

# philosophy @ LISBON

International eJournal  
Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa

n. 5 | 2016



ISSN 2182-4371

[www.cful.lettras.ulisboa.pt](http://www.cful.lettras.ulisboa.pt)

# philosophy @ LISBON

## EDITOR

Carlos João Correia (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Filipa Afonso (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

## SPECIAL NUMBER EDITORS

Tomás N. Castro (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

Maribel Mendes Sobreira (Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

## EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Ana Paula Loureiro de Sousa

Ana Rita Ferreira

Bruno Peixe Dias

Elisabete de Sousa

Pedro Galvão

Rui Lopo

Vasco Marques

## ADVISORY BOARD

António Moreira Teixeira (Universidade Aberta de Lisboa, Portugal)

Catarina Belo (The American University in Cairo, Egypt)

Christian Hamm (UF de Santa Maria, RS, Brasil)

Deepak Sarma (Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, USA)

Diogo Sardinha (Collège International de Philosophie, Paris, France)

Diogo Ferrer (Universidade de Coimbra, Portugal)

Gabriele Tomasi (Università di Padova, Italia)

Herman Siemens (Univ. Leiden, Niederland)

Katia Hay (Universität Freiburg, Deutschland)

Marco Sgarbi (Università di Verona, Italia)

Maria Gabriela Castro (Universidade dos Açores, Portugal)

Markus Gabriel (Universität Bonn, Deutschland)

Nuria Sánchez Madrid (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, España)

Paulo Licht dos Santos (UF de São Carlos, SP, Brasil)

Stephen Zimmermann (Universität Bonn, Deutschland)

Teresa Castelão-Lawless (Grand Valley State University, Allendale, USA)

Teresa Marques (Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal)

Ubirajara Rancan de Azevedo Marques (UNESP-Marília, SP, Brasil)

CFUL Scientific Committee

Published by © Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa

ISSN 2182-4371

# philosophy @ LISBON

International eJournal  
Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa

n. 5 | 2016

## Special Number *Philosophy & Architecture*



*edited by*  
Tomás N. Castro  
*with*  
Maribel Mendes Sobreira

ISSN 2182-4371



[www.cful.lettras.ulisboa.pt](http://www.cful.lettras.ulisboa.pt)

## Table of contents

Editorial   Foreword .....	5
<i>Playing in Space; Profaning Architectural Practice</i>	
Carlos Jacques .....	11
<i>What is an architect?</i>	
<i>The singular case of Manuel Graça Dias and his multiple selves</i>	
Alexandra Areia .....	27
<i>Changing the Architectonic of Philosophy.</i>	
<i>John Rajchman's Interest in Folded Architecture</i>	
Frederike Lausch .....	39
<i>Of canopies and roofs. The global interior and the outside</i>	
Giorgio Ponzo .....	55
<i>Hermeneutics, Architecture and Belonging</i>	
Lucy Elvis .....	69
<i>Walking with Michel de Certeau. Jesuit architecture and the city</i>	
María Rivo-Vázquez .....	83
<i>Chaos and Composition in Félix Guattari</i>	
Matías García Rodríguez .....	95
<i>Rewriting Another Modernity from the Global South.</i>	
<i>The Viet Minh and the use of Vegetation as a Political Agent</i>	
Philippe Zourgane .....	105
<i>The Architecture of Memory. The Memory of Architecture</i>	
Ramona Costea .....	119
<i>An autonomist view on the ethical criticism of architecture</i>	
Ricardo Miguel .....	131
<i>Is Space a part of being?</i>	
<i>Reassessing space through Japanese thought</i>	
Ricardo Santos Alexandre .....	145
<i>Towards an intensive architecture:</i>	
<i>how do we compose intimacy, in architecture?</i>	
Susana Ventura .....	163

## Editorial

In this special edition of *philosophy @ LISBON* journal, the topic to be analyzed will be Philosophy and Architecture. It is a theme seldom analyzed on Aesthetics, but it deserves our best attention taking into account the importance of architecture in our lives. So it is a wonderful way to resume the publication of this journal. Soon, we will have a regular issue of the magazine, as well as a special edition on Schelling.

Application for new articles should be sent to the following e-mail [philosophyatlisbon@letras.ulisboa.pt](mailto:philosophyatlisbon@letras.ulisboa.pt) by the end of December.

Lisbon, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016

*Carlos João Correia*

## Foreword

### *Philosophy & Architecture*

Architecture is one of the most antique achievements of human civilizations. Daily we experience it and we found ourselves surrounded by buildings that decisively influence the way we live. Still, most of the times, this familiarity could become uncannily problematic if it becomes a kind of invisibility and indifference.

As practice, architecture rises specific questions on authorship, ethics, social and political implications, aesthetic values, hermeneutics and multidisciplinary intersections. Several attempts throughout the ages tried to emancipate architecture from the other artistic disciplines and to claim an autonomous field for it. It is however arguable whether architecture should have an artistic status or if it is to be considered within the context of a *beaux-arts* system. This year, a new iconic building designed by Amanda Levete was inaugurated in Lisbon: named MAAT—Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology—, its own description is symptomatic of an ontological thesis now deep-rooted, which claims architecture's full autonomy from the arts.

Admitting the particularities of an architectural thought and if we consider it within a philosophical perspective, one may understand its manifold implications and comprehend — perhaps in an excessively Neoplatonist-based framework—, not only the idea of an object, but also all the encompassed idea of a worldview, or even the challenging connections between space and thought.

The papers presented in this thematic issue offer —each own in its own way— approaches that come from both philosophy and architecture. Our goal is to refresh the debate on questions such as how these two areas of study can work together and profit from mutual approaches. It is our conviction that it is possible to discuss architecture's idiosyncrasies within a philosophical point of view, especially when focusing its contemporary relevance. The same applies to certain philosophical systems whose highly architectural character has been poorly underscored.

One year ago a very thought-provoking debate took place in Lisbon. Tomás N. Castro and Maribel Mendes Sobreira would like to thank those who participated in the *Philosophy & Architecture International Postgraduate Conference* (Lisbon, 4—6<sup>th</sup> November 2015): the keynote speakers (Filipa Afonso, Inês Moreira, Luís Santiago Baptista and Carlos Jacques), the scientific committee, the moderators, the authors of more than 40 papers presented, and the institutions that held the venues (Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa and Museu Coleção Berardo). Preliminary versions of the papers here published were firstly discussed at the conference's sessions. The Editors would also thank the directive board of the journal *philosophy@LISBON* and the Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa for their effortless reception of this idea and warm support.

Lisbon, 7<sup>th</sup> November 2016

*Filipa Afonso*

*Tomás N. Castro*

*Maribel Mendes Sobreira*



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# Playing in Space; Profaning Architectural Practice

**Carlos Jacques**

School of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Al Akhawayn University  
Av. Hassan II  
Ifrane 53000  
Morocco  
c.jacques@au.ma

## **Abstract**

There are no intrinsically radical ways of moulding architectural space. But once it is understood that space is made through social relations, that it is as a social practice, what emerges is the need to imagine spatial practices, in urbanism, architecture, or whatever, beyond their subservience to regimes of oppressive power. What then might, for example, a radical architectural practice look like? Without any pretence to proposing norms, and in consonance with the idea that human spaces are created, a liberating architecture cannot consequently be reduced to any fixed aesthetic and/or functionally defined form. It must rather be conceived of as a practice that creates spatial forms open to the multiplication of desires, and not their domestication.

Inspired by the occupation movements of city squares in early 2011, this reflection is an invitation to question, to reject, functionalist orderings of architectural space. It is an apology for an architecture of excess, of the monstrous; an architecture that allies itself with overflowing energies, wild experimentation, iconoclastic irreverence. To profane architectural practice is to render it anarchic.

## **Keywords**

Space; occupation; anarchism



... it is pointless trying to decide whether Zenobia is to be classified among happy cities or among the unhappy. It makes no sense to divide cities into these two species, but rather into another two: those that through the years and the changes continue to give their form to desires, and those in which desires erase the city or are erased by it.

Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

## 1.

This reflection on architecture was animated by the eruption of occupations of city streets and squares in early 2011, movements in which the anonymous many appropriated “public” spaces for purposes no longer permitted or imagined. Each occupation exploded the narratives and histories of technocratically administered well-being; each profaned spaces moulded by the sanctities of power and the flows of wealth; each was the uncaused and unpredicted creation of a “myriad of new possibilities”.<sup>1</sup> Without any political party affiliation, without any hegemonic organization, without known leaders, the movements arose as pure *events of shared self-making*, where the location, the place of the event opens to all humanity (“This *plaza* has no borders”, could be read amid the eruption of texts that decorated Madrid’s Puerta del Sol under occupation by the 15<sup>th</sup> of May movement)<sup>2</sup>; a place where “all speech is listened to, all propositions are examined, all difficulties are treated for what they are.”<sup>3</sup> Like a child who turns reality into a play thing, a toy, rendering it thereby susceptible to multiple uses limited only by dreams and freedoms, oblivious to what should and should not be done except as its imagination dictates, the occupation of cityscapes redefined them as open and horizontal, without closed functions. Squares became spaces of festival, carnival, disclosing dimensions of constructed space forgotten or repressed, and opening thresholds onto new spatial possibilities. The city, its urban plans and architectural forms, was freed, however momentarily, for unprogrammed uses, for radical desires. The striated landscapes of urban space were transgressed; the almost sacral nature of city ordinances, regulations, urban authorities, functional division of spaces, city toponymy, monuments, buildings, streets and squares and so much more became toys in a proliferation of spatialities that testified to a profaning of the *urbe* by ways of life, bearers of new ways of making space.

This reflection then is written amid a sea of resonances, of occupations become cradles for radically democratic, assembly based, auto-

1. Badiou, February 18, 2011.

2. *15-M Al Sol*.

3. Badiou, February 18, 2011.

mous self-determination, of appropriated abandoned city lots greened for play and food, of factories and rural lands reborn for sustainable life, of resistance to eviction and the taking of policed unused housing for shelter and dignity, of the acts of appropriation of food from commercial centres of over-abundance and the waste of excess, of the self-organisation of social services before the retreat of the State, of the creation of *okupied* social centres, spaces of conviviality, solidarity and resistance: all of these created spaces and so many others in our “time of riots”<sup>4</sup> push us towards the question, among others, of how we can conceive of architectural and urban space not as confining and satisfying presumed needs (an ambition coincident with regimes of power), but as liberating desires, as “means of testing a thousand ways of modifying life.”<sup>5</sup>

Man must stop making and manipulating, and instead allow architecture to happen.

William Katavolos

## 2.

It is not uncommon, in efforts to circumscribe *modern* architecture, to speak of it in terms of form and/or function. In rupture with past architecture, the modern would be styled after machines, stripped bare of ornamentation, and organised rationally in a functional distribution of spaces. Yet however useful classifications and definitions of this kind may be, they carry with them the risk of passing over the differences and tensions, the heterogeneity, of the architecture designed and built under its name. And critical positions and practices within modernism are in parallel weakened, for they are often reduced to simple proposals of alternative forms and functions; an aesthetic posturing that offers little resistance to functional imperatives.

If a unity there is in modern architecture, it lies elsewhere. And by analogy with Immanuel Kant’s answer to the question “What is enlightenment?”, namely, “man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity”, with “immaturity” understood as “the inability to use one’s own understanding without the guidance of another”,<sup>6</sup> one might say of modern architecture that it is the self-consciousness and autonomous design of built space, freed from the burden of past architectural forms, canons and non-architectural demands. Architecture thereby freed from presumed extra-

4. Badiou, 2011: 14.

5. Chhtcheglov, 2009: 36.

6. Kant, 1991.

neous and secondary exigencies, becomes then, and conceives of itself as, an art exclusively concerned with space. “Have the courage to use your own understanding!”, Kant’s motto for the enlightenment, becomes, in its architectural guise, “Have the courage to freely shape space, as space, for yourself!” Yet Kant’s autonomous thought, a thought for thought’s sake, would come to grief on an unthought at its very heart, that of the underlying contingencies necessary to thought, but that are at the same time unsusceptible to illumination. As “the locus of an empirico-transcendental doublet”,<sup>7</sup> to employ Michel Foucault’s terminology, the thinking subject that is *modern man* “is that paradoxical figure in which the empirical contents of knowledge necessarily release, of themselves, the conditions that have made them possible.”<sup>8</sup> Enveloped in folds of realities which render thought possible, in our being, life and language, thought cannot in turn unveil what lies beneath itself without further pushing back the shadows of its existence. The “immediate and sovereign transparency of a *cogito*” breaks upon the shoals of its own, yet inevitable, non-knowledge.<sup>9</sup> “I think”, but “I am not” only what I think. “Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *episteme* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught.”<sup>10</sup> This Other of thought, this “unavoidable duality”, is both exterior to it and indispensable.<sup>11</sup> And like some promised land of primitive wholeness, to which return or future reconciliation is possible, modern self-knowledge will assume the undertaking of bringing its Other as close as possible to itself. The “whole of modern thought is imbued with the necessity of thinking the unthought.”<sup>12</sup> An ethical imperative thus affirms itself within thought, the demand for the “elucidation of what is silent”, “the illumination of the element of darkness that cuts man off from himself.”<sup>13</sup> This is no ethics of moral norms or standards, a morality *thought* for pure souls; it is rather an ethics that calls for “a certain mode of action.”<sup>14</sup> More fundamentally, “modern thought is advancing toward that region where man’s Other must become the Same as himself.”<sup>15</sup> The central question

---

7. Foucault, 1973: 322.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid., 326.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 327.

13. Ibid., 328.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

of modern thought, and it remains our question, is how this “sameness” is to be thought, without naivety or the repetition of sterile *aporias*? Or more radically, how can we think beyond it if the *aporias* are inevitable? How can we think past the thinking subject, beyond *man*?<sup>16</sup>

Modern architecture, defined as the “mastery of space”, to cite Walter Gropius, will replicate the same doublet of modern thought analysed by Foucault.<sup>17</sup> Aspiring to a pure, absolute dominion of space, its ambition could only end in purposelessness, severed as it would be from the conditions of its possibility. An architecture that seeks sovereignty of space through space, a mastery of infinite space, as Hans Hollein once celebrated it, was still the mastery of man over space.<sup>18</sup> If architecture is “not the satisfaction of the needs of the mediocre”, if it “is not an environment for the petty happiness of the masses”, if a “building is itself”, it nevertheless cannot escape the finitude of its *arkhe*, its ruler or master builder.<sup>19</sup> The *arkhi-tecton*, and all that envelops her/his creativity, is architecture’s Other; the space of her/his mastery remains the space that *she/he* moulds, the space conceived as fit for dwelling, a space to *inhabit*, from the Latin, *habitare*, the frequentative of *habere*, to have, to hold, to possess. Hollein’s *absolute architecture* would thus amount to a refusal of possession, the exclusion of inhabiting, and consequently, against programmed intentions, the dissolution of architecture in infinite space. If architectural form need not follow function, in Hollein’s words, form remains finite as the idiom of our being in the world.<sup>20</sup> Erich Mendelsohn expressed the problematic, the doublet, of modern architecture, and implicitly the *ethics* of this architecture’s “mode of action” succinctly: “The finiteness of mechanics plus the infiniteness of life.”<sup>21</sup> The “finiteness” here is human power extended by machines, daunting yet limited before the infiniteness of life and its inexhaustible spatiality. The mature autonomy of modern architecture is thus bound by, consciously and/or unconsciously, the gesture of giving forms to human possibility. And its passion for radical autonomy will find its contours in an ethics of trying to *contain* and give expression to that same autonomy in the guise of what is properly human; the Other of architectural practice upon which its autonomy will necessarily be sacrificed in the *aporia* of endeavouring to model man’s truth, when it is man’s *being-in-the-world* that enfoldes the art of giving form to space.

If modern architecture’s self-consciousness teems with essentialising discourses, it is because of the ethics which sustains it. Architecture is va-

16. *Ibid.*, 342.

17. Gropius, 1965: 24.

18. Hollein, Pichler/Hollein, 1971: 182.

19. *Ibid.*, 181, 182.

20. *Ibid.*, 182.

21. Mendelsohn/Hoetger, 1971: 106.

riously called upon to create “the true form of things”,<sup>22</sup> to give shape to an “absolute nucleus”,<sup>23</sup> to be an “organic entity”,<sup>24</sup> susceptible to become part of “man’s flesh and blood”,<sup>25</sup> a “second skin”, a “bodily organ”.<sup>26</sup> It is asked to organise life, to create order through laws and fixed principles,<sup>27</sup> which could then serve as the basis for the elaboration of elemental and universal forms and functions,<sup>28</sup> summarised in the first De Stijl manifesto as the struggle for “an international unity in life, art and culture.”<sup>29</sup> However diverse the language used, the desire for unity between human being and free spatial form is the constant ethical leitmotif, and equally the source of the fragility, if not the impossibility, of architecture’s modernity.

The militant and trenchant prose of Le Corbusier’s writing on architecture may serve as a paradigm for architecture’s strivings and its unthought. Le Corbusier defined architecture as a pure art, a *tekhne*, of “the masterful, correct, and significant play of volumes brought together in light” while simultaneously placing the house at its centre.<sup>30</sup> The latter was to be conceived as responding to natural human functions intuitively aspired to by all.<sup>31</sup> Le Corbusier’s house was “the ordinary and common house for normal and common men.” It should be rooted in the human: “the human scale, the typical need, the typical function, the *typical* emotion.” No mere arbitrarily assembled shelter, the *new architecture* was to design and build houses on the foundation of the common organism of “men”, an organism said to possess identical functions and needs, and a natural element of the biological family.<sup>32</sup> Without such a ground, architecture could only fail to be an *art*; it would be reduced to arbitrary construction, incapable of properly *housing man*, contributing thereby to frustration, alienation and, reading Le Corbusier’s *Toward an Architecture*, to revolution. But then men, and it is *men* that Le Corbusier speaks of, become the darkness that haunts the “volumes brought together in light”. The mastery of space is held fast by the weight of assumptions regarding what human beings are. The art is tarnished by such corporeal needs as eating, sleeping and evacuating. And for the art to remain art then, our physical condition must itself be puri-

22. Van de Velde, 1971: 13.

23. Poelzig, 1971: 16.

24. Lloyd Wright, 1971: 25.

25. Graeff, 1971: 71.

26. Häring, 1971: 126.

27. De Stijl, 1971: 66; Van Doesburg and van Esteren, 1971: 67.

28. Muthesius/Van de Velde, 1971: 28; Van Doesburg, 1971: 78.

29. De Stijl, 1971: 39.

30. Le Corbusier, 2007: 102.

31. *Ibid.*, 83.

32. *Ibid.*, 84.

fied to absolute functions reproducible spatially in the shaping of houses and cities. What human being though can be reduced to absolute functions? The absurdity of the pretension was perhaps best expressed by Adolf Loos, who before the phenomenon of erotic toilet graffiti, could find nothing more to say than that it was a sign of criminality and degeneracy. The toilet's function is to piss and shit in, and should the human insist on any other kind of parallel activity, in this instance "artistic", this could only be seen as symptomatic of moral and cultural degeneracy. In Loos' words, a "country's culture can be assessed by the extent to which its lavatory walls are smeared."<sup>33</sup> The purity of architecture then was to be had in the purification of humans. This in turn however condemned modern architecture to increasing forms of functional reductionism. The heroic art would become the maidservant of inescapably fragile bodies.

The failure of the vision of modern architecture, Le Corbusier's and others', is perhaps nowhere more manifest than in the programmatic declarations of the different *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM) gatherings beginning in 1928, with the Charter of Athens of 1933 standing as their final testament. In the Charter, the city's destiny, and the house as its basic social cell, is affirmed to be the satisfaction of "*the primordial biological and psychological needs of their inhabitants.*"<sup>34</sup> The frustration of these ambitions however was evident in the stated need to continually refine design, so as to be able to contain the human essence fully through rational planning and building. Only then could the crisis "raging in all the big cities and spreading its effects throughout the country" be vanquished.<sup>35</sup> Yet what if the "crisis" was but the sign of the impossibility of architecture's ethics of confinement, of the ideal of unity between human need and ordered space? And what if this impossibility was not due to the difficulty of the labour, whose final end is but delayed, but rather to the mutual dependence of the act of ordering space and need and that both emerge together against agencies that can never be fully mastered? In a CIAM inspired meeting in 1957, under the name of "*groupe d'études d'architecture mobile*" (GEAM) in Paris, after the dissolution of the CIAM, the statement produced and published in 1960 affirmed that existing "construction and those still being put up today are too rigid and difficult to adapt to life as it is lived."<sup>36</sup> What the statement however testified to, contrary to the intentions of its authors, was not the inadequacy of design, planning or construction, but to architecture's creativity as the expression of human life, life that cannot itself be captured by that creativity. The reign of order from which

---

33. Loos, 1971: 13.

34. CIAM, 1971: 143, 137.

35. Ibid., 137.

36. GEAM, 1971: 167.

well-being is born, following Le Corbusier,<sup>37</sup> ends in enforced functional forms sustained finally by political and economic power. And before this reality, the GEAM could only impotently propose variable and interchangeable constructions, alterable and interchangeable functions of spatial units, and the ability of inhabitants “to adopt their dwellings themselves to the needs of the moment.”<sup>38</sup> The ethics of early modern architecture was thus domesticated through the administration of spatial integration and adaptation; what remained of “man” could now be managed by the civil servants of urbanism.

... the provisional, the free realm of ludic activity ... is the lone field of true life, though it be constrained fraudulently by taboos claiming to be eternal.  
Guy Debord

### 3.

The writer Georges Perec once tried to map in an unequivocal, sequential and nycthemeral manner the functions of the different rooms of an apartment.<sup>39</sup> It was an exercise in absurdity, but it served to demonstrate that however precise an architect’s ideas may be regarding the particular function of each room in an apartment, that rooms were in the end more or less alike: that “they’re never anything more than a sort of cube, or let’s say rectangular parallelepiped.”<sup>40</sup> In sum, Perec reminds us, “a room is a fairly malleable space”,<sup>41</sup> and that therefore it is not difficult to imagine the rooms of an apartment depending on completely different functional relations, for example, on functional relations that find their place *between* rooms, or an apartment “whose layout was based on the functioning of the senses” (we could then speak of a gustatorium, an auditory, a smellery, a feeler, and the like), or a division based on “heptadian rhythms”, where each room would be used exclusively on a single day of the week.<sup>42</sup> Functionality is not thereby abandoned in these experiments, but what the satire seeks to make evident is that whatever function apartment rooms possess,

37. Le Corbusier, 2007: 122.

38. GEAM, 1971: 167.

39. The map begins as follows: 07.00, The mother gets up and goes to get breakfast in the KITCHEN; 07.15, The child gets up and goes into the BATHROOM; 07.30, The father gets up and goes into the BATHROOM; 07.45, The father and the child have their breakfast in the KITCHEN; 08.00, The child takes his coat from the ENTRANCE-HALL, and it continues in the same vein until 22.00, The father and the mother go to bed in their BEDROOM. Perec, 1999: 28-30.

40. Ibid., 28.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 31-2.

it is not one fixed by a correspondence between a human need and a distinctive space. Indeed, the space is malleable, as we are, and how we live, make, space is very much a matter that is underdetermined.

More interestingly philosophically and architecturally still, following Perce's reflections on the plasticity of space, is his consideration of the possibility of a "useless room, absolutely and intentionally useless", "a functionless space" that "would serve for nothing, relate to nothing."<sup>43</sup> Perce admits that it was impossible for him to follow this idea through; even language failed in "describing this nothing."<sup>44</sup> "How does one think of nothing? How to think of nothing without automatically putting something round that nothing, so turning it into a hole, into which one will hasten to put something, an activity, a function, a destiny, a gaze, a need, a lack, a surplus ...?"<sup>45</sup> The effort is nevertheless described as not without value, because it "seemed to produce something that might be a statute of the inhabitable."<sup>46</sup>

But what then if Perce's "a-functional space", the hole that appears as we surround it with purpose, points to the empty space, the void, which the doublet of modern knowledge struggles to fill through complete self-knowledge or that modern architecture attempts to complete through the coincidence of form and need? What if the ethical task for both were to be instead to keep this space open, as an openness; to conceive then, in the case of architecture, of this space without purpose as that which holds open possibilities of spatial forms and the inhabiting of forms? Perce's room without purpose would then reveal another dimension of *inhabiting*, a dimension which escapes the word's family ties with *having* and *possessing*. If all designed space is haunted by purposelessness, then our possession of such spaces must always be incomplete; they may be *used*, but never *mastered* or *owned*, as something will always escape our grasp. The imposition of function on space reveals our power, a power to hold and enframe. But that is only made possible by the original absence of function. It is because space enfolds within itself no purpose, that it can be shaped for endless number of purposes. In place then of seeking to fill all space with utility, Perce's "statute of the inhabitable" would be an inhabiting beyond fixed functionality, severed from a submission to purpose, and therefore open to a functionless being in space. Structure and form do not thereby evanesce, but rather take on the nature of a *threshold*: a temporary form given life through a function that holds within itself the possibility of other functions in other spaces. Built space is thus conceived of as a threshold for desires. As regards architecture, it would then cease to "*be understood as the endea-*

---

43. Ibid., 33.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., 35.



*vour to harmonise ... the environment with man*”,<sup>47</sup> as in Futurist proclamations, or as the construction of the “‘art-edifice’ of Man”, in the language of the Bauhaus.<sup>48</sup> In other words, the architect must cease to aspire to be the master/*archon* of built space for what are presumed to be pre-given, proper human needs. The latter do not exist, except as determined by regimes of power, of which architectural practice has been more often than not an instrument.

This is not a call for an architecture of resistance or liberation, however this has been imagined in the past. As Michel Foucault put the matter simply once, “I don’t believe that it ever belongs to the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom.”<sup>49</sup> “Freedom is a practice”, a way of being in the world; whatever guarantee it commands is in the practice itself. And what perhaps characterises it above all else is the refusal of conceptual or practical closure to an end, which amounts to the sealing over of our openness to the world. Extended to architecture and architectural practice, this becomes the rejection of any pretence to formal and functional finality in the design and construction of space. Spaces are instead to be played with, something that assumes the profanation of spaces, of their shaping and uses.

The onetime *Situationist* Constant, speaking of his city *New Babylon*, described it as a possible architectural and urban space in which utility would be obsolete. The “city of New Babylon will no longer be centred on utility, but on the game. It will not be outlined as a utilitarian society in the style of today, but as a ludic society.”<sup>50</sup> If we take Constant’s utopia as more than a design, a plan, as he himself did, and see it rather for what it is, a spatial metaphor for free ways of being, then what he put forward was the sketch of a life in which all human spatial forms are profaned. Giorgio Agamben teaches us that to *play* and to *profane* are one and the same: they are the restitution of things to our free use, divorced from any practical means-ends logic.<sup>51</sup> They do not overthrow distinctions, but rather *de-activate* them, *disabling* their moral hold upon us. In playing with designed and built space then, to profane architecture, is to render impotent the ethical conceit of seeking to bind architectural form with human desire in a kind of sacral-artistic unity. As the architect Bruno Taut once wrote, “Down with everything serious!”<sup>52</sup>

47. Sant’Elia and Marinetti, 1971: 38.

48. Schlemmer, 1971: 70.

49. Foucault, 2001 : 1094-5.

50. Constant, 2014: 167.

51. Agamben, 2005: 95.

52. Taut, 1971: 57.

No inhibitions should be placed upon the individual's desire to build! Everyone ought to be able and compelled to build, so that he bears responsibility for the four walls within which he lives. ... A stop must finally be put to the situation in which people move into their living quarters like hens and rabbits into their coops.  
Hundertwasser

#### 4.

The proliferation of occupations of urban spaces in our time have freed desires and refashioned subjectivities in a manner that has not been a cry for novel and adequate representations, more consonant with demands and needs. It has rather given birth to an anti-representational politics that puts into question the hegemony of hegemony in all domains of human creativity. (“¡Que no! ¡que no! ¡que no nos representan!” was the perhaps the central slogan of Spain's 15M). With regard to cityscapes and built spaces, the movements have loosened and smoothed spaces, allowing for shifts across thresholds of formerly controlled territories and identities. In parallel, they have shown less concern with securing and defending spatial heterotopias of dissidence than with undermining the borders which marginalise and exclude heterotopias from controlled spaces.

“Power lives on our incapacity to live; it maintains infinitely multiplied splits and *separations* at the same time that it plans *almost* as it likes allowable encounters.”<sup>53</sup> The words are Théo Frey's, writing for the *Internationale situationiste*. If architecture's role in such power is modest, it is nevertheless present in the ordering of *spatial* separations. That role loses all creative legitimacy once it is made manifest that it rested upon the illusory possibility of containing human being ethically within formal and functional spatial orders. With the illusion unmasked, it remains for the builders, for all of those who can build, to keep open the spaces of collective self-creation of spatialities and subjectivities.

#### Reference List

- 15-M *Al Sol: Indignación: Un Libro De Poesía Espontánea*. 2012. Madrid: Amargord ediciones.
- Agamben, Giorgio. 2005. *Profanations*. Paris: Payot et Rivages.
- Badiou, Alain. 2011. *Le Réveil de l'histoire*. Paris: Nouvelles éditions lignes.
- Badiou, Alain. “Tunisie, Egypte : quand un vent d'est balaie l'arrogance de l'Occident.” *Le Monde*, February 2, 2011.
- Chhtcheglov, Ivan. 2009. “Formulary for a New Urbanism.” In *The Situationists and the*

53. Théo Frey, 2009: 210.

- City*, edited by Tom McDonough. London: Verso. Originally published in 1953.
- CIAM. 1971. "Charter of Athens: tenets." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1933.
- Constant. 2014. "New Babylon." *Provo*, n° 4, Amsterdam, October 28, 1965. In *Playgrounds: Reinventar la plaza*. Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía.
- De Stijl. 1971. "Manifiesto I." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1918.
- De Stijl. 1971. "Manifiesto V: - + = R4." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1923.
- Foucault, Michel. 2001. "Espace, savoir et pouvoir." In *Dits et Ecrits II : 1976-1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1973. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York, NY: Vintage.
- Frey, Théo. 2009. "Perspectives for a Generation." In *The Situationists and the City*, edited by Tom McDonough. London: Verso. Originally published in 1966.
- GEAM. 1971. "Programme for mobile architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1960.
- Graeff, Werner. 1971. "The new engineer is coming." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1923.
- Gropius, Walter. 1965. *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Häring, Hugo. 1971. "The house as an organic structure." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1932.
- Hollein, Hans, Pichler, Walter/Hollein, Hans. 1971. "Absolute architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1962.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1991. "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" In *Kant: Political Writings*, edited by H.S. Reiss. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Le Corbusier. 2007. *Toward An Architecture*. London: Frances Lincoln Publishers, 2007. Originally published in 1923.
- Lloyd Wright, Frank. 1971. "Organic architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1910.
- Loos, Adolf. 1971. "Ornament and crime." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1903.
- Mendelsohn, Erich/Hoetger, Bernard. 1971. "Synthesis – World architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1928.
- Muthesius/Van de Velde, Henry. 1971. "Werkbund theses and antitheses." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1914.
- Perec, Georges. 1999. "Species of Spaces." In *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, edited by
- philosophy@LISBON

- John Sturrock. London: Penguin Books.
- Poelzig, Hans. 1971. "Fermentation in architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1906.
- Sant'Elia, Antonio and Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. 1971. "Futurist architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1914.
- Schlemmer, Oskar. 1971. "Manifesto for the first Bauhaus exhibition." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1923.
- Taut, Bruno. 1971. "Down with seriousness!" In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1920.
- Van de Velde, Henry. 1971. "Programme." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1903.
- Van Doesburg, Theo. 1971. "Towards a plastic architecture." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1924.
- Van Doesburg, Theo and van Esteren, Cornelis. 1971. "Towards collective building: Commentary on Manifesto V." In *Programs and Manifestos on 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Architecture*, edited by Ulrich Conrads. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. Originally published in 1923.



# What is an architect?

## The singular case of Manuel Graça Dias and his multiple selves

**Alexandra Areia**  
DINÂMIA-CET, ISCTE-IUL  
xanaareia@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This paper departs from a seminal text by Michel Foucault — “What is an Author?” (1969) — in order to question some of the idiosyncrasies of being an architect, particularly within the contemporary Portuguese realm. By transposing some of the concepts and ideas of Foucault’s essay into current architectonic debates, we aim to reflect on the “architect-function” through an analysis of Manuel Graça Dias’s work. For Foucault, the question of “What is an Author?” (extrapolated in this paper’s argument as the correlating question, What is an Architect?) is fundamentally linked both to the function of the author’s name — *that performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function* — and also to the question of what constitutes a “work” (*oeuvre*) — *If an individual were not an author, could we say that what he wrote, said, left behind in his papers, or what has been collected of his remarks, could be called a “work”?* In the case of Manuel Graça Dias, an architect divided between multiple forms of discourse production (construction, drawing, writing, teaching, film, television, radio, etc) who also nourishes a peculiar appreciation for forms of “architecture without architects”, one could inquire: How can Manuel Graça Dias architectonic practice be delimited, when it is scattered through a plurality of selves? What ultimately constitutes his “work”? Finally, what defines him as an Architect?

### **Keywords**

Architecture; philosophy; visual culture; media

This paper is consequence of a PhD research, which focuses specifically on broadcasting and audiovisual production about architecture, in Portugal. One of the most fundamental case-studies of this research is the audiovisual production of the Portuguese architect Manuel Graça Dias. Born in Lisbon in 1953, Manuel Graça Dias shares his architectural practice with Egas José Vieira in the office “Contemporânea” and he is also a teacher, writer, editor and filmmaker, and has developed several programs for radio and television. Quite peculiarly, he is also a regular *Instagrammer*. In terms of audiovisual production alone, Manuel Graça Dias has explored the medium through a wide array of formats – from the television program to cinema, video and digital film – and he has also been involved in the backstage of several feature films as the designer of decor and props. But the intention of this paper is not to focus solely on his link to audiovisual production, it is rather concerned with engaging in a global analysis of how all these multiple forms of discourse production have influenced the construction, and even the definition, of Manuel Graça Dias’ own architectural practice. However, for reasons of limitation of space, we will be analyzing just two different facets of Dias’ production, which can function as points of contrast. The first example is one of Manuel Graça Dias’s recent incursions in cinema, as a director – realized in the formal and scientific context of academia, this film is as then undoubtedly linked to a “juridical and institutional system”. The second example is Dias’ regular *Instagram* activity – the highly personal and spontaneous nature of which introduces the question of whether it should be even considered “work”. Taking into consideration these two activities, this paper mainly aims to question: Can all Manuel Graça Dias’s incursions in different media be considered as forms of architectonic production? How can we define, or delimit, his body of work as an architect? And, finally, departing from Manuel Graça Dias’ singular case, how do we then define what an “architect” is, or even, how do we define what is “architecture”?

To attempt to respond to some of these questions, this paper will resort to some of Michel Foucault’s writings, and it is within Foucault’s own notion of the “freedom of the reader” that we felt somehow at ease to freely apply and adapt his ideas. *If thinking is needed, it is not as Foucault but with Foucault* — claims José Bragança de Miranda and António Fernando Cascais in “The Lesson of Foucault”, the preface of the Portuguese edition of “What is an Author?” (2012, 27) — *It is a way to fight what he [Foucault] called the ‘monarchy of the author’ — always a limitation of the freedom of the reader to depart from the intention and meaning targeted by the author, who, in his ‘eminent sovereignty’ (sic) presents himself as the law of the entire reading.* The final aim behind this free exploration of Foucault’s texts and reflections is solely to generate thought and hopefully initiate a structured understanding of how to approach the entirety of Manuel Graça Dias’s body of work, which

is fundamental to the future development of the PhD research of which this paper forms a part.

### What is an Architect?

“What is an Author?” — “*Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?*” — was a communication Michel Foucault presented in 1969 at *Société Française de Philosophie* (for the purpose of this paper, two different English translations have been used: the first from 1977 [Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon] and the second from 1998 [Robert Hurley and others]). For Foucault, this essay emerged from a gap he detected within his previous “*Les mots et les Chooses*”, admitting that in that work he had focused more on the “hidden discursive fabrics” of the text, and not so much on the works and the writers themselves. “What is an Author?” also seems to have emerged as a reaction to a 1967 text of Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, wherein Barthes criticized the “God-like” figure of the author in classical literature and criticism, condemning both for never paying any attention to the reader — *for it, the writer is the only person in literature*. For Barthes, in order to “give writing its future” there could only be one radical solution: *the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author*. (Barthes 1977, 148) Even though Foucault, in his essay, does not entirely contradict Barthes manifesto, he definitely seems interested in pushing the debate further by questioning the author figure in its relation with the text: *I am not certain that the consequences derived from the disappearance or death of the author have been fully explored or that the importance of this event has been appreciated*. (Foucault 1977, 117) Within this paper’s objective, which foremost aims to question the figure of the author in architecture, is it possible then to establish a kind of parallel between the philosophical debates of the late sixties in France — where, as Barthes and Foucault diagnosed in their essays, a major shift in literature was occurring — and the current Portuguese architectonic scene? Could a similar shift also have taken place in our architecture? If so, could the architectonic production of Manuel Graça Dias somehow embody this fundamental shift?

To begin with, Manuel Graça Dias’ practice of architecture surely needs to be interpreted in a different light than that of the more “traditional” definition of an architect, a notion which remains very much rooted in the Portuguese *status quo* that still largely considers the function of an architect to be solely linked to building and construction. The recent economic crisis however, which has led to a severe stagnation of construction activity, might have led to the emergence and acceptance of new forms of practicing architecture, especially those connected to cultural production. In this regard, Manuel Graça Dias’ career is absolutely remarkable and



prescient: since its very beginning, almost four decades ago, his architectural practice was already punctuated by the different forms of cultural production that only now are beginning to be more widely associated with the discipline. It is precisely these kinds of “alternative” forms of architectural production that this paper is keen to analyze in order to question the very essence of being an architect. Foucault said that *if we wish to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence*. (Foucault 1977, 117) Our approach is also to attempt to “know the architect in our day” by the “singularity of his absence”, using the case of Manuel Graça Dias to understand what it means to practice architecture at the very fringes of the discipline, at a place where the architect almost “disappears” and one can be left to wonder if what is being produced can even be considered “Architecture” — *We should reexamine the empty space left by the author’s disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of his void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance*. (Foucault 1977, 121)

### Manuel Graça Dias and Cinema

Manuel Graça Dias always cultivated a close relationship with cinema, ever since his time as a student of architecture. Immediately after the Portuguese revolution of 25<sup>th</sup> of April 1974, the school of architecture was shut down due to profound convulsions started by students that demanded drastic changes and actualizations to the programme and way in which architecture was being overall taught at the school. During that time, Manuel Graça Dias enrolled to study cinema. Years after, he would work on some cinematographic productions, namely on the film of António-Pedro Vasconcelos, “*O Lugar do Morto*” (1984), where he was responsible for the creation of all interior environments – controlling the arrangement of all objects within the spaces of the scenes and even designing the style of clothes that the female protagonist was to wear in the film.

More recently, Manuel Graça Dias directed two short films, which were produced within the context of an academic project he was integrated within as one of the main researchers. The project was suggestively titled “Silent Rupture” since it was envisioned to explore the intersections between Portuguese architecture and cinema during the dictatorship, more specifically in the period between 1960-1974 (this project was based at the Architecture School of Oporto University in 2010-13). The first film, “*A Encomenda*”, is a film about a project of architect Raul Hestnes Ferreira, a single house in Albarraque that the architect built for his own father, the poet José Gomes Ferreira, in 1959-61 [Figure 1]. However, even in this film about an acknowledged architectural project by a well-known author,

Manuel Graça Dias “contaminates” the discrete authorship of the house by emphasising the outside world and the anonymous “architecture” (“architecture without architects”) surrounding the territory of this special and delicate house. In addition to these more personal points of view, foregrounding Graça Dias’ own fascination with informal architecture, the director “contaminates” both the film and Hestnes Ferreira’s house yet further, through a particular scene in which Manuel Graça Dias himself appears in the film as another character, as a postman passes on the street with his bicycle, and introduces Dias with a very short biography: *Good morning my friend Manuel Graça Dias, born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April of 1953*. [Figure 2].



Figure 1: *A Encomenda*; Film by Manuel Graça Dias, 2012



Figure 2: *A Encomenda*; Film by Manuel Graça Dias, 2012

Throughout Manuel Graças Dias's work we always feel his subtle presence through these little "contaminations", which function almost like a signature. For Foucault, the function of the author's name proffers, (...) *more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description.* (Foucault 1998, 209). A name, in fact, also implies a "classificatory function": *Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others. In addition, it establishes a relationship among the texts.* (Foucault 1998, 210) In the case of Manuel Graça Dias this recognition might also apply, as a form of organizing and classifying the wide diversity of his production. No matter the form or format which Manuel Graça Dias decides to work and express himself within, if he signs it and associates his name to it, then, as an unarguably acknowledged architect (several times recognized by the institutions that officially sustain the discipline of architecture in Portugal), it should be with some degree of safety that anyone can classify whatever he does as "architectonic production" — *The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being of discourse: the fact that the discourse has an author's name, that one can say 'this was written by so-and-so' or 'so-and-so is its author' shows that this discourse is not ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes, not something that is immediately consumed. On the contrary, it is a speech that must be received in a certain mode and that, in a given culture, must receive a certain status.* (Foucault 1998, 211)

### What is Architecture?

Following Foucault's line of thought in "What is an author?", there are two fundamental notions that could be substituted for the notion of the author in the case of his "disappearance", but that he feels end up blocking it instead. The first is the notion of "work" [*oeuvre*] and the second is that of "writing" [*écriture*].

As Foucault puts it, this question of the "disappearance of the author" is not as immediate as at first it could seem. It is not sufficient to leave the "author" and just focus on the "work", because, he says, "work" and the unity this term implies can be just as problematic as the individuality of the author himself: *If we wish to publish the complete works of Nietzsche, for example, where do we draw the line? Certainly, everything must be published, but can we agree on what 'everything' is? We will include everything that Nietzsche himself published, along with the drafts of his works, his plans for aphorisms, his marginal notations and corrections. But what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included in his works? Why not?* (Foucault 1977, 118)

Regarding the notion of “writing” [*écriture*], which Foucault recognizes might be even more complex than that of “work”, how can the status of a certain text be defined if there is no reference to an “author”, if it has no signature, if it is, by chance or accident, anonymous? There are plenty of discourses all around us, Foucault says in “The Order of Discourse”, which circulate without having their meaning or efficacy necessarily associated with an author: *everyday remarks, which are effaced immediately; decrees or contracts which requires signatories but no author; technical instructions which are transmitted anonymously.* (Foucault 1981, 58) But there are domains in which anonymity is not tolerable and the literary domain is definitely one of them — as is architecture, we risk to add, at least in rapport to the notion of the discipline that is widely conceived today — *If by accident or design a text was presented anonymously, every effort was made to locate its author. Literary anonymity was of interest only as a puzzle to be solved as, in our day, literary works are totally dominated by the sovereignty of the author.* (Foucault 1977, 126)

### Manuel Graça Dias and Instagram

The act of regularly posting images on *Instagram* might not be immediately comparable to the “laundry bill” mentioned above that Foucault suggested as a potential component of Nietzsche’s full body of work, but it is, in fact, a similarly intimate artifact — a personal and spontaneous activity that it feels almost voyeuristic to peek into, despite being published to the public within the form of social media. Nevertheless, these images, which he regularly collects from his everyday life, have the potential of rendering an interesting, though slightly skewed, viewpoint of Manuel Graça Dias’s “work”, introducing some degree of novelty into the analysis of his more “canonical” architectonic production. In fact, these images somehow seem to encapsulate a hint of his authorial essence and intuition, which can be quite useful when attempting to grasp the unity and coherence that links the entirety of his work.

On *Instagram*, Manuel Graça Dias organizes his photographs through different categories that are grouped around *hashtags* like: *#iseefaces*, where he photographs suggestions of faces in buildings, objects, etc [Figure 3]; *#onedooraday*, which consists of a never ending collection of images of this fundamental architectonic element [Figure 4]; *#cityistherealmuseum*, which are basically photographs of objects scattered through the city that are generally considered “trash”; *#signs*, following his fascinations for words or any other written element in the city; *#gostomodernismo* (I like modernism) — where Manuel Graça Dias takes pictures of different modernist buildings that he admires, with an almost childlike approach: “I like this”, “I don’t like that” (by the way, he also has a series called “I don’t like *Português*”

*suave* – a style of Portuguese architecture from the 1950s-60s); and, finally, in the middle of all these random images, he also captures his own architecture (which he shares with Egas José Vieira, #*gracadiasegasvieira*), always with the same relaxed and uncompromising posture as the other images.



Figure 3: #iseefaces; Instagram of Manuel Graça Dias, 2015



Figure 4: #onedooraday; Instagram of Manuel Graça Dias, 2015

The question of whether these *Instagram* images might be considered, and therefore potentially analyzed and scientifically studied, as Manuel Graça Dias “work”, can probably only be answered by its author, that is, Manuel Graça Dias himself — *The author provide the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications.* (Foucault 1998, 214-215) Is it then the author (architect) that ultimately holds the power to legitimize, or not, his own “work”, his own (architectonic) production? Should it then be Manuel Graça Dias himself who ultimately decides which aspects of his own multiple and diverse production — these materialisations of his “multiple selves” — are in fact, or not, Architecture?

### The “architect-function” (Final Considerations)

According to Foucault, the function of the author plays a vital role in the review of all literary works, as it serves to characterize the mode of existence and circulation of certain discourses within a society. However, the “author-function” does not generate itself spontaneously by the attribution of a certain discourse to an individual, it is in fact the result of a complex operation that constructs a rational entity called an author. But even this authorial entity is not always constructed in the same way, it varies according to period or type, as the philosopher-author is not constructed in the same way as the poet. Still, in the face of all these variables, Foucault admits there are some constants that have ruled the construction of the “author-function” throughout the ages, which in his essay he limits to four characteristic traits:

- 1) it is linked to a juridical and institutional system. On this point, it could be interesting to also bring to the debate the notion of “discipline”, which is a very strong and foundational subject within the architectonic universe, and an idea Foucault sees mainly as a “principle of control over the production of discourse”: *Within its own limits, each discipline recognizes true and false propositions; but it pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins.* (Foucault 1981, 60-61);
- 2) it does not affect all discourses in the same way
- 3) it is not spontaneously attributed but results instead of complex operations; and finally
- 4) it does not simply refer to a “real individual” but it can give rise to a simultaneity of “several selves”, several “subjects-positions”. (Foucault 1998, 214)

But more than an end in itself, Foucault's notion of "author-function" introduces the possibility of a method — a method for the construction of a "typology of discourse": *Perhaps the time has come to study not only the expressive value and formal transformations of discourse, but its mode of existence: the modifications and variations, within any culture of modes of circulation, valorization, attribution and appropriation.* (Foucault 1977, 137)

The questions proposed by this paper were not objectively answered and will probably always remain in a fairly open state, but the introduction of the "author-function" notion into the architectonic debate — the "architect-function" — opens the possibility for a more systematic process of analysis of the work of architects like Manuel Graças Dias, who has dedicated a large amount of his practice precisely to the development of multiple forms of discourse production and communication: to talk, write, teach and broadcast Architecture, and ultimately even design it.

## References

- Barthes, Roland. 1977 (1968). *Death of the Author*. In *Image, Music, Text*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Dias, Manuel Graça. 1992. *Vida Moderna*. Lisboa: João Azevedo Editor.
- Dias, Manuel Graça. 1992-94. *Ver Artes/ Arquitectura*. Television program: 84 episodes, color, 4:3. Lisboa: RTP.
- Dias, Manuel Graça. 2013. *A Encomenda*. Film:18", color, 16:9. Porto: Silent Rupture.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977 (1969). *What is an Author?* In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. 113-128. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1998 (1969). *What is an Author?* In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Volume 2*, trans. Josué V Hahari, 188-204. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 2012. *O que é um autor?* Lisboa: Nova Vega, Passagens.
- Foucault, Michel. 1981 (1970). *The Order of Discourse*. In *Untying the text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*. 48-78. Boston, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Miranda, José Bragança and Cascais, António Fernando. 2012. *A lição de Foucault*. In *O que é um autor?* 5-28. Lisboa: Nova Vega, Passagens.
- Vicente, Manuel. 1991. *Um prefácio para um livro, ambos feitos por arquitectos*. In *Vida Moderna*. 13-15. Lisboa: João Azevedo Editor.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira



# Changing the Architectonic of Philosophy. John Rajchman's Interest in Folded Architecture

**Frederike Lausch**

Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main /  
DFG-Research Group Media and Mimesis  
lausch@kunst.uni-frankfurt.de

## **Abstract**

Based on the assumption that in the 1990s certain figures and institutions conducted the rise of Gilles Deleuze in US-American architecture, the paper examines the actions and intentions of John Rajchman as one intercessor for a working together of architecture and philosophy. It is necessary to find out why he is interested in folded architecture and how he wants to use architecture for his philosophical work. To answer these questions the paper addresses the introduction of Deleuze into the US-American academic discourse in the 1970s and the shift in reception from predominant political and social issues to art and architecture related topics in the 1980s. This is followed by further investigations of Rajchman's actions in the scope of the Anyone Corporation and the implementation of a 'Deleuze-after-Derrida' narrative in the 1990s. Of interest are especially Rajchman's contributions to discussions about 'folding' in architecture and his relation to Peter Eisenman. Finally via a close reading of Rajchman's essays, it is argued that he intends an enhancement of philosophy through a "new" folded and flexible architecture, as if both disciplines working together the rigid architectonic of our thinking might lighten up and thereby philosophical working and writing can acquire "new" forms.

## **Keywords**

Fold; Gilles Deleuze; John Rajchman; Peter Eisenman; Anyone

In an interview with Simone Brott, the US-American philosopher John Rajchman explains his contribution to the intensive connection of architecture and Gilles Deleuze's philosophy in the 1990s: "I was really interested in Deleuze as a philosopher and also as an interesting way of doing philosophy in an academic context and so I wanted to extract for my own purposes a model and architecture happened to provide an opportunity to do this"<sup>1</sup>. Rajchman emphasises that he belongs to the field of philosophy. Meanwhile he contributes with articles to almost all the major architectural publications about the concept of 'folding', where Deleuze's *The Fold* gets translated into the realm of architecture. Therefore Rajchman appears to be a kind of facilitator accelerating the relationship between US-American architecture and French philosophy. He himself draws the line to Deleuze's term 'intercesseurs'<sup>2</sup>. It gets often translated as 'mediators' and is used to define figures, events and mobile connections producing different resonances of Deleuze's work.<sup>3</sup> In this regard Brott states, that the "affiliation between Deleuze and architecture arose neither by his direct interest in architecture nor by architecture's immediate affection for him", but it evolved through mediators, as she formulates it: a "cult-assemblage of various characters who pursued their own activities around Deleuze"<sup>4</sup>. The 'mediator' Rajchman explains that architecture serves him to obtain a model for his very own purpose, which is doing philosophy in an academic context similar to the way Deleuze is doing it. But what does it mean then, that architecture provides an opportunity to extract a model for his philosophical work? How is he in fact using architecture?

### *Semiotext(e) and Zone*

Before looking at Rajchman's interest in folded architecture, one has to go back to the 1970s and the introduction of Deleuze and Félix Guattari into the US-American academic discourse. It is at Columbia University, where in 1973 the collective Semiotext(e) is founded by Sylvère Lotringer, who is associate professor in the French Department and hired to teach semiotics.<sup>5</sup> From the initial semiotics reading group, where Rajchman, being a graduate student in Philosophy, takes part, the cultural/theoretical jour-

1. Rajchman 2003, 3.

2. Ibid., 2. See Deleuze 1985.

3. Besides Rajchman other theoreticians like Elizabeth Grosz, Anthony Vidler, Sanford Kwinter, Brian Massumi and Manuel De Landa are as well presented as the "major secondary commentators [on Deleuze] operating at the threshold of the architectural discipline" Frichot and Loo 2013, 6.

4. Brott 2011, 16.

5. Schwarz and Balsamo 1996, 206.

nal *Semiotext(e)* emerged with Lotringer as general editor and Rajchman as secretary. The first three issues appear in 1974 and 1975 “devoted to ‘traditional’ semiotic texts and commentary”<sup>6</sup>. Then the journals content shifts from semiotics to introducing French radical thought, for instance in 1977 the 6<sup>th</sup> issue is entirely devoted to Deleuze and Guattari’s *L’Anti-Œdipe: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*. From the beginning, *Semiotext(e)* is conceived as “an intervention into cultural politics, not merely as an academic exercise in theoretical reproduction”<sup>7</sup>. In November 1975 they organise the legendary schizo-culture colloquium at Columbia University. Lotringer and Rajchman give the introduction together, followed by presentations from Jean-François Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Guattari and Deleuze, who then become regular contributors of *Semiotext(e)*. Retrospectively it is summarized as a fusion of “the radical writing of key figures of post-1968 French philosophy with the chaotic creativity of an emerging New York downtown art scene”<sup>8</sup>. *Semiotext(e)* serves Rajchman to publish some of his first critical articles, mainly on Foucault, Lacan, Nietzsche and Deleuze.<sup>9</sup> Around 1980, the collective disperses and Lotringer starts the Foreign Agents series, a succession of little black books from French theorists such as Deleuze and Guattari, whose *On the Line* appears as the second book in 1983 and *Nomodology. The War Machine* gets distributed in 1986. With this series *Semiotext(e)* – and Rajchman as being an active member – publishes some of the earliest English translations of Deleuze and Guattari, that is why Schwarz and Balsamo call *Semiotext(e)* “an agent of infection”<sup>10</sup> – infecting the US-American audience with French theory. In an interview Lotringer says that they “were intercessors in the sense that there were no texts [of Deleuze] available in English [...] we were intercessors because we just allowed something to happen”<sup>11</sup>.

The End of the 1980s marks a turning point in the reception of Deleuze in the United States: from a radical, interdisciplinary ethos as well as an interest in questions of subjectivity towards the situation that Deleuze is being directly taught in architectural schools by theorists, such as Sanford Kwinter.<sup>12</sup> He and other seminar students of Lotringer, namely Michel Feher, Jonathan Crary and Hal Foster, form the younger generation and possess a stronger affinity to art, architecture or space and the techno-

6. Ibid., 207.

7. Ibid., 208.

8. Artistspace Web Page.

9. See “Semiotics, Epistemology and Materialism.” *Semiotext(e)* 1 (1974): 11-28. “Analysis in Power: A Few Foucauldian Theses.” *Semiotext(e)* 6 (1977): 45-58. And “Nietzsche, Foucault and the Anarchism of Power.” *Semiotext(e)* 7 (1978): 96-107.

10. Schwarz and Balsamo 1996, 218.

11. Lotringer 2013, 256.

12. Brott 2011, 26.

-scientific dimension of Deleuze.<sup>13</sup> Together they create the magazine *Zone* with its first issue “The Contemporary City” appearing in 1986 and with essays from Paul Virilio, Christopher Alexander, Manuel De Landa and of course Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>14</sup> The back of the issue features statements about the city by architects and architectural theorists such as Kenneth Frampton, Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind and Rem Koolhaas. According to Kwinter the most architectural dimension of *Zone* is not the topic of the city and the contribution of architects, but the materiality of the book itself and its graphic design produced by Bruce Mau. The academic publications become a design object. This “increasing aestheticization of the text within the New York publishing scene around Deleuze” is also remarkable in the development of *Semiotext(e)*’s graphic design.<sup>15</sup> To this effect the 15<sup>th</sup> issue *Semiotext(e): Architecture*, edited in 1992 by architect Hrazten Zeitlian, displays a highly layered, complex and high-contrast photocopy graphic design, about which Lotringer tells in an interview, that “he didn’t like the graphics, which he found to be too polished, ‘too architectural’”<sup>16</sup>. *Zone* is for Lotringer the “antithesis of Semiotext(e)”, because “it was rich, beautiful, and full of money”<sup>17</sup>. Kwinter explains the increasing reception of Deleuze by the field of architecture combined with an emphasis on the importance of graphic design in the following way: “But it was only by chance. I wasn’t in architecture. I was interested in it, but I was doing literature, linguistics, philosophy, art; and it was an architect [Christian Hubert] that came and asked me the question [about Deleuze and Postmodernism], and it played an amazing role. The American reception was essentially driven by architects”.<sup>18</sup> Surprisingly the issue *Semiotext(e): Architecture* does not get the same attention as the future architectural publications on Deleuze will get – especially the ones produced in the scope of the Anyone Corporation.

### Anyone Corporation and ANY

One day, according to Rajchman, the architect Eisenman calls and invites him to the Anyone conference, organised by the Anyone Corporation, which was founded in 1990 by Eisenman, Cynthia Davidson, Arata Iso-

13. Rajchman 2003, 1.

14. Rajchman tells about his contribution to *Zone*: “I was editor of zone for a day, they [Kwinter, Cray and Feher] say, because I went to the initial meeting, but since I’d already done Semiotext(e) I thought it would be more interesting for them to do it rather than me.” Ibid.

15. Brott 2011, 33, Annot. 43.

16. Ibid., 26.

17. Lotringer 2013, 256.

18. Brott 2011, 24-25.

zaki, and Ignasi de Solà-Morales Rubió with the overall aim “to advance the knowledge and understanding of architecture and its relationships to the general culture” at the dawn of the Third Millennium.<sup>19</sup> Rajchman explains his reaction as follows: “So I said it sounded really interesting but I didn’t know much about architecture. He led me to believe that was no problem at all. [...] so since I was working on this Deleuze project and reading this material I said to myself Deleuze could have a really interesting impact in these debates in architecture [...] Eisenman finally had a problem with Derrida, they found in Deleuze something interesting, and this, in my point of view, is how the two things came together”<sup>20</sup>. As said, Rajchman’s involvement in the actions of the Anyone Corporation seems to start with an invitation and the following thought that introducing Deleuze to the field of architecture could have an interesting impact on architectural debates. In this regard, the paper “On Not Being Any One”, which Rajchman gives in the occasion of the first Any-conference in May 1991, reads as an introduction into Deleuze’s philosophy. He is above all addressing two key texts of Deleuze, which possess a strong connection to questions of space and to spatial figures. On the one hand there is the concept of striated and smooth space in Deleuze and Guattari’s *Mille Plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2* from 1980, on the other hand Deleuze’s *Le Pli* on folding and baroque architecture from 1988. At the end of his paper Rajchman alludes to Eisenman’s architecture, admitting that he never saw a building by him, but he perceives in his drawings and writings a process of liberating architecture from the delimiting rational, striated spaces of traditional architectural plan – a process he calls “becoming-Eisenman” as an analogue of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal/woman/minority etc. But then Rajchman speaks of a “disheartening element” in Eisenman’s writings, when the architect “imagines a great metaphysical agon or struggle between philosophy with a capital P and architecture with a capital A, the one having to resist the incursions or the advances of the other”<sup>21</sup>. Instead, Rajchman claims for an encounter of philosophy and architecture, where they together create a “temporary space in which the question of what is new in architecture and what is new in thought combine or compose with one another in an unexpected configuration or opening that no longer belongs to anyone”<sup>22</sup>. So his intention is the opening up of both disciplines to work together without fighting for a hierarchical position within this relation.

Rajchman contributes to almost all the other Any-conferences in the

19. Anyone Corporation Web Page.

20. Rajchman 2003, 3.

21. Rajchman 1991a, 110.

22. Ibid., 110.

following years referring mainly to Foucault and Deleuze.<sup>23</sup> Besides the conferences, Rajchman is part of the editorial board of *ANY*, the magazine of the Anyone corporation with Davidson as general editor.<sup>24</sup> In 1993 the first issue “Writing in Architecture” appears and one year later Greg Lynn and Rajchman edit together the 5<sup>th</sup> issue on “Lightness”, in which Rajchman wants “to try out a concept like lightness in architecture”<sup>25</sup>, a concept which is derived from Deleuze and Guattari and which shall rescue architecture from the traditional burden-support space.<sup>26</sup> Lightness points to the imagination of a freer and more experimental sort of space, different from the classical one, which is defined by gravity. With the help of Deleuzian concepts, Rajchman envisions architecture freed from grid frames, structure, typology or any kind of ideology. In the same issue, a translation of the chapter “Mystère D’Ariane selon Nietzsche” from Deleuze’s *Critique et clinique* and an article by Bernard Cache are published. Deleuze refers in *Le Pli* to a manuscript with the title *L’ameublement du territoire*, written by his student Cache but not yet published, and replaces the notion of a static object with Cache’s term ‘objectile’ for a function, which contains virtually an infinite number of objects. Deleuze writes about Cache’s work: “Inspired by geography, architecture, and the decorative arts, in my view this book seems essential for any theory of the fold”<sup>27</sup>. It is Rajchman, who – reacting to the big interest of Deleuze in the United States – asks Cache for the still unpublished manuscript. Then it gets translated and distributed in 1995 under the title *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories* as the first book of the Writing Architecture series, which the Anyone corporation uses to spread mostly theoretical essays on architecture. Retrospectively Rajchman says, that without him taking care, the manuscript wouldn’t have been published and Cache would have had nothing to do with the connection of Deleuze and US-American architecture.<sup>28</sup>

Karen Burns writes in regard to the influence of the Anyone Corporation in the “Deleuze-after-Derrida” narrative in architectural history, that the “rise of Deleuze [in architecture] was not a natural phenomenon,

23. See “On Not Being Any One.” *Anyone* (1991). “Anywhere and Nowhere.” *Anywhere* (1992). “Manyways.” *Anyway* (1993). “The Place of Architecture in Philosophy.” *Anyplace* (1994). “Some Senses of ‘Ground’.” *Anybody* (1996). “A New Pragmatism?” *Anyhow* (1997). “Time Out.” *Anytime* (1998). No contributions to *Anywise* (1995), *Anymore* (1999) and *Anything* (2000).

24. Other members of the editorial board are Tadao Ando, Jennifer Bloomer, Brian Boigon, Henry Cobb, Charles Gwathmey, Rem Koolhaas, Sanford Kwinter, Greg Lynn and Mark C. Taylor. Later Silvia Kolbowski, R. E. Somol and Sylvia Lavin join. See imprint of *ANY*.

25. Rajchman 1994, 7.

26. *Ibid.*, 6.

27. Deleuze 1993, 144, Annot. 3.

28. Rajchman 2003, 6.

but an institutionally structured one”.<sup>29</sup> The conferences and publications from the Anyone Corporation in the 1990s provided a critical setting for architectural debate around Deleuze, which was in the beginning dominated by the concept of the fold. Rajchman’s contributions to discussions about ‘folding’ in architecture and his relation to Eisenman will now be of interest.

### ***Unfolding Frankfurt* and “Folding in Architecture”**

Considering Deleuze’s books on art related topics, like *Francis Bacon. Logique de la sensation, L’image-mouvement. Cinéma 1* and *L’image-temps. Cinéma 2*, the book *Le Pli. Leibniz et le baroque* has a special position and not only because there Deleuze says a few things about architecture. According to Rajchman his concept of baroque architecture is “so strange that though it was like that... you could actually try to do things that aren’t already determined by Deleuze himself”<sup>30</sup>. Apparently this wasn’t the case for Deleuze’s books on painting and cinema: “Initially it wasn’t so much that Deleuze was good at architecture or that there was some connection between the two but that architecture appeared as its own development in which they could absorb Deleuze in their own interesting way whereas the Cinema and Art History worlds couldn’t do that because they were more literary”<sup>31</sup>. So Rajchman perceives the realm of architecture as an occasion, in which one can relate to the philosophical model of Deleuze in an experimental way, something that Deleuze would appreciate. Rajchman tells the story, that when Deleuze publishes *Le Pli* he writes about the new book and sends the review to him. The answer he receives is: “this is very funny, because in reaction to this book there’s two groups that I never expected to respond: surfers and architects”<sup>32</sup>. In his opinion Deleuze is surprised as well as interested at this phenomenon that is emerging mostly among English speaking people and much less in France itself. And Rajchman is one of these people, who foster the Deleuze architecture connection by speaking in architectural schools and contributing to architectural publications.

In 1991 Eisenman publishes *Unfolding Frankfurt*, a book, in which he presents his master plan for the Rebstockpark in Frankfurt/Germany. At Eisenman’s invitation Rajchman contributes the article “Perplications: On the Space and Time of Rebstockpark”, which he calls “the literature on folding architecture”<sup>33</sup>. Here Rajchman defines the relation between *Le*

29. Burns 2013, 28.

30. Rajchman 2003, 3.

31. Ibid., 3.

32. Ibid., 2.

33. Ibid., 4.

*Pli* and Eisenman's project as a reciprocal "intensive reading", to be understood as an experimental encounter, where unnoticed "complicities" between both are released while both remain divergent and singular.<sup>34</sup> So not only Eisenman's architecture is an intensive reading of *Le Pli*, also *Le Pli* is an intensive reading of the Rebstockpark project. Again a hierarchy between both disciplines is rejected. Philosophy and Architecture fold into one another, they encounter, capture and dislocate each other, without one being the original and the other the adaptation – that is what Rajchman imagines.<sup>35</sup> For him Eisenman uses the fold firstly as "the central formal technique employed in the generation of the design" – seen in the obvious folding process of the site – and secondly as "the central Idea or Question of the project", questioning the overarching totalities of the traditional view on architecture.<sup>36</sup> Because the architect uncovers multiplicities, "an imperceptible disparation in what presents itself as a perceptual totality"<sup>37</sup>. Rajchman introduces Eisenman as a player, who throws questions into the field of architecture, and equalizes him to the "true players", which are Deleuze, Nietzsche, Mallarmé etc. These true players don't play according to pre-existent rules, rather "the [playing] table itself bursts open and becomes part of a larger, more complex game that always includes the possibility of new rules"<sup>38</sup>.

Rajchman also contributes with the article "Out of the Fold" to the most famous publication on the concept of 'folding' in the architectural discourse, the *Architectural Design* profile "Folding in Architecture" edited by Lynn. After introducing some main concepts of Deleuze, especially the notion of an 'affective' space, he asks: "The modernist 'machines for living' sought to express a clean efficient space for the new mechanical body; but who will invent a way to express the affective space for this other multiplicitous one?"<sup>39</sup> Thus Rajchman assigns to architecture the task to create the so-called "affective space", in which the subject cannot understand and interpret a discernible logic but experiences the space through the body. And the architect Eisenman now provides this "architectural expression" – the architectural equivalent to Deleuze's philosophy, that is why Rajchman writes: "As Deleuze invents a new philosophy of the informe, or an informel art of thinking, so Eisenman invents an architecture of the informe, or an informel way of building and designing"<sup>40</sup>. So invited initially by

---

34. Rajchman 1991c, 22.

35. Ibid., 24.

36. Ibid., 21.

37. Ibid., 36.

38. Ibid., 70.

39. Rajchman 1993, 63.

40. Rajchman 1991c, 22.



Eisenman, quickly Rajchman becomes the most ambitious intercessor of ‘folding’ in architecture.

### **Constructions**

After having reconstructed Rajchman’s several contributions and its role in introducing and spreading Deleuzian concepts among architects, now the question is what is his interest in bringing Deleuze and Architecture together. To answer this, I recommend a close reading of *Constructions*, an assemblage of essays by Rajchman, published in 1998 in the Anyone Corporation’s Writing Architecture series, and of *The Deleuze Connection* from 2000. In *Constructions* he starts with asking: “What if the architectonic in Kant were not an overarching system but something that has itself to be constructed anew, in each case, in relation to fresh problems – something looser, more flexible, less complete, more irregular, a free plan in which things hang together without yet being held in place?”<sup>41</sup> Here the task is to overcome the Kantian architectonic, to recognize it only as a temporary construction, from which we have to free ourselves in order to reach “a free plan, in which to move, invent concepts, unfold a drama”<sup>42</sup>. For Rajchman ‘to think’ is synonymous with ‘to construct’, so he calls the philosopher a constructor and every work is, in reference to Deleuze, a montage, an ‘agencement’ (a layout of room), that is why “making a philosophy would become a matter of architecture”.<sup>43</sup> Philosophy’s plan of construction shouldn’t be predetermined by given rules, as it is the case with the Kantian architectonic, rather it has to be always built anew. Rajchman thinks, that for once the architectonic of thinking is loosened up, the main philosophical questions – how to construct a work and how to construct a life – will acquire new shapes.<sup>44</sup> Important here is the notion of the architectonic of thinking and its relation to both architecture and philosophy. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues, that philosophy has an inner schema, called architectonic, which is based on the distinction between sensibility and understanding and which is complete and necessary. This architectonic is now regarded to be too rigid and can be compared to the traditional notion of architecture as a grounded and static object, also something that Rajchman wants to overcome. This means, that because the architectonic is shaping philosophical thinking, he believes that exactly this sort of architectonic needs to get changed, so that philosophy can change too. This means further, that because the architectonic is based on

41. Rajchman 1998, 1.

42. Ibid., 2.

43. Ibid., p. 2-3.

44. Ibid., p. 2.

the traditional concept of architecture, this concept needs to get changed as well. And here, I would argue, lies Rajchman's interest in the realm of architecture.

In the much earlier book *Philosophical Events. Essays of the '80s*, where the last chapter is titled "What's New in Architecture?", Rajchman explains the notion of space in the theories of Foucault, Derrida and at the end Deleuze, in order to claim for "an architecture of the event".<sup>45</sup> Already here he asks, "what an 'invention of the other' possessing the 'singular structure of an event' would mean for architecture, and for the architectural allegory of thought, and therefore of invention in thought"<sup>46</sup>. So again the way of doing architecture is connected to the structure of the thought, conceived by an architectural allegory, and thereby to the possibility to create something unexpected in philosophy. Rajchman continues: "for a long and powerful tradition of thought which we still 'inhabit', to construct a habitation, a way of living, has meant to construct a space in conformity with a plan, an ideal, a model, essence, or nature, that would be independent of it [...] The task of inhabiting the uninhabitable is to conceive of another relation of our being-together in a space and a time than this one"<sup>47</sup>.

So the rigid and predetermining Kantian architectonic needs to get abandoned by rethinking architecture and its notions of ground, gravity and ideal plan. The Cartesian notion of space, a homogenous gridded space, in which everything is ordered within the three dimensional coordinate system, is regarded as not being able to explain social space, which envelops in-between-spaces possessing "distances and proximities of another, nonquantifiable sort"<sup>48</sup>. Here the concept of the fold, introducing a heterogeneous, complex and every changing notion of space, serves as an alternative. It gets connected to the organisation of the city, for instance Rajchman writes that for once the architectonic is loosened up, then philosophy "would become free, impermanent constructions superimposed on one another like strata in a city"<sup>49</sup>. The city is seen as free and vital to the degree that it allows for the movement of free thought.<sup>50</sup> Deleuze introduces the "brain-city" as one "filled with voids and interstices, always changing

45. Rajchman 1991b, 156. The book cover is interesting because underneath the alignment of the philosophers Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, Lyotard and Rorty an image of an architectural plan is displayed, showing probably housing units in rather organic shapes. Here the connection of philosophy and architecture is materially inscribed in the layout of the book's two-dimensional space.

46. Ibid. References are from Derrida.

47. Ibid., 157-158.

48. Rajchman 2000, 100.

49. Rajchman 1998, 2.

50. Rajchman 2000, 41.

and leaking, defined by tacit or indeterminate rules”<sup>51</sup>. Like the city the new kind of philosophical construction should be “a montage of overlapping and necessarily unfinished ‘remarks’ and ‘investigations’”<sup>52</sup>. Consequently architects as well as the philosophers have to work with informal plans and diagrams, so through experimentation, rather than through a plan or program as sort of ideology. The plan of construction must “always be unformed, indeterminate, loose enough that other figurations, other confabulations may yet happen”<sup>53</sup>.

For Rajchman the problem emerges in the course of realisation, because the question is “how to introduce this anorganized or complex space into building – in other words how to create a free, operative space in construction not preset by any overarching organization or given through combination among existing elements”<sup>54</sup>. Since this is not yet designed, Rajchman commissions seven architects to design a ‘virtual house’ – published in the 20th ANY issue “The virtual House”<sup>55</sup> – a house, “which, through its plan, space, construction, and intelligence, generates the most new connections, the one so arranged or disposed as to permit the greatest power for unforeseen relations”<sup>56</sup>.

In fact Rajchman imagines that a “freer” architecture would lead to a “freer” architectonic of thinking and thus to a way of doing philosophy, through which unexpected inventions can emerge. In order to see this happen, he as a philosopher commissions architects to design buildings, which, as he supposes, shall be connected to philosophy, more precisely to concepts of Deleuze. So it goes from philosophy to architecture, back to philosophy and so forth? How, then, does Rajchman conceive the relationship between architecture and philosophy?

## Working together

At the end of *Constructions* Rajchman asks: “And what if then happened that constructions in architecture and philosophy discovered provisional points of contact and alliance, as though together speaking a new and foreign idiom no longer belonging to the recognized languages of

51. Rajchman 1998, 6.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 7.

54. Ibid., 105.

55. The ANY issue “The Virtual House” from 1997 is based on the commissioning of seven architects to design a virtual house, among them Eisenman, and on the discussion of those houses at a seminar in Berlin.

56. Rajchman 1998, 115.

either?”<sup>57</sup> He imagines a working together of philosophy and architecture without rivalry or identification, without one dictating the rules and the other applying them. Instead they together create “a zone of new connections”, which lead to “the formulation of new problems, the invention of new concepts”.<sup>58</sup> Referring to Deleuze and Guattari’s expression, according to which “Philosophy needs a nonphilosophy that comprehends it”<sup>59</sup>, Rajchman explains that philosophy not only presupposes nonphilosophical understanding, but is also addressed to it.<sup>60</sup> Therefore he is stressing the importance of “translations in arts or sciences”<sup>61</sup> by saying, that “to do philosophy is thus to fabricate concepts in resonance and interference with the arts, past as well as present”<sup>62</sup>. The image of philosophy as a metadiscipline that sets the rules for the others has to be abandoned. In a similar way Deleuze says, that philosophy should be practiced like an ‘art brut’, which has “its own raw material that allows it to enter into more fundamental external relations with these other disciplines”<sup>63</sup>. In this regard Rajchman states, that “philosophy is impoverished when reduced to being merely about the arts, reflecting on their forms of judgment; for it has a much more vital role to play together with them, linking up with them in odd places, interfering and intersecting, with them through ‘encounters’ prior to settled judgments”<sup>64</sup>. So philosophy should not become a new theory, prior to art and which art is applying then, rather it serves as an ‘interceder’: inciting creation or thinking in other nonphilosophical disciplines, so that together speaking something “new” emerges.<sup>65</sup>

Coming back to the initial quote, architecture seems to serve as the nonphilosophical discipline, which philosophy is presupposing in order to obtain a much more vital role. Rajchman thus believes in an enhancement of philosophy through the realm of architecture, as if by working together architecture overcomes the traditional burden of the Cartesian space and the notion of gravity, then they might change together the architectonic of our thinking and thereby philosophical working and writing. With this in mind, we eventually see that the story of architecture and philosophy connected via sharing the topic of ‘folding’ during the 1990s is not necessarily the one of architects appropriating Deleuze’s philosophy for formal

---

57. Ibid., 9.

58. Rajchman 2000, 4.

59. Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 218.

60. Rajchman 2000, 114.

61. Rajchman 1998, 100.

62. Rajchman 2000, 115.

63. Deleuze 1995, 89.

64. Rajchman 1998, 56.

65. Rajchman 2000, 118.

or organisational innovation, but also one, which incorporates the actions and intentions of philosophers alike – in this case of Rajchman as one ‘intercesseur’ for a working together of architecture and philosophy.

## References

- Anyone Corporation. Web. <http://www.anycorp.com/anycorp/about.html>.
- Artistsspace. Web. <http://artistsspace.org/programs/schizo-culture>.
- Brott, Simone. 2011. *Architecture for a Free Subjectivity: Deleuze and Guattari at the Horizon of the Real*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub.
- Burns, Karen. 2013. “Becomings – Architecture, Feminism, Deleuze: Before and After the Fold.” In *Deleuze and Architecture*, ed. Hélène Frichot and Stephan Loo, 15-39. Edinburgh University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1985. Interview by Antoine Dulaure and Claire Parnet. *L'autre journal* 8: 10-22.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1993. *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles. 1995. *Negotiations*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Frichot, Hélène and Stephan Loo. 2013. *Deleuze and Architecture*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Lotringer, Sylvère. 2013. Interview by Scapegoat at Los Angeles Art Book Fair. [http://www.scapegoatjournal.org/docs/05/SG\\_Excess\\_254-265\\_F\\_LOTRINGER.pdf](http://www.scapegoatjournal.org/docs/05/SG_Excess_254-265_F_LOTRINGER.pdf).
- Rajchman, John. 1991a. “On Not Being Any One.” In *Anyone*, ed. Cynthia Davidson, 102-111. New York: Rizzoli.
- Rajchman, John. 1991b. *Philosophical events: Essays of the 80s*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rajchman, John. 1991c. “Perplications: On the Space and Time of Rebstockpark.” In *Unfolding Frankfurt*, ed. Peter Eisenman and Judy Geib, 20-77. Berlin: Ernst.
- Rajchman, John. 1993. “Out of the Fold.” In *AD Profile* 102 (Folding in Architecture): 61-63.
- Rajchman, John. 1994. “Lightness: A concept in architecture.” In *ANY* 5 (Lightness): 5-7.
- Rajchman, John. 1998. *Constructions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Rajchman, John. 2000. *The Deleuze connections*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Rajchman, John. 2003. Interview by Simone Brott. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/67949/2/67949.pdf>.
- Schwarz, Henry and Anne Balsamo. 1996. “Under the Sign of Semiotext(e): The story according Sylvère Lotringer and Chris Kraus.” In *Critique* 3: 205-219.



# Of canopies and roofs. The global interior and the outside

**Giorgio Ponso**

Leeds Beckett University  
G.Ponso@leedsbeckett.ac.uk

## **Abstract**

In his book *In the World Interior of Capital* Peter Sloterdijk (2013) describes how Western civilization managed, over the course of a process that lasted about 500 years, to build up a global system of communication and exchange that ended up enclosing the whole planet into one “psychotechnical” construction.

The process of Globalization, implemented through a series of material and immaterial constructions — defined by Sloterdijk as “canopies of globalization” — determined both the (work) ethics of Modernity (devoted to exploration, research, and innovation), and the essential character of modern space as an interior.

In February 2015, Google presented the project for its new headquarters in Mountain View, California: a series of gigantic transparent canopies frame both large stretches of natural landscape and the space of production, the “workspace,” seemingly embodying Sloterdijk’s narrative of the construction of the global interior. On the one hand, the new Google campus appropriates and transfigures the character of past radical projects, from 1954 Mies’ Convention Hall Project in Chicago, to 1969 Superstudio Continuous Monument and 1970 Archizoom No Stop City. On the other hand, it seems to call for the construction of a new outside (even if not a real one) that will be able to break the boredom of life within the global interior and re-activate the processes of discovery and innovation that are essential to modern enterprises.

## **Keywords**

Canopy; Google; interior; Sloterdijk

## The global interior

In February 2015, Google presented the project of its new headquarters to be built in Mountain View, California. The project presents a series of lightweight structures, gigantic transparent canopies stretched above American suburbia, that aim to provide the community of the Googlers an enclosed and controlled environment capable of replicating the complexity and the diversity of both the natural and the urban settings, constituting a persuasive alternative to the outside.

The attempt to build this kind of substitute worlds, all-encompassing, enclosed and controlled yet explicitly built to foster innovation and change, is not new neither within the history of architecture nor to within the history of capital ventures.

On the contrary, the endeavour to build a totalizing environment, enveloping all human activities, is recognized by Peter Sloterdijk as the most typically modern enterprise: the construction of the “global interior of capital.”

Looking at the ways in which this process historically unfolded can give us useful insights about the character of this space (the global interior), about the nature of the activities that they host (modern work or the process of construction of the global interior itself), and about the character of the subject that lives in them (the modern subject, the global worker).

## Modernity as interiorization project

In *In the World Interior of Capital* Sloterdijk outlines the “grand narrative” of the formation of the world we live in; it is a 500 years long process that started with the geographic discovery of the globe in the fifteenth century and ended with its total enclosure within a global apparatus of communication and transport that make us perceive the world as one continuous, global, interior.

In Sloterdijk’s view, the very definition of modernity coincides with the process of globalization (modernity = globalization) and westernization of the world, implemented “practically through Christian-capitalist seafaring, and politically implanted through the colonialism of Old European nation-states” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.9).

Globalization, the unfolding of modernity, acted in parallel on two levels: on the one hand, there was the literal geographic discovery of the world; on the other hand, this “penetration of the unknown” was always accompanied by the simultaneous extension of the respective motherlands laws, cultural, social, and economic frameworks that progressively enclosed



ever larger territories. It is in this sense that modernity can be seen as a gigantic interiorization project carried out at a global scale by means of a continuous process of discovery and appropriation by enclosure.

The formation of this global interior, a construction that is at the same time psychological and material (or, as Sloterdijk would put it, psychotechnical), is accompanied by two phenomena: the emergence of the modern subject and his ethics, and the new relationship established by this subject with the environment where he/she performs.

### **How the global interior was built. The modern subject at work**

We can think of modernity as an enterprise carried out at a global scale by a series of different subjects — discoverers, conquistadores, preachers, colonizers, merchants, etc. — each having a different agenda that steered their behaviour and shaped their character. Beyond the particular aims and attitudes of each category it is possible to notice the emergence of common features that, all together, contributed to the construction of the generic modern subject. These features are still recognizable in present times, especially if we think of the way we work today; in fact, many of the rhetoric of work that accompany both our daily life and the successful business models are shaped on a type that can be traced back to the unfolding of modernity.

The modern subject is the active agent of modernization, the one who carries out “the penetration of the unknown.” Direct exploration (of the globe) and the discovery of previously concealed truths can, therefore, be considered the typically modern enterprises: “the essence of the Age of Discovery remained determined by the expedition as an entrepreneurial form” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.95).

It is important to underline that, for Sloterdijk, “not everyone [...] is a subject, but rather one who takes part in the experiments of modernity, in the psychological formatting of entrepreneurial energies” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.57). Those who do not take part “in the experiments of modernity” are non-modern subjects and their attitude and behaviour can be taken as reference for practices of resistance to the process of globalization.<sup>1</sup>

1. If, on the one hand, Sloterdijk presents globalization as a historically unavoidable process, throughout the book, he presents a few possible forms of resistance. I would like to mention them, because they might be useful, as it will hopefully become clear at the end of the essay, when there was the need to break the monotony of life within the global interior. Moreover, Sloterdijk often devises anti-modern heroes whose attitudes seem able to undermine the globalization process. The first of these forms of resistance is *skepticism*: a fixation in an “endless reflection” that does not allow the subject to become modern, performing the transition from theory to practice that lies at the basis of the modern construction. Hamlet, with his impossibility to be entirely convinced by anything, is the hero of this “chronic inhibition to act” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.61). The second form of resistance is *pessimism* as opposed to the optimistic future projection of wealth that anticipates

Modernity, at least in its unfolding, does not subjugate individuals; rather, it is constructed, through exploration and appropriation. Even if this may sound almost like an oxymoron, the modern subject is, therefore, an active figure: it is the subject that makes modernity and not the other way round.

In a way this implies, that there is not such a thing as “the project of modernity:” modernity defines its goals in its making, while it is constructed by those who take part in the endeavour.

This (work) ethic, heavily projected towards action, is a crucial quality of the modern subject: the modern subject has to find motivations to act. Disinhibition, the liberation from “what constrains us from action” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.60) and most importantly self-disinhibition,<sup>2</sup> becomes a fundamental aspect of modernity. In this sense also the very notion of theory, finds, in the modern era a new definition: the modern subject “theory, of course, no longer means the quiet gazing of thinkers before the icons of being; what is now meant is the active establishment of sufficient reasons for successful deeds” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.62).

Discovery and research, as well as the documentation of their making, become the key features for any venture, gradually shifting from their original geographical context towards less material fields. The original rush of European states into geographical discoveries through exploration takes, later on, the shape of the competition for innovation (and the opening of new markets) among businesses of different sorts.

Innovation, the promise of a future condition that is better than the present one, is the key factor that calls to action and that is able to perpetuate the cycle of discoveries (even in our geographically saturated world). When certain routes become ordinary paths entangled within (global) traffic, the innovator explores innovative directions.

Looking at the process of construction of the global interior it is possible not only to delineate the character of the modern subject but also to look at the qualities of the space where he performs.

---

any (modern) deed. In this case the characters embodying pessimism are the mutineers on the ships. The third form of resistance to globalization devised by Sloterdijk is the attempt to re-establish the distance between different points of the globe and re-affirming the presence of an uncompressible context between them: “*participation, situatedness and indwelling*” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.255) seem able to oppose the spatial compression realized by globalization.

2. In fact, if traditionally the transition to action happens by means of a command, modernity succeeded in placing this “command to act” within the subject itself. Along these lines, Sloterdijk notes how the “awakening of a taste for the passion” (seen as *imitatio Christi*, Sloterdijk, 2013, p.60) within non-religious practices becomes operational in this process of transition to practice and shows how a “sequence of adverse events can be experienced as a passion, [and] suffering is converted into ability.” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.60). We can see how it is not incidental, in our society, the recurrent invitation to have (a) passion, to be passionate about what we do: passion delivers the necessary motivation to act, and the suffering that passion provides is a reward in itself being the imitation, or mirroring, Christ’s passion.

## **Beyond the Crystal Palace**

According to Sloterdijk, throughout globalization two radically different kinds of spaces confront each other: the “pure outside” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.109) and the interior.

As anticipated above, globalization is the process that succeeded in interiorizing ever larger domains of the “outside,” literally wrapping them into the (social, political, and technological) construction of western civilization. Modernity, as interiorization project, consists in making inhabitable (and exploitable) previously hostile, indifferent territories by means of a pattern of progressive discovery, appropriation and inclusion.

The final outcome of this process is the completion of terrestrial globalization where the world becomes spatially saturated (the picture of the world is completed) and deprived of the possibility of further expansion (there is nothing left to discover). This saturated condition constitutes the fundamental aspect of the era we live in, the Global Age, or the age of Electronic Globalization.

If modernity succeeded in constructing the global interior, the next era (in this sense post-modernity) cannot but be permeated by a sort of claustrophobic feel, being a space where it is impossible to devise any way out.<sup>3</sup>

The global interior, this all-encompassing construction presents a very peculiar quality: it is not an entirely original, new, construction. On the contrary, it clearly presents features of the previous “outside.” The interior appropriates the outside, mirrors and replicates it. However, what the interior presents is not an exact replica of the outside: the outside is domesticated, deprived of any dangerous element.

Modern architecture delivers multiple examples, either realized buildings or theoretical architectural projects, that make apparent the process of interiorization of the world and seem able to materialize the construction of what Mark Pimlott has called “the continuous interior” (Pimlott, 2009).

The Crystal Palace built for the 1851 World Exhibition in London is probably one of the most spectacular structures that renders the literal interiorization of the world: “with [the construction of the Crystal Palace] the principle of the interior overstepped a critical boundary: [...] it revealed the timely tendency to make both nature and culture indoor affairs” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.170). The Crystal Palace was not simply a “magnified arcade” (as Walter Benjamin saw it) aiming at sheltering bourgeois urban life and its commodified relations, but, much more ambitiously, “anticipa-

---

3. Isn't this the feeling we have at times when we perceive ourselves entangled in a world entirely saturated by information technology, communication devices, more or less social networks?

ted an integral, experience-oriented, popular capitalism in which no less than the comprehensive absorption of the outside world in a fully calculated interior was at stake” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.175).

Since the construction of the Crystal Palace, the technological developments have enabled the construction of ever larger buildings that aim at producing not simply large interiors, but rather environments, ingeniously controlled despite the sheer size, that are able to reproduce the complexity, the richness, and the diversity of the outside world.

In the early 1940s the journal *Architectural Forum* commissioned Mies van der Rohe a project for a Museum for a Small City. The project represents a seemingly infinite field where the artworks — a collection of recently completed contemporary masterpieces — seem to float in an uninterrupted horizontal space extended towards the horizon beyond a transparent pane. Ten years later, Mies developed a project for a Convention Hall in Chicago. The scale of the building dwarves the visitors gathered under the gigantic steel structure of the roof, supported by the perimetral columns that leave the interior completely free from any vertical structure. A similar structure, where a square roof is supported on its perimeter by few monumental columns, finally gets built in the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (a project that appropriates a scheme originally conceived for the headquarters of the Bacardi company in Santiago de Cuba): the permanent collection of the museum is gathered in the semi-underground lower level, while the entrance floor simply frames a portion of the surrounding urban context. In these projects the roof, or the floor, simply highlight certain forms of life that they host, establishing a direct continuity with the uninterrupted space outside.

It is important to underline that these structures simply forget, or better, erase “the outside.” Even in the drawings elaborated for these projects there is little space for the representation of the facades and for the relationships with a surrounding context: life happens inside, and the features of the outer space are merely replicated in the interior, a place where one can find everything.

Besides Mies’ projects, the idea of building a gigantic roof, under which the most diverse activities can “freely” happen, was widely implemented in the typology of the American shopping mall and in the construction of large infrastructural hubs such as airports. In both cases, the original freedom of use that the open plan was supposed to provide is significantly twisted: these large constructions become environments where activities are carefully controlled, and where the “public” becomes a crowd of consumers.

Along these lines, and with the provocative boldness of a purely theoretical project, in the late 1960s the group Archizoom developed the model of No-Stop City. It is a “city without architecture” that refuses “all

the design criteria still linked to figurative codes” and aims at producing a “knowledge of architecture in exclusively quantitative terms” (Branzi, 2006, p.70). In No-Stop City the artificially ventilated and lit environments of factories and commercial malls extend to include all the activities of the city; and the city itself becomes “a conglomerate of habitable parking lots, [...] a system of typological storages and free residential forest”: No-Stop City “no longer had an external form, but had infinite interior forms” (Branzi, 2006, p.71).<sup>4</sup>

We could say that No-Stop city and “the Global Interior of Capital” described by Sloterdijk converge in a space where one can find “everything under one roof” (Pimlott, 2009).

### Mountain View.

In a video published on YouTube,<sup>5</sup> in February 2015 Google presented the project for its new headquarters in Mountain View, California.

The project consists of a series of buildings, a campus, wrapped within gigantic transparent canopies stretched over large areas of the typically suburban landscape of the Silicon Valley. Under these canopies, the actual buildings aim to be constructed in a way that will easily enable reconfiguration of programs and activities to adapt to the future changes of the working environment.

Even if, in the presentation video, three speakers — Dave Radcliffe (Google’s Vice President of Real Estate), Bijarke Ingels, and Thomas Heatherwick (the odd couple of designers chosen by Google) — alternate in describing the features and the goals of the new Google campus, it is possible to say that there is only one discourse,<sup>6</sup> generally charged by a rhetoric that revolves around a series of contemporary architectural commonplaces about “environmental sustainability” and the need to create inspiring environments for creative and innovative activities.

However, it is interesting to see how one of the companies that most clearly represents the character of the globalized capital describes the project for its headquarters entirely along the lines of the “global interior.” In fact, it is possible to read the description of the project for the Google campus as a comment to the projects presented above, from the Crystal

4. The social and cultural context that anticipated No-Stop City project are thoroughly described and commented in Aureli, Pier Vittorio (2008). *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

5. Google’s Proposal for North Bayshore. 2015. YouTube video, 9:51. Posted by Google. 28 February 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3v4rIG8kQA>

6. In the following lines the quotes are transcriptions from the video presentation; for the purpose of this essay, they will not be attributed to the actual speaker but will be considered as parts of the same homogeneous communication.

Palace to No-Stop City.

One of the most compelling parts of the video refers to the relationship — mediated by the porous boundaries of the campus and by the transparent canopies — between the Google campus and the surrounding environment, either natural or urban.

As far as the natural landscape is concerned, the Google headquarters aim to establish a symbiosis with the natural environment even re-creating nature where it was erased by previous developments. Nature will seamlessly extend inside and outside the buildings, described as “greenhouses that will protect [one might ask: from who?] pieces of nature” and “create wildlife [sic] habitat.” Here one might say that *natural* nature does not exist anymore: nature, in the global interior, is a construction.

Also the relationship with the surrounding urban context is marked by the attempt to establish a productive exchange. Literally productive: Google cannot afford to “shut away the neighbours,” therefore “the buildings [...] allow both the public as well as employees to move through them: [...] part of our work is to try to find ways to make places that you would go and have a conversation and go for a walk with great pleasure, and choose in a weekend to be. So in that sense, our idea for the Google campus is really to give it the diversity, the liveliness that you find in an urban neighbourhood so that a lot of the traditional distinctions in an urban setting or in an office environment will have evaporated or at least been blurred significantly.” Production and consumption, work and leisure, the city and the workplace finally coincide thanks to an architecture that is at the same time an office, a piece of neighbourhood, and a nature reservoir.

The seamless continuity between the natural environment, the city, architecture, and the modes of production (“the way we work”) is further made clear: “in nature, things aren’t over-programmed or over-prescribed. And in a way, if our cities or our work environments could have more of this flexibility or openness for interpretation, they would become more stimulating and more creative environments to live and work in. [...] The desire, really, is to try to create pieces of environment you can work in, in multiple ways. Suddenly, within this, the architecture of the building becomes almost like giant pieces of furniture that can be connected in different ways. [...]. You can just pile them up and assemble them differently, with basically no new materials.”

Again, instead of looking at the project for Google campus, we should read these words and simultaneously look at the work of Superstudio, whose projects Continuous Monument (1969), Supersurface (1972) and the later furniture design products seamlessly connect landscape, architecture and domestic space.

The project of the Google campus makes apparent that the project of No-Stop City is accomplished: both nature and the city are interiorized,

philosophy @LISBON

the architect looks at the city as pieces of furniture meaning that scale relationships do not matter anymore, program is incidental and can change at any time in any location.

### **The real outside (does not exist)**

We have seen how modernity coincided with a progressive interiorization of the world and how a series of architectural projects made apparent this process. We have defined modern work as the activity that aimed at appropriating ever larger expanses of previously unknown territories, finally realizing globalization. Then, looking at the Google campus project we have seen a series of semi-transparent structures “colonizing” the sub-urban American landscape and framing nature and working environments within gigantic canopies.

The figure of the canopy is particularly interesting.

The “canopies of globalization” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.120) are a series of material (e.g. the ships) and immaterial (e.g. the insurance system) constructions — “psychotechnical figures” — that helped European states to displace their power across the globe, exporting value(s) and meaning(s) of motherlands into previously inhospitable spaces (the oceans and the unknown continents).

The canopies were, in the first place, instrumental to build a familiar framework; otherwise, outside these canopies, the modern subject was confronted with a physical and moral state of absolute deterritorialization with no attachment to objects and no need to respect any house rule. In order to escape this condition of spatial alienation (being “displaced bodies in an abandoned space”, Sloterdijk, 2013, p.110) the modern subject had to find ways to inhabit the outside: “the living arts of modernity aim to establish the non-indifferent within the indifferent” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.115).<sup>7</sup> It was precisely the activity of constructing, dismantling, displacing, rebuilding settlements into the unknown, in a repeated cycle, that characterized the realization of the project of modernity as continuous effort to explore, discover, appropriate, and innovate.

Eventually the canopies of globalization grew to enclose the whole world. With a side-effect: both the Crystal Palace (as read by Sloterdijk) and Archizoom’s No-Stop City ended up producing boredom. The construction of the Crystal Palace aimed at presenting the world as an object to be exhibited, entirely tamed and pacified: inside the crystal palace “hu-

7. Initially, the ship was one of the technical devices that work in this sense. The space of the ship is an extension of the motherland (as long as it carries the flag of a crown). Once landed overseas its qualities will transfer into the unknown space by a series of other light, mobile, and more or less provisional “interior” spaces spawning from it (canopies, tents, caravan, cars, etc., Sloterdijk, 2013, p.122)

mans are cheated of their ecstasy, their loneliness, their own decisions, and their own direct connection to the absolute outside, namely death. Mass culture, humanism and biologism are the cheerful masks that [...] conceal the profound boredom of an existence devoid of challenge” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.172). Similarly, according to its authors, No-Stop City deliberately internalized “the catatonic dimensions of the market” (Branzi, 2006, 71). If the construction of the global interior was the goal of modernity, its accomplishment brings mankind into a new era — post-modernity or post-history — and sets a new goal: the crystallization of this status and the generalization of boredom.

But, looking at the Google campus project, why would canopies be needed within the global interior? What are these canopies doing?

There is one property of the canopy that should not be overlooked. By drawing a protective boundary, the canopy actually draws an outside. We believed that there was no outside anymore, and that spaces of different nature were seamlessly connected at a global scale. Now, we are confronted with a series of structures that re-establish an outside, even if it is, as in the case of the re-created wilderness of the Google campus, a constructed — a fake — one.

It seems that there is a need for re-inventing, re-cognizing, and re-constructing an outside as if this friction between the inside and the outside was the fundamentally productive activity, the zero degree of (modern) work, the only process that is actually able to innovate, break boredom, produce value; re-establishing an outside would create “inexhaustible horizons for projection and invention in the face of a geographically exhausted world” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.115). In order to breach contemporary monotony “the task of philosophy would then be to shatter the glass roof over one’s own head and directly make the individual the monstrous once again” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p.173).

If this is the task of philosophy, what is the task of architecture?

Two different strategies could aim at re-establishing an outside.

The first looks at practices that could be defined in a hybrid disciplinary territory between art (installations and performances), architecture, and political activism: temporary projects, subversive occupation of public or abandoned spaces can activate certain sensible spots constructing within the otherwise frozen and ossified condition of the global interior. It can be noticed that this is not an original strategy, but — I would argue — needs to be re-initiated from time to time picking up a tradition that can be referred back to the activities of the collectives Ant Farm (in the late 1960s and early 1970s) and, more recently, Raumlabor.

The second strategy takes a more theoretical or psychoanalytical (post Lacanian / Zizekian) direction investigating the perverse need to construct a fake outside (a projected one, a non-real one) in order to re-

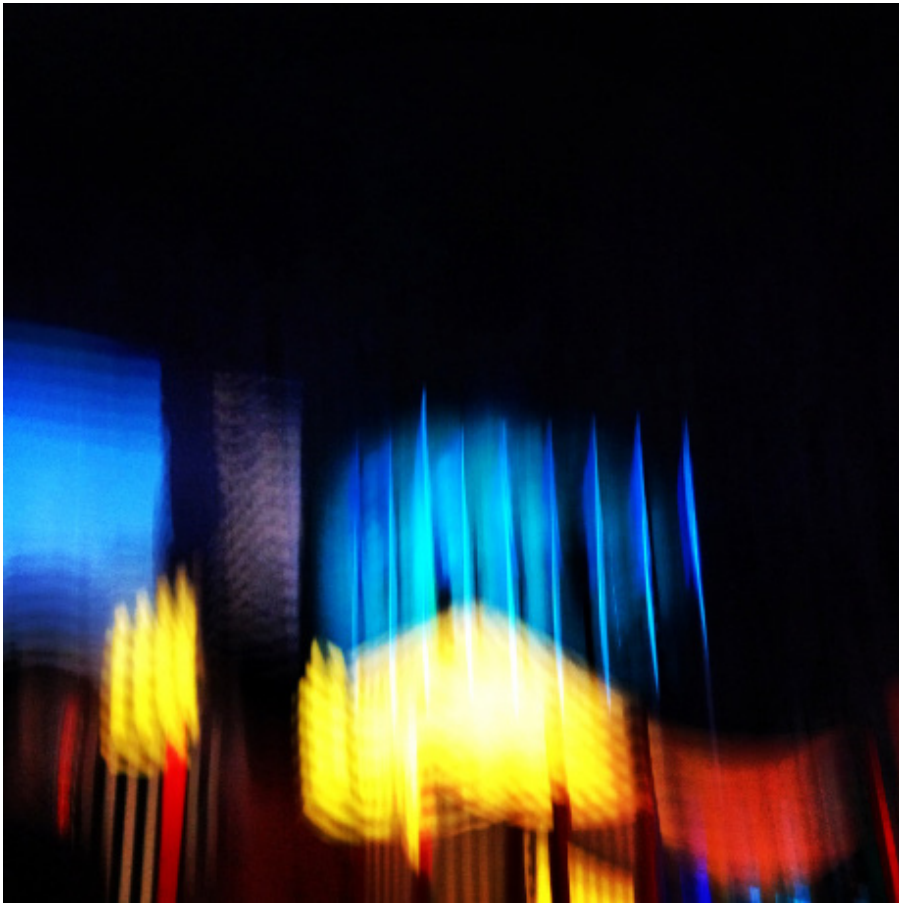
philosophy @LISBON



-initiate the productive process of exploration, discovery and innovation; it seems that we will have to pretend that the global interior does not exist and put at work the mechanisms that regulate the relationships between the symbolic, the imaginary, the real in the Lacanian triadic construction of the most radical interior space: our unconscious.

## References

- Aureli, Pier Vittorio. 2008. *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Branzi, Andrea. 2006. *Weak and Diffuse Modernity: The World of Projects at the Beginning of the 21st Century*. Milan: Skira.
- Google's Proposal for North Bayshore. 2015. YouTube video, 9:51. Posted by Google. 28 February 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3v4rIG8kQA>
- Pimlott, Mark. 2007. *Without and Within: Essays on Territory and the Interior*. Rotterdam: episode publishers.
- Pimlott, Mark. 2009. "The Continuous Interior. Infrastructure for Publicity and Control." *Harvard Design Magazine*, 29 Fall/Winter 2008-09, pp.75-86.
- Scott, Felicity D. 2007. *Architecture or Techno Utopia: Politics after Modernism*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press
- Sloterdijk, Peter. 2013. *In the World Interior of Capital, For a Philosophical Theory of Globalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Zizek, Slavoj. 1991. *Looking Awry, An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# Hermeneutics, Architecture and Belonging

Lucy Elvis

National University of Ireland Galway  
L.ELVIS1@nuigalway.ie

## Abstract

For many aestheticians, architecture occupies a difficult position within the pantheon of the arts. Hegel's normative approach leaves architecture limited in its truth-disclosing capacity due to its brute physicality. This paper argues, with Gadamer, that this physicality is fundamental to architecture's role in establishing a space for the emergence of all other art forms. As such, architectural space creates a space for the creation of and encounter with all other forms of cultural expression. Architecture, therefore, both includes decoration and is, in its very nature, decorative. It is bound to imposing its aesthetic content and then foregrounding its contents in order to facilitate the encounter between viewer and art work.

Gadamer's interpretation of architecture thus requires a rehabilitation of ornamentation which refutes Hegel's separation of ornament in his reading of architecture. Ornamentation becomes inseparably related to the harmony of the architectural work as the whole, its *komospoeisis*. This reciprocity between ornament and the work as a whole is an analogue of the relationship between architecture and 'bildung'. Once shaped by culture, architecture becomes the 'house' in which culture is established and sustained. As a result, Gadamer restores the connection between art and the ethical life of a community that is lost in Romanticism where the artist is sequestered through the concept of genius.

The paper makes reference to selected passages from *Truth and Method*, *On the Relevance of the Beautiful* and other select essays by Gadamer. Although for such a brief presentation an exhaustive account of the advantages of a hermeneutic approach to architecture cannot be provided, the paper suggests that it is perhaps incorrect to debate its position within the pantheon of the arts, for, as Gadamer's approach highlights, it remains the foundational space of culture itself; the site in which culture and community are brought not only into being, but into question.

## Keywords

Gadamer; Hermeneutics; Architecture; Ethos

## 1. Introduction

In Gadamerian aesthetics, through its space designating function, architecture occupies a position of distinct significance. Since architecture, for Gadamer, creates the settings in which art, as cultural expression emerges and is set to work, architecture and the other arts are placed into a relationship of contingency. Without architecture's mediation, the art work can obtain no real 'presence' (Gadamer 2013, 156.) In recognising *Dasein* as always-and-already situated in not only a physical world, but a system of norms and values, both emergent from and sustained by tradition, Gadamer's hermeneutics recognises architecture as the ground from which *Bildung* (culture) is physically articulated and thus questioned or sustained. Without this crucial process, dangerous ideas or indeed delicate balances of power cannot be fully comprehended and thus refuted. Gadamer identifies the richness of expression possessed by other art forms as uniquely present in architecture. A space that expresses something in itself, whilst facilitating cultural expression, or indeed a certain function; works of architecture make a claim that, although initially striking, necessarily recede to foreground its respective function or cultural meaning.

In a break with Hegelian aesthetics, architecture transcends the lowly position it's often afforded in aesthetic hierarchies, obtaining lasting relevance as that which establishes and sustains the ground for the cultural life of its own epoch and those that follow (Hegel 1998).<sup>1</sup> With architecture thus established, as a means of designating and articulating the priorities of a given community, in accordance with his wider project of reuniting ethics and poetics; Gadamer returns architecture to a position of centrality within the ethical life of the community of history; a unique expression of epochal ethos.

Gadamer's hermeneutic approach has several implications then for architecture and belonging. It gathers a work and its community together, creating a 'fitting' environ for hermeneutic dialogues to unfold. As works of permanence, architecture attests to the vital role of tradition in world-articulation, a theme central to Gadamer's understanding of *Dasein*'s self-realisation. It can serve to foster the community of spectators vital to the setting to work of the work of art, but also to aid in the recognition of *Dasein*'s membership to a wider community of historically effective cons-

---

1. Gadamer draws heavily on Heidegger in this reading. Progressing his idea of activities owned and designated by dwelling as articulated in *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* in particular; but with crucial difference (Heidegger 2001). Gadamer stresses architecture's space designating function in order to develop a position that sees architecture as a womb from which other forms of art might be born. Whereas for Heidegger, earth's claim over being, overtly stresses a rootedness incompatible in many ways with our modern living (Harries 1998). Gadamer's reading, on the other hand, based in *poesis* or the articulation of a world provides for the evolution of architectural expression within the laterally expanding horizon of our spatial understanding.

sciousness. As that which resounds with the 'echoes of the past' it occupies a central position in the memory of collective historically effective consciousness, and reconciles the divide between the architect and artist forced into being by the post-enlightenment rise of 'genius'.

In order to understand the fruitful revision of architecture provided in Gadamer's aesthetics, the following paper will examine the references made to architecture within a range of texts by Gadamer: *The Artwork in Word and Image*, *On the Relevance of the Beautiful*, *The Philosophical Foundations of the Twentieth Century* and his magnum opus: *Truth and Method* (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986; Gadamer and Palmer 2007; Gadamer and Linge 1977; Gadamer 2013.) This brief introduction to Gadamer's architectural theory will be presented thematically, firstly to the role of the architectural work as playful interlocutor, and the vital role of play in the emergence of cultural critique. Following this, a brief examination of Gadamer's comments on the role of the architect in contrast to that of the artist will identify the rise of 'artistic genius' as an alienating force in our understanding of artistic and architectural practice. Gadamer's redefinition of the architectural as *necessarily* decorative, will cite a crucial feature of the experience of architecture. Namely, that it 'speaks' to us through a twofold mediation, as both aesthetic object, and as the fitting scene for the commerce of our daily lives. This designation I argue, serves to reconcile the harsh division between building and architecture enforced by the Pevsnerian line, which arguably reduces architecture to the following: '*mere* building + aesthetic intention = architecture' (Pevsner 1948, xix). This understanding of the architectural work as decorative will be deployed in a brief account of the Gadamerian concept of festival and the event-like nature of understanding. Though brief, it is hoped that this introduction will serve to indicate the significance of Gadamer's approach to architecture as one which reconciles the aesthetic at work in building without alienating it from the commerce of our daily lives or forcing the assumption of a detached aesthetic regard in order to let it speak. In this sense architecture rehabilitates us into the community of historically effective consciousness to which we are necessarily members, and as such achieves a gentle rehabilitation that highlights the framing of our experience within the fragile temporality of existence.

## 2. Artwork as playful interlocutor

The dialogical structure at work in aesthetic experience and indeed all experiences within Gadamer's hermeneutic system, places the emergence of meaning for the historically situated subject within the to and fro of question and answer. Artistic practice likewise becomes an interpretative

act (although the reconstruction of artistic intention is of no relevance for Gadamer.) Through the concept of play he rejects the impossibility of a Kantian 'aesthetic consciousness' characterised by disinterest as well as the validity of readings based on intentionality, arguing that such a stance always eludes the historically situated subject (since each subjectivity is held and sustained tradition, the position of objectivity proposed by Kantian and various romantic aestheticians necessarily inaccessible.) (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 29) The play of question and answer engages the spectator in dialogue with the work, bringing about an extension of being and an uncovering of meaning such that each experience gives rise to a further question. In the play brought about by the artwork the spectator enters into a process of self-representation developed after Huizinga's account of play as the origin of social ritual (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 23):

Primitive society performs its sacred rites, its sacrifices, consecration and mysteries, all of which serve to guarantee the well-being of the world, in a spirit of pure play truly understood. Now, in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play. (Huizinga 1971, 5)

The participant belongs to the play in a way that the artist (or architect) belongs inseparably to their social context, or indeed the way in which partners in 'genuine' conversation belong to the process of question and answer. For Gadamer, each creative act should be the result of this praxis, an interpretive act in relation to the world-as-text. 'To interpret [Gadamer states] means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really speak for us.' (Gadamer 2013, 415)

For architecture, this entails an articulation of the aspirations of a given community. Play and festival as concepts underline the need for spatial designation, for indeed for one to be 'at' play either of the immersive kind that Gadamer offers in the case of the art work or the more common formulations of the practice of play he gives as examples; a specific venue, domain or arena in which the play might take place is required. Architecture, whilst inviting the spectator into a 'play' of its own also performs the double function of establishing a ground from where the types of play instigated by other forms of art can be established.

There are those that might cynically claim this process simply means the slow acceptance through sensuous experience of the ideas of a dominant group. Certainly, the idea architecture preserves and sustains culture could give rise to concerns in this regard. As projects of scale and expense architectural works would suggest the preservation of the ideas of the most powerful or well-moneyed. Gadamer does not dispute the power of social

norms or that in the development language there may be a certain balance of power that is at play:

Fundamentally in our world the issue is always the same as it was in the beginning: in language we are trained in conventions and social norms behind which there are always economic and hegemonic interests. But this is precisely the world we as humans experience: in it we rely on the faculty of judgement, that is, on the possibility of our taking a critical stance with regard to every convention. (Gadamer 2013, 573)

On the contrary, it is the awareness that we are always and already in this state of affairs that allows the emergence of criticality. What he says of authority is instructive here: ‘.....authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if one is to lay claim to it.’ (Gadamer 2013, 291) If the work of architecture is the site of the self-understanding of a community, then it possesses a crucial role in bringing about critique of dominant ideas and affecting understanding between communities divided by time, distance or social contrast. In order to find or dispute common ground one must first understand the community in which they find themselves and their relation to the ideas dominant within it.

### 3. Defining the Architect and the Architectural

Gadamer adopts open criteria for the designation of objects or items as: ‘art’. He states in *The Artwork in Word and Image*.

In contrast to this, an artist, even if he or she uses a mechanical means of production, constructs something that is for itself and is there only to be contemplated. One allows an artwork to be exhibited or would like to see it exhibited, and that is all. And precisely *then* it is a work. (Gadamer and Palmer 2007, 202)

The proper reception of artwork, is contingent on the exhibition space to create a fitting or situation in which the work of art to be encountered as such. Architecture on the other hand is not offered the same freedom. In a somewhat more prescriptive tone, Gadamer informs us that the work of the architect may not: ‘stand anywhere like a blot on the landscape’ as result of the myriad concerns it must arbitrate in order to truly bring truth to bear (Gadamer 2013, 156). The restoration of the public nature of all art in Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, serves to reconcile the gulf between architects and other artists opened up through the post-enlightenment rise of genius. An alienation of the artist as genius had transformed him/her into an ‘ambiguous figure’ in Gadamer’s reckoning, with the result that:

today we feel that the architect is someone *sui generis*, because unlike the poet, painter or composer, he is not independent of commission and occa-

sion. (Gadamer 2013, 80)

To our detriment we overlook the fact that most artistic production has historically been subject to the predilections of patrons and public bodies. Far more than the simple historical fact of the need for commission in placing the artist as interpreter and viewer as the same at two ends of an elliptical process of emergent understanding, both the production of art and the reception of its becomes a matter of praxis. Gadamer's refutation of aesthetic disinterest reunites the architect and the artist through the identification of the crucial processes of interpretation at the heart of the activities of both. Gadamer's more astringent criterion in relation to the work of architecture relates closely to his contention that architecture is fundamentally decorative in its performance of a 'twofold mediation'; at once a visually engaging schema, able like the work of art to 'pull one up short' but also fundamental in the creation of fitting environments that sustain a given culture and preserve its ethos.

#### 4. Rehabilitating Ornament

Central to Gadamer's reading of architecture is a re-conceptualisation of ornament or decoration as a necessary element of architecture's basic character. In great works of architecture, it is the countenance of the whole building, inclusive of the scheme of decoration that bears forth its meaning to the contemporary viewer. Decoration itself, is more than embellishment, it retains a sense of propriety that resonates through the work as a whole. He writes:

On surveying the full extent of the architect's decorative tasks, it is clear that architecture explodes that prejudice of the aesthetic consciousness according to which the actual work of art is what is outside all space and all time, the object of an aesthetic experience. One also sees that the usual distinction between a work of art proper and mere decoration demands revision. (Gadamer 2013, 158)

A criticism not only of Hegel's hierarchical Aesthetics, in which ornament serves to usher in the demise of architecture and the rise of sculpture but something of a response to Loos' pejorative use of the term, Gadamer firmly argues that architecture is, in its very nature, decorative. That is, that the architectural work provides a fitting backdrop to the activities of the given community for which it has been created. Decoration is thus rehabilitated as an element of the self-presentation of the architectural work and thus of the culture in which it is situated. In this sense he returns ornament to its original relation to the Greek *Kosmos* or the concept of *komospoeisis* the specific ordering of parts in respect of a harmonious whole; and the



later conception of fitting ornamentation in relation to the built whole recounted by Vitruvius:

The temples of Minerva, Mars, and Hercules, will be Doric, since the virile strength of these gods makes daintiness entirely inappropriate to their houses. In temples to Venus, Flora, Proserpine, Spring-Water, and the Nymphs, the Corinthian order will be found to have peculiar significance, because these are delicate divinities and so its rather slender outlines, its flowers, leaves, and ornamental volutes will lend propriety where it is due. (Vitruvius 2014, 29)

The propriety of any given building rests for here on the use of a fitting mode of decoration in keeping with the characteristics of the deity to whom the temple had been erected. He applies the same principles to the construction of Florentine villas. Ruskin to cite the expectation of propriety as a characteristic ‘good’ buildings in *The Stones of Venice* (Ruskin 1960). The position of ornament in relation to the built whole is analogous to the hermeneutic structuring of experience. Each experience points to a yet-to-be conceived whole, each moment of understanding gives rise to a new question, a Socratic wisdom whose depth of knowledge is wedded to a recognition of its own ignorance. The re-conceptualisation of the decorative in Gadamer’s aesthetics cements the belonging between all elements of building within a harmonious whole as well as presenting architecture as both an aesthetic object and vital element of the commerce of life.

## 5. Architecture as Occasion and Festival

Gadamer extends his concept of the event-like structure of understanding to the hermeneutic encounter with the work of art. Thus the work of architecture when encountered draws the subject into its own temporality through a mediation of its rootedness in its own time and yet retains its capacity to remain contemporaneous. Even as they stand amid the changing built landscape around them, buildings possess a unique duality; belonging profoundly to their own time and irrefutably to the present in which they stand. They are: ‘borne along’ by the stream of history. (Gadamer 2013, 156) The complex reality in which it was conceived remains a vital element of its being, although it can only be reconstructed in terms of the horizon of understanding possessed by successive viewers. The space-shaping function of architecture means that it always and already embraces all other forms of representation displayed and consumed as art. Individual works of art must lay claim to space in their own right and their claim to a certain or ‘fitting’ space for an encounter between the and the viewer becomes an intrinsic element of the ontology of the work itself:

This is why works of art can assume certain real functions and resist others: for instance, religious or secular, public or private ones. They are instituted and erected as memorials of reverence, honour or piety only because they themselves prescribe and help fashion this kind of functional context. They themselves lay their claim to place, and even if they are displaced- e.g., by being housed in a modern collection-the trace of their original purpose cannot be effaced. It is part of their being because their being is presentation. (Gadamer 2013, 155)

As such, architecture possesses a 'twofold mediation'. Where other works of art simply invite the viewer to tarry with them; architecture once having captured the attentions of the viewer is bound to redirect them 'to the greater whole of the life context which it accompanies.' (Gadamer 2013, 157) In creating an appropriate setting for a given way of life, architecture ensures the potential of such experiences to be genuine and meaningful. Gadamer accounts for this capacity in the concept of the festival. Like play, the festival infers a goal-less intentionality. The festive in art works, like play, serves to suspend the day-to-day, allowing experience to unfold in the liminal space between spectator and work. Like architecture, the festival has an inherently public character performing a gathering function in contrast to the individuation of 'work-time' or labour. (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 41) The work of architecture, like the celebration, is an immersive experience. Indeed, Gadamer explains the power of 'festive quiet' in light of his experience of the national museum at Athens (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 40).

The festival possesses an 'autonomous time' and, like architecture, is fundamentally communal. The work of architecture expresses this time in its unique physicality. Unlike the other arts, Architecture consistently stands exposed to the unrelenting passing of time. In their submission to the ravages of time, the body of buildings undergo a kind of graceful ageing. Stone is worn away by rain and harsh weather conditions, users inscribe themselves into the given space. In the surrounding areas, new buildings spring up in the face of which the existing structure seems stylistically out of step, to embrace practices for which the old building is ill-equipped. Although such a reading might be excessively anthropomorphic, it illustrates the applicability of Gadamer's concept of 'autonomous time' to the aesthetic encounter of architecture. We can extend his observation of our intuitive recognition of aging to our relationship with the built environment. (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 42) Although we may not 'know' the specific completion date of a certain building in terms of objective time, we can recognize it as aged and worn. We can distinguish between architecture in its youth and in decline. Just as the individual cannot extricate themselves from their given historical context, and the ornament cannot be isolated from the architectural work at large, neither can the practices of life be

seen in isolation from the physicality of its setting.

## 6. Ethics, Culture and Community

Culture possesses a fundamental role in hermeneutics. As a product of tradition, it is the means by which the historically effective consciousness situates itself within and against tradition. As physical artefact, architecture serves as a powerful reminder of the historical context from which subjectivity cannot extricate itself. Gadamer follows Hegel in his definition of *Bildung* (culture) as an element of spirit. Gadamer argues that: 'Keeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his bildung.' An acute awareness of this becomes the mark of a 'cultivated consciousness'. (Gadamer 2013, 15-16) The concept of communion with a wider community of historical consciousness is intrinsic to the experience of all works of art despite the distancing effect of history or social division:

The essence of the beautiful is to have a certain standing in the public eye. This in turn implies a whole form of life that embraces all those artistic forms with which we embellish our environment, including decoration and architecture. If art shares anything with the festival, then it must transcend the limitations of any cultural definition of art, as well as the limitations associated with its privileged cultural status. (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 50)

Above, as with the festival, Gadamer firmly roots art within the development of a cultural consciousness that is in no way esoteric or associated with the good taste. Rather, culture is the sum total of a life-world. In demanding the attention of the viewer, the art work brings the viewer into its distinct temporality. In tarrying with architecture, one becomes a player or guest at the feast that is the festival of the work at work.

As a means of designating space, architectural works put dwelling at issue. They provide a ground for the self-understanding of a given community. As historically situated, any encounter with a work of architecture is an interpretation of ones belonging in the light of their own community and in the historical community of consciousness. It is this capacity of architecture to provide a fruitful self-encounter that reunites art with the ethical and political life of a community. With the reference to the Greek concept *Kalon*, Gadamer strives for a reunion of the good and the beautiful. Gadamer presents music and architecture as prime examples of this kind of praxis, the only place where one 'find[s] the art of getting it just right' (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 222) In reuniting art with a 'good' life in this way, Gadamer elevates it from the disinterest of an aesthetics of good taste or amusement to a vital position in the general health of a community:

... one must admit that for the good life in general this art is needed “if one is simply to find one’s way home” (Gadamer and Palmer 2007, 222)

In his concept of community Gadamer infers a community across history, rather than of simple geographical or historical immediacy (he says of artists):

Nevertheless, he does create a community, and in principle, this truly universal community (*oikumene*) extends to the whole world. In fact, all artistic creation challenges each of us to listen to the language in which the work of art speaks and to make it our own. (Gadamer and Bernasconi 1986, 39)

It is this community that a Gadamerian understanding of architecture ushers its subjects into. One that recognizes the processes of change across tradition, tests ideas through their articulation and experience through its repeatability.

## Conclusion

Although such a brief paper cannot give a full account of the Gadamerian approach to architecture, it is hoped that the foregoing has served to provide an introduction to the deeper implications a hermeneutics of architecture has for the concept of belonging. As a form of art in which the creator (the architect) has never been displaced from their role within the concerns of their peculiar societal setting, architecture is the art par excellence in terms of the praxis Gadamer demands not only from the architect but from artists and viewers alike. The latent aspirations of a community must, Gadamer reminds us, be instantiated in order for their full comprehension. With proper understanding necessary for the conclusive refutation of such ideas, architecture is reunited with the ethos of the community, ethics re-joined with poetics. Spatial priorities and the implications of the decorative schema adopted in a given epoch therefore allow for such assumptions to be brought into question and for our unique position within a wider community of historically effective consciousness to be comprehended.

In a post-modern age where debates around the temporary and the virtual seem to dominate, Gadamer’s approach to architecture serves as a quite reminder to architect of the lasting significance of the built environment to our self-understanding and sense of belonging. As clients demand iconic buildings of their architects and architects themselves strive to create universally recognised ‘signature’ styles, a hermeneutic understanding can help to traverse such difficult debates between plurality and communality. The concept of architecture presented by Gadamer possesses significance, not only to the communities of immediacy which we foster, but

the wider process of tradition and community of a historically unfolding culture from which we cannot stand apart.

## References

- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 2013. *Truth and Method*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, and Robert Bernasconi. 1986. *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, and David E. Linge. 1977. *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. University of California Press.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, and Richard E. Palmer. 2007. *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of the Later Writings*. Northwestern University Press.
- Harries, Karsten. 1998. *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. MIT Press.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1998. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Clarendon Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2001. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. HarperCollins.
- Huizinga, Johan. 1971. *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*. Beacon Press.
- Pevsner, Nikolaus. 1948. *An Outline of European Architecture*. J. Murray.
- Pollio, Marcus Vitruvius. 2014. *Vitruvius. The Ten Books on Architecture*. Translated by Morris Hicky Morgan. Elibron Classics.
- Ruskin, John. 1960. *The Stones of Venice*. Hill and Wang.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# Walking with Michel de Certeau. Jesuit architecture and the city

**María Rivo-Vázquez<sup>1</sup>**

Research Group Iacobus (GI-1907)

Department of History of Art

Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

Praza da Universidade, n.º 1, 15782

maria.rivo@usc.es

## Abstract

“Bernard loved the valleys, Benedict the mountains; Francis the towns, Ignatius loved great cities”. According to Thomas M. Lucas SJ this is an old Jesuit proverb which, I think, clearly expresses the strong bond between the Society of Jesus and urban settings. In fact, the establishment of most of its colleges followed a precise urban strategy. Thus, even though limited by numerous circumstances such as the patron and the inhabitants’ wishes, the frequent reluctance of previously settled religious orders, and the urban layout, the Jesuits used to achieve significant locations inside the city walls. And this, along with the orientation, dimensions, configuration and iconographic elements of their façades, makes it evident that the Society carried out a quest for representativeness –or, from Evonne Levy’s perspective, “propaganda”– that is paradigmatic of the *cultus externus* promoted by the Counter Reformation. In other words, they strove to show their peculiar white wall/black hole to as many people as possible. Therefore, to consider aspects like the urban layout and its unfolding, viewpoints, transit dynamics, current and past functions of space, or toponymy can be very useful to better understand Jesuit architecture. This paper aims to reflect on Jesuit urban strategy with a special focus on Galicia –in the Northwest of Spain– by using the wandering gaze of Michel de Certeau.

## Keywords

Michel de Certeau; Jesuit architecture; Urban layout; Galicia.

---

1. Holder of a FPU predoctoral fellowship awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Education. This paper was written within the research projects «Programa de Consolidación e Estructuración de Unidades de Investigación Competitivas» (GRC2013-036) and «Programa de Consolidación e Estructuración. Redes» (R2014/024) awarded by the regional government of Galicia (Xunta de Galicia). I would like to thank my colleague Matías García Rodríguez from the University of Santiago de Compostela for introducing me to the work of Michel de Certeau SJ and for all his bibliographical suggestions, as well as my colleague Pablo Abascal Sherwell Raull from the European University Institute (Florence, Italy) for introducing me to the work of Thomas M. Lucas SJ and Luce Giard.

## Location is the key

As Thomas M. Lucas SJ explains in his magnificent book *Landmarking. City, Church & Jesuit Urban Strategy*, location was of capital importance for the Society of Jesus' establishments. Whereas the previously settled mendicant orders used to prefer the countryside, Jesuits realised from the beginning that cities were the ideal place to implement their particular project<sup>2</sup>. This, along with the rapid expansion of the Society from short after its foundation in 1540, impelled Ignatius and his companions to quickly develop a precise strategy in order to get the best urban settlements all over the world. A strategy that, despite encountering constant obstacles<sup>3</sup> generally led them to excel in fulfilling most of their desired features for urban locations (Lucas 1997, *passim*). Jesuit urban locations ought preferably to be: in downtown and as central as possible<sup>4</sup>; close to the main political, religious and social centres<sup>5</sup>; large enough<sup>6</sup>; and salubrious<sup>7</sup> (Lucas 1997, 135-137, 140-141, 151).

The example of the *Gesù*, the Society's Mother Church, certainly worked as a model for other Jesuit establishments in many ways, also regarding the siting. Located in the core of Rome, the complex of church and 'headquarters' dominates a central area within the walls of the city, not far away from the *Campidoglio* and with its façade "oriented squarely onto the *piazza* that fronted the *Via Papale*"<sup>8</sup> (Lucas 1997, 158). Similarly, Florence's college is just a few steps from the *duomo* and right next to its powerful patrons' palace, *Palazzo Medici*. And also the colleges of such distant and different places as Naples, Ferrara, Sienna, Palermo, Messina, Prague, Mi-

2. In Father Lucas' words, that of the Jesuits was "an aggressive, interactive urban ministry" quite different from the passivity of other orders (Lucas 1997, 36).

3. As Father Lucas summarizes, Jesuits "invariably collided with the interests of other orders and other urban religious institutions" (Lucas 1997, 157).

4. "Ignatius deliberately and strategically opted for downtown sitings of his most important works, both in Rome and elsewhere." (Lucas 1997, 135). "Finding a convenient, central location [...], what Ignatius called the *commodo luogo*, was a major concern from the beginnings of the Society. For Ignatius, the idea of commodity [...] denoted aptness and convenience for the needs of the ministry." (Lucas 1997, 136).

5. "The ministerial *proposito* for a residence or professed house required certain "commodities": [...] a convenient location that was easily accessible to large numbers of citizens; and a residence for the Fathers. Proximity to the local court was a decided advantage." (Lucas 1997, 137).

6. "Take special care that you obtain a good and sufficiently large site, or one that can be enlarged with time, large enough for house and church, and if possible, not too far removed from the conversation of the city", Document *EpisIgn 3, 1899*, dated June 13, 1551 (quoted in Lucas 1997, 140).

7. "it is expedient that attention should be given to having houses and colleges in healthy locations with pure air and not in those characterized by the opposite.", *Constitutions*, final paragraph (quoted in Lucas 1997, 141).

8. It was an explicit desire of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who promoted the works (Lucas 1997, 157-158).



lan, Vienna, Lisbon (Lucas 1997, 141, 150-151), or Porto, where the Jesuit college was built very close to the cathedral.

In Galicia, in the Northwest of Spain, the Jesuits settled four urban colleges. A central position was very much pursued for all of them, but not always possible. Pontevedra and Coruña colleges had to reluctantly accept sites on the edge of the wall, though in rather good locations inside it. Whilst Pontevedra's college was next to a wall gate widely used by wine traders and not too far away from a grocery market, Coruña's college was very close to the market and next to the only public fountain, exactly in the limit between the two main quarters of the city (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 372-377, 404-405). On the other hand, Santiago's college was settled in the place of a former Franciscan convent which was also next to the wall, but not too far from the cathedral and very close to some landmarks of the city such as a church which was key in its foundational legend or the place of a former Neolithic fortified settlement. Besides, an important weekly market was held at the square next to the college, so the site was a neuralgic point of city life (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 218-220). And finally, Ourense's college was established in the city's best location [Fig. 1], very close to the cathedral and in the former Jewish Quarter, whose synagogue may have been very close to or even in the same place where the Jesuit church was built and still stands nowadays (Rivera Vázquez 1989, 345).

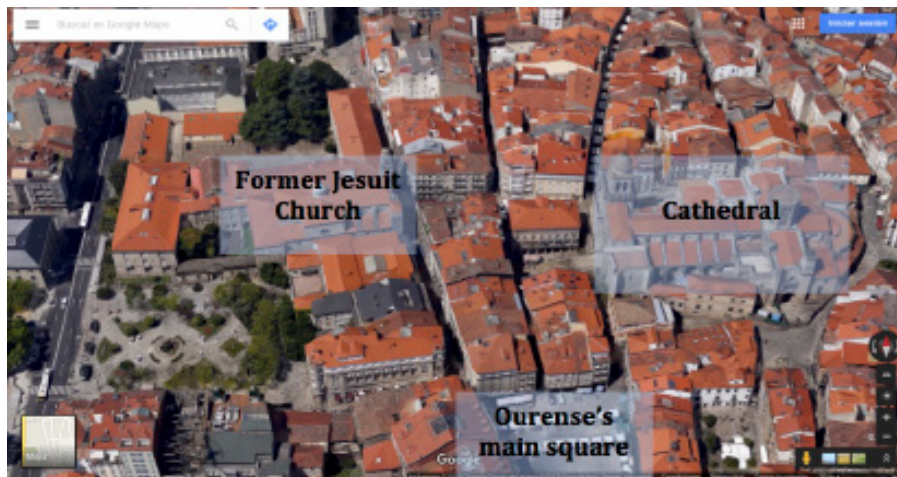


Fig. 1

## Everyday life writing

In the essay “Walking in the City”, written by the French Jesuit and philosopher Michel de Certeau, the *Wandersmänner* –unlike the idleness of Baudelaire’s *flâneur* and Rousseau’s *promeneur*<sup>9</sup>– are the busy inhabitants of the city, the ordinary people whose daily activities make them move constantly rewriting the urban layout. However, they are incapable of reading the whole writing because each of them is just a little part of it, a tiny piece that barely guesses the existence of other pieces (Certeau 1988, 93). And yet their walking discloses the city, it is to the urban system what the speech act is to a language. Walking is constructing the city as writing or speaking is materializing the language (Certeau 1988, 97-99); both actions have the power of turning something that belongs to an intellectual stratum into reality. Nevertheless, as Wittgenstein pointed out “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Wittgenstein 1922, 74), and therefore the limits of my city mean the limits of my walking. In other words, the possibilities are not infinite, they just stay hidden until speaking/writing –or walking– make them become real, allow them to temporarily exist<sup>10</sup>. For Roland Barthes, “The user of a city picks out certain fragments of the statement in order to actualize them in secret.” (quoted in Certeau 1988, 98). Or, as Francesco Careri observes, “It is as if Time and History were updated again and again by ‘walking them’” (Careri 2004, 44-48).

At the same time, for de Certeau “To walk is to lack a place” (Certeau 1988, 103), so using a place just as a transit space transforms it into the “non-place” formulated by Marc Augé (Augé 1992). Moreover, as the French Jesuit clearly states, there is a rhetoric of walking that, in my opinion, is always a Baroque one in everyday life. In de Certeau’s words, everyday life “practices of space also correspond to manipulations of basic elements of a constructed order”, “deviations relative to a sort of ‘literal meaning’ defined by the urbanistic system.” (Certeau 1988, 100). Everyday walking selects and fragments the space, transforming it into a “spatial phrasing” “composed of juxtaposed citations” as well as of “gaps, lapses, and allusions” through rhetorical operations (Certeau 1988, 102)<sup>11</sup>. Unlike the stillness of architectural landmarks, the restlessness of everyday life is constantly forcing the adaptation of the space to new functions. As in Lamarck’s theory, function creates space.

9. A text about the multiple works which reflected on the art of walking can be found in the Spanish edition of one of these works, *Die Spaziergänge* by Karl Gottlob Schelle (López Silvestre 2013, 165-182).

10. For the architect Francesco Careri, member of the *Stalker urban art workshop*, “walking has always generated architecture and landscape” (Careri 2004, 13), and “It’s walking, too, which makes the internal frontiers of the city evident; which, by identifying it, reveals the *zone*” (Careri 2004, 15).

11. In a certain way, de Certeau’s comparison between walking and speaking reminds me of Barthes’ analysis of Ignatius of Loyola’s *Ejercicios Espirituales* (Barthes 1997, 51-92).



Fig. 2

### Baroque viewpoints

Furthermore, in Michel de Certeau's text the act of looking has a petrifying quality which connects with that of the camera capturing the decisive moment; it places a period or full stop in the walking that instantly transforms the city: "Its agitation is momentarily arrested by vision. The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes.", he says (Certeau 1988, 91). That superior, half mystical-half voyeuristic eye, which in the Jesuit's text looked down from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center (Certeau 1988, 91-92), operates not very differently from the one that Baroque urbanism and architecture generate through framing and surprising effects.

The surrounding streets of Santiago's Jesuit church give the walker a wide range of perspectives. The slightly crosswise façade appears gradually after crossing the only remaining city gate, just before the old marketplace; and its only tower is suddenly revealed around the corner of a house when arriving from a frontal narrow street<sup>12</sup> [Fig. 2]. In Ourense, since the current square in front of it was not opened until the 20th century, the façade was originally suffocated by the narrow street to which it is oriented, so its concavity was probably thought as an attraction tool. The whole façade, slightly crosswise like that of Santiago, shows up unexpectedly when coming

12. In fact, other authors have dealt with Santiago's Baroque viewpoints before (Martín González 1964).

from the city's main square and arises overwhelmingly when looking up closely and frontally [Fig. 3].

The Baroque eye, half mystical-half voyeuristic just like de Certeau's, operates upon the reality of the building making it become a kind of "still frame", a static image, from very specific viewpoints.



Fig. 3

### White wall/black hole

But actually it is not a mere static image. The façades of these churches are a brand, a face, the presentation card of the college to the city, its particular "white wall" in Deleuze and Guattari's words (Ballantyne 2007, 64-79). Their orientation, dimensions, configuration and iconographic elements must therefore have been as wisely chosen as the location of the whole college<sup>13</sup>.

In regard to the orientation, in both Santiago's and Coruña's cases a flow of people would pass by or clearly see the façades in their way to the marketplace. Similarly, in Pontevedra the façade is oriented onto the street that leads into the wall gate near Santa Clara's convent. And in Ourense the proximity of the cathedral surely determined the Jesuit church to be facing it, despite merely having an alley to connect both temples. In fact,

13. As Luce Giard emphasises, "Among the authorities there was a clear awareness of the importance of colleges to establish the public image of the Society of Jesus." (Giard 2008, 5).

the canonical orientation towards the east was hardly followed in all these examples. In Ourense and Coruña the church is orientated to the west, in Pontevedra to the north, and Santiago's building follows the normative orientation, probably because that was also the most suitable one for the Jesuits' purposes.

In their quest for representativeness –or “propaganda”, in Evonne Levy's words (Levy 2004)–, the Society also managed to ensure a sort of alluring façade in every place of the world by cleverly combining Jesuit and local traits. Pontevedra's façade, for instance, was designed after the prestigious model of the *Gesù* –until then scarcely used in the region– but with two typical Galician bell towers [Fig. 4]. Santiago's and especially Ourense's churches present strong Italian reminiscences because of their respectively rectangular and curved fronts, which make them distinctive. And even Coruña's façade, closer to Galician architectural trends, seems to show a sort of structural connection with the Roman *Gesù*.

Finally, the presence of Jesuit emblems, its patrons' coats of arms and a few places for sculptures of Jesuit or titular saints complete a representativeness which is paradigmatic of the *cultus externus* promoted by the Counter Reformation in opposition to Protestant ideas (Repishti and Schofield 2004, 125-249). A carefully planned and captivating white wall that the Society strove to show to as many people as possible. That, no doubt, was the key of its success. The “still frame” of the white wall at which the inhabitants of the city stared when their restless everyday walking reached a period or full stop was, and is still, a powerful weapon.



Fig. 4

## Toponymy as memory

But the meaning of such a powerful weapon can change in a moment, and after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 a *damnatio memoriae* process was carried out by removing or replacing all of the Jesuit emblems and sculptures from their façades.

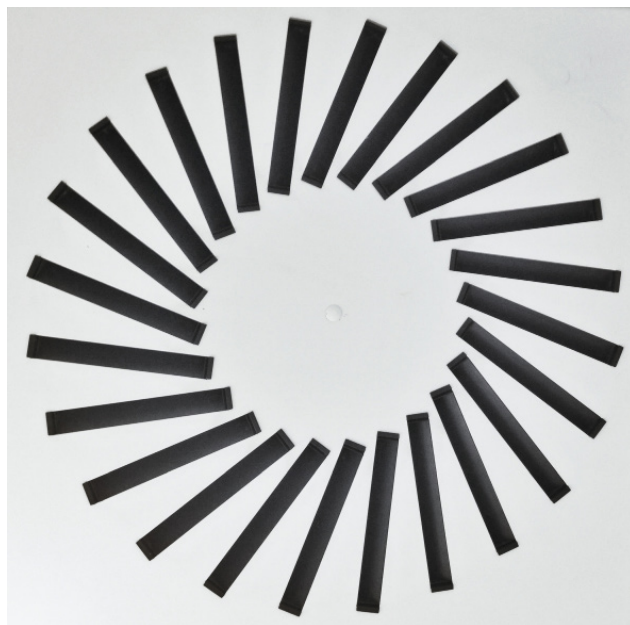
For de Certeau, walking “is attracted and repelled by nominations whose meaning is not clear”, because “proper names carve out pockets of hidden and familiar meanings.” In other words, toponymy affects itineraries by giving them a meaning that –generally according to a historical background– works as the “impetus of movements” (Certeau 1988, 103-104). Thus, these names have the power to make a place *believable*–and therefore habitable– by associating it to a word, *memorable* by recalling its past, and *primitive* by creating a sort of nowhere due to its conflict with today’s function of the place (Certeau 1988, 105). “The places people live in are like the presences of diverse absences” (Certeau 1988, 108) which toponymy barely evokes.

As many others, some Galician Jesuit buildings have left an evident trace in their surrounding toponymy. Thus, in Santiago an alley called “Tránsito dos Gramáticos” (Grammarians’ Passage) leads into the former Jesuit complex, and several streets surrounding Pontevedra’s college are named after two of its Jesuit inhabitants and one of its most outstanding students. However, the Society’s expulsion in 1767 changed the names of many nearby streets and squares along with the functions of the former Jesuit colleges. In Santiago there is a “University” street and square; in Ourense, the narrow street to which the façade of the church is oriented was renamed “del Instituto” (Secondary School Street) in the 19th century because of the use of the building; and in Coruña, one of the nearest streets is nowadays called “San Agustín” (Saint Augustine), the order to which the building was given after the Jesuits’ departure. Sadly enough, however, the original names and functions of these streets and buildings, as well as the meaning behind the Jesuit related names are today unreadable for most *Wandersmänner*.

As father Lucas states, “Jesuits understood the urban equation.” (Lucas 1997, 163), but in de Certeau’s words “Places are fragmentary and inward-turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state” (Certeau 1988, 108).

## References

- Augé, Marc. 1992. *Non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Seuil.
- Ballantyne, Andrew. 2007. *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*. London. New York: Routledge.
- Barthes, Roland. 1997 (1971, 1<sup>st</sup> French ed.). *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, translated into Spanish by Alicia Martorell. Madrid: Cátedra.
- Careri, Francesco. 2004 (2002, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.). *Walkscapes: Walking as an aesthetic practice*. Barcelona: Gustavo Gili.
- Certeau, Michel de. 1988 (1984, 1<sup>st</sup> French ed.). "Walking in the City". In *The practice of everyday life*, translated into English by Steven Rendall, 91-110. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Giard, Luce. 2008. "The Jesuit College. A Center for knowledge, Art and Faith 1548-1773". *Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits*, v. 40, n. 1.
- Levy, Evonne. 2004. *Propaganda and the Jesuit Baroque*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- López Silvestre, Federico. 2013 (1802, 1<sup>st</sup> German ed.). "Recorridos y paseos de papel". In *El arte de Pasear*, by Karl Gottlob Schelle. Translated into Spanish by Isabel Hernández, 165-182. Madrid: Díaz & Pons.
- Lucas, Thomas M. SJ. 1997. *Landmarking. City, Church & Jesuit Urban Strategy*. Chicago: Loyola Press.
- Martín González, Juan José. 1964. "Perspectivas barrocas de Santiago de Compostela". *Goya* 61: 28-34.
- Repishti, Francesco and Richard V. Schofield. 2004. *Architettura e controriforma: I dibattiti per la facciata del Duomo di Milano, 1582-1682*. Milano: Electa.
- Rivera Vázquez, Evaristo. 1989. *Galicia y los jesuitas. Sus colegios y enseñanza en los siglos XVI al XVIII*. A Coruña: Fundación Barrié.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 1922 (1921, 1<sup>st</sup> German ed.). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated into English by C. K. Ogden and F. P. Ramsey. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira



# Chaos and Composition in Félix Guattari

**Matías García Rodríguez**

University of Santiago de Compostela  
matias.garcia.rodriguez@usc.es

## **Abstract**

Chaos is an extremely important concept throughout the work of Félix Guattari. Related both to deeply personal troubles and to epochal epistemological correlates in the context of post-structuralist discourse, we will describe its relationship with the concept of composition –one of the keys of his later aesthetic theory. In order to illustrate some of the concepts behind his epistemological proposals, we will comment some of his texts on Japanese architect Shin Takamatsu.

## **Keywords**

Félix Guattari; Architecture, Composition; Chaos; Shin Takamatsu.

## 1. Uneasy chaos<sup>1</sup>

Félix Guattari's later work seems to give free reign to chaos, which was a consistent obsession of him. Certainly, almost any quote in Guattari's texts from the eighties and up to 1992 shows some consistency with actual personal issues which he fought throughout his life, more so in those final years of "winter". Dissolution, particularly, casts a shadow that was already impossible to ignore in his early work. In a way, the radical Lacanian "speedy-Guatt" of the fifties is not that different from the aesthetics theoretician who wrote *Chaosmose*. If it was not for his continuous -if nor rather obsessive- enterprise of formalization, of constantly redefining his conceptual web through decades of constant rewriting and revisiting of texts, we could take the risk of forgetting that some of his original intentions, needs, and interests remained essentially the same, from the structure to the machine, from the machine to the rhizome, and still onto the final chaosmos.

However, probably the most important thing to acknowledge is to which extent all of his epistemological retracing was particularly in tune with the very core of Nietzschean post-structuralist discourse. Even though Guattari's name is frequently erased from its pantheon, in terms of the History of Philosophy his work is probably the most revealing and informative in order to understand the changing flows of post-war French philosophy after the glorious success and -up to a point deceiving- fall of structuralist regimes, both in faculty departments and in Parliament.

The core of it all is *chaos*. Of course, this could lead us to a very old, and way too vague, confrontation between so-called Order and so-called Disorder. However, as simple as it may seem the fortune of chaos throughout the French philosophy of the sixties and up to the eighties -between the decline of pan-linguistics and the return of the already-quite-old *nouveaux philosophes*- reveals itself as a rather specific historical problem.

From a "merely" morphological point of view, which is possibly not the best way to call it, but probably one of the most suitable in order to open up such a question, chaos is not defined by its "disorder", but by its velocity:

On définit le chaos moins par son désordre que par la vitesse infinie avec laquelle se dissipe toute forme qui s'y ébauche. C'est un vide qui n'est pas un néant, mais un *virtuel*, contenant toutes les particules possibles et tirant toutes les formes possibles qui surgissent pour disparaître aussitôt, sans consistance ni référence, sans conséquence. C'est une vitesse infinie de naissance et d'évanouissement. (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 117-8).

The tone which Guattari and Deleuze are here using is rather ambiguous. Although it is not a negative depiction, there is a certain feeling of

1. I would like to thank Cristina R. Lesmes for her generous and useful comments.

excess, of something which not only exceeds it all, but which is firstly characterized by its very aversion to control. There is a sort of dizziness in the face of the seemingly absolute powers of chaos, powers which at same time remain somehow attractive. Even in 1991 -the year of the publication of *What is Philosophy?*-, we still perceive -notably given the overall celebratory tone of the book- that certain *unease* which is always present throughout post-war French thought, whether in its neurotic -structuralist- or in its schizoid -68's post-structuralism- manifestations, both on philosophy and the more general forms of culture.

Post-structuralists are often accused of speaking in riddles. Be that as it may (seem), they are in any case very historical ones, related to very real problems. In the case of chaos, it truly is everywhere. Certainly, chaos constantly appears in numerous Guattari's papers, books, and diary entries throughout his last years. At the same time, chaos is also omnipotent in epistemological terms. However, chaos is neither chance nor mere formlessness. It is in fact the very Form which allows for the possibility of thinking to emerge. In a very general but also immediate way, dissolution is the main enemy of thought:

Nous demandons seulement un peu d'ordre pour nous protéger du chaos. Rien n'est plus douloureux, plus angoissant qu'une pensée qui s'échappe à elle-même, des idées qui fuient, qui disparaissent à peine ébauchées, déjà rongées par l'oubli ou précipitées dans d'autres que nous ne maîtrisons pas davantage. [...] [I]l n'y aurait pas un peu d'ordre dans les idées s'il n'y eu avait aussi dans les choses ou état des choses, comme un anti-chaos objectif: 'Si le cinabre était tantôt rouge, tantôt noir, tantôt léger, tantôt lourd...'. (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 201-2).

Again, the mixture of both truly personal and transversal historical issues is evident. The image of ideas "simply flying off", that recurrent menace to production itself -the molar word, the tendency towards reterritorialization, the fear and rejection of the institutions which merely produce anti-production- is an everlasting *topos* in Guattari's work. However, it is also true that this is a fundamental feature of the vaster epistemological constructions of post-structuralist discourse, particularly in aesthetics.

The inherent logic of such a discourse is simultaneously simple and ambiguous: In the same way as "chaotization" -that is, the continuous dissolution of any consistency- is both the opposite to what Philosophy and Art seek for, and, at the same time, their only possible beginning, *déterritorialisation* is simply not possible without a *reterritorialisation* -and vice versa. The same is applicable to any molecular multiplicity that is truly far from molar groupings. It is not a matter of essences and/or structures, but of moments and becomings:

Le plan d'immanence est comme une coupe du chaos, et agit comme un cri-

ble. Ce qui caractérise le chaos, en effet, c'est moins l'absence de déterminations que la vitesse infinie à laquelle elles s'ébauchent et s'évanouissent: ce n'est pas un mouvement de l'une à l'autre, mais au contraire l'impossibilité d'un rapport entre deux déterminations, puisque l'une n'apparaît pas sans que l'autre ait déjà disparu, et que l'une apparaît comme évanouissante quand l'autre disparaît comme ébauche. Le chaos n'est pas un état inerte ou stationnaire, ce n'est pas un mélange au hasard. Le chaos chaotise, et défait dans l'infini toute consistance. (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 46)<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Composing a house

This *plan d'immanence* borrows from chaos the determinations that allow it to perform its infinite movements: “On peut, on doit dès lors supposer une multiplicité de plans, puisque aucun n’embrasserait tout le chaos sans y retomber, et que chacun ne retient que des mouvements qui se laissent plier ensemble” (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 53). “Nous ne le vaincrons qu’à ce prix”: In order to “déchirer le firmament”, we have to submerge ourselves into chaos (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 202). What ties together the work of both philosophers and artists lies in *composition*, and is the very same element that allows Guattari and Deleuze to establish a fundamental distinction:

L'art lutte effectivement avec le chaos, mais pour y faire surgir une vision qui l'illumine un instant, une Sensation.<sup>3</sup> [...] L'art n'est pas le chaos, mais une composition du chaos qui donne la vision ou sensation, si bien qu'il constitue un chaosmos, comme dit Joyce, un chaos composé –non pas prévu ni préconçu. L'art transforme la variabilité chaotique en variété *chaotique*, par exemple l'embrassement gris noir et vert du Greco; l'embrassement d'or de Turner ou l'embrassement rouge de Staël. L'art lutte avec le chaos, mais pour le rendre sensible, même à travers le personnage le plus charmant, le paysage le plus enchanté (Watteau). (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 204-5).

2. It is always a question of chaos and the ways to confront it in order to produce: “Ce qui définit la pensée, les trois grandes formes de la pensée, l'art, la science et la philosophie, c'est toujours affronter le chaos, tracer un plan, tirer un plan sur le chaos. Mais la philosophie veut sauver l'infini en lui donnant de la consistance: elle trace un plan d'immanence, qui porte à l'infini des événements ou concepts consistants, sous l'action de personnages conceptuels. La science au contraire renonce à l'infini pour gagner la référence: elle trace un plan de coordonnées seulement indéfinies, qui définit chaque fois des états de choses, des fonctions ou propositions référentielles, sous l'action d'observateurs partiels. L'art veut créer du fini qui redonne l'infini: il trace un plan de composition, qui porte à son tour des monuments ou sensations composées, sous l'action de figures esthétiques.” (Guattari & Deleuze 1991, 198).

3. The examples that then follow are singularly interesting for us: “Même les maisons...: c'est du chaos que sortent les maisons ivres de Soutine, heurtant d'un côté et d'autre, s'entrepêchant d'y retomber; et la maison de Monet surgit comme une fente à travers laquelle le chaos devient la vision des roses. Même l'incarnat le plus délicat s'ouvre sur le chaos, comme la chair sur l'écorché” (Guattari & Deleuze 1991, 204).

As stated in a quote that is extremely revealing of Guattari's attitude towards architecture: "Composition, composition, c'est la seule définition de l'art. La composition est esthétique, et ce qui n'est pas composé n'est pas une œuvre d'art" (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 192-3). If the artist is the composer of chaos -someone who is able to build something out of chaos-, then the primordial sense of architecture reveals itself: "L'art commence non pas avec la chair, mais avec la maison; ce pourquoi l'architecture est le premier des arts" (Guattari & Deleuze 2005, 187).

### 3. Shin Takamatsu and Japanese subjectivity

Taste is a strange companion to a philosopher's work, and numerous reasons explain why this is frequently the case. However, this is not what happens with Guattari, an author who frequently delved into his pantheon as much as he did with his own work -always retuning, always looking for better arranged concepts-, and is frequently in his texts on Joyce and Kafka that we find the most interesting side of his work. This is also the case when it comes to his relationship with Japan, a country to which he repeatedly travelled to, and about whose culture and arts wrote several texts.

From a historiographical point of view, his theories on Japanese architecture are not always consistent or systematic, nor should we read those texts as if those were his intentions. The history of contemporary Japanese architecture is, as simplified as it may sound, the history of its detachment from the International Style, a movement initiated by Kenzo Tange<sup>4</sup> and Arata Isozaki<sup>5</sup>. Guattari is mainly interested in the then so-called "new wave". Even though this is a label whose arbitrariness is acknowledged by Guattari himself, he prefers it to the "imprudence" of placing those architects under the umbrella of post-modernism, given that the Japanese "new wave" "échappe heureusement à l'opportunisme superficiel et éclectique que recouvre généralement cette qualification aux États-Unis et en Europe" (Guattari 1994, 4).

In Guattari's words, if there is a link between the authors frequen-

4. "Dans les années 60, Kenzo Tange opéra une rupture radicale avec les aspects simplistes du fonctionnalisme international par la fondation d'un mouvement structuraliste dans l'architecture et l'urbanisme japonais. En contrepoint de ce structuralisme, qui mettait l'accent sur la complexité des aspects relationnels propres aux espaces architecturaux, se développa un courant se dénommant « métaboliste » qui, de son côté, s'efforçait d'adapter la nouvelle industrialisation du bâtiment aux besoins humains, en particulier en édifiant des agglomérats de capsules modulaires. Dans le même souci de prise en compte des spécificités sociétales, individuelles et culturelles, les métabolistes furent également très préoccupés de composer des formes évoquant les constructions japonaises traditionnelles ou s'y rattachant indirectement." (Guattari 1994, 4).

5. "Isozaki, qui fut l'élève de Kenzo Tange, s'efforça de dégager radicalement l'architecture japonaise de son classicisme moderniste, pour laisser libre cours à une créativité symboliste et maniériste, confinant quelquefois au surréalisme." (Guattari 1994, 4).

tly thus labelled is their *processualisme*, a surprisingly vague term that here stands for nothing more than the fact that those architects “échappent aux modélisations préétablies par des écoles ou des courants”. The important thing, however, is that they were trying, so says Guattari, to step out of functionalist guidance, context dependency and, even, “any humanist reference” (Guattari 1994, 4). However, he is mainly interested in what he calls “creative becomings” of those architects:

Un “devenir enfant” (par exemple, chez Takefumi Aïda, Kazuhiro Ishii, Minoru Takeyama), soit à travers des constructions directement à destination des enfants, soit s’inspirant indirectement d’une vision enfantine. Un ‘devenir végétal’, par exemple chez Mayumi Miyawaki, qui a construit à Tokyo sa *Boîte bleue*, enserrant totalement la cime de quelques grands arbres, ou chez Kijo Rokkaku, avec sa *Maison aux trois racines*, où des troncs d’arbres et une partie de leurs racines émergent, à l’état brut en haut d’une façade de ciment. D’une façon plus générale, on retrouvera, chez la plupart des architectes de cette nouvelle vague, l’utilisation d’éléments boisés à titre de symbole de la nature. Un “devenir animal”, explicitement revendiqué par le Team Zoo de l’université de Waseda à Tokyo, influencé par Takamasa Yoshizaka, et qui a réalisé, par exemple, le *Domo Celakanto*, édifice construit comme un mystérieux monstre marin. Il conviendrait également d’évoquer un “devenir abstrait” chez Tadao Ando qui parle de “catabolisme du paysage”, un “devenir Nirvana” chez Aida, une politique du vide et de la lumière chez Toyo Ito, un “devenir non-objet” chez Hiromi Fujii et chez Shinohara, dont le conceptualisme voudrait ramener l’architecture à son degré minimal, Mozuna, de son côté, étant parti à la recherche d’un principe “anti-résidence”... (Guattari 1994, 5).

However, Guattari’s interests are elsewhere, invested in the becoming-machinic “devenir machine”- of Shin Takamatsu, one of the architects about whom he has more eloquently spoken. Leaving aside the beautiful imagery used by Guattari -Takamatsu’s buildings as a Buto dancer<sup>6</sup>- and his arguable historical appreciations -his statement that Takamatsu rejects any idea of “style”<sup>7</sup>-, the core of Guattari’s exposition is that Takamatsu is

6. “Quel type de rapport entretient donc ce créateur avec le contexte urbain au sein duquel il travaille ? Rappelons que deux positions s’affrontent classiquement pour aborder ce genre de question, d’ailleurs sujette à d’interminables controverses. Il y a ceux qui, à la manière de Le Corbusier, prennent en compte le contexte de telle sorte que la gestion de la forme instaure l’objet architectural dans un rapport de continuité avec le tissu urbain. Et il y a ceux qui, à la manière de Mies van der Rohe, détachent l’œuvre du milieu ambiant de façon à ce qu’elle prenne un caractère d’objet structurant l’organisation d’une forme. Mais peut-être que l’architecture de la nouvelle vague japonaise et, tout spécialement, celle de Shin Takamatsu nous conduisent à une troisième position possible telle que l’œuvre se trouve à la fois parachève en tant qu’objet esthétique et totalement ouverte au contexte. Cela m’évoque la position d’un danseur Buto, tel que Min Tanaka, totalement replié sur son corps et, cependant, hypersensible à toute perception émanant de l’environnement.” (Guattari 1994, 7).

7. “Et en cela nous restons encore sur le terrain de Shin Takamatsu dont l’un des principaux philosophes @LISBON

a builder of machines, and those machines are “processuelles et resingularisantes”: in Guattari’s eyes, they reinvent Japanese subjectivity (Guattari 1994, 9). These machines being *machines* in the strict sense of the word constantly operate *coupures*, opening up new universes of reference which allow for the potential emergence of new territories and new *agencements collectifs d’énonciation*.

Even though the objective is always the same –“parvenir à ce que l’édifice devienne sujet non humain, capable d’œuvrer de concert avec des segments de subjectivité humaine individuelle et collective” (Guattari 1994, 9)-, Takamatsu’s becoming-machinic manifests itself through a variety of methods: symmetry breaks -Kitayama Ining 23, Kyoto, 1987-, interlocking of decentred forms -Kido Clinic, Kyoto, 1978-, horizontal and vertical fissures -Yamamoto Atelier, Kyoto, 1978; Koboko Lighting Showroom, Kyoto, 1978-, or, most important, the game of scopic structures, be it cyclopean eyes -Miyahara House, Kyoto, 1982-, superimposed eyes -Pharaoh, Kyoto, 1984-, or “machinic” eyes -ARK, Kyoto, 1983- (Guattari 1994, 10-3). Within such architectural machines, Takamatsu is somehow playing with chaos, forcing that very Form to multiply itself, to proliferate, and thus trace new plans for the city’s subjectivity.

## Reference List

- Guattari, Félix, and Gilles Deleuze. 1991. *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* Paris: Minuit.  
 Guattari, Félix. 1994. “Les machines architecturales de Shin Takamatsu.” *Chimères* 21: 1-15.

---

impératifs est de refuser toute idée de style parce qu’il entend ne jamais faire deux fois la même chose, ne jamais livrer la même bataille avec la ville et n’appréhender l’histoire qu’à partir de son propre message.” (Guattari 1994, 7).



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira



# **Rewriting Another Modernity from the Global South. The Viet Minh and the use of Vegetation as a Political Agent**

**Philippe Zourgane**

Architecture Milieu Paysage  
Paris Research Laboratory  
(LAVUE – CNRS)  
philippe.zourgane@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

This paper argues that vegetation can be used as a tool in the struggle by the weaker against the stronger. I do not mean the art of camouflage, nor a return to a primitive state; rather, I mean that vegetation can be used as a subordinate weapon for the preservation of autonomy. In this case, vegetation is neither a planning tool or a management tool; it offers a possibility to escape from the colonial grid and to disappear. Vegetation has also been used to create the conditions to live different and autonomous lives apart from state authorities, as James Scott describes it in his book *The Art of not Being Governed*. Vegetation was often used as a political agent in asymmetrical or revolutionary wars, during decolonizing process, as theorized by Mao Tse-Tung and Ho Chi Minh. I will use the Viet Minh Guerrilla during the first Vietnam conflict as a case study to explore these and related issues. From a theoretical point of view, I argue that the use of vegetation contributed to the reconstruction of another modernity, upturning the conceptualization of culture as a key point of reference for modern society. In the case of the Viet Minh, Nature replaced Culture to form a new agency that was able to destroy a modernity construct based on infrastructure and total territorial planning. Nature was defined as the new point of departure instead of culture, and helped to form a revolutionary society.

## **Keywords**

Modernity; culture; nature; vegetation; guerrilla

This paper purposes to analyze the relation between territorial planning and theory. Field work has presented territorial planning as a technique and an action against a pre-existing reality. But it can be seen as well as a theoretical activity, that is to say as an action which is part of an ideological set of tools to organize territory for a state administration.

### **Culture, Nature and Modernity seen from Europe**

From the beginning of colonial conquest, the colonial subject is supposed to be a savage. In the late nineteenth century Social-Darwinism played a crucial role in arguing scientifically that African, Asian, Indian were all beneath the European race in terms of racial classification.

Culture has always been considered as a concept born inside the city during the Greek civilization. It was a value and a heritage circumscribed inside the city for centuries. There was a direct link in European culture between civilization, culture and city, which was pushed ahead by the colonial system. The essence of the the colonial subject became inseparable from civilizing the savage. Nature was defined from the beginning in opposition to culture. Marcus Colchester's definition is fairly precise: "In ancient Greece, untamed nature was perceived as the domain of wild, irrational, female forces that contrasted with the rational culture ordered by males. In this world view, not only was nature a dangerous threat to the city state, but the wilderness beyond was peopled by barbarians, the epitome of whom were the Amazons — long haired, naked, female savages who represented the antithesis of Greek civilization".<sup>1</sup>

Colonization established a direct link between culture, civilization, and the city. Considered as a savage, the colonized is put outside the civilization. Its uncivilized figure clearly refers to nature as its unique domain. We must have in mind that in English, "*savages*", which is a word that comes from the French word "*sauvage*" and the Spanish "*salvaje*," which signifying "*forest inhabitant*." Civilizing the savage could be considered as bringing the city to the savages. This is one of the tasks of the civilizing mission of colonization.

The myth that the city in the colonial space was the colonizer's construction is still very present in our contemporary society. Catherine Coquery Gondrovitch, who specifically studied African Urban History, demonstrates that colonizer importance in urbanizing was not as important as was previously supposed. It is interesting here to note a long passage that describes what I mean precisely "The decisive supposed role of the western initiative: the colonizers would have created their cities, often ports, either strategic implanted knots *ex-nihilo* or, from thin villages at the heart

1. Colchester 1994, 11.

of a zone to be conquered and to be exploited. Certainly it was exact. But very partially. Most of the time, Europeans community, only a few number of people were worried about a fast efficiency. They especially used the existing centres. But they selected, among the African villages, those who would become in turn the centre of their power.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us have a look at the etymology of Metropolis. Metropolis is a Greek word, coming from μήτηρ, or *mētēr*, which means “mother” and πόλις, or *pólis*, meaning “city” or “town.” In the antiquity, Greek colonies referred to their mother cities as their Metropolis. The subjection link between these two territories was established in the beginning. The use and abuse of Metropolis and Metropolitan in the colonial context functioned as the marker of the active domination of the western world on the non-western. Whatever the domain of excellence, “the one relationship that does change is the hierarchical one between the metropole and overseas generally.”<sup>3</sup>

This domination was not only political and economical. It was activated in the remodeling of the colonial cities in Africa (Dakar, Johannesburg, Dar-es-Salaam) and in Asia (Delhi, Saigon, Shanghai). City reshaping was conceived as the insertion inside the existing urban fabric of landmark buildings. Architecture and urbanism were used to inscribe these European cultural fragments in the metropole. European architecture was used both to materialize the inferiority of other cultures (African, Indian or Asian) and to materialize the colonizer power. Territorial planning, as well as infrastructure construction overseas, has to be seen as part of the European project; it sits in a strict relation with modernity as a global project. It was the construction of a mobility network that made for trading policy, displays of force abroad, and the aesthetic representation of the European power.

Modernity is seen in Europe as the foundation of the state nation system, and social democracy is linked in a strict relation with the age of Enlightenment. Modernity can be seen as a set of facts that established the European power over overseas territories. From the beginning, it was a concept applied worldwide. Negri and Hardt define modern sovereignty as a concept organizing “European domination both inside and outside its border. There are two coextensive and complementary faces of one coherent action: power in Europe and Europe’s power over the world.”<sup>4</sup>

2. “Le rôle supposé décisif de l’initiative occidentale : les colonisateurs auraient créé leurs villes, souvent des ports, ou bien des noeuds stratégiques implantés ex-nihilo ou, au mieux à partir de maigres villages au coeur d’une zone à conquérir et à exploiter. Certes ce fut exact. Mais très partiellement. La plupart du temps, les Européens peu nombreux et soucieux d’une efficacité rapide, ont surtout utilisé les centres existants. Mais ils ont tout au plus sélectionné, parmi les bourgades africaines, celles qui deviendraient à leur tour le centre de leur pouvoir.” Coquery Gondrovitch 1993, 329.

3. Said 1994, 106.

4. Negri and Hardt 2000, 103.

In his book *The Art of Not Being Governed*, James Scott in two different chapters decodes the territory organization, first through total territorial state planning and then through an anti-total territorial state planning. He focuses on the transportation system, agriculture and village settlement. However, I would like here to put forward the intellectual goal of territorial planning as prescribed by James Scott in two very different ways.

In chapter two, “State Space” Scott asks us to:

Imagine for a moment, that you are a Southeast Asian counterpart of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, chief minister to Louis XIV. You, like Colbert, are charged with designing the prosperity of the kingdom. The setting, like that of the seventeenth century, is premodern: overland travel is by foot, cart and draft animals, while water transportation is by sail. Let us finally imagine that, unlike Colbert, you begin with a blank state. You are free to conjure up an ecology, an demography, and a geography that would be most favorable to the state and its ruler. What, in those circumstances, would you design?<sup>5</sup>

In chapter six, “State Evasion, State Prevention,” Scott asks us to:

Imagine, once again, that you are a Southeast Asian counterpart of Jean-Baptiste Colbert. This time, however, your task is not to design an ideal state space of appropriation but, rather, the precise opposite. How would you go about designing a topography, a subsistence strategy, and a social culture that was as resistant to state formation and appropriation as possible ?<sup>6</sup>

The territory outside the city, and especially the agricultural space, was considered as the first space of capital accumulation from Greek civilization to nineteenth-century European colonization. Appropriation of new state space is strictly linked to the visibility of the whole agricultural space and its workers and owners. What is planted, what is harvested, where it is stocked, and how much it is sold for are *the* important questions for the state administration. By contrast, a space that doesn’t allow appropriation as state space should be a space with low visibility, with cultivated lands not visible, even to the trained eye.

Construction or deconstruction of the appropriated state space is linked to visibility as a major factor of space organization. Analyzing the politics of vegetation in relation to agriculture, natural spaces, and conservation is a way to investigate the politics of space, as well as the regime of governance of the territory itself.

Plant life is central in the development of modern operational spatial framework. To focus on plant life is to juxtapose several scales. The micro-scale of plant life includes botany and economy, while the macro-scale includes vegetation and cultivation; lastly, the territorial scale includes ter-

5. Scott 2009, 40.

6. Scott 2009, 178.

ritorial planning and infrastructures.

Plant life has been a subject of study and contemplation for botanists, a source of wealth via spices or coffee, a field of production for the agricultural plantations, and an exotic subject for travel tales. During the 17th and 18th century, vegetation had a central position in the whole Western society. Its power was enhanced: the plants analyzed by botanists, drawn by naturalists, and acclimatized in the botanical gardens were modified to be more robust and productive. For this reason, from the very beginning, plants were fundamental to the creation of colonial space. It is well-known that flows of capital, maritime industry and market capitalization were orchestrated around plants. But we can also say that the colonial territory was structured at the service of plants. There is a reversal of the rules of the game here: the cultivated areas are ordering the whole territory, even the city. To that extent, plant life has a certain autonomous agency, the major/minor relationship between built and non-built space is inverted. Linking this inversion to the economic, financial, and political conditions of colonialism and post-colonialism allows us to re-read these territories in a different way, for their planning and their iconic architectures. To treat vegetation—plant life—as a political agent enables us to foreground the ways in which vegetation orders social and economic relations. It is an ordering agent of the colonial and postcolonial territory, of agricultural planning, and of urban space.

I use the word vegetation as it was defined by Buffon in 1749, where “all the plants inside a defined area” constitute an areas vegetation<sup>7</sup>. There is a strict relation between market, empire, and plant life. The key role assigned to plant life in the colonial system is what I am defining as “vegetation as a political agent.”

During the same period of time, vegetation was also used in another way, that is, to struggle against the colonizer by people, or in the decolonizing process. If vegetation has been a tool employed in the struggle by the weaker against the stronger, it was because it was seen also by natives, slaves, or oppressed people as a weapon in itself. I do not refer here only to the art of camouflage, nor to a return to a primitive state; rather, vegetation is used as a subordinate weapon for the preservation of autonomy. In that case, Vegetation is not a planning tool or a management tool. Vegetation offers a possibility to escape from the colonial grid and to disappear.

### **Culture, Nature and Modernity seen from the Global South**

Vegetation was often used as a political agent in asymmetrical or revolutionary wars, during the decolonizing process, as theorized by Mao Tse-

7. «Ensemble des plantes d'un endroit.» Buffon, 33.

-Tung and Ho Chi Minh. It was a very powerful weapon throughout the Vietnam's war, and more specifically during its first phase, the Indochina War (1945-1954). I will focus in this section on describing guerrilla action, and the subjection link that exists between the spaces of organization put in place by vegetation, on the one hand, and the way this specific natural space was used to reinvent different human activities, on the other.<sup>8</sup> The use of vegetation as a political agent in war time could be considered as a mass weapon in itself.

First, we have to revisit the concepts of culture and nature concepts and as redefined them through by independence movements in the forties 1940s. The redefinition of these concepts works at the same time, at both a very pragmatic level and at a theoretical level.

It was a matter of fact that many guerrilla movements had to first gain to their cause the large part of the rural community for then to be able to attack urban areas. Their progression into the city space was risky, as it was the space of colonial representation with the presence of an important concentration of the legal army, the presence of the colonial administration, and of the European community. These guerrilla movements developed themselves for strategic reasons, but also for ideological reasons in the countryside, in the natural space, and in the natural environment to then progress to the city space.

The strategic reasons of this location in the natural, rural environment are military. For instance, it allows them to be at a long distance from the different sites where legal armies are stationed. This is not the only argument in favor of the natural environment as a source of guerrilla planning, and particularly wild nature, but the ideological reasons are much more complex. Partially, we have to refer ourselves to culture; it was a place to find the local culture, itself untouched by colonial assimilation. Wild nature was a place to reinvent the local culture away from the colonial administration. The new local culture, under development there, had to compete the universal culture imposed by the colonizer. This nature, untouched by urban civilization, was clearly seen as a place untouched or sidelined by colonial administration (except for plantations). Two cultures were in opposition, one within a minor c, the local millenary Vietnamese culture, in this particular case and the other one within a major C, the European one, imported by the colonizer. The European culture was representing progress in the technical fields (scientific, medical, etc. ...) and imposed its civilizing mission.

The local culture found, at this time, the place to reinvent itself in the countryside with the peasants, or in the remaining wild spaces (forests,

---

8. The word vegetation is defining both "natural spaces" not constrained by human actions such as forests, mountains, etc. and "artificial natural spaces" such as fields, pastures, planted forests or largely transformed by human actions.

swamps, mountains, and so on ...). The natural environment is seen as the only jewel box for the new rising power, a place of legitimacy to reconquer the ancient link with the territory itself and its inhabitants. Nature was used to reinvent links with topography, history, and local culture, but also peasants, fields works, and crafts. The Viet Minh used nature, and especially vegetation as a source of power. It was a military and a political movement that was conquering the territory, transforming it from the natural space to the urban space. It was using nature as a weapon in se. The Viet Minh were are fighting Modernity as a European project supporting European Imperialism, which that was put into crisis by these guerrilla movements.

The Viet Minh guerrilla begun its conquest in the countryside where it found large support from peasants. To win the territory from countryside to the city was seen at the same time as both a cultural movement and a political movement. Reintroducing the local culture, here Vietnamese, as secular, as noble and vital, was an ideological way to introduce other values far away from the occidental ones. We have to remind ourselves that assimilation has always been the only organized policy in the French colonial space. Culture has been underestimated in many national liberation struggle. Amilcar Cabral, in a text titled “*Le rôle de la culture dans la lutte pour l’indépendance*” written for a UNESCO meeting in 1972 in Paris, argued “that culture is a method of group mobilization, even a weapon in the fight for the independence.”<sup>9</sup> References to the peasant works are very present in manifestos texts from Mao Tse-Tung, Amilcar Cabral, or Ernesto Che Guevara, and there are also many important theoreticians such as Pierre Bourdieu, Andre Gunther Frank and Giovanni Arrighi that worked on peasants labour, struggles and education in the sixties. This important corpus linked politicians, agriculture labour forces, and theoreticians in the southern countries.

The General Vo Nguyen Giap book’s *People’s War – People’s Army*, was prefaced in the 1964’s Cuban edition by Ernesto Che Guevara. It was seen for both of them as a political book to propagate revolution in the Third World and also as a means to form a new group of southern countries, with a new ideology along the non-aligned movement. Guevara points out that: “Vietnam has peculiar characteristics: [it is] a very ancient civilization, [with] a long history as independent kingdom having its own specificities and its own culture. Compared to its thousand-year-old history, the episode of the French colonialism is only a drop of water.”<sup>10</sup> Its intellectual

9. “la culture est une méthode de mobilisation de groupe, voire une arme dans la lutte pour l’indépendance.” Cabral 2013, 70.

10. “Le Vietnam a des caractéristiques particulières : une très ancienne civilisation, une longue histoire en tant que royaume indépendant ayant ses spécificités et une culture propre. En regard de son histoire millénaire, l’épisode du colonialisme français n’est qu’une goutte d’eau.” Che Guevara 2006, 91.

independence is acquired through culture and the civilization preexisting revolution, rebellion, or guerrilla actions. Culture is replaced as an act of resistance, but also as a mass weapon.

On the one hand, urban space at this particular moment was seen only as a place of oppression and assimilation supervised by the colonizer. On the other hand, rural space was seen as a space of freedom, which kept its secular roots and history. From the dense forest or countryside to the city space, it was a collective human experience that was conducted from nature to culture by guerrilla movements. A collective and collaborative experience proposed an alternate relationship with nature, not a second-zone citizenship for peasants. Culture was not seen anymore as the one with a major C, defined in Europe and imposed in the colonial space. It was precisely this that was part of the urban colonial experience, operated by local bourgeoisie and European bourgeoisie as unique social class. This decolonizing process ideologically put in place, using culture as a mass weapon, was precisely inverting the way European colonization programmed the colonial territory. If European colonization was based on agriculture exploitation, it found its representation, its strength, its power and its local staff (or European community) in the city centre that was designed in total reference to the metropole.

During the whole Vietnamese war (1945-1975) thousands of soldiers and logistic workers traveled across the country without using established infrastructures. Instead, they were using pathways that were allowing them to avoid detection by the French occupiers. In this way they invented a new map. As we've already seen, this new mapping of the territory was inverting the relationship between city and countryside. The guerrillas created a new territory built from nature (the countryside) toward culture (the city). Airports, ports, and roads were seen as the symbol of power, a power to see from the air, space and sea using new technology. Destruction of pre-existing infrastructures is a very basic action in any war period. Cutting fluxes (logistics fluxes, soldiers fluxes, as well as information fluxes) is oftentimes a key in winning important battles. During the decolonizing war period after World War II, these infrastructures were supporting the colonizer power. Movement, speed, and intensity were the army obsessions to obtain the quick deployment of patrols, to pacify any place in the colony. Infrastructures were seen as a key point in the battle also because they were vectors to distribute the flux of weapons made in Europe and the United States. There were the symbol of the unlimited power of the Occident. That is the reason why each infrastructure was seen as a support systems for capitalism and imperialism. No infrastructure was a leitmotiv in this asymmetrical war. Thus this strategy was pragmatic as well as ideological.

Relying on photograms extracted from the film *Chiến thắng Tây Bắc* (The victory of the North West) shot in 1952 by the military forces in the



Viet Minh zone, during the war against French occupation to support the conquest, one can see that these archive images demonstrate a form of counter-planning of the land that allows topography (plains and mountains), geography and the ecosystem (the forest or the savannah) to be used as a weapon. These images depict the strength of the soldiers who are becoming one with their own territory. These three photograms discussed below are extracted from this propaganda film.



The first photogram (TC 00 29-37 B) shows a group of soldiers walking in the countryside. Disappearance is at work here as a concept. The first report is on the art of camouflage: to disappear in the natural environment is theorized as a guerrilla technique, when facing a stronger enemy. The meaning of the motto, the guerrilla is in the countryside is as a fish in the water, should be obvious.

Vegetation is used as an anticolonial weapon. It allows the magic to operate: as a magician the guerrilla is able to disappear and reappear elsewhere. Another nature definition is at work, a nature that was used not to order, and not to discipline as in the colonial project. This time nature is used to protect oneself, to hide oneself, to disappear, to reappear somewhere else, and to disappear again if necessary.

It seems to be a scene (TC 00 30 29 B) in the nature with soldiers, walking or waiting for something. In fact there is no movement, everything is frozen. Troops are having their lunch on the pathway. They just stopped in the middle of their traveling. They are eating their lunch of white rice, with their bare-hands. There is no need to get out from the natural environment. The picturesque is very present in this photogram, as it is a very odd setting. The disconnection of genre, between the environment and the action, should catch our attention. A new community is created, linking the human figure and nature without hierarchy. Behind this image, there is also the crucial collaborative work made with peasants. Giap pointed out that: "Our army always organized days of assistance to the farmers in the field works, in the fight against the flood or the drought. It always observed a correct attitude in its relations with the people. Never it struck a blow at its properties, were it only a needle or an end of thread."<sup>11</sup>

11. "Notre arme a toujours organisé des journées d'aide aux paysans dans les travaux de pro-  
philosophy @LISBON

So the unity with the vegetation and landscape is a reality in the muscle of each soldier who also became for some periods of time a field worker.

The last photogram (TC 00 26 53 B) presents a multitude of humans (men and women) crossing a river with rafts made of bamboos. Different characters cross the river not in a line ; rather, it's more like a fluxed form. Disorder is exploited as a tactic here. There is a mimesis with the nature development process.

Bamboo rafts were used to cross rivers, swimmers produced the energy to move the raft from one bank to another. This basic technique for crossing river was used only in the first part of the war. New equipment replaced it such as invisible bridges made from bamboo and positioned 10 centimetres under the surface of the water, which allowed them to escape the enemy's bombardment. What stands out in these peculiar inventions is the use of vegetation to support the resistance effort. Here, in this specific situation, there is the very clear idea to be one with nature. The human being is becoming again an animal, he is renaturalising itself.

The use of low technology was also for ideological reasons. Low technology was considered a condition for a guerrilla to fight a greater enemy. In this asymmetrical war: topography, rivers, and mountains became important tools and potential weapons to defeat the colonizer. French troops that did not know the territory used only the existing infrastructure to move. So it was easy to preview their movements and neutralize some parts of them during these operations. Guerrillas used to have a perfect knowledge of the territory. They used forests, fields, and mountains like they were gardens, and moved without being visible.

The route de la Cordillère was the most important road that fed the front during the Vietnamese war. The route was vital for the conquest of the power, it was considered as the main infrastructure owned and operated by Viet Minh forces. Can the Route de la Cordillère, or as Vietnamese used to call The Ho Chi Minh road,<sup>12</sup> be considered as an infrastructure or a anti-infrastructure ?

This is a very ambiguous and difficult question. It was not an infrastructure built off the ground, but it was functioning like a *dispositif* inserted in a topography that was negotiating with it continuously, more than imposing its own logic. It was partially buried with invisible bridges constructed under water level. It was built in a very precise way in order not be seen from aerial report airplanes and photography. Its completion and non stop exploitation throughout aerial bombing was a real achievement. It was a very hybrid construction with hospitals, dormitories, and canteens cons-

---

duction, dans la lutte contre l'inondation ou la sécheresse. Elle a toujours observé une attitude correcte dans ses relations avec le peuple. Jamais elle n'a porté atteinte à ses biens, fussent il seulement une aiguille ou un bout de fil." Giap 1967, 53.

12. Cordillera Road is the Vietnamese name of the so called Ho Chi Minh road in Occident.

tructed under ground. There is no need for infrastructure as a power in itself as guerrillas action unfolded. Infrastructure was seen only as a demonstration of one's economical superiority not a military superiority. Perhaps that's why even the most incredible logistic that supported Vietnamese conquest, the so called Ho Chi Minh road, could be considered as the natural support given the nature to reconstruction of another modernity.

## Conclusion

Another Modernity was constructed during this period by guerrillas in Vietnam. Infrastructure destroyed places to a collaborate between the environment and guerrilla movements. A specific collaboration was put in place between the new Vietnamese army and peasants. A complete collaborative system was put in place between human activities and nature. It reveals a specific attention to nature, that is, it was site specific. From a theoretical point of view, it was the reconstruction of another modernity that turned upside down the conceptualization of culture as a key point of reference for modern society. Nature replaced Culture to form a new agency that was able to destroy a modernity constructed on infrastructure and total territorial planning.

Édouard Glissant characterizes another modernity by the fact that it can accept a degeneralization process. He is mixing ideas from culture, politics, and human relations when he argues that: "The Western work of "generalization" has for centuries equalized diverse community tempos and tried to order (to prioritize) their flowering. The panorama resolved, the equidistances defined, perhaps is it time to return to a "degeneralisation" no less necessary? Not to an excessive renewal of specificities, but to a total freedom (dreamed-of) of their relationships, even worn down to chaos by their confrontations?<sup>13</sup> In otherwords, it is a modernity that is dealing the singularity of each element, without any will for hierarchy as a domination process.

We have to remember ourselves that, once the war finished, mutual assistance didn't survive or carry over to the reorganization of a more or less classic state with its own infrastructure. Collaborative systems found during the decolonizing process were reduced to nothing, to let places enter into a very hierarchical system, top down, very similar to the pre-existing one put in place by the European colonizer.

This construction of another modernity was seen both as the end of

13. "Le travail occidental de «généralisation» a, pendant des siècles, introduit à l'équivalence des divers temps communautaires et tenté d'ordonner (de hiérarchiser) leur floraison. Le panorama résolu et les équidistances définies, peut-être y a-t-il lieu de revenir à une «dégénéralisation» non moins nécessaire? Non pas à une outrance renouvelée des spécificités, mais à une liberté totale (rêvée) de leurs rapports, frayée au chaos même de leurs affrontements." Glissant 1990, 75.

imperialism and as a possibility to reconstruct another postcolonial society. Unfortunately, this modernity based on a collaborative system existed only during war time.

## References

- Buffon, Comte de. 1825. *Théorie de la Terre – Histoire Générale des Animaux*. Paris: Editions Garnier Freres.
- Cabral, Amilcar. 2013. *Receuil de textes*. Genève: Editions CETIM.
- Che Guevara, Ernesto. Derbent, Thierry, and Giap, Vo Nguyen. 2006. *Giap et Clausewitz*, Bruxelles: Editions Aden.
- Colchester, Marcus. 1994. *Salvaging Nature*. New York: United Nations Institute for Social Development
- Coquery Gondrovitch, Catherine. 1993. *Histoire des Villes d'Afrique Noire*, Paris: Editions Albin Michel.
- Giap, Vo Nguyen. 1968. *Guerre du Peuple, Armée du Peuple*. Paris: Editions François Maspéro.
- Glissant, Edouard. 1990. *Poétique de La Relation, Poétique III*, Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Negri, Antonio and Hardt, Michael. 1990. *Empire*. Paris: Éditions Exils.
- Said, Edward. 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: First Vintage Edition book.
- Scott, James. 2009. *The Art of Not Being Governed*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# The Architecture of Memory. The Memory of Architecture

**Ramona Costea**

Architecture Graduate of “George Matei  
Cantacuzino” Faculty of Architecture of Iași;  
“Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iași

## **Abstract**

*Architecture, where from, where to?*

Memory is as a *modus operandi* in establishing rapports between the material and the metaphysical, such that objects endowed with a forceful meaning permeate in the space of memory. The complex evolution of humanity takes place directly proportional to the evolution of consciousness and cognitive flow, understood not only through intellectual eyeglass, but also through identity, emotion, empathy. Considering that architecture is an “infusible fusion” of culture, art, technology, functionality, vital and spiritual support, augmenting society, we may state that consciousness, architecture and memory determine the system of our conscious existence. The temporary character of architecture represents the outgrowth of the society evolving at an accelerated pace, surpassing the individual, thus making the evolution of memory unpredictable and its life shorter. The aim of this paper is to analyse the connection between architecture and memory, starting with the known phenomenon of memorizing, continuing with the memory’s path through architecture and “the built memory” within historical or contemporary patterns of our cities and connecting it with its complexities of philosophical and metaphysical origin - the discourses of architecture – the implicit theoretical discourse, the fictional<sup>1</sup> discourse (the literary dimension of architecture) and the philosophical discourse. In order to transcend into the space of long-term memory, an object permeates through three essential perception stages: the sensorial stage (regarding sensorial memory), the semantic stage (related to short-term memory) and the emotional stage, triggering the long-term memory. Thus, in order to imprint its values to long-term memory, architecture should comply to these four conditions: synesthetic, semantic and syncretic, and emotional.

Reinterpreting architecture through the way it is being memorized and rediscovering memory as an architectural meta-language imply their reconnection with the identity and consciousness of a culture.

## **Keywords**

Memory; architecture; consciousness; identity

---

1. Vais, 2008, 121

The study suggests memory as a method of understanding and perceiving architecture and landscape, beginning with the derived function of linguistic structuralism and considering memory a veritable, truly universal language and primordial matter in the creation of individual and collective identity. If space represents a materialization of society in a certain time in history, it also is a materialization of consciousness. The study upon “petrified landscapes” constitutes an important venue of investigation of human memory itself, from neuroscientific perspective. The urban dimension of space formulates a context for the incidence of consciousness instances, catalysing them through manifestation into an *illo tempore* and *illo spazio* of collective memory.

Architecture is the peremptory expression of a culture’s spirituality, *sine qua-non* metalanguage within the identification and understanding algorithm of collective memory manifestation and it constitutes the physical space of memory as long as the collective memory encodes those crucial values of spirituality that constitute collective consciousness. Memory, architecture and consciousness make up a unitary principle of cultural existence (Fig. 1).

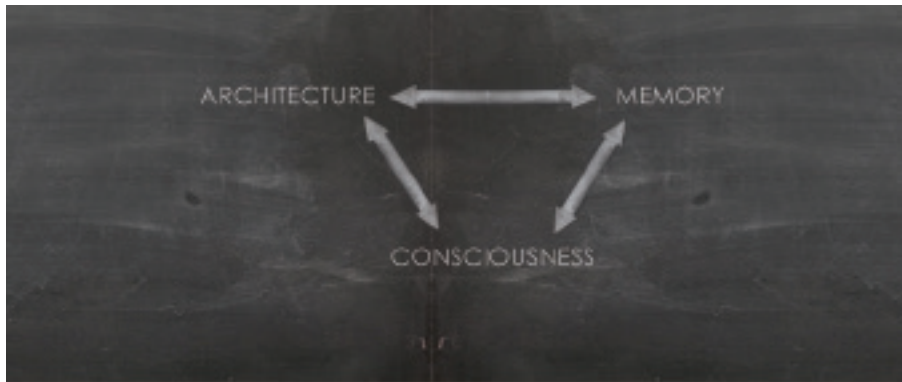


Fig. 1

The dependency between memory, architecture and consciousness  
© 2015 Ramona Costea

The bidirectional relationship between architecture and memory sets consciousness as the unifying context, where architectural memory bleeds into the space of consciousness and the consciousness of memory bleeds into architectural space. The unified principle of architecture, memory and consciousness constitutes the effervescent motor for the existence of society and for the condensation of cultural thinking. The whole landscape is, or should be, built memory, abiding by the intrinsic laws of spirituality, with sufficient actuating force to activate human existence in all its

philosophy @LISBON

aspects – social, cultural, creative etc. In this context, the *landscape* is the translation of any form of scenography of the surrounding world, as it is the result of human activity and humanity's intent to mould space. Because, "in that world of memory where music and vision, adjusted by the other senses, polarize around some major themes, according to cadences that create an interior rhythm, everything is solidary, including the great mess that engulfs the rare islands that our attention, with time, is drawn to."<sup>2</sup>

When speaking of his book, *Autobiografia Científica*, Aldo Rossi concludes that "to forget architecture" becomes a pertinent title for his book because "I may talk about a school, a cemetery, a theatre, it is more correct to say that I talk about life, death, imagination."<sup>3</sup> This platonic perspective considers the physical world an exponent of transposition in the world of ideas, a dimension one would consider relevant to existence. In a heraclitian manner, truth and absolute reality are represented by the becoming, the transcendence, the flux, whereas static condition is a mere illusion and an inability of consciousness to transcend towards the space of becoming (in the world of ideas, objects *are* not but they *become*). Thus, an analysis of the possibilities to interpret the built landscape as an essential vector of transposition in the space of consciousness is warranted, along with a study of the mutation of architecture, both as a means and conclusion and as a hypothesis and moment of *becoming*.

The main argument for a study about memory has roots as far back as antiquity. The will to fortify a cultural heritage, to rule a potential space of universal cognition, has been fuelled by the constant pursuit of identity. In the vision of G.M. Cantacuzino "perception takes all its value and is amplified only within memory. The mutation of images of reality into memories is what we call sensibility, including the act of grouping and selection of perceptions. From the synthesis of these perceptions, new form and harmonies are born, meaning art. Sensibility is the actual quality of our memory. In intimate parts of memory /.../ new images and personal experiences from the field of thinking take their place, live, get amplified or remain the same /.../ but all of them are part of that unitary climate that is defined by what we call *identity*."<sup>4</sup> Ultimately, a study of memory is equivalent to a study of self. The loss of memory, be it individual or collective, is equivalent to the loss of identity, context, thus a tear in the evolution of consciousness reflected through the spectrum of its activity.

A study upon memory assumes its understanding as a process and phenomenon. Starting from the simple process of memorizing and inter-

2. Cantacuzino, 1993, 28

3. "Forgetting Architecture comes to mind as a more appropriate title for this book, since while I may talk about a school, a cemetery, a theatre, it is more correct to say that I talk about life, death, imagination." Rossi, 1998, 94

4. Cantacuzino, 1993, 32



preting its implications in the perception and memorizing of architecture, as object and sequence (urban or not), we identify the essential steps and understand the lasting character of architecture of the stages of transcendence in the space of memory. The process of individual memorization offers an essential perspective for the analysis of collective memory, of forming identity and the dynamics of consciousness.

*The first part of this analysis* follows the defining and the memorizing process, as well as its transposition in the phenomenon of “memorizing architecture”, understood as both the object and the ensemble (scenery, city, etc.). The approach focuses on the interconnections between “individual memorizing” and “collective memorizing”.

*Sensory memory* – A first relation between information about self and the surrounding world enables the manifestation of sensory memory, whose “operators”, sensorial organs - hearing, sight, smell, touch, taste - transfer specific coded information towards the areas of memory that harbour the processes of consciousness. Architecture that requires the full experience of sensory, gnoseology and ontology will form stronger long-term memory.

From a critical perspective on the history and theory of architecture, this is easy to see – from antiquity, whose spaces, from housing to urban places, seem to imagine epistemological experience and metaphysical models of sacredness, by appealing to the senses, consciousness and memory, to Zumthor’s atmospheric architecture, in which, to transcend architecture to the plane of consciousness and memory, it is essential to perceive it thorough the sensorial apparatus. Within the cities of newness, of the experience of the sacred and the sensorial is an amputated dimension. In the landscape of post-industrial or forcefully reinvented cities of the last decades, many urban contexts are too incoherent to convey an architectural message, at most, paying tribute to visual aspects, in a quest to satisfy only the lower tiers of achieving and perfecting consciousness. A visually tributary architecture, as manifested in many cases in recent years, annihilates its potential of being perceived as a whole and to establish a complex relation with the human instance and its entire corolla of sensitivity.

*Short-term memory* implies the infusion of architectural concepts through *semantism*. Its implicit temporary nature attributes the metaphor of a sketchbook or draft to this type of memory, the information that will ultimately slide to the space of long-term memory, whose main trait is the availability of immediate information, acting similarly to connecting idioms and words in written text. The subtler the analogy needed to understand the information is, the more its eligibility for long-term memory storage it is.

A “landscape” (we will consider the general notion of landscape with the entire perceptive plethora implied – visual, acoustic, auditory, olfactory, tactile, spatial-temporal, etc.) ensures its place in long-term memory

space by its familiarity or its novelty, as it is juxtaposed to a meaning, an emotional connotation or any other type of relation with existing information. A landscape that is indifferent, whose nature infringes more than it intrigues perception or that requires a sum of information without rhyme or reason will have problems breaking into the realm of memory. Architecture that does not actively communicate with its users or whose message does not constitute a part of its user's reality and identity will rarely pierce the filter of memory.

*Long-term memory*, involving *syncretism and affect in architecture*, correlates the space of a multi-dimensional complex made of the previously defined levels of perception. The material support, merged with perceived space, make up a metaphor of bonding material with immaterial, defining the aesthetic category of *sublime* in architecture. The ability to communicate with architecture generates a sense of belonging, of spiritual connection with the environment and meanings – carriers of values of tradition. Syncretism in architecture refers to all the levels that make it up, physical and metaphysical, which constitute an indivisible architectural presence, and whose evocative or one of a kind force refracts into consciousness, resulting in the generation of emotion. Analog to individual consciousness, self-awareness and identity recognition involve the development of long-term memory. The same step involves acknowledgement of the subjective dimension of existence, corresponding to affect. Affect in architecture is, therefore, the humanizing of architecture.

*The second part of this analysis* refers to *memory mapping*. A relevant part in the study of memory refers to the relation between memory and space, from the perspective of time, analysing “radiographs” of “life slices” (as the naturalist exegesis names them). *Space, as a place for the memory*, has potentiated a historical will of conveying knowledge through creation, including the creation of space. The concept of place constitutes itself a space endowed with memory, an important way through which civilizations have mapped their memory. One could say that, throughout history, consciousness has mapped its memory through creation. The risk of losing or forgetting the importance of memorable places lead to the importance of understanding the theory that lies behind the creation of these places and their impact on collective memory. Mathematical and astronomical principles have been encrypted through the construction of the pyramids and other ancient representative ensembles; Cicero envisioned the concept of memory palaces; Camillo imagines memory as a theatre; Saint Augustin connects the concept of “sancta memoria” to the concept of “aedificatio”<sup>5</sup>, stating that the

5. “A soul places far from God creates a kind of machine, that by its means [the soul] may be lifted to God.” Gregory the Great, “Expositio in canticum canticorum”, 3.14-15, quoted in Carruthers, 1998, 81

science of building thoughts is reflected through the science of building architecture; Gregory the Great, then, describes the memory as “*machina mentis*”, a device of the mind able to carry the consciousness to divinity. However, it was not until the Renaissance that architecture was considered relevant to physical conservation within cultural patrimony as a wilful act. Yet, the place, as a space for the memory, manifested itself continuously, as a way of memorising through architecture. The functioning of collective memory as a radiography of the cultural – identity matrix can be identified through its mapping (through architecture, implicitly and through arts, explicitly). The immateriality of its namespace has often lead to reducing it to the cartographic material, but one could axiomatically affirm that each consciousness represents a memory, that we are living memories of our culture (Fig. 1). The potential memories within Canaletto’s works have inspired the “Analogous City” of Aldo Rossi. 30 Years later, Christine Boyer criticises the modernist city, now displaced from the coherent discourse of the memory and history and responsible of the nihilism of the idea of an interpretative and cultural device, able to “translate memories and traditions into meaningful contemporary forms”<sup>6</sup>. Memory, thus, describes the function of a metalanguage in the study of architectural and urbanistic language. Continuing the structuralist and poststructuralist point of view, the structures of the memory, yet to be conquered from a neuroscientific point of view, could represent a new paradigm in the theorization of architecture.



Fig. 2  
Collective Consciousness  
© 2015 Ramona Costea

The place as a space for the memory also implies the reverse perspective of recovering messages and memories encrypted through the above-mentioned processes, in order to reconnect humanity with its memory, with its past, present and future, understood as a “fountain” (in the world of the unconscious, Romanian Philosopher Lucian Blaga identifies three time horizons: the “waterfall” time, related to the past, the “fountain” time, related to the future, and the “river” time, related to the present. Regarding his categorizing, memory) of tradition, spirituality, history, culture and identity of a civilization. Aggressively reacting to the abundance of

6. Boyer, 2001, 28

forms without substance, modernism alienated itself from everything that constituted history and tradition in previous times. It dislocated the individual, with its consciousness, thus emerging an undeniable syncope within collective consciousness. Also generated through a reactive phenomenon, radical historicist tendencies have altered the perceiving of memory and identity in the plenitude of their semantics.

The study upon memory combines three approaches, which, intertwined, generate a complex analysis upon the cultural memory. The first point of view is generated by the attitude of remembrance and defining the archiving, the cultural-identity, and the historical function of the memory. The second approach is related to the manifestation of the memory in the present tense and the third point of view is oriented to the potentiality of the memory and its force to discover and enrich the identity of a culture, its becoming and alternating future.

Places of remembrance range from the monument, the memorial or the museum to any other form of building a collective memory. The “built” memory represents a wilful act of collective consciousness. The gesture of edification itself bears the value of a ritual, to embody and coherently put in words flows of meanings. They empower existences that lay beyond life, death, and even memory, imprinting even on a subconscious level. Their dispersion throughout public spaces mark the historical discourse of a culture’s becoming, at least in theory.

Yet, the architecture of the memory does not rely only on its galleries and monuments. The meanings that transcend towards long-term memory are not restricted by the criteria of bearing a message. Memory itself occurs in our day-to-day life and is strongly impacted by the subjective nature of humanity in general. Our day-to-day happenings shape our memories. The city, judged by its impact on *collective memory*, emphasizes the procedural study of its evolution. Often, the contemporary city is not centred on the human dimension. It is hard to say to what extent this tope can be viewed as the most complex result of the existence of a culture and to what extent it defines the identity of its inhabitants, provides them with a sense of belonging, appropriation. Tradition, in its timelessness circumscription to the city, comes from a timeline with strong cultural substrate and presents, and manifests itself in the present foretelling scenarios of the future. The contemporary city risks the disjointing of tradition and memory from everyday modern life. Reinvented in modernism, “accelerated” and more crowded in recent times, the city has had numerous scenarios of reinventing itself. Assuming the complexity of current city requires its mental reconstruction and reinterpretation through memory. Mental maps, psycho-geography are known concepts of dealing with the hyperspace of our city.

*The sequences of nowadays* capture collective memory circumscribed to the city by defining three instances – residents, communities and non-

-residents. The city's memory is perceived through its constitutive elements – routs, fronts, urban units (districts), nodes, landmarks, and boundaries (historical stratifications, plan-metric and vertical). These constituents make up, firstly, the endogenous image (Marius-Cristian Neacsu) corresponding to inhabitant and community, and secondly, the exogenous image (Marius-Cristian Neacsu) corresponding to un-inhabitant, the perception by tourists. The instances of recollection become points of incidence between endogenous and exogenous dimensions of the city. Places marked by interventions made without consideration for the substance of spiritual and cultural substrates that memory implies are deserted places. These also constitute a point of incidence between the exogenous and endogenous memory, to a lesser extent than the first, but are fascinating through the anti-memory impact and dystopian character.

*Creative memory*, enhanced by its *oneiric and utopian character*, is a ludic or imaginative reconstruction of known realities. It polarizes around the creative act as a generator and regenerator of memory. The dream is a meta-reality in which space and the universe are deconstructed and reconstructed by non-physical laws, specific to human subjectivism. Throughout history, the manifestation of creation through oneiric leitmotif has constituted a new type of memory, usually attributed to utopian visions. The act of creation is doubled, therefore, by the act of recreation. The recreation of space in contemporary times plays a crucial role in the recovery of history, through what Romanian architect Augustin Ioan called “virtual heritage”. Thus, the act of “re-creation” manifests itself in possible ways of recovering memory through heritage.

The final part of the study suggests a method to redefine the identity of architecture through cultural memory. The memory represents a space for the recovery of the values of society: consciousness is constantly remodelled by memory and memory survives only by the will of consciousness to impose its values. To survive the time consuming and perishable destiny, consciousness maps out memory with the act of creation, be it of artistic nature or not. The metaphor of a city's “becoming” is the metaphor of consciousness's “becoming”, which centres memory as a generative spirit, “genius loci” of identity substance. The “becomings” manifest themselves as acts of creation, not limited to the boundaries of artistic vision. Architecture represents the synthesis of numerous dimensions, which we will symbolically separate into mathematical perspective and poetical perspective. The “becoming” of architecture space constitutes, generically speaking, the synthesis of the significance that it can portray, which, through a coefficient of remanence within the realm of memory, have the potential to refract through various filters of active modelling that define memory. An architectural space that has gone through the process of “becoming” implies

the physical and metaphysical crossing, an almost ritualistic gesture in the process of interchanging memory. In the Romanian context, architecture can regain the values of cultural memory by re-establishing the dialogue with philosophy and literature, as obvious proponents for the perpetuation and individualization of cultural identity on the universal scale. The stylistic matrix defined by the philosophy of Lucian Blaga represents an important point for redefining the potential routes for local architecture.

The interpretation of architecture by using revelatory metaphors emphasizes the importance of poetic language in architecture. The “poetization of architecture”, not limited to lyrical interpretation but to a spectrum of syncretic composition, semantic and subjective, concretely formulates the principles of remanence within the bounds of collective memory. This poetization also implies considering architecture a poetic art, doubling the architectural discourse with a proustian depth every architect should have. As a man of architectural language, the architect must also be a man of letters (as Le Corbusier also stated once), capable of deciphering and encrypting metaphors. Poetic language constitutes the main avenue of understanding architecture for both its creator and its receiver, in a coagulated will of memory, culture, spirituality and identity. The poetics of architecture embody its subjective nature and its affective dimension.

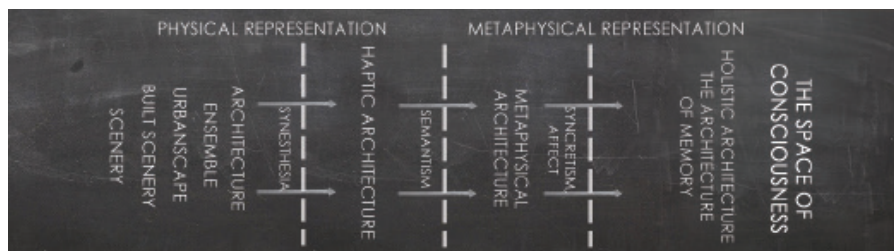


Fig. 3  
The architecture of memory  
© 2015 Ramona Costea

The reinterpretation of architecture through the way in which it is memorised and the redefining of memory as architectural meta-language require a reconnection to the identity of consciousness and culture. This study strives to analyse this potential method of reinterpretation of architecture and memory, starting with the simple act of memorization and following through to its philosophical and metaphysical complexities.

In conclusion, this gigantesque consciousness, whose rhythm and hidden geometry operates as an artful cryptographer of time embodied through architecture, must constitute an essential part of every signified, without altering the experience of the new, but empowering it and potentiating it with value, coherence and continuity.

## References

- Boyer, Christine M., 2001. *The City of Collective Memory. Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*, London: MIT Press
- Cantacuzino, G.M., 1993. *Letters to Simon – The Second Letter*, Cluj-Napoca: Dacia
- Carruthers, Mary, 1998. *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the making of Images*, London: Cambridge University Press
- Rossi, Aldo, 1998. *Autobiografia Científica*, Barcelona: Editorial Gustavo Gili
- Vais, Dana, 2008. *Arhi-texte: în căutarea unei noi modernități: eseuri de arhitectură = Arhi-texts: in search of a new modernity: architecture essays* Bucharest: Arhitext Design Foundation



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira



# An autonomist view on the ethical criticism of architecture

**Ricardo Miguel**

LanCog, Centro de Filosofia, Universidade de Lisboa  
Centro de Filosofia, Faculdade de Letras  
Alameda da Universidade  
1600-214 Lisboa  
Portugal  
ricardomiguel{at}campus.ul.pt

## **Abstract**

It is a fact that there is ethical criticism about art. Art critics, the general public and even artists point out moral flaws in artworks while evaluating them. Philosophers, however, have maintained a hot debate on the meaning of such criticism. This debate can be understood as a disagreement about the kind of relation between the artistic value of artworks and their alleged moral value. While some claim that moral value can contribute to artistic value (moralism), others claim that there cannot be such a contribution (autonomism). Since at least some works of architecture are artworks, that debate also concerns architecture. A moderate moralist view claims that *some* works of architecture have moral flaws/merits that bear on their artistic evaluation. In an apparently promising version, the contention is that some moral flaws/merits are aesthetically relevant. In this paper I argue against such contention and defend an autonomist view. Following some taxonomy remarks I distinguish the views in the debate and present two points in favour of autonomism: its simplicity and not having the burden of proof. Then I discuss Carroll's merited response argument for moralism and I argue that in its best interpretation either it begs the question against autonomism or it is compatible with it. I conclude with some possible objections that may help further investigations on the subject.

## **Keywords**

Architecture; autonomism; ethical criticism of art; philosophy of art; moralism

## 1. Ethical criticism of art and its philosophical debate\*

Ethical criticism of art is the practice of ethical evaluation of artworks. These are often considered good/bad or better/worse in virtue of some moral properties. For example, a story where the hero is a wicked person is considered to be ethically flawed, but the one where the evil character is punished is ethically approved. This kind of judgements is widespread and assumed to be artistically relevant. And they are not specific to art critics since the general public and even artists engage in ethical criticism. And even though, like Carroll said, there has been, throughout the twentieth century, “a gap between theory and practice with respect to the ethical criticism of the arts”,<sup>1</sup> it is now safe to say that philosophers are trying to bridge this gap. Still, they disagree about how this should be done. This disagreement, then, gives rise to the debate on whether and how ethical criticism is relevant to artistic evaluation.

I take the philosophical debate on ethical criticism to be essentially about answering the question *can moral value contribute to the artistic value of artworks?* In a similar way, Gaut shapes the debate around the question “are the ethical flaws (or merits) of works of art also aesthetic flaws (or merits) in them?”<sup>2</sup> Although values and properties are two different things, I will ignore this difference here for it is commonly assumed in the debate that artworks may have moral properties and that these determine a corresponding value. The issue is rather if moral properties or, as in the question above, moral value, also help to determine artistic value. This is why I will freely move from talk about properties to talk about values and vice versa. However, since, in this context, scepticism about values is not even a view to take into account, I believe that Gaut’s question depicts the problem in a restrictive way. If some ethical property is identical to, or part of, some aesthetic property, then surely moral value can contribute to artistic value. But this contribution might occur even if there is no identity nor mereological relation between the properties. Unless there is some additional argument that precludes such contribution, I believe it is better to pursue the more general question.

## 2. Taxonomy remarks

There are two main answers to the question above: (1) moral value can

---

\* Firstly I thank Maribel and Tomás for organizing this conference. I am also thankful to the audience for helpful questions and comments on my talk. Lastly, this written version of my talk was concluded under the FCT Studentship SFRH/BD/107907/2015 with the financial support from POPH and FSE.

1. Carroll 2000, 350.

2. Gaut 2013, 394.

contribute to artistic value – Moralism; (2) moral value cannot contribute to artistic value – Autonomism. These two views are usually divided into more specific theses, each one having a radical and a moderate version.<sup>3</sup> Radical moralism states that moral flaws in artworks always count as aesthetic defects in them, while the moderate version only makes the particular claim that moral flaws in artworks sometimes count as aesthetic defects in them. On the other hand, radical autonomism says that it is nonsense to ask if moral value can contribute to the artistic value of artworks, just like it is nonsense to ask e.g. what is the square root of a building. It is a category mistake. The point of radical autonomism is that moral value and aesthetic value are so independent of each other that thinking about their interaction is meaningless. As for moderate autonomism, despite accepting the meaningfulness of the question, it insists that the two values are independent.

A first taxonomy remark is that there are good reasons to deny that radical autonomism is a relevant view to this debate. Firstly, such a view does not seem to have any supporters. As Giovannelli points out, the foremost figures of autonomism do not fit under Carroll's 'radical' tag.<sup>4</sup> Following Giovannelli, another, more significant reason to set Carroll's radical autonomism aside is that it provides no answer to the question that frames the debate.<sup>5</sup> Claiming that the question is nonsense is not really an answer to it. To be sure, even granting that such claim represents a legitimate logical view, it is not one on a par with all the others that agree with the meaningfulness of the question. And the interesting, lively debate is about these last views' different answers to a sound question, not about the soundness of the question itself.

A second remark is that I part ways with Giovannelli regarding his characterization of autonomism. Even though he dismisses Carroll's radical autonomism, he preserves the 'radical' predicate to describe the view that I simply call 'autonomism', that is, the view that accepts (2) above. As a consequence, we disagree about the characterization of moderate moralism as a view "allowing for the ethical status of artworks to bear, on occasion, on their artistic value, but claiming that it always does so in an unsystematic way."<sup>6</sup> Under the approach I am favouring, this would be a moralist view since it accepts the answer (1). Giovannelli, in contrast, takes it as an autonomist view because he believes that the relevant property to

---

3. I am following Carroll's 2000 characterization of the views.

4. See Giovannelli 2007, 118-119.

5. Giovannelli presents his taxonomy under three principles and Carroll's radical autonomism does not satisfy the principle of ethical amenability. This principle says that we ought to look at theories that "at least agree on the fact that art can be subject to ethical evaluation" (Giovannelli 2007, 118).

6. Giovannelli 2007, 122.

distinguish between the basic views is not the acceptance of (1) or (2) but whether there is or not a systematic contribution of moral value to the artistic value. Instead, I believe that differences in such systematicity only allow for distinctions between moralist views. Otherwise we would be using the terms ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ with different meanings in relation to autonomism and moralism.<sup>7</sup>

The last taxonomy remark is about immoralism, which is the view that positive moral value contributes negatively to the artistic value and that negative moral value contributes positively to the artistic value. Giovannelli dismisses a radical version of immoralism and says that a moderate version is “germane to this discussion”.<sup>8</sup> However, in my view radical immoralism is not irrelevant to this debate. It may be a very unappealing view to defend but, contrarily to Carroll’s radical moralism, it provides an answer of the sort that is relevant to this debate.

So, to summarize, if we are trying to answer if moral value can contribute to the artistic value of artworks, then there are two basic views, moralism and autonomism, which offer a positive and a negative answer, respectively. Moreover, moralism can be divided into two more specific views, according to the quantity or the generality of the relation between the moral and artistic values: the radical view claims that the relation holds for all kinds of artworks while the moderate claims that the relation only holds for some kinds of artworks. In more detail, moralist views can also be distinguished by the quality of the relation between the two values: it can be symmetric, where moral merits and moral defects correspond, respectively, to artistic merits and defects; it can be inverse, where moral merits and moral defects correspond, respectively, to artistic defects and merits; and it can be contextual, where the context will determine whether moral merits and moral defects will count positively or negatively to artistic value, which means, using the taxonomy just given, that the relation between both values is not always symmetric or inverse.<sup>9</sup>

---

7. Regarding moralism the terms distinguish the generality of the relation (systematic, in this case) between both values, being radical when it concerns all types of artworks and moderate when it concerns only some. On the other hand, in the case of autonomism, ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ are not used to distinguish generality since radical autonomism accepts no contribution of moral value to the artistic value, be it systematic or not.

8. Giovannelli 2007, 122.

9. See Gaut 2013, 397, where he considers immoralism and contextualism as the same view. In the light of the remarks above these are two different views, although they are both forms of moralism. See also Baumberger 2015, to whom I owe the “symmetric” and “inverse” jargon. I should also mention that I do not claim that this taxonomy is original. Most of it was already present in the literature and these remarks are a mere rearranging of the relevant views according to the central question from section 1.

### 3. Ethical criticism in architecture

Turning our attention to architecture, I believe that the great majority of works are buildings with little or nothing to do with art. Most of them are homes and workplaces. Some of us are fortunate enough to live or work in good buildings, that is, buildings capable of providing shelter and comfort beyond the level of basic needs. Also, I think that the really lucky ones inhabit artworks or have their daily occupations inside them. Fortune aside, the point is that even though not every work of architecture is an artwork, some of them are. Now it is certain that trying to offer a detailed explanation for this will necessarily involve a conception of art. And it is well known that the debate about what is art stands on its own and is much more demanding than the ethical criticism debate. Still, it seems rather uncontroversial that, say, Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum or Gaudí's Casa Batlló are artworks. This, then, is enough to extend the debate between moralism and autonomism to architecture.

According to Baumberger we can morally evaluate works of architecture in two ways: i) through a work's causal impact on well-being and environment during planning, construction and use; ii) and through its symbolic meaning or endorsement of moral attitudes.<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that, e.g., a house can cause quite an impact, and not just on the lives of those who inhabit it. All those involved in its construction are also affected. The architect, for example, may be happier with a few more digits in his bank account or maybe with another entry in his portfolio. And if we suppose that health and safety rules were broken, some of the workers would be better off if they had declined that particular job. Furthermore, if the materials used are harsh to the environment, then future generations will be affected as well. Accounting these and other less obvious causal impacts of architecture will, one assumes, lead to the conclusion that morality is really important when it comes to the evaluation of architecture. And, in a broad sense, it is. Architecture involves actions and these are morally relevant (or some at least are). Nonetheless, the debate about ethical criticism is concerned with artistic value and there is no such thing in architecture in general. What this means is that by looking at the causal impact of architecture we are taking it as an action in general and not specifically as art. Consequently, we need to focus on the moral assessment of architecture *qua* art. This is why I will ignore the causal impact of a work as a way in which we can morally evaluate works of architecture and instead I will concentrate on the work's symbolic meaning.<sup>11</sup>

10. See Baumberger 2015, 184-185. In my point i) I am merging Baumberger's first three ways of morally evaluating works of architecture.

11. With this agrees Gaut: "Ethical flaws should not be understood in terms of the causal powers of works to affect audiences (...) rather, we should understand flaws in terms of the intrinsic

### 3.1. Two points for autonomism

Before I go on to consider and criticize a well known argument for moralism, I would like to present two points that favour autonomism in this debate. The first one is about the burden of proof and second is about theoretical simplicity. Although important, these points are not in any way decisive and function more as advantages that contribute to an overall comparison between the theories.

Starting with the burden of proof, we can say that moralists accept a restricted autonomist thesis: that in some cases moral value does not bear on artistic value; so, they agree with the autonomist thesis that artistic value can be independent of moral value. Therefore, given that the autonomist view is a generalization of what both parties accept, and also that moralism implies the interaction between the two values, it is moralism that needs substantially different support to it. This, then, is why the burden of proof is on the moralist.

The moralist might reply that the autonomist view also demands additional evidence because it implies the universal claim that denies the interaction between moral value and artistic value. And this is right, but the relevant difference is that moralism, but not autonomism, needs evidence of a kind that goes beyond what is already assumed. That the two values sometimes interact, if it is a fact, it is one over and above what both theories agree. On the other hand, the autonomist can be pictured as saying that what moralists accept in some cases – that the moral and the artistic values do not interact – actually apply to every case. Thus, in this sense, the autonomist thesis requires nothing substantially new to the debate. Its initial plausibility remains until moralists are able to provide convincing evidence for their claim.

The second point that favours autonomism is its relative theoretical simplicity. If I am right about the taxonomy remarks from the last section, then there is only room for one autonomist view while there are many ways of being a moralist. As described above, moralist views differ according to the structure of the relation between the two values. Hence, we have symmetric, inverse and contextual moralisms. Moralist views can also differ about the relative weight given to the two values, that is, about whether moral value always worth more, always worth less or, say, if it depends on the kind of artwork and/or on the moral properties involved. As one may suspect, these issues are tricky to tackle. Additionally, owing to the varieties of moralism, moralists need not only to argue against autonomism, but they also need to argue against competing moralist views.<sup>12</sup> As such,

---

properties of works.” (Gaut 2013, 395) And one of these properties is the artwork’s symbolic meaning, which may involve moral attitudes.

12. Jacobson 1997, for example, argues against moderate autonomism from a moralist view (immoralism).

having a more demanding conceptual apparatus, all those tricky questions to address and also various opponents to argue against, moralism lacks simplicity when compared to autonomism.

### 3.2. The merited response argument and replies

I will now discuss Carroll's version of the merited response argument (MRA) for moralism. Here is the argument:

- (1) "Securing audience uptake to the responses a work prescribes is a leading feature of any artwork's agenda (...) [and] failing to secure uptake, then, is an aesthetic defect in an artwork".
  - (2) Some artworks prescribe emotional moral responses.
  - (3) "An artwork may fail to secure the emotional responses it mandates (...) by being immoral."
- ∴ "Sometimes a moral defect in an artwork can be an aesthetic flaw".<sup>13</sup>

The intuitive idea of the MRA is that in some cases moral properties are aesthetically relevant. Consider, for example, *Volkshalle* (the people's hall), a work by the Nazi architect Albert Speer that was part of Hitler's project to rebuild Berlin after the war. For obvious reasons this work was never built. But from its model and concept we can say that this building was conceived to praise the Aryan superiority, represented in the huge, non-human proportions of its dome. These aesthetical features of *Volkshalle*, then, are assumed to be connected with racism, which, in turn, *somehow*, blemishes the appreciation of the work.

Returning to the MRA, I think that the conclusion is somewhat misleading because it omits the connection between morality and aesthetics which figures in premiss (3). This connection is where the aesthetic relevance of moral properties comes from, namely, their effect on audience response. However, the conclusion ignores this and states only that it is possible to have an identity between moral properties and aesthetic properties. Therefore, as presented, the MRA is invalid: one thing is immorality *leading* to an aesthetic flaw (through failure to secure audience uptake); another is immorality *being* an aesthetic flaw.

So, in order to maintain the argument's intuitive idea in a valid form, the MRA needs some rephrasing. Here is a more adequate version of the argument:

- (4) Failing to get the prescribed emotional moral response is an aesthetic defect in an artwork.

13. Carroll 2000, 377.

- (5) In some cases, an artwork being immoral explains its failure to get the prescribed emotional moral response.  
 ∴ In some cases, an artwork being immoral explains an aesthetic defect in an artwork.

Now that the validity problem is solved, it may look like the autonomist must reply by showing that at least one of the premisses is false. I will consider this case but I also think that other, more interesting replies are available to the autonomist. A first thing he might say is that the MRA presupposes, in (4), that artists' intentions about the consequences of their work in the audience are relevant to artistic value. This makes moralism incompatible with theories of art that deny such a relevance. Although this alone is not enough to dismiss (4), it might be considered an unnecessary limitation to place on one's theory of art. In addition, to defend that (4) is false he might ask us to consider the following: think of a great architectural work of art; now suppose that the author had immoral intentions regarding the work that no one knew about; would you say that, after all, you were mistaken about the work's artistic evaluation? If not, does it become a worse work of art after his intentions become known? I admit that intuitions can go both ways here, but these are questions that the moralist needs to address while the autonomist is able to avoid them and offer a parsimonious explanation for the case. He can simply say that the author's intentions are part of his moral character and, accordingly, the moral blame is on the author, not on his artwork.

A more damaging reply consists in arguing that the explanation relation involved in premiss (5) and in the conclusion can have two different readings, but that none of them serves the moralist thesis. On the first reading, the moral property is, by itself, the *explanans*. If this were so, aesthetic properties would play no explanatory role and, as a consequence, the moral property would have itself an aesthetic defect or it would be simultaneously aesthetic. The problem is that this begs the question since it assumes that moralism is true. Maybe moral properties have aesthetic defects, but this requires argument just like moralism.<sup>14</sup> On the second reading of the explanation relation, the moral property is only a part of the *explanans* – its role consists in causing aesthetic properties. The trouble for the moralist is that now the autonomist will be happy to agree that *in this way* moral properties contribute to the artistic value of artworks. Yet, he will insist that such contribution is not *qua* moral value. Ultimately, aesthetic properties are what is relevant to artistic evaluation, not moral value by itself.<sup>15</sup>

14. The following argument might be used by the moralist: every aesthetic defect contributes to the artistic value; some moral properties of artworks have aesthetic defects; *ergo*, some moral properties of artworks contribute to the artistic value. Notice that the autonomist may accept the first premiss. But then he cannot accept the second one because it would lead to the conclusion that moralism is true.

15. These two readings are not a problem of the explanation relation itself. The problem remains philosophy @LISBON



#### 4. Possible objections and conclusion

I will now discuss some possible objections to what I have been defending. In doing so I am not trying to bulletproof my view on this debate. This would require a much more in depth discussion than the one I am able to offer here. In a sense, in this last discussion I suggest some ways that opponents might explore to enrich the debate. At the same time, considering these objections will also be useful to clarify some of the points I made.

One possible objection is that I have dismissed too lightly utility considerations concerning artistic evaluation (in section 3). Someone might say that even architecture *as art* is also about utility and, in this manner, its causal impact cannot be ignored in ethical evaluation. Maybe this could provide another way to bring ethical and artistic evaluations closer. My worry with this approach is that by considering a work's consequences we face epistemic difficulties that might lead to scepticism about artistic evaluation. For instance, we would need to discriminate which consequences are relevant (all, foreseen, or foreseeable?). This seems hard to achieve, but even assuming that such work is done we could still wonder, for any given artwork, if some significant consequences were not accounted for. Consequently, we might end up as sceptics about artistic evaluation. In the end we would have to choose between pursuing this approach and somehow get around its drawbacks or abandon it in favour of a simpler type of evaluation, like the aesthetics-based one.

Another objection consists in claiming that it is sufficient for moralists that moral properties cause aesthetic properties. For this to be true, my argument at the end of section 3.2 cannot be right and the opponent needs to show why. Besides this, he also needs to frame such a reply against Carroll's moderate moralism, since Carroll recently presented his view by saying that "sometimes an ethical defect in an artwork can also count as – i.e., be identical with – an aesthetic defect."<sup>16</sup> With this I am not assuming that Carroll's authority about how to describe moderate moralism cannot be challenged. Rather, this is reminder that there might be good reasons to talk about the identity of those properties instead of there being just a causal relation between them. If the relevance of this difference is yet to be discussed, then this is something that might be explored to bring about new and interesting results.

The last objection I will consider has to do with practical implications of autonomism. Someone may argue that if architects as artists embrace autonomism, they will be careless about the morality of their artworks. And, arguably, this is dangerous. But this objection misses the point. It is based on a poor understanding of the autonomist thesis as being about

---

even when 'explains' is replaced by 'leads to' or 'causes'.

16. Carroll 2015, 151-52.

prescribing actions when, in fact, it is solely about values. Moreover, in practice, architecture continues to be subject to moral assessment as an action in general. A building can be admirable as an artwork and yet terrible regarding the actions which caused it – it would have been right not to build it even at the cost of losing a fine work of art.

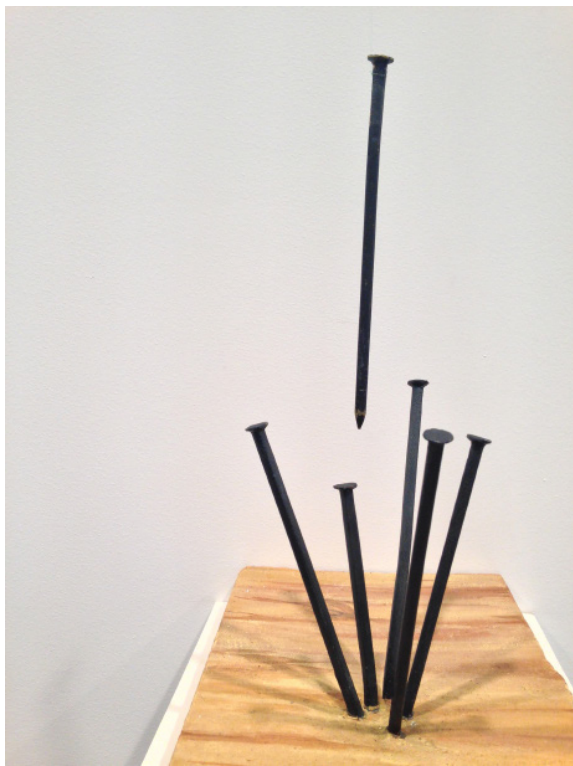
To conclude I will just underline the key points that I have defended. I started by presenting what is the ethical criticism of art and its philosophical debate. In accordance with some authors my approach is centred on the question *can moral value contribute to the artistic value of artworks?* The varieties of answers to this question led me to present a taxonomy of the views on this debate that is slightly different from the ones already available.

Then I showed that the debate between moralism and autonomism also applies to architecture since at least some works of architecture are artworks. Before discussing an argument for moralism I offered two points in favour of autonomism: its simplicity and not having the burden of proof. These points should be viewed only as advantages that affect an overall comparison between the theories. While discussing the merited response argument I concluded that, in its original formulation, the argument is invalid. In order to give the idea behind the argument some more credit I rephrased it into a valid form. Yet, even with this adjustment the autonomist has at least two kinds of replies: firstly, he can argue that premiss (4) is false; secondly, he can say that there are two readings of the explanation relation involved in (4), both of them leading to an unsuccessful argument for moralism. The problem with the first reading is that the premiss already assumes moralism to be true. And the problem with the second reading is that it is harmless against autonomism.

Finally, I am aware that moralists have other arguments on their behalf. I choose to discuss only the MRA because it seems to be a staple among moralists and my goal was never to offer a comprehensive refutation of moralism. Rather, I wanted to present an autonomist view and how it fares relatively well against moralism. Even though I am convinced that the advantages of autonomism would retain their salience on a thorough comparison with moralism, the ethical criticism debate is still lacking such a work.

## References

- Baumberger, Christoph. 2015. "The Ethical Criticism of Architecture: In Defense of Moderate Moralism." *Architecture Philosophy* 1 (2): 179-197.
- Carroll, Noël. 2000. "Art and ethical criticism: An overview of recent directions of research." *Ethics* 110 (2): 350-387. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/233273>.
- Carroll, Noël. 2001. "Moderate moralism." In *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays*, 293-306. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (originally published in 1996 *British Journal of Aesthetics* 36: 223-238).
- Carroll, Noël. 2015. "Architecture and Ethics: Autonomy, Architecture, Art." *Architecture Philosophy* 1 (2): 139-156.
- Gaut, Berys. 2013. "Art and ethics." In *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic Lopes, 394-403. London: Routledge. (1st ed. 2001, 341-352.)
- Giovannelli, Alessandro. 2007. "The Ethical Criticism of Art: A New Mapping of the Territory." *Philosophia* 35 (2): 117-127. DOI 10.1007/s11406-007-9053-0
- Jacobson, Daniel. 1997. "In praise of immoral art." *Philosophical Topics* 25 (1): 155-199.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# Is Space a part of being? Reassessing space through Japanese thought

Ricardo Santos Alexandre  
ISCTE-IUL  
rfsae@iscte-iul.pt

## Abstract

This paper adopts a hermeneutical approach to Japanese thought, in the light of Heideggerian thought, in order to reassess the way we understand space. In a first stage, a few ideas concerning Japanese language and aesthetics will be briefly addressed for a better understanding of how space is embraced in Japanese thought and culture (experience precedes description). We will then turn to the two main concepts: *fūdo* (*milieu*) and *basho* (place), coined by two 20th century philosophers: Watsuji Tetsurō and Nishida Kitarō. The logic behind *fūdo* is that a true awareness of space is built not from thinking about it – since we are already objectifying it and, therefore, understanding ourselves detached from it –, but from being in it; experiencing it. The concept of *basho* represents a more logical argument and allows us to focus on the relation between the particular and the universal; or, as we will see, between *being* and space. What we can conclude from the articulation and interpretation of these two concepts is that space is certainly more than just a pure geometrical concept or a receptacle where human beings exist – it can also be thought of as a part of *being*.

## Keywords

Space; Being; Japanese thought; Ontology

Human beings are creatures of distance! And only by way of the real primordial distance that the human in his transcendence establishes toward all beings does the true nearness of things begin to grow in him. (Heidegger 1984, 221)

What exactly is space? And how can we define it? Probably, these questions will only be partially answered at the end of this paper; and, apart from the general notion of ‘space as a part of being’ that pervades this paper, answer them is not my purpose. Mainly because in trying to do so, tasks analogous to those required for interrogations such as ‘What it means to be a human being?’ or ‘What is good and bad?’ will certainly come up. The problem with all these notions – space included – is that defining them or theorizing about them might lead us towards a different direction than the one we wanted to go in the first place: the abstract. This does not mean that we should stop trying to think about space, but that the best way to know and understand it is through lived experience, through constant subjective and inter-subjective interpretation of ourselves in our relation to it. What I say or think about the word ‘space’ is near meaningless if not anchored to a concrete experience of it.

The role of experience in space is first credited to Kant for the significant leap he gave by focusing on bodily orientation and experience, thus breaking with the polarity between absolute and relative space. His insights were then developed by Husserl, who expanded the focus of spatial experience from the body to, what he called, the ‘near-sphere’ (*nah-sphäre*): “the proximal place or places in which I *am* or to which I can go”<sup>1</sup> – space had turned into a kinesthetic dimension. Later, this focus on kinesthesia was reviewed by Merleau-Ponty who elevated the experiential dimension of space to a level embedded not in one’s body, but in the entire perceptual field. In later works he reacts against the excessive focus (in Kant and Husserl) on “bodily bilaterality” (two eyes, two ears, two hands); for it led to a “fragmentation of being” and “a possibility for separation”<sup>2</sup>. Probably due to this “danger” of objectifying the body in order to invoke spatial experience, Heidegger did not apply it as a means to his discourse on space<sup>3</sup>. One interesting notion he uses when treating space is “making room” (*einräumen*): an ontological aspect of *Dasein* that consists in the ways he creates a space that allows him certain actions. With this, he turns *homogeneous space* into a secondary dimension of *spatiality*. In Casey’s words<sup>4</sup>, “There can be no such homogeneous medium as space unless room as

1. Casey 1997, 219–220

2. Merleau-Ponty as quoted by Casey 1997, 236–37

3. Casey 1997, 243

4. Casey 1997, 252

been made within a given region of the ready-to-hand". If we acknowledge that human beings are spatial – always already-in-the-world, and constantly “making room” – then space can be thought of as the medium through which human perception is constructed.

Nowadays, the role of experience is becoming crucial for any account of space. Even though, we still tend to build complex and intricate theories of space, even when focusing on body experience, which tend to over-objectify it. In the case of Japanese thought, until the encounter with the West in 1868, there was no problematization of space. Philosophy and Aesthetics were not thought of as separated disciplines, but as one single way to improve the self through the refinement of the sensuous experience of things – and not their exhaustive description. The word used today for space, *kūkan* 空間, was only coined after the referred encounter as a translation of the western abstract and measurable notion of space. Prior to that, what we find in Japanese traditional thought is a conception of space primarily based on the word *ma* 間 ‘interval’ – a fundamental notion of the Japanese *sense* of space: space grasped not through description, but through direct perception of the sensible phenomena<sup>5</sup>.

The encounter of Japanese and Western philosophy brought up their differences while, at the same time, gave both sides new tools of thinking. The two philosophers discussed below were both living during an era of intense intercultural exchange with the Western traditions of thought and science when they wrote these works. Watsuji Tetsurō’s *fūdo* is embraced here as an ethical concept and shows us a reluctance towards defining or theorizing space or nature; Nishida Kitarō’s logic of *basho*, on the other hand, is helpful mainly from a pure logical perspective and from his account on the ‘particular-universal’ relation.

In the following arguments I will try to avoid theorizing too much about the nature of space itself while proposing a new way to think about it, drawing a few stimulating insights from a few sources of Japanese thought. We will first begin our analysis with a brief look into both Japanese language (especially the word *ma* 間 ‘interval’) and aesthetic ideals, and their value for an account of space based on experience rather than description. Then, entering the realm of philosophy, Watsuji Tetsurō’s *fūdo* and Nishida Kitarō’s *basho* will be presented, each followed by an interpretation of their logics. Both these concepts are not problematizations of space, but hold some interesting clues that will help us reevaluate how we think about it in relation to *being*. But first let me define briefly what I understand as *being* is this paper.

---

5. Nitschke 1966

### A brief clarification of *being*

Before beginning our analysis, there are a few ideas that should be clarified regarding the notion of *being* used here. Heidegger's being-in-the-world, or *Dasein*, presupposes a being already thrown up in the world before he starts to make meaning out of it. Furthermore, as he puts it, "Dasein is already ahead of itself"<sup>6</sup>. This means that one characteristic of *Dasein* is to be concerned with the possibility of its own being. In other words, being-ahead-of-itself is a condition of being that directs him towards his own (future) possibilities of being. This structure of *being* is comprised in the notion of 'care' (*sorge*); not emotionally (like worry, etc.), but ontologically, as *being towards*<sup>7</sup>.

The way he addresses this dimension of *being* is an example of his need to reformulate language to convey his message. Nonetheless, the fundamental idea behind it is similar to Husserl's 'intentionality': the idea that 'to be conscious is to be conscious of something'; there is always something towards which we *are* in the world. The difference between Heidegger and Husserl is that the former, although never using such a term, builds his own notion of intentionality by refusing to focus on consciousness itself, but on a level prior to our being-conscious-of-consciousness<sup>8</sup>. For Heidegger "our fundamental sense of things is not as objects of perception and knowledge, but rather as instrumental objects that fit naturally in our ordinary practical activity"<sup>9</sup> – it is fundamentally a praxis-oriented account of *being*.

Nonetheless, what is important to retain here is *being* not as some kind of attribute embedded in the physical subject, but as a continuous process of intentional "circumspection" (*umsicht*) that constitutes that subject's own existence. Charles Guignon<sup>10</sup> summarizes it: "As ex-sisting (from *ex-sistere*, standing outside itself) *Dasein* is always already "out there," engaged in undertakings, directed toward its realization" – and this is the essence of *being* I wish to emphasize in this paper.

### Japanese perception: from language to aesthetics

There are two fundamental aspects that I want to focus regarding space in Japanese perception. The first one is the Chinese character *ma* 間, 'interval'. This is a very significant word in Japanese architecture, arts and ethics, and no account of space or place in Japanese thought can ignore

6. Heidegger 1962, 236

7. Heidegger 1962, 237

8. see Crowell 2005

9. Hall 1993, 125

10. C. Guignon 2005, 397



its relevance. It has been rendered as “sense of place”, “not as something that is created by compositional elements, [but] the thing that takes place in the imagination of the human who experiences those elements”<sup>11</sup>. Its ideogram depicts the sun 日 showing through an open gate 門. Thus, aside from ‘interval’, the space that this character implies is not an empty space, but one that establishes the very possibility of relating to something – in this case: the sun. It is a *relational space*, a space that is not just a measurable area, but the very *possibility of relation*. In this sense, and as Nitschke<sup>12</sup> writes, it “fully expresses the two simultaneous components of a sense of place: the objective, given aspect and the subjective, felt aspect”. We can also identify this concept in (a) the *sumi-e* monochromatic painting, where, rather than an object’s detailed depiction, a great amount of space is left blank to invite suggestion and imagination<sup>13</sup>; in (b) architecture, as a principle used in the creation of a room or a space for a very specific action<sup>14</sup>; or (c) as a concept influenced by Buddhism and in work, for example, in the famous temple *Ryoan-ji*<sup>15</sup>, where space is experienced by the minimum detail and complexity, inviting the viewer’s imagination.

The most relevant aspect regarding *ma* is that it forms part of the Japanese word for ‘human’: *ningen* 人間. The first character means ‘man’; the word literally means ‘among men’ or ‘interval between men’. Thus, unlike the West where ‘human’ usually means an individual contained in himself (like the Greek ‘Anthropos’, the Latin ‘homo’ or the English ‘man’), in Japanese language, we can consider that being human intuitively holds a sense of space. Watsuji Tetsurō works his theory of *fūdo*<sup>16</sup>, that we will address later, and of *Ethics*<sup>17</sup> based on the analysis of the word *ningen*; in the latter he develops the notion *aidagara* 間柄 or ‘betweenness’ (note the first character) as an ethical foundation for being human.

The second aspect is the impact that this particular ‘spatial thinking’ has on the aesthetic ideals that permeate Japanese arts. Without going into detail I will introduce a few ideas that we can find in Japanese aesthetics that will prepare the ground for the philosophical approach we will take below. Donald Keene (1995) defined ‘suggestion’ as one of the four characteristics of Japanese aesthetics. He opposes it to the “Western ideal of the climactic moment” that “grants little importance to the beginnings and

11. Nitschke 1966, 117

12. Nitschke 1993, 49

13. Parkes 1995, 90

14. The tea ceremony room, for example. Nitschke 1966

15. Iimiura 2002

16. Watsuji 1979; Watsuji 1988

17. Watsuji 1996

endings”<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, most painting (as we saw already in the *sumi-e*) and poetry, as well as most aesthetic ideals, are fundamentally suggestive. There is a manifest intention to present the least possible detail on what is being depicted, trying not to limit the reader/spectator’s possibility of understanding while allowing imagination to fill in the ‘empty spaces’. We can see this in the following poem:

An old pond,  
A frog leaps in.  
The sound of water.

Here the details are minimized; the poet just presents the scene. He does not explain it or puts his own emotions into it; for the scene itself cannot be described. The reader has to experience it himself and he does it through his own imagination, filling the poem’s ‘empty spaces’. Yasuda<sup>19</sup> states it perfectly:

Here we want no adjective to blur our impression; the picture speaks for itself. We seek no metaphor or simile to make the picture clear, but simply let the objects do their part. (...) then our understanding will supply the necessary adjectives.

There are many aesthetic ideals that could be discussed regarding ‘suggestion’, but the one I feel is the most relevant for our analysis is *yūgen* 幽玄 (mysterious, subtle, hidden beauty)<sup>20</sup>, for it largely summarizes all the aesthetic ideals that permeate poetry, drama, painting, gardens and tea ceremony during the 12<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>21</sup>. *Yūgen* describes the hidden or profound feeling that “may be comprehended by the mind, but cannot be expressed in words”<sup>22</sup>. There are everywhere and at several occasions moments when the phenomena being experienced transcend any description. And even when someone describes such moments exquisitely – like, for instance, Marcel Proust did – we still tend to turn them inside and fit them to a similar moment in our own lived experience. There are certainly no words to define such moments – still, the Japanese managed to coin an emotionally charged word that would refer to what is indescribable: *yūgen*.

Eventually other aesthetic ideals could be brought here and we would find in them more or less the same underlying principle: suggestion. In-

18. Keene 1995, 31

19. Yasuda 1995, 129

20. The *yūgen* ideal was brought to the highest degree of refinement through the Nō theatre. The actor’s slow, stylized movements are used as a means to *suggest* and not *represent* something. Besides, there is also the idea that the “no-action” moments were the most enjoyable, since they incite our own involvement in the play. see de Bary 1958, Chapter 14; Ueda 1995

21. de Bary 1958, 278

22. a passage of a XV century book quoted by de Bary 1958, 279

deed, there is a preoccupation with avoiding detailed descriptions or definitions, inciting lived experience – *experience* precede *description*. Which amounts to saying, *feeling* precede *thinking*, *aesthetics* precede *philosophy*. And traditionally, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century Japan, aesthetics did not develop as a separate field from philosophy. On the contrary, the aesthetic experience – whether poetry, calligraphy, painting or the tea ceremony – was, to a great extent, the medium through which philosophical thinking was produced<sup>23</sup>. Now, if we turn to the origin of the word ‘aesthetics’ – the Greek *aisthētikos*, ‘perceptible things’, from the verb *aisthesthai* ‘perceive’ –, an aesthetic experience is but a relation with what surrounds us, a way of perceiving. In this sense, Japanese aesthetics can show us a particular way of relating to space through its conceptual language and arts.

### ***Fūdo* as space ethics**

The term *fūdo* 風土 (literally ‘wind and earth’) was coined by Watsuji Tetsurō in 1935 in a book considered as a theory of geographical determinism: *Fūdo: an anthropological inquire*. In the first section he starts with a philosophical consideration of the environment and its influence on humans. In the second section, he engages in a description of three types of climate – monsoon, desert and meadow – and the different characteristics of those who live under these different climates.

However, just as Augustin Berque has been showing for more than thirty years<sup>24</sup>, there is more behind Watsuji’s book than simple determinism. The first thing to take into account when trying to transcend the deterministic reading is the very translation of the word ‘*fūdo*’ as ‘climate’. In 1961 the book was translated into English by Geoffrey Bownas under the title *Climate: a philosophical study*; and then changed, in the 1988 edition, to *Climate and Culture: a philosophical study*. Just as Berque shows us below, the whole structure of this translation leads to strange renderings of the derivatives Watsuji coins from the substantive *fūdo*:

This lack of understanding sometimes leads Bownas to surrealistic roundabouts in order to avoid rendering the idea of *fūdosei* [*function of climate*’ or *human climate*’, according to Bownas; ‘*mediance*’ according to Berque] in some passages which are meant to illustrate it; roundabouts which are indeed inescapable, since the translation, straightaway, locks out the purport of the book.<sup>25</sup>

Many scholars still choose to use Bownas’ translation when treating

23. Parkes 1995, 82

24. The book where Berque exposes his interpretation of Watsuji’s ideas was first published in French (Berque 1986), then translated to Japanese (Berque 1988) and to English (Berque 1997).

25. Berque 2004, 390

Watsuji's theory<sup>26</sup>. For that reason, justifying the translation's choice turns out to be essential to the present argument. We can start by taking a look at the terms used by Berque when translating Watsuji's theory. The main one, *fūdo*, is translated as *milieu*. Here, the author wanted the translation to keep the underlying meaning of the original word: *fūdo* 風土 has the character of wind and earth, but the wind character 風 also means 'ways' or 'customs'. Following this, Berque recovered the word *milieu*, coined by the French geographer Vida de la Blache (1845-1918), that stands for *the relation between humans and their particular environment*; a relation both subjective and objective, natural and cultural, collective and individual. With this, Berque moves closer to Watsuji's intention of avoiding the word 'nature': when we think about the natural environment, we tend to think of it as the concrete base of human life, and so we separate both *human life* and *nature*, "we then find ourselves examining the relation between two objects"<sup>27</sup>. From the term *fūdo*, Watsuji derives *fūdosei* 風土性<sup>28</sup> and *fūdogaku* 風土学<sup>29</sup>. The one that interests us the most here is the first one, which Berque translated as 'mediance'. Being *fūdosei* the character of *fūdo* and *fūdo* a relation itself, as explained before, a word that could express the very character of that ongoing relation was required: *mediance*, then, is "the attributive character between the physical and the phenomenal, the natural and the cultural, the individual and the collective"<sup>30</sup>. Is the instant, I would say, at the very middle of that relation (*fūdo*) where we find ourselves constantly; where both poles of each of the three dualisms meet. Or, as Watsuji defined it: "is the structural moment of human existence"<sup>31</sup>.

Now, why is *fūdo* an important notion for our reassessment of space? There are three main reasons. First, because Watsuji's book is a reaction against Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* and its emphasis on time, to the detriment of space. We saw how the word 'human being' in Japanese (*nin-gen*) has an implicit notion of space, or betweenness; it is expected, then, that Watsuji reacts against Heidegger's lack of focus on space. For Watsuji, Heidegger's account of being primarily based on *time* and the *Dasein* leads to an excessive focus on the individual, without considering the collective and, therefore, spatiality<sup>32</sup>. Here, we can recover the above mentioned

26. Mochizuki 2006; Carter 2013

27. Watsuji 1979, 3

28. The *-sei* 性 suffix adds the idea of 'character/function of'; so, from 'climate' (*fūdo*), the notion 'climaticity' (*fūdosei*) is sometimes used.

29. The *-gaku* 学 suffix turns the word into a discipline, like construction (*kenchiku* 建築), architecture (*kenchikugaku* 建築学). In Bownas translation we find 'the study of climate'. In Berque's: 'mesology'.

30. Berque 1997, 130

31. Watsuji 1979, 3

32. Watsuji 1979, 4

*fūdosei* as the character that is neither individual nor collective because it is both at the same time. This means that, in Watsuji's thought, each pole of the three dualisms referred to above cannot be treated on their own, independently: they are the very character (*fūdosei*) of our *fūdo* and the point from where we stand and deal with the world. Hence, Heidegger focus on individual leads Watsuji to approach the spatiality of human existence, which implies society as well as the surrounding environment, through the lens of the constant relation between nature and culture, subject and object, individual and collective: the *fūdo* (*milieu*).

Second, because of the conclusion he draws from his 'metaphor of the cold'. Although Watsuji reacts against the lack of spatiality in Heidegger, he is also strongly influenced by him when developing the argument that supports this metaphor. Very briefly, he tells us that it is impossible for us to know the existence of cold, as a transcendental phenomenon, before we feel cold ourselves<sup>33</sup>. The cold, as an objective, independent thing, forms itself for the first time when felt by the subject that acts in constant intentionality. At this process of intentionality – Heidegger's *sorge* (care) and Watsuji's *sotoni deru* (stepping outside) – when the subject is *feeling cold* he is actually *stepping outside into the cold*. He concludes the metaphor by saying that it is at this very moment, when we step outside into the cold, that we "find ourselves"<sup>34</sup>. It is in this *stepping outside* that we, within an encounter with something that is not us (later we will find a correlate of this in Nishida's logic of *basho*), comprehend ourselves. In one of Watsuji's examples: "[j]ust as we encounter our self happy or saddened in the wind that scatters the cherry blossoms, we comprehend our withering selves in times of drought when the sun scorches the trees"<sup>35</sup>. I believe this example is enough for a better understanding of *fūdosei*. Watsuji introduces other examples, based on construction materials and culinary, not as products of a geographical determinism, but as expressions of that "structural moment" when nature and culture find each other and, to some extent, influence each other – they are expressions of how human beings comprehend themselves in their *fūdo* (*milieu*)<sup>36</sup>.

The third reason is related to the absence of a definition or problematic of space in Watsuji's book. Indeed, while he points out the lack of spatiality in Heidegger as the primary reason for writing *Fūdo*, in the rest of the book he does not talk about space, but about distinctive types of climate and their influence on human beings. First, we have to recall the word *ningen* 人間 and its implicit spatiality, meaning that we cannot separate

33. Watsuji 1979, 11

34. Watsuji 1979, 13

35. Watsuji 1979, 15

36. Watsuji 1979, 17–19

humans from space and produce an independent account on each one of them. If Watsuji prefers to work his theory from the notion of *fūdo* instead of *nature* to avoid objectification, it is only natural that he also does not develop a problematic of space. What he does, then, is to work out a description of the phenomena of the world itself and of *fūdosei*: that “structural moment” when culture meets nature. Berque<sup>37</sup>, recovering Nakamura Hajime’s ideas, links this to Japanese’s tendency of attaching themselves to “the sensible manifestations of nature, rather than referring them to some abstract principle”, illustrated by the proverb ‘*Matsu no koto wa matsu ni narae*’ (About pines, learn from the pines) – a tenet also present in Japanese aesthetics. We might consider, then, that Watsuji could not develop an abstract theory of space after having rejected the very notion of nature. Instead of developing a problematic of space (or even nature), he examined the relation between nature and culture in particular *milieus*.

### Space as the *basho* of being

Nishida Kitarō’s main goal is to deconstruct the subject and object dualism. With the clear notion that a too brief account of his logic holds the risk of being overly simplistic, I will attempt to sum it up in a few sentences and then draw some hints from his discourse that are enough to grasp the logic behind *Basho* (Place).

Nishida’s logic, in my point of view, can be summarized in two key ideas: if (a) everything that exists, exists in something else<sup>38</sup>, then (b) whenever objects are to be related and form a single autonomous system, there must be something that sustains that system, somewhere where it takes place<sup>39</sup> – this forms, what I will call, the ‘core logic’. Following this, Nishida starts developing his logic of *basho* from what is central to the act of knowing: the consciousness. He writes that when we think of things there must be a *basho* that reflects them, which he calls “the field of consciousness”. Thus, “[t]o be conscious of something is to reflect it in the field of consciousness”<sup>40</sup>. He then goes on arguing against the idea that the object stands on its own outside our consciousness. If this were the case, how can we, who are within our consciousness, conclude that the object exists and transcends our consciousness? His answer is quite straightforward and follows the core-logic: “For the consciousness and the object to be connected, there must be something that envelops both of them; there must be a

37. Berque 1998, 64

38. An axiom stated for the first time by Archytas of Tarentum, which has repercussions in Plato and Aristotle’s accounts of place.

39. Nishida 1987, 67

40. Nishida 1987, 69

*basho* where their relation takes place”<sup>41</sup>. Nishida then starts to account for what this *basho* might be by pursuing a strong dialectical and metaphysical line of thought where he speaks about the “*basho* of true nothingness”, which I chose not to bring into this analysis.

My goal here is not to present a fully explained account of *Basho*, for it has been done before by some academics well versed in Japanese language and philosophy, but a much more elementary one: to take the core-logic of *Basho*, along with some hints developed by Nishida along his essay, and to interpret them as tools to help us think about space.

The main hints I will refer to are from his definition of ‘judgment’ and from his account of the relation between the particular and the universal, the subject and the predicate. For Nishida, “the act of knowing is an act of enveloping”<sup>42</sup>. And this ‘enveloping’ can be thought of as the main feature of a *basho*. On the other hand, ‘knowing’ is also formed by acts of judgment; and judgment is, in Nishida’s words, “the process of connecting the gap between the object of cognition and the place where it is reflected, its *basho*”<sup>43</sup>. Nishida explains this argument using a grammatical example, which will lead us to the most meaningful hint for my analysis here. In the judgment ‘the rose is red’ the copula ‘is’ places the particular ‘rose’ inside the universal ‘red’ – ‘red’ becomes the *basho* of ‘rose’. Judgment, then, connects the gap between ‘rose’ and ‘red’, both of which do not hold any meaning if taken on their own.

Until now there is nothing new, but the way Nishida characterizes the relation between the particular and the universal leads me to an interpretation of the logic behind *basho* in spatial terms. According to Nishida, the copula ‘is’ forms the foundation of a judgment and expresses the relation between the universal and the particular. The judgment, then, becomes the process through which the universal particularizes and develops itself through specialization<sup>44</sup>. The way he defines this relation is central to my argument:

the universal does not possess the particular, the particular is not the result of the universal, neither the relation between the two carries a meaning like ‘space that contains objects’ or ‘objects that exist in space’ (...). “The particular is a part of the universal; it is his silhouette. (...) [T]hat which exists possesses partially (分有) the proprieties of the *basho* where it exists: things in space are spatial.”<sup>45</sup>

41. Nishida 1987, 70

42. Nishida 1987, 75

43. Nishida 1987, 73

44. Nishida 1987, 89 The word Nishida uses is *bunka-hatten* 分化発展. *Bunka* 分化 means specialization; differentiation; the process of division with the goal of creating two or more different things. *Hatten* 発展 means both development, as in ‘argument development’ or growth, as in ‘city growth’.

45. Nishida 1987, 86–87

When trying to make sense of this logic and reinterpret it as a resource for the ‘being-space’ relationship, the connection between Nishida’s arguments and an ontological account of space can be smoothly accomplished. For that, I will divide his discourse into two arguments: the dialectical and the grammatical argument. In the dialectical argument what is at stake is the idea that things exist in relation to one another, and something that *is* exists against what *is not*: we are humans only by opposition to what is not-human; or, I am *myself* only in opposition to others that are not *myself*. But, in Nishida’s core logic, there must be a *basho* where this opposition is reflected and that sets it up. So, I am human against what is not-human, and this relation is sustained and made possible through a *basho* that is *space*. I can only *be* through the medium of space. Once again, the core-logic tells us that ‘everything that exists, exists in something else’: meaning that *being* that exists, exist in space. Here, we are already forming a judgment.

The grammatical argument draws from the definition of judgment explained before and completes this logic: forming a judgment is to place a particular inside a universal, i.e. turning the universal into the *basho* of the particular; then, by logical inference, when examining the relation between *being* and its surroundings, space is the universal and *being* is the particular. We can now reinterpret Nishida’s account on the relation between the universal and the particular in order to elucidate us about the ‘being-space’ relation: space does not possess *being*; *being* is not the result of space – which breaks away with a possible claim for geographical determinism –, neither the relation between the two carries a meaning like ‘objects that exist in space’ nor ‘space that contains objects’. Again, what exists, according to Nishida, possesses partially 分有 the properties of the *basho* where it exists: *being* possesses partially the proprieties of the space – *basho* – where it exists.

Kopf quotes Ueda Shizuteru’s concrete example concerning the ‘particular-universal’ relation and complements it:

There is no escaping the fact that England and I cannot be separated. England is the country in which I reside, and I reflect England by living there.” Consequently [Kopf adds], universals like the historical situation and the *Zeitgeist* are not transcendent or abstract but are concretely particularized in individual events. In this sense, there is no postmodernism without Jacques Derrida’s writings, no Nishida scholarship apart from particular essays on Nishida’s thought, no American lifestyle without individual Americans living their lives.<sup>46</sup>

---

46. Kopf 2003, 32



## Concluding remarks

The look into Japanese aesthetics assumed the role of a brief introduction to some of the general characteristics of Japanese perception and laid the ground for a better understanding of the subsequent analysis. As we saw, the general tendency is to avoid descriptions and details. Whatever sensible phenomena exist in the world, their most fundamental truths can only be apprehended by our own *taking-part* of it.

This *taking-part*, on the other hand, is analogous to the idea of ‘care’ that Heidegger used to refer to a subject that *is* always towards something, i.e. that continuous intentionality that, constituting the most basic feature of *being*, casts the way we deal with the world experientially. *Ex-sistere* or *sotoni deru*, ‘stepping outside’ (as Watsuji called it), is our way of being: the process where we are constantly stepping outside into our surroundings and its constituents and where we first comprehend ourselves. When we assume that we cannot think of human beings separated from our own *fūdo*, to think of *being* as this constant process of self-understanding through the space we always already inhabit is to turn a supposedly abstract and measurable notion of space into an indispensable part of *being* – or like the *ma* 間 word: the very possibility of relation.

With Nishida’s logic of *basho* we were able to turn space into the *basho* of being. Furthermore, examining his account of the ‘particular-universal’ relation we could see that while *being* is not possessed by space, neither determined by it, it possesses partially its properties. Here we are not simply claiming for, in Berque’s words, an “absolutization of the predicate”, but creating a relation between the universal (space) and the particular (*being*); between the subject and the predicate. If being possesses partially the properties of the space where it exists, then, space, while constituting a part of *being*, is *being*’s self-comprehension as well as an interpretation of that same being.

We can now return to Heidegger. Just like his idea of a praxis-oriented space ontologically preceding and abstract and homogeneous space, I am also proposing a similar notion of space: a *relational space* that, being a constitutive and absolutely essential part of *being*, can only be fully grasped through *being*’s practical activities; in other words, through its ontological condition of being constantly towards something.

## Bibliography

- Berque, Augustin. 1986. *Le Sauvage et l’artifice les Japonais devant la nature*. Paris: Gallimard.  
 ———. 1988. 風土の日本：自然と文化の通態 [Fūdo no Nihon : shizen to bunka no tsūtai] *Le Sauvage et l’artifice les Japonais devant la nature*. Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō.

- . 1997. *Japan : nature, artifice and Japanese culture*. Yelvertoft Manor: Pilkington Press.
- . 1998. «The question of space: From Heidegger to Watsuji». Em *Interpreting Japanese Society*, editado por Joy Hendry, 2nd ed., 57–67. London: Routledge.
- . 2004. «Offspring of Watsuji’s theory of milieu (Fūdo)». *Geojournal* 60: 389–96.
- Carter, Robert. 2013. «The Kyoto school an introduction». New York: State University of New York Press.
- Casey, Edward. 1997. «The fate of place a philosophical history». Berkeley : University of California Press.
- Crowell, Steven Galt. 2005. «Heidegger and Husserl: The Matter and Method of Philosophy». Em *Blackwell Companion to Martin Heidegger*, editado por Hubert L. Dreyfus e Mark A. Wrathall, 49–64. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- de Bary, Wm. Theodore, ed. 1958. *Sources of Japanese Tradition Vol.1*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Guignon, Charles. 2005. «The History of Being». Em *Blackwell Companion to Martin Heidegger*, editado por Hubert L. Dreyfus e Mark A. Wrathall, 392–406. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Hall, Harrison. 1993. «Intentionality and world: Division I of Being and Time». Em *Cambridge Companion to Martin Heidegger*, editado por Charles B. Guignon, 122–40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. Traduzido por John Macquarrie e Edward Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- . 1984. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Traduzido por Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana university Press.
- Iimiura, Takahito. 2002. «A Note for MA: Space/Time in the Garden of Ryoan-ji». *Millennium Film Journal: Winds From the East*, n. 38: 50–63.
- Keene, Donald. 1995. «Japanese Aesthetics». Em *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, editado por Nancy G. Hume, 27–41. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Kopf, Gereon. 2003. «Between Foundationalism and Relativism: Locating Nishida’s “Logic of Basho” on the Ideological Landscape». *Nanzan Bulletin* 27: 24–45.
- Mochizuki, Taro. 2006. «Climate and Ethics - Ethical implications of Watsuji Tetsurō’s concepts: “Climate” and “Climaticity”». *Philosophia OSAKA*, n. 1: 43–55.
- Nishida, Kitarō. 1987. «場所 [Basho] Lugar». Em 西田幾多郎哲学論集・I [Nishida Kitarō *tetsugakuronshū-I*] *Ensaio Filosófico de Nishida Kitarō I*, 67–151. Tōkyō: Iwanami Shoten.
- Nitschke, Günter. 1966. «“MA” - The Japanese Sense of Place in old and new architecture and planning». *Architectural Design*, 113–56.
- . 1993. «MA - Place, Space, Void». Em *From Shinto to Ando : studies in architectural anthropology in Japan*, 48–61. Berlin: Academy Editions; Ernst & Sohn.
- Parkes, Graham. 1995. «Ways of Japanese Thinking». Em *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, editado por Nancy G. Hume, 77–108. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Ueda, Makoto. 1995. «Zeami and the Art of the Nō Drama: Imitation, Yūgen and Sublimity». Em *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, editado por Nancy G. Hume, 177–92. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Watsuji, Tetsurō. 1979. 風土 人間学 的考察 [Fūdo : ningengakuteki kōsatsu] *Fūdo: uma investigação antropológica*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten.
- . 1988. *Climate and culture : a philosophical study*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- . 1996. «Rinrigaku». New York: State University of New York Press.,

Yasuda, Kenneth. 1995. «“Approach to Haiku” and “Basic Principles”». Em *Japanese Aesthetics and Culture: A Reader*, editado por Nancy G. Hume, 125–50. New York: State University of New York Press.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira

# Towards an intensive architecture: how do we compose intimacy, in architecture?

**Susana Ventura**

Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto (FAUP)  
susanapventura@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

The present paper aims to define “Intensive Architecture” as an aesthetic category in the Theory of Architecture, stemming from the problem of sensation, understood mainly in the light of Gilles Deleuze’s seminal work *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation*, which allows therefore to understand how certain sensations are composed in space and sustained through time. However, sensations and senses should not be confused. A sensation has a direct impact on the nervous system, as well as every organ is a receptacle of sensation (and not only those of the senses) when a Body without Organs is fabricated (as the paper will demonstrate).

Moreover, as sensation is “the being of the sensible,” it always obeys to an aesthetic composition mastered by the artist or architect. We will look into some of the Adolf Loos’ works to inspect how the sensation of intimacy is composed, through which artifices, forms and matters of expression, and how, in its turn, it is hold in space independently of time and seasons.

## **Keywords**

Deleuze; Intensive Architecture; Sensation; Body without Organs; Intimacy

In the woodcut “Encounter in Space,” by Edvard Munch, we see two figures - a woman and a man - floating toward each other in an abstract weightlessness space among sperm cells. The critics usually mention the erotic tension between these two figures whose physical proximity, implies, however, an emotive distance. The encounter happens in space, as the title refers, and Munch himself used to compare people’s lives with planets, appearing from the unknown to meet briefly and immediately disappear. Independently of the comparison, which in this woodcut is literal (the bodies float in a pure abstract dark space without gravity), we focus our attention on the space that these two figures create in between, which is, necessarily, a space of intimacy where the two naked bodies touch each other and a tension is mastered.

We witness a similar encounter in the film “Intimacy,” by Patrice Chéreau, specially during the first part of the film when the two main characters meet every Wednesday in an informal or shabby room of a London flat just to have sex without knowing each other, without speaking a word (which would potentiate a story to be known). We could understand these scenes like some critics mention the erotic tension on Munch’s woodcut, although they mainly express a moment of pure intimacy for which Chéreau removed any trace of romanticism or tenderness. Of course, during the film, the characters will know their stories, the intimacy will dissolve and blur into feelings, and, in the end, we are left with the emotional self-delusion of the characters.

These two examples, from different art expressions - painting and cinema - disclose part of our understanding of intimacy as an intensive encounter or moment between two bodies without resorting to a story or any representation of personal feelings or emotions. Curiously as well, in these two examples, the space where the encounter happens is the most indifferent as possible - a black surface and an informal room - as if the space was not important to represent, notwithstanding allowing to intensify the encounter and bring to the surface a pure intimacy.

In another film, by Woody Allen, titled “Interiors” in English and translated into Portuguese as “Intimidade” (“Intimacy”), we watch Eve’s (Renata, Joey and Flynn’s mother) suicide on a night when the family (their father and his new wife) were at the beach house. After the funeral, the three sisters return to the house and contemplate, through the window, the tranquility of the sea where their mother chose to die. The acceptance of death and the tranquility, the serenity it brings, are inscribed in the surface that separates the interior space, where the three sisters stand, and the landscape they contemplate. In the most intimate moments of the film (in several moments, confessions-like), Woody Allen places his characters glued to that surface which separates them from the exterior world, inducing us to think that the intimacy doesn’t limit itself to the interior, but it

happens precisely in that very limit between exterior and interior.

The meanings, attributed to the very word intimacy, do not clarify that difference, which undoubtedly exists, between interior and intimacy, which is not to be, solely, a difference of distance between the closer and glued to the exterior surface of the world and the more internal, distant or profound, similarly to the centre of the earth, which would be, that way, the absolute intimate space of the very world (never reached however). The difference is, above all, that of the degree of intensity (and never that of distance, which is always nullified in the intimate space), which transforms an interior space into an intimate space, which has the ability to attract, through its design and composition, a natural posture of the body, the I of the body in space, reminding us of the encounter between two embracing naked bodies. [Figure 1]

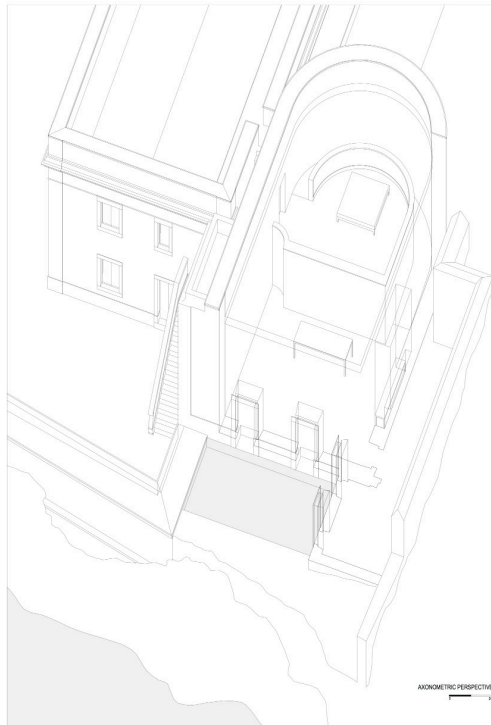


Figure 1

Axonometric perspective of the “Space of Intimacy,” project by SAMI Architects for the 14th Portuguese Representation at the Venice Architecture Biennial, 2014. Within the pre-existent Albarquel Fort, the project unfolds a sequential composition (antechamber - chamber or room - post-chamber, which Sami looked for in what is understood to be one of the first examples

of domestic architecture in Portugal, the medieval palace) that corresponds to a variation in intensity, through successive steps and boundaries (not only for the sequence in itself, which begins, inclusively, on the ground floor, but, above all, through the unfolding, or even the unveiling suggested by the two levels of the space of intimacy: a higher level, whose curve welcomes and embraces the bodies, and a lower one, with a double height ceiling, whose limit is rapidly undone by the ramp that leads to the faraway horizon of the sea, whose movement “sucks us into the landscape”, as the architects explain), of an interior space to an intimate space, embracing and receiving the exuberant landscape, which reveals itself naked before it, in its composition.



Figure 2  
View from the Albarquel Fort onto the Sea.  
Photograph: Paulo Catrica, 2014.

The question becomes, then, how to build a space which constitutes that difference, since an interior space isn't, necessarily, an intimate space and an intimate space, in turn, does not imply a separation from the exterior space either. On the contrary, there seems to exist a form of contemplation<sup>1</sup> from the inside to the outside, from the body to the lands-

1. At this moment, it's important to clarify what we mean by contemplation, which comes from Deleuze & Guattari's reading of Plotino: “La sensation est contemplation pure, car c'est par contemplation qu'on contracte, se contemplant soi-même à mesure qu'on contemple les éléments dont on procède. Contempler, c'est créer, mystère de la création passive, sensation. La sensation remplit le plan de composition, et se remplit de soi-même en se remplissant de se qu'elle contemple. [...] Plotin pouvait définir toutes les choses comme des contemplations, non seulement les hommes et les animaux, mais les plantes, la terra et les rochers. Ce ne sont pas des Idées que nous contemplons par concept, mais les éléments de la matière, par sensation. La plante contemple en philosophie @LISBON



cape, which makes the body, which inhabits the space, contemplate itself from within, when it fills itself with tonalities, variations, colours, water and scents from the landscape that stands before it. [Figure 2] The intimacy will always be that which the body is able to create or compose between itself and the space, reducing it to a sensitive surface, capable of receiving the infinitesimal variations of its qualities. The space of intimacy is a space where to sleep, lie, sit, look at the landscape become imperceptible movements, long unhurried pauses, where time stands still and the world is kept outside. And, nonetheless, it may occur also when the landscape emerges, unequivocally, as the Other to those who inhabit space, reducing the distance between the exterior and interior to a surface where the inhabitant is faced with his or her own nakedness (where he or she may feel intimate with the space they inhabit). [Figure 3]

But how do we compose this sensation of intimacy, in the work of architecture? At this moment, we ought to look into the object of study of Aesthetics, the being of the sensible, and find in Deleuze's approach (we will focus on the deleuzian aesthetics, therefore using its terminology) a practice named "body without organs"<sup>2</sup> which enlightens us about architecture's power to compose sensations or, in other words, to edify the sensible<sup>3</sup>. For Deleuze, a work of art is a bloc of sensations, understanding

---

tractant les éléments dont elle procède, la lumière, le carbone et les sels, et se remplit elle-même de couleurs et d'odeurs qui qualifient chaque fois sa variété, sa composition: elle est sensation en soi", Deleuze & Guattari 1991, 200. In architecture, we find its equivalent when a building contemplates the landscape where it stands, not through the openings onto the landscape (although these may also be part of the composition), but through its matter. The landscape is metamorphosed, its matters of expression are transformed into expressive qualities of the work of architecture, in its composition and hence a sensation is built.

2. The body without organs is a deleuzian experimental practice upon the body. It's an experimentation that every person undertakes whenever he or she desires and the unconscious begins to work and the body and its organs discover their own power to create sensation after their intense matter. As explained: "At any rate, you have one (or several). It's not so much that it preexists or comes ready-made, although in certain respects it is preexistent. At any rate, you make one, you can't desire without making one. And it awaits you; it is an inevitable exercise or experimentation, already accomplished the moment you undertake it, unaccomplished as long as you don't. This is not reassuring, because you can botch it. Or it can be terrifying, and lead you to your death. [...] It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices," Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 166. Note: In the present paper, we use Massumi's translation of *Mille Plateaux*, because it's translated into English by a known deleuzian, although our interpretations and knowledge come from the original text in French, which obviously is more precise.

3. It would be impossible here to pormenorize all the different implications that come from the problem of the body without organs in Deleuze's own plane of immanence (or body without organs), and then in architecture. We may recommend the reading of: Susana Ventura, *O corpo sem órgãos da arquitectura (Architecture's body without organs)*. Lisboa: Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Tese de Doutoramento em Filosofia, especialidade de Estética (PhD's thesis in Philosophy - Aesthetics), Novembro 2012 (only available in Portuguese).

the sensation, the being of the sensible, as the difference in intensity itself<sup>4</sup>. It's in *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation* that Deleuze gives a precious insight into how a sensation is composed in the body without organs, the plane of composition of art<sup>5</sup>. Like philosophy needs a plane of immanence where the philosopher creates his or her concepts, the plane of composition is where sensations are created by the artist. However, some misunderstandings arose within this practice, as Deleuze's favourite examples report cases of physical bodies (sometimes even sick or drugged), like the masochist who uses his or her own body to create a plane that will only be populated by intensities. First, he or she ties the body parts with elastic bands or ropes and sew the orifices turning the body into a plain surface. Then, starts the flogging through whatever means are allowed, increasing and intensifying the pain more each time. Deleuze & Guattari, in *Mille Plateaux*, explain that the masochist doesn't look for pain or pleasure with it, but to populate his or her body with "intensities of pain, pain waves"<sup>6</sup>. The body without organs is the plane of desire defined by thresholds, populations, movements and speeds, that envelop a sensation of pain<sup>7</sup>. But

4. "C'est l'intensité, la différence dans l'intensité, qui constitue la limite propre de la sensibilité. Aussi a-t-elle le caractère paradoxal de cette limite: elle est l'insensible, ce qui ne peut pas être senti, parce qu'elle est toujours recouverte par une qualité qui l'aliène ou qui la 'contrarie', distribuée dans une étendue qui la renverse et qui l'annule. Mais d'une autre manière, elle est ce qui ne peut être que senti, ce qui définit l'exercice transcendant de la sensibilité, puisqu'elle donne à sentir, et par là éveille la mémoire et force la pensée. Saisir l'intensité indépendamment de l'étendue ou avant la qualité dans lesquelles elle se développe, tel est l'objet d'une distorsion des sens. Une pédagogie de sens est tournée vers ce but, et fait partie intégrante du 'transcendantalisme'. Des expériences pharmacodynamiques, ou des expériences physiques comme celles du vertige, s'en approchent: elles nous révèlent cette différence en soi, cette profondeur en soi, cette intensité en soi au moment originel où elle n'est plus qualifiée ni étendue. Alors le caractère déchirant de l'intensité, si faible en soit le degré, lui restitue son vrai sens: non pas anticipation de la perception, mais limite propre de la sensibilité du point de vue d'un exercice transcendant", Deleuze 1969, 305.

5. The body without organs disappears from the pages of *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?* when Deleuze & Guattari write about the plane of composition in art. It's long known that some concepts were more of Deleuze and others of Guattari, as we also find Guattari's doubts about the practice of the body without organs in his notes to *Anti-Oedipe* (Félix Guattari, *Écrits pour L'Anti-Oedipe*. Paris: Lignes Manifeste, 2004). In fact, the first known appearance of the body without organs (which is named after Artaud) is in Deleuze's work *Logique du Sens* (1969). Then, it appears in both volumes of *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, and, finally, in *Francis Bacon: la logique de la sensation* (of course, it also appears in several essays by Deleuze). We only may speculate about its removal from the plane of composition in *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?*, but it immediately reappears in *Francis Bacon*, the major work of Deleuze on Aesthetics.

6. Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 168.

7. "A BwO is made in such a way that it can be occupied, populated only by intensities. Only intensities pass and circulate. [...] The BwO causes intensities to pass; it produces them in a *spatium* that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space, nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree - to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced. [...] That is why we treat the BwO as the full egg before the extension of the organism and the organisation of the organs, before the formation of the strata; as the intense egg defined by axes and vectors, graphology @LISBON

it's always about how the desire itself (the plane of the body without organs is the plane of consistency of desire) is composed and through which lines does the desire flow uninterruptedly, enveloping and enveloped in a *continuum* of intensities (we must advert that it happens only in a molecular scale, within the intense matter of the unconscious). Two moments are defined by Deleuze & Guattari when it comes to making a body without organs: the first requires the fabrication of the plane, which usually implies an elimination of clichés as well as of all relations subject-object<sup>8</sup>. There's no Self in the body without organs, only a series of becomings, as the two authors would later explain. Again, the masochist's body without organs is populated by a becoming-animal. The second phase happens when the intensities start to circulate in the plane of the body without organs, and, when a force is captured at a certain degree, to compose a sensation. The two moments happen simultaneously, otherwise the fabrication of the body without organs would fail or it would be an empty body without organs.

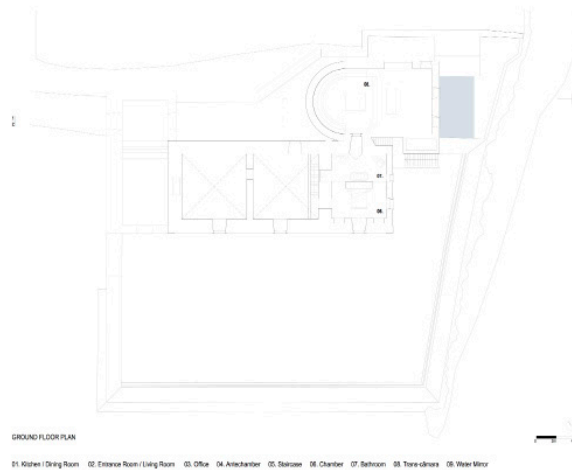


Figure 3  
Ground Floor Plan of the “Space of Intimacy,”  
project by SAMI Architects for the 14th Portuguese  
Representation at the Venice Architecture Biennial, 2014.

dients and thresholds, by dynamic tendencies involving energy transformation and kinematic movements involving group displacement, by migrations: all independent of accessory forms because the organs appear and function here only as pure intensities”, Deleuze & Guattari 1980, 169-170.

8. “The BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole”, *Ibidem*. This finds its equal in Loos’ approach to architecture: remove all ornament, remove all sentiments, remove the Family (as institution), the suicide note of the girl in the chest of drawers doesn’t have anything to do with the walls (designed by the architect).

Francis Bacon also makes a body without organs for himself. In his book about Francis Bacon's work, Deleuze definitely links the body without organs to the process of creation of a work of art. The phases are the same as described in *Mille Plateaux*, but, in this book, Deleuze goes further explaining how a sensation is formed in the body without organs as we start to be in the presence of several bodies without organs: Francis Bacon's body without organs, which vanishes away at the very moment the painting embodies the sensation, but whose trace is left in the bodies (Figures) painted, that detain, in their turn, the power to affect us and transform our flesh and nerve into that sensation or yet another, allowing us to create a body without organs for ourselves.

In architecture, we also find several bodies without organs or traces of them as their existence vanishes away at the very moment one has consciousness of its fabrication. For example, Peter Zumthor, without naming it, refers to its effects: "We know all about emotional response from music. The first movement of Brahms's viola sonata, when the viola comes in - just two-seconds and we're there! [...] I have no idea why that is so, but it's like that with architecture, too"<sup>9</sup>. The sonorous wave that affect us, transforms our body into a musical plane, planting ears all through it, in our stomach, in our lung, in our breast, as, in seconds, we dissolve ourselves (our organisation) to become a sonorous expressive matter, become birds and the cosmos. Zumthor is correct when he says that this happen in architecture too. In certain works, our bodies are forced to wait, for example, or to inhabit space with such postures or to walk around it following movements that awake the flesh and the nerve. We may recall all those postures of the body that Adolf Loos imprints in his houses, as if the inhabitants were Beckett's characters or Bacon's Figures, or the movements Lewerentz obliges the body to describe in space or the effects that light, as he composes, have in our eyes. In certain works, there is a preparation of the body simultaneously of elimination of remains and an intensification acting upon the body (upon its flesh and nerve), transforming, finally, the lived body into an intensive body. As Deleuze remarks: the body without organs is "at the limit of the lived body, it's the intense and intensive body"<sup>10</sup>.

However, the inhabitant makes a body without organs for himself or herself only if the work of architecture is a work of art that holds a bloc of sensations. Usually, when it comes to define architecture as art, and Loos himself denied this quality with the exception of monuments and graves, some authors immediately state that a building or an architectural space

9. Zumthor 2006, 13.

10. Deleuze 1981, 44. It's at this time that Deleuze criticises the phenomenological hypothesis as "it merely evokes the lived body. But the lived body is still a paltry thing in comparison with a more profound and almost unlovable Power [*Puissance*]," *Ibidem*.

must be used by people, being its main purpose to be inhabited. Nevertheless, what type of inhabiting may occur when a work of architecture, beyond functions and types, beyond material structures and techniques, holds a bloc of sensations? A work of architecture, that may be consider a work of art, must create within it an interval of an intensive body-space. It's interesting that Deleuze defines several art forms by what they create that is unique to them. For instance, painting is a bloc of lines and colours, cinema is a bloc of image-movement and image-time, music is a bloc of sounds... Deleuze doesn't give any definition of architecture (although he does mention that architecture is the first art expression, and art appears with the animal when it transforms the territory into a matter of expression, into a *plateau*), but, taking into consideration what has been written, we may define architecture as a bloc of body-space, where the two terms - body and space - which define the interval, in order for architecture to become a work of art, must become, in their turn, an intensive body and intensive space, both defined by the intensities that populate the interval that they define. A lived body that inhabits space must transform itself into an intensive body or body without organs, precisely when it inhabits an intensive space, a type of space that is defined by the sensations that it holds or creates, thankfully to its matters of expression or aesthetic composition. The architect, in a very Loosian definition, must occupy himself or herself of this interval. Zumthor, in his turn, denominates this intensive interval of atmosphere (or it would be more correct to say that Zumthor's atmosphere is what fills this interval).

Loos' houses are examples of what we call an intensive architecture: a type of architecture that holds an interval of an intensive body-space, occupied, filled, by sensation<sup>11</sup>. In these, we witness, almost literally, to this interval's fabrication. First, all the clichés and symbols are removed from the plane of composition (it's curious that Karl Krauss named Loos the architect of the *tabula rasa*): family, power, subjectivity were removed to give birth to a space defined only by its pure qualities. Even the program is in part eliminated in the sense that it was built up through the "elevation" of space and the modulation of volume from which the program would naturally fit (if we separate into different levels, we immediately introduce a difference in their occupation, and a movement that may be slower or faster, or constrained). [Figure 4] Then, we assist to a clear definition of the body postures (the feminine and the masculine bodies) in space. And

11. "At one and the same time I become in the sensation and something happens through the sensation, one through the other, one in the other. And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation. As a spectator, I experience the sensation only by entering the painting, by reaching the unity of the sensing and the sensed. This was Cézanne's lesson against the Impressionists: sensation is not in the 'free' or disembodied play of light and color (impressions); on the contrary, it is in the body, even the body of an apple", Deleuze 1981, 35.

contrary to what some authors have been saying, these postures only have to do with the placement of the body in the space exactly whenever a force is exerted upon the body and a tension or a spasm is produced, coinciding, in space, with a maximum of intensity or a threshold, recalling curiously Bacon's Figures. Passing the door, the sensation changes.



Figure 4  
The Raumplan of Villa Müller, Adolf Loos, 1930.  
Photograph: Susana Ventura, 2014.

All these imperceptible movements, tensions and spasms of the body in Loos' houses depend solely of the composition of sensation which is mastered by the architect. The body enters into the plane of composition as a matter of expression, similarly to other elements. The body, its postures and declinations are part of the code of sensation, implying however an experimentation of Loos' own body and its transformation into a body without organs, where he was able to localise the precise limits and thresholds of the sensation. Of course, Loos had several artifices to compose sensations, sometimes of pure comfort (like the one that fills and swells all around Lina's bedroom of white furs and plush), other times of intimacy, others of pure desire (as in Villa Karma's bathroom or Josephine Baker's house), and all these sensations may even coexist and form a sequence which is, in fact, the difference of intensity of a single sensation or rhythm in itself (as Deleuze also explains). A sensation of comfort may correspond to a degree of intensity of the sensation of intimacy, as in Lina Loos' bedroom, for example.

Considering the sensation of intimacy as we've been thinking it, how  
philosophy @LISBON

did Loos compose it in his works of architecture? How did he transformed the difference between exterior and interior into a difference of intensity wherein each of the inhabitants is glued or merges with the space around his or her body? There is a nakedness in these intervals of an intensive body-space in Loos' houses which doesn't mean that the body is undressed or naked. On the contrary, Loos, just like the Easterners, is extremely aware of the importance of having several veils to temperate the very difference of intensity between private, interior and intimacy, as we find this sequence, as in the Japanese houses, in Loos' ones: it's a variation in intensity of a single sensation of intimacy throughout successive boundaries and thresholds, regulated by the postures of the body (including accelerations, tensions, spasms and speeds, that usually occur within permanence and under the body to recall Artaud).

Therefore, there is a clear definition and design of the boundary that separates the exterior and public space from the private space. We should notice that the private space, in Loos' houses, does not coincide totally with the interior as the social areas, as Beatriz Colomina has noticed, resemble a theatre box where characters inhabit space in order to see others, be seen or sometimes to become indiscernible, a fleeting silhouette in a dimness space. However, this later effect would depend on the light, to which Loos always paid much attention (from where it would come in and how it would enter into the room, depending also on the time of the day and of the room's materials, a darker wood or a lighter, for instance). We prefer an idea shared by Gravagnuolo, who refers to Loos' houses as Japanese boxes: there is a larger one and inside a smaller one successively, in order to control, exactly, the different degrees and the correspondent thresholds in the interior. The body, in its turn, is usually placed at the very limit, in the boundary, as it happens, for instance, in the woman's room at Villa Müller (one of the best examples of spaces of intimacy in Loos' houses). Mrs. Müller could choose to sit in the small sofa if early in the morning, and the light would come in from the side, creating beautiful warm reflects on the light wood panels specially chosen because the room is open towards the East. She's very comfortable, seeing who might come from the entrance or from the corridor (the one that access to her husband's room). Or she may choose to sit in the sofa placed just below the overture to the main living room and, once there, choose if she turns her back to the living room or if she prefers to keep an eye on both entries of the room. All these postures were clearly rehearsed by Loos himself, as he usually did while the construction works elapsed, and allow to determine those different degrees of intimacy.

The body occupies the boundary or the wall and the wall is a part of the body itself. They become indiscernible, as Deleuze would say. The windows, in their turn, are understood as pure light frames (usually they have

curtains to veil the exterior), whose main purpose is to mark the various places where the inhabitant must be or rest. This rest, in Loos' houses, happens almost always with a person's back to the window, as many authors denoted, but what becomes, in fact, very evident in the Villa Müller, for example, is that it requires a fixed position of the body upon itself and towards the interior space of the house. In turn, when a person wanders through the interior, her or his body are in constant torsion or if one directs her or his gaze towards the exterior, the body describes an unnatural position. It is inside the house, in the determined positions, that the body may coexist with space in an intimate relationship.

Finally, we find another Loos' artifice to create a spatial sensation of intimacy in the creation of a multiplicity of surfaces, equivalent to the multiple veils or boxes, by the use of multiple mirrors or reflecting surfaces. We find their use in the houses, but, curiously, it's in the American Bar, that they create mostly a space of intimacy. Here, the use of mirrors is usually justified to augment the space, due to its small dimensions, and create an effect of infinity. However, due to the chosen mirrors, to the carefully placed lamps, to the dark panels of wood furniture, Loos creates an effect of a *sfumato* generating an illusion of an intermediate inhabited space - the mirror itself - directing our attention towards above, when the intimate space is located below where two lovers may meet. The space of intimacy is always beyond our compromising attention. [Figure 5]



Figure 5  
American Bar, Adolf Loos, 1908.  
Photograph: Susana Ventura, 2014.



## References

- Colomina, Beatriz; *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The MIT Press, 1998 [1994].
- Deleuze, Gilles; *Différence et répétition*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968.
- Deleuze, Gilles; *Francis Bacon: Logique de la Sensation*. Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 2 vols, 1981.
- Deleuze, Gilles; *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation*. London, New York: Continuum, 2003 [1981].
- Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix; *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A Thousand Plateaus*. London, New York: Continuum, 1987 [1980].
- Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix; *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie 2: Mille Plateaux*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980.
- Deleuze, Gilles; Guattari, Félix; *Qu'est-ce que la Philosophie?* Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991.
- Gravagnuolo, Benedetto; *Adolf Loos: Theory and Works*. London: Art Data, 1995 [Milano, 1982].
- Guattari, Félix; *Écrits pour L'Anti-Oedipe*. Paris: Lignes Manifeste, 2004
- Zumthor, Peter; *Atmospheres*. Basel, Boston, Berlin: Writings - Publishers for Architecture, 2006.



© Maribel Mendes Sobreira