference.[6]

Through the early 1990s, Kwinter's and Kipnis's teaching became one of the main conduits by which a Deleuzian discourse spread in architecture. Kwinter soon became part of Eisenman's social circle, writing texts for him. It is likely as a result of the conversations with both Kipnis

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[3] Interview with Jeff Kipnis by Joseph Bedford (July 25, 2018); Interview with Beatriz Colomina by Joseph Bedford (December 16, 2018); Interview with Michael Hays by Joseph Bedford (July 12, 2018) and Interview with Catherine Ingraham by Joseph Bedford (July 17, 2018). On the Miami conference see also B. Colomina, L. Kogod, "At Home with His Parents," *Assemblage*, 30, 1996, pp. 108–12.

[4] Interview with Jeff Kipnis by Joseph Bedford (July 25, 2018).

[5] Interview with Jeff Kipnis by Joseph Bedford (July 25, 2018).

[6] Interview with Greg Lynn by Joseph Bedford (October 31, 2018).

and Kwinter in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Eisenman picked up on the concept of affect also, putting it into circulation in "The authors affect" (1991) and "'The Affects of Singularity" (1992).[7] Though while Eisenman understood the significance of affect as a sensate response to the environment that did not involve language, he tended to equate it with Walter Benjamin's notion of aura, worrying about its loss at the hands of technical reproduction, thus giving it a nostalgic cast that Kipnis and Lavin would avoid giving it in the years to come.

Despite having no training in architecture, Kwinter began teaching studios and seminars at Harvard in the early 1990s where he inspired other soon-to-be-influential figures such as Alejandro Zaera-Polo to develop his own Deleuzian discourse.[8] Kwinter taught in Kipnis's new graduate program that he launched at the AA in London in the early 1990s and the two of them, along with Greg Lynn, attended a number of influential conferences at the AA on topics such as "the fold" and "complexity."[9] Kwinter, Kipnis and Lynn were also part of an influential group of young architects teaching in New York and based at Columbia University's School of Architecture who were thinking through the possibilities of new digital tools such as those offered by the animation software, Maya, and how the kinds of ideas about dynamic process and complex systems discussed in such books as Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*—recently translated by Brian Massumi—might help in understanding the significance of the new digital forms.[10]

Kipnis's writings in the early 1990s already began to lay out some of the arguments within which the discourse of affect would soon be situated. In 1991, for example, in his "Moonmark" article, Kipnis turned to "space" and "aesthetics" in architecture to shift away from what he took to be the current focus on architecture as a source of meaning and symbolism and to address in their place simply the qualities of buildings and the effects of these qualities on the subject.[11] Through the middle of

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[7] P. Eisenman, "The Authors Affect: Passion and the Moment of Architecture," in Cynthia Davidson (ed.), *Anyone* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), pp. 200–211, and P. Eisenman, "The Affects of Singularity," *Architectural Design Profile*, 100, Nov–Dec 1992, pp. 42–45.

[8] Interview with Sanford Kwinter; Interview with Jeff Kipnis; and Interview with Alejandro Zaera-Polo by Joseph Bedford (January 12, 2025).

[9] The Fold conference took place at the AA on June 14, 1993, and the Architecture and Complexity conference took place on May 6, 1994.

[10] G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987.

[11] J. Kipnis, "Moonmark," *Assemblage,* 16, 1991, pp. 6–13.

the decade, Kipnis was attempting to define a "new architecture" based on the possibilities that curvilinear forms could create heterogeneous qualities of spatial experience.[12] This line of thought was best captured in a short text, "(Architecture) After Geometry," in which Kipnis wrote about a "spatial sensibility" that was liquid, boundless, fluid, and emergent and which escaped language and signification. As Kipnis put it, "no codes, no clever meanings. Looks cool."[13] But it was in 1997, with the publication of "The Cunning of Cosmetics" that Kipnis began to invest his discourse with a vocabulary rooted in affect, writing of "the cosmetic effect" of Herzog and De Meuron's work as "more visceral than intellectual."[14] As he went on, "The reductions of cosmetic minimalism, on the other hand, are anorexic, a compulsion to starve the body until it dissolves into pure (erotic) affect...."[15]

What then of the second trajectory; that which passed via psychoanalysis? Here, we can start by looking to the work done by Anthony Vidler beginning at the end of the 1980s on the theme of the uncanny, as well as on the themes of spatial phobias in the urban metropolis. His collection of essays, *The Architectural Uncanny* had been published in 1992, and he was completing his follow-up book *Warped Space* in the late 1990s.[16] While the theme of estrangement, the unhomely, shock and psychological disturbance supported the dominant critical discourses in architecture, Vidler's research on the psychology of the metropolis could also be seen to have pointed the way towards a post-critical discourse of affect. Like Rem Koolhaas before him in *Delirious New York*, Vidler was focusing attention upon the enervation of the new mass subjects and crowds of the dense 19th century metropolis and raising questions about how political and social life was being transformed by the new scale, speed and sensory stimulation of modern life. Though Vidler had not yet adopted the same kind of celebratory stance towards the metropolitan life of crowds as Koolhaas had done, the fact that the topic of the irrational

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[12] J. Kipnis, "Towards a New Architecture," *Architectural design,* 63, 3–4, March–April 1993, pp. 40–49.

[13] J. Kipnis, "(Architecture) After Geometry: An anthology of Mysteries. Case Notes to the Mystery of the School of Fish," *Architectural Design*, 67, 5–6, May–June 1997, pp. 42–47.

[14] J. Kipnis, "The Cunning of Cosmetics," *El Croquis*, 84, 1997, pp. 22–28.

[15] *Ibid*.

[16] A. Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1994, and A. Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture, and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000.

aspects of metropolitan experience, came to the fore in the dawning age of cyberspace, suggests the possibility of a more positive valence to come.

Vidler's close friend Mark Cousins, an architectural theorist trained in psychoanalysis, hosted a substantial conference on the theme of "Psychoanalysis and Space" at the Architectural Association (AA) in 2000 in honor of the publication of *Warped Space*.[17] The gathering afforded an opportunity for a certain realization at least on the part of one figure in the audience, Jeff Kipnis, that affect would become a major discourse in the coming years. As we have seen, Kipnis was one of the first to adopt the vocabulary of affect in his writing and had done so three years earlier, but he has recalled being guided by a renewed engagement with Freud's early writings at this moment, especially "Instincts and their Vicissitudes,"[18] and saw in that text untapped potential in Freud's account of the affects as distinct from meaning.[19]

Yet, it was likely one of the conference papers in particular, that delivered by Sylvia Lavin, that caught Kipnis's attention; a paper titled "Open the Box: Richard Neutra and the Psychology of the Domestic Environment" which she had already published in *Assemblage* in 1999.[20] By the time of the psychoanalysis conference, Lavin had already also published a short manifesto text titled "The New Mood or Affective Disorder" that called for an affective architecture as a program for contemporary design, and here at the AA her paper demonstrated to the audience—which included Kipnis—what an architecture that embodied the "new affective sensibility" looked like.[21]

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[17] The Psychoanalysis and Space Conference took place at the Architectural Association in London on December 11–12, 2000.

[18] S. Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIV (1914–1916), The Hogarth Press, London, 1957, pp. 111–140.

[19] As Kipnis put it in an interview with Hans Tursack in 2014, "[Freud wrote about] two different kinds of interpretations, one is based on meaning, which the linguistic school had focused so heavily on, and the other one which is based on what Freud called affect." J. Kipnis, "Affect: Interview with Hans Tursack," Attention, 2, 2014, episode 2E, 30:00 mins, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/attention-audio-journal-for-architecture/id1103549975?i=1000451911741, (accessed November 22, 2024).

[20] S. Lavin, "Open the box: Richard Neutra and the psychology of the domestic environment," *Assemblage*, 40, 1999, pp. 6–25.

[21] S. Lavin, "The New Mood or Affective Disorder," *Assemblage,* 41, 2000, p. 40. When Lavin was working on her book on Neutra, she advertised the title of the book as "Affective Environments: Richard Neutra and the Culture of Psychoanalysis," See S. Lavin, "What You Surface Is What You Get," *Log*, 1, Fall 2003, p. 106.

While Lavin's work on Neutra might at first glance be seen as part of the critical discourse that was engaged in the revision of modern architecture through the lens of post-structuralism and deconstruction—specifically the simultaneously historical and theoretical discourse developed by those around the journal *Assemblage,* such as Michael Hays, Beatriz Colomina, and Mark Wigley—it is evident that her reading of Neutra, in contrast to their critical readings of Hannes Meyer, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Mies Van Der Rohe, Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier was from the outset already "post-critical." Lavin was one of the first to use the term "post-critical" in her "New Mood" article and it is clear from a comparison of her work with the work of the *Assemblage* generation that while they attempted to refashion these modern architects as being already post-structuralist (and post-humanist) through their various efforts to decenter the bourgeois subject of modern capitalism by implicitly critiquing the alienation and reification of modern life, Lavin, by contrast, painted a picture of the modern architect as a figure who believed in the erotic and libidinal power of the body and its direct and unmediated organic relationship to its environment.[22] That is, rather than viewing the human subject as an ideological construct and viewing the environment as an instrument that would negatively critique human actions, estranging the subject and making it feel unhomely, split, or decentered, Lavin was engaged in the project of showing how the human body as a biological organism could be enervated by its environment such that the environment could be viewed as an instrument that would positively motivate human actions, persuading and seducing, rather than unmasking and destabilizing.

In making her case for an affective account of architecture through the work of Neutra, Lavin's talk at the AA conference simultaneously criticized both phenomenology and the critical discourse of post-structuralism for being, respectively, too nostalgic and too hostile. "Modernism is under assault today," she explained to her audience, "both from a

[22] Colomina for example drew from Jacques Lacan to understand the split nature of the modern subject and in her book Privacy and Publicity she presented Le Corbusier and Loos alike as "displacing" the "humanist subject." B. Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996, p. 326. And as Hays argued, it was the achievement of avant-garde architects such as Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer to have "inject[ed] into bourgeois humanist normality the alienating dissonances and contradictions that characterize rapid industrialization... " K. M. Hays, "Reproduction and Negation: The Cognitive Project of the Avant-Garde," in B. Colomina, J. Ockman (ed.), *Architectureproduction*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 1988, p. 153.

too loving nostalgia and an overly hostile criticality. The nostalgic tend to embrace modernism in the suffocating constraints of a phenomenological regime. While the critical tend to trap modernism in the landmines set by the semiological regime."[23]

As I have suggested already, it is somewhat surprising that affect theorists in architecture, as in other fields, wished to distance themselves so much from phenomenology, given their shared criticisms of the intellectualist and rationalist Cartesian account of subjectivity and their shared emphasis on the role of pre-conceptual or tacit dimensions of human experience in human consciousness and actions. Indeed, Martin Heidegger's elaborate account of mood in *Being and Time*, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of absorbed coping in his *Phenomenology of Perception* have many parallels with what affect theorists have been attempting to address. Yet, the depiction of phenomenology as a "suffocating" and "nostalgic" discourse apparently closed to the modern world and to its modern complexities, and yearning for an original completeness or universality was useful to those attempting to distinguish affect theory as something new—even if this was a somewhat crude characterization of phenomenology at the time.[24] Within architecture in particular, given the prominence of more essentializing interpretations of phenomenology by architects such as Christian Norberg-Schulz, Juhani Pallasmaa and Peter Zumthor, there were understandable local discursive reasons to overplay the differences.

Lavin's critique of phenomenology went further, however. Likely with someone like Norberg-Schulz in mind, she suggested that phenomenologists treated "space" as something entirely relative to human subjectivity and possessing no objective reality of its own. In this way, while post-structuralism could be cast as presenting architecture merely as an effect of the externalized structures of language, phenomenology could be cast, in a somewhat overly neat symmetry, as presenting architecture as merely subordinate to an essentialized and interiorized subject, leaving affect theory as the only discourse truly addressing the living connection between the body and its environment. As Lavin put it:

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[23] S. Lavin, "Open the Box, Richard Neutra and the psychology of domestic environment," presented at the Psychoanalysis and Space Conference at the Architectural Association, London (December 11–12, 2000).

[24] See L. L. A. Zerilli, "The Turn to Affect and the Problem of Judgement," in *A Democratic Theory of Judgment*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2016, p. 241.

> Despite its many contributions, particularly with respect to perception, phenomenology never permitted space to escape its position as a Kantian *apriori*, while the swirling valences and atmospheric allusiveness of space itself has always seemed to evade the structuralness of semiology. ... I would like to think that psychoanalysis can help us produce a concept of space that is neither essential nor outside of the chain of signification but rather that is ecological and material.[25]

Given that, in her work on Neutra Lavin was immersed in Wilhelm Reich's materialistic and biologistic theories of the organism-environment relationship, it is somewhat strange for Lavin to have accused phenomenology of not being open only to have then turned to what many phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty had long viewed as the reductive naturalistic and biologistic accounts of the relationship between the human body and its environment. If one takes, for example, Merleau-Ponty's early work in the 1940s, such as *The Structures of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, one can see Merleau-Ponty engaged in a sustained critique of the then widespread behavioristic account of the human being that held sway in many areas of the social sciences and psychology. He saw behaviorism as understanding the human organism in mechanistic terms, over emphasizing the degree to which the environment determined actions and behaviors.[26]

Yet it is understandable how the dynamism suggested by Deleuzian philosophy could represent biology as a site of emancipation. As critics of affect theory such as Ruth Leys have pointed out, affect theorists often attempted to cast the biological level of human experience as a site of spontaneity, indeterminacy, and unpredictability, giving new connotations of possibility, potentiality and newness to what had formerly been viewed as deterministic and controlling.[27] This representation of nature in general as a dynamic and chaotic system rather than as a mechanical universe was part and parcel not only of Deleuzian discourse, but more

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[25] S. Lavin, "Open the Box, Richard Neutra and the psychology of domestic environment," presented at the Psychoanalysis and Space Conference at the Architectural Association, London (December 11–12, 2000).

[26] M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Structures of Behaviour*, Beacon Press, New York, 1967, and M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge, London, 2013.

[27] R. Lays, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," in *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2017, p. 312. First published as R. Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," *Critical Inquiry*, 37, 3, Spring 2011, pp. 434–472.

generally of the science of complexity and chaos theory, and the work of those connected to the Santa Fe Institute. It is crucial, then, to grasp this history, to understand how affect theory could displace phenomenology because of its more progressive political connotations.

Corresponding to Lavin's adoption of a theory of dynamic enervation, she presented Neutra's houses as functioning, as Lavin claimed, as a kind of "architectural Viagra," apparently making prospective buyers of them "tingle" as they walked around them.[28] For Lavin, the "spatial excitement of the glazed corners in Neutra's bedrooms recalls the erotic translucency of new products for the bed and bath and voyeuristic pleasures of picture windows as represented through photography and advertising."[29] Through Neutra, the single-family home in America was becoming "an environment that was to produce pleasure itself."[30] Lavin even likened Neutra's architecture to the curious orgon-energy-accusatory (the organ-box) invented by Wilhelm Reich, to try to intensify orgon-energy in the subject, to raise one's sexual energy and intensity of orgasms.[31] As she later put it, "Neutra houses ... generate excitement through zones of affective intensity."[32] The smooth and featureless surfaces of his houses constituted "the durable quality of the house, its normal state, its unconscious affect."[33]

2. The Science and Politics of Affect Theory

At this juncture in our tracing of the discourse of affect, we must pause our history in the social milieu linking Kwinter, Kipnis, Lynn, and Lavin around the mid-1990s, to take a closer look at the one text that above all others most shaped the understanding of what was meant by affect. That text was Brian Massumi's "The Autonomy of Affect" published in *Cultural Critique* in the autumn of 1995. It combined in a single source a Deleuzian vocabulary of intensity, virtuality, and immanence, with a biologistic psychological discourse coming out of a number of influential

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[28] S. Lavin, "Open the Box, Richard Neutra and the psychology of domestic environment," presented at the Psychoanalysis and Space Conference.

[29] S. Lavin, "Open the box: Richard Neutra and the psychology of the domestic environment," *Assemblage*, 40, 1999, p. 11.

[30] *Ibid*., p. 12.

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] S. Lavin, *Form Follows Libido: Architecture and Richard Neutra in a Psychoanalytic Culture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004, p. 99.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 100.

neuroscientific experiments, which Massumi drew upon to support his ideas about the primacy of affect and the political significance of understanding affect by way of scientific studies that proved to him that emotions and feelings are more important than ideas, reason and meaning in human judgements and actions.[34] While the more precise work of mapping the influence of Massumi's writings in architecture awaits being undertaken, it is safe to assume, as many have done, that Massumi was the first and most influential channel by which Deleuze's work was read in the Anglo-American world and by which a Deleuzian inspired affect theory was developed.[35]

Massumi's text followed the lead of a range of new psychological experiments that had been developed in the twentieth century, and of one experiment in particular by Benjamin Libet, developed in 1983. Libet's experiment claimed to have found proof that human actions were not free and rooted in the autonomy of moral choices, but were determined by the body's unconscious relationship to its sensory environment. Because of the influence of Massumi's text, it is worth focusing upon Libet's experiment and how Massumi interpreted it because of the degree to which the conclusions that Libet drew from his studies have been widely questioned in subsequent years.

Benjamin Libet's experiment involved monitoring his patients brain activity with an electroencephalograph (EEG) and their skin with an electromyograph (EMG). The first measured their brain activity and the second recorded the electrical activity in their muscles. He then asked his patients to quickly and spontaneously flex the finger or wrist of their right arm and to record the time on a clock when they first became aware of their decision to move. The finding that seemed to change the world of psychology and which transformed popular ideas about human consciousness, free will, and individual action and responsibility, was that the EMG documented an electrical brain signal that preceded the patient's conscious awareness of their own decision by 0.3 seconds—a time frame that Massumi liked to exaggerate by referring to the "mysterious half second." From this, Libet drew the conclusion that the "initiation

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[34] B. Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique*, 31, Autumn 1995, pp. 83–109. See also B. Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2002.

[35] M. Jobst, H. Frichot, *Architectural Affects after Deleuze and Guattari*, Routledge, London, 2020, pp. 4, 10.

even of a spontaneously voluntary act ... can and usually does begin unconsciously."[36]

Massumi interpreted Libet's experiment as indicating that bodily, unconscious, autonomic processes precede human action and human intentions. As Massumi put it:

> In other words, the half-second is missed not because it is empty, but because it is overfull, in excess of the actually performed action and of its ascribed meaning. Will and consciousness are subtractive. They are limitative, derived functions which reduce a complexity too rich to be functionally expressed. It should be noted in particular that during the mysterious half-second, what we think of as 'higher' functions, such as volition, are apparently being performed by autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger, but prior to action and expression.[37]

More generally, Massumi drew from this a much larger interest in how responses to stimulation could take place in ways that human beings were not aware of. Such responses could be observed by, for example, measuring such things as heart rate, the depth of breathing, and galvanic skin responses or skin resistance, while individuals could have no conscious awareness of these responses or their significance. Massumi concluded from his account of these automatic reactions that the effect of a sensation enters quickly through the body and its physiology, before and without being processed in terms of socio-linguistic meaning. In a memorable phrase, Massumi summarized this by writing that "The skin is faster than the word."[38]

Yet Massumi's articulation of affect offered architects like Lavin, Kipnis, Somol and Whiting more than a reminder of ongoing scientific research on human physiological responses to environmental stimuli; it offered a political account of the importance of engaging affect as a potential avant-garde cultural project that might challenge reigning forms of power. The larger context for Massumi was, of course, a sense of the decline of the Left after the years of Reaganism. He was concerned that the media

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[36] B. Libet, *et al.*, "Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral-activity (readiness-potential): the unconscious initiation of a freely voluntary act," *Brain*, 106, 3, 1983, p. 640.

[37] B. Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique*, 31, Autumn 1995, p. 90.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

technical conditions of the age had favored this new kind of politics not by reasoned decision-making but by warm reassuring feelings. Affect, then, became for Massumi a name for the kind of persuasion that is regularly deployed in the media in our postmodern world. It results from the kind of sense stimulation and nervous enervation experienced by individuals exposed to a flood of media messages that arouse their feelings in various ways. As Massumi put it in concluding his text, affect is key to our:

> late-capitalist, image- and information-based economies. Think of the image/expression-events in which we bathe. Think interruption. Think of the fast cuts of the video clip or the too-cool TV commercial. Think of the cuts from TV programming to commercials. Think of the cuts across programming and commercials achievable through zapping. Think distractedness of television viewing, the constant cuts screen to its immediate surroundings, to the viewing context where other actions are performed in fits and starts as attention flits. Think of the joyously incongruent juxtapositions of surfing the Internet. Think of our bombardment by commercial images off the screen, at every step in our daily rounds. Think imagistic operation of the consumer object, as turnover time increases as fast as styles can be recycled. Everywhere, the cut, suspense—incipience. Virtuality, perhaps?[39]

And as he went on, citing Deleuze's observations in his essay, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," an essay in which Deleuze wrote of the new logic of control society as being a logic in which individuals are free but in which their collective behaviors are modulated and controlled as crowds:

> *Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power.* For although ideology is still very much with us, often in the most virulent of forms, it is no longer encompassing. It no longer defines the global mode of functioning of power. It is now one mode of power in a larger field that is not defined, overall, by ideology. This makes it all the more pressing to connect its real conditions of emergence. *For these are now manifest, mimed by men of power*.[40]

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[39] *Ibid*., pp. 103–104.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 104. See also G. Deleuze, "Postscript on the Society of Control," *October*, 59, Winter 1992, pp. 3–7. Emphasis added.

The argument that the analysis of affect would serve in the fight against postmodern forms of power on its own terms was taken up by many on the Left including Nigel Thrift who argued in 2001 that "[t]he envelope of what we call the political must increasingly expand to take note of the 'way that political attitudes and statements are partly conditioned by intense autonomic bodily reactions that do not simply reproduce the trace of a political intention and cannot be wholly recuperated within an ideological regime of truth'."[41] Massumi's and Thrift's diagnoses might seem dark, foreboding, and the opposite of an avant-garde program, yet it nonetheless appeared to contain the positive proposition that the progressive Left can still reshape the world for the better by engaging the very forces that coerce and distract the subjects of late capitalism, redirecting them to alternate ends. Sylvia Lavin, in particular, can be seen to have directly recapitulated this Massumian argument, when in the conclusion to an essay encouraging architects to address themselves to the sensual effects of color in architecture she wrote that "effects have taken over as techniques in the production of political and cultural change once accorded to technology. *Effects are the new instruments of power.*"[42]

3. Affect in the 2000s: From Theory to Practice

Let us return to our history of the discourse of affect in architecture by following Lavin as she played a central role as an administrator in a school of architecture by advancing affect as one of the contemporary "conversations" that she sought to foster within architecture. Lavin was Greg Lynn's partner by the mid-1990s and it was also through Lynn—who was closer to Massumi personally at this point—that Lavin became ever more socially connected to the discourse on Deleuze that was being further cultivated by Lynn, Kwinter, Kipnis, and others at Columbia in the mid 1990s.[43] After becoming the chair of the architecture program at UCLA in 1996 (a position she held until 2006), she further supported the cultivation of an affect discourse there, helping to bring Robert Somol in 1997, Greg Lynn in 1998, and Jason Payne and Heather Roberge in 2002—both former students of Lynn.

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[41] N. Thrift, "Thinking the Post-Human: Literature, Affect and the Politics of Style," *Textual Practice*, 15, 1, 2001, p. 24, cited in R. Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique," *Critical Inquiry*, 37, 3, Spring 2011, pp. 434–472.

[42] See S. Lavin, "What Color Is It Now?," *Perspecta*, 35, 2004, pp. 111. Emphasis added.

[43] S. Lavin, Pers. Comm.

By the late 1990s, Robert Somol, an especially influential advocate of Deleuze's philosophy in architecture, was also writing on themes of repetition and diagrams in his texts. But by 1999, he came to make very similar claims to those of Lavin in her text on Neutra of that year. As Somol postulated in 1999, architecture could leave behind the critical project, invested as it was in representation and language and pursue instead an "ambient architecture [that] mixes the intoxicants of the contemporary, setting the scene for diverse behaviors, desires, and demands." And referring to Julius Schumlan's infamous photograph of a bachelor putting on a record in a Pierre Koenig case study house in LA, Somol wrote "This is architecture .... as seduction scene: not architecture for paying attention to (not about its meaning), but an environment for acting in, for instigating new events and traits."[44]

In Lavin's "New Mood" polemic in the following year, she too positioned the affective against the critical in much the way that Somol had done using the analogy of psychoanalysis to make her case more vivid. The critic, she wrote, had become an analyst and had placed architecture under analysis such that everything including "the structure of the profession, the mechanisms of its discourses and modes of representation, as well as the very concepts that make architecture architectural" had been analyzed to reveal latent and sublimated desires "for power."[45] Yet, as she went on:

> Ironically, emotion itself came to be repressed in the analytic discourses of criticality and an affective disorder began to emerge in which the pathological symptoms of the unconscious were identified with great abandon but the passionate drives theoretically generating these symptoms were nowhere to be found. The house had become a neurotic bundle of tics and compulsions but affect itself no longer had a home.

As a deeper context for Lavin's remarks, it is worth noting that only a few years earlier she had been engaged as a guest professor running a master class with Liz Diller at the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam, in which their students had been tasked with exploring the house through the analysis of the themes of paranoid hygiene, claustrophobia, agrophobia,

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[44] R. E. Somol, "Intracenter: The Seduction of the Similar," *Assemblage*, 40, 1999, p. 75.
[45] S. Lavin, "The New Mood or Affective Disorder," p. 40.

boredom, eating disorders, obsessive compulsive disorder and optical paranoia, such that Lavin may have had as a result the critical attitude of Elizabeth Diller in the late 1990s in her mind as she wrote her critical lines about the house being seen as a neurotic bundle of compulsions.[46]

As she went on, offering an alternative strategy to that of the analyst of architecture's disorders:

> Reconfiguring this psychodynamic has emerged as a major potential of the postcritical era. The work of Gilles Deleuze has permitted the affective terrain of buildings to organize itself anew and the discipline seems to be entering an almost hyperemotional state. Increasingly uninhibited by repressive regimes of regular geometry and Taylorist modes of production, architecture is instead nurtured by the ardent expressions of consumer desires and the secret pleasures of new, soft materials. Buildings can now be animated, ecstatic, and rapturous. [And] criticism must now understand *sensibility as a form of intelligence* rather than as opposed to intellect.[47]

One of the ways in which a specifically Massumian interpretation of affect can be traced in architectural discourse, then, was in the sharp distinction that he drew between experience and meaning, or between a level of unconscious behavior that responded automatically to the environment and a level of conscious intellectual reflection that involved meanings, symbolism language, and culture. As we have seen repeatedly, it was said by Kipnis that affect involved a mode of interpretation that did not involve meaning and by Somol that it was "not about its meaning." And as Lavin went on to claim in the 2000s, affect was "without signification,"[48] it was "the internalization of perception and *not personal feelings shaped by symbolism, language, and other forms of cultural predeterminations*."[49] Massumi's interpretation of Libet's experiment and his focus on the "half second" between the EGS signal and the movement of the finger reinforced this same argument that conscious reasoning comes only *after* decisions have already been made by the

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[46] S. Lavin, E. Diller, "Domesticating Space: Elizabeth Diller and Sylvia Lavin," *Berlage Cahiers*, 7, 1998, pp. 62–65.

[47] S. Lavin, "The New Mood or Affective Disorder," p. 40. Emphasis added.

[48] S. Lavin, "Plasticity at Work," in *Mood River*, Wexner Center, Columbus, OH, 2002, p. 81.

[49] S. Lavin, "Kissing Architecture: Super Disciplinarity and Confounding Mediums," *Log*, 17, Fall 2009, pp. 9–16.

body. As Massumi put it in the *Parables of the Virtual* in 2002, affect is an "intensity" that is "not semantically or semiotically ordered."[50]

Indeed, Kipnis also argued for the primacy of feeling over reason in his catalogue essay accompanying his 2002 "Mood River" exhibition at the Wexner Center in Columbus. That exhibition presented a range of contemporary artifacts of design, from chairs to toothbrushes that used smooth surfaces, color, and other qualities in ways that were seductive. In his essay, one of Kipnis's main arguments for why the realm of feelings and emotions solicited by affect were important was that new feelings precede and lead to new ideas. As he wrote:

> New feelings erupt into the world ... [D]esign and the arts give diverse and specific material moment to these new feelings, help make them choate and concrete, and spread them about like the wind spreads pollen, like mosquitoes spread disease. After these new feelings have materialized, taken shape, taken various shapes, and disseminated, they eventually evolve into their most auspicious incarnation as new ideas.[51]

Kipnis went so far in the essay as to suggest that Leibniz could only have invented calculus because of a feeling that had been put into widespread circulation by experiences that had been engendered by the invention of the microscope. Calculus, Kipnis said, was like putting a curve under a microscope.[52] The claim that Kipnis was ultimately making about architecture was that it would be like the microscope in his analogy; architecture too could engender new experiences that would spread new feelings and lead to ideas that could change the world in the way that calculus had done.

The attraction of the argument that ideas, meanings, and words were secondary in importance had everything to do with the local context of disciplinary debates in architecture in which this particular group of thinkers sought to distinguish their project from those who had, in the years prior, invested so heavily in linguistic analyses, semiological theories of the sign, Derridean word-play, and the critique of ideology. It had everything to do with the larger political shift they attempted to initiate from the negative project of critical theory—which they saw as tending

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[50] B. Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual,* pp. 24–25.

[51] J. Kipnis, "On those who Step into the Same River...," *Mood River,* Wexner Center for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 2002, pp. 34–44.

[52] *Ibid.*

to undermine the power of design—to an affirmative and positive project that celebrated the power of design.

The best documentation of the discourse that Lavin cultivated at UCLA in particular is the publication *Crib Sheets*, which documented the more informal conversations and ideas that circulated through the school after a conference in 2003 called "The Good, The Bad and the Beautiful." In what is in effect a collection of quotations from articles, books, but also transcribed speech from conferences, we find several entries on topics related to the discourse of affect such as "surface," "atmosphere," and "environment" that suggest the intellectual milieu in the school at the time. Lavin's own transcribed remarks on the topic of surface read, for example, "The surface [becomes] manifestly effective rather than tectonic when architecture seeks mood instead of meaning."[53] Her remarks on atmosphere read:

> Of paramount importance in the reorientation of architecture toward a field of effects de-emphasize volume, the logic of the plan, and the ethics of rationalism, in favor of atmospheres produced through the *curation* of the surface. Through accumulation, lamination, decoration, colorization, agitation, plastification, and environmentalization, these surfaces curate effective moods and when these effects are special, they catalyse the contemporary.[54]

Her remarks were echoed by younger members of faculty such as Jason Payne, who is similarly recorded as having said:

> People respond viscerally to atmospheres. Increasingly they respond to institutions with ennui. We are becoming ever more a species that thrives on immediate, palpable stimulation, on material fact. It's not *what* it is so much as *how* it feels. One of the things we feel most potently in buildings is their atmosphere. Maintaining and even extending the public role of buildings demands they produce a saturated experience that almost clings to the skin of the people moving through them.[55]

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[53] S. Lavin, "Surface," in S. Lavin, H. Furján (eds.), with Penelope Dean, *Crib Sheets: Notes on the Contemporary Architectural Conversation*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2005, p. 63.
[54] S. Lavin, "Atmosphere," in S. Lavin, H. Furján (eds.), with Penelope Dean, *Crib Sheets: Notes on the Contemporary Architectural Conversation*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2005, p. 70.
[55] J. Payne, "Atmosphere," in S. Lavin, H. Furján (eds.), with Penelope Dean, *Crib Sheets: Notes on the Contemporary Architectural Conversation*, Monacelli Press, New York, 2005, 70.

While the discourse of affect in architecture was pioneered by theorists such as Lavin, Somol, and Kipnis in the years around 1999-2002, it was inherited and developed by a generation that had been their students but who were now teaching alongside them. This generation, seeing itself as a generation committed to practice as much as to theory was trying to build and to exemplify the persuasive power of design when thought of in affective terms. In their NGTV Reception Bar of 2006, for example, Jason Payne and Heather Roberge worked with translucent materials and methods of forming surfaces with vacuum molding to create a bar that glowed hot-red. And by 2009 when Diller and Scofidio, now in a phase of prolific building, adopted a similar approach in their renovation for the Alice Tully Hall at the Lincoln Center in New York (Figures 1 and 2), the walls not only glowed red but pulsed as the lights behind came up and went down.

By 2008-2009, Payne, Roberge, Gage, Pita and others were grouping themselves behind the related concept of "sensation." They did so in a group show called "Matters of Sensation" at Artist Space in New York in 2008, and in conjunction, Gage and Pita guest edited a special issue of Log—number 17—that included the publication of a transcript of a conversation about the show and individual essays by Gage and Pita, Payne, and Lavin. Payne's essay brought together and summarized much of what had gone before in the previous decades. It continued to argue that the discourse of affect was to be distinguished from phenomenology, though without going into much detail about the matter other than to write that phenomenology was a "darker, disciplinary codified doctrine."[56] It also continued to argue that meaning was irrelevant to the power of aesthetics in our postmodern age. Nobody is interested in the question, Payne claimed, of what a specific color, tone, shade, or curve means to any one particular group of people in any one context. Taste and symbolism had been replaced by intensity, he wrote, and interpretation had been replaced by reaction. He argued that there was no need to worry about the precision of the concepts involved in his essay, because the feelings that words evoke were the real way they mean anything, such that one could use "mood, atmosphere, sensibility, sensation, [and] feel" as synonyms for affect without much consequence.[57]

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[56] J. Payne, "Hair and Makeup," *Log*, 17, 2009, pp. 41–48.
[57] *Ibid.*

Figure 1. Jason Payne and Heather Roberge, NGTV Reception Bar and Film Set, Beverly Hills, California, 2006. Photograph by Deborah Bird.

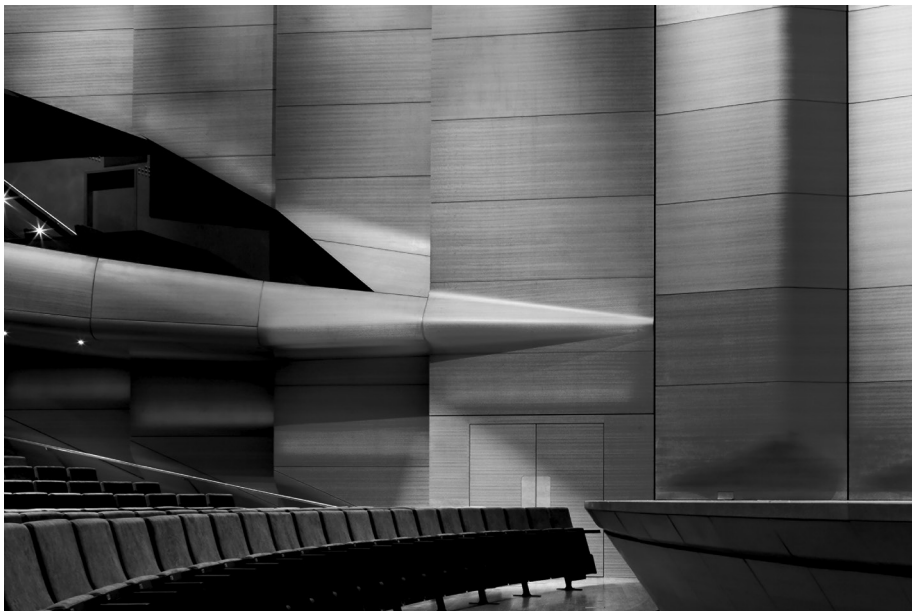

Figure 2. Diller Scofidio + Renfro, Alice Tully Hall Renovation, Lincoln Center, New York, 2009. Photograph by Iwan Baan.

In addition to the work of this younger generation of practitioners, the teaching of a younger generation still, especially at UCLA, led to further design explorations, both in the studio context and in gallery exhibitions, of the way that forms and their variously shiny or hairy surfaces could evoke feelings of attraction to the cute or repulsion to the horrifying. Ellie Abrons and Andrew Holder were creating forms that looked ambiguously adorable or disgusting as little embryonic creatures, insect-like or animal figures, posed to fall from cliff edges or appearing to be soon crushed by a great weight (Figures 3 and 4). And Michael Loverich created haunting abject sculptures that ambiguously combine the cuteness of babies with the animal-like hairy forms (Figure 5).

3. The Critique of Affect in the 2010s

The changes taking place in architecture as it shifted from the cordial rivalry between phenomenology and post-structuralism to the new reigning discourse of affect were not happening in isolation. The discourse of affect was part of similar post-critical developments happening elsewhere in the arts and humanities wherever they had been touched by the spread of post-structuralist discourses. Affect was above all part of a response to the perceived exhaustion of the critical claims made by post-structuralism. In English, Rita Felski and others were already emphasizing pleasure as a dimension of the experience of the reader.[58] And by 2010 students of Brian Massumi, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, were able to document in *The Affect Theory Reader* a whole host of discourses and texts indebted to the affective turn.[59]

But a quarter century on from these developments, surely it is time to step back and assess the validity of their scientific and political claims which underpinned their neo-avant-garde stance. The discourse of affect certainly seems behind us now in many ways. Few architects speak of, or let alone read, Deleuze anymore. There have been strong critiques of the association between the discourse of affect and neoliberalism by the resurgent Marxism that swelled after the financial crash of 2008, and that was

[58] R. Felski, *Uses of Literature*, Wiley Blackwell, London, 2008, and *The Limits of Critique*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2015.

[59] M. Gregg, G. J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham, NC, 2010.

Figure 3. Ellie Abrons, *Inside Things*, 2016.
Photograph by Joshua White.

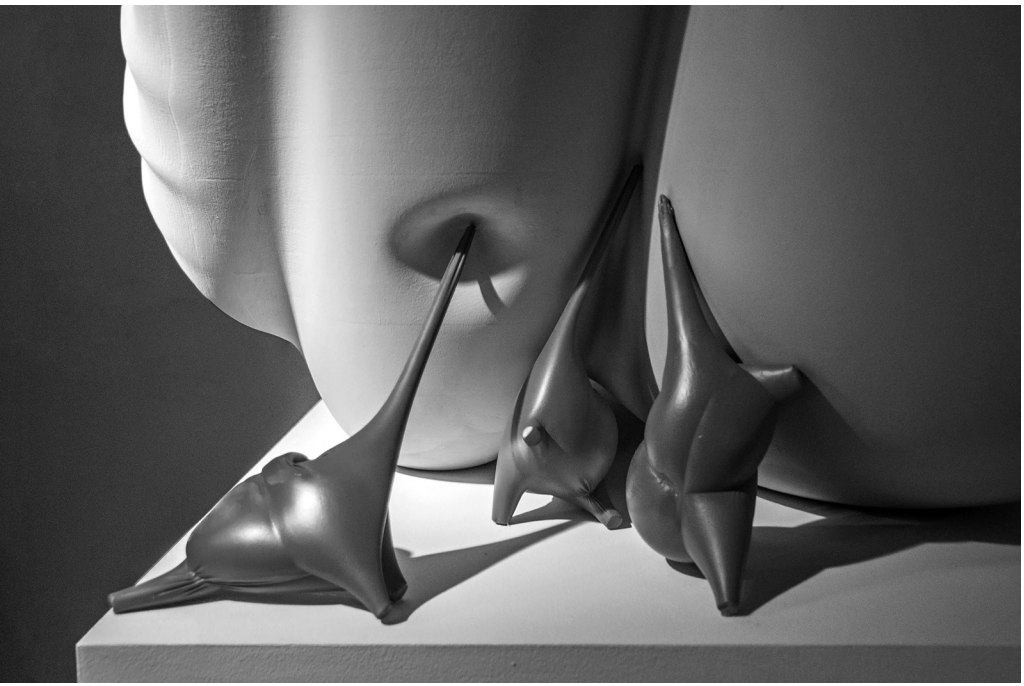

Figure 4. Andrew Holder, *48 Characters*, 2016.
Courtesy of Andrew Holder.

Figure 5. The Bittertang Farm, *Quilt Babies*, 2009.
Courtesy of Michael Loverich.

best represented by figures such as Douglas Spencer.[60] And even many of the second generation around Jason Payne—including also David Ruy, Mark Foster Gage, and Florencia Pita—began to speak of the project of affect in the past tense as the origin out of which they came, but are now more likely to associate themselves with the newer discourse of Speculative Realism and Object Oriented Ontology, and primarily with the philosophy of Graham Harman.

But certainly, today, the turn to affect and the post-critical turn are behind us and are thus ripe for evaluation, not least because of the substitution of Harman for Deleuze by its own protagonists or by the younger inheritors who were to carry the torch, but also because the entire discourse—not only in the academy but in much of the elite spaces of the media, government and professional middle class culture—has experienced a swing back in many ways to something like the identity-based critical discourse that once dominated the project of the generation of *Assemblage* in the late 1980s, only this time without the same thoroughgoing commitment to the linguistic constructivism of reality.

For Lavin, Kipnis, and Somol, affect was part and parcel of the claim that interrogating the architectural object, negatively undermining it, pulling it apart and deconstructing it, while aggrandizing to the critic, had left architects without much of an understanding of the power of architecture to shape the world. They had tried to recover those powers on the grounds that it was preferable to use them to fight fire with fire in an attempt to make the world better rather than it was to endlessly wring hands about all the things for which architecture is guilty and for which it can be criticized. In the past decade, roughly from around 2015 to 2025, there has been a recouperation of this deep sense of critique of architecture that Lavin and her colleagues had been attempting to shift away from, albeit now through a much more explicit foregrounding of the deconstruction of racialized and gendered norms of the urban environment and the architectural profession.

The general post-humanism that post-structuralism helped to bring about within the academy has not gone away, however, in part because it has been such a useful way to avoid the traps of talking about human

[60] See D. Spencer, "Architecture and the Affective Turn," in *The Architecture of Neoliberalism: How Contemporary Architecture Became an Instrument of Control and Compliance*, Bloomsbury, London, 2016, pp. 141–150, and D. Spencer, "Affect, Architecture, and the Aapparatus of Capture," in M. Jobst, H. Frichot (eds.), *Architectural Affects after Deleuze and Guattari*, Routledge, London, 2020, pp. 26–39.

history, culture, symbols, and meaning in a multicultural society, and to attempt to avoid an explicit confrontation with the culture wars. Nonetheless, the immediate claims of the 1990s affect turn which bracketed out meaning altogether have also faded. In effect, the resurgent critical turn of the identitarian politics that swept through the academy in the mid-2010s has placed meaning and cultural context back on the agenda but without much of a framework or vocabulary for talking about meaning and certainly not one as sophisticated as that which had been developed in the years shortly following the linguistic turn and the discovery of semiotics. And many architects wishing to explore the traumatic histories of various marginalized groups have found themselves asking about narratives, memory, and cultural traditions, yet with intellectual tools somewhat blunted by years of neglect.

Affect theory has also recently been the subject of much critique.[61] William Mazzarella has argued that affect theory reverses the long-standing critical literature on crowd psychology and comes to uncritically favor affect over reason.[62] As Mazzarella puts it, "the crowd's formerly unacceptable unreason now reappears as the productive, emergent puissance of the multitude."[63] For Mazzarella, affect theory also greatly underplays the role of dialectical mediation and the relationship between mediation and social institutions that are crucial to politics. Arguing against Massumi specifically, Mazzarella claims that mediation should be understood as the "most fundamental and productive principle of all social life,"[64] and suggests that Massumi's very idea of a premediated experience is in the end a fiction that mediation itself produces.[65]

Similarly, in *Immediacy, or The Style of Too Late Capitalism,* Anna Kornbluh links affect discourse to the current logic of the financialized, just-in-time, gig economy that depicts everyone as fulfilled by their own direct ability to buy and sell goods—and to buy and sell themselves—without being able to grasp the abstractions and mediations of the platforms and algorithms that modulate their direct experiences. She argues that affect theorists fail to recognize that the discourse of affect ultimately

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[61] See the critique offered by J. A. J. Storm, *Metamodernism: The Future of Theory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2021, and W. Mazzarella, "Affect: What is it Good for?," in *Enchantments of Modernity*, Routledge, London, 2009, pp. 291–309.

[62] W. Mazzarella, "Affect: What is it Good for?" *Enchantments of Modernity*, Routledge, London, 2009, p. 297.

[63] *Ibid*., p. 297.

[64] *Ibid*., p. 302.

[65] *Ibid*., p. 303.

assumes and reinforces the same logics of the software used by today's major corporations such as Google.[66] She criticizes the discourse of affect, therefore, for its tendency to limit human subjects to only the self-commanded resources of their own identities and to indulge in a cult of authenticity that destroys the ground of communication upon which social relations and political solidarities are built.[67] In the process, she argues, affect discourse mires us in the perpetual present and is unable to offer a much-needed vision and hope about the future.[68]

Finally, Ruth Leys has been perhaps the staunchest of critics of affect theory in recent years, directing her attention towards Massumi's work and his reading of neuroscientific experiments. She has also pointed out in her critical reading of Brian Massumi's "Autonomy of Affect" text that affect theorists tend to misconstrue two key claims in ways that are questionable. Firstly, affect theorists, for Lay, tend to claim that up until now we have overemphasized rationality in political decision-making and have not realized the degree to which political decisions are made on non-rational bases. She points out that affect theorists tend to be committed to arguing that there is "a gap between the subject's affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that thinking comes 'too late' for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them."[69] This gap however is often rooted in their interpretation of psychological studies that have subsequently been questioned by many in the field of psychology.[70]

The enormous literature on the Libet experiment in particular has produced a series of extensive and thorough meta-analyses, particularly

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[66] A. Kornbluh, *Immediacy: Or, The Style of Too Late Capitalism,* Verso, New York, 2024, p. 123.

[67] Kornbluh, *Immediacy*, pp. 45, 47, 83.

[68] Kornbluh, *Immediacy*, p. 15.

[69] R. Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique."

[70] For critical studies of the Libet experiment within psychology and neuroscience see M. N. Braun, J. Wessler, M. Friese "A meta-analysis of Libet-style experiments," *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 128, September 2021, pp. 182–198; C.D. Frith, P. Haggard, "Volition and the Brain: Revisiting a Classic Experimental Study," *Trends Neuroscience*, 41, 7, July 2018, pp. 405–407; Within phenomenology Paul B. Armstrong argued that Massumi misinterprets Libet's experiment and that it does not indicate that thinking precedes reason. See P. B. Armstrong, *Stories and the Brain: The Neuroscience of Narrative*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2020, pp. 62–64. And within philosophy more generally Nursena Çetìngül shows the range of philosophers, including Marcel Brass, Alfred Mele, and Peter Ulric Tse, who have rejected the claims made about human beings not having free will based in Libet's experiments. See N. Çetìngül, "Benjamin Libet's 'Free Will Experiment,' Scientific Criticisms and Kalāmic Perspective," *Kader,* 21, 1, 2023, pp. 320–349.

that done by Marcel Brassa, Ariel Furstenberg, and Alfred R. Mele in 2019, that have argued that while neural activity can be detected in advance of a decision, there is no evidence that it represents a decision being made unconsciously. They argue that many of the more convincing critical studies place the moment of decision as well as the ability to veto a decision very close to the time when patients think they are deciding, which as they put it, reinforces the "common idea or feeling that we decide at the moment of conscious intention."[71] They ultimately argue that the pulse observed in the brain at 0.3 seconds before the decision to move is specifically related to what Aaron Schurger has called "stochastic neural fluctuations,"[72] which appear to be related to the process of accumulating evidence prior to a decision, but not to a decision itself. They point out that these neural fluctuations are correlated to the arbitrariness of the decision-making scenario in the experiment and suggest that it is *precisely because* there is no natural context by which perception guides the making of a decision that decisions are made in a way that required more of this internal neural noise. As Brassa *et al.* put it:

> In typical cases, when people make a decision about whether to accept or reject a job offer, whether or not to make a bid on a certain house, and so on, their leading options differ from one another in ways that are important to them. In such cases, people often have a wealth of information to mull over. There is no need to depend primarily on subthreshold neuronal noise. [73]

The literature is also critical not only of the conclusions drawn by Libet from his experiments but of the methods and assumptions in his study. They point out the critiques within the literature of the artificial nature of Libet's experiment and the way that the instructions of the experiment influenced the experiment by leading the patient to adopt a "metacognitive strategy" where they attend to their own attention in ways that are unnatural in everyday experience. This in turn, Brassa *et al.* claim, leads to the fundamental problem that whatever the experiment

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[71] M. Brassa, A. Furstenbergb, A. R. Mele, "Why Neuroscience Does Not Disprove Free Will," in *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 102, 2019, p. 263.

[72] A. Schurger, J.D. Sitt, S. Dehaene, "An Accumulator Model for Spontaneous Neural Activity Prior to Self-Initiated Movement," in *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of Americas,* 109, 2012, pp. 2904–2913.

[73] M. Brassa, A. Furstenbergb, A. R. Mele, "Why Neuroscience Does Not Disprove Free Will," p. 263.

finds in the laboratory context cannot be generalized as an explanation for human experience per se.[74] They point out the significant differences between making decisions in an arbitrary manner such as lifting a finger randomly when prompted by an instruction to do so and making decisions in a situational context of meaning and significance, such as hitting the brake when you see a pedestrian crossing the road.[75]

Conclusion

In retrospect, the claims made by affect theorists like Massumi, Lavin, Kipnis, and others, that the level of affect is prior to and distinct from the realm of significance and meaning, seem evermore difficult to sustain given that the scientific studies that were once supposed to underpin these claims are no longer widely supported. It is not entirely clear anymore that it is accurate or desirable to demote the role of such things as reason, meaning, the imagination, culture, and history in human decision making and actions. As these qualities of human nature are being daily undermined by the media-technical systems of "too late capitalism," it no longer seems a progressive gesture to embrace a logic of immediacy that is in fact a symptom of these systems.

Throughout this article I have charted, through a number of protagonists and their writings, an intellectual history of affect theory in architecture. In the course of doing so, I have pointed out how affect has historically displaced or supplanted the discourse of phenomenology, largely on the strength that its claims were more politically progressive and on the aspersion that phenomenology was a "dark," closed, or "essentializing" philosophy. Yet as affect theory's own politics looks far from progressive, it is unclear why phenomenology would remain so understudied as an alternative means of understanding experience.

There was not space in this paper to analyze the ways in which phenomenology offers a means to think about how the qualities of buildings are experienced, and this analysis will have to wait for another occasion. Yet, we can say that within the historical triangle between post-structuralism, affect theory and phenomenology, phenomenology occupies a

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[74] The same critique is offered by Przemysław Strzyżyński. See P. Strzyżyński, "Benjamin Libet's Experiment and Its Critique Between 2000–2012," *Filozofia Chrze Cijańska*, 10, July 2013, pp. 83–102.

[75] M. Brassa, A. Furstenbergb, A. R. Mele, "Why Neuroscience Does Not Disprove Free Will," p. 252.

position that evades the nominalism by which everything is viewed as a discourse without resorting to immediacy. Phenomenology's account of experience, far from essentializing or adopting an *a priori* conception of space, could be demonstrated to understand experience in terms of the historical, cultural, and social significance of situations that are deeply wired into all human experience from the moment a child is born and during the process of child development, such that there is no such thing as experience prior to cultural mediation, because cultural mediation is what enables human beings to orient themselves in the world, to perceive their environment, and to act intentionally in the world.

If in the last decade we have witnessed a swing back to the critical project through increasing demands to understand the meaning of human experiences because of a desire to understand the history and politics of those experiences, then phenomenology might prove a useful vehicle by which to sharpen our tools for understanding the meaning of experience, without falling back upon the nominalism and linguistic primacy once championed by post-structuralism.

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Phenomenal Existence and World-Building: Revisiting the Ambivalences of Hannah Arendt's Public/Private Distinction and Its Relation to the Body

ABSTRACT: Hannah Arendt argues for a primacy of appearance in which human existence is embedded. Specific forms of appearing relate to specific activities. In the first part of my paper, I turn to Arendt's late work *The Life of the Mind* in order to reconstruct how human activities can come into view. This allows to get a clearer grasp of what world-building in a phenomenal world amounts to and how certain activities like building, acting, speaking, thinking, and judging open up dimensions that go beyond the immediately appearing world. They disclose historical, generative, and political horizons and thereby create new worlds within the appearing world. While in the first section I focus on the careful distinctions Arendt makes between the phenomenal world, the space of appearance, and the public realm, I turn to a problematization of her public/private distinction in the second section. Instead of accusing her of a "phenomenological essentialism" which locates every type of activity in a proper place, I take a look at the correlation between embodiment and architecture. Based on the horrors of a boundless mega-body, the need for bodies to be sheltered and located, and the possibility to relate bodies to a common history, Arendt develops specific claims about how bodies should be arranged, housed, and located.

KEYWORDS: Hannah Arendt, public–private differentiation, space of appearance, body, worldlessness

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Hannah Arendt argues for a primacy of appearance in which human existence is embedded. Specific forms of appearing relate to specific activities. In the first part of my paper, I turn to Arendt's late work "On thinking" (the first part of *The Life of the Mind [LM]*) in order to reconstruct how human activities can come into view. Taking her departure from the difference between thinking the world and acting in it, Arendt embeds her earlier considerations from *The Human Condition (HC)* in a new comprehensive regime: that of appearance and in/visibility. This allows to appreciate that we share a phenomenal world with all living creatures who make their appearance in it and even have an "urge" to appear. It also allows, however, to get a clearer grasp of what world-building in a phenomenal world amounts to and how certain activities like building, acting, speaking, thinking, and judging open up dimensions that go beyond the immediately appearing world. They disclose historical, generative, and political horizons and thereby create new worlds within the appearing world. While in the first section I focus on the careful distinctions Arendt makes between the phenomenal world, the space of appearance, and the public realm, I turn to a problematization of her public/private distinction in the second section. Instead of accusing her of a "phenomenological essentialism" which locates every type of activity in a proper place, I take a look at the correlation between embodiment and architecture. Based on the horrors of a boundless mega-body, the need for bodies to be sheltered and located, and the possibility to relate bodies to a common history, Arendt develops specific claims about how bodies should be arranged, housed, and located.

The World's Phenomenal Nature, the Space of Appearance, and the Public Realm

On the very first pages of *The Life of the Mind,* Arendt's main claim is that the world's nature is phenomenal. All things that are appear, "natural and artificial, living and dead, transient and sempiternal."[1] But the concept of appearance would not make any sense if "recipients of appearance did not exist."[2] Appearances thus conceptually imply existing spectators, somebody to whom they appear. These spectators are not unworldly eyes of the mind, just watching a spectacle from another sphere. They are "living creatures" and as such, they are embedded in a world of appearance. They enter this world by appearing in it and leave it by

[1] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1977, p. 19.
[2] *Ibid*.

disappearing from it. So, essentially, they are themselves appearances, with their (normally) invisible bodily functions producing surfaces that present themselves to other sentient creatures. Living beings are thus not only in the world but are *of* the world in the sense that "nobody so far has succeeded in *living* in a world that does not manifest itself of its own accord."[3] In the phenomenal world which is our lifeworld, "Being and Appearing coincides."[4] This means that everything "depends in its being, that is, in its appearingness, on the presence of living creatures,"[5] including those creatures themselves. Living creatures possess consciousness qua intentionality, i.e., that they are aware of something: appearances and a whole appearing world. Vice versa, this world implies a plurality of spectators: "Plurality is the law of the earth."[6]

In just a few sentences, Arendt spans a whole phenomenological ontology with far reaching philosophical consequences. By starting from a primacy of appearance, she arrives at a co-implication and co-dependency of subjects and objects that commonly actualize the world's phenomenality, while being a part of it. Appearance equals Being, implies plurality, constitutes world, and embeds life. One could call this a co-constitutive philosophy of manifestation, combined with a primacy of the lifeworld which is a phenomenal world: "the world of appearances is *prior* to whatever region,"[7] and this "primacy of appearance is a fact of everyday life which neither the scientist nor the philosopher can ever escape."[8]

As I have argued elsewhere, Arendt's notion of appearance is clearly a phenomenological one.[9] Even if the Kantian approach to judging appearances in the Third Critique is of crucial importance to her, she goes far beyond Kant by equating appearance with Being. Her pluralization of appearances transcends Nietzsche as well because she views appearances as constitutive of reality and not as "illusions created for the sake of life."[10] Arendt's notion, just as Heidegger's, roots in the Greek concept of *phainesthai*: shining forth, showing oneself. What she emphasizes a lot more than Heidegger is that this implies a plurality of "spectators," or of

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[3] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] *Ibid*.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 23.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 24.
[9] *Cf.* S. Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality,* Routledge, New York, 2018, pp. 53–76.
[10] D. R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, Princeton University Press, Princeton/New Jersey, 1996, p. 103.

conscious beings who experience the appearing world and appear in it like on a "stage."[11] Without relapsing into a Cartesian philosophy of the subject, Arendt thereby confirms the Husserlian theories of intentionality, the intersubjective constitution of reality, as well as the double nature of the body as lived body and objectively appearing body. She does this mostly by drawing on Merleau-Ponty, and his later work on *The Visible and the Invisible.*

Thinking, as Arendt explains, is an activity that allows to partly withdraw from the world of appearances—into "the life of the mind." The thinker is "absent minded," she is not involved in the events of the world, even if her body is still there and visible to all. In this way, thinking "makes sense" of the appearing world, it creates meaning and context, it elucidates the appearances in a specific mode: that of speaking with oneself. But it also brings transcendental (i.e., necessary) illusions with it. Through the experience of thinking, which is a reflexive activity of the mind in the medium of language, professional thinkers are drawn to a metaphysis of two worlds where the visible world is taken to be a "mere appearance" grounding in the reality of the invisible world.

Arendt explains how these metaphysical conclusions occur in thinking while she insists that the realm of appearances is the only realm where life is really lived, and reality is experienced and shared. From the thinker's perspective, she reminds us, the whole of life goes on "in public."[12] But this is a philosophical way to frame the situation. It leads to a philosophical use of the public/private distinction, indicating a dichotomy of a "private mind" and a "public world." This not only covers up that private and public spaces are actually and originally innerworldly, built spaces; it also declares everything worldly to be "public" in the same way. It is thus important to note that Arendt herself avoids using the public/private vocabulary in this philosophical sense (in the quote above she only cites Hugh of Saint Victor, a medieval author). She tries to be more nuanced in order to develop different regimes and ways of appearing. If we look at her terminology, she very consistently discerns between (1) the "phenomenal world"—including its appearances and its visibility—and (2) the "*space of appearance*" which, in *HC* she again clearly distinguishes from (3) the "public realm" as an institutionalized and organized form. What are the differences and how do the three concepts relate to one another?

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[11] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 21.

[12] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

Ad (1) In the *phenomenal world*, all kinds of activities take place, they are "public" in the sense of being "visible." Even appearing itself is an activity for living beings who show themselves on a "stage":

> The urge toward self-display—to respond by showing to the overwhelming effect of being shown—seems to be common to men and animals. And just as the actor depends upon stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge and recognize its existence.[13]

The "worldly stage shared with all sentient beings"[14] is thus something like a proto-public realm, one where life thrives as appearing, visible, shared life. Conceiving life as *appearing* life in *LM* gives it new a surplus beyond the only necessary functions Arendt attributed to life in *HC*: animal life in all its colors, varieties, and forms surpasses what would be needed for mere survival. It is an excess of abundance and beauty. This connects the dimension of life with what transcends it and appears for its own sake. Arendt thereby allows for life what she ascribed to utensils and functional objects already in *HC*, using the same argument:

> Everything that is, must appear, and nothing can appear without a shape of its own; hence there is in fact no thing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or

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[13] *Ibid*., p. 21f.

[14] A. Gündoğdu, "Animal Trouble: Arendt and the Question of Anthropocentrism," *The Review of Politics,* 86, 4, 2024, pp. 505–528, here 515. It has been argued that Arendt gives up what she defended in *HC* (176), that only human plurality expresses itself as uniqueness. Instead, "plurality arises out of the intersubjective practices of appearing and being perceived in distinct forms on a worldly stage shared with all sentient beings who are all beginners in the sense that their (inter)actions set something into motion that cannot be predicted by necessity or utility" (*ibid*., p. 10). I agree that embedding life in the primacy of appearance opens it up to more than a logic of necessity or utility, but I would be hesitant calling (higher? or all?) animals "beginners" in the historistic sense as Arendt uses the term. It is one thing to say that all sentient animals have their range of reaction and play beyond necessity alone; it is another thing to say that a group of squirrels in 1789 set something in motion that changed the whole course of squirrel history. This difference is important, and I do not regard it as discriminatory to not apply this kind of talk to non-human animals; to the contrary, I would rather see it as problematic if the only way of getting into a theoretically and ethically accurate relation with non-human animals would be to anthropomorphize them.

> ugliness, is identical with appearing publicly and being seen. By the same token, namely, in its sheer worldly existence, everything also transcends the sphere of pure instrumentality once it is completed.[15]

The lifeworld, a plurality of spectators, and appearance hence intrinsically belong together and allow for the possibility to transcend invisible processes and functions. The human public realm does not fall from the sky, it is rooted in plural, appearing life.

Ad (2) In *HC* as well as *LM*, Arendt throws a spotlight on types of activities: On the one hand, she investigates their intentionalities, temporalities, products, rhythms, and establishment of relations to others and the world. On the other hand, she explores their relation to appearance. It is no exaggeration to say that *HC* is methodologically based on this heuristic, which is reflected in the chapter structure, and I would argue that it is also at work in *LM*. From the viewpoint of thinking (Arendt always takes a specific viewpoint and never suggests she could stand above all viewpoints), action and speech as well as acting and speaking subjects appear just like anything else in the phenomenal world. Form the viewpoint of action and speech themselves, however, something additionally happens which is decisive for our topic: acting and speaking generate an additional *"space of appearance."* Whenever people are "together in speech and action," Arendt says in *HC*, the "space of appearance comes into being."[16] What kind of illumination is this, adding to the phenomenal world? And what kind of quality characterizes these activities in order to be able to produce this additional sort of "light"?

Let us look at speech first: clearly, Arendt sets a different focus than Heidegger when she claims that "being together in speech" brings something to light. Heidegger argues that the *logos* "lets something be seen *(phainestai)*"[17] in principle, but regarding political relevance, then reduces it to rare accomplishments of thinkers, poets, and leaders.[18] This is democratized in Arendt: "whenever people are/gather together" such a "light" emerges.[19] What does the discourse bring to light that is otherwise not visible in the phenomenal world? Once again Heidegger gives the initial answer: that "what the discourse is about; and it does so either

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15 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1998, p. 173.
16 *Ibid*., p. 199.
17 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, p. 56.
18 D. R. Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger*, pp. 155, 218.
19 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 199f.

for the one who is doing the talking (the medium) or for persons who are talking with one another."[20] Speech—or *logos* as a way of being in the world together—reveals the world and the speakers in a specific way. The simple fact that the logos lets something be seen *as* something[21] adds something to the self-givenness of appearance and self-display: a perspective that makes something a theme and thereby expresses itself. The other simple fact that one can contradict this articulated perspective, opens up a whole realm of self- and world-articulation that goes beyond our immediate appearance and expressivity as living beings.

Acting, the second activity that "shows something," has obviously been added by Arendt to Heidegger's scheme of disclosive existentialia of *Being and Time*. Yet, it is central that acting and speaking are inextricably linked. Action without speech remains sheer violence which is mute.[22] Speech, on the other hand, can be action, since it conveys not only information or generates communication, but sets something in motion. Hence, there is a particularly revealing quality of deeds that are accompanied by words, and words that are deeds. An action can reveal an actor, show who she is, which goes beyond her visible appearance. She appears as a person who, in a conscious decision or not, has come to take this or that position, who has reacted this or that way. Of course, this implies a context of common affairs, a historicity of events, and a shared intelligibility of possibilities, all of which is provided by Heidegger's description of Dasein. At the same time, the actor appears as someone who could act differently or begin something new: the "who" gains shape in her actions but, as long as alive, remains inscrutable and intangible.[23] By emphasizing this point, Arendt introduces what she calls "natality," a force that precisely has the power to rupture the conformities of "the anyone".[24] Arendt also highlights how important plurality is for action, again by examining its relation to appearance. Her very specific notion of action primarily looks at action *as it appears, not as it is intended*. This does not mean that the intention does not matter, but rather that what unfolds in the world depends on how the action is taken up. If an action is not taken up at all, it is as if it had not happened. By contrast, an action can be impactful to the highest degree, even if its intention is misunderstood.

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[20] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 32.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[22] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 26.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 181.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 246.

This indicates how much Arendt ties the revealing qualities of action and speech to worldly appearance and actualized plurality, but also to factors that transcend plain exposedness and visibility. What expresses itself in speech and action is a standpoint of an individuality that articulates something *as* something and that shows herself *as* some*one* in a web of relationships. Plurality is "the law of the earth" and rooted in the phenomenal world; but articulated plurality lets something appear that transcends the visible.

The "space of appearance" created by acting and speaking thus enhances the phenomenal world but has to be differentiated from it. One important difference is that it is a dimension that is actualized by specific activities, which implies that it disappears again when the correlating activities cease. Unlike the phenomenal world which "manifest[s] itself of its own accord"[25] and which we can neither leave behind nor destroy, the space of appearance is not a necessary feature of existence, not even an enduring one, but rather a fleeting phenomenon:

> Its peculiarity is that, unlike the spaces which are the work of our hands, it does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men [...] but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever.[26]

Another important feature is that the activities generating a space of appearance are themselves dependent on it "in order to be actualized at all."[27] This indicates a co-dependency in actualization, which also underlines the fragile status of the activities themselves. They do not just produce a space of appearance from a distant, independent sphere, but need the environment they continue to produce. In Arendt's words, they depend on a certain "degree of manifestation"[28] which discerns them from other activities, like laboring, working, thinking, or willing. This is a position Arendt holds onto also in *LM*:

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[25] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 26.
[26] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 199.
[27] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 72.
[28] *Ibid.,* p. 72.

> If we consider the whole scale of human activities from the viewpoint of appearance, we find many degrees of manifestation. Neither laboring nor fabrication requires display of the activity itself; only action and speaking need a space of appearance—as well as people who see and hear—in order to be actualized at all. But none of these activities is invisible.[29]

When Arendt argued earlier in the book that every appearing being needs uptake from fellow creatures, it seems like a contradiction now to reduce this again only to acting and speaking. I think we can only understand Arendt adequately if we take her talk of "degrees of manifestation" seriously. First, even if worldly appearance implies a plurality of spectators, this does not mean that certain activities would depend on their visibility: the activity of working is visible because it occurs in the phenomenal world, our lifeworld; but it does not *have to* be perceived by anyone in order to accomplish its aim: to produce a thing and bring it into appearance. Hence, its basic visibility in the world can be modulated without changing its productivity: it can be hidden or displayed, its aim can be achieved one way or the other. The opposite is the case with speech and action. If they are hidden away, their effect is seriously diminished, up to not making any sense anymore. A speech no one hears and an action no one takes notice of simply cannot achieve what they are meant to—it questions not only their success but their being as a whole. Speech and action thus need to appear and be taken up in order to be what they are. This sets the course for Arendt's differentiation between "the public" and "the private." Secondly, it remains true that "everything that is must appear,"[30] a conviction Arendt had already in *HC*, and that this implies a plurality of spectators, of fellow creatures recognizing one's existence. But in order to recognize more than existence, namely, thematizations, statements, positionings, new beginnings, opinions, standpoints—everything speech and action have to offer—a different degree of manifestation is necessary: that of appearing in a dimension where others not only take notice of it, but speak and act themselves and are ready to continue doing so. This is what Arendt calls a "web of relationships" and a "second in-between." In contrast to the first in-between, which is the appearing world, and which must include reciprocal and continuous interaction

[29] *Ibid.,* p. 72.
[30] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 173.

between those who live in it, the second in-between establishes a different kind of "light" and dimension of co-existence: it lets things be seen from different perspectives, it lets characters and personalities appear, it opens up a temporal, generative, and historistic dimension of a past and a future—and indeed, all of this ceases and can wither away if the space of appearance is not held in actualization.

Arendt calls a continuing actualization of an in-between *power*: "Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence."[31] In the simplest form, it can be actualized by "gathering together:" this creates common attention, readiness to act or respond, continuing communication and interaction. But in order to last, this coming together needs to be bound by something that allows to transcend the present and project itself into the future: Arendt thinks of promises and political forms that arise from acts of commitment to be a functioning community. Power is thus something that only a plurality of beings can actualize together. Importantly, power is "a power potential and not an unchangeable, measurable, and reliable entity."[32] This means on the one hand that it cannot be stored like a thing. On the other, it indicates the specific actuality of a potential: the greatest power does not have to be exercised, it has its effect just by being a real potential. This is how it can be a force that holds together the space of appearance which contains pure actualities. But it also has normative requirements:

> Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.[33]

For the "light" of action and speech to ignite, they must actuate their disclosive and creative characters: words must disclose realities; deeds must establish relations and create new realities. As we know from Heidegger's existentiell modifications, this is by far not the whole range of these existentialia: action can be disruptive violence, speech can be idle talk or lie. Speaking and acting thus could in fact go on but would not

[31] *Ibid*., p. 200.
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid*.

have the power to illuminate anything—the space of appearances can darken or fade away. On the other end of the spectrum, word and deed can reach a powerful combination if a community chooses to regulate its affairs among equals and only with words and not violence. This sets the course for Arendt's democratic approach to the public realm. But here the fleeting space of appearance is already cast into a form. We have to take a look at the next basic activity, world-building, and its relation to appearance to understand how the actuality of the space of appearance can be institutionalized and transformed into a lasting "space." This is where and how architecture—in a concrete as well as in more metaphorical sense—becomes crucially relevant for mediating, realizing, and stabilizing humans' phenomenal existence.

Ad 3) World-building allows to arrange spaces and places in the appearing world: a home, a stage, a place for memory; it can conserve, create, protect, or hide appearance. It can do a similar thing for the product of action and speech, the space of appearance: while not being able to produce it (nor to produce power), it can give it a framework, a built and/or designed stage, a medium, an interface, an organization—and thereby institute it, make it become a *"public realm."* This transforms the mere actualization-phenomenon of the space of appearance which "predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm" into an organized dimension of relative stability: be it a "reading public" or "various forms of government [...] in which the public realm can be organized."[34] In its political form, it secures a space and builds a structure "where all subsequent actions [can] take place, the space being the public realm of the *polis* and its structure the law."[35] For Arendt, it is of immense importance that human affairs are "housed" by the human artifice, as otherwise they "will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word;"[36] but just as much does the human artifice need the "lifeblood" of power and actualized action and speech, or else it "lacks its ultimate *raison d'etre*"[37]—it becomes meaningless. The public realm, terminologically, designates this hybrid dimension, partly erected and stable, partly enlivened by the activities which the "architecture," in a metaphorical and non-metaphorical sense, enhances and supports. This has the following two implications.

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[34] *Ibid*., p. 199.
[35] *Ibid*., p. 194.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[37] *Ibid*.

First, the public realm is less fragile than the space of appearance, but certainly also of a different nature than the phenomenal world. While it necessarily roots in the basic ontological regime of appearance, it amplifies and stabilizes a very specific kind of disclosing activity. Second, the public realm is not only a historical and political phenomenon, it also founds history and politics. As Heidegger argues, Dasein is historistic, which means that it (co-)exists temporally. Therefore, it will necessarily exist in traditions, in a language, and in the everydayness of the "anyone." However, in order to enlighten this dimension, to manifest and grasp it, it is necessary to tell stories and to give appearing individuals and their words and deeds a stage which transports their accomplishments (and failures) over time and lets them sediment as the "history" of this group: this is how our community was founded, this is how and why we started or stopped doing this, this is our story, etc. For Arendt, this necessary shift from a simply *lived* tradition to stories, deeds, and individuals—"heroes" as well as everyday people—that are put in the spotlight is crucial, although it does not yet satisfy the condition for the public realm as she envisions it. A public realm additionally organizes these activities and inspires their continuation by promising "glory" or, to use a more contemporary expression, recognition for great deeds and words—a place in history, where the passion to distinguish oneself and appear by one's own initiative, is rewarded with attention and rememberance. Furthermore, it has a tendency, exceptionally realized in the Greek case, to fully free the word-deed-complex as an own, self-standing dimension of existence. Words, publicly spoken, can resist an otherwise only endured fate and allow for an experience of dignity, even if they are futile; likewise, publicly spoken words can motivate people to do something together which they would not do, had they been left enclosed in their own worlds: it makes them feel, and, ideally, realize their common agency and freedom.

Finally, I would like to shortly address the activities of thinking and judging in their relation to appearance in order to complete the picture. In terms of being activities of the life of the mind, they do not appear in the world, except if they manifest themselves in spoken or written words. Hence, the experience of thinking as well as judging suspends the constant exposedness of appearance and involvement in the world. While thinking steps back to make sense of it all, judging distances one's immediate reaction to get a "view" on things also from different perspectives. Both activities thus enable to relate to the appearing world *as* an appearing one; they allow to thematize it, articulate one's standpoint

and thereby provide an additional illumination beyond the immediacy of appearance. Their withdrawal provides a resource that enhances and deepens appearance in different ways. In the case of thinking, it can lead to metaphysical illusions that eventually degrade the original appearing lifeworld. Judging, by contrast, escapes this bias which is why Arendt is so fond of it: as Kant explained, it deals with single appearances which are not just subsumed under concepts or moral ideas but are reflected in their forms and shapes in relation to our pleasure or displeasure; and it has to appeal to others and their judgments of taste to test its own validity. Therefore, it has to return to the phenomenal world. Judging thus closes the circle and completes the architecture of the public realm:

> The public realm is constituted by the critics and the spectators and not by the actors or the makers. And this critic and spectator sits in every actor and fabricator; without this critical, judging faculty the doer or maker would be so isolated from the spectator that he would not even be perceived.[38]

Judging provides a context, it aims at a holistic picture, but not in form of the "one truth" of the singular spectator (the thinker), but in the plural assessments of a judging public. The spectators, not the actors, hold "the clue to the meaning of human affairs"[39] and "Kant, more aware than any other philosopher of human plurality"[40] was the one who recognized this in his *Critique of Judgment*. The phenomenal world thus provides the basic positions, actor, spectator, and stage, which are then elevated to another level and different degrees of manifestation by distinct activities: action and speech weaving a second, however fleeting in-between, which is fastened, formed, and institutionalized by the capacity of world-building; thinking and judging enriching this realm with a depth-dimension that is achieved by moving back and forth between the visible and the invisible, between the dialogue with oneself, the appearances themselves, and the judgment of others.

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[38] H. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992, p. 63.
[39] H. Arendt, *The Life of the Mind,* p. 96.
[40] *Ibid*.

The Public and the Private and the Ambivalences of Embodiment

In the second part of my paper, I would like to take a closer look of how the phenomenal existence of human beings in all its complexity relates to the public/private distinction and how this shapes the political significance of world-building. Arendt largely seems to argue for a rigid and pretty traditional defense of the public/private divide which has earned her pronounced criticism, especially from feminists.[41] For example, Seyla Benhabib charged her with being committed to a "phenomenological essentialism," defined by "her contention that each human activity has a proper place in the world, in which it must be carried out and within which it unfolds."[42] As I have argued previously,[43] I neither think that Arendt's argumentation is essentialist nor that, in this case, it rests on phenomenological grounds. What really motivates Arendt's judgment is "political significance,"[44] i.e., the impact it has on the political when a certain type of activity becomes dominant in the public sphere (which means it can very well unfold there). This measure mainly determines her views about what should be hidden away and what should be displayed in public. The reason to ban a logic of production and consumption (which she calls "life") from taking hold over the public realm is to protect locations where other domains and activities can unfold: first and foremost, acting and speaking, which indeed cannot come into their own existence without being heard and seen. Instead of a "phenomenological essentialism" we thus find a normative argument for protection of those elusive activities that actualize plurality. Furthermore, we find an argument for a multiplicity of spaces and activities, public and private, supporting each other.

Arendt is aware that the public realm does not emerge out of nowhere; that it rests on conditions of life and worldliness, labor and work; that it is interrelated with these conditions and that already life is embedded in appearance. I started my reconstruction of her phenomenology of the public with *The Life of the Mind* in order to emphasize this crucial embeddedness in lifeworldly appearance. It corresponds to the two

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41 B. Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1995.

42 S. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt,* Rowman and Littlefield, New York, 2003, p. xliv, cf. also pp. 123–126, 157, 172.

43 S. Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality,* pp. 133–143.

44 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 78.

most fundamental conditions one could also call appearance-conditions of the individual: natality and mortality. The condition of natality means that we enter this world of appearances by being born into it; the condition of mortality addresses the fact that when we die, we leave a world of appearances that has been there before us and will continue after us. As this short explanation already indicates, there is a specifically human way of being born and dying since it grants us not only the dis/appearance in a phenomenal world, but, on top of that, relates an individual to the historical world and to a generative chain. Natality and mortality thus contain the promise of embedded individuality to make sense in a realization of plurality. Plurality, again, is in need of the other two activity-conditions to be actualized: the needs of life have to be fulfilled and there has to be a stable world in order for speaking and acting to be sustained and have a location. In contrast to this, to simply live and appear in the phenomenal world is not in need of worldliness and plurality. This comes at the price of not being able to grant the individuals their space of appearance. Life needs individual reproduction, but it can do without the individuals' articulation *as* individuals in a space of appearance. When life occurs primarily in this mode, the balance between individuality and its conditions is out of joint, the promise of natality is broken. That life can have this deindividualizing aspect and can, quite literally, become a general term of existence which is "instantiated" by different specimens counting all as the same, is a horror that constantly haunts Arendt's considerations.

I find Linda Zerilli's psychoanalytic interpretation helpful in this regard, since it brings out the ambivalences in Arendt's account. By drawing on Kristeva's distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic, she argues that Arendt "offers a powerful if problematic account of the subject's terror of embodiment" namely, the "terror of having a body, an anxiety about mortality and loss of symbolic mastery that, on her account, haunts every speaking subject in Western culture."[45] Being reluctantly gender-blind, Arendt does not grant women an escape from this terror by means of an alleged special relation to their embodiment. Instead, she stages the terror for all sexes and "in doing so she both confirms *and* contests, secures *and* attenuates, the symbolic order."[46] In the

[45] L. M.-G. Zerilli, "The Arendtian Body," in Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, PA, 1995, pp. 167–193, here p. 174.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 175.

deindividualizing form of life Arendt invokes, "we witness a recalcitrant, desiring and polymorphous body that ruptures the very boundaries (private/public) and identities (woman/man) that Western culture and Hannah Arendt herself frantically secure in an effort to keep the body in its place."[47] *Animal laborans*, the monstrous and amorphous accomplice of an "unnatural growth" of life (in the form of consumerist capitalism), conquers the public light of differences and makes everything diffuse into one formless, anonymous process. Zerilli has a point that, put in Kristeva's psychoanalytic terms, this restages "the symbolic law of the father against the unnamable, jouissant body of the mother"[48]—and it is no coincidence that Arendt sees a large part of her philosophical method in making clear distinctions *(krinein)* and drawing borders like Zeus, the father of gods. In fact, Arendt "does more than describe the wall that secures the border between public and private, nameable and unnamable, symbolic and semiotic; she rebuilds it."[49] Arendt, thus, can be read as something like a haunted architect. I think that this is what we can see in many of Arendt's problematic accounts, be it her disinterest in subsistence labor or her dismissal of "nomadic tribes" and other indigenous peoples as "worldless" and not having a "history."[50]

Being lost in the amorphous, unhistorical, unnamable is a horror that Arendt unfortunately—but maybe not so surprisingly—combines with Eurocentric, culturally elitist, and in the case of the description of (South-)African peoples, even culturally racist biases.[51] But she also relates it to the totalitarian horror: totalitarian politics systematically deprives individualized, housed life of all its legal, moral, personal forms with the goal to reduce it to unprotected superfluous life that does not count and can be annihilated. "The danger is that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages."[52] Arendt's fear of this "possible regression

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47 *Ibid*., p. 175.
48 *Ibid*., p. 178.
49 *Ibid*., p. 179.
50 H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 204 & cf. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1973, pp. 190–192.
51 Regarding several difficult passages in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, I would like to point to Shmuel Lederman's helpful analysis in S. Lederman, "Making the Desert Bloom. Hannah Arendt and Zionist Discourse," *The European Legacy*, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/10848770.2016.1158559 (accessed May 5th, 2025).
52 H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* p. 302.

from civilization,"[53] of masses of "rightless people" who "live and die without leaving any trace"[54] results in a nearly desperate desire for *form qua protection*: a right to have rights, a guaranteed place in a community which she calls "property,"[55] and a world that is solidly built so that it can outlast us.

All of these issues hang together closely with her conception of the public and the private. If we go to the *locus classicus* in HC, chapters 7 and 8, "The Public Realm: The Common" and "The Private Realm: Property" we can see how she reimagines a balance between the two realms, partly by drawing on Greek and Roman Antiquity, partly by contrasting it with the modern developments. It is important to note that Arendt speaks from a position where she regards the ancient public/private distinction as having long been superseded by the difference between the "social" and the "intimate" sphere—the latter being the very small rest that is defended against a complete socialization and commercialization in modernity. From this viewpoint, Arendt's characterization of the public and private realm has an ideal rather than a descriptive character; it has a heuristic function in our current situation, one that again introduces differences. Generally speaking, the private realm should anchor and harbor individuals and their (generative) life process, in order to have a place from which they can rise into the public sphere and gain a voice, sounding through the "mask" of *persona*. While the public stands for the real, the shared, and the common, the private stands for a place one owns and occupies in the world, a place that guarantees belonging to a common world.[56] Arendt's architectonic project emphasizes, in a metaphorical as well as in a quite material way, that only marked distinctions and owned, protected spaces can serve as the foundation for real, plural communality.

Let me highlight three main arguments Arendt makes with regard to the political significance of the public/private distinction and explicate how this relates to the body and architecture: The first one concerns the arrangement of bodies in a way to prevent them becoming one mega-body and thereby losing the reality *between* them. This is mainly directed against a privatization of the public realm. The second one addresses the need to shelter bodies and give them "a room of one's own"

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[53] *Ibid*., p. 300.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 58.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 62.

(Woolf) in order to be able to withdraw as well as rise into the public from a solid ground. This defends the private realm in the sense of property, having a place. The third argument insists on housing bodies in a tangible generative world—a place that outlasts my existence and that allows us to care for future generations.

1. Arrangement: A Shared Reality vs. the Darkness of a Mega-Body

One of Arendt's main arguments is that only the public realm, i.e., intersubjective attention and recognition can constitute reality. I consider this to be an existential version of Husserl's theory of transcendental intersubjectivity, which claims that the difference between reality and illusion presupposes others to whom the world appears as well. Inner life can be intense, but it only gains reality, in terms of coming into view from different perspectives and being taken up, when it appears in a shared world. Arendt even enforces this contrast by going to a drastic example, that of extreme pain. It is not by chance that the vulnerable body exemplifies how the initial opening to the world can close down. Arendt calls extreme pain a "borderline experience" which "deprives us of our feeling of reality" and which is "so subjective and removed from the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all."[57] Furthermore, a state of extreme pain is "privative" in the sense of depriving us not only from the world, but also from being able to share a world with others. Note that this whole argument builds only on the category of subjectively lived bodies and yet does not say or claim anything about the political sphere or the sphere of the household. As a phenomenological argument, it could hold without thematizing built public or private spaces at all. But Arendt takes this subjective paradigm of privacy and its correlative intersubjective paradigm of reality and extrapolates it to a political situation:

> The subjectivity of privacy can be prolonged and multiplied in a family, it can even become so strong that its weight is felt in the public realm; but this family 'world' can never replace the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators.[58]

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 51.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

What Arendt wants to underline in this section, is that there can be different "wes:" a we that is constructed from the one perspective of a de-individualizing mega-body, knowing neither birth nor death; and a we that is constituted by a plurality of embodied, finite perspectives. It is crucial to understand that these are very different social formations which involve specific forms of arrangements of plural first person perspectives. Arendt uses two terms for these different arrangements: "world" for the multiperspectival arrangement attaining publicness; and "body" for the one-perspectival arrangement remaining in the paradigm of subjective privacy, now taken in a metaphorical sense. While the "world" gathers people together, relates and separates them,[59] the "family," and on a larger scale, the "social body" arranges people according to the logic of an organism: in an interdependent interplay, but united by one teleology: to keep being alive. For Arendt, this is *the* paradigm of privacy on a social scale. It is "private" like the inner darkness of a body whose organs do not need to appear before each other in order to function together. Instead of the paradigms of appearance and in-between, it is the paradigms of function, productivity and efficiency that arranges people in different (social) architectures.

A public realm does not come into being between people who regard themselves mainly as "members of a family," simply because the one family interest coordinates and, in case of conflict, overrules the perspectives of its members. They are not equal first person perspectives, but arranged in a hierarchical order and eventually channeled into one perspective. This is why Arendt argues that such social formations lack "reality"—their "world" never comes into view from another perspective. Arendt further extends this argument to mass society whose arrangement is that of one big macroeconomic body and whose "objective" common denominator has become money. "As distinguished from this 'objectivity' [through money] the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised."[60] Hence, the difference between private "need/intensity" and public "reality" also implies two forms of objectivity: one that is achieved by reducing everything to one measurement; and the other which is constituted intersubjectively by articulating different

[59] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[60] *Ibid.*, p. 57.

perspectives of the same thing. A common denominator, neither that of mass society's "conformism," nor even that of a "common nature,"[61] will never create an experientially common world. For this, experiential plurality is needed, and this means to experience equals which see the world from a different perspective. If this is not possible anymore, people

> have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective.[62]

Let me illustrate this famous point Arendt makes in HC by returning to the question of arrangement—which, not by chance, reminds us of our digital worlds of clicks and likes: if everyone is held in front of a screen where a common denominator makes all manifestations measurable and thus reduces them to it, it is very likely that everything that appears will converge to one mode, namely the one that achieves the most clicks. Arendt regards such captive state "worldless." It is deprived of the reality that only "truly and reliably" comes to pass "where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity."[63]

To sum up: Arendt uses an argument to distinguish between "private" and "public" by drawing on the difference between the "subjective" and "intersubjective" sphere. The former is connected to the logic of the body, including its urges and needs, and to the fleeting phenomena of the stream of consciousness, which do not gain worldly shapes; the latter is conceived along the lines of a shared world, where everything that is in-between subjects comes into view from different, articulated perspectives. By extrapolating the subjective paradigm of the public/private distinction (i.e., the philosophical public/private divide) to social formations, i.e., a "mega body," Arendt arrives at the claim that specific intersubjective arrangements come with a loss of experiential reality.

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61 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

2. Location: Privacy Is Needed for Public Life to Unfold

This brings me to Arendt's second, central argument with regard to the relation between public and private spheres: in order to achieve this specific intersubjective arrangement of being gathered around things that are in-between, subjects need to be *located*. Again, Arendt draws conclusions from basic phenomenological insights and transposes them into political constellations. But now, without her making it explicit, the body attains a much more positive role. It serves as a model for what privacy should provide subjects with: a location in the world, a basic "zero-point of orientation."[64] It is bodies which allow that "those who are present [in the world] have different locations in it, and [that] the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects."[65] What embodiment does for consciousness in a basic phenomenological sense, i.e., to locate it in a world, and thereby to enable it to constitute identical, three-dimensional objects and subjects in the world, is what "property" allows for in a political sense. This is the "profound connection between private and public, manifest on its most elementary level in the question of private property."[66] Arendt reminds us that property does not equal wealth. In fact, what she really means by it is a stable place and position in the world which is owned without question: a place to live. In more abstract political sense, it means citizenship, an unconditioned right to belong to a community (Arendt speaks about the "location in the world and the citizenship resulting from it"[67]). Arendt takes her extrapolating intuition from the fact that bodies do not simply exist in an appearing world but need to be clothed, housed, and sheltered. Every body needs a home, its very own protected place, in order to fulfill its world-opening function well. It needs to be fed and cared for to be able to be the transparent projection onto the world that bodies usually are (certainly also if they are regarded as abled bodies). Arendt's argument, without explicitly mentioning bodies, bears a certain resemblance to Simone de Beauvoir's[68] treatment of the body, embodied existence, and its (gendered) relationship to the public and the private:

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[64] E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Second Book,* Kluwer, Dordrecht, 1989, pp. 61, 135, 166.

[65] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 57.

[66] *Ibid*., p. 61.

[67] *Ibid*.

[68] Cf. S. Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* Vintage, New York, 2011.

embodied existence, of whatever gender, is essentially meant to transcend itself. When it is held back in immanence (i.e., the private), it suffers and is cut off from its ownmost possibilities. While Arendt would probably agree with Beauvoir's analysis—and would likely be hit by the same criticisms—what she emphasizes here are the conditions for the body's political integrity: and this is to have a place in the world. Otherwise, the capacities for political orientation, so she argues, become confused. Arendt does not think so much about "straight" or the "right" orientation (as the reflections of Sara Ahmed[69] on this topic have taught us), but primarily about the constitution of multiple located perspectives in a common world: me being here and the other being over there, so *us* being positioned with regard to an object in this and that location/distance/view/light etc. In a second move, she would probably agree with Ahmed that the position of a "pariah" with regard to "society" results in queer/ing orientations. But the crucial thing is to be able to remain orientated at all, and for this, property is necessary.

Now, there are two ways to read Arendt's claim: One is revisionist and would take her comments on the world of antiquity as a direct advice for today: "To own property meant here to be master over one's own necessities of life and therefore potentially to be a free person, free to transcend his own life and enter the world all have in common."[70] This would not only legitimize the exploitation of others in order to become "master" over one's life and venture freely and carelessly into the public sphere; it would also bypass the body and regard all the labor and the place sustaining it as inferior. I find this an unproductive interpretation. Therefore, I favor another reading which highlights Arendt's emphasis on the lost "sacredness of private property"[71] and transforms it into a "right to have rights" and a much stronger conception of social rights that Arendt explicitly advocates for (although she does, of course, insist that "[t]here should not be a discussion about the fact that everybody deserves a decent place to live."[72] For Arendt, it is more about finding a modern form that grants the privilege of rising into the public sphere from a protected home *for all* than just returning to Antiquity. Arendt is not only well aware that the modern age "began with the expropriation

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[69] Cf. S. Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology,* Duke University Press, Durham / London, 2006.
[70] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 65.
[71] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[72] H. Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt," in M. A. Hill (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. The Recovery of the Public World,* St. Martin's, New York, 1979, pp. 301–339, here 332.

of the poor and then proceeded to emancipate the new propertyless classes"[73] to unleash "the enormous and still proceeding accumulation of wealth in modern society."[74] She also notes that

> mass society not only destroys the public realm but the private as well, deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life.[75]

If we think of the massive number of displaced persons, refugees, migrant workers, homeless people, and other forms of contemporary uprootedness and homelessness, it is hard to deny that this development of modernity continues, no matter how much wealth capitalism produces. Although the "limited reality" of family life is certainly not Arendt's ideal (as we have seen before), it is more than an uprooted modern existence has to offer. Arendt could make a strong political argument for social justice given her claim about private property as a condition for public life, but, unfortunately, she fails to do so because she regards the private as pre-political. It is hard not to view this as a mistake: if the conditions for the political can themselves not become a political issue, how are they to be realized? Arendt hopes for technological solutions, at best some that are uncontroversial. But so far, technology has rather supported the forces of the dynamized capital instead of housing and locating people.

To summarize: Arendt strongly argues for a privacy in the form of a sheltered owned home, in order to make the arrangement of public life possible. Interestingly, she implicitly bases her argument on the orientating functions of the body which gives individuals a form, and a place (even when they move). In this case, the body does not stand for an anonymous and amorphous inner urge, but precisely for boundaries, orientation, and location. There is no common world without embodied perspectives, and *a forteriori*, without located and sheltered bodies. To combine the first and second argument in a very concrete sense of political emancipation relating to architecture, we can think of Virginia

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[74] *Ibid.*, p. 66.
[75] *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Woolf demanding a "room of one's own."[76] Woolf famously preferred this and a regular revenue to the right to vote, thereby indicating that material conditions need to be at the basis of legal emancipation. The female individual body needs to be given its own space and place to withdraw, without being constantly exposed in the kitchen and appropriated by the mega-body of the family and its constant needs. Only then will the female body also be able to leave the house and enter the public realm.

3. Continuity: A Lasting World vs. Worldlessness

The third argument takes the spatial form of the intersubjective, public arrangement to a temporal stage. Arendt argues that "[i]f the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men;" because: "the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die."[77] What Arendt has in mind here is the creation of a historical world which can only be a public world. It is a world where people and deeds are remembered through a collective endeavor that has to do with telling stories, recording, judging, canonizing, building something that lasts, etc. In Arendt's view, this illuminates the past as well as the future in a specific way: it creates care for something that outlasts us. This enables a different kind of attitude than believing that everything we do is futile or doomed. "Worldlessness as a political phenomenon is possible only on the assumption that the world will not last; on this assumption, however, it is almost inevitable that worldlessness, in one form or another, will begin to dominate the political scene."[78] For Arendt, this creates a "darkness" which I would characterize as an intersubjective and temporal phenomenon. It is a peculiar form of "privacy" in the sense of being deprived of something: the generational possibility of existence. What people are deprived of when they must consider the world doomed is a lasting place in which they can project a generative future. In times of climate change this feeling is probably more widespread than Arendt would have thought when writing *The Human Condition*. During her own times, the nuclear threat was perceived as the more imminent danger. Both create a comparable fear of an uninhabitable earth and thus a vanishing world. Arendt's prime example, however,

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[76] V. Woolf, *A Room of One's Own,* Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, 1995, p. 28.
[77] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 55.
[78] *Ibid.,* p. 54.

which goes back to her early work on Augustine, is the worldlessness of the Christian community in the end-time atmosphere of late antiquity. It was built on the assumption "that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the *proviso quamdiu mundus durat* ('as long as the world lasts')."[79] Again, we encounter the idea of the *corpus*, the body, as an answer to worldlessness: in this case, as the principle to unite the Christian community, "whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family."[80] It is, again, a mega-body, one that is orientated towards a worldless transcendence. Consequently, Arendt regards it as "non-political and even antipolitical."[81]

So, on the one hand, a specific form of collective temporal apperception is at stake, one in which action matters and can make a difference. On the other hand, Arendt displays a problematic Eurocentrism by regarding herself fit to judge who has a history and who does not. Her cultural elitism, paired with the idea that human affairs must be given a stage by being housed in the human artifice, held together by power, and preserved through time, leads her to regard everything else as "floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes."[82] Who is outside of this "light," can at best be condemned to the melancholy wisdom that everything is nothing in the eternal recurrence of things: without believing in action, there is "nothing new under the sun;" without speech and the human artifice, there is "no remembrance;" and without power, the space of appearances fades away "as rapidly as the living deed and living word."[83] By repeating the distinction between "Greeks" and "barbarians," Arendt seems to conjure up a specific kind of darkness which is rather one ascribed to others than a genuine phenomenon of the addressed peoples themselves. The privative dimension of being lost and unremembered in time, seen only from the vantage point of the ones considering themselves superior, might, eventually, be the latter's very own privation in the bright light of cultural dominance.

Building, thus, for Arendt not only has a protective but a communicative and narrative function across time. It houses bodies in the history of generations before them. This creates a generative in-between and a world that outlasts the current living generation. To build always means

[79] *Ibid*., p. 53.
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *Ibid*., p. 54.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 204.
[83] *Ibid*.

to build for the future—not for eternity, but for a sustainable, livable place where a community creates its own world, a world it can believe in as the objectively tangible and enduring manifestations of its existence and spirit. Arendt's reflex against nature again seems to have its source in the fear of the big eternal cycle in which our tiny individual life-circles turn, age, reproduce, and wear out, without leaving a trace. But the real horror, eventually, is not the eternal presence of nature. It is the "holes of oblivion" built by humans for humans.

What Architecture Can Do

Let me close by pointing to these two extremes in the range of the human activity of building: On the one hand, there is the possibility to make spaces of appearance thrive by providing the right arrangements and surroundings. On the other hand, people can violently hold others in a darkness that not only equals an absence of recognition but will most likely also express itself in built structures. This can be the enclosed household, as a place of labor; it can be the modern factory; and it can be, much worse, the plantation or totalitarian death camps, "holes of oblivion," "into which people stumble by accident and without leaving behind them such ordinary traces of former existence as a body and a grave."[84] As these heterogeneous places indicate, being condemned to being invisible and "leaving no trace,"[85] can have different degrees. It can concern a life that might consider itself fulfilled but that just does not enter public life; but it can also indicate a violence of the highest degree, targeting the most basic forms of social visibility and generative remembrance. On the one hand, Arendt brings home that a life limited to these non-public places is a privative life, and that to be held in darkness equals violence, even "social death."[86] On the other hand, she again reinforces the perspective of those who are "in the light," thereby overlooking that those "in the dark" (and in different kinds of "darknesses") might see things differently. This is why a look at refugee camps[87] as well as at the

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[84] H. Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism,* pp. 434, 459.

[85] H. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* p. 55.

[86] O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1982.

[87] I cite two exemplary and recent works which engage in such analyses, partly with a phenomenological and even Arendtian background. Cf. A. Singh, *Negotiating Homelessness. Rethinking the Human Condition in the Refugee Camp*, https://kuleuven.limo.libis.be/discovery/search?query=any,contains,LIRIAS3429785&tab=LIRIAS&search_scope=lirias_profile&vid=32KUL_KUL:Lirias&offset=0 (accessed 3 May 2025)

"generativity of landscapes"[88] might tell us more about how people deal with their historistic and generative existence, precisely in absence of a "proper architecture." Such a differentiated look can also make us understand how people under these conditions are still worldly and not "ghostlike" creatures.

The idea of a "proper architecture" (including private property, the public realm of common affairs, and a built world that is sustainable and lasts) indeed makes a claim about what is right for humans. But interestingly, it draws lines and builds spaces only to open up to a transgressive event eventually: the actualization of plurality. Arendt's rigid reinstalment of the borders between the public and the private finds its aim in the non-sovereign and unpredictable interaction of equals showing themselves as a "who:" "Whereas the 'what' not only *can* be symbolized by the subject but also is fixed or (over)determined by symbolic categories [...], the *jouissant* 'who' exceeds those categories and is even 'hidden from the person himself'."[89] A final key to Arendt's ambiguous conception of the public and the private hence is that both realms actually deal with *non-sovereignty*: "man," even if master of his household, is neither the creator of the phenomenal world and his appearance in it, nor of plurality and generativity; to relate to facticity as if we could create ourselves and others is equally wrong as to relate to plurality as if it could be tamed and controlled. This is where the body and the dimension of political self-expression converge and, as Zerilli rightly observes, "are not in fact so much opposed as interdependent:" "As the locus of radical heterogeneity and vitality, the body is not the limit point but rather the condition for the nonsovereign subject of Arendt's action."[90] Architectural arrangements of an in-between, location and continuity hence should free a potential that is very much an embodied one.

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[88] Cf. T. DuFour, *Husserl and Spatiality: A Phenomenological Ethnography of Space*, Routledge, New York, 2022.

[89] L. M.-G. Zerilli, "The Arendtian Body," p. 181.

[90] *Ibid*., p. 180.

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Out of Love: Inviting *Plastik* into Architecture

ABSTRACT: The question of form in architecture remains a delicate and contested issue. Formal expression is frequently criticized for privileging visual display over architecture's disciplinary commitments. Contemporary discourse often responds by promoting the tactile and the atmospheric as alternatives to optical dominance. Yet our engagement with most buildings remains primarily visual. This essay therefore first distills a suggestion from J. G. Herder's *Plastik* on our perceptual relation to form and then mobilizes it toward a nuanced reappraisal of form at the scale of building.

KEYWORDS: vision, form, haptics, materiality, Herder, architecture

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Preliminary Remarks on Phenomenon and Form, Touch and Vision[1]

Phenomenon, derived from the Greek *phainesthai*, means "that which shows itself." What shows itself is perceived under diverse conditions and from different vantage points, so that it seems to present itself in ever-changing ways—even when we know it remains the same. This difference, between what shows itself and how it shows itself, gives rise to the related notion of appearance. The appearance itself can be described as though it were something standing on its own. This difference also manifests in deceptive appearances, where we discover that something is other than it appears. At times, we seem to perceive something where nothing exists, and in such cases we say that it was a "mere appearance" or a "mere phenomenon." In this way, the term *phenomenon* is used both for what appears (as in the "natural phenomena" studied by science) and for its opposite: that which lacks reality and is mere semblance. Since an appearance in all these cases is relative to our experience of what shows itself, the term *phenomenon* is also employed to refer to the experience itself. The difference between what shows itself and how it shows itself has, consequently, been operative in philosophy in various ways. The idea that the world as we experience it differs from the way it truly is led, in scientific realism, to a devaluation of the sensuously appearing world. Yet this view was countered by the claim that the supposed material reality underlying every experience is an empty, unverifiable hypothesis, so that, for metaphysical phenomenalism, reality collapses into our phenomenal experiences.

Less dramatically, the appearance of things is also objectified in the traditional pictorial arts. The manner in which something presents itself—or how we experience it—is arrested in time within a painting. As with a photograph, we observe how the thing is shown, while ignoring the material presence of the medium, yet remaining aware that the thing itself is absent. This interplay between appearance and reality presupposes imagination. It is imagination that likewise enables us to look at ordinary things as though they were mere appearances. Our capacity to dislodge things from their contextual reality allows, according to Susanne Langer, even artifacts that represent nothing—such as buildings—to be called "images." This, however, presupposes, as Langer argues, that the

[1] I would like to thank Petar Bojanić for inviting me to contribute this impromptu reflection on form to the special issue of the journal *Khōrein* "Phenomenon."

building offers itself purely to vision: "If we receive it as a completely visual thing, we abstract its appearance from its material existence. What we see in this way becomes simply a thing of vision—a form, an image."[2]

Langer's statement should work as a red rag to a bull for today's critics of ocularcentrism in architecture, who claim that we have become entangled in an entirely visual architectural culture, reinforced by a thoroughly vision-oriented pedagogy. They repeatedly marshal a familiar litany of charges, portraying vision as an insidious hegemon that has rendered architects insensitive to users' actual needs while seeking validation through ostentatious design. Although the assertion that architectural education has become wholly visual is neither factually nor historically tenable, the claim nonetheless resonates widely. One must therefore ask why people seem to want it to be true. It appears that the problem is overstated because there is a strong desire to embrace the proposed solution—namely, the promotion of non-visual qualities as an antidote against building practices generating experientially impoverished living environments. While the negative component of the ocularcentrism critique raises eyebrows, many would likely agree with its positive counterpart. Ideally, a built environment could offer an experience akin to walking through a forest: scents, sounds, light, and the feel beneath one's feet merging into an atmospheric experience offering a heightened sense of bodily presence. One difficulty is that we mostly expect buildings not to emit odors and to dampen the sounds of others. Yet bodily interaction with our immediate surroundings is both inevitable and necessary, making the haptic dimension of architecture a legitimate concern and opportunity for designers. The early twentieth-century claim on space thus gave way to a plea for haptic architecture.

Buildings are, however, defined by the fact that we can enter them. As long as an inhabitable entity is not much larger than the human body, the experience of inside and outside remains organically linked—no one, after all, seems troubled by the photogenic yet cold exteriors of steel and glass in automobiles. Once the program requires a certain scale and height, the structure inevitably becomes something visible from a distance, and from afar, we have no direct haptic interaction with it. Most buildings remain for us, inescapably, visual objects; they are experienced more like a mountain peak than a forest. And, like mountain peaks, they

[2] S. K. Langer, *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953, p. 47.

may invite contemplation—while conversely offering, from their heights, a detached panoramic view over the built surroundings.

Thus, the larger a construction, the more our visual and haptic relations tend to drift apart and become separate modes of engagement. It is therefore unsurprising that the plea for haptic or atmospheric architecture, alongside its reproaches of visuocentrism, offers little guidance for the design of larger structures and for how these present themselves from the outside—providing, ultimately, little more than a recipe for boxed atmospheres.

The fact that we can have any sensory relation at all with objects of considerable size is due to the nature of our visual apparatus. The eye functions as a *camera obscura* in which light reflected from the environment is gathered to produce a projection on the inner wall of the eye. The discovery of the retinal image, however, misled theorists for centuries, as it was assumed that the projected image mediates our representation of the world. Yet the mere fact that the *camera obscura* delivers an image does not mean that this image constitutes the object of perception. Nevertheless, the principle of projection is decisive for our visual relation to the world, since it enables us to perceive any object—regardless of its size—from an appropriate distance as a whole. It is thanks to this principle that every object, moreover, lends itself to aesthetic contemplation—from a minute crystal to an immense cloud.

In his lectures, Benoît Mandelbrot liked to show a photograph of his camera lens cap on a stony surface, only to reveal in the next image that this was in fact a two-meter replica mounted against a rock wall, in order to illustrate how the same natural patterns recur at different scales. Yet the point I wish to stress is that the image of the lens cap, as projected on the lecture hall screen, was far larger still—and could have been enlarged indefinitely on a bigger screen, even beyond the size of any terrestrial object, projected onto the dark side of the moon if we had the means. But note that such enormous projection does not necessarily imply that the lens cap appears gigantic. Precisely because vision is *scale-free*, so to speak, not only is there no limit to the size of visible things, but their appearance is in no way bound to their real scale. This was one of the observations George Berkeley employed in his *New Theory of Vision* to persuade us that our visual representations of things are entirely independent of their tangible nature.

Touch, by contrast, does not operate through projection but through physical contact, and therefore never gives us the impression to present

things as larger or smaller than they are. The probing hand coincides with the surface it touches, leaving no room for distortion due to scaling or perspective. Yet Berkeley exploited not only the perspectival variability of visual objects to distinguish them from tangible ones; he sought to demonstrate that visually perceived objects are not the same as tactually perceived objects. He did so by pointing out that they are not where we take them to be. Objects seem visually to appear at various distances from us. But since every light ray reflected by those tangible objects *over there* projects only a single point on the retina—regardless of how far the light has traveled—the optical projection contains no information about the distance of things. The visual impressions we experience are, strictly speaking, at no distance from ourselves; they are not *out there*, but merely mental. In this way, Berkeley tried to convince us that from early childhood we have learned to interpret our visual impressions on the basis of simultaneous tactile spatial perceptions, so that over time we have come to understand our visual impressions as tangible objects.

Although Berkeley's analysis of vision—which was only a stepping stone toward his metaphysical phenomenalism—is profoundly misleading, his argument persuaded generations of philosophers that sight by itself cannot provide information about the distance of things or their three-dimensional nature. The alleged spatial incapacity of eyesight meant that touch was regarded as the true source of the spatial content of all our perceptions. Thus arose the idea that we owe our representations of the three-dimensional form of things to the sense of touch—a thought that eventually evolved into the conviction that we possess hands precisely in order to apprehend object form: "Nature seems to have given this organ only to man, so that by feeling all the sides of a body he could form a concept of its shape."[3]

The fact that in touching we stand in direct physical contact with a physical object might explain why we use the word "appearance" primarily in relation to vision, and scarcely—if at all—in relation to touch. As noted earlier, the notion of appearance is prompted by the difference between the thing that shows itself and the manner in which it shows itself. In tactile experience, there seems to be no room for the emergence of this difference. When we touch, we never encounter a mere appearance; on the contrary, we collide with material reality. When I touch the

[3] I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, p. 46.

wall, I experience its physical resistance; but when I press against it in a different place, I do not have the impression that the wall now shows itself differently. Nor does this difference arise with smaller objects: either I can hold it in my hand and have a full grasp of its solid form as it is, or the object is larger, so that I must move my hand across it; but in that latter case, I have the impression that I am feeling different parts of the form rather than that the form itself appears differently to me, as happens when we *look* at a form from different angles, which is probably also why the Latin *forma* meant both "form" and "appearance"; for an object could, in principle, become pure appearance by losing its materiality, though only if it retained its form, as in a picture, so that we could still see it as appearance of *that* object. "Image," "form," "appearance" are therefore, as implied in the passage from Langer cited above, philosophically related notions.

This is also why the sense of touch remained excluded from the consideration of art in modern aesthetics. As summarized in Hegel's *Lectures on Fine Art*: in the consideration of art we are interested in the sensuous presence of an object but the sensuous "should appear only as surface and as a pure appearance of the sensuous."[4] What the spirit seeks in the sensuously present artwork is not a materially present object as such, but a sensuous presence "liberated from the scaffolding of its purely material nature."[5] Art, Hegel explains, "deliberately produces only a shadow-world of shapes, sounds, and sights,"[6] while, in one way or another, "smell, taste, and touch have to do with matter as such."[7] The pleasures of these senses are directly related, not to beauty and art, but to our vital needs. Indeed, the expressions *it looks good* and *it feels good* tend to express a different orientation; the one object-directed, the other subject-related. The look of something is an objective appearance; its feel a bodily experience.

The exclusion of touch, smell, and taste required little argument, since it seemed confirmed by the fact that there is music and visual arts, whereas the pleasures of touch and taste remained relegated to the everyday realms of intimacy and appetite. In an attempt to ground this intuitive difference between true aesthetic appreciation and the sense pleasures of touch, taste, and smell more deeply, Sydney Zink distinguished

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[4] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 38.
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[7] *Ibid*.

two points.[8] First, he argues that, in order to heighten pleasure, in sense enjoyment we must strive to immerse ourselves completely in the sensation itself, whereas the mind in aesthetic contemplation remains calm yet actively directs all its attention to a complex, external object. Second, he claims that, while the pleasurable impressions of taste, smell, and touch can only be experienced one at a time, aesthetic appreciation presupposes that various elements are apprehended in relation to one another—whether temporally or spatially. In the visual arts, this primarily concerns the spatial relations implied in shape and compositions consisting of multiple shapes.

Such divisions no longer correspond to the expectations we have of art today. Yet the point that concerns me here is that this leaves us with a strikingly paradoxical situation in eighteenth-century philosophy. On the one hand, virtually all philosophers after Berkeley adopt the idea that touch is the only sense capable of providing us with a direct perception of forms and spatial relations; on the other hand, touch is excluded from aesthetic appreciation, which is precisely a matter of grasping spatial relations and forms. These two discourses seem to unfold side by side. But if the plastic arts are a matter of the apprehension of spatial relations, one would expect touch to play a role in the philosophical reflection on art. There is, however, one work that stands exactly at the intersection of these two discourses: J.G. Herder's *Plastik* from 1778.[9] In what follows, I will first offer a selective, focused reading of this work, and then mobilize one of its core ideas for a reflection on our sensory relation to buildings.

Out of Love for Form

Without mentioning him by name, Herder makes it clear that he aligns himself with Berkeley's *New Theory of Vision* by opening *Plastik* with several testimonies concerning individuals deprived of sight—testimonies which, as in Berkeley, are intended to demonstrate that our visual and tactile relations to the spatial world are fundamentally distinct. But

[8] S. Zink, "Esthetic Appreciation and Its Distinction from Sense Pleasure," *Journal of Philosophy*, 39, 26, 1942, pp. 705–707.

[9] J. G. von Herder, *Plastik: einige Wahrnehmungen über Form und Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traum*, Riga, J.F. Hartknoch, 1778. I will refer to Jason Gaiger's English translation: J. G. von Herder, *Sculpture: Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002, as well as to Gaiger's translation of Herder's earlier, unpublished version: J. G. von Herder, *Critical Forests: Fourth Grove*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004.

unlike Berkeley, who sought to separate the spatial deliverances of vision and touch in order to draw out the epistemological implications of their heterogeneity, Herder is interested in this very difference for its relevance to the experience of the arts. Leaving aside Berkeley's portrayal of vision as a natural language, Herder instead begins with a descriptive analysis of vision, drawing an analogy with the painted image:

> What is light able to paint upon our eyes? That which can be painted: pictures. As upon the white wall of a camera obscura, pencils of light fall upon the retina of the eye from everything that stands in front of it. But they can only draw what is there—a surface, the most diverse visible objects ranged alongside one another.[10]

Herder here emphasizes the structural correspondence between the retinal image and a painted picture, which allows for nothing beyond the juxtaposition of colour patches. It is unclear whether Herder is aware that the retinal image should not be regarded as the object of vision; in any case, he reiterates his point concerning the phenomenal givenness of visually perceived objects:

> The sky that lowers to the ground and the wood that merges into it, the broad expanse of the field and the water close by, the bank of the river, the motif that dominates the entire picture—these are but an image, a panel, a continuum of things placed alongside one another.[11]

This example—clearly inspired by landscape painting—is masterfully chosen, for it requires no explanation that the sky does not in fact descend to the ground, even though we nonetheless see and paint it as such. With this illustration, Herder underscores that the visual world unfolds within an apparent, strictly two-dimensional field.

In this way, Herder introduces the well-known Berkeleian motif that vision, by itself, cannot disclose a spatial world of corporeal bodies and is therefore dependent on touch to gain a grasp of reality. The fact that our visual impressions are elicited by light reinforces the thought that eyesight cannot provide an original experience of solidity. Without the possibility of touch, visually perceived objects would, Herder claims, forever remain for us like the rings of Saturn—namely, "phenomenon, *appearance*"

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[10] J. G. von Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 35.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 36.

(*Phänomen, Erscheinung*).[12] Nevertheless, in a lyrical description Herder praises this alliance between eyesight and sunlight, for it enables us to apprehend things clearly and distinctly, and to compare them—hence it is entirely understandable that we borrow so many terms from sight to designate our intellectual faculties. At the same time, the inherent capacity of ocular perception to let us experience the unity and diversity of things affords us pleasure, which, according to Herder, explains the kinship between the German words "*Schein*" (appearance) and "*Schön*" (beautiful): "According to its original meaning, the concept of beauty is a 'phenomenon', and thus to be treated, as it were, as an agreeable illusion, as a charming deception."[13] The gateway to a philosophy of beauty is, therefore, a "phenomenology"—a "theory of vision."[14]

Compared with the brilliance of sight, touch may seem a coarse and unrefined sense. While Berkeley devoted little attention to touch, Herder is keen to emphasize its distinctive character. As long as we merely gaze at a bodily thing, he suggests, we dream of what it might truly be; but when the hand takes hold of a body, it has a lively feeling—a genuine grasp (*Begriff*) of the thing.[15] In a passage that comes very close to the above-cited thesis from Kant's *Anthropology*, Herder asserts that only human beings possess concepts such as volume, form, hardness, and solidity because they have not only reason but also a hand capable of feeling and grasping. These most primary concepts—such as body, space, and form—cannot be taught or demonstrated; they can only be acquired through the experience of haptic exploration. Herder goes so far as to claim that the blind, who rely on slow manual exploration and cannot content themselves with fleeting visual appearances, develop an understanding of the properties of solid bodies that is far more complete than that of the sighted—a point he reinforces by citing blind sculptors who surpass their sighted colleagues.[16]

From birth, the tactile perceptions of the sighted are accompanied by visual impressions, so that in time these visual impressions suffice to evoke tangible ideas. We are so accustomed to this, Berkeley explained, that we believe we *see* the tangible world. Herder, however, wishes to stress that this development entails a flattening of our *experience*. We see so much

[12] *Ibid*.
[13] J. G. von Herder, *Critical Forests*, p. 204.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 206.
[15] J. G. von Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 37.
[16] *Ibid*.

faster and so much more than we could ever actually touch that our visual perception ceases to be a genuine perception of tangible bodies: "sight is but *an abbreviated form of touch*."[17] Because visual perception operates within a flat field, it works with great speed, and thus seeing becomes superficial—in both senses of the word: related to the external surface and lacking depth. The gaze skims the world as if it were a surface yet never grasps things as bodies. Herder's chief concern is that, in visual experience, corporeal forms lose their volume: "The rounded *form* becomes a mere *figure*, the *statue* a flat *engraving*."[18] The operation of eyesight is, hence, not merely superficial but potentially destructive. It is no accident that Herder signals this danger by invoking the decline of sculpture into picture.

The key passage of *Plastik* seems to suggest—or so I read it—that the art of sculpture carries the promise of breaking the normal relationship between seeing and touching. For the confrontation with sculpted forms unsettles the habitual operation of eyesight. In a description of a spectator's behavior in relation to a sculpture—clearly inspired, as the corresponding passage in *Critical Grooves* indicates, by the well-known description of the *Apollo Belvedere* by J. J. Winckelmann—Herder observes that the spectator restlessly circles around the sculpture because it prescribes no proper viewpoint, as a painting does. Yet even a thousand viewpoints prove insufficient, since each one separately reduces the beautiful volumes to pitiful figures. Precisely because spectators sense this intuitively, they continue to change position. In this way sculpture frustrates vision, and the spectators, Herder remarks, would give anything to transform their seeing into touching, which feels in the dark. But precisely because Herder's spectator finds no satisfaction and therefore keeps searching, "his eye becomes his hand" with which his soul can feel the work.[19] Because sculpted forms make us aware that vision affords no real grasp of bodies, our physical mode of looking changes, and our way of seeing assimilates itself to the operation of feeling. Where Berkeley had demonstrated that vision first relied on touch and then emancipated itself from this dependence, Herder seems to suggest that sculpture has the power to reverse this relation of service: the sense of feeling makes use of the eye for its own operation.

This description evokes a strikingly similar passage from Charles Baudelaire's critical essay "*Pourquoi la sculpture est ennuyeuse*" ("Why

[17] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 41.

Sculpture is Tiresome"), in which he laments that "the spectator who moves around the figure can choose a hundred different points of view, except for the right one;" painting, by contrast, "has but one point of view; it is exclusive and absolute."[20] Consequently, the painter exercises greater control over the spectator, endowing the work with superior expressive force. Other voices—such as Boccioni's characterization of sculpture as mummified art—suggest that nineteenth-century sculpture elicited little appreciation. Be that as it may, from Herder's perspective it is evident that Baudelaire's analysis stems from his tendency to conceive sculpture by analogy with painting, as a picture: that is, as something presented frontally, to be apprehended from a prescribed vantage point, rather than as an art form that fundamentally exploits its full spatiality. Most strikingly, this outlook on sculpture is explicitly prescribed by Adolf von Hildebrand—himself a sculptor—in his influential treatise *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, first published in 1893. Although the artist may elaborate multiple viewpoints, there must, Hildebrand insists, be one viewpoint that "is representative of the total plastic nature of the object, and, like a picture or relief, expresses it all in a single two-dimensional impression."[21] Failure to achieve this entails the risk that the spectator feels compelled to shift position: "Thus we are driven all around the figure without even being able to grasp it once in its entirety."[22] In such a case, Hildebrand argues, the artwork is no better than an object of nature. "The purpose of sculpture is not to put the spectator in a haphazard and troubled state regarding the three-dimensional or cubic aspect of things. … The real aim is to give him instantly a perfectly clear visual idea and thus remove the disturbing problem of cubic form."[23] Hildebrand's expectation stands in diametric opposition to that of Herder:

> So long as the chief effect of any plastic figure is its reality as a solid, it is imperfect as a work of art. It is only when the figure, though in reality a solid, gains its effect as a plane picture, that it attains artistic form, that is to say, perfection for our sense of vision.[24]

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[20] C. Baudelaire, "Why Sculpture Is Tiresome," in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies by Charles Baudelaire*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City, NY, 1956, p. 120.

[21] A. von Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, G. E. Stechert & Co., New York, 1907, p. 94.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 95.

[23] *Ibid*., pp. 95–96.

[24] *Ibid*., p. 96.

Viewed through Herder's lens, Hildebrand's conception and Baudelaire's complaint appear distorted—indeed, even inverted: the art most essentially defined by spatiality is deemed problematic precisely because of that spatiality; more specifically, because its three-dimensionality unsettles the spectator, who is culturally disposed to consume the world as visual images. In my reading of Herder, this very property constituted sculpture's unique power: its capacity to disrupt the natural reduction of the spatial world to a flattened realm of visual presentations. Anticipating the risk of a pictorial understanding of sculpture, Herder argued that sculpture should restrict itself to individual figures, since we spontaneously perceive groups as scenes—that is, as images. Sculpture, by contrast, must present solid volumes and therefore avoid distracting details such as veins, wrinkles, or folds of clothing—a point Baudelaire himself later also made.

Like any theory that expects artworks to exert a determinate effect on the spectator, Herder's view may seem little more than wishful thinking. Yet his ambition was primarily theoretical. Following Lessing's influential distinction of music as an art of temporal relations from the visual arts as primarily determined by spatiality, Herder sought above all to demonstrate that it is a fundamental error to subsume sculpture under the so-called "visual arts." Purely from the visual, he argued, no art of corporeal form can arise. Hearing, sight, and touch are each distinct modes of disclosing the world, and to each belongs its own art form. Hence every art must be purified of what properly pertains to a sense foreign to it. Accordingly, sculpture should renounce colour and resist optical effects.

Herder's separation of the arts according to the laws arising from their proper mode of perception seems to anticipate the modernist impulse to reduce the arts to their medium-specific features. Nevertheless, Herder's view is more than an expression of theoretical rigor. Charles Taylor has characterized Herder as a "deeply innovative thinker" who, owing to his lack of philosophical discipline, was easily ignored once his ideas were appropriated by more systematic minds.[25] Whether this judgment applies to *Plastik* is debatable; yet Herder's argument concerning sculptural form merits renewed attention, for beneath it lies a curious—indeed, audacious—movement of thought.

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[25] C. Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995, p. 79.

At first glance, Herder seems merely—like so many philosophers across time—to repeat Berkeley's theory of perception uncritically, and then extend it to the arts so that the allegedly natural distinctness of our sensory modalities dictates a strict separation of art forms—a position rather unappealing today. Yet within his account of the encounter between sculpture and spectator lies a conception of aesthetic experience that diverges both from contemporary interest in tactile aesthetics and from the dominant historical narrative, according to which the arts elevate us above our animal impulses and material reality. Joyce expressed that narrative succinctly: "Desire urges us to possess, to go to something; loathing urges us to abandon, to go from something. These are kinetic emotions. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts." The proper emotion, consonant with aesthetic contemplation, is static: "The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing."[26] Herder, by contrast, does not hesitate to describe the relation to sculpture by analogy with the attraction felt by a lover: "the more vital our feeling for an object *from afar*, the more we sense the space that intervenes and the more everything in us surges forward to meet it." And: "Pity the lover who gazes upon his beloved from a distance as if she were an image on a surface and for whom this suffices!"[27] That same traditional conviction—that aesthetic experience, unlike sensory pleasure, requires static, tranquil contemplation—was precisely the reason why, according to Zink, tactile perception could not qualify as a source of aesthetic delight. Tactile experience, moreover, was thought not only incapable of grasping spatial relations but also, as Hegel argued, fatally entangled with materiality itself and, accordingly, too deeply stirring.

Herder's advocacy of touch, however, does not simply invert the ideal of a distanced aesthetic relation, as we often find in recent tactile aesthetics that seek contact with materialities through the reversibility of tactile sensation. Herder's aesthetic experience is an experience of the hand, not of the skin. What Herder does, rather, is describe the experience of sculpture as an almost erotic longing—yet one that does not culminate in pleasure but leads instead toward a "truth:" not a rational truth bathed in light, but a truth nonetheless. This truth is relative to the untruthfulness of any situation in which eyesight pretends to offer what properly derives from touch. Painting embodies this untruthfulness, making it

[26] J. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Penguin Classics, London, 2000, p. 222.
[27] J. G. von Herder, p. 42.

at once a wondrous "dream" and a "magical deception."[28] Nowhere is this untruthfulness more evident than in its complete reversal, when the "dream becomes truth"[29]—namely, when the painter succeeds in making a child reach out to grasp an image. Sculpture, by contrast, represents the "living, embodied truth of three-dimensional space of angles, of form and volume;" the "physically present, tangible truth."[30] This truth is that of the naked presence of solids, which as such elude incorporation into the visually driven processes of cognition.

Out of Love with Form

The thought I distilled from *Plastik* is the suggestion that the encounter with a sculpted corporeal form transforms our mode of seeing. An art connoisseur entering the Belvedere Courtyard can instantly identify the figures by their visual silhouette: *that is Apollo, that is Hermes, Dionysos...* Yet the art lover, if Herder is correct, would be drawn to a single piece and become enthralled by its forms, so that ordinary, rapid categorical seeing no longer suffices. The customary functional duality of seeing and knowing gives way to an alliance between the eye and the feeling hand. The figures that demand our cognitive classificatory powers recede into the background, while we willingly devote all our attention to the physical presence of a tangible form.

But *Plastik*'s suggestion likely came too early. The direct comparison between the lover and the art lover, together with the erotic connotation implied in the title's allusion to the myth of Pygmalion, clashed too strongly with the principle of disinterestedness that dominated philosophical aesthetics from his time onward, and may well have invited an overly literal reading. The suggestion that a desire to touch, provoked by form, can lead to a heightened awareness of the bare presence of corporeality, in fact, seems to resonate more naturally with the abstract work of Constantin Brâncuși, Henry Moore, or Barbara Hepworth, for whom "sculpture is a three-dimensional projection of primitive feeling: touch, texture, size and scale, hardness and warmth, evocation and compulsion to move, live, and love."[31]

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[28] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 40.
[31] B. Hepworth, *Sculpture: Process and Purpose*, Studio Vista, London, 1970, p. 11.

There is, nonetheless, a feature of the Apollo Belvedere—*not coincidentally* lost to the eye in photographic reproductions—that I wish to exploit in the following: the statue is much larger than life. This did not impede Winckelmann's rapturous experience, precisely because the feeling gaze operates through the ocular apparatus and is therefore not confined to the true scale of things, as is the touching hand. Consequently, it is just as possible for the feeling gaze to move across a life-sized figure as across a colossus, over Brancusi's *Birth of the World* as over Genzken's ellipsoids, a public work by Moore, the strange volume of an oil tank, or an upturned fishing boat. Although Brâncuși, Moore, and Hepworth repeatedly allude to the importance of the tactile relation, they progressively worked on a larger scale, as if nonetheless expecting greater aesthetic efficacy from volumes beyond tactile reach. Hence, the feeling gaze can likewise traverse a bunker as easily as a vault or a slate-covered dome, a silo as readily as a tower, a capsized vessel, or an airship. This implies that Herder's suggestion not only aligns more closely with the abstract plastic arts of the twentieth century but even applies to forms on the scale of architecture.

One particularly instructive example—because it is nearly as familiar to philosophers as to architects—for discussing form in architecture is the chapel at Ronchamp. Although the building as a whole constitutes an assemblage of sculptural forms, I wish to focus specifically on the way the roof manifests itself from the east, where the open-air church is located.

Standing at the eastern side of the building, one sees a semi-open space formed by a frontal, planar wall, a rounded volume to the right, and, to the left, a much higher, massive wall that seems to disappear behind the frontal plane. Resting atop these three walls lies an elongated concrete volume, which is in fact more like a shell, appearing not quite to touch the walls but separated from them by a narrow slit. Although this volume hovers obliquely above the walls, it does not seem in danger of sliding off, for it lightens toward its highest side, where it tapers to a sharp point. This apparent volume functions simultaneously as a roof and as a sculptural element; the building could just as well have had a flat roofline, like the organic volume that houses the crypt at La Tourette. As a roof, it belongs to the familiar elements that form the backdrop for the activities around the altar; as a sculptural element, it seizes attention—but not as a picture does. Where the gaze loses itself in a picture, here it wishes to coil around the form. The form holds the gaze because it invites a more engaged viewing; it occupies the spectator, who seeks to grasp the

volume visually. One captivated by the volume might, as Herder said, long to hold and explore it by touch. That it is far too large for this does not diminish the desire.

The chapel at Ronchamp was once praised as an answer to the cold geometry of early modernist machine aesthetics—owing largely to its formal expressiveness, not merely to its program. Yet sculptural formality is among the most problematic issues in architecture, precisely because it detaches itself from program and draws attention to itself. The expectation that form and function coincide is deeply rooted in the intellectual tradition the West inherited from the Greeks. Socrates, in Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos ou l'architecte*, recounts how a strangely shaped stone on the beach led him to wonder whether it was of animal origin, crafted by a human who imposed an idea upon matter by carving it with a specific purpose, or merely shaped by the accidental play of natural forces—forces that, in principle, might even have produced a form resembling the head of Apollo.[32] Unable to discern the cause or the end of its form, Socrates flung it back into the sea in frustration. Yet the unusual shape continued to trouble his mind, prompting him to imagine how a completely uncivilized person, washed ashore here, might determine whether a table, an amphora, or a house was made by nature or by humans. Where the forms of natural objects suggest that all parts are bound together by hidden relations, Socrates reasoned, in human artifacts matter, form, and function are only loosely connected. This is because humans, who seek to live, unlike mathematicians and philosophers, have but one practical aim in view and impose it externally upon matter, whereas in natural things the maker and the made are one. The forms of natural objects therefore radiate necessity. Yet Phaedrus remarks that in some artifacts the form is almost miraculously adapted to its function, so that the object gives us a sense of kinship between beauty and necessity: "Nothing in these fortunate creations occurs but what is useful (*utile*); they contain nothing beyond what can be derived from the requirements of the intended effect."[33] This, Socrates explains, is because "thousands of experiments of thousands of men gradually converge toward the most economical and the surest figure;" they have "in a certain sense made themselves; the use of centuries necessarily found the best form."[34] In this respect, they

[32] P. Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte – L'Âme et la danse – Dialogue de l'arbre*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1995, pp. 79–80.
[33] *Ibid*., p. 91.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 92.

resemble things shaped by time and chance—like a stone from the sea—that, despite its strangeness, seems to have been formed by some inner or external principle. Chance or not, a brief time later, the young Corbusier was prompted to let the character Paul Boulard in *L'esprit nouveau* speak of the curious forms of stones on the beach at Trégastel, which reminded him of an exceptional stone he had once found. That large flint bore a striking ridge caused by wind erosion, just as the winds of the Sahara shape dunes with profiles, he writes, one might have thought only marble sculpted by human will could achieve. Boulard discerned a rule behind the production of these forms that "our mind can recognize," that gives rise to a "*jouissance* of a mathematical order," and he advanced this purity of forms produced by natural forces as a model for an architecture that must cast off traditional ornamentation.[35]

When Baudelaire claimed—to illustrate that, compared to painting, sculpture stands closer to nature than to culture due to its material presence—that "our peasants [...] are enchanted by the sight of an ingeniously-turned fragment of wood or stone," while remaining unmoved by the finest painting, he likely did not have the likes of Socrates and Le Corbusier in mind.[36] We know why Plato's Socrates could not appreciate painting, yet it is clear that Valéry's Socrates' fascination for physical forms has nothing to do with their material presence—there is nothing solid about the *Platonic solids*. Socrates, like Le Corbusier, looks at the form of natural objects as the product of an intelligible principle. For this reason, Socrates seems incapable of appreciating the remarkable shape of the stone itself, as in certain Eastern traditions; the form serves merely as the occasion for a philosophical reflection on forms in general, for an exercise in categorization—and ultimately, the reason the form can set Socrates thinking is that it appears to have a purpose, as if it were made *for a reason*. The expectation that a form must possess an internal cause or an external end prevents Socrates from contemplating the form itself. Forms are deemed beautiful only when they appear as the necessary product of a determinate principle.

The mind that delights in the form of things because it perceives a harmony between organization and cause or purpose, in fact, takes pleasure because it encounters its own image in the material world. The inner domain of intellect—the realm of reasons—appears reflected in the

[35] P. Boulard, "Jouissance d'ordre mathématique," *L'Esprit nouveau*, 28, 1925, p. 2330.
[36] C. Baudelaire, "Why Sculpture Is Tiresome," p. 120.

external order of things. Here, objective beauty is, in truth, a narcissism of the intellect. Herder's *éloge* of form deserves renewed consideration, in my view, because it moves in an entirely different direction. Herder's praise aligns not with the mind's eye, but with the hand and the heart. It concerns not the content or structure of forms, but the very nature of form in contrast to the figure as we visually perceive it and represent it in pictures. This *éloge* is ultimately motivated by resistance to the attitude of mind that arises from the nature of vision. Vision and the life of the intellect are indeed closely related. The eye is not only a powerful instrument of knowledge by virtue of its vast range—from detail to overview—facilitating both analysis and synthesis. In visual imagination, moreover, the mind is traditionally thought to experience and express its freedom, its unbounded spontaneity. When the eye gazes upon a marble wall, the mind loses itself in the intricate veining and transforms it into figures; it delights in its capacity to deny material reality by creating its own universe, reducing the material to a mere backdrop for the emerging spectacle.

This spontaneous act of imagination is what is celebrated in traditional figurative painting, as it creates a new, unreal universe that comes into being as the image. The material canvas is ignored in the imaginative act of looking into the image. By contrast, the materiality of sculpture always remains present—so much so that Baudelaire called sculpture "as brutal and positive as nature herself."[37] In sculpture, the creative aspect of looking is less explicit, precisely because the material support is already three-dimensional and the *Bild* inhabits our bodily reality, whereas the negation of materiality in figurative painting is a necessary achievement of the mind. The drawback of this convergence—between the spontaneity of imagination and vision's capacity for detachment from the physical through projection—is that the reflective mind must forever doubt the deliverances of vision. Vision, as Berkeley persuaded us, makes no contact with the material world as such; it is, in reality, an immanent sphere to which nothing material need correspond. For this very reason, vision requires touch as "the solid foundation and guarantor of seeing."[38] Ever since the modern awareness of the subjectivity of sensations, epistemology relies on touch—on the experience of resistance to voluntary movement—to anchor our mental representations in the material world. To

[37] *Ibid*.
[38] J. G. von Herder, *Sculpture*, p. 38.

mark this decisive moment, Fichte introduced the notion of *Anstoss*. The experience of a check upon one's voluntary movement signifies both the end of the mind's freedom and the beginning of the external world. Yet in the theory of perception, its primary role is to ground the separate universe of visual representations. This grounding, however, seems little more than a security check—a mere touchstone—whose function is to link our visually acquired knowledge to the world, without itself offering any refined knowledge of that world. One might already suspect this from the bluntness implied in the term *Anstoss*, which means little more than "bump." It is because sculpture, positive and brutal, stands in the physical world, whereas painting withdraws into its own imaginary space, that sculpture presents itself to touch like any other thing—allowing Barnett Newman to define it with as much disdain as Baudelaire: s*culpture is what you bump into when you back up to see a painting*.

Yet the very physical positivity of sculpture, which Baudelaire and Newman regarded as a brute presence in the bodily world we happen to inhabit, is interpreted quite differently by Herder, through his characteristically modern epistemological distrust of vision, spilling over into the world of pictures. That same brute presence becomes for Herder a matter of truth, not a rational, but a material one—a truth that belongs to sculpture which, unlike painting, offers no illusion; it is *Darstellung*. Herder's notion of truth is therefore bound up with the way the sculpted object reveals that it eludes the eye. Any perceivable object we know or understand we recognize by its form, and thus it is already incorporated into our cognitive framework. Yet, in principle, it cannot be fully incorporated into consciousness. Time and again, Edmund Husserl described the perception of a thing as an unfinishable process: from every standpoint we see only one adumbration of the object, and even if we were to move completely around it, an open multiplicity of views would remain possible. Precisely for this reason, the object is an *external* object that resists reduction to our mental representations of it. Even an absolute mind, Husserl argued, would have to experience a thing in this necessarily incomplete way if it were to be experienced as a thing. To be an external object, it must appear as inexhaustible to perception.

However this is not how things appear in our everyday visual experience—otherwise we would not need Husserl to make this insight explicit. The pen, the telephone, the book on my desk does not manifest itself to me as something visually inexhaustible. The book seems a block with six sides and contains, within, three hundred and twenty-four pages, and

thus one hundred and sixty-two sheets. But Husserl points to the infinite number of possible viewpoints on any part of the object and clarifies that every exploratory series of perceptions remains forever an approximation; the thing can therefore be characterized as an "*Idee im Kantischen Sinne*"—a philosophical allusion apt for an observation that flows from theoretical reflection yet eludes everyday perception.

The plastic artwork, however, stands among other physical things, yet it possesses the capacity to elicit this very insight—not through reflection, but through lived experience. Herder's suggestion anticipates the familiar twentieth-century trope according to which artworks have the power to disrupt our perceptual habits and allow us to experience a thing as though for the very first time. In Herder, however, this is not a process of alienation but, quite the contrary, a removal of estrangement—a recovery of tangible reality achieved by breaking the developmental process of habituation that had absorbed feeling into seeing. But just as this insight escapes everyday vision, perceptual inexhaustibility likewise fails to impose itself upon *feeling* in the ordinary handling of things—perhaps even more so. What facilitates the awakening of this heightened awareness of the object's naked presence through its perceptual inexhaustibility is precisely the peculiar status of the sculpture as an object we wish not to reduce optically, yet we are not permitted to touch. It is within this seductive yet prohibitive situation—neither purely optical nor simply haptic—that form manifests itself as something for which, in Herder's words, a thousand viewpoints will never suffice: something irreducible to any number of views. The shift in perceptual attitude is provoked not by matter but by form itself. Form is no longer *forma*; it no longer functions as an appearance aiding the identification of the thing. Rather, form becomes something that shows itself.

Which forms are capable of this? Probably least of all those sculpted forms available to Herder—namely, the forms of classical sculpture that we visually recognize as representing human bodies; possibly better, then, are the structural elements devised by architect Mark West, which evoke corporeality while remaining indeterminate. Nor is it the forms of classical geometry, which we need not view from every side because we comprehend them at first sight—hence also not those forms that repeat themselves as patterns. Rather, it may be forms that generate tension precisely by disturbing the expectations of our geometric understanding. Consider the tension produced by Isa Genzken's hyperboloids, whose extremities disclose mutually divergent logics, compelling the spectator to scan the

object in search of clarification of their formal connection—an experience Lisa Lee describes as follows: "But satisfaction remains elusive, for the transformation is too subtle and incremental to be mapped by sight. Furthermore, the longer and closer one looks, the less conviction one can feel about what one knows."[39] And ultimately, as she concludes, "The viewer's frustrated pursuit for clarification, insofar as it produces a state of heightened perceptual and cognitive alertness, is also the substance of aesthetic pleasure."[40]

Perhaps, however, it is above all plastic forms that solicit our attention without ever fully yielding themselves. Not the organic geometries of Saarinen or Utzon, but rather those that refuse any allusion to a *natura naturans*. Somewhere after Paul Boulard's reflections relating forms shaped by cosmic forces with the need for pure mathematical forms in architecture, yet still before the design of Ronchamp, Le Corbusier began incorporating found objects—remarkable stones and pieces of wood—as central elements in his paintings, with titles such as *Premières recherches d'une sculpture monumentale* and *Recherche de sculpture architecturale*. These paintings, however, compelled him—entirely intelligible from Herder's perspective—to translate them into sculpture. In these works, Le Corbusier claimed to recognize Père Ubu, the character from Alfred Jarry's 1896 grotesque play *Ubu Roi*, a usurper king whose untempered desires lead to burlesque violence. This figure, beloved by the Surrealists and appearing in works by Dora Maar, Max Ernst, Picasso, and in sculptures by Miró, was often represented as a bloated, distorted figure with disrupted or missing sense organs. In Le Corbusier's paintings, Ubu first appeared as a stone, then as an animal-like being, and ultimately its various sense organs seem enlarged and isolated, scarcely connected, detached from any body, "as parodies of the body itself mocking higher values of ideal beauty."[41] These organs without a body are body parts larger than the body itself, and thus seem deliberately to violate Valéry's Socratic law, according to which natural bodies are always more complex than their parts. Le Corbusier's representations of Ubu have been linked, via the works of other authors, to a turn toward anti-intellectualism and an acknowledgment of the physicality of the body. Whatever their significance

[39] L. Lee, *Isa Genzken: Sculpture as World Receiver*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago / London, 2017, p. 37.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[41] A. G. Read, "Le Corbusier's 'Ubu' Sculpture: Remaking an Image," *Word & Image*, 14, 3, 1998, p. 217.

may be, it is evident that these forms—degenerate rather than cosmic—emerge everywhere in his later architectural realizations.

Whereas in Marseille these forms provoked little resistance, appearing as playful curiosities in the rooftop leisure zone, at Ronchamp they were perceived as standing in tension with the chapel's function. The building was reproached for diverting attention from the liturgy, for presenting itself rather than serving—a cardinal sin within the architectural community. The moment a design ventures into a form that clamors for attention at the expense of its humble function, it is taken to commit something unforgivable. As long as the building remains safely nestled within the fabric of its context, the likelihood of transgression is limited. Yet once a structure stands free, the temptation of sculptural form looms large—against which the innocent box-shape offers itself as an easy and virtuous self-restraint. Alternatively, one may feign, not without hypocrisy, that a spectacular form flowed necessarily from the program, if only to justify the indulgent use of the latest, and most unchaste, form-finding toys.

Just as Le Corbusier once dreamed of a built sculpture—not modeled but assembled and cast in concrete, "where the formwork can provide shapes as noble as those of shipbuilding"[42]—so today it is again technology, in direct relation to construction, that offers architects a sense of liberation. Yet the price paid for such liberation is that of disapproval and disdain. Never has architecture attracted so much attention from the general public, and yet that attention is suspect—tainted, even derisive; for it is the optical attention of the tourist, lured by the cheap appeal of expensive, ostentatious forms. But even where Frank Lloyd Wright believed he had achieved an organic unity of form and function with his concrete logarithmic spiral, criticism oscillated between reproaches concerning the sacrifices imposed upon the artworks for the sake of architectural presence and ridicule of the form itself—usually through nicknaming, which in effect amounts to a recuperation of an indefinite form within existing visual-cognitive registers, a fate sculptural buildings share with the rocks at Trégastel. Wright's Guggenheim Museum is now lumped together with the works of Utzon and Saarinen, and even the chapel of Ronchamp—once praised for disrupting the cold geometric language of early functionalism—as a frequently cited precursor of today's trend toward architecture that primarily seeks to capture optical attention.

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[42] Le Corbusier, "Unité," *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, numéro hors-série, 1948, p. 57.

The conception and realization of plastic forms in architecture has never been easier; paradoxically, it has never been more difficult to appreciate them. One factor is that we seem unable to see—or architecture seems unable to make us see—a working of form itself beyond its casing functions; and yet even evolutionary biology, the domain of natural forms, acknowledges *roles* alongside functions. Revolving around polished marble, *Plastik*'s aesthetic materialism—despite its erotic undertone—remains dry and clean, perhaps too clean for the taste of today's trends. Yet it offers an avenue toward a reconsideration of haptic aesthetics that need not contradict but rather address a blind spot in current approaches. Its philosophical take on form, then, might at least provide us with a lens through which to discern the difference between gimmicky display and forms that mobilize attention, thereby eliciting a perceptual attitude that is the very opposite of rapid visual consumption.

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An Impossible Encounter: A Conversation Between Jacques Derrida and Coop Himmelb(l)au (Wolf D. Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky, Regina Haslinger)

The "Jacques Derrida" archive in Irvine holds a French version of a conversation between Derrida and Coop Himmelb(l)au (Wolf D. Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky, Regina Haslinger).1 Clearly, the text was at one time carefully revised and prepared for publication—the handwriting in the margins is only Jacques Derrida's. Although the text appears ready to be published, it has remained in the archive and has been almost entirely forgotten. The interview was conducted in English, but the original is currently lost; it is, furthermore, unclear whether its French translator, Kenneth Hylton, is still alive.

The first citation of any part of the interview, to our knowledge, came from Petar Bojanić in a paper delivered on October 25, 2012, at the conference "Architecture of Deconstruction: The Specter of Jacques Derrida," held in Belgrade. Marguerite Derrida was in attendance and gave her consent for the interview to be published. Other participants of the event included people who knew Derrida, worked with him, and were his friends (Bernard Tschumi, Jeffrey Kipnis, Mark Wigley, Maurizio Ferraris, Peter Eisenman, and others).

Other than that, the interview was circulated discreetly within a small circle of people (for example, Gerrit Wegener and Andrea Canclini used it for their PhD theses on Derrida, defended in Berlin and Turin respectively). From the interview, it is evident that it was conducted in Paris, shortly after Derrida's trip to Japan and the conference in which he mentions discussions and disagreements with his new architect friends concerning the role of architecture.

In March of this year, the conversation with Wolf D. Prix and people from his office (see interview with Wolf D. Prix in this issue) made clear

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[1] "Un entretien impossible," *Jacques Derrida papers*, Critical Theory Archive, Special Collections and Archives, The UC Irvine Libraries, Irvine, CA, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf3q2nb26c_aspace_ref894_6yx (accessed 12 September 2025).

that the Derrida/Coop Himmelb(l)au interview must have been conducted in Paris in 1992, during the eponymous exhibition at the Centre Pompidou organized by Regine Haslinger. It is not clear whether Derrida participated in any way in the exhibition or whether the interview was conducted at the Centre Pompidou.

We have scanned and here publish the French version exactly as we found it. Furthermore, we have translated it back into English, seeking to preserve its edited form and handwritten interventions.

CH/RH: ~~The 1988 MOMA exhibit~~ [cf. introductory text / reference to the 1988 MoMA exhibition] ~~sought to create a connection between deconstructivism and an architecture that would correspond to what we might call – in the absence of a better term – a completely new philosophy. And yet, if we were to ask the architects who took part in the exhibit, they would refuse to say that their architecture is the application of a theory, which is a philosophical notion. Instead, many of them avowed that certain deconstructivist elements seem to play a role in their work, impacting the architectural tradition. In light of this, I would like to open the questions with the following:~~ What are for you the affinities between deconstruction and architecture? On the one hand, deconstructivism is a procedure, an analysis that supposes the existence of a construct, a body or text, whose premises deconstructivism then questions; on the other, architecture, however radical in appearance or questioning its own suppositions – harmony, stability, symmetry – is always close to synthesis in the production.

D: ~~Thank you. There are a lot of topics there, lots of strings to pull at.~~ First of all, you used the term affinity, which is easy for me to accept, since it is rather vague and can fall within a number of different categories. I do believe there is affinity between deconstruction – in the sense of that word that I am interested – and deconstructivism in architecture.

What we need to do is establish what is affinity, and what kinds of differences can sustain affinity. I am not trying to avoid the term, but I would be careful what I include in it. There's our first precaution. The second would concern what you have called procedure; here, I must object. Deconstruction is not a procedure. It is not a method. It does not consist of a set of rules that one might apply to something that exists. In

deconstruction, as I use it, there are of course preexisting objects or institutions, but deconstruction is also a form of inventing them, producing something new.

From this point of view, deconstruction, in my account, must produce new events, rather than content itself to think critically about already existing things; although of course a memory of things past, that something was already there, is indispensable. Which is not a mere act of remembering. Deconstruction in my view produces new information, structures, writings, texts. This then is my second precaution.

But let us return to the exhibit ~~that you opened with~~ [in MoMA]. First, I was very, very happy and reassured not to see any mention of my own work in the accompanying texts. This was already interesting. Mark Wigley, the organizer, avoided all specific references to justificatory terms or official affiliation, since the exhibit was rather heterogenous and strong enough to be able to dispense with any "protocol" or theoretical legitimation. This I already thought a good thing. This does not mean that there was no affinity among the various architects who took part. They were not all doing the same thing – they were rather different one from another – but there was undoubtedly an attraction between them and deconstruction at the level of discourse or philosophy of the kind I and some others are at pain to try to conduct.

Now, what is this affinity? ~~What does it consist of? I am certain there is one, but it is difficult to grasp, nor should we be too hasty to define it. We should preserve a shadow zone – something that remains to be determined. This attraction draws us to the future, to the extent that we do not know where it all leads.~~ If we wished to put a finger on this attraction, we could say, first, that in architecture, as in other domains, such as philosophy, literature, law, painting, politics, institutions, etc. – the common trait would be a kind of rethinking history and he premises that we hold, the implicit norms, the institutions that regulate our work.

~~We must try to analyze, to isolate that which is absolutely specific to a field, given, not with purity in mind, nor to isolate architecture from all contamination. For example, a possible path might consist of discern-~~ ~~ing~~ (*missing in original*), let us take architecture, for this is our case. Architecture in itself need not be uniquely functional – even if it must be

useful, this is not the main goal. Functionality is not the essence of architecture, nor its religious dimension. Traditionally, the architecture of temples, churches, sacred places, of the *genius loci* was a question of divine presence, in one way or another presence of God. This is entirely unavoidable, I would say, even in a New York building today; yet, it is not the essence of architecture. Beauty and harmony, aesthetic norms are not essential to architecture either, though. And dwelling, even though indispensable, is not the only thing created by architecture. Once we have abstracted using all these criteria, removed all these ends, what remains is almost nothing. Yet, this almost nothing is possibly that which is closest to architecture in itself. All of which is to say that architecture does not have to deconstruct all its implicit or unexamined norms in order to be a purely architectural architecture.

This first gesture, an analytical step, which leaves an abstraction of architecture, does not offer a residue of a pure architecture, but rather something that we could then – and only at this moment – put in conversation or contact with comparable domains, such as cinema, literature, philosophy, seeking to relate it to other deconstructions. This does not mean that what we build need be ugly or less than functional or aesthetically pleasing or simply unlivable or uninhabitable; rather, it is a matter of something that ultimately is not constrained by beauty, livability, etc. We could graft this architectural writing onto other forms of writing – music, cinema, literature, politics – since it is often necessary to keep in mind what history, the actual political context, and technology could introduce into this space. At such a moment, the question of affinity returns.

CH: A question came to me while listening to you. Is there a link between philosophy and architecture? ~~In other words, do you think one could build with philosophy, or conversely, could architecture be a philosophy. How are these two terms positioned within a larger frame of reference? You spoke of functionality and of beauty; have these terms not been rendered ineffectual, or are they still used in philosophy? Do we need to redefine all these terms, as you seem to think, or perhaps simply erase them from our memory?~~

D: To begin with, we must remember that there is a long tradition, a wealth of ties between philosophy and architecture. For, within philosophy, we find architectural metaphors that have always been at work.

When we speak of foundations, of systems – in the sense of a way to construct, to develop discourse, grounded concepts, a covering term, and circulation among various spaces – there is always a topology. There would be no philosophy without spatial organization of its discourse. Philosophers have always referred to architecture in order to define their efforts. For example, Aristotle mentions the architect as the one who knows the foundational principles (the *arche*), and who is thus capable of giving orders to slaves or workers who are performing the work in the city. This is thus a metaphor for philosophy, for politics and architecture – and of course, a metaphor for the city. Kant defines the system, and what he called the art of the system, as a construction of order of topics (*systema* means to hold something), as the architectonic, the art of building a philosophical system. Using politics as the blueprint, the philosopher of course constructs systems, just like an architect: starting with the *arche*, from the beginning, they construct their system from the bottom up. And then we have the metaphor of the foundation, from which rises the rest of the construction, or on which it rests – the idea of *standing* is important here. Being is to be standing. Heidegger, for example, never ceased to remind us that the ethnological being stands, vertical, from the bottom up. Thus, these are not mere metaphors, rather, they are essential, implying that philosophical discourse is itself a spatial discourse. Heidegger said that spatiality of language is not an accident, but rather that any concept contains a spatial aspect. Spatialization is not accidental. In this sense, there has always been an affinity between philosophy and architecture. Nietzsche often compared philosophers to architects. He compared Spinoza not only to someone who constructs, but weaves (playing on the German word for spider, *Spinne*, Spinoza). And of course, in the philosophical classification of art – specifically, in Hegel – there is a profound interest in architecture, an attempt to place it within the systematization of the arts. Thus, there is an understanding of architecture as interior to philosophy. Now, to return to deconstruction, here we have another way of, let's say, scrutinizing (*suspecter*) this affinity between philosophy and architecture. Deconstruction asks questions about the metaphor of the foundation of the *arche*, the primary cause. Deconstructivism would in that sense be a deconstruction of philosophy and architecture, of their common roots, so to speak. It is a way of posing questions about the validity or legitimacy of the metaphor of foundations. This is not in order to leave either philosophy or architecture hanging in the air, but to wonder: why do we seek this

Sicherheit, the security of the ground? Again, this is not to render them groundless, but to call the foundation into question. What does it mean to found? Founding is *begründen*, finding an articulation. Deconstruction is a means to disarticulate and thus dislocate (*desarticulé*) the fraternity of philosophy and architecture. Which is also why it is sometimes considered dangerous for both.

CH/RH: I want to give an example that ties the two disciplines, writing and architecture, in an entirely different way: the Tower of Babel. The construction of the Tower illuminates the gift or the foundation of naming. Until the endeavor is interrupted, it encapsulates not only architecture, but also language, which is thus modified. Now, the principle of interruption, I see it as important for deconstructivism to the extent it does not presuppose that there was a beginning, a real origin. Instead, it proposes an arbitrary border, a demarcation, by which a structure could become visible. I would like to know how this opening of space might be applied to architecture?

D: ~~I see.~~ Let us look at what you first said about the Tower of Babel. It is interrupted when God stymies the will of the builders, who wished to have a single language and name for the whole world. This interruption opens up to a multiplicity of languages, to translation. I have already written a lot on this subject, so I will not return to it, but I would like to underline one thing. The interruption is not entirely negative, meaning that it does not mark an end or limit, rather opens the possibility of language, and ultimately, the language of building. Let us leave this principle of interruption – of dysfunction, disconnection, demarcation – and return to our initial question of affinity, which there can be between all these architects and deconstruction. What they have in common is taste, not just taste, but a common relation to the necessity of the interruption, to construct by way of disjointing blueprints, and not beginning at the beginning, stopping at the end, but operating with transversal disconnections. They begin in the middle with an interruption, and end with another interruption instead of an accomplishment, fulfilling something that is self-contained without an absolute beginning or absolute end. Thus, the suspension of this relation is perhaps that which is common to all deconstructivist architects. Nothing begins with the *arche*, the foundation, origin, ground; nor does anything become fulfilled with a total accomplishment. These architects privilege disconnection, disjunction,

incompleteness, disproportion (*dissymétrie*) – values that range from interruption to relation. As soon as we give up on the reassurance and certitude of *Sicherheit* of ground, the beginning of *arche*, origin, we can glean buildings that "begin" from the middle, with impassable disconnections within the very discontinuity of their structures – dissociation and deconstruction are analogous values. And of course, you were right to bring up the Tower of Babel, which is a problem of translation, a multiplicity of languages, a transposition or grafting of cultures or different languages upon one another. Grafting here provides a good blueprint. The multiplicity of culture, of references, codes, languages is irreducible. And architects perhaps have a common way of not belonging, or attempting not to belong, entirely to their culture. When Isozaki constructs something, it is at once Japanese and Californian and Spanish – he is trying to use anything that could be used to build the Tower of Babel. This is not to say that he forgets or erases reference to Japanese culture, but that he is playing around with grafting; this transfer, translation, the means of travel between different cultures, is equally political, it implies a politics.

~~CH: You seem to be saying that philosophy and architecture share the same foundation, the same root. But when I look out the window, I see many buildings inspired by reasons, origins, conditions other than philosophy.~~

~~D: Are you certain that there is no philosophy here? I think it is full of philosophy.~~

CH: ~~Yes, but it is an obsolete philosophy.~~ Let us return to the image of the Tower of Babel. If I understand you well, we can look at those events described from two points of view. I suppose we are suspicious of buildings that try really hard to simulate an impression of social stability. In that sense, architecture has always constituted a means of a sham politics. Yet, on the other hand, we could say – ~~and this is the image that I had in my mind when you brought up interruption as a means to open up, to acquire different perspectives, spatial-temporal relations, among various things that had not been previously in contact~~ – the notion of a multicultural society, comprising different languages. From that point on, the problem of translation, its imprecisions and impossibility of it being perfect, can be seen as a process that emerges from this event. Which is why

we were wondering – since architecture is what interests us – why is it obsolete compared to art and philosophy, at least since the beginning of the twentieth century.

D: Yes, I suppose the rhythms and transformations of architecture cannot be the same as in, let's say, music or painting, and there are reasons for this, which are related to society, the city, politics. Architecture cannot be renewed – at least not the kind that is tied to the urban. It is easy to transform the architecture of individual houses, but not that of a major city – or something of the kind. That is political, tied to the political history of capitalist society, of course.

CH: But I do think it is possible in architecture and in urban studies, to make the distinction between an architecture considered as a means to achieve stability and foresee the uncontrollable, and another that accepts the world as changing and affirms this change. One of the main purposes of art is to provide a new way of looking at things, in order to better function. Of course, there are old traditions, entirely lacking in stability, such as the architecture of nomads, or the Turkish house, which is differently dwelled in, depending on the seasons.

D: I have another model. Since my visit to Japan a few months ago for a lecture on architecture, I noted that Japanese temples [for example] are regularly reconstructed using the same blueprint. This does not mean that the building must remain the same across the centuries; rather, the Japanese reconstruct it regularly with new materials. That way the building – the temple – always remains the same. It is another way to conceive of reconstruction and transformation. They do not modify the architecture, they modify the substance – not the form – but the substance, the content, the material. This is neither nomad, nor sedentary, nor any other form of reconstruction. What does it mean to reconstruct?

~~CH: It is the metaphorical need to demolish and rebuild in the same garden.~~

D: In Western cultures, when we reconstruct, we construct something new. We do not construct the same, or nearly the same. In Japan, they are not unhappy to build the same thing.

~~CH: Returning to philosophy of seeing. I am very intrigued by the idea that everything we see has a philosophical grounding, that is, saying that a philosophy hides behind all reasoning.~~

D: ~~I would not say that all seeing is philosophy, but that it implies something philosophical.~~ Would you like me to tell you how philosophy is incarnated ~~here~~ [in Paris]?

CH: Gladly.

D: ~~Well, I will have to improvise. I was not prepared for such a question, but allow me to improvise.~~ First of all, what is most visible are the religious buildings; this is not philosophical in itself, but there is an implicit philosophy in the fact that the city of Paris wishes that its buildings remain standing. Religion exists due to the law that says religious structures should endure. There is a long story behind this, since certain churches were destroyed during the Revolution, but others were not; and now, we have arrived at a time, both religious and political of course, that wishes its churches remain standing, that wishes them restored, made visible, that they be seen by a certain number of people, etc. Thus, there is a religious memory, and not only memory, but activity; and the philosophy implicit in the French Constitution is to respect religion, ok? And then we have the Pantheon. It is a temple for great minds, great military leaders, and politicians in French memory. The issue of who ought to be buried there is of the greatest importance. When Mitterand became president – the first leftist president in two centuries, it should be said – his first act was to go to the Pantheon. Thus, here again, there is a philosophy. Not religious, but a religion of a nation, of the republican tradition, which is a philosophy. The philosophy of French politics – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc. – is incarnated in the Pantheon.

Now, there are a few other religious buildings that rise above the others, and there is a law that forbids further construction of taller buildings. Such a philosophy implies that the physical size of a human – normal, average, anthropologically speaking – must not be crushed by skyscrapers. Thus, there are practically no skyscrapers.

Of course, there are one or two, more to remind us why there should not be any more, right? And this too, this is a philosophy, a kind of ethics.

I am improvising, ok? What I would like to suggest, not to say develop, is that every choice – ~~even ones coming from the President (and as you know, everything being constructed in Paris, is done at the will of the President, in the last several decades, what we call "the big projects" were decided upon, signed, confirmed by the President, not the city mayor, but the President of the nation, this is true for Beaubourg, for La Défense, for the new wing of the Louvre~~ – every choice signifies that we are in the presence of a monarchic concept of architectural or urban authority.

CH: But I did not mean churches or cultural monuments, which is perfectly clear. I would like to speak of the new monuments in the city. Right behind Beaubourg [Centre Pompidou], we can see a large number of HLM [affordable housing buildings], which now define the city. The memory we have of the city, or the city we imagine, is that of a hundred years ago. In reality, the city of today comprises traffic and its new buildings, since many people live in such neighborhoods. Thus, I can see lots of concepts behind the recent big projects, but I see no philosophical concept behind these buildings. I see marketing concepts, electoral-political ones; I see industrial, economic concepts.

D: You think too much of philosophy. You think that there is no philosophy except where the philosophers write their philosophical systems. [well said!] There is a philosophy in marketing. To privilege marketing is to make a philosophical choice. When I say that there is philosophy, I do not mean that there are profound philosophers who construct systems and inspire architects. No, as soon as you give preference to marketing, to industrial functionality, that is a philosophy. It is a form of organizing a city, organizing modes of life, etc. Within which there is always conflict. There are those who would like to preserve what they have in their memory, its exact trace, intact. Even if something new is being built, one must make accommodation to this memory. Others think that *if* we wish to have something new, we must tear down. Others still – a third category – attempt to graft something on an ancient structure, without destroying, but producing new forms that might protect the memory without having to abandon invention. An example, which I offer without value judgment, would be the Buren columns within the Palais Royal, even though they have shocked quite a few people, left the old structure intact. Much like the Louvre pyramid. This shows that it is possible to restore

an old structure, while at the same time adding something new; we are beginning to get used to this new hybrid body of architecture.

~~CH/RH: The remodeling of the roof by Coop Himmelblau in Vienna, looks a lot like this concept of deconstructing the ancient body and then conjuring it into an entirely new structure.~~

~~CH: It helps that the term deconstruction often carries a negative connotation. For many people, deconstructivist architecture is synonymous with destruction...~~

~~D: We could abandon the term. I am not particularly attached to it.~~

CH: ~~No, I want to say that, if there are elements that make sense in the ancient structure, they could, they really should stay, except if they need to be razed to create new spaces. Yet,~~ there is another question that interests us: when it comes to architecture, is the concept more important the space constructed? The concept – written, drawn, published in a journal, for example – is it more important than the act, the three-dimensional space? Or is it the same thing?

D: It is a very important question, of course. First, I would say – even in philosophy – what we call philosophy in universities, in the classroom, in writing, etc. in deconstruction, which is something I have not stopped reiterating, whether I am heard or not – the concept is not essential. Deconstruction has nothing to do with concepts as such. Texts I write, for example, are not guided, or let's say, structured by concepts, the given meaning in relation to the signifier, the word, space and so on. The concept cannot be dissociated from what I will call writing a text, an event, an institution, a speech act, my own body. What I call a trace, for example, is nothing but the tracing of letters on a page. I would not like you to think that the concept goes along with philosophy, while construction goes on the side of architecture. Regarding architecture, it seems to me sometimes – and this depends on specific, particular events – that a drawing in a journal, for example, could be a more important architectural event than something built, a giant building in a city. Sometimes (but not always), it is also the case that the writings of an architect are more effective than so many real buildings made of stone. So, we should not rigidly draw a line between the concept of a project and an actually built

object, because the line is elsewhere. Of course, what we are in the habit of calling architecture implies that at a given moment, an object is built, visible and stabilized – this too is a concept we should respect. Do you think, for example, that stability is essential for architecture? Is an airplane somehow architectural? Is it an architectural product, according to you?

CH: Of course.

D: Good. Now, materials such as wood and stone are not indispensable to architecture; it can use metal, it can use glass. If you replace stability with some other material, with mobility, the concept of an architecture and the opposition between a drawing and a block of stone begins to soften. This is why the concept of architecture remains fuzzy to this day. Which is not a catastrophe by any means. If it is still fuzzy, and why not, it is fuzzy; it is similar with philosophy, with literature. We do not know the exact borders between architecture, literature and cinema. Have you read what Bernard Tschumi has written, for example, something entirely narrative, that was never constructed: *The Manhattan Transcripts*? Who knows whether it is literature, philosophy, cinema or architecture? Tschumi is, of course, an architect, that is his profession, he runs an architecture school, and what he signs off on is meant to be architecture; yet, strictly speaking, would you characterize the *Transcripts* as an architectural work? It is a work, an effort, and who cares about the rest. This is why I am not particularly attached to the word deconstruction – but then again, I am not particularly attached to the word architecture either. We need words, we need names for reasons that are extrinsic to what interests us. Of course, I have the need to be called professor, to an extent, I am not saying that I am not a professor of philosophy, ok? After all, I am paid, I have a small office, I have a little legitimacy; but at heart, if I go beyond the superficial, I know that I am not really a professor, and what I write is not really philosophy. To a certain extent, I negotiate with the city, regarding the budget, with the institution, etc. and I think the same goes for architecture. We need a word, we need to be able to affirm that there is a discipline that can be taught at institutions, but beyond that, the rigidity of limits poses a problem.

CH/RH: Well, we have truly abandoned the Tower of Babel, for the eternal process of interruption and continuity does not cease to exist and coexist. On the one hand, there is continuity that consists of erecting

buildings that represent, as you say, religion, politics, even a name. On the other hand, you have a continuous process of interruptions, a process to which we attribute the myth of the Tower of Babel. What I wish to say is that interrupting the erection of the Tower, and which produced a kind of primary chaos, came at a time when many other structures, like the pyramids, were erected. It would appear that history has obscured this unfinished and broken negotiation of a tower that might have been but an incident, a failure that history has nevertheless relayed transformed as myth.

CH: It is a history of interruptions of stability. If we could see an infinitely complex process with an infinite capacity of innocence, we would not need a myth such as the Tower of Babel in order to have grounding and for seeking the rupture.

D: Of course; when I speak of non-stability or of mobility, I do not wish to say that I am seeking to avoid stability at all cost. There is a certain amount of stability we cannot disavow. Even constructing something mobile, it is a mobility that carries a certain stability: an airplane is stable; it moves of course, but it changes position in space as a coherent object that remains as it is. Thus, even a mobile architecture presupposes a certain stability, a degree of stabilization. What I want to say is this: although a certain stability is necessary, the fact of its production implies that it be made on unstable ground, on chaos in a sense; there is chaos, there is something that moves constantly, which is unstable. Stability is not naturally given – there is no such thing as natural stability – which implies that artificial stability in architecture is a stabilization, something that gives stability to the ground, to the foundation without foundation, to a possible disorder, what I would call chaos.

This means that the most stable and durable monuments contain some instability inscribed within; their stability is not infinity, it already consists of ruins, potential ruins. This is what I wanted to say: these are potential ruins. Thus, a structure of ruin is inscribed in the most solid of buildings. The ruin is not an accident which at a given moment strikes certain buildings while leaving others whole. Ruin is there from the beginning, in a sense, we construct ruins the whole time. Interior to the general concepts of ruins, there is the concept of restraint. For example, Walter Benjamin wrote that during the Baroque there was particular

interest in ruins. This presents a problem, but let us talk about it. What Benjamin wanted to say of actual ruins, those that are ruins in themselves, where we see the dismemberment of the whole. Yet, the fact is that even the best built building will end up a ruin, it is haunted by its potential ruin. Deconstruction, in particular in architecture, is perhaps one way of thinking the ruin, the possible ruin of everything, of the finite structure of all construction. It's finite. It's mortal, in a sense; we construct against mortality, which is to say, we confirm this mortality.

~~CH: I like the idea of architecture as being in a state of transition. For example, I like scraping the surface until the underlying terms of the image become interchangeable underneath, that is, until the sketch becomes the architecture, reality, a piece of the architectural, the same is true of words written by the architect.~~

~~D: Let us say that words are useful, nothing beyond that.~~

~~CH: And terms are interchangeable?~~

~~D: That depends on the context, it depends on the persons speaking. Sometimes, I would say: well, I am not a philosopher, I willingly relinquish this term in my philosophical activity. At other times, when I see that political forces wish to erase philosophy, I become militantly a philosopher; I say that there is a philosophy that must be preserved, that it should be developed. Speaking and acting based on context is not empirical relativism. Each political act must keep the context in mind, the place, the situation, etc.~~

~~CH: I very much like this transient state of terms, the instability of words, as well as of architecture structures, which contain both stability and instability at the same time.~~

~~D: Yes. It is a stability that vies with an unstable ground, what I call chaos: something that cannot be mastered, in constant transformation. What I call absolute disorder. Thus, architecture constructs order on an unstable foundation.~~

~~CH: A foundation without foundation.~~

~~D: A foundation without foundation, if you like.~~

CH/RH: I have another question: what would you say about how architecture is covered in the media? If we were to be too critical, we could say that the more there is talk of an "event," the more there is doubt and suspicion that behind these mediatized stories, there is only a "non-event."

D: Well, you know, I don't know if it is a critique or not, but I would say that I am very attuned to how the architectural discourse, or architecture publications are very rich. Which is to say, currently, architecture is tied to the great economic powers of Western civilization. This is something I do not criticize, but we should pay attention to this, the political aspect. ~~The fact that architectural journals are beautiful is a good thing; yet, we could nevertheless pose the question: why is that? How come they are more expensive than, say, philosophy journals? Why is architecture more seductive, more useful? Why are political and economic powers compelled to support architecture, while not supporting teaching philosophy or humanities at universities, or even other arts, such as painting? Why is that so?~~ In the lecture I gave in Japan, I insisted on the fact that the best architects today – the most audacious, most inventive – have stopped, with good reason, to pay too much attention to social and political problems, such as housing, for example. What they are making is more formal, more formalist; sometimes even architects associated with deconstruction. And I can see that, I understand why you would not want to listen, let us say, to political codes, to the housing committees that say "so, you wish to build social housing, something for the homeless, go do social work;" very well, because this requires using old architectural plans, you are right, you should not have to use them. Nevertheless, you should endeavor to be more political, in a new way, deliberately political; you should pay attention to sources of investment, to the manner in which your inventions are used, or exploited so to speak. Why is it possible to build deconstructivist architecture in Japan, in Los Angeles, perhaps in Berlin, but in Central Africa or in China? What are the ties to capitalism? I would say that we need a new analysis, not following old schemes, of this new architecture. But of course, my comments were not well received, which I can understand.

~~CH: I can imagine.~~

D: Some good friends said to me, "well, we are political, we know, we are always grappling with political structures, with the city government of

Berlin, with such and such a city" – and I believe them. Still, struggling against the authorities in Los Angeles, in Berlin, is not exactly the desired aim, however important these struggles are. Thus, I think we need to elaborate a new political discourse. No one is ready to do this. Old, Marxist schemes are, of course, no longer entirely useful, even if they are not entirely dead and gone, not simply out of fashion, yet, we need to find a new way with this old cause.

~~CH: Is there a comparable problem in philosophy today?~~

~~D: Comparable, yes. Of course it would require a bit of thinking to determine the exact affinity. There are analogous problems, but also differences. We do not build, so we do not need as much money, we do not grapple with policy makers, or not in the same way. An architect, as soon as they build something, must meet with the mayor, a representative of the government, the president of the country, economic power brokers, etc. The poor philosopher must only convince an editor or their students.~~

~~CH: In what concerns architecture, we could say that politicians and other people who hold power and have influence over architecture are not interested so much in philosophy, that they are disdainful of aesthetics.~~

~~D: That depends. In Berlin or in Prague, for example, I took part in conferences organized by the Senate of Berlin, or by politicians in Prague, and I recall them wanting to have something like a philosophical concept of what their cities ought to look like in the future. What they do with this is another problem, but at least they cared to hear a philosopher's point of view, to take stock of the possibilities.~~

CH: When you say that we need to elaborate new political thinking, does this lead us towards utopia?

D: Oh, utopia is a huge problem. Not necessarily in the form of utopia, although I am not pushing this aside either, utopia could have a certain value, but you know, it is very difficult...

CH: Yes, perhaps that is not the right word; let us say, imagining the future?

D: Yes, even if it seems impossible, even if you do no more than write it or draw it, without any power to construct it, it remains effective. Even if you imagine or invent something that is impossible to build today, whether a discourse or a drawing, the fact of having written it or sketched it could have an effect on that which will be built in the future. Therefore, we should not denounce utopia or abstract, impossible projects. Somewhere, I wrote – although I do not like to cite myself – that the only possible invention is the invention of the impossible.

~~This could be a good place to end this impossible encounter.~~

~~CH: Yes, thank you very much.~~

~~D: No, thank you.~~

Translated by Edward Djordjevic and Andrea Perunović.

UN ENTRETIEN IMPOSSIBLE

Discussion entre Jacques Derrida et COOP HIMMELBLAU (Wolf D. Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky, Regina Haslinger)

CH/ RH L'exposition au MOMA en 1988 a tenté de forger un lien entre le déconstructivisme et une architecture qui s'associait à ce qu'il faut appeler — à défaut d'un nom adéquat — la toute nouvelle philosophie. Et pourtant, si l'on pose la question aux architectes ayant pris part à cette exposition, ils refusent de dire que leur architecture applique une théorie, une notion philosophique. Au lieu de cela, beaucoup d'entre eux affirment que les éléments déconstructivistes qui semblent être à l'œuvre dans leur architecture, puisent en fait dans la tradition architecturale. Donc, je voudrais commencer en vous posant une première question: quelles sont pour vous les affinités entre le déconstructivisme et l'architecture? D'un côté, le déconstructivisme relève d'une procédure, d'une analyse qui présuppose l'existence d'une construction, d'un corps ou d'un texte dont il remet en cause les prémisses; et de l'autre, l'architecture, qu'elle soit radicale en apparence ou en questionnant ses propres prémisses — harmonie, stabilité, symétrie — aboutit toujours à une synthèse de la production.

D Merci. Cela fait beaucoup de thèmes, beaucoup de filons. D'abord, vous employez le terme d'affinité, que j'accepte sans peine car il est suffisamment vague pour y subsumer un certain nombre de choses différentes. Je suis certain qu'il existe des affinités entre la déconstruction — à la façon dont je m'y intéresse — et le déconstructivisme en architecture.

Donc, il nous faut déterminer ce qu'est une affinité, et quelles différences peuvent, disons, habiter les affinités. Je n'éviterais pas le terme, mais je ferais très attention à ce que j'y mettrais. Voilà une première précaution. La deuxième concernerait ce que vous avez dit sur la procédure; et là, je protesterais. La déconstruction n'est pas une procédure. Ce n'est pas une méthode. Il ne s'agit pas d'un ensemble de règles que l'on appliquerait à quelque chose de déjà existant. Dans la déconstruction, telle que j'essaie de la pratiquer, il y a bien sûr des corps ou des institutions pré-existants, mais la déconstruction est aussi une manière d'inventer, de produire quelque chose de nouveau.

De ce point de vue, la déconstruction doit, selon moi, produire des événements nouveaux, et ne pas se contenter de réfléchir de manière critique à des choses pré-existantes, bien qu'il soit indispensable qu'il y ait une mémoire de quelque chose de passé, de quelque chose de déjà là. Ce n'est pas qu'un acte de mémoire; ma déconstruction produit des informations, des structures, des écrits, des textes

nouveaux. Voilà pour ma deuxième précaution.

Mais revenons à l'exposition ~~dont vous parliez au début~~ au MoMA. D'abord, j'ai été très, très heureux et rassuré de ne voir aucune mention de mes propres travaux dans les textes qui l'accompagnaient. Ce fait était déjà assez intéressant en soi. Mark Wigley, qui l'a organisée, a évité toute référence précise en termes de légitimation ou d'affiliation officielle, car l'exposition était assez hétérogène et assez forte pour se dispenser d'un "protocole" ou d'une légitimation théoriques. Je pensais que c'était là une bonne chose. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il n'existait pas d'affinités entre les différents architectes qui y ont pris part. Ils ne faisaient pas tous la même chose — ils étaient très différents les uns des autres — mais il y avait sans doute comme une affinité entre eux et la déconstruction en matière de discours ou de philosophie, celle que moi-même et quelques autres nous efforçons de pratiquer.

Or, quelle est cette affinité? ~~En quoi consiste-t-elle? Je suis sûr qu'il y en a une, mais elle est difficile à cerner, et nous ne devons pas la définir trop hâtivement. Nous devons respecter une zone d'ombre — quelque chose qui reste à déterminer. Cette affinité a trait au futur, dans la mesure où nous ne savons pas où tout cela nous mènera.~~ Si nous voulions mettre le doigt sur cette affinité, nous dirions d'abord que, dans l'architecture et dans d'autres domaines tels que la philosophie, la littérature, le droit, la peinture, la politique, les institutions, etc., le trait commun serait une manière de repenser l'histoire et les prémisses de ce que nous faisons, les normes implicites, les institutions qui régulent nos travaux.

On ~~doit essayer d'analyser,~~ d'isoler ce qui est absolument spécifique à un champ donné, non pas afin d'être pur, non pas afin d'~~isoler l'architecture~~ de toute ~~contamination. Par exemple,~~ une première démarche consisterait à ~~cerner~~ *[manque quelque chose dans le texte original anglais],* prenons l'architecture car c'est ici notre exemple privilégié. L'architecture en soi ne doit pas être uniquement fonctionnelle — même si elle doit être utile, ce n'est pas le but principal. La fonctionnalité n'est pas l'essence de l'architecture, ni sa dimension religieuse non plus. Traditionnellement, l'architecture des temples, des églises, des lieux sacrés, du génie du lieu avait affaire à la présence de Dieu, à une quelconque présence de Dieu. Ceci est absolument inévitable, même, dirais-je, dans un immeuble new-yorkais d'aujourd'hui, mais ce n'est pas l'essence de l'architecture. Or la beauté et l'harmonie, les normes esthétiques ne sont pas non plus ce qu'il y a d'essentiel dans l'architecture. Et l'habitation, bien qu'indispensable, n'est pas tout ce que crée l'architecte lorsqu'il construit. Une fois qu'on a fait abstraction de tous ces critères, de toutes ces finalités, ce qui en reste doit être presque rien. Mais ce presque rien est peut-être ce qu'il y a de plus

proche de l'architecture en elle-même — ce qui ne veut pas dire que l'architecture doive déconstruire toutes ces normes implicites ou non examinées, pour parvenir à une architecture purement architecturale.

Ce premier geste, qui est un geste analytique, qui fait abstraction de ce qu'il reste de l'architecture, ne donne pas le résidu pur d'une architecture pure, mais quelque chose qu'on peut alors — et seulement à ce moment-là — mettre en communication, en contact avec d'autres domaines comparables, tels que la cinématographie, la littérature, la philosophie, en tentant de faire quelque chose qui fasse appel à d'autres déconstructions. Ceci ne veut pas dire que ce qu'on fait est laid ou peu fonctionnel ou esthétique ou tout simplement invivable ou inhabitable, mais qu'il s'agit de quelque chose qui n'est pas, en fin de compte, régulé par la beauté, l'habiter, etc. On pourrait essayer de greffer l'écrit architectural sur d'autres types d'écriture — musique, cinéma, littérature, politique —puisqu'il est souvent nécessaire de tenir compte de ce que l'histoire et la situation actuelle de la politique et la technologie ont pu introduire dans cet espace. À ce moment-là, la question d'affinité doit revenir.

CH Une seule question m'est venue à l'esprit pendant que vous parliez. Y a-t-il un lien entre philosophie et architecture? Autrement dit, pensez-vous que l'on puisse construire de la philosophie, ou inversement, l'architecture peut-elle être une philosophie? Comment ces deux termes se situent-ils par rapport à un cadre de référence plus large? Vous parliez de la fonction et de la beauté; ces termes ne sont-ils plus effectifs, ou existent-ils toujours en philosophie? Faut-il redéfinir tous ces termes comme vous sembliez le préconiser, ou devons-nous les effacer de notre mémoire?

D D'abord, il faut se rappeler qu'il existe une vieille tradition, riche de rapports entre philosophie et architecture, car, à l'intérieur de la philosophie, nous trouvons une métaphore architecturale qui a toujours été à l'œuvre. Lorsqu'on parle de fondations, de systèmes — un système est une façon de construire, de construire des discours, des concepts avec des fondations, un toit et des circulations entre les espaces — il y a une topologie. Il ne peut y avoir de philosophie sans une organisation discursive des lieux. Et, constamment, les philosophes se sont référés à l'architecture afin de définir leurs propres pratiques. Par exemple, Aristote fait mention de l'architecte comme quelqu'un qui sait d'abord ce qu'est le principe (*arche*), et qui donne alors des ordres aux esclaves ou aux ouvriers qui effectuent le travail dans la ville. Il s'agit donc d'une métaphore de la philosophie, une métaphore de la politique et de l'architecture — et, bien sûr, de l'urbanisme. Kant définit le système, ce qu'il appelait l'art du système, la construction d'un ordre de thèmes en quelque sorte (*systema* veut dire

"tenir quelque chose") il l'appelait architectonique, l'art de bâtir un système philosophique. Avec la politique comme schéma médiateur entre philosophie et architecture, bien sûr le philosophe construit des systèmes tout comme un architecte : en commençant par l'*arche*, par le début, il construit son système depuis le début. Et puis il y a la métaphore des fondations, d'où surgit la construction, ou sur lesquelles elle repose — l'image de la verticalité (*standing*) est importante dans ce contexte. Etre, c'est être debout. Heidegger, par exemple, n'a cesse de nous rappeler que l'être ethnologique est debout, vertical, de bas en haut. Donc, ce ne sont pas que des métaphores, ce sont des métaphores essentielles, impliquant que le discours philosophique est en lui-même un discours spatial. Heidegger dit que la spatialité du langage n'est pas fortuite, qu'en fait chaque concept a quelque chose de spatial. La spatialisation n'est pas qu'un hasard. Donc, à ce niveau-là, il a existé une longue affinité entre philosophie et architecture. Nietzsche compare souvent les philosophes aux architectes. Il compare Spinoza à quelqu'un qui non seulement construit mais tisse (il fait là un jeu de mots entre Spinoza et *Spinne*, "araignée"). Et, bien sûr, il y a dans la classification philosophique des arts — et tout particulièrement chez Hegel — un intérêt profond pour l'architecture, une tentative de la localiser dans le système des arts. Donc, il y a interprétation de l'architecture à l'intérieur de la philosophie. Or la déconstruction, pour y revenir, est, entre autres, un moyen de, disons de *suspecter* cette affinité entre philosophie et architecture. Elle pose des questions concernant la métaphore des fondations de l'*arche*, de la cause première. Dans ce sens, le déconstructivisme est une déconstruction de la philosophie et de l'architecture, de leurs racines communes en quelque sorte. C'est une manière de poser des questions sur la validité ou légitimité de la métaphore des fondations, non pas afin de suspendre tout au-dessus du vide, mais pour demander: qu'est-ce que nous faisons lorsque nous recherchons la *Sicherheit*, la sécurité du fond, non pas en vue de l'infondé, mais afin de questionner le fond? Qu'est-ce que fonder? Fonder, c'est *begründen*, trouver une articulation. La déconstruction est un moyen de désarticuler cette fraternité entre philosophie et architecture, et c'est pourquoi elle est parfois considérée comme menaçante à la fois pour l'architecture et la philosophie.

CH / RH Je voudrais citer un exemple qui relie les deux disciplines, écriture et architecture, d'un manière tout à fait différente: celui de la tour de Babel. La construction de la tour relevait directement du don ou du fondement des noms. Lorsque cette entreprise a été interrompue, c'est toute la manière d'aborder non seulement l'architecture, mais aussi le langage, qui s'en est trouvé modifiée. Or, ce principe même d'interruption, je le vois opérer dans le

déconstructivisme dans la mesure où il ne présuppose pas qu'il y ait eu un commencement, une origine vraie. Au lieu de cela, il pose de manière assez arbitraire une frontière, une démarcation, à travers laquelle une structure peut devenir visible. Je voudrais savoir comment cette ouverture de l'espace peut s'appliquer à l'architecture?

D Je vois. Reprenons vos remarques initiales concernant la tour de Babel. Elle est interrompue lorsque Dieu contrecarre la volonté des bâtisseurs, qui voulaient qu'un seul langage et un seul nom prédominent dans le monde. Cette interruption ouvre en fait une multiplicité de langages, de traductions. Je me suis efforcé d'écrire beaucoup sur ce sujet, je n'y reviendrai donc pas, mais j'en voudrais souligner un aspect. Le fait que l'interruption ne soit pas uniquement négative, qu'elle ne marque pas une fin ou une limite, ouvre en fait la possibilité d'un langage, enfin celle du bâti./Quittons maintenant ce principe d'interruption — de dysfonctionnement, de déconnexion, de démarcation — pour revenir à notre question première de l'affinité qu'il peut y avoir entre tous ces architectes et la déconstruction. Ce qu'ils ont en commun est un goût, pas simplement un goût, mais un rapport commun à la nécessité d'interrompre, de construire au moyen de schémas disjoncteurs, sans commencer au commencement, sans s'arrêter à la fin, mais en pratiquant des déconnexions transversales. Ils commencent au milieu avec une interruption, et terminent par une autre interruption au lieu d'un accomplissement, la plénitude de quelque chose qui serait compris entre un commencement absolu et une fin absolue. Donc, la suspension de ce rapport est peut-être ce qui est commun à tous ces architectes déconstructivistes. Rien ne part de l'*arche*, des fondations, de l'origine, du fond, et rien ne s'achève avec l'accomplissement total. Ils privilégient déconnexion, disjonction, incomplétude, dissymétrie — valeurs qui ont trait à l'interruption du rapport. Dès qu'on renonce à l'assurance, ou à la certitude de la *Sicherheit* du fond, du début de l'*arche*, de l'origine, on entrevoit des bâtiments qui "commencent" tout simplement au milieu, avec des déconnexions infranchissables à l'intérieur de leur propre discontinuité de corps — dissociation et déconstruction sont des valeurs analogues. Et bien sûr, c'est pourquoi vous aviez raison en citant la tour de Babel, il s'agit d'un problème de traduction, d'une multiplicité de langages, d'une transposition ou d'un greffage de cultures ou de langages différents les uns sur les autres; le greffage fournit ici un schéma important. La multiplicité des cultures, des références, des codes, des langages, est irréductible. Et ces architectes ont peut-être une façon commune de ne pas appartenir, ou de tenter de ne pas appartenir, totalement à leur culture. Lorsque Isozaki construit quelque chose, c'est à la fois japonais et californien et espagnol,

il essaye de faire de tout ce qu'il construit une tour de Babel. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il oublie ou qu'il efface la référence à la culture japonaise, mais qu'il joue avec ses greffes; et ce transfert, cette traduction, cette manière de voyager entre différentes cultures, est également politique, implique une politique.

CH Vous semblez dire par là que philosophie et architecture partagent un même fond, une même racine. Mais si je regarde par la fenêtre, je vois beaucoup de bâtiments inspirés par des raisons, des origines, des conditions autres que celles de la philosophie.

D Etes-vous sûrs qu'il n'y a pas de philosophie ici? Je pense que c'est rempli de philosophie.

CH Oui, mais il s'agit peut-être d'une philosophie désuète. Mais revenons à l'image de la tour de Babel. Si je vous comprends bien, on peut regarder cet événement de deux points de vue. Je suppose que nous nous sommes méfiés des bâtiments qui s'efforçaient de simuler une impression de stabilité sociale, et dans ce contexte, l'architecture a toujours constitué le moyen d'une politique tout aussi bidon. Mais d'un autre côté, on pourrait parler — et c'est l'image que j'avais en tête pendant que vous évoquiez l'interruption comme un moyen d'ouvrir, d'obtenir des perspectives différentes, des rapports spatio-temporels entre différentes choses qui ne sont jamais entrées en contact auparavant — de l'image d'une société pluri-culturelle, faite de différents langages. À partir de ce moment-là, le problème de la traduction, de son imprécision et de l'impossibilité d'avoir une traduction parfaitement conforme, peut se voir comme un processus qui résulte de cet événement. C'est pourquoi nous nous sommes demandé — puisque l'architecture nous importe — pourquoi elle paraît dépassée par rapport à l'art et à la philosophie, du moins depuis le début du XXe siècle.

D Oui, je suppose que les rythmes de la transformation de l'architecture ne peuvent pas être les mêmes que dans, disons, la musique ou la peinture, et il y a des raisons pour cela, des raisons qui tiennent précisément à la société, à la ville, à la politique. On ne peut pas renouveler l'architecture — du moins, pas celle qui est liée à l'urbanisme. Il est facile de transformer l'architecture des maisons individuelles, par exemple, mais il est difficile de transformer l'architecture d'une métropole — ou quelque chose comme cela. Et ça, c'est politique, c'est lié à l'histoire politique des sociétés capitalistes, bien sûr.

CH Mais je pense qu'il est possible, dans l'architecture et dans l'urbanisme, de faire la différence entre une architecture qui se voit comme le moyen d'atteindre une stabilité et de prévenir des processus incontrôlés, et une autre qui regarde le monde comme changeant, qui affirme ce changement. Un des intérêts majeurs de l'art est d'avoir un regard nouveau sur les choses afin de pouvoir

fonctionner. Et bien sûr, il existe de vieilles traditions entièrement dépourvues de stabilité, comme dans l'architecture des nomades, ou dans la maison turque, qui est habitée comme un processus changeant selon les saisons.

D J'ai un autre modèle. Lorsque j'étais au Japon il y a quelques mois, pour donner une conférence sur l'architecture, nous avons remarqué que le temple japonais [par exemple] est régulièrement reconstruit selon le même schéma. Ceci ne veut pas dire que le bâtiment doit rester le même à travers les siècles: mais que les Japonais le reconstruisent régulièrement avec de nouveaux matériaux, alors que le bâtiment — le temple — demeure toujours le même. C'est là une autre façon de concevoir la reconstruction, la transformation. Ils ne modifient pas l'architecture, ils en modifient la substance — pas la forme — mais la substance, le contenu, le matériau. Ce n'est ni nomade, ni sédentaire, c'est une autre forme de reconstruction. Que signifie reconstruire?

CH ~~C'est le besoin métaphorique de démolir puis reconstruire dans le même jardin.~~

D Dans les cultures occidentales, lorsqu'on reconstruit, on construit quelque chose de nouveau. Nous ne construisons pas la même chose, ou presque jamais la même chose. Au Japon, ils ne sont pas mécontents de reconstruire la même chose.

CH ~~Pour en venir à la philosophie de la vue, je suis très intrigué par l'idée que tout ce que nous voyons comporte un fond philosophique, en admettant qu'une philosophie se cache derrière chaque raison.~~

D ~~Je ne dis pas que la vue soit de la philosophie, mais elle implique quelque chose de philosophique.~~ Voulez-vous que je vous dise comment la philosophie est incarnée ici?

CH Volontiers. à Paris

D ~~Eh bien, je ne ferai qu'improviser. Je n'étais pas préparé à une telle question, mais laissez-moi improviser.~~ D'abord, ce qu'il y a de plus visible d'ici, ce sont les bâtiments religieux; ce qui n'est pas philosophique en soi, mais il y a une philosophie implicite dans le fait que la ville de Paris veuille que ces bâtiments restent en place. La religion existe par le fait que la loi édicte que les bâtiments religieux perdurent. Il y a eu une longue histoire là-dessus, car certaines églises ont été détruites au cours de la Révolution, et d'autres pas; et maintenant, nous sommes arrivés à une certaine étape, à la fois politique et religieuse, bien sûr, qui veut que les églises restent en place, qu'on les restaure, qu'on les rende visibles, qu'on les voit fréquentées par un certain nombre de gens, et ainsi de suite. Donc, il y a mémoire religieuse, non seulement mémoire mais activité, et la philosophie implicite de la Constitution française est qu'il faut la respecter,

d'accord? Et puis, nous avons le Panthéon. C'est un temple pour les grands esprits, et les grands maréchaux, et les grands politiques, dans la mémoire de la France. Et la question de savoir qui doit être enterré ici relève d'une décision grave. Et lorsque Mitterrand a été élu président — le premier président de gauche depuis deux siècles, pour ainsi dire — son premier geste a été de se rendre au Panthéon. Donc là aussi, il y a philosophie, non pas religieuse, mais une religion de la nation, de la tradition républicaine, et c'est une philosophie. La philosophie politique française — la déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme, etc. — s'incarne au Panthéon.

Or, vous avez un certain nombre d'autres édifices religieux qui s'élèvent plus haut que les autres, et il existe une loi qui interdit désormais de construire des immeubles plus hauts. Cette philosophie implique que la taille de l'homme — la taille normale, idéale, anthropologique — ne doit pas être écrasée par des gratte-ciel. Et donc, il n'y a pratiquement pas de gratte-ciel.

S'il en existe un ou deux, ce n'est que pour nous avertir qu'il n'en faut pas davantage, d'accord? Et ça aussi, c'est une philosophie, une sorte d'éthique. J'improvise, d'accord? Ce que j'aimerais suggérer sinon développer, c'est que chaque choix — même celui du président de la République (et comme vous savez, tout ce qui est construit à Paris, l'est selon la volonté du Président; au cours des dernières décennies, ce que nous appelons les "grands projets" ont dû être décidés, signés et contresignés par le président, non pas de la ville, mais de la nation, et ceci est vrai pour Beaubourg, pour La Défense, pour le nouveau Louvre) — chaque choix signifie que nous sommes là en présence d'un concept monarchique de l'autorité architecturale ou urbaine.

CH Mais je ne parlais pas des églises ou des monuments culturels, tout cela est parfaitement clair, je veux parler des nouveaux monuments de la ville. Derrière Beaubourg, on voit beaucoup d'immeubles HLM, qui définissent la ville de maintenant. La mémoire que nous avons de la ville, ou la ville que nous imaginons, est celle d'il y a cent ans. La réalité de la ville de maintenant est celle de la circulation et de ces immeubles, car beaucoup de gens habitent ces quartiers. Donc, je vois beaucoup de concepts derrière les grands projets récents, mais je ne vois aucun concept philosophique derrière ces immeubles. Je vois des concepts de marketing, des concepts politiques électoralistes. Je vois beaucoup de concept industriels, économiques.

D Vous avez trop de respect pour la philosophie. Vous pensez qu'il n'y a philosophie que là où les philosophes écrivent des systèmes philosophiques. Or, il y a une philosophie dans le marketing. Privilégier le marketing, c'est faire un choix philosophique. Quand je dis qu'il y a philosophie, je ne veux pas dire qu'il

y a de profonds philosophes qui construisent des systèmes et inspirent les architectes. Non, lorsque vous donnez votre préférence au marketing, à la fonctionnalité industrielle, c'est de la philosophie. C'est une manière d'organiser la ville, d'organiser les modes de vie, etc. Et il y a toujours conflit. Il y a ceux qui veulent garder intacte la mémoire, la trace de la mémoire. Même lorsqu'on construit quelque chose de nouveau, il faut s'accommoder de cette mémoire. D'autres pensent que *si* nous voulons avoir quelque chose de nouveau, il faut détruire. D'autres encore — la troisième catégorie — tentent de greffer quelque chose sur l'ancienne structure, sans détruire, mais en produisant des formes nouvelles qui puissent garder la mémoire sans avoir à renoncer à l'invention. Un exemple, que je citerais sans jugement de valeur, serait les colonnes de Buren au Palais Royal qui, bien qu'elles aient choqué plus d'un, ont laissé intacte l'ancienne structure. Comme l'a fait la pyramide du Louvre. Ceci montre que nous restaurons l'ancienne structure, mais qu'en même temps nous ajoutons quelque chose de nouveau; et nous commençons à nous habituer à ces nouveaux corps hybrides de l'architecture.

CH / RH Le "remodelage de toiture" de Coop Himmelblau à Vienne, ressemble beaucoup à ce concept de déconstruire le corps ancien et de le conjuguer à une structure entièrement nouvelle.

CH Il n'empêche que le terme de déconstruction est souvent négativement connoté. Pour beaucoup de gens, l'architecture déconstructiviste est synonyme de destruction...

D On pourrait abandonner le terme. Je n'y suis pas particulièrement attaché.

CH Non, je veux dire que, s'il y a des éléments qui font sens dans l'ancienne structure, ils peuvent, ils doivent rester, sauf s'il faut les supprimer pour créer de nouveaux espaces. Mais il y a une autre question qui nous intéresse: en matière d'architecture, le concept est-il plus important que l'espace construit? Le concept — écrit, dessiné, ou publié dans une revue, par exemple — est-il plus important que l'action, que l'espace tri-dimensionnel? Ou est-ce la même chose?

D C'est une question très importante, bien sûr. D'abord, je dirais que, même en philosophie — dans ce que nous appelons philosophie, du moins à l'université, dans l'enseignement, dans l'écriture, etc., dans la déconstruction, et c'est là quelque chose que je ne cesse de répéter, qu'on m'écoute ou non — le concept n'est pas l'essentiel. La déconstruction n'a rien à voir avec les concepts en tant que tels. Les textes que j'écris, par exemple, ne sont pas régulés, ou disons, structurés par la relation aux concepts, la signification donnée par rapport au signifiant, le mot, l'espace et ainsi de suite. Le concept ne peut être dissocié de

ce que j'appellerais écrire un texte, un événement, une institution, un acte-parole, mon propre corps; et ce que j'appelle une trace, par exemple, n'est pas que l'écriture alphabétique qui reste sur la page. Je ne voudrais pas que vous mettiez le concept du côté de la philosophie, ni l'architecture du côté de la construction. En parlant maintenant de l'architecture, je dirais que parfois — ça dépend d'événements ponctuels et spécifiques — un dessin publié dans une revue, par exemple, pourrait être un événement architectural plus important que quelque chose de bâti, qu'un immeuble gigantesque dans la ville; et il arrive parfois, pas chaque fois, pas toujours, que les écrits d'un architecte soient plus efficaces que tant de vrais bâtiments en pierre de taille. Donc, il ne faut pas fixer la limite entre le concept d'un projet et un bâtiment vraiment construit, car la limite est ailleurs. Bien sûr, ce que nous avons l'habitude d'appeler architecture implique que, à un moment donné, elle soit construite, visible et stabilisée — et c'est un concept que nous devons respecter. Pensez-vous, par exemple, que la stabilité est essentielle pour l'architecture? Est-ce qu'un avion est quelque chose d'architectural? Un avion, est-ce un produit architectural selon vous?

CH Bien sûr.

D Bien. Or, des matériaux tels que le bois ou la pierre ne sont pas indispensables à l'architecture; ça peut être du métal, ça peut être du verre. Si vous remplacez la stabilité ou n'importe quel type de matériau par la mobilité, le concept d'une architecture et l'opposition entre le dessin et le bloc de pierre commencent à vaciller. C'est pourquoi le concept d'architecture est si flou de nos jours, et ce n'est pas une catastrophe s'il est flou, s'il est plus flou encore, et pourquoi pas, il est flou, c'est la même chose pour la philosophie, la même chose pour la littérature, nous ne connaissons pas les limites entre architecture, littérature et cinéma. Vous avez lu ce qu'a écrit Bernard Tschumi, par exemple, quelque chose de simplement narratif, qui n'a jamais été construit, *The Manhattan Transcripts*? Qui sait s'il s'agit là de littérature, de philosophie, de cinéma ou d'architecture? Bien sûr, Tschumi est un architecte professionnel, il dirige une école d'architecture, et ce qu'il signe est censé être de l'architecture, mais rigoureusement, qualifieriez-vous les *Transcripts* d'œuvre architecturale? C'est une œuvre, c'est un travail, le reste on s'en moque. C'est pour cela que je ne suis pas particulièrement attaché au mot de déconstruction — mais je ne suis pas attaché au terme d'architecture non plus. Nous avons besoin des mots, nous avons besoin des titres pour des raisons qui sont extrinsèques à ce qui nous intéresse. Bien sûr, j'ai besoin qu'on m'appelle professeur, dans une certaine mesure, je ne dis pas que je ne sois pas professeur de philosophie, d'accord? Parce que j'ai un salaire, j'ai un petit bureau et j'ai un peu de légitimité; mais pour l'essentiel, si je

vais sous la surface des choses, je sais que je ne suis pas vraiment professeur, ce que j'écris n'est pas de la philosophie. Dans une certaine mesure, je négocie avec la ville, avec le budget, avec l'institution, etc., et je pense qu'il en va de même pour l'architecture. Nous avons besoin du mot, il faut pouvoir affirmer qu'il existe une discipline qui puisse être enseignée dans les institutions, mais au-delà d'un certain point la rigueur des limites pose problème.

CH / RH Donc, nous n'avons jamais vraiment quitté la tour de Babel, car le processus éternel d'interruptions et de continuités ne cesse d'exister et de coexister. D'un côté, il y a la continuité qui consiste à ériger des bâtiments qui représentent, comme vous l'avez dit, la religion, la politique, voire un nom. Et de l'autre, vous avez un processus continu d'interruptions, un processus auquel nous attribuons le mythe de la tour de Babel. Ce que je veux dire est que l'interruption du chantier de la tour, donnant lieu à une sorte de chaos primaire, est survenue à une époque où beaucoup d'autres pyramides ont été achevées. Et il se trouve que l'histoire a mystifié cette négociation inachevée, rompue, d'une tour qui aurait pu n'être qu'un incident, un échec dont l'histoire a néanmoins tenu compte en la transformant en mythe.

CH C'est une histoire d'interruptions de la stabilité. Si nous pouvions regarder un processus infiniment complexe avec une capacité infinie d'innocence, nous n'aurions pas besoin d'un mythe comme celui de la tour de Babel, pour avoir des fondations et pour chercher la rupture.

D Bien sûr, lorsque j'ai fait mention de la non-stabilité, ou de la mobilité, je ne voulais pas dire qu'il faille chercher à éviter la stabilité à tout prix. Nous ne pouvons pas renoncer à une certaine stabilité. Même lorsque nous construisons quelque chose de mobile, il s'agit d'une mobilité qui comporte une certaine stabilité : un avion est stable; bien sûr, il bouge, mais il se déplace comme un corps cohérent, qui demeure ce qu'il est. Donc, même une mobilité architecturale présuppose une certaine stabilité, un degré de stabilisation. Ce que je voulais dire était ceci: le fait qu'une certaine stabilité soit nécessaire, le fait qu'elle soit produite, implique qu'elle soit stabilisée sur une instabilité sans fond, sur un chaos en quelque sorte; il y a chaos, il y a quelque chose qui bouge constamment, qui est instable. Le fait que la stabilité n'est pas une donnée naturelle — il n'y a aucune stabilité naturelle — implique que la stabilité artificielle de l'architecture soit une stabilisation, quelque chose qui produit de la stabilité au sol, sur le fond sans fond de l'instabilité, d'un désordre possible, de ce que j'appellerais chaos. Cela veut dire que même les monuments les plus stables et durables ont une part d'instabilité qui est inscrite en eux; leur stabilité n'est pas infinie, il s'agit déjà de ruines, de ruines possibles. C'est ce que je voulais dire, ce sont des ruines

possibles. Et donc, la structure de la ruine s'inscrit dans le plus solide des bâtiments. La ruine n'est pas un hasard qui, à un moment donné, frappe certains bâtiments tandis que d'autres sont épargnés. La ruine est au commencement, en quelque sorte, nous construisons des ruines tout le temps. A l'intérieur de ce concept général de la ruine, il existe des concepts plus restreints. Par exemple, Walter Benjamin disait que la période baroque s'intéressait plus que d'autres aux ruines. Cela pose problème, mais parlons-en. Par là, Benjamin voulait dire de vraies ruines, des ruines en tant que telles, où l'on voit le démembrement de la totalité. Mais le fait est que même le bâtiment le mieux achevé est une ruine, étant hanté par sa ruine éventuelle. Et la déconstruction, particulièrement celle de l'architecture, est peut-être un moyen de penser la ruine, la ruine possible de tout, la structure finie de tout bâtiment. C'est fini. C'est mortel, en quelque sorte; nous construisons contre la mortalité, ce qui revient à dire que nous confirmons cette mortalité.

CH J'aime l'image de l'architecture telle qu'elle se trouve dans un état de transition. Par exemple, j'aime gratter la surface jusqu'à ce que les termes de l'image deviennent interchangeables en-dessous, c'est-à-dire jusqu'à ce que l'esquisse devienne de l'architecture, la réalité, une pièce architecturale; et la même chose est vraie des mots qu'écrit l'architecte.

D Disons que le mot est utile, pas plus.

CH Et les termes sont-ils interchangeables?

D Ça dépend du contexte, ça dépend des gens qui parlent. Parfois je dis, eh bien, je ne suis pas philosophe, j'abandonnerais volontiers le terme dans mes activités philosophiques. Et dans d'autres contextes, lorsque je vois que les forces politiques veulent supprimer la philosophie, je deviens un militant de la philosophie, je dis alors qu'il y a une philosophie qu'il faut maintenir, qu'il faut la développer. Parler ou agir selon le contexte, ce n'est pas du relativisme empirique. Chaque acte politique doit tenir compte du contexte, du lieu, de la situation et ainsi de suite.

CH J'aime beaucoup le statut transitoire des termes, l'instabilité des mots comme celle des structures architecturales, qui renferment à la fois une stabilité et une instabilité.

D Oui. C'est la stabilité qui est en concurrence avec un fond d'instabilité, de ce que j'appelle le chaos: quelque chose que l'on ne peut pas maîtriser, qui se transforme constamment. C'est ce que j'appelle le désordre absolu. Ainsi, l'architecture construit un ordre sur fond d'instabilité.

CH Un fond sans fond.

D Un fond sans fond, si vous voulez.

CH / RH J'ai une autre question: Avez-vous des critiques à formuler par rapport à l'architecture, par exemple, la façon dont elle est couverte par les médias? Si on est très critique, on pourrait dire que, plus on parle d'un "événement", plus on se met à douter, à soupçonner l'existence d'un "non événement" derrière ces faits médiatisés.

D Eh bien vous savez, je ne sais pas s'il s'agit ou non d'une critique, mais je dirais que je suis très attentif au fait que le discours architectural, ou les publications architecturales, soient très riches. Ce qui veut dire que, dans son état actuel, l'architecture est liée aux grandes puissances économiques de la civilisation, des cultures occidentales. Et c'est là quelque chose que je ne critique pas, mais il faut faire attention à cela, à la dimension politique. Le fait que les revues d'architecture soient les plus belles, et c'est une bonne chose, peut néanmoins nous amener à poser la question: pourquoi est-ce ainsi? Pourquoi sont-elles plus chères que les ouvrages de philosophie, par exemple? Pourquoi l'architecture serait-elle plus séduisante, plus utile? Pourquoi les pouvoirs économique et politique sont-ils si promptes à soutenir l'architecture alors qu'ils ne soutiennent pas l'enseignement de la philosophie, ou des humanités dans l'université, voire même les autres arts, comme la peinture? Pourquoi est-ce ainsi? Au cours de la conférence que j'ai donnée au Japon, j'ai insisté sur le fait que les meilleurs architectes d'aujourd'hui — les plus audacieux, les plus inventifs — ont cessé, et ils ont raison, de prêter trop d'attention aux problèmes sociaux et politiques — celui du logement par exemple. Ce qu'ils font est plus formel, plus formaliste; parfois même les architectes associés à la déconstruction, je dis d'accord, je comprends pourquoi vous ne voulez pas écouter, disons, les codes politiques, les commissions de logement qui disent, "Eh bien, vous devriez construire du logement social, quelque chose pour les sans-abri, faire du travail social"; d'accord, parce que si cela implique d'employer les vieux schémas architecturaux, vous avez raison, vous ne devriez pas le faire. Néanmoins, vous devriez essayer de devenir plus politiques, d'une façon nouvelle, consciemment politiques; vous devriez prêter attention aux sources d'investissement, à la manière dont vos inventions sont utilisées, ou exploitées pour ainsi dire. Pourquoi est-il possible de construire de l'architecture déconstructiviste au Japon, à Los Angeles, peut-être à Berlin, et non pas en Centre Afrique ou en Chine? Quels sont les nouveaux liens avec le capitalisme? Je dirais qu'il faut procéder à une analyse nouvelle, et non pas selon les anciens schémas, de cette architecture inventive. Mais bien sûr, mon discours n'a pas été très bien reçu pour autant que j'ai pu comprendre.

CH J'imagine.

D Mes bons amis m'ont dit, "Eh bien, nous sommes des politiques, nous savons, nous sommes constamment aux prises — et je pense que c'est vrai — avec les pouvoirs politiques, avec la ville de Berlin, avec telle ou telle ville"; pourtant, lutter contre les autorités de Los Angeles, de Berlin, n'est pas exactement le but recherché, quelle que soit l'importance de cette lutte. Donc, je pense qu'il faut élaborer un nouveau discours politique. Personne n'est prêt à cela. Les vieux schémas marxistes, bien sûr, ne sont plus utiles dans une certaine mesure, mais ils ne sont pas morts pour autant, ils ne sont pas tout simplement démodés, il faut trouver quelque chose de nouveau avec la chose ancienne.

CH Y a-t-il un problème comparable dans la philosophie d'aujourd'hui?

D Oui, comparable. Mais bien sûr, il nous faudrait une médiation pour déterminer l'affinité. Il existe des problèmes analogues, mais aussi d'énormes différences: nous ne construisons pas, nous n'avons pas besoin d'autant d'argent, nous ne sommes pas aux prises avec les décideurs politiques, pas de la même façon. Un architecte, dès qu'il construit quelque chose, doit rencontrer le maire, l'homme d'État, le président de la République, les pouvoirs économiques, etc. Le pauvre philosophe doit convaincre ou l'éditeur, ou ses étudiants.

CH En ce qui concerne l'architecture, on pourrait dire que les politiques et autres gens de pouvoir qui ont une influence sur l'architecture ne s'intéressent plus tellement à la philosophie, qu'ils se moquent un peu de l'esthétique.

D Ça dépend. À Berlin ou à Prague, par exemple, j'ai participé à des conférences organisées par le Sénat de Berlin, ou par les politiques de Prague, et je me souviens qu'ils voulaient avoir quelque chose comme un concept philosophique de ce à quoi la ville devait ressembler demain. Ce qu'ils en feront est un autre problème, mais au moins ils étaient soucieux d'écouter le point de vue du philosophe, de savoir ce qu'il pourrait être.

CH Lorsque vous dites qu'il faut élaborer une nouvelle pensée politique, est-ce que ça a trait à l'utopie?

D Ah, l'utopie pose un problème énorme. Pas forcément sous la forme de l'utopie, mais je ne l'écarterais pas comme cela, l'utopie peut avoir une certaine valeur, mais vous savez, c'est très difficile...

CH Oui, ce n'est peut-être pas le bon mot, disons, à l'imagination du futur?

D Oui, même si elle paraît impossible, même si vous ne faites que l'écrire ou la dessiner, sans pouvoir la construire, elle demeure efficace. Même si vous imaginez ou inventez quelque chose qu'il est impossible de construire aujourd'hui, qu'il s'agisse d'un discours ou d'un dessin, le fait de l'avoir écrit ou dessiné peut avoir un effet sur ce qui va être construit à l'avenir. Donc, il ne faut pas renoncer à l'utopie ou aux projets abstraits, impossibles. Quelque part j'ai

écrit, mais je ne voulais pas me citer, que la seule invention possible est l'invention de l'impossible.

Ceci pourrait être la fin d'un entretien impossible.

CH Oui, merci beaucoup.

D Non, merci à vous.

Traduit de l'anglais par Kenneth Hylton

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Coop Himmelb(l)au Between Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis: Interview with Wolf D. Prix

KHŌREIN: Where does architecture as a profession stand today, in general, and where is it in relation to philosophy?

WOLF D. PRIX: Well, our profession has come to an end. Radical architecture is only radical when it's built. If it isn't, it's like the notes Beethoven, Mozart or Bach wrote on paper. Only a minority can understand them, only a few can read the notes and hear the music. So now, architecture only exists on paper and at an academic level. This doesn't match reality. As architects, we have to consider this, but not overthink it. With philosophy, one risks getting lost in things that are far away from reality.

KH: Why do you think this is so?

WP: There is something very important that Derrida told me in 1992, thirty-three years ago. I disagree with it, although maybe it's true, now that I think about it—that a little sketch is sometimes more important than lots of built projects. I agree, but only in a context that has nothing to do with social responsibility, and that's a problem. I can now see that the students who come to our office have no idea about architecture at all. They know how to use computer programs, but that's not architecture. They know how to delegate life to the machine. As Erich Fromm said, this makes me very worried about the future because a society that delegates life to machines has a death wish. When I look at Elon Musk, I think this comment is right.

KH: In 1992, Coop Himmelb(l)au had an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou. Did you know Derrida before this exhibition?

WP: Yes, because the Deconstructivist exhibition at the MoMA took place in 1988. The term "Decon" architecture was already in common use by then. I have a completely different view of the deconstructivist philosophy.

KH: You have said that you were against deconstruction?

WP: My view of so-called deconstructivist philosophy in connection to architecture is very different. These architects claim that we can tear a building down and put it back in a different way. However, the way Derrida explained it to me—since I am not a philosopher and haven't read much of his work—was that he was influenced by Freud. He was interested in how the subconscious operates. So, long before Derrida and 1988, as early as the sixties and seventies, at the start of my career—but I should mention that my father was an architect, and I knew from the moment I saw [Le Corbusier's] La Tourette that I wanted to be an architect. There is a little chapel there that catches the light not through windows, but through these tubes in the ceiling. When we started, we wanted to change architecture radically. We needed to find a way to do that. We said that the first sketch of whatever one is designing is the most important thing. We must liberate that sketch and that moment from all external pressures, such as codes, rules, aesthetics, and philosophy. We thought that if we could liberate space from these rules, architecture would become free. Even our name, Coop Himmelb(l)au, has nothing to do with architecture, but it shows where this idea comes from.

KH: What do you mean when you say architecture must be free? You mean some kind of autonomy?

WP: In order to create open, pressure-free architecture that influences the context and social situation, the architect must be free. We thought that we had to redesign or rethink the moment of the conception process. To do so, we—myself along with my friends, collaborators, and partners used the subconscious to rethink this moment of conception. You have to be free of all circumstantial pressure.

KH: Does this mean opening something before the concept is created, before conception itself?

WP: I use a pen, not a computer. At the beginning is the sketch. I just draw without thinking, "Oh, I can't do that because the client won't like it," or "It doesn't meet fire codes," or anything like that. It is just free sketching. All the while, we talk about the project. The iconic project we did was the Open House. We had an exhibition in New York where we showed a lot of sketches and explained that we build models because architecture is a three-dimensional language that can only be understood by being grasped or conceptualized (*begreifen*) this way.

Then, we received a call from a Viennese psychologist who wanted us to design a house for him in Los Angeles. When we asked where the house was, we were told, "You should come and see the site." Although we didn't go, we talked a lot about the house. We were free to design it however we wanted, but we had to follow the sketch and model. We discussed the project for at least a month. I remember it clearly. To escape all the drawings, I closed my eyes and could see the house in my mind, as if it were a psychogram of the upcoming house. I used my pen as a seismograph, and we immediately built a small model. Then, we started thinking about the practical aspects, such as the plans and structure—but always following the sketch!

Derrida says—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—that every artwork, whether a text, painting, or piece of music, contains a trace of the artist's unconscious. This means that the artist's unconscious rules the entire work. This was long before the MoMA exhibition. We found a site for the house and started building it—not on site because the steelwork had to be done here; it couldn't be done in the US. It was rather complicated. However, the client passed away, and his children no longer wanted the house. It was never finished.

KH: So, at the beginning, was Derrida on your mind?

WP: No! Derrida wasn't on our board at that time. We were invited to work on many projects like that house. People were looking to Philip Johnson or Mark Wigley for inspiration, as they were interested in the geometry of buildings. But that was not our approach.

KH: Why did you think back then that you didn't belong to this group?

WP: They—especially Eisenman—were always quoting Derrida. "Derrida told me to do it this way." We thought, okay, he's going in this direction, but we could go deeper by using the unconscious. It wasn't about taking some forms and putting them together; it was about the method of liberating space by getting rid of conventions, rules, regulations, and aesthetics. We didn't care.

KH: This means you had never met Derrida before that interview?

WP: No, never. Then, in 1992, we had an exhibition organized by Regine Haslinger at a time when everyone was talking about deconstruction.

KH: Do you remember whether Derrida saw your exhibition at the Centre Pompidou?

WP: I don't know. He was giving a lecture. I can't remember exactly what he said, but I don't recall him mentioning Freud at all. I didn't want to talk to him about this aspect of working through the subconscious. I read his work later on.

KH: In that interview, Derrida talks about "the new," and you mentioned that "the new," or innovation is important to you. He mentions this question several times, without prompting. And at the end, he also talks about "impossibility"...

WP: Che Guevara made the following remark: "Be realistic; demand the impossible." I like to quote that, even to my students.

KH: How can we see impossibility in your built projects?

WP: Well, I've learnt a lot about strategies for overcoming the argument that something cannot be built. For example, we were once asked to design a private school in Germany. They said: "It's a very nice project, but it's too ambitious; it cannot be built." We returned home and brought in a consultant to help us prove that it could indeed be built. Then they said: "It can be built, but it will be too expensive." So, we went back again and found a way to keep it within budget. Then they said: "It can be built within budget, but you know, *es gefällt mir nicht*, I don't like it."

KH: What is your response to that? In this case, architecture becomes the destruction of impossibility. You are proving that it is possible to do it, to build it.

WP: Yes, this is the same argument we used to prove by referring to space exploration. Before 1969, nobody thought it would be possible to see the Earth from space. Remember the *Life* magazine cover that said: "The Blue Planet." That image pushed us to consider the impossible as possible. We learned that the constraints we have to overcome can have many answers. For example, to go to the moon, there were many constraints, but also many ways to overcome them. Consider the Soviet and U.S. designs of helmets, or the different patterns of red dots and black spots on the wings of butterflies. Why? Trial and error. Development requires trial and error. Otherwise, you always build the same things, like the Ancient Greeks did.

I always say: We have Ferraris and Porsches today, so why should I ride a horse? This applies not only to the car industry, but also to the weapons and military industries. They are more intelligent than architects. And clients. Architects aren't always the least intelligent people in the room; sometimes it's the clients.

KH: It seems to us that the way you work involves interrupting the connection between architecture and philosophy. Is this correct?

WP: It's not exactly interrupting. Philosophy is very important. It certainly influences the way we think. However, philosophy itself is not important to me as an architect for developing myself and my way of thinking. Otherwise, I'd end up doing the same as Eisenman or Tschumi.

KH: You were close with them, is that correct?

WP: Yes, we were friends. Especially with Zaha Hadid. She told me that she wasn't a deconstructivist.

KH: This exhibition on deconstructivism is interesting because all of you participated, and yet you all say in the end, "we are not deconstructivists."

WP: Yes, no one wants to be a deconstructivist. In common discourse, deconstructivism is associated with *zerstören*, which means to destroy. But we weren't destroying anything. We just had a different way of designing.

KH: Or constructing?

WP: Well, yes, but that came later. For example, I was always against columns. After all, I'm from the generation of 1968. Anti-authoritarian thinking, like that of the Frankfurt School, was very important to us. Popper's book *Open Society and Its Enemies* was also important.

I remember Derrida telling us to think socially. We were rather angry because we thought that thinking about open architecture wasn't the opposite of being social. I'm thinking about the self-determination of people, if I can put it that way.

KH: But you think that you might be closer to his ideas than the others?

WP: Yes, perhaps ironically. We were never explicit about this. Everyone kept saying, "We are not deconstructivists," so I held back my idea about using the subconscious. In our school we had to learn about Freud, that was part of our education.

KH: After that interview, you never met or spoke with Derrida again? Nor did you write anything about deconstruction?

WP: Correct, only a lot of talking.

KH: Did you write anything about the unconscious, though?

WP: I think so, but it didn't come up with Derrida. I wrote more about open architecture, referring to the idea of the open society.

KH: In the interview with Derrida, you resist his positions the whole time. Sometimes, he even sounds a little angry. As you remember, he could be quite irascible...

WP: I don't think he was angry, but he was lecturing us. I had a lot of respect for people who knew more than I did. I was young then, I wanted to learn, so I listened to Corbusier, Louis Kahn, and Frank Gehry. It's

good to learn from others in different fields. I read a lot about the Rolling Stones, about the Beatles, but not about architects.

KH: How do you see your work today compared with what you were doing in 1988?

WP: That has nothing to do with this time. Those were projects that were never built. By choosing the name *Himmelb(l)au*, we made it clear that we were far from conventional architectural thinking. As an architect, it's hard to say, "I hate columns," because everyone wants them, especially postmodern architects. I hate them because the column is a synonym for pressure. It's important to me to use reinforced structures because they're under tension; they're dynamic.

The development of architecture can best be illustrated by comparing the Doric temple in Paestum to the BMW Welt in Munich. The temple's 1,300-square-meter roof required 36 supports to hold it up. By contrast, the BMW Welt's roof is ten times larger and is supported by only eleven pillars.

KH: At one conference on Jeffrey Kipnis and the new[1], Eisenman said that deconstruction is just a method. Do you think of it that way? Is it a design tool for architects?

WP: To make it more understandable, we said that it is a design method, but essentially it is a way of thinking. At the time, we were much more interested in development. We examined how evolution works—trial and error, Popper, and so on—and used all of that to develop a project. It is very difficult to do so in a big office. Very tough.

KH: What is the architectural concept for you?

WP: I cannot answer this [laughter]. I have no architectural concept, so it would be difficult to explain. We receive a program and try to organize it. All of our buildings are highly functional and climate-appropriate. To me, this is craftsmanship. I learned that from my father and at school.

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[1] Symposium Jeffrey Kipnis & The Quest for the New — 19 May 2022; https://coop-himmelblau.at/news/2022-05-19-symposium-jeffrey-kipnis-the-quest-for-the-new-19-may-2022/

It's not necessarily architecture, but creating great new spaces really depends on the program the building has, although this may sound banal. I don't design military buildings, I don't do nuclear silos. I want to design schools, museums, cultural buildings, conference centres, etc.

KH: What do you think about design and AI, new software, new technologies? For example, you talk about dynamic structures, and now we have 4D printing, with the memory of materials, amongst many other new tools.

WP: This is very interesting. All the new programs are interesting, but they are only tools. First, architecture is a three-dimensional language. We build models to see if everything fits together. Renderings are the fake news of architecture because you can manipulate them to suit the client's preferences. That's stupid. But the computer is a very helpful tool.

Young architects say that AI is helping them. I respond that there is no such thing as artificial intelligence, only *architectural intelligence*. AI is a fantastic tool for bringing inspiration to the design process and reducing work time. We have all our projects in our library, and we can put them together—for example, if a new opera building is being designed, we can bring together previous similar projects. We are far from achieving AI that can organize a building the way we want.

If you ask how AI could help, imagine a client who wants an opera house. In ten or fifteen years, you can give the program to my AI assistant, and the rest of the office can go on vacation to the Maldives. After two weeks, we come back and say, "This is wrong. Change a few things and give it to the model maker." Then, we go on vacation to Bermuda. When we return, we send the project to the client along with the bill, and then we go on vacation again. It will never happen like that. It's naive to think so. AI will certainly help us, but only if we control it.

This reminds me a little of Elon Musk's theory to delegate everything to the machine. My friend Wolf Singer, a neurologist who studies the brain, says that flies have to make decisions in milliseconds to survive. Even the most advanced computer can't make this decision in under two weeks. The brain is still the best.

KH: You think that the mind has the capacity to decide?

WP: Yes, and hopefully it will stay with us so that we can continue to think in complex ways as we always have.

KH: Then what is the position of design? Where does design happen? In the brain, in the mind, or artificially, via the computer? How do thinking, designing, and the computer fit together?

WP: In German, designing is *entwerfen*, where *ent-* refers to the subconscious—*entäußern, entflammen, und entwickeln*—and *werfen* means to throw, to project. This is how we describe our design process. "Design" is not a good word. We design glasses, vases, and ashtrays. "Entwerfen" is much more than following a method. Do you know what Bob Dylan says, "you don't need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows?"

KH: Then the question is: what are you doing when you're deciding? When you are in the position to werfen, to project, what are you doing? Do you work intuitively?

WP: Mostly. I usually work on the model rather than the drawing. I can read the organization of the project from a ground plan or cross-section blueprint. However, to understand how it will define a new context, I need to see it as a model. This is intuitive.

KH: What inspires your first sketches?

WP: I try to imagine how people might use the space. And I leave it as open as possible.

KH: For transformation?

WP: Yes, for transformation, too. I don't care if they remodel the entire project.

KH: Comparing the design or methodology of a project with the built object, can you see a dynamism in the finished, completed work? Of course, you always somehow follow this dynamic structure, but how do we find that fragile thing, that instability in the built project? We started this conversation saying that the most important thing for an architect is to build...

WP: Yes, but I was referring to "radical" architecture, which only exists in radical buildings. Whether or not an architect wants to build is a personal decision; it's not a universal rule. I would never create a universal rule or recipe for everyone. The only advice I give students is: develop your self-confidence and find a strategy to realize your ideas. I can't give you codes, rules, or regulations. The golden ratio isn't even really found in nature. Look behind the scenes and ask yourself: why does the client want this? Why does the city need this project in this location? Is it political or personal (which is the best kind of client).

Or, is it just following rules and regulations because a street must go through there? You can criticize that, but not too much, or you might lose the project. If you ask uncomfortable questions, you're out.

When I visited the Pyramid of Pharaoh Djoser, I was impressed by its presence. Now, they are trying to figure out how they built it and how they used math. I imagine Imhotep, the architect, standing next to the pharaoh on the palace balcony and saying: "Mr. Pharaoh, what do you think about building something like this for you after you die?" Today, you can't do that; everything has to follow rules and regulations. You have to prove things; certain things seem obligatory, but they aren't. That's what is fascinating about this "deconstruction philosophy." We never know what is right or wrong; or, everyone is right, but nothing is correct.

KH: What about the autonomy of architecture?

WP: Oh, it's all in schools. You could play around and define your own thing, but now there are codes, rules, and regulations. Can you imagine two presidents (Trump and Zelensky) arguing in the Oval Office of the White House? We lost. My generation lost. All the ideas we had about new societies and development are gone. Schools haven't changed. The education system is the same. My kids bring home the same notes I did. Kids are on their phones, which makes me skeptical and worried about how things will turn out. Architects are trying so hard to be cool, but they're sweating. Our situation is hopeless but not serious.

Interview conducted by Petar Bojanić, Snežana Vesnić, Edward Djordjevic, Andrea Perunović, and Sara Dragišić.

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Against Geometry. Architecture in Continuum: Interview with Kengo Kuma

AYA JAZAIERLY: *Khōrein* is a journal for architecture and philosophy. And this issue, through the topic of "phenomenon," bridges between practice and phenomenology. In this framework, we would like to know more about what you have in mind when you are doing architecture or when you are producing architectural acts.

First we would like to ask you a little bit about philosophy. Which philosopher or philosophers have you read, or are you reading now? And if you can give us some idea about your relationship with philosophy. And specifically, Japanese philosophers.

KENGO KUMA: The theme I'm interested in recently, because of my exhibition in Venice[1] last year, is the concept of language and onomatopoeia, which my practice is interested in exploring and applying in architectural design. For example, my favorite onomatopoeia, *para para (パラパラ)*, is translated into *particlized* phenomenon: instead of using big volumes, we try to cut it into small particles, with small distances between them. And that kind of phenomenon is very similar to the phenomena in the forest: the leaves, the trunks, and branches are at some distance, and natural light filters through those small particles. So, we basically feel some kind of sympathy to that kind of phenomena. But it is difficult to describe that kind of phenomena and the term *para para* is the most useful word to explain it.

And in our office design meetings, we often use *para para*: "we need more *para para*, or we need much *para para*"... that is a very typical discussion for us in the office. Why am I interested in this onomatopoeic

[1] Referring to "KENGO KUMA Onomatopoeia Architecture" exhibition for the 18th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice, held at Palazzo Franchetti (May–November 2023).

vocabulary? Maybe the reason is that we tried to show or explain some kind of phenomena using scientific vocabulary. By "scientific," I mean not coming from individual senses. I try to find some common word to explain the phenomena. And maybe it's related to phenomenology. In the twentieth century, people started to talk about phenomenology, it was considered as an individual feeling towards the place. Personal, individual experience, is always considered as a phenomenon.

But if we are living together and we are in the same space, maybe people's experience can have some similarity; some common experience exists. And onomatopoeia is the best way to explain that kind of common experience. But usually, in architectural design, nobody uses onomatopoeia. The vocabulary we use comes from geometry: the cylinders, or circles... But geometry is related to geometrical design. I'm not interested in that kind of geometrical design. What I'm interested in is some ambiguity, and without focusing on the shape, we can get some experience from that kind of ambiguity. That is the main reason I try to avoid the vocabulary from geometry and instead I use onomatopoeia. Also, in Japanese we have many forms of onomatopoeia, much more than in most other languages. Besides Japanese, Basque, and some African languages have a similar number of onomatopoeias, but I think Japanese tops the list. And my understanding, as to why this onomatopoeia happened, is that Japanese people are interested in natural phenomena.

And because of Japanese conditions—Japan is an island, it is very tough, very small, dense place. And we have always had disasters, typhoons, earthquakes... Every year we have these kinds of disasters. So people began to think that nature is much stronger than us and that taking care of nature and the environment is the key to survival.

These tough conditions made Japanese people [prone] to that kind of phenomenon. It is the Japanese lifestyle, I think. And Japanese has weak structures; it has many words to explain the phenomena. It is very different from other languages.

My architectural design is related to this Japanese way of thinking, way of living with nature. It is different from China. Chinese is not ambiguous. It has a very simple structure, and they don't use onomatopoeia so often.

ANDREA CANCLINI: It's like hosting nature in the language. Receiving nature in the language.

KK: Yes.

PETAR BOJANIĆ: Is it possible also to say that onomatopoeia contains mimesis, that you are trying to imitate what is close to you, protecting, and at the same time reconstructing it? Is it possible to say that onomatopoeia starts to be creative, when you are producing something? How can we design something through this protocol of onomatopoeia?

KK: In the beginning, we used very few "onomatopoeias": *para para* (パラパラ), or *tsun tsun* (ツンツン). But recently we have expanded the vocabulary to explain some ambiguous situations. Because I began to understand that onomatopoeia is very useful to talk about design in the team. And maybe that kind of approach is different from other firms.

PB: Certainly the way you are producing new *concepts* with onomatopoeia is different from a Western way. That's the new design *concept*? Is it possible to say that?

KK: Yes, it is. The main design concept is onomatopoeia.

The "material" is always our main theme. As you know, we are interested in using natural materials: wood, stone, or clay. But our way of using materials is different from the "normal" way. The "normal" way to use materials is applying it as a texture on the building volume; it's like texture mapping in computer graphics—after deciding on the shape of the building, architects map and add textures to the volume; that is the "normal" or common way for material application, acting just as a thin skin. But I'm not interested in designing a thin skin; instead, we are using wood to create small particles, or the condition of "tsun tsun," for example: *tsun* means sharp edge that gives a strong magical feeling, not sharp as metal edge or a knife, which gives us a sense of risk or danger. But the *tsun tsun* onomatopoeia applied in this project [GC Prostho Musuem, 2010, Aichi, Japan], for example, you can see the edge of the wood bar is coming to us, as if attacking us. Here, the wood material is not that thin surface, the material is a kind of "animal," I feel. There is always some relationship between the animal and the human. And onomatopoeia is the best way to explain this relationship between animal life and us. The

wood in the forest also has this "tsun tsun" feeling... the branches, and the leaves, and the sharp edges are giving us some feeling, and our life always depends on the relationship with other lives and we should find a way to explain the essence of that relationship.

AJ: So, the materials are active and not passive.

KK: Yes, exactly, active!

AJ: You previously mentioned the word "common," as in common *experience* in terms of the Japanese way or *feeling* translated through onomatopoeia. It is not an individual experience, but it's a common experience. How can you define this "common"? The way you explain it seems like it's a feeling that anyone would have, a child or a grown-up. But how is this achievable in architecture, in practice, in the daily practice in the office?

KK: Using onomatopoeia enhances our sensibility to the material. Without using onomatopoeia, people often misunderstand and consider wood just as a surface. People often say that we use wood for the façade, and it's beautiful! Okay, but in fact, using wood as surface is just the beginning, we should develop the relationship between lives: the material and the human.

AJ: You spoke a little bit about Japan and disaster; in your public talks you always talk about disaster as a possibility of change. So, are you only interested in natural disasters? What about political, social, economic major shifts? What's your view on that and how does this affect architecture?

KK: Historically, for the Japanese, political disasters and natural disasters are not so different. If a disaster happens, such as a big earthquake or fire, people would blame politicians who made a mistake, and heaven punished us. So, there is no division between political and natural disasters; it's one thing, it's connected.

AC: It's a common destiny.

AJ: Do you think that climate change and the climate emergency, is a sort of natural disaster as a result of political crisis?

KK: Maybe, as most of Japanese think, it is basically one thing. And this is also the problem of Japan: we don't do political protests against politicians because we persevere and practice resilience; "how to survive quietly" is important in Japan. Japanese mentality is like that. In America, it is the total opposite: they always protest against something or speak up. In Japan, it is not polite to speak against somebody, and Japanese people prefer to always be quiet. This is also very much the case with disasters. There are always disasters and the disasters cannot be protested against.

AJ: So in line with that idea of disaster, you say that if we don't change the way we do things, we do architecture, we will perish in our own disaster, we create this disaster as architects, but also as a society. Yet, you rarely talk about sustainability. What then is your view on sustainability and the future that will exist between us and nature? What is the role of the architect in that?

KK: Sustainability is a kind of respect of nature. At the beginning of the twentieth century, people thought that we could control nature, and that we could do anything in the environment.

That arrogant way of thinking was the basis of the twentieth century industrialization. But now we began to think that nature is basically uncontrollable. What we can do is reduce the damage to nature as much as we can. It's not perfect, and people have become very humble compared with the industrialization at the beginning of twentieth century. Our attitude has become very, very humble. Humbleness is the basis of sustainability, I think.

In that sense, this attitude, the humbleness is similar to the Japanese way.

PB: Can we go a little bit back? You mentioned the Japanese way several times.But we are sitting now in Paris. How do you modify, or do you modify your Japanese experience and way of thinking to build here?

KK: I think, the Japanese are kind of pioneers in this environmental crisis. Long before industrialization, the Japanese attitude towards nature was very humble: living in small spaces, consuming as little as possible. This kind of attitude was the basis of our tradition. And now, most people in the world began to think that this kind of humbleness is needed and

that without it we cannot survive anymore. This is why I think that the Japanese are pioneers of this humble lifestyle. And my dream is to apply this lifestyle to other places.

PB: But I think that there is something more. There is something more substantive in your Japanese experience here. You know, in structuralism we had several investigations 50 years ago, some kind of pre-linguistic moment, that means on one side there is grammar (or geometry as you said), and on the other side there is semiotics. For example, onomatopoeia belongs to semiotics. Here you are referring to onomatopoeia but written in Japanese letters, because when we say it in, for example, French or other European languages, we put onomatopoeia in grammar. Cuckoo, for example: once it is written it is already in grammar.

Here you are using letters, and with these letters you already have some kind of design moment, because the letters are already designed. And this is beautiful, practically from your letters, from your language you are exporting and transforming it into design and material. You said this is the Japanese way of thinking, but your letters also help you do this.

KK: It is a good point. For Japanese, the letters and these kinds of images are continuous. So, no clear border between the letters and image.

AC: It's a graphic onomatopoeia.

KK: And it is a 2-D graphic image, and architecture is a kind of 3-D image. And it is all continuous. Letters, 2-D, and 3-D are continuous.

AC: Exactly because, *ónoma* means name in Greek and *poieîn* means creation, so onomatopoeia means creation of names. So, it's a seamless creation from sound and graphic: description of this sound and then application in 3-D, and design is all together.

AJ: To follow up on this line of thought, you talk a lot about place and designing with place, with the context. What is *context* for you?

KK: Place is the basis of my creation. Because when we talk about place, we refer to the place for the "animal" to live, a place for humans (as animals), to survive. If we sit in one place, we are surrounded by so many lives, trees and animals.

PB: Would you call these objects?

KK: Yes, *living* objects. We are surrounded by living objects: water is flowing; sometimes, the flood or the typhoon are coming, but it is always the experience in the place. Ideas without the place have no meaning for the animal. This is totally different from Le Corbusier's idea. He tried to float buildings and separate them from their place. I think that kind of separation actually has no meaning. We should always stand in the place, on the ground, and we should start thinking from the place. And this is the difference from Modernist ideas to forget the place; this is the basis of modernism. I want to go back to the place.

AC: You're talking about this relation with the ground, the place. Could we say that this relation is one we establish with time in that place, as time is part of nature?

KK: Yes, time is part of nature and also the history of place is part of nature. Whenever I go to a site, I do some research of the history of that place. In postmodernism, history is not a history of nature; history is a kind of story. But the history of a place is the history of nature in that place and the history of the relationship with that place. I am very much interested in the history of a place.

PB: In that case, are you, as an architect, a holder of something common? Because you said, through onomatopoeia you are trying to make some kind of alternative grammar or geometry. When you are on site or in a place, you are not part of this context, you are *doing* something, you want to *do* something. As an architect, you make a design moment or gesture. You said you are trying to understand the history of this order of objects. And then what? What are you doing after that as an architect? Because you are certainly changing something?

KK: Yes. Gesture is very important. If I design something, the design is a "gesture" towards the environment. I want to invite people, or I want to control the moment, that kind of gesture, as an intention.

PB: Can we say that your gesture (from your perspective) is a social gesture? Because you hold people's opinion, you are trying to objectify the subject, the experience.

KK: Yes. My design process starts with doing the research of the history of a place, and also at the same time I want to hear people's opinions and idea for the place. And through this process, I want to objectify people's ideas.

PB: This is onomatopoeia. You are listening. And then?

KK: Yes. Research and listening. And then I propose something to the people. Also, we often do workshops, and I want to listen to the people's comments on the project. Dialogue with them is the best way to objectify the project.

PB: Yet, since you bring something new with you to a place, how do you use your own old experiences?

KK: Yes, old experience is very helpful to talk with people.

PB: Do you require interaction with others all the time? In studio also?

KK: Yes. And the references from the past are very important for the process.

PB: What does author or authorship mean, in that sense?

KK: Authorship is a kind of group creation. The group needs to have some kind of center, an organizer. And maybe I am an organizer of the creation.

AC: The organizer not the creator?

PB: Is it perhaps also Japanese?

KK: Yes, authorship is not so clear in Japan. For example, Western poems always have authors, but in Japan, Haiku is the result of group work.

AJ: You created this exhibition in 2018, "The Lab for Materials,"[2] for which you wrote: "I want my legacy to be the lab of materials [...] and

[2] Referring to Kengo Kuma's exhibition in Tokyo, titled "Kengo Kuma: a LAB for materials," in 2018.

not [architectural] objects." You talked a lot about the Anti-Object.[3] Our question here is: are you creating anti-objective objects? What is an "object" and what are "objects" for you, in your architectural projects?

KK: I think that our design, our product is always a temporary—non-permanent—object. Through that kind of process, we could create something. But this design is just the beginning, and the product can be modified again and again; there is no end to that process. It is continuous, architecture should change, in the process. Actually, Japanese wooden buildings are always changing, because wood is very easy to cut and adapt, and the columns of Japanese houses are always moving. It is a very special structural system that we have. And even structural columns can be moved to other places. Because life is always changing and architecture is always changing, following life.

AJ: Is it like Material Immaterial?[4]

KK: Yes.

AC: This is like "The ship of Theseus" paradox in Greek philosophy: if you have a boat and you replace all pieces of the boat over time, is it still the same boat?

AJ: In Tokyo, we are organizing a symposium[5] with you and with Professor Kenneth Frampton, with the title "Shared Phenomenology."

KK: "Shared Phenomenology" is a very interesting title.

AJ: We are interested in the intersection between phenomenology and social justice, society, public space, and the future of the built environment. In your view, what is Shared Phenomenology?

KK: We need to have some kind of new language in the team. Instead of a strong authorship of an architect, everyone [can] say something about design, or say something in relation to the environment. But we don't

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[3] Referring to K.. Kuma, *Anti-object: The Dissolution and Disintegration of Architecture*, AA Publications, London, 2008.

[4] Referring to B. Bogna, *Material Immaterial: The New Work of Kengo Kuma,* Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2009.

[5] "Shared Phenomenology" Symposium held at the University of Tokyo, 2 July 2024.

have a good way to manage the conversation; there is always a fight that happens between the community and architects. For example, the community asks us to preserve something—an old building—because preservation is the only vocabulary we have; preservation or construction, it is the total opposite. But maybe the best solution lies between construction and preservation, but we don't have the vocabulary for that which is between these two opposites. Onomatopoeia can give a new way of communication; it makes the conversation softer than before. And actually, I prefer the softer conversation between team members, not fighting. In architectural firms in America, people are always fighting, but I don't think that fighting is fruitful. So instead of fighting, I want to have a new way of communication.

PB: Do you have any philosophers in your team?

KK: We don't have philosophers, but sociologists give us new ideas about society and community. Feminism, for example, and the role of women is very important in architecture.

PB: Have you read Husserl or other phenomenologists?

KK: Husserl? Yes. Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, very interesting people.

PB: How did you find this idea for an onomatopoeia?

KK: Phenomenologists try to analyze experience. But for me, what they write is not open to the community. It focuses on our experience in a deep way. But I want to widen our experience, which relates it to shared phenomenology.

PB: What about the Japanese heritage of the philosophers Heidegger and Husserl? Have you had any contact with any Japanese philosophers in this tradition? Have you read them?

KK: Yes, in Japan, Washida-san[6] studied Merleau-Ponty.

PB: Did he participate in your work?

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[6] Kiyokazu Washida (鷲田 清一) born 1949.

KK: He is a friend. He gave me hints about phenomenology. For example, he emphasized the importance of listening; listening to other people is very important. He wrote about the power of listening. The architectural practice and the philosophers should be on one platform, stimulating each other. Sometimes architects misunderstand philosophers, but I think we share the same problems.

AJ: We are talking about philosophy and philosophers, but we also want to ask you if there are other disciplines that interest you and inspire you in your work? For example, you worked with Noh masters, or master carpenters, but are there other disciplines that inspire you when you work?

KK: Yes, craftsmen might also provide many hints. In European history, the architect is above craftsmen; architects draw everything, and craftsmen apply the design with material. But between craftsmen and us [architects], the relationship should be different. We are working with craftsmen and talking to them, and they give us hints for the detail. Without their support, we cannot find solutions for project details.

AJ: Our last question relates to the stadium. We are publishing an academic article[7] about the Japan National Stadium and we are comparing autonomous architecture and a regionalist phenomenological approach. Further, you have the exhibition opening today in Paris[8] of Kenzo Tange. Any comment on the relationship between the two stadiums, your stadium and Tange's stadium?

KK: Yes. Tange's generation wanted to be architects with strong authorship. The Western architect was a model for that period. Because, before their generation, we didn't have architects [in Japan]. Basically, Japanese traditional buildings were designed by carpenters and politicians. So, for Tange's generation, the model was Western architects. But what he actually did is a collaboration with excellent engineers. We had a symposium in the Maison du Japon here in Paris yesterday: Shimizu,[9] the construction company, explained the construction process. And it's really

[7] A. Jazaierly, A. Canclini, "The Japan National Stadium: Between architectural bigness and urban smallness," *The Plan Journal*, 9, 1, 2024.

[8] Referring to the "KENZO TANGE – KENGO KUMA – Architects of the Tokyo Games" exhibition, held at the Japan Cultural Institute in Paris (May–June 2024).

[9] Shimizu Corporation is an architectural, civil engineering and general contracting firm in Japan.

amazing. Tange's idea is kind of primitive with the suspended roof. It's a strong idea, but primitive, and there's a lot of difficulty in constructing it. And based on that primitive idea, structural engineers and construction companies worked together to realize that vision. And Tange was open to that kind of idea; he also *listened* to their ideas and assembled those ideas together to create the final product. So, the model was the Western architect, but what he did is, basically, a collaboration with the construction company, craftsmen... And then, the final product, looks like a kind of miracle. I was really impressed by it.

Comparing Tange, in the same generation, Eero Saarinen designed some beautiful buildings. They're beautiful, but as for the detail and for the construction, I was not so impressed by Saarinen's buildings compared to Tange's gymnasiums. Tange is different because of the Japanese way of collaboration.

SNEŽANA VESNIĆ: The title of the recently published issue of *Khōrein* is "Change." And we would also like to ask you what is *change*? What is your *change* of a place? Can we say that you are producing new concepts? And what is the *context* or onomatopoetic concept? Because when your architectural intervention is an addition to the place, it is immediately a new concept since you have a new value in that place.

KK: A new concept, perhaps; what is new for me is simply a kind of ambiguity. Authorship wants to achieve strong identities and a clear shape, but I want to go in a different direction; some new type of ambiguity to accept people, their desires and their requests, open to people. And if architecture is too strong it rejects people. What I'm trying to create is a new type of ambiguity.

Interview conducted by Aya Jazaierly, Andrea Canclini, Snežana Vesnić, and Petar Bojanić.

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Atmospheric Attunement: A Conversation with Alberto Pérez-Gómez

ROBERT KIRKBRIDE: Thank you, Alberto, for this opportunity to discuss phenomenon and architecture. To begin, let's touch on a recent interview between Kenneth Frampton and André Patrão, included in the previous issue of *Khōrein*,[1] in which they revisit Kenneth's 1983 essay, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance." That essay begins with an extended quote from Paul Ricœur, asserting that the phenomenon of global universalization constitutes both an "advancement of mankind" and "a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of [...] the ethical and mythical nucleus of humankind."[2]

Frampton's subsequent argument for phenomenology in architecture sought "the reinstitution of meaningfulness in design" by promoting a "critical regionalism," whereby tectonics would be tuned to localized specificities of climate, topography, and culture, "retrieving history from the modernist *tabula rasa*, learning from the neglected teachings of tradition, and refocusing design strategies from global homogeneity to regional circumstances."[3] While critical regionalism encouraged site-specific explorations to counter the placelessness and lack of identity generated by modernism and the international style, it also rejected as superficial the "scenographic" historical allusions of architectural postmodernism. What are your current thoughts on phenomenon and architecture, and what are we to make of the recent reemergence of architectural postmodernism?

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[1] A. Patrão, "On Conversations about Architecture and Philosophy, with Kenneth Frampton," *Khōrein*, II, 1, 2024, pp. 135–150.

[2] K. Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," in H. Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1983, p. 16.

[3] A. Patrão, "On Conversations about Architecture and Philosophy, with Kenneth Frampton," p. 143.

ALBERTO PÉREZ-GÓMEZ: Well, let me first say a few things about Kenneth Frampton's position, if I may. Not long ago, I wrote a short essay for Kenneth's *Festschrift*,[4] which connects his ideas about critical regionalism to my recent thoughts about atmosphere. Kenneth, as is well known, is citing a very early book by Paul Ricœur, which worked perfectly to buttress his position—what he thought was the necessary articulation, or conversation, if you like, between world civilization and regional cultures. Ricoeur had put his finger on how destructive global universalization is for traditional cultures, but in my opinion, he is not radical enough.

From my own writing about this crisis, also in 1983,[5] I point to how global universalization's values emerged from a technological mentality that is fundamentally instrumental, and not at all "subtle." Its central and driving value is efficiency, excluding or marginalizing all others, so it has been quite deliberate and unapologetic in its destruction of traditional cultures. This is not something that is easily repaired. And if you would ask me today, with our prevalent concerns about enduring colonialism, I would say that technological instrumentality is its vehicle. So, while I am very sympathetic to Kenneth's argument, I believe one has to be much more critical of the inherent values of technology in order to aspire to a contemporary architecture that not only respects but foregrounds and celebrates the traditional and very diverse values of cultures worldwide.

Cultural gestures, sedimented as habits that manifest in traditional cities and their architecture, are precious. They enrich our built environment, and contemporary architecture should treasure and enhance such continuities. In other words, while I share Kenneth's aim, believing that the tradition of modernism has much to offer, I have necessarily differed from the formulations and paradigms of his critical regionalism—particularly on the question of how architectural tectonics may avoid its reduction to technical utility. While I may agree that tectonics can be distinguished from technical utility, unfortunately the technical efficacy of

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[4] A. Pérez-Gómez, "Engaging the Lifeworld in Architectural Design: Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in K. C. Britton and R. McCarter (eds.), *Modern Architecture and the Lifeworld: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Frampton*,Thames & Hudson, London, 2020, pp. 94–102.

[5] A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA / London, 1983.

globalization—its compulsion to homogenize, if not eliminate, local contexts and conditions, undermines the poetic values that Kenneth would like to save through the tectonic. That's one side of it.

RK: So, although it may be true that "utility established as meaning generates meaninglessness," as Hannah Arendt asserted (and Frampton cites),[6] such a realization is not enough in itself to change the behaviors of those who embrace the instrumentalization of global capitalism and are unconcerned about "meaning." Perhaps that is also why, at least in part, phenomenology has been criticized in the past as being too "nostalgic"—its urge to return to an "unrecoverable past," a world centered on "meaningfulness."[7] What about the other side?

APG: The other side is the notion of the "scenographic," which in 1983 connected to the banal stylistic postmodernism of aarchitects such as Michael Graves, whose ornamentation was often two-dimensional and ironic. These people made sense as targets of Kenneth's critique. But when you think about scenography as it relates to the events and experiential dimensions of human life, I don't think it is something to simply throw away. There is something to be gained from saving the atmospheric qualities of architecture; yet, at that point, in 1983, anything to do with "atmosphere" was folded into scenography and received bad press from critics of postmodernism.

In my own recent work, and now that I see my career—my life—retrospectively, I realize I have always wanted to save the experiential dimension of architecture, understanding that its core is not necessarily buildings, but its situations and events. And that, of course, has a scenographic dimension because that's where habits manifest in culture. That's perhaps where one has a greater opportunity to save traditional cultures from the decimation of technological instrumentality, and the tools of global universalization. So, if what you mean by the "current re-emergence of postmodernism" is a valorization of the situational, experiential dimension of architecture—as opposed to the appliqué of historical stylistic quotations, per se—I would defend that position.

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[6] K. Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance," p. 17.

[7] A. Patrão, "On Conversations about Architecture and Philosophy, with Kenneth Frampton," p. 144.

RK: That's an intriguing and nuanced distinction. On the first point, then, you're challenging Ricœur's characterization of global universalization as "a sort of subtle destruction" that "might not be an irreparable wrong" as a grave underestimation of the dilemma, correct? In hindsight, we see the consequences of enduring colonial behaviors—divide, conquer, extract, exploit—that have been instrumentalized through technology and embedded in the flows and mechanics of architectural production (and the built environment, more generally), causing ecological and cultural devastation at a magnitude that could not have been imagined forty years ago. And your urgency in *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* addressed the perils of instrumentalized colonialism and "misleading divisions" between reason (science) and intuition (art) in architecture,[8] while Kenneth dwells more on the paradox articulated by Ricœur: "how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in universal civilization."[9]

APG: That's right.

RK: Regarding the second point, on the "recent re-emergence of postmodernism," I *was* indeed referencing its propensity for shallow historical glosses rather than the "situational, experiential dimension of architecture," as you put it. Yet I appreciate your interpretation of the "scenographic" as a revalorization of experiential situations and the atmospheric in architecture, and it reminds me that architectural ornament—despite its ancient significance—was also thrown under the bus by critics of postmodernism, alongside the scenographic and atmospheric dimensions of architecture.

For millennia, ornament in everyday life—in architecture, artifacts and clothing—had been understood as essential storytelling equipment for the varied settings of human life, from the dining table to the public forum. Not only did their aesthetic properties express and elicit sensorial delight, Vitruvius's *venustas*, they also informed the *ethos* of human behaviors and actions by establishing "atmosphere" and "mood," two terms you've plumbed. Yet, after modernism had all but stripped away architectural ornament as needless expense, it was further discredited in

[8] A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, p. 324.

[9] A. Patrão, "On Conversations about Architecture and Philosophy, with Kenneth Frampton," p. 147.

the excoriation of postmodernism and its superficial stylings. Here, your passage from *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science* still resonates: "It should be remembered that ornament had never been perceived as superfluous by Renaissance or Baroque architects. Regardless of theoretical discussions about the specificity of structure and ornament, the latter was always understood as an integral part of a building's *meaning*."[10]

So, let's go deeper into your exploration of the "attunement" of a building to its setting and inhabitants. To what extent does architectural attunement *anticipate* inhabitant behaviors during design development, *pre*-occupancy, versus *accommodating* those behaviors through reflective adjustments, *post*-occupancy? In the mid-twentieth century, behavioral design emerged in reflective response to the notorious failures of modernist architecture to resonate with inhabitants,[11] yet it also quickly became deterministic and prescriptive, often generating insipid design solutions. Is it possible to revisit the initial reconciliatory aims of behavioral design in light of recent discoveries in neuroscience?

APG: Yes. I can speak a little bit to all these thoughts. First, to conclude with Kenneth. It is true what he says, that the tectonic foregrounds traditional values of making from within regional cultures, as in, for example, the architecture of Tadao Ando. Yet his examples are drawn from the implicit assumption that architecture, and its existential meanings, are encompassed in the building-as-object. To address the problem of meaninglessness created by a utilitarian approach to technology, I think one has to return to the possibilities of a building-as-experience, both in the quotidian sense of everyday life, and also in its experience as poetic discovery. Sometimes this discovery happens in discrete moments over time, inhabiting a building over an extended period, as one might experience a familiar piece of music that suddenly yields a kind of enhancement of our existential and sensory life, and perhaps even addresses fundamental values of existence.

I think this is true throughout the history of architecture, which includes not only buildings and public spaces, but also gardens and a myriad of situations that one could qualify as ephemeral transformations of quotidian

[10] A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, p. 256.

[11] The urban housing complex of Pruitt Igoe, in St. Louis, Missouri, built in 1954 and fully demolished by 1976, offers one notorious example.

life, mostly in cities, including religious, political and civic celebrations. These are all responses to existential questions, including how architecture contributes or doesn't contribute enough to alleviate the ecological crisis and the problems that we face in the environment. But I think we have to be both ambitious, as architects, and humble. Architecture is not exclusively about buildings and never has been. It's indeed a small portion of the fabric that humans construct to transform the more-than-human world into our environment. But like a piece of poetry, it has always had the capacity to reorient us.

That's why I deliberately use the word *attunement* to denote the possibility of architectural meaning in our complicated world, with its universal aspirations and local cultural differences. The term is kindred to the German *Stimmung*, the rich word co-opted by German Romantic philosophers to denote the meaning of all works of art, that itself means both "atmosphere," and "mood," while *Stimme* is a tuneful voice. The centrality of atmosphere in the tasks of architecture foregrounds the importance of cultural habits and the need to propose coherent environments, it weakens formal conceits and stylistic expression and demands a recognition of the needs of others while enabling the poetic realization of a participatory consciousness.

Attuned atmospheres give home to our needs, they represent a human-centered architecture but not merely a banal functionalism, understanding that the main questions of human beings are existential. I use the term attunement in my book with its Heideggerian resonances. Heidegger argued that we are fundamentally out of tune when we are born as humans because of our awareness of mortality. And there are certain things in the world that orient us and make us a little bit more tuned. We become more harmonious, if you like, in certain moments due to certain conditions, to certain artifacts that include architecture, music, and poetry.

RK: And food. I recently reread several articles by Marco Frascari on the phenomenal relationship between architecture and cooking, and the interplay of taste (*sapor*) and wisdom (*sapienza*)...[12]

[12] M. Frascari, "*Semiotica ab Edendo*, Taste in Architecture," *Journal of Architectural Education*, XL, 1, 1986, pp. 2–7. See also, M. Frascari, "Cooking an Architectural Happy Cosmospoiesis," *Built Environment*, XXXI, 1, 2005, pp. 31–37.

APG: Oh yes, I remember that work! Attunement is at the center of our discipline, the condition that architects must seek. That's what I've concentrated on in my later work. And I'm not alone. Like you say, there are many colleagues who are trying to recuperate architectural meaning by focusing on these issues rather than on the objective, formal characteristics of a building. And so, one can get there by adaptive reuse. One can get there by building new fabric. One can get there by building ephemeral structures in many different ways. There's not only one way. But this question of attunement is central to the discipline.

In recent decades the significance of attunement in architecture has been vindicated by neuro-phenomenology, a term coined by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch by bringing in line insights from evolutionary biology, Continental philosophy and Hindu philosophy of mind, and cognitive psychology. In their 1991 book *The Embodied Mind*, they evidence and valorize the insights of phenomenology, which had been criticized by postmodernist, post-structuralist, and deconstructivist philosophers, as well as by architects like Peter Eisenman and his students, for not being able to "demonstrate" the claims of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

RK: Claims such as...

APG: Most fundamentally, that presence is *real*, a *fact* of experience—like the perception of meaning in a melodic phrase. It had been argued by philosophers like Jacques Derrida and many of his followers, that the *presence* of a work of art—how it contributes to our well-being and our orientation in the world—was a fallacy. Famously, Derrida "deconstructs" Heidegger's "Truth in Painting" constructed upon the premise of the presence evident in Van Gogh's painting of a peasant's shoes. Derrida argued, particularly vehemently in his earlier works, that the present is nothing but a *punctum* between past and future, and thus the present does not really exist. Well, the interesting thing is, neuroscientists now better understand how our neurons fire, vindicating ancient theories of mind in Buddhism and Hinduism along with Merleau-Ponty and Husserl's argument for the substantial prereflective foundation of consciousness. Contemporary neuroscience verifies that we are not dreaming presence as it appears in the world. Presence is real. The present has a thickness, and time is not merely a linear sequence of perpetually vanishing non-existent points.

RK: As you've noted, citing Friedrich Schelling, "We are not 'in' linear time. Rather, 'time, or pure eternity, is in us'."[13]

APG: The concept of temporal linearity, giving priority to the objectivity of seconds we can measure, is a convenient reduction of reality, a scientific fabrication that does not coincide with the way we actually experience the world. So that's a real contribution of neuroscience, and that's why you are absolutely right about behavioral psychology. This was tried unsuccessfully in the late 20th century. The quantification of comfort and optimization is not the issue. The claim for the centrality of attuned atmospheres in architecture cannot be reduced to prescriptions generated by experimental data. You cannot reduce design to metrics. Even if you can measure whether a street with very long walls is comfortable or it's creating discomfort and people become threatened and anxious, you cannot fold your findings into numbers and dictate how to design a better city. That is absurd. Sometimes the experience of the labyrinth, in Crete or Chartres, can bring existential realizations.

RK: "By revealing the limitations of mathematical reason," as you've noted, "phenomenology has indicated that technological theory alone cannot come to terms with the fundamental problems of architecture."[14] It's an intriguing plot-twist that it's the hard, scientific evidence produced by recent neuro-phenomenology that actually substantiates phenomenology's critique of mathematical reason.

APG: The struggle, now, is to take these insights of neuro-phenomenology and see if we can give ourselves tools as architects to design places, spaces, situations that are both more suited to human life so that our lives are more awesome, so that we have psychosomatic wellbeing, but also without losing track that the underlying issue for architecture is meaning, after all, *existential meaning*.

RK: This echoes your argument, forty years ago, that for contemporary architecture to "find a new metaphysical justification, its point of departure is once again the sphere of perception, the ultimate origin of existential

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[13] A. Pérez-Gómez, "Mind, Mood and Architectural Meaning," in *Timely Meditations: Sellected Essays on Architecture*, *vol. 2*, *Architectural Philosophy and Hermeneutics*, RightAngle International, Montreal, 2016, p. 256.

[14] A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architecture and the Crisis of Modern Science*, p. 325.

meaning."[15] Subsequently, several notable architects have explored the role of perception in their architecture and writing—Juhani Pallasmaa, Steven Holl, Peter Zumthor—several of whom you've collaborated with, directly.

APG: Yes, I worked with Juhani and Steven on *Questions of Perception*.

RK: So, let's delve more deeply into the "sphere of perception." For at least two millennia, philosophical and physiological debates see-sawed between theories of *extramission* and *intromission*. Where advocates of extramission posited that light rays are emitted from our eyes out into the world, enabling us to see, intromissionists argued the opposite—that we see as a result of light being transmitted from objects in the world into our eyes. These literal and metaphoric views of internal perception and worldly experience held direct consequences for aesthetics, ethics and artistic works. Alongside this debate, a legacy of philosopher-physicians evolved theories about a meeting place in the mind, the *sensus communis* (common sense), wherein sensory phenomena were integrated to form judgments and guide our actions in the world.[16]

The recent findings of neuroscience seem uncannily corollary: our everyday experience of the world is an ongoing reconciliation of embodied and out-of-body experiences. As the neuroscientist Anil Seth summarizes, "we don't just experience our bodies as objects in the world from the outside, we also experience them from within; we all sense being a body from the inside."[17] In an unceasing flow, our brains subconsciously integrate our *interoception* (sensory perceptions inside the body), with our *exteroception* (sensory perceptions of the exterior world), as well as our proprioception (sensory perceptions of the body's position and movement in space). Seth describes the seamless integration of these multiple perceptual streams as "a controlled hallucination generated by the brain," and observes that "we're all hallucinating all the time. It's just that when we agree about our hallucinations, we call that reality."[18]

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[15] *Ibid*.

[16] For debates on the location of the *sensus communis* in the brain, see R. Kirkbride, *Architecture and Memory: The Renaissance Studioli of Federico da Montefeltro*, Extended Caption #8, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, http://www.gutenberg-e.org/kirkbride/extended-captions.html#ec8.

[17] A. Seth, "Your Brain Hallucinates Your Conscious Reality," TEDX Talk, April 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyu7v7nWzfo.

[18] *Ibid*.

Let's turn from perception to *phenomenon*, which is generally understood as a noteworthy and perhaps unusual situation, event or condition in our everyday experience of "reality." Among its etymological roots, the ancient Greek term *phainómenon* (*φαινόμενον*) defined a "thing appearing to view," extending from *phaínein* (*φαίνειν*)—"to show," and connecting with phantasy (to make visible) and phantom (illusory likeness, figment of the imagination). Interestingly, all these terms share an origin in *pháos* (*φάος*)—light.[19]

Neuroscience has revealed how nuanced and complex being a "self" is, let alone being a self among others. How might architecture show us how to better attune ourselves with one another and the world around us?

APG: Like an atmosphere, a mood is shared, and is contagious, just like laughter or yawning. In the everyday world our bodies spontaneously express our moods and others directly pick them up and respond to them. Merleau-Ponty calls this phenomenon "intercorporeality." According to Gaston Bachelard, we literally resonate with another's experience. First there is reverberation, followed by the experience of resonances in oneself, and these eventually have repercussions in the way we perceive the world. This is how the poetic image is communicated, and how we can all have the experience of being co-creators. Now neuroscientists have found an explanation for this important phenomenon in mirror-neurons, that fire both when one makes a movement and when one sees another person make that sort of movement: when we observe the actions of others, our nervous system literally "resonates" along with the Other.[20]

In support of this phenomenon, architects can try to bring about the appropriate moods for human actions that reveal life as purposeful,[21] incorporating in their designed spaces a more lasting mood, one that we may associate with the room itself: solemn, strange, quiet, cheerful, reverential, oppressive, etc. It's important to point out that regardless of these precisions, our architectural experience is always ultimately dependent upon our participation in an event housed in the space; it is in such circumstances that architecture "means."[22] That's what these recent discov-

[19] M. Frascari, "*Semiotica ab Edendo*, Taste in Architecture," n. 18.
[20] A. Pérez-Gómez, "Mind, Mood and Architectural Meaning," p. 266.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 267.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 265.

eries of neuro-phenomenology bring to the table in architectural design. I realize what I have always been trying to do is find ways to explore the atmospheric; with drawing, of course, *drawing* the atmospheric, sketching, but also with words. That's why I focus so much on the importance of poetic language in my book *Attunement*. Architects have disregarded, for a long time, the importance of language as *poetic* language, as metaphor in our design processes to make more attuned environments.

RK: Is this due in part to our professional preoccupation with technological instruments? One might argue that the coding of AI and software applications like *Grasshopper23* is simply a new form of language...

APG: Yet human language is distinct from the coding that generates artificial intelligence or parametric design software: it is intersubjectively emergent and rooted in prereflective bodily gestures and experiences.

RK: Anil Seth would agree with you: "we are biological flesh and blood animals," he observes, "whose conscious experiences are shaped at all levels by the biological mechanisms that keep us alive. Just making computers smarter is not going to make them sentient."[24] So perhaps that might help the dystopians among us to sleep more easily. You also note, citing Merleau-Ponty, that language "speaks through us" and captures meaning in its mesh.[25] If "words point towards meanings but never fully coincide with them," this means there's always a slight gap in understanding one another, like the misalignments we experience when navigating multiple languages. As the Italian phrase goes, "traduttore, traditore" (translator, traitor). When you transport a word, a colloquialism, an idea, across cultural boundaries, and even more specifically, across the boundaries of your own experience and comprehension, you cannot help but "betray" that word and its assigned meanings to a degree, even if unintentionally. Some may fear language's polymorphic multiplicity as a betrayal of monolithic, original "truths." And yet, as George Steiner argues in *After Babel*, the richness of language is its dynamic malleability and porosity, not its fixity or monolithic uniformity.

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[23] *Grasshopper* is a visual scripting language add-on for *Rhino*, developed by Robert McNeel & Associates.

[24] A. Seth, "Your Brain Hallucinates Your Conscious Reality."

[25] A. Pérez-Gómez, "Mind, Mood and Architectural Meaning," p. 262.

APG: Yes. Indeed. That's why we may complement the somewhat despairing "traduttore, traditore," with "il vero traduttore e un poeta" the true translator is a poet].

RK: I've long been fascinated with Steiner's interpretation of the myth of the Tower of Babel, that humans didn't lose the capacity to communicate with one another due to a wrathful god's deliberate confusion of one "original" shared language, but rather the opposite. It is the *difference* among languages—and the inevitability of their mistranslation—that offers fertile ground for new ideas to flourish. New truths are revealed in the constant *becoming* of language, through our interpersonal exchanges. The more exchanges, the more possibilities emerge in the human experience. Perhaps Steiner's reading of this myth, which centers on the metaphoric interplay of architecture and language, also provides a way of seeing architecture as an unfinished and unfinishable project, always becoming?

APG: That's what is disregarded by understanding architecture as the production of buildings-as-objects. Place is not a postcard. Place is constituted by the habits, language, and the stories of the people that live in this place. If you're serious about building for others, truly respectful of the other, it's really a linguistic problem. You have to listen carefully to what others are about to be able to build for them, engaging with the others and their habits in true hermeneutic dialogue. Yet many architects are preoccupied with form-making. Whether we say it explicitly or not, this is unfortunately still very much what rules in the profession.

RK: And this formalism continues to have direct pedagogical consequences, especially with respect to the impacts of current technologies on architectural design skills and habits. Digital software programs promise users—especially novices—easier, speedier production of provocative building forms and building-like simulations than traditional analog methods of architectural representation that demand nuanced and slowly acquired physical dexterity. While one may rightly argue that "digital" and "manual" techniques should ideally complement one another, rather than be pigeon-holed as dichotomous adversaries, what matters is the *order* in which these skills are acquired. The correct order of learning would thus encourage embodied learning rather than digital dependence.

One ubiquitous software program, *Rhino*,[26] generates building sections with the greatest ease by use of the "clipping plane," a digital feature that enables users to choose a section cut by moving it back and forth, at the tip of their cursor. Unfortunately, the user-friendliness of the clipping plane requires little deliberation, nor does it instill the hard-earned habits acquired through hand-drawing and modelmaking. Consequently, many student projects currently feature an exuberant overabundance of rapidly produced architectural images that don't speak coherently as an ensemble. Frequently, neither windows nor doors are included in the sections, allowing no flow or access between interior and exterior, or from room to room. Where the construction of a tell-tale section would traditionally reveal how a building was to be constructed, from earth to sky and stem to stern, for an inexperienced student not yet aware of the interdependence of plan and section, the clipping plane too often renders the building section mute, its walls lacking the apertures to speak their purposes.

The clipping plane also inhibits the more advanced technique of "jogging a section," which merges multiple section lines into one representational plane to tell the story of a building, visualizing its throughlines and the pivots in its subplots. "Jogging a section" challenges mental and physical dexterity, combining abstraction and representation through bodily expression, by the kinetic gestures of drawing and making. By these more slowly acquired habits, a pen in an architect's hand becomes a scalpel, capable of revealing the anatomical workings and flows of light, air, and physical bodies that characterize the everyday life of a future place. Without such habits, an unwary student is easily distracted by software features that produce the semblance of a building by facilitating money-shots of its exterior, resulting in a building-as-object conceived from the outside-in, rather than from the inside-out. In this inverted process of architectural conception, form is lionized and the section has become perfunctory. Easily produced and undernourished, the section becomes an obligatory afterthought rather than a vehicle of revelation.[27] The results are often tasty-looking strawberries with insipid interiors.

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[26] *Rhinoceros 3D* is computer-aided design application software developed by Robert McNeel & Associates.

[27] For valuable antidotes to this predicament, see *Manual of Section* (2016), and *Manual of Biogenic House Sections* (2022), by David J. Lewis, Paul Lewis, and Marc Tsurumaki.

Shifting gears from architectural pedagogy to practice, is it too big of a synaptic leap to compare the temporal space between our prereflective and reflective experience—that thick present—with the life cycle of a building, from prereflective design development to post-occupancy reflection? How might the mechanically-centered commissioning of a building, post-construction, compare with the attunement you're describing?

APG: Your analogies are very rich, both the literal and the metaphoric. Maybe first I would say a few things about this business of prereflective, reflective, and how it connects to the question of presence in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, now vindicated by neuroscience. The prereflective is a condition that is always present as long as we are alive. It's fundamental intentionality—*motricity*—Merleau-Ponty describes, which allows us to play the piano, for example. We don't really do it reflectively, once the know-how is acquired. Our body *knows* how to do it, like riding a bike or driving a car.

Although there is a tendency to attribute prereflective knowing to the unconscious, this is problematic because the "unconscious" is really an invention of Dr. Freud in the 19th century. It has a usefulness, but it is only emerging through the stories that a patient recounts to an analyst. Otherwise, Freud himself would recognize that it's inaccessible, and in truth, has a Cartesian dimension. The prereflective dimension is something else.

Scientists and philosophers estimate the prereflective dimension of consciousness as about 80% of our full consciousness, with 20% being what you and I are using in this conversation. Yes, we represent thought to one another in order to be able to talk, and we consider it very important. We make our lives out of it, you and I as professors. But it's only 20% of our consciousness. The other 80% is tacit. It is like the bottom of an iceberg. They're always operating together in the lived present, but 80% of it is tacit, and it constitutes our habits, without which we cannot understand anything. Socrates cleverly said, "I don't know much except a few erotic things." Erotic in this sentence of Socrates really stands for this 80% of experience. If you don't experience love, you cannot talk about it. Forget about theorizing love if you have not experienced it.

Of course, love is the master emotion, right? It's the affective dimension of experience, it is part of this 80%. So, in our everyday life, we carry this

with us, and there are *eureka* moments, fantastic moments, enlightened moments, which are part of the reflective dimension of consciousness, which happen in architecture that we all talk about when a building is amazing, when we go visit something and we are moved, and yet it's only 20%. There's always 80% that buttresses this 20%. So, I think it's important to keep this in mind when we're designing because, usually, people only think of the 20% that appears when as voyeurs, we travel and visit the Acropolis or a work by Peter Zumthor. Yes, yes, sure, there's this poetic, metaphoric clarity of the 20% that enlarges our experience and makes our lives worth living. But without this other 80%, nothing of that would be possible. So how to deal with that is one of the big issues of design, because when you're designing for life in its fullness, you are not designing for the 20% of eureka moments, with wonderful and poetic architecture, however much we love it, right?

RK: Place is not a postcard.

APG: Now, you offered the possible analogy, connecting the prereflective dimension of consciousness to pre-occupancy and post-occupancy. This is fascinating. It reminds me of a connection that Paul Ricœur makes to describe how the imagination works in the creation and reception of literary works. For example, when the poet writes a piece, they are using the imagination to create the piece. When we read the piece, we are using the imagination to inhabit the poem. So, what the architect puts forth tries to anticipate, like you say, the possibilities of prereflective and reflective fruition. This dimension of the architectural imagination is linguistic and profits from understanding the architectural program as a fiction for a future life—rather than the common understanding of a diagram or list of spaces with stipulated square footage. But then there is also the condition, once the building is out there, of the post-occupancy reading of the building—the *inhabiting* of the building, if you like—that can also be dissected and articulated in similar ways. And you can, of course, adjust, suggest improvements, change the building according to certain changing dimensions of human life. There are different ways that an artifact, building, poem, or piece of literature can yield its poetic meaning, and part of it is put there by the poet or the writer, while another, crucial dimension, is brought in by the reader, by the inhabitant of the work.

RK: Akin to Octavio Paz's description of poetry and poetics in *The Bow and the Lyre*, where poetry isn't a *thing*, per se, an object, or category, it is the *act* of performing a poem.

APG: Yes, the *performance*.

RK: In this vein, a building is a poem brought to life by others the architect may never know, and much is to be gained from closely considering the 80% of a building people tend not to think much about, closely reading how others in-habit and perform in a place. Do they embellish, ignore or even erase your ideas with their habits, their furniture, clothing, and stuff, the *flotsam* that equips—*ornaments*—our lives?

Meanwhile, we do not hallucinate the reality that architect-designed structures constitute only two to five percent of a built environment whose construction accounts for approximately 40% of the carbon released, yearly, into the earth's atmosphere. If the philosophical value of architecture is not merely to embody knowledge poetically, but to problematize it by expressing and facilitating existential questions,[28] to what extent is it architecture's responsibility to problematize the other 96% of the built environment as well as its own influence on the 4%?

APG: Good architecture can do both. It can certainly be critical and also poetic. It's important that it do both, though—that it not only problematize, but that it propose something. It should open up a world, state an ethical position upon which we may live our lives. Otherwise, it's a little bit like Derrida—endless critique with a deferral of ethical positioning, similar to what so-called deconstructive architecture once tried to accomplish. Sure, you can problematize, but I think you have to propose something for others to live a better life, and to deal with our questions of existence. A good piece of architecture does actually show the limitations of all that other 96% of stuff built in the world that doesn't have the thoughtfulness of architecture, but perhaps I'm thinking about it too simplistically. I may not understand the full scope of what might be intended by the usage of "problematize," but I think it's possible. Problematize, yes by all means, but it doesn't mean that you solve or *even address* a problem just by "problematizing" it.

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[28] J. Dodd, *Phenomenology, Architecture and the Built World: Exercises in Philosophical Anthropology*, Brill, Leiden, 2017, p. 8.

I think ultimately one must be very humble. Architects may add little to pragmatic shelter, compared with the other 96% of what is built. In addition, we know and must acknowledge that our natural world is very sick. Obviously, this adds to our responsibilities, but without detracting from our central poetic, political and philosophical vocation. I think good architects are becoming more and more ecologically responsible. We have a lot to learn from traditional and vernacular building practices that are already sustainable and are already doing the right thing. And they have been doing it for a very long time.

RK: Yet much of what is currently celebrated as consequential architecture on social media are object-buildings that are truly exceptions to the rest of the built environment. What do we make of an ecological stance that urges us to build nothing new and to focus our architectural energies and innovation on the adaptive reuse of existing infrastructures? How does one counter the evergreen habit of architects to design buildings at the whim of the wealthy and powerful, who may be largely uninterested in the social and ecological perils that confront us?

APG: It's very important to become aware of all these things. I don't have an answer other than better education, so that students who become practitioners have really solid ethical grounding to be able to articulate a position when some wealthy and powerful person urges them to build something stupid, although I don't think that's going to change the way things usually work, unfortunately.

I don't know how much we can do other than be keenly aware of our ethical responsibility, that we are not—and that's something that as you know, Robert, and I know you do the same since we've been saying constantly to our students since the beginning of our pedagogical practices—that we are not mere specialists in making formal decisions. We have to be responsible for our acts. What we put out there is a political statement. It matters. There's no excuse if you work for some bastard that asks you to do the unthinkable. You should just say no.

I know some colleagues, even some former students that make me proud, that have truly ethical practices. They have managed to find the good developers with a conscience, lobbying politicians to enhance the public realm, putting together programs that may be both profitable economically and

contribute to the common good. But I do recognize this is not the rule. And yet I think it should be emphasized that that's what we are about as architects. It's first an ethical responsibility towards others. What else can we do about our compulsion to build anew? At least we must recognize the gravity of our work, which is a promise we make to others toward a better future, in atmospheres that are both beautiful and just.

I remember teaching in Venice a few years ago, in the PhD program at IUAV, and people made me aware that the thesis projects of most architecture students in Italy are rarely, if ever, new constructions. They always work with historical fabric, which makes a lot of sense in Italy, less so in North America. So, I would agree on your principle of building nothing new, yet I think it's also in a certain way our responsibility as architects to see in new ways. Dictating that we should not construct new buildings in view of our ecological crisis has wisdom, but honestly it makes me nervous. If we understand architecture is a setting for lived situations, the issue is never building, per se, but proposing new ways of life. Our responsibility, I think, is understanding how from our present conditions we may evolve a more spiritual, better, more wholesome environment. Whether that means we build a new building or whether that means that we pursue adaptive reuse, that's maybe secondary. As a pedagogical position, though, I think it's a sound political statement.

RK: Can works of the poetic imagination cause change?

APG: Yes, I certainly think so. Perhaps not "change" in the terribly urgent meaning of the word that we see today, with our burning environment and the dire circumstances that surround us. But works of the poetic imagination can certainly cause change. Probably nobody saw the world in perspective before the painters painted it. I remember that my maternal grandmother could not make sense of a Cubist painting and now we think of it as reality. I can see a Cubist painting and I can see the real world through it.

RK: Likewise, the poets and painters manifest(o)ing surrealism were not concerned about fascism in the United States, and yet "surreal" is a commonly heard phrase when describing the disturbing turn of events in recent U.S. politics, and current events worldwide. The dreamlike—often nightmarish—works of surrealism have equipped us to describe experiences that do not align with the reality many thought we shared.

APG: And in the tradition of *phronesis*, the practical philosophy of Aristotle, what evidences truth is the poetic work, right? That's where real wisdom appears because it's always *situated*. So, where I learn about the possibilities of my own life is really through the fiction that is around me. Today it happens in movies, or in some television series. Now that I've retired, I read more fiction. I seriously read *a lot* of fiction. I truly believe that's the way we find our way in the world. So, I am convinced that works of poetry *do* change things, but they change things in ways that matter to people personally, existential issues that need to be addressed.

RK: So, the influences of poetic works are not necessarily direct, nor do they effect large-scale problem-solving; they are more intimate, incremental, activating us personally and interpersonally. I recently came across an interview with Richard Kearney, who also cites Aristotle's view that the "detour" of fiction enables us to look at the most hideous things, the most difficult things, the most painful things, the most tragic things and see them in a new way.[29] In other words, if you want to better understand and empathize with others, read their ghost stories, watch their horror movies, and understand that there are always, somewhere, buildings and places that are haunted.

APG: That's why I think our little luxuries, poetic luxuries such as architecture, help make us live properly as humans. That's not an insignificant task. There's such bad conscience about so many things with young students now. I know we have to be critical, to seek equity and social justice above all, but I think we also have to realize that there's only good to be gained from artifacts that address existential questions and reveal the ever-present enigmas in everyday human life, conveying emotional wisdom through awe, evidencing the coincidence of truth and beauty. Even if they may be of an order and magnitude that cannot be placed at the same level as "the decimation of the world," we have real experiences and issues that may be addressed through poetic artifacts, including architecture.

Interview conducted by Robert Kirkbride.

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[29] "Fiction Stronger than Truth: an Interview with Richard Kearney on Imagination," July 9, 2013, interview of R. Kearney by Rebekah Smick, http://www.groundmotive.net/2013/07/fiction-stronger-than-truth-interview.html.

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Disappearing Act: Interview with Petra Blaisse and Aura Luz Melis

ŽELJKO RADINKOVIĆ: It seems that the spheres of interior and exterior categorically define the concept of your work. Assuming you do not consider these spheres to exist "as such" or "in themselves," how would you formulate the aesthetic or architectural process of their constitution? Alternatively, is there a more specific notion of interiority and exteriority that serves as the starting point for your work?

AURA LUZ MELIS: Regarding the aesthetic and architectural process of the constitution of both interior and landscape spheres, I would like to start by saying that we design by neglecting any type of border and by freeing ourselves from a prescribed *métier*. We work on both interior and landscape design fields simultaneously by studying and looking at the entirety situated in a specific context. Strong concepts, big gestures, lively lines, rhythmical patterns, artistic de-contextualization of fabrics, light atmospheres, etc. all react to the context and the architecture while moving fluidly between both. The freedom we take to intuitively work in an interdisciplinary manner allows us to master the entire setting defined by floor, walls, and ceiling in the interior or by soil, sky, and local climatic conditions in the exterior. The effect of color, the catching and play of light and movement are key elements that we engage with in both fields to create sensitive and exciting moments/settings.

PETRA BLAISSE: I can't say I understand your question very well. I do know that we like to combine "interiority" with "exteriority" in all senses of the words (mental and physical). We find it important to create environments that invite people to appreciate and take care of their immediate surrounding, so that they grow attached to them. Both the interior—the home—and the landscape—the garden—are objects of attachment (so often a blind spot in territorial action).

ŽR: Let's dwell on this topic for a while. In your work there is also a kind of relationship between the spaces outside and the spaces inside. How should we understand the concept of space? Are these spaces closed and already defined? Are they fluid? How should we understand their boundaries? What is your conception of those entities?

PB: Open air can become an inside space if defined with planted screens, a (green) roof, or a tent—a form of protection built with simple materials that can be changed, taken away or moved around. But the terms inside and outside can have philosophical, poetic, or political meaning too, beyond the physical one that, apart from "space," could be about internal thought or feeling versus external expression; or about interaction between living species. We learn that invisible exchanges between nature and "us," and between "us" humans among ourselves, are an ongoing phenomenon. The idea of each of us as unique, encapsulated individuals becomes blurred.

The past few years we have been concentrating on life underground, with the emphasis on the exchanges and collaborations of organisms, air and water within the first 30 to 50 cm of soil, where exterior and interior life forms come together and most activities, processes, and exchanges take place. In this research process we invite scientists to join our team, to educate us, and introduce us to their individual specialisms so that an overall picture emerges. We also met biologists who focus on life within "our" interior, namely our intestines, which led us to discover that our bodies and underground life are quite comparable. This is not what you're asking, I know, but the idea that fascinates us is that we are not autonomous individuals, but in fact all linked and connected through these invisible yet fundamental exchanges of invisible particles and bacteria. This blurs the boundary between the "I" and the other. Of course, in psychological sense, the actual boundary between or connection of living creatures can also be discussed.

I do agree with your thoughts, and if you translate them into language, then you talk about inside and outside and about communication and exchange.

Inside for us means protection, intimacy, a defined place of which you know where it begins and ends, and how. With clear openings and

controlled views outward. If you have a view into the outer world, you feel the enclosure and protection of the enclosed space you are in. Outside for us means the large outside world, the unknown in which we form a minuscule part, in which we can disappear without anyone noticing; or it means nature, the countryside, with all its beauty, harmony, dangers and and surprises.

We could talk for 70 hours about what it can all be and mean, but our work, although also based on naïve idealism and romantic ideals, beauty, and philosophical thought, has to take shape, be materialized, and remain functional for many years. Working in and around architecture, public space, and urban planning, the boundary between inside and outside a built structure or area—or even of a given budget or program—is always present. We usually try to dissolve or overcome boundaries, to create fluidity and flexibility. To make psychological or visual connections, even if there is in fact no such thing, we create spatial illusions. You can, for instance, stretch the experience of inside and outside, of "here" and "there," with the manipulation of light, levels of transparency, reflection, perspective and scale; with moving objects too. Classic tools!

ŽR: Could you elaborate on your relationship with modernism in architecture? According to some interpretations, architectural elements such as curtains are originally part of a pre-modern architectural discourse, which also carries an ideological bourgeois dimension. In your work, however, these elements return to a central role in the constitution of space.

ALM: Curtains and textiles have always been intimately related to humans and to our private atmospheres. They have developed hand in hand with humankind for centuries. In architectural discourse, we tend to look back mostly at the passive role of textiles in the bourgeois era, and at their "liberation" during modernism, when they first appeared as soft walls inside an exhibition designed by Mies von der Rohe and Lilly Reich.

Petra Blaisse took this liberation a step further in the late 1980s and early 1990s, escaping the limits of architecture even more and giving curtains a *raison d'être* that goes beyond being servile backgrounds. Their artistic expression, scale, and positioning within a space gave them an identity of their own.

PB: The "emancipation of the curtain" has led to one version that is completely independent from architecture: a transparent membrane that floats in space, held up by helium balloons. The emancipation is, however, also about its freedom of presence or character, its movements and its independent shape: suggesting an evening dress when stored around a structural column in a museum space, acting like an attractive diva that closes and opens a stage at considerable speed, transmitting sound from its reflective, pleated surface, traversing a room in unexpected directions, or choosing to disconnect from the architectural form, letting go of defined boundaries to form a composition of its own. It can be thick and heavy or thin and as light as a feather. Like an actress, the curtain can appear or disappear; be modest, witty, dramatic, or boldly striking. The curtain is suddenly a lively presence, able to totally transform a space or atmosphere in the blink of an eye! All this forms the curtain's charisma and creates its cinematic quality.

SAŠA KARALIĆ: Does the curtain serve as a kind of mediator between the inside and outside?

PB: Traditionally it does. If the curtain follows the architecture, like a transparent façade, a wall, or a stage, it defines a division or an ending, opening up or closing off a space. What is inside and outside? Where are you, and where are they? A curtain is, of course, in itself a space with interior and exterior elements (pleats, layers, structure). It can indeed be the mediator between inside and outside, or it can form a boundary where there was none, then move sideways or upwards to open up a place or connect spaces, such as in the theatre.

The curtain is also space in itself: if you look at the curtain up close, you'll find all kinds of spaces within. Within the weave or knit, within the hairs, in-between pleats—so-called air chambers. We talk about inward and outward, and inside and outside, forward and backward when we weave, cut, knot, knit, fold, or sew, or when we describe where the yarn goes with which we sew. Also, in a microscopic sense, you have the inside and outside within each yarn, each particle. It's endless when one starts to think about the definition of space, its place, scale and boundaries.

SK: I think that's a beautiful analogy between the use of the curtain in architecture and in theatre. Željko mentioned earlier that the

curtain originates from the bourgeois tradition. The way the curtain you just mentioned is positioned on stage also strongly reflects bourgeois theatre conventions. Later, in modern and experiential theatre—where the boundary between stage and audience was often blurred—the curtain took on a completely different function and became less relevant. In your work, I see the curtain almost as a question mark: a mediator, but also a boundary—a soft barrier between two worlds.

PB: As we like contradictions, we often flirt with the "bourgeois" aspect of curtains when it can challenge the context, or when it can refer to the hidden, forbidden, or denied cultural background of a place or its inhabitants.

SK: My question is: how do you perceive the space you are invited to participate in, and the role of the curtain within that space? Once your work is situated within the context of an art exhibition, how do you reflect on its cinematic qualities?

PB: I don't know if we meant cinematic *because* it inhabits an art exhibition. The cinematographic quality lies in the fact that it can behave as an actor, as a personality, influencing the spectators and the atmosphere of a place or moment. And it moves along a carefully organized choreography through a place at various speeds, coming up, stopping, disappearing. It flutters in the wind, catches light, reflects it, transmits light, and spreads shadow patches all around. It has a certain feel and smell, bounces off color, triggers memories, communicates with its users. So, it's a living element, and a real presence if it wants to be.

SK: I was interested to hear—how do you position your work within the context of art? When it comes to architecture, that's quite clear to me, but within the art context, I'm curious how you see it.

PB: For the Haus der Kunst in Munich (2004-2007) we made a monumental curtain that, on its interior side, acted as a projection screen. Once the curtain was pulled out completely and fastened at its outer end, the pleats were flattened and the translucent surface, thanks to its opaque lining, reflected moving images with perfect quality. So: a curtain as acoustic tool, space-definer, and flexible cinema. I particularly liked the softness and almost ethereal quality of the "screen" material in combination

with the immateriality of the medium of film, actually each time a kind of miracle how with rays of light images fly straight through the air to strike a plane, and in this case onto a soft, slightly swaying, almost indefinable material that simultaneously absorbs the images and passes them through to the other side. For the Diana und Aktaion exhibit at the Kunstpalast in Dusseldorf (2008) we created two sinuous curtains that meandered through the exhibition spaces as integral part of the exhibit, reenforcing the theme of the installation through its materialization and strategic transparency.

ŽR: Is it possible to define private and public space in architecture beyond ideological preconditioning? Are the "interspaces" or "spaces within spaces" you create, in some sense, de-ideologized spheres focused on exploring new possibilities?

ALM: Interesting question. Let me try to rephrase: what would the precondition of a space be before it is labelled as private or public? Do we create spaces that are somehow in-between, removed from ideology, or given a possible new status? Unintentionally, we might have created spaces within gardens or interiors where you can feel protected or secluded while inside a very public building or park. Being surrounded by hedges, screened by tall grass, or standing within a dense circular forest can be a space that is hard to define or pin down. In our exhibition designs, one can stand between a sea of floating vitrines or be trespassing an enfilade of transparent screens. Both scenarios can disorient or create the feeling of being in another dimension that is neither here nor there.

PB: To come back on your words "de-ideologized spheres," I think it is important to state that it all depends on the situation: we sometimes feel like taking our interventions out of the system of prescribed intentions, and sometimes we purposely pick up on the intended ideology when we feel there is a lack that can be enriched.

ŽR: How would you define architectural elements like curtains in terms of their mediatory role? Can we even speak of mediation, or should this relationship be understood in a different way?

ALM: In one way, curtains can have a mediatory role, in the sense that they facilitate many things and act as a welcome connector. Technically

speaking, they filter light, enhance acoustics, influence climatological conditions, define spaces. Emotionally, a curtain introduces tactility, memory, and cultural and generational connection. Socially speaking, they create privacy, invite for gatherings, or divide a space or a group of people into segments. Curtains are intermediary objects between space and architecture, between mass and void, defining the contra-form, the empty space.

PB: The word "mediation" sounds a bit fashionably sensitive. It is true that we often play an intermediary role, functioning as diplomats in complex situations, navigating between opposing mentalities and expectations. But often we are much more "activist" than the word "mediation" implies. We assert independent identities, challenging the architecture, the architect, the client, and the users with our interventions—bringing the viewer off balance or introducing moments of surprise.

ŽR: Your work in designing open spaces involves dynamic elements, such as the incorporation of biological components (vegetation) that are subject to seasonal changes. How would you articulate the processual nature of your approach?

ALM: A landscape is a process which is never finished. A landscape design is a forward-looking document predicting what will happen in at least the coming 50 years. We embrace natural processes and lately also try to visualize them, not only in drawings but also in moving images. Through our collaborations with ecologists, we have been advised to introduce very young plants to a site, or even to just "invite" local plants and weeds to settle in a specifically created condition—allowing them to grow more durably and healthily, and letting wind and rain shape them into their naturalistic look. Learning to let go of control and to predict gradual transitions between landscape conditions, rather than prescribing a fixed image of a landscape, means that working in the landscape today is all about processes, and that is what we facilitate with our current designs.

PB: Contrary to the static of architecture, nature is indeed dynamic. The incorporation of biological components, such as vegetation, has a counter timeline to, for instance, in comparison to curtains, in the sense that textile works are installed in a perfect final state, after which they

slowly degrade. Man-made nature's development, on the other hand, only starts after implementation, slowly growing towards its "final state" (imagined by the designers). Its success and survival depends on many different and often uncontrollable factors, such as urban density, air and water quality, wind turbulence, light levels, waste management, damage caused by animals and humans, and maintenance quality. This makes the introduction of "nature" into a project complex, time-consuming, often frustrating, but also fascinating (almost addictive!) all at the same time.

ŽR: In this context, could we also speak about the dynamic nature of the very concept of sustainability, which plays an important role in your work?

ALM: Yes, it's all about dynamism, adapting to changing conditions, a changing climate, and thus introducing the element of flexibility in forms of use and circumstances over time. A large percentage of our landscape projects is projected on roofs, as full soil conditions in the urban context are scarce. We try to mimic the natural soil condition by using water retention systems allowing the roots and their capillary properties to develop well, making the entire green package future-proof. There are smart controls that are in contact with the weather forecast and can automatically release water before heavy rainfall or supply extra water during dry periods. Besides this high-tech solution, we also have better control of the soil build-up itself and its nutritional quality. Apart from creating conditions that allow plants and trees to develop their root systems horizontally sufficiently to be connected below ground, our "Living Soil" research is giving us more grip on the importance and the role of living organisms in the soil. The number and diversity of living organisms indicate the soil's condition and help capture more CO2, nitrogen, and nutrients for the roots, expressed above ground in healthy plant growth. Diving into this subject gives us tools to create regenerative landscapes which are not only attractive to look at but also influence the underground layers, their conservation, and their healthy development. "Plants are the only organisms that connect the ground to the atmosphere, the soil to the climate."[1] This immediate relation between soil and atmosphere is a topic we are elaborating on. It is an opportunity to find deeper meaning.

[1] R. S. Elkin, *Plant Life: The Entangled Politics of Afforestation*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis / London, 2022, p. 3.

PB: The aspect of sustainability has always been important for us, but in this time and age, when our globe is in urgent need of strategic thinking and fruitful global collaboration to heal and improve our planet and the health of all living things (with COVID and global warming as dramatic warnings), the necessity for sustainability is clear to everybody. Too bad that the current wars are slowing down initiatives and reducing available budgets.

What is new in our work is that we aim to make life inside the soil visible in the form of drawings. With the help of scientists—each with their own specialism—whom we invite to our studio, we are taught how every living ingredient functions and what it looks like, so that we can visualize it. This visualization has already become a valuable tool for many parties internationally, inspiring and educating people outside our *métier*.

ŽR: You recently published a book titled *Art Applied*. How do you understand the concept of "applied" art, especially in the context of architecture?

PB: "Applied Art" is more conventional and refers to handicraft or mass-produced work. Art *Applied*, on the contrary, is the connection between a free spirit and a controlled context. It refers to the creation of unique pieces that fulfil a certain necessary function, applied to a given framework.

ŽR: What role does collective work on projects play in your approach?

PB: We cherish and stimulate collaborations with specialists and colleagues from various backgrounds (this is the case within Inside Outside as well), as this enriches and challenges our intelligence, perspective, knowledge, and creativity, raising the results that emanate from this collective process to a higher and deeper level. It also opens up special friendships.

ALM: Collaboration provides a sense of connection and belonging to a team with a shared goal. We realized this together! We went through it together! Sometimes architectural and landscape projects can last more than a decade; during this time the team itself develops, politics and economic circumstances change, and each individual goes through different

phases of their life. Overcoming and adjusting to all this strengthens the sense of community (in this case, the design team).

ŽR: In your book *Art Applied*, you note that certain materials in architecture have specific traditions of application. For instance, curtains are traditionally understood as opposing the "masculine" principle, carrying the signature of the "feminine." Can specific materiality already point to a particular symbolic order, such as the mentioned binary?

PB: Architecture used to be seen as masculine (read: strong, confident, and decisive), and our work with textiles and gardens as feminine (read: sensitive, thoughtful, and accommodating). In our time we see much more sliding scales between the *cliché* of masculine and feminine. In this sense, our work can just be considered an intelligent tool that performs both technically and aesthetically, connecting all cultures and generations through their recognizable presence in the human environment, both inside and outside.

ALM: Our work is fluid, always in movement and free. There is not much labeling in an interdisciplinary result.

ŽR: Your architectural interventions in space seem to challenge conventional notions of the functionality of certain spaces. However, it also appears that this is not simply about repurposing or introducing a new function but about opening space for new interpretations.

PB: Indeed, that is correct.

ALM: We see some of our designs as "inventions." They happen because of the liberty we take to experiment without being bound to "what has already been proven" or the framework of a certain profession and because of our disinterest in following the latest trends and work of other designers. We keep inventing the wheel with each new given context and program, and this is important, as challenging ourselves keeps us curious and energetic, in addition to introducing innovation and originality.

ŽR: Your work is often exhibited in art spaces, such as Luma Westbau in Zurich, sometimes in group exhibitions, where its reading can shift from an architectural gesture to an autonomous artwork. Are you aware of this shift, and if so, do you consider it significant to your practice?

PB: Yes, of course this is significant to our practice. It symbolizes the many faces of our work, the different forms of intervention and thinking directions. Normally, our work is about reacting to and commenting on the context in which we are invited to participate, so it is sometimes a great relief if we can be free to create just for the sake of creating.

ŽR: Hybridity and transiency seem to play an important role in your work, particularly in projects that involve natural processes and the element of time. Do you see a connection between these aspects of your practice and similar tendencies in contemporary art, such as in the work of Pierre Huyghe?

PB: I love his work, but I don't feel there is an actual connection, because, first of all, there is a huge difference between the means available to artists and those reserved for architects and designers. Secondly, our work on gardens and landscape has shifted considerably from "design" to biology, with the health of soil and the biodiversity of all its inhabitants as focal points, increasing the distance and decreasing financial support even more. This might change, but until now this has been the case. So, we can talk about creative affinity and acknowledge the fact that we appreciate green inside an art building and that we certainly use similar ingredients in our work—but we were never invited to create a temporary landscape inside a gallery.

ALM: Something I admire in Huyghe's work is its experimentation with reality, blurring fact and fiction. He makes highly controlled, sculptural collages that have an impact because of their clarity and directness. For me, this relates slightly to our curtain designs, where we decontextualize existing materials, assemble them—almost as a "collage"—and experiment with a range of techniques to thus create new typologies. But for the rest, we are worlds apart, as our work is about functionality and about answering a multitude of given requirements and regulations, including the technical complexities that go with it.

Interview conducted by Željko Radinković and Saša Karalić.

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Simone Ferracina*

Graham Harman, *Architecture and Objects: Art after Nature*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2022.

I first read *Architecture and Objects* in the summer of 2021, in advance of its publication.[1] At the time, I was completing the manuscript of my first book *Ecologies of Inception: Design Potentials on a Warming Planet,* which challenged—towards non-extractive and caring forms of architectural practice—the Western grounding of potentiality in notions of blankness, formlessness, and plasticity.[2] Guided by a relational, feminist, and emancipatory interpretation and analysis of "withdrawal," the book also considered how Graham Harman's philosophy—what has come to be known as object-oriented ontology (OOO)—could help develop architectural design as a form of stewardship, and separate the value of buildings, materials, and components from their original functions and the associated projects—also recognising it in their embodiment of violence, harm, labour, carbon, and energy.[3] In my reading, the opacity of objects, much like Édouard Glissant's "right to opacity," could establish a metaphysical ground for the coexistence of many worlds—freedom as

[1] I begin this review by framing the context of my engagement with Harman's work, as a reminder that reading is a situated and creative act (as Ursula K. Le Guin suggests, the story is a collection of "black marks on wood pulp" until the "reader, reading it, makes it live"). U. K. Le Guin, *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, Grove / Atlantic, Incorporated, New York, 1997, p. 182.

[2] See S. Ferracina, *Ecologies of Inception: Design Potentials on a Warming Planet*, Routledge, Abingdon / New York, 2022.

[3] I should note that the book stemmed from my PhD project at the European Graduate School (Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought). The thesis, *Ecologies of Inception: Designing Hyperobjects*, was developed with Graham Harman as supervisor, and completed in 2020 with Harman, Timothy Morton, and Christopher Fynsk as thesis defence committee members.

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the constitutional impossibility of being fully known, paraphrased, used up, named, dominated, or reproduced.[4]

Back in 2012, Harman still shied away from defining the "possible significance or insignificance" of OOO for architecture in any detail, preferring to "leave it to real architects to decide that question" and merely suggesting that his philosophy might contribute to "better integrating the unknown and the counterfactual into our picture of reality."[5] Instead, a decade—and several books and articles—later, *Architecture and Objects* demarcated an authorised landing zone for the encounter between OOO and architecture, one that significantly strayed from my own interpretative aspirations. The tension between these opposite uses of object-oriented philosophy—towards architectural autonomy on one side, and architectural stewardship on the other—coloured and colours my reading of *Architecture and Objects*, and situates the present review. But let's start from the book's central arguments.

The book interrogates architecture's relation with philosophy and art respectively. The former concerns primarily—and defends the status of—the architectural translation of philosophical insights, linking it to the priority of aesthetic experience in accessing, partially and indirectly as this may be, the reality of objects (I will clarify this below). The latter inspires a formalist approach to architectural aesthetics that adopts a Kantian model of autonomy but loosens its parameters, trading a wholesale rejection of ulterior interactions—the disqualifying usefulness of buildings—with the selection of a limited few. In both discussions, Harman argues for the separability of relational concerns and circumstances (for example, environmental or socio-political effects) from the autonomous and aesthetic building-objects outlasting them—a separation I will contest. Three threads run across the chapters and often combine: an exposition of the key tenets of object-oriented philosophy; the object-oriented re-tracing of recent encounters between Western avant-garde architects

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[4] É. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbour, 2009, p. 189. See also S. Ferracina, "Reclaiming Opacity: Towards Errant, Exaptive, and Monstruous Architectural Ecologies," https://pensarecomeunamontagna.gamec.it/en/reclaiming-opacity-towards-errant-exaptive-and-monstrous-architectural-ecologies/, (accessed 9 April 2025).

[5] G. Harman, "Non-Relationality for Philosophers and Architects," *Bells and Whistles: More Speculative Realism*, Zero Books, Winchester / Washington, 2012, pp. 208, 217. A key intermediate step in the encounter between OOO and architecture is represented by J. Bedford (ed.), *Is there an Object-Oriented Architecture? Engaging Graham Harman*, Bloomsbury Academic, London / New York, 2020.

and philosophers; and the definition of a triple-O brand of architectural formalism in opposition to literalist, rationalist, or functionalist approaches.

The American philosopher's basic insight is that neither experience (the partial ways in which we encounter them) nor knowledge (the information we can gather about them) can exhaust or fully capture the reality of objects, which eludes forms of paraphrase and reduction, remaining in part withdrawn.[6] While subordinating objects to underlying structures presumed to be deeper or more fundamental (e.g., atoms, primordial soups, being) fails to account for emergence—their being more than the sum of their parts—, reducing them to their qualities or effects cannot account for how they change.[7] For Harman, the term "object" denotes precisely entities that resist forms of reduction in these two directions (what he calls undermining and overmining). Anything can be an object: buildings, bricks, poems, zoning laws, strawberry jam recipes, human beings, foxes, historical events, and fictional characters—and even the relations between them.[8]

Harmanian objects comprise a phenomenal and a noumenal pole, existing dynamically either in relation to a perceiver (sensual object and sensual qualities) or withdrawn from that relation (real object and real qualities).[9] Here, causation can only be vicarious—two real objects only come into contact indirectly, through the intercession of a sensual one, and within a larger object that acts as either medium (a neutral background) or mediator (a portal towards new situations).[10] When I perceive a tree, for example, I am not encountering the real tree, but a sensual translation (the "tree for me") that combines a unified object and its many partial profiles or qualities. In this interaction (what Harman calls "sincerity") a sensual object is, as helpfully articulated by Jon Cogburn and Niki Young, "the glue between two real objects, one emanating and one intending."[11] As sincerity forms a new compound object (the real

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[6] G. Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, p. 3.

[7] G. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, Zero Books, Winchester / Washington, 2011, pp. 8–13.

[8] *Ibid*., pp. 7–19. My treatment of OOO in *Ecologies of Inception* attempts to displace the focus on the architectural object precisely by attributing the starring role of "object" not to buildings, but to Land, nonhumans, inhabitants, and building components respectively. See S. Ferracina, *Ecologies of Inception*, pp. 201–234.

[9] G. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, p. 110.

[10] G. Harman, *Architecture and Objects,* p. 111.

[11] J. Cogburn, N. Young, "Revisiting the Notion of Vicarious Cause: Allure, Metaphor, and Realism in Object-Oriented Ontology," *Open Philosophy*, VII, 1, 2024, p. 4.

me + the sensual tree), a "subject can always be found on the interior of some wider object to which it belongs, and is not some unique point of transcendence or negativity that rises above everything else."[12]

But objects and their qualities are not always fused together, and can be pulled apart from one another, resulting in what Harman calls "tensions." With the exception of the causal link between a real object and its real qualities, tensions are central to OOO's understanding of aesthetic (that is, non-literal and non-conceptual) experience: the vertical one between the withdrawn reality of an object and its sensual qualities as they appear to another real object; the horizontal one between a stable sensual object and its shifting sensual qualities; and the eidetic one between an intelligible sensual object and the real qualities ascribed to it by a beholder.[13]

Aiming to resolve the impasse between "ontological evaluation" and "design proposition" lamented by Bryan E. Norwood,[14] Harman offers cautious examples of architectural precedents, strategies, and "aesthetic techniques" (e.g., "ambiguous legibility"; "targeted overornamentation"; "emphatic transparency"; the use of plinths that separate a building's mass from the ground) that may address and amplify these tensions.[15] However, the appeal to repeatable recipes, rules, and protocols, even if tentative and unstable, remains fraught with difficulties, and runs the risk of mistaking the conceptual underpinnings or critical success of a building for its aesthetic content, or of ascribing aesthetic value to architectural solutions that, removed from disciplinary discourses and art-historical baselines, have none. Doesn't OOO, after all, foreground precisely how reality exceeds our articulations and representations of it? And is it not possible that slippages between objects and their qualities be found in all manner of spaces and configurations, spanning different scales, and even piercing the outlines of buildings and the language used to describe them?

In any case, Harman challenges a literalist approach to architecture (one according to which "we can adequately describe" a building "by enumerating an appropriate set of qualities" or functional orientations), proposing one that, by alluding to the withdrawn objects below the relational surface of things, is capable of unlocking their "not-yet-discovered

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[12] G. Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, p. 106.
[13] *Ibid*., pp. 82–86.
[14] B. E. Norwood, "Metaphors for Nothing," *Log*, 33, 2015, p. 115.
[15] G. Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, pp. 82, 83, 172.

qualities."[16] For example, unlike descriptions of oxygen's measurable atomic properties or environmental behaviour, a poem might refer to the element as being "fed by all plant life on the earth, including trees."[17] This, Harman tells us, causes the oxygen to "come to life."[18]

> Oxygen is *fed*, suggesting a ravenous appetite on the part of this inanimate chemical. It is fed in part not just by trees, but by *all* trees, hinting at a vast arboreal conspiracy. Moreover, it is not just all trees, but all trees *from the earth*, which also brings soil and bedrock into the cartel. Even if we insist that this is merely improper personification of an inanimate chemical, the poem still does genuine cognitive work. By ascribing so much unfamiliar drama to the life of oxygen, the line in question splits oxygen as an inscrutable *object* from oxygen as a *bundle of qualities*: whether those that science measures in mathematizable form or those that practical life uses as it will. In OOO terms, the poem produces an object/quality rift, which is precisely what theoretical knowledge and practical know-how equally avoid.[19]

But as the real oxygen remains inaccessible and cannot bear "fed" qualities, it turns out that the real object performing the oxygen's quality of being fed is the poem's reader.[20] In this reverse form of mimesis, "it is not that the artist manufactures imitations of objects," writes Harman, "but that the beholder of art *enacts* a nonliteral imitation of what is beheld."[21] In other words, not unlike the combination of hydrogen and oxygen in a molecule of water, the metaphorical union between the beholder and the qualities of the absent oxygen produces a new compound object that is itself autonomous, and that, by remaining precarious and improbable, de-literalises the relation between its components.[22] This overcomes and neutralises, according to Harman, Kant's rejection of the relation between art object and human beholder (and Peter Eisenman's rejection of the relation between architecture and inhabitant).[23] Therefore, OOO's formalism no longer identifies an interior reality cut

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[16] *Ibid*., pp. 60, 114.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 115.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] *Ibid*., pp. 115–116.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 116.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 153.
[23] *Ibid*., pp. 152–153.

off from everything else, but one that only engages with specific slices of reality (those invited into the compound object, or "cell").

Harman's formalism aims to de-relationalise or "zero" two terms, form and function, that usually refer to how buildings are perceived and used respectively.[24] Harman drains them of relational content to maximise architecture's autonomy "despite its built-in handicap of usefulness."[25] Two examples stand out: Louis Sullivan's functionalist maxim "form ever follows function" being read as a quasi-formalist limiting of impurities ("an important variation on Kantian aesthetics"),[26] and the foreshadowing, in Aldo Rossi's enduring types, of Harman's understanding of form as denoting "the reality of a thing apart from [...] relations."[27] The tension between form and function, taken to represent the "gap between an entity's intrinsic structure and its relations with the world," informs three formalist design protocols: the zeroing of form, the zeroing of time, and the zeroing of function.[28] The zeroing of form is achieved through the production of new contexts and compound objects, and is analogous to the selective assembly of individual building components (a stack of bricks) into architectural structures (an arch or a wall).[29] The zeroing of time refers to the merging of the experiences and memories associated with a building ("the house seen from everywhere") and appeals to the development of "temporal complexity" in built form.[30] Finally, the zeroing or "monumentalising" of function doesn't suppress programmatic concerns, but loosens and detaches its constituent terms.[31]

It should be noted that, for Harman, "a monumental imperative" animates, in every discipline, a desire to deliver outputs that are "more than the product of [their] time and place."[32] However, it is difficult to imagine how the establishment of any canon could be independent of the contingent socio-political history that informs it. Aren't monuments, after all, also symbols and consolidations of power? Yet, the tension between form and function described by Harman could also articulate and

[24] *Ibid*., p. 68.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 54.
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] *Ibid*., p. 44.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 135.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 154.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 157.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 158.
[32] *Ibid*., p. 174.

renegotiate an object's continued identity, outline, composition, and persistence as it moves across users, uses, scales, programmes, and times. Indeed, Harman's language ("zeroing") is suggestive of a dial that could be turned up and down to describe, with some degree of precision, different levels of programmatic and functional attachment and co-dependence.

Architecture and Objects is fascinating and at times exhilarating, yet this reader is left wondering whether OOO's radical views on aesthetics and causality, and its rejection of onto-taxonomy (the postulation of a fundamental gap between humans and nonhumans), could deliver more than a conservative account of architectural value as centred around the significance of individual avant-garde buildings and their phenomenological or critical appreciation. Beyond the metaphorical world of poems and art objects, couldn't architecture be defined by more active forms of engagement that, like making or misusing, are able to also produce object/quality rifts? Doesn't playing a chair like a bongo drum, or turning a tree into a table, bring forth the "not-yet-discovered qualities" of the respective objects? And, insofar as the tree-turned-table has a reality that is independent of language and perception, should we not understand them (the tree and the table) to be the same object?

The appeal to nonrelationality, metaphors, and allure expounded in *Architecture and Objects* can inspire compelling new ways to think about architectural composition and design. Harman's case for a formalist architecture, however, remains unconvincing insofar as aesthetic experience is understood to be more important than, or even inversely proportional to, other design considerations (e.g., social, political, environmental, constructional). "*Sociopolitical critiques of formalism in architecture*," he pre-emptively tells us, "*bear only on its preconditions* [...] Formalism is not politically suspect, any more than poems are suspect for not attempting to save the world."[33] Yet buildings are not poems, and what differentiates our present moment from those animating the Deleuzian or Derridean architectural explorations of the nineties or two-thousands is precisely a broad and detailed disciplinary understanding of how, in the ongoing environmental and social crises, buildings embody and perform violence. Aside from the most glaring instances of exploitation and human rights abuse associated, for example, with on-going Saudi developments (to which architects explicitly inspired by Harman's brand of formalism happen to be attached), architectural configurations and

[33] *Ibid*. Italics in the original.

solutions are directly responsible for environmental harm and injustice.[34] Specifying ultra-clear glass in a building, for instance, doesn't only promote a form of "emphatic transparency," but also commits to a "radical increase in the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides," to the extent that the material can be understood, in Andrés Jaque's words, as "a socio-territorial apparatus intended to segregate humans and nonhumans in zones of diverse levels of pollution exposure."[35] Similarly, the extraction and production of materials like aluminium, steel and concrete have been shown to cause irreparable damage to livelihoods and ecosystems, often along the well-trodden paths of environmental inequality and racism.[36] The list could go on; the point being that, as I wrote elsewhere, "[d]esign decisions are never just decisions about a design."[37] Or, to put it differently, aesthetic decisions are never just decisions about aesthetics.

Now, these considerations are not attempts to "undermine" the architectural object or to confuse it with its history, insofar as there is a difference, glossed over in Harman's book, between the object of aesthetic experience (the completed building) and the design decisions informing its configuration and construction. That is: not only are aesthetic decisions—of the formalist as well as of any other persuasion—inextricably and causally linked to the effects of their implementation, of which the building is one; they also are, alongside all manner of other concerns (e.g., functional, tectonic, energetic, ethical) just another "precondition

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[34] See for example: M.Thomas, L. El Gibaly, "Neom: Saudi Forces 'Told to Kill' to Clear Land for Eco-City," https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68945445, (accessed 9 April 2025); D. J. Roche, "New Documentary Reveals that 21,000 Laborers Have Died Working on Saudi Vision 2030, which includes NEOM, Since Construction Began," https://www.archpaper.com/2024/10/documentary-reveals-21000-workers-killed-saudi-vision-2030-neom/, (accessed 9 April 2025).

[35] A. Jaque, "Architecture as Ultra-clear Rendered Society," in V. Grossman and C. Miguel (eds.), *Everyday Matters: Contemporary Approaches to Architecture*, Ruby Press, Berlin, 2021, pp. 165–167.

[36] See for example: C. A. Zimring, *Aluminum Upcycled: Sustainable Design in Historical Perspective*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2017; V. Beiser, "Sand Mining: The Global Environmental Crisis You've Probably Never Heard of," https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/feb/27/sand-mining-global-environmental-crisis-never-heard, (accessed 9 April 2025); A.N. Conejo, J-P. Birat, A. Dutta, "A Review of the Current Environmental Challenges of the Steel Industry and Its Value Chain," *Journal of Environmental Management* 259 (1 April 2020): 109782.

[37] S. Ferracina, "The Ethics of Use: Repurposing Debenhams," https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/after-comfort/563085/the-ethics-of-use-repurposing-debenhams/, (accessed 9 April 2025).

for architecture."[38] Beauty can never be truly separated from the complex matrix of decisions, pressures, biases, and constraints directly or indirectly involved in its pursuit, nor can formalist architects be exonerated from professional duties, or from the need to extend the scope of their responsibility and attention in the face of mounting social, political, and environmental crises.

[38] G. Harman, *Architecture and Objects*, p. 172.

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Andreas Lechner*

Madalina Diaconu, *Aesthetics of Weather*, Bloomsbury, New York, 2024.

There are books one reads with the mind—and then there are those one inhabits with the senses. *Aesthetics of Weather* by Mădălina Diaconu belongs unmistakably to the latter. As an architect attuned to the nuances of light, air, and the ever-shifting moods of the sky, I found myself instinctively drawn into Diaconu's layered inquiry—one that approaches weather not merely as a meteorological fact, but as a phenomenon that is embodied, internalized, and culturally inflected.

Reading this book feels less like following a linear philosophical argument and more like moving through a sensuous landscape. One does not simply observe the passing of clouds; one begins to sense how they modulate thought, gesture, and spatial inhabitation. Diaconu does not describe weather in the abstract—she animates it philosophically, tracing its textures through aesthetic perception, phenomenological presence, and shared cultural memory. It is a rare work that deepens atmospheric awareness with such subtlety and depth.

Structured as a collection of thirteen essays, the book unfolds a nuanced exploration of an interdisciplinary field shaped by a phenomenological framework indebted to Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It draws attention to how the "out there" of weather becomes an "in here"—a felt, lived, and interpreted part of our being-in-the-world. Throughout, the book unfolds a series of resonant themes in architecture, recognizing that buildings do not merely shield us from the elements but also mediate and amplify our experience of them—at times, even poetically.

In her introduction, Diaconu sets the stage by highlighting the omnipresence of weather in daily life that necessitates an aesthetic framework

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in order to understand it not merely as a backdrop but as a dynamic entity that both shapes and is shaped by human experience. Here she outlines the book's bridging of phenomenology, environmental studies, and cultural analysis, to offer a holistic view of atmospheric aesthetics:

> To fit our times, the aesthetics of weather must "update" classical analyses of the aesthetic experience, such as the Kantian theory of sublime, and consider its socioeconomic and environmental embedment. Only then can the aesthetics of atmosphere fully deploy its social and environmental critical potential and go further than unveiling the manipulative power of staging atmospheres in the "aesthetic capitalism" [...] no matter how strong the emotional impact of ambiances may be, humans can still self-critically reflect upon their experience, disclose its sociocultural filters and restrain from para-aesthetic, environmentally nocuous practices.[1]

The first part of the book starts with exploring the ambivalences of weather as both a phenomenon and the object of aesthetic experience and argues for a redefined aesthetics of weather that integrates ecological awareness, phenomenology, and social critique. As traditional aesthetics often dismissed weather as ephemeral, the Anthropocene demands ethical and political engagement, also because the accessibility of weather is socially conditioned, shaped by urbanization, pollution, and economic disparities.

Phenomenologically, weather is both *available*—universally present—and *accessible*, though unequally experienced. Its aesthetic qualities, such as *framelessness*, *ephemerality*, and *chromatic diversity*, interact with bodily perception while hyperphenomena, like extreme weather, evoke the Kantian sublime, oscillating between awe and existential dread.

Diaconu extends Gernot Böhme's phenomenology of atmosphere by incorporating scientific perspectives, advocating for an engaged aesthetics of weather that fosters ecological awareness and policy engagement. With the chapter *Hotness and Coldness* Diaconu integrates phenomenology, biology, and environmental aesthetics, arguing for a cultural and ecological interpretation of temperature beyond scientific abstraction. The fourth chapter examines tornadoes as hyper-phenomena that challenge perception and ontology, aligning with Kant's dynamical sublime and

[1] M. Diaconu, *Aesthetics of Weather*, p.3.

Adorno's allegory of the beyond. While meteorology defines tornadoes as atmospheric vortices, phenomenology reveals them as perceptual thresholds mediating between chaos and form. Tornadoes, in their visual and existential immediacy, disrupt human perception, demonstrating how elemental forces shape human experience and the built environment.

The second book section, *Phenomenography*, traces the representation of weather in art and cultural discourse, revealing tensions between empirical and symbolic interpretations. Diaconu starts by examining weather proverbs as cognitive frameworks that blend predictive, perceptual, and imaginative knowledge. While these sayings historically guided agricultural and maritime activities, their poetic dimensions enrich contemporary environmental aesthetics. This linguistic and cultural sensitivity to weather extends to artistic depictions of landscapes and atmospheric conditions, demonstrating how weather has functioned as both a literal and metaphorical force in human history.

In *Longing for Clouds*, Diaconu challenges the assumption that fine weather is aesthetically superior, arguing that unnoticed, stable conditions contrast with the perceptual prominence of rain, fog, and snow. As the Anthropocene shifts human agency from passive observation to active weather-making, Diaconu sees a contemporary suspicion of fine weather as a direct result of climate change. The seventh chapter examines the wind's aesthetic paradox as an ungraspable, dynamic force.

The final chapter in this section, *Thermic Aesthetics: Conservation, Comfort, and Contingency in Art*, addresses temperature's neglected role in aesthetic experience. While global warming has heightened interest in thermic perception, aesthetics has traditionally ignored temperature. Unlike sound and vision, temperature thus lacks a distinct art form and has been historically associated with materiality rather than aesthetic contemplation. It is buildings that most distinctively integrate thermal comfort, from vernacular traditions adapted to climate, to modern and contemporary architecture discourses. Climatic design strategies are re-emphasized by architect Phillippe Rahm, who argues for an architectural shift from solid forms to atmospheric conditions, considering airflow, humidity, and radiation as design parameters. As thermic qualities also extend beyond direct perception— –colors, materials, and scents can evoke warmth or coolness, wood and textiles can feel "warm," while metal and glass "cold"—thermal aesthetics challenges traditional ocularcentrism, revealing temperature's sensory, environmental, and artistic significance.

Diaconu opens the third part of the book, *Collective Practices,* with an examination of the travel writings of the 19th-century scientist John Tyndall, focusing on his detailed sensory descriptions of Alpine environments, blending scientific observation with aesthetic appreciation. The next chapter, *Remembering the Air or Breathing Landscapes* explores the evolving concept of landscape, questioning its conventional associations with land and stability by tracing the historical and disciplinary expansion of landscape studies from classical aesthetic and geographical perspectives to contemporary ecocritical approaches.

The chapter *The Weather-Worlds of Urban Bodies: Summer in the City* explores the deep entanglement of urban environments, weather, and human bodies, arguing that cities, like people, are shaped by atmospheric conditions. While classical urban studies by Georg Simmel or Walter Benjamin focused on psychology and social structures, recent scholarship highlights urban *sensescapes* and the embodied experience of weather. The relationship between climatic exposure and access to controlled environments as a reflection of social hierarchies as investigated by Henri Lefebvre as well as the homogenizing effects of air-conditioning and climate-controlled urbanity are critiqued.

The chapter *Para-Aesthetic Environmental Practices: Revisiting the Kantian Sublime in the Age of Mass Tourism* explores the intersection of aesthetics, environmental ethics, and tourism. Diaconu introduces the *para-aesthetic*, referring to the spatial and temporal framing of aesthetic experiences and the collision of aesthetic enjoyment with ethical concerns. Disaster tourism exemplifies the *dynamical sublime*, where visitors observe destruction from a detached position, while astronomic tourism commodifies the *mathematical sublime*. She argues that contemporary aesthetics must recognize the ethical implications of aesthetic consumption, shifting from individualistic sublime experiences to collective environmental responsibility.

The final chapter, *Leave No Traces – Towards a Paradigm Change in the Anthropocene?*, critically examines the concept of traces in environmental philosophy, aesthetics, and waste studies, advocating for a shift from permanence to ephemerality as an ethical imperative in the Anthropocene. Traditional Western thought has long privileged durability and continuity, valuing monuments and historical inscriptions as forms of resistance against transience. In response, Diaconu critiques phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches like Levinas or Ricœur, which have historically emphasized the past while neglecting the future consequences

of human-made residues. She argues thus that contemporary waste—ranging from CO_2 emissions and plastic pollution to orbital debris—functions as an involuntary trace, persisting beyond human lifetimes and challenging conventional notions of aesthetic and ethical responsibility. In light of this, she advocates for alternative frameworks such as the *temporal sublime* and *aesthetics of care*, proposing that sustainability necessitates not only the reduction of material traces but also a fundamental reimagining of aesthetic practices as transient, adaptive, and responsive.

Diaconu's call for a paradigm shift in aesthetics—one that embraces impermanence and minimizes environmental impact as an ethical imperative in art and design—resonates deeply with resilient and emotionally charged architectural practices that already engage in continual transformation, adaptive reuse, and the repurposing of existing structures and infrastructures. Yet, beyond this architectural and biopolitical framing, the book's urgent appeal for global ecological responsibility, its nuanced intersections of perception, culture, and environment, make it both an erudite and beautifully written warning and a hopeful invitation to reimagine our relationship with nature. In this vision, *Aesthetics of Weather* emerges as a crucial lens through which to envision an "ecosophically" sounder future—one that is attuned to the ephemeral, the adaptive, and the deeply entangled nature of human and ecological time.

Book Review
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Susanne Stacher*

Stéphane Bonzani, *De l'invention en architecture: initier, situer, durer*, Éditions deux-cent-cinq, Paris, 2024.

This book explores invention in architecture in the Anthropocene, questioning architecture's relationship with philosophy and habitability. Stéphane Bonzani distinguishes invention from innovation, often conflated terms. While innovation refines and adapts, relying on prior knowledge for recognition and comparison, invention introduces something entirely new that is unpredictable and independent of existing frameworks, yet contributes to redefining existing conditions and connecting disparate realities.

Given today's social and environmental crises, the pursuit of novelty in architecture is increasingly seen as outdated. Originality is no longer a value in itself but must align with an ethical framework that critically examines progress. Architectural projects reveal complexities that transcend simplistic ideological interpretations. This is why the author critically interrogates the notion of invention in architecture and advocates for "inventing differently" in response to ecological crises that threaten the planet's habitability. Unlike modernism, which associated invention with rupture, *tabula rasa*, and radical newness, Bonzani proposes invention as *negotiation* rather than creative destruction, arguing that "inventing differently" should be linked to re-inhabiting the Earth in an inclusive and holistic manner. He draws inspiration from Kirkpatrick Sale's concept of Bioregionalism, Alexander Tzonis' and Liane Lefaivre's Critical Regionalism, and Alberto Magnaghi's advocacy for the Local Project.

The book is structured around three main themes: "Initiating," "Situating," and "Enduring," each concluding with "Challenges for Research" sections exploring theoretical implications for teaching and practice.

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Initiating: Rethinking Beginnings

The first chapter, "Initiating," invites us to reconsider invention as an act of beginning throughout architectural history. Bonzani questions founding myths, such as the "primitive hut," as every architectural act emerges from a pre-existing context, whether it be a physical site, cultural traditions, or materials. The author examines the return to archaic architectural practices as a response to contemporary crises, referencing Bruno Zevi's 1970s observation of a growing interest in prehistory and "architectless architectures." This return to origins critiques technological society and ecological devastation. Zevi and other theorists argue that each era has sought to reset architecture in response to its unique challenges. Across cultures, foundation rites demonstrate that architecture is fundamental to establishing a habitable world, symbolizing the creation of a cosmos and imbuing space with meaning (as explored by Mircea Eliade). A successful beginning is crucial to the durability of the worlds it shapes, emphasizing the importance of inaugural acts. Architecture, Bonzani argues, serves as a matrix of beginnings, structuring societies and spaces. The contemporary architectural trend toward archaic gestures, simple forms, and raw materials—exemplified in the works of Peter Zumthor and Francis Kéré—reflects a deeper (re)connection with the world. This movement transcends fragile economic contexts, responding instead to the urgent need to rethink the conditions of existence and renew architectural practices in the face of ecological crises.

In the "Challenges for Research" section, Bonzani points out that the first major issue in the re-evaluation of architectural invention concerns initiation practices. Theoretically, this involves exploring how the foundational act of building—seen as an essential and archaic function—is being reconfigured today. Contemporary conditions seem to suppress the essential moment of beginning, what is not deliberate but results from several key trends, such as automation, which diminishes the architect's role as an initiator. Preformatted architectural elements shift the architect's role from creator to assembler, the author argues with a techno-critical approach, without considering that the prefabrication of wooden or adobe wall elements can contribute to the spread of ecological constructions and favour strong experiences of space and time. He is more concerned with the ontological difference of deterritorialised technical objects and architectural environment-objects, and further criticises "generalised programming" (Derrida), regulatory constraints,

risk-aversion and the culture of precaution, as they discourage architectural experimentation. The loss of ritual significance in acts of initiation reduces symbolic power, yet, "[t]he Anthropocene implies radical transformation and requires us to invent, even if it means reinventing invention itself."[1]

Situating: Context and Time

The second chapter, "Situating," examines the fundamental distinction between architecture and technology, particularly the immobility and uniqueness of architectural objects. Unlike standard technical objects, architecture is anchored in a specific situation, which influences its mode of invention. The author explores the relationship between architectural objects and their environments, noting that while buildings are defined by their immobility, their surroundings are in constant flux, influencing the architecture itself. Therefore, buildings act as markers of time, allowing us to perceive changes in their contexts. Architectural transformations can be significant, as they sometimes alter entirely a structure's identity. This dynamic interplay between stability and change is crucial for understanding architecture in an accelerating world.

In his attempt to grasp the relationship between architecture and place, Bonzani sets two dead-end positions against each other: one that sanctifies place (*genius loci*) versus one that weakens its force. In both cases, we miss the dynamic, interpretive relationship involved in architectural invention. In an era of homogenised architecture and standardised production, the tension between similarity and singularity becomes a central issue. Attention to the existing environment, temporality, and change is therefore essential for a thoughtful architectural approach. Invention in architecture, Bonzani asserts, requires lived knowledge—a deep engagement with the environment to prevent oversimplification and reductionism.

The relationship between architecture and context is also reconsidered. While context represents the existing environment, the project embodies the act of invention. The two are interdependent yet often treated separately. Given the pressures of productivism, architecture must redefine invention as an effort to establish conditions conducive to life.

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[1] *L'Anthropocène implique une transformation radicale et engage à inventer, quitte à réinventer l'invention même.* S. Bonzani, *De l'invention en architecture*, p. 93.

In the "Challenges for Research" section, Bonzani calls for investigating how reevaluating localisation can reshape architecture. He questions how architecture, despite its immobility, can engage with localisation without rigidly confining sites within predefined identities or administrative boundaries. He then stresses theoretical concepts such as "paradox spatialities," "milieu," and "infra-place." Traditional dichotomies like local versus global are outdated, as local contexts are inseparable from their dependencies. The notion of place must foster connections rather than isolation. Studying vernacular architecture offers resources for imagining complex arrangements between different realities. Bonzani distinguishes between *place*, which is often perceived as static, and *milieu*, which is dynamic and reflexive. The *infra-place* represents the underlying layers beyond immediate perception, crucial for addressing environmental challenges while preserving situational complexity.

Enduring and Durability

The third chapter "Enduring" explores the durability of architecture, which often outlives the activities it houses. The question of longevity raises contemporary concerns, particularly the need to reduce the environmental footprint of architecture. Architecture should not be a simple response to needs and norms (shelter, efficiency...), but rather a field of possibilities. The author considers living as a "possibilising activity" and puts forward the idea that the duration of built environments gives rise to the possible over time: the longer a building lasts, the more possibilities appear in the uses we can make of it. Ensuring the longevity of built environments means extending architectural invention beyond initial construction, incorporating renovation and transformation. Durability reflects architecture's foundational principle of maintaining connections over time. This perspective reframes architecture not just as the "art of building" but as the "art of connections"—a practice of maintaining and reinforcing ties.

Historically present in architectural theory since Vitruvius, this idea gains renewed importance today, as the crisis of habitability stems from the breakdown of physical, social, and ecological bonds. Architecture fosters multiple forms of connections, including physical, compositional, perceptual, social, political, symbolic, and emotional links, rooted in memory and attachment to places, that all contribute to interconnectedness. Though often considered separately, these connections interact

simultaneously in architecture. The current crisis of habitability stems from the breakdown of these relationships. Spaces do not become uninhabitable due to a lack of quality but because the ties that sustain them have been eroded. The author's thesis is that the durability of inhabited environments depends on careful attention to all these forms of attachment, reinforcing continuity and resilience in the built world.

In the "Challenges for Research" section, a key issue is to identify and map architectural practices that prioritise durability, moving beyond the 20th-century's obsession for novelty and innovation. In Europe, many architects are shifting towards an approach that values what lasts and are endeavouring to extend the lifespan of materials.

Conclusion: Ecologising Invention

After exploring the triad "Initiating, Situating, Enduring," Bonzani concludes with the concept of "ecologising invention." He argues that while he rarely explicitly discusses ecology in his book, it is a fundamentally ecological book—understood as the interrelations between beings, ideas, and their environments. The book emphasises architecture's ecological role in shaping and being shaped by its context, rejecting abstract, universal ideas in favour of a situated, relational approach. As the three architectural key values are *initiation*, *immobility*, and *duration*, architecture must resist automation by emphasising the complexity of beginnings, challenge modern flux by embracing the fixed nature of buildings, and value long-term endurance over ephemeral trends. Ultimately, architecture should foster possibilities and resist the purely calculable or the overly abstract. Its mode of invention is paradoxically archaic, tied to origins while shaping the future. The book advocates for architecture as a practice of resistance, care, and creative engagement with its own conditions, grounding architectural theory in concepts that both interpret and stimulate inventive practice.

This book is not an easy read, as it is a very dense and theoretically rich, covering a wide range of topics, from history and philosophy in general to ethics and aesthetics, challenged by current environmental, social and cultural concerns. Whilst its complexity makes it sometimes hard to follow, its depth and scope offer valuable questions and insights into new aspects of architectural theory, as the author unsettles and re-examines concepts that may seem obvious at first glance. Of particular interest is the fact that time is considered as a key factor in the development of

invention in architecture, as it must incorporate durability as an essential factor of constant change. Ultimately, *De l'invention en architecture* is also a plea for good architecture, which must not content itself with merely conforming to environmental regulations, as it has a much more holistic and relational dimension that it needs to further explore.

Book Review
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Richard Lee Peragine*

Marco Biraghi, *Rem Koolhaas: l'architettura al di là del bene e del male*, Giulio Einaudi editore, Torino, 2024.

The most recent book by Italian architectural historian, Marco Biraghi, provides a timely take on the Koolhaasian "philosophy of praxis." Rem Koolhaas, the book argues, can only be understood ambiguously and incoherently, or, as put by Biraghi, in contradiction.

Biraghi warns us from the start that the intention of examining Rem Koolhaas' projects *and* theory, or his design projects as much as his projects of thought, is not to provide a model of "the architecture to come" (xi) but a "paradigmatic interpretation" of the architecture of the last fifty years. Koolhaas, Biraghi continues, has perhaps been the architect who most clearly rejected the ideological foundation of modern architecture: "that architecture must deal with *truth*—or, rather, with the (supposed) *moral* of truth,"[1] one to be created by way of the architect's idea, self, and work. We might then look back at Koolhaas—who, following the author, we might indeed call *the Nietzschean architect*—precisely because his critical approach formulates an *ethics* that strives to break the confines of society's dominant ideology, that is, the prevailing cultural values proper to liberal democratic capitalism, and touch down in a space beyond its supposed truth. If modern architecture sought to "make/transform reality *starting from* a vision of a world that differs from the existing, since Koolhaas an architect is someone able to use reality—or, that which is *as it is*—in order to *transform the world*."[2] Koolhaas turns

[1] M. Biraghi, *Rem Koolhaas*, p. ix.
[2] *Ibid*.

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the paradigm of architectural modernity on its head and does so, Biraghi suggests, by seizing on reality's *contradictions*, moving toward a Nietzschean ethics beyond all moral judgement.

Koolhaas' drive to move "Beyond Ideology," as the title of the first chapter indicates, is a feature of the Dutch architect's very first work on the Berlin Wall in 1971. The unsettling objective of finding potential within the negativity of the linear ruin of the Wall, a space of technical-military order, is moreover an example of the distinctive Koolhaasian "design writing."[3] Works like *The Berlin Wall as Architecture* and *Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* subvert the ideology of utility and morality that undergird modern architecture, in order to ironically make room for an individualistic desire that lets loose all passions reined in by dominant morality.

Subversion in the early works of Koolhaas (the Zenghelises and Vriesendorp) proceeds by twisting Manhattan's orthogonal grid in *The City of the Captive Globe* (1972). If the Grid is "conceived as the coexistence of infinite difference's generative potential" that is because, for Koolhaas, as was for the Berlin Wall and for *Exodus,* "the most unpredictable potential is triggered from the loss of freedom."[4] Paradoxically, Manhattan's capitalist "congestion" becomes an opportunity for the anonymous, autonomous and atomised development of infinite difference. This means "*any* building can affirm its own 'diversity'"[5]: architecture becomes the concrete rendering of a specific identity *qua* theory and ideology, while the unity of the metropolis is given by diversity.[6] Here, Koolhaas' realist descent into the contradictions of society brings to the fore the possibility that "the conditions of capitalism are indispensable *pre-conditions* for the emergence of *another* 'possibility' of architecture,"[7] beyond nostalgia, refusal or dread.

Indeed, New York's significance for Koolhaas' work cannot be understated. *Delirious New York* is a theory of a city "burdened by the guilt of having no ethical foundation"[8]; a speculative and theoretical gesture, rather than a historical examination, aimed at examining how the city

[3] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[4] *Ibid*., pp. 10–11.
[5] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[6] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[7] *Ibid*.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 18.

exposes "a sort of *ecstatic* condition"[9] which coincides with "the *desire* drive, a *Lustprinzip*."[10] Manhattan and New York are traced back to a level of abstraction that allows Koolhaas to overturn notions used to describe the city and put them to work in design. Biraghi thus locates in Koolhaas a Deleuzian creation of concepts, a connection the book prolongs thanks to the Dutch architect's conceptualisation of New York's skyscrapers as "desiring-machines" for the fantasies of metropolitan dwellers, whose socialised unconscious determines the libidinal economy of the metropolis itself. Architecture can only confront such machines by *accelerating* their mechanisms: a push toward an extra-moral architecture by insisting on the atomisation produced by the Grid, or by other Koolhaasian conceptual creations (such as lobotomy, schism). Koolhaas' "Theorem of New York" thus corresponds to the city's lack of community and continuity: a lack which Biraghi describes as "a supreme *indifference* towards all individuality (and 'morality') located within it, which is precisely that which allows them to coexist."[11]

Biraghi claims the ambiguous relation Koolhaas entertains with modern architecture is precisely that which pushes him to overcome ideology and turn the crisis of the city into an opportunity. His aim is to denude modern architecture of its ideological-political dimension and retrieve its features: "a second chance" that rests on "a work of *de-ideologisation*."[12] Such an objective plays out in Koolhaas/OMA's projects of the late 1970s and early '80s: a "return of the *different*"[13] that according to Biraghi describes architecture's (including Koolhaas') troubled relation to modernity. In this sense, Koolhaas/OMA's 1982 design proposal for Parc de la Villette in Paris retrieves the logic of "congestion" proper to New York from its skyscraper substance.[14] Such a design move is the result of careful theoretical work which, together with the skyscraper, uncovered the centrality played by the architectural plan in Western modernity for the end of capitalist accumulation. From Rotterdam's Kunsthal to the Jussieu campuses in Paris, Koolhaas' attention for the plan paradoxically "exploits" the capitalist logic of congestion as a means for design.

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[9] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 26.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 40.
[14] *Ibid*., p. 49.

Congestion foregrounds Koolhaas' notorious concept of "bigness." Inspired by quantum physics, bigness brings to the fore how the shift from the architectural object to urbanism that characterises Koolhaas/OMA's work (from the project for Euralille to Congrexpo), rather than just a fact or "effective dimension of contemporaneity,"[15] is grounded on the recognition of "size—'the purely quantitative'—as a design tool."[16] Biraghi moreover suggests that, against the ideological quantitative logic and metrics of metropolitan production, Koolhaas thinks the house—a "(bachelor) machine for living" that exceeds the modernist *machine à habiter*—as the site of a quasi-Bataillean *dépense*, a machine for pure desire, starkly opposed to the skyscraper *qua* desiring-machine. The house/bachelor machine "does not produce anything—it is socially unproductive—and precisely because of this it is the source of *free, limitless pleasure*, without 'consequence', that is, free from all legacy, 'offspring'."[17]

Biraghi thus reads Koolhaas/OMA's work considering the historical developments of capitalism since the 1970s. Indeed, Biraghi understands Koolhaas' critical theory and practice as a polemic to Manfredo Tafuri's prognosis regarding the inevitable equation between reality and ideology. The question of globalisation, in this sense, is an opportunity for Koolhaas to act on the contradictory, unpacified (or indeed *unpacifiable*) relationship between architecture and capital, while jettisoning Tafuri's architectural critique. If architecture cannot but be an *affirmation*: "its 'assertions' *must* correspond to its efficacy, without a way out,"[18] the challenge is that of being an architect "in spite of it all: *in spite of* architecture, and *in spite of* architects"[19] or, as Biraghi writes (with tinges of Italian *operaismo*) "*within* architecture and *against* architecture."[20]

The state of generalised interconnection that characterises globalised capitalism frames Koolhaas/OMA's work on preservation, epitomised by the firm's collaboration with Prada. Again, Koolhaas seizes on reality—in this case, on the consolidation of global operations of capital in the early 2000s—in order to extract a theory and practice that re-elaborates political and economic conditions to radically disrupt architectural work. Globalisation is paradoxically praised for what the accumulation of

[15] *Ibid*., p. 63.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 64.
[17] *Ibid*., p. 74.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 85.
[20] *Ibid*.

the diversity and multiplicity it entails is able to produce: "a heterogeneity, dissonance that, as such, beyond any simple 'will to congest,' brings about an *aesthetic pleasure*" of the Nietzschean order, "an authentically Dionysian character."[21] Such an extra-moral aesthetics questions dominant canons of beauty and its spaces rupture any attempt to create the kind of homogeneity that might be gathered from the architectural exteriority of Prada's buildings.[22]

If capitalism is the reality and fact of architecture and urbanism, Koolhaas, as Biraghi rightly insists throughout the book, has the merit of having brought this contradiction into focus, thanks to the "questioning affirmations"[23] which constitute his critical approach to theory and practice. Koolhaas's *oeuvre* allows Biraghi to resume crucial questions he has been foregrounding over the years on architectural theory and practice in a capitalist society. Indeed, Koolhaas exposes capitalism's contradictions: "the market economy—within which architecture works and to which most of its products are destined—is fundamentally antithetical to the *idea* of architecture as it could (or even *should*) be."[24] It is precisely Koolhaas/OMA's (self-)critical "transparent disposition toward the *real* conditions of contemporary architecture" that constitute the other side of Koolhaas's crisp extra-moral architectural ethics.[25] Contradictions, Biraghi writes again with workerist echoes, cannot be solved but only exacerbated. In this sense, Koolhaas paves the way toward confronting "*analytically* and *critically*" the "*many* issues" of architecture today.[26] Like Koolhaas, an architect can only be Nietzschean: both builder and destroyer, servile and revolutionary, realist and sceptic. Koolhaas puts forward "a superior ethics, located *beyond good and evil*"[27] that begins from reality's crises and complexity, without assuming architecture should "build *to* hide, *to* remove, *to* homogenise"[28] contradictions as if they did not exist.

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[21] *Ibid*., p. 109.
[22] *Ibid*., pp. 107–110.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 128.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 146.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 147.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 151.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 153.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 152.

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