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The Subject and Architecture

In March of 1982, *Skyline*, the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies serial, published the landmark interview between Paul Rabinow, an American anthropologist, and Michel Foucault, which would only appear two years later under the title “Space, Knowledge, and Power,” in Rabinow’s edited book *The Foucault Reader*. Foucault said that in the spatialization of knowledge and power beginning in the 18th century, architecture is not a signifier or metaphor for power, it is rather the “technique for practising social organization.” The role of the IAUS in the architectural dissemination of Foucault’s ideas on the subject and space in the North American academy – such as the concept “heterotopia,” and Foucault’s writing on surveillance and Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, subsequently analysed by Georges Teyssot, who was teaching at the Venice School – is well known. Teyssot’s work is part of the historical canalization of Foucauldianism, and French subjectivity more broadly, along its dizzying path, via Italy, to American architecture schools, where it solidified in the 1980s paradigm that would come to be known as American architecture theory. Foucault was already writing on incarceration and prisons, from the 1970s. (In the 1975 lectures he said “architecture was responsible for the invention of madness.”) But this work was not properly incorporated into architectural discussion until the early ’80s. What is not immediately apparent, what this history suggests to me is that subjectivity was not a marginal topic within “theory”, but was perhaps a platform and entry point for architecture theory. One of the ideas that I’m working on is that “theory” can be viewed, historically, as the making of architectural subjectivity, something that can be traced back to the Frankfurt School critique which begins with the modern subject.

Now Foucault’s sinister reading of subjectivity is not surprising, if we understand the juridical etymology of the term *subject*, which in 12th century Old French referred to “someone who is under the dominion of a monarch or prince.” From the 15th century, there is the notion of the “subject of the realm”; in the 16th century: the subject is a person subject to some injury. In the 18th century, Foucault’s starting point, the term subject was used to describe the dead body used for anatomical examination or a cadaver for dissection; and, by 19th century psychology, a live subject of experiments. (My project was Deleuze, but if I could do it again, I would choose Foucault whose contribution to architecture I think is much more important.)

The notion of architecture is reliant on the existence and life of a subject. Nothing could be more obvious. For Vitruvius, architecture was the organisation of human life – and the quality of an architectural work depended on its social relevance. Be it the subject of territorial dominion, property, the rule of law, corporeality, life, death, consciousness, and thought itself – there is no such thing as architecture without subjects. Nor can there be subjectivity without architecture, this last statement is I suppose implied by my own project, a simple idea which held me in its thrall for a decade.

The central idea of my PhD and later a book was a new model of subjectivity that is purely architectural. I know this class is about method, but really I didn’t work in that

self-reflexive manner, and the PhD in Australia, when I started, there was no requirement to describe my methodology – as long as my argument was logical defensible it didn't matter how I went about it. The method is the PhD itself and its central concept as an organising term. The genesis of the project really came from my conviction in a material architectural subjectivity that I had read in all of Deleuze's literature and believed was explicit even when it was not directly stated in his writings, a compelling idea of a nonpersonal subjectivity which collapsed any distance between the traditional subject and object. So if in German aesthetic theory, I project my subjectivity into an object – the idea that the individual subject is formed through the aesthetic encounter – in my own theory – which I called “subjectivization” very early on – there is no longer an autonomous human subject that stands outside the architectural object in an act of contemplation. Rather, I came to believe in a category of aesthetic objecthood that carries its own agency, prior to the constitution of an individual subject, a you, a me, or an I. This primordial subjectivity was something I could see very clearly in the cinema, and it was obvious why Deleuze loved the cinema – because it not only portrayed his own aesthetic system, internalised in all his writing, but confirmed it – Deleuze's cinema books are a silent rejoinder to Worringer and Riegl, to German aesthetic theory. Now Deleuze of course favoured cinema over architecture, so what is original and peculiar in my work is the reformulation of the architectural object via Deleuze's model. But what I've done is somewhat problematic given Deleuze's real attitude to architecture. Unlike Guattari, Deleuze is a staunch Foucauldian, and his view of architecture can be seen in “the control society,” in his writing against cities, in a long line of French philosophy including figures like Bataille who are responding to the authoritarian discourse of architecture and urbanism that goes back to the French revolution and 18th century Enlightenment. So, in a way, my project side steps Deleuze's view of architecture even as I try to bring Deleuze's liberatory conception of subjectivity to architecture, by rewriting the architectural code. So, it was this sheer conviction that I had in a single idea that led to the specific project, and my stubborn refusal to explore other possibilities for a PhD. I will return to the stubbornness. The project is very clearly organised around the concept rather than any body of work or period in time. Because Australia is so remote from the history of architecture, perhaps that's why we take refuge in books and ideas. There was this kind of cult around Deleuze among the postgrads, even if the faculty merely tolerated Deleuze. In terms of supervision, there was no one that had read Deleuze properly who could supervise me, not in philosophy or architecture, so I conducted the PhD on my own. Perhaps for all these reasons the book is the way it is, rootless, without ground.

Now, architectural history and thought are tightly bound by the status of the subject in any age. The reigning definition of subjectivity is key to understanding a particular culture, especially while you are caught up within it. My project is a product of my own culture, so entirely unlike the brilliant American style of education that I still long for. I studied philosophy alongside architecture in my undergraduate degree at Melbourne University, in Australia, which at the time had a really great philosophy school. I was frustrated with what seemed to be the lack of intellectual grit in the architecture faculty, so I took courses in Heidegger, Husserl and Plato. No one taught Deleuze in philosophy then. Of course, in architecture school, everyone was reading Deleuze, in Australia, by the time I had finished my undergraduate degree in 1997. Deleuze died a year before I graduated and I was always sorry that I didn't get to interview him and ask him about architecture.

The real starting point for the project was 2001, when I landed in America for the first time to undertake the Master of Environmental Design program at Yale. Like in Australia, I never really felt that architecture was enough for me, so I took courses in philosophy and film, one of them was called Psychopathology in the Cinema, taught by a psychiatrist from the Medical School. One of the films he screened, Ingmar Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly* deeply affected me and was in some sense the first case study for what I would later develop into an architectural theory. I cannot recommend this method, unless you are in art history and looking for new aesthetic categories. It's perhaps not the best way to begin an architectural project. Anyway, it turned out that it wasn't only films about mental patients that presented walls and buildings and landscapes as having a kind of will or agency, but throughout film history, objects are unconscious characters in the cinema.

At the same time I was studying these films by Bergman and Tarkovsky I was reading the Deleuze literature in architecture, on *Le Pli*, Deleuze's concept of the virtual, and so on and delivering my reading of this literature in the periodic MED round-table presentations that we had to deliver. And what I found really peculiar was the way in which Deleuze had been interpreted in this very purist, abstract-geometric capacity in say Greg Lynn's "folding in architecture" paradigm, on the one hand, completely divorced from *Le Pli* which is all about Leibniz's model of subjectivity, and yet on the other hand, the architectural object resurfaced as a kind of ego-organism – think of the book "Animate Form." As if the Deleuze vanguard had become aware of *Anti-Oedipus* but had re-oedipalised the architectural object. It could be seen as a kind of psychoanalytic perversion: the object replaced the subject, and became itself an ego. Deleuze is very much against this idea in Sigmund Freud of the strengthening of the ego. So, I wanted to provide a reading of Deleuze that was properly Deleuzian and which would also explore this problem of subjectivity that was materialising in front of my eyes as I was living in America and discussing my project within the round table discussions. A week after I arrived, the September 11 attacks took place, and I believe a new model of subjectivity was born out of that, but I couldn't see it until I returned to Australia to see it from the outside. [Now, we have not evacuated the question of subjectivity, rather what we are witnessing is the rapid proliferation of new subjectivities in a state of emergency.]

Because it turned out the literature on Deleuze was impoverished in this way, I wanted to go back to the source of Deleuze in America, to those who knew him, to pursue interviews with three people that I hoped would give me answers: Sylvère Lotringer, John Rajchman, and Sanford Kwinter. The first person I interviewed was Kwinter, which was arranged for me by a member of the MED program. Kwinter sat with me for three hours in a Soho café talking continuously. I began each interview with the problem of subjectivity – and this is the one thing that everyone agreed on – Kwinter said "subjectivity is the chief problem in Deleuze" that architecture is nothing but subjectivizational processes and so on, and that people who read Deleuze without this understanding, in particular, those who have never read *Anti Oedipus*, don't get it and so on. John Rajchman was really interesting because he gave me the background on the whole Semiotext(e) project, a journal and publishing house by Sylvère Lotringer in the 1970s, through which the first English translations of Deleuze's writings appeared. Semiotext(e) was also the forum which organised Deleuze to come and speak at Columbia university in 1975, the only time Deleuze came to America, where he presented his 'lateral' theory of philosophy as a Rhizome

root structure, versus the arborescent model of classical ontology and German metaphysics, a tree resting on a Grund. Both Kwinter and Rajchman said, go and talk to Sylvère, Kwinter said: “you have to get the story from Sylvère.”

I did meet Sylvère at Columbia. I waited for him outside a class he was giving in French, and I taped our short meeting, but I never used any of it. He was resentful about the other two guys I had interviewed, because of what had taken place at the Schizoculture conference, where he claims that when the violence started Kwinter and Rajchman (who were part organisers of the conference with Sylvère) fled, and abandoned him. Kwinter had described the way the conference had gotten out of control, but what he didn't tell me was what happened to Sylvère who apparently was left in this really precarious situation, and hasn't gotten over it. And he didn't like the way in which the architects had framed their project in the *Semiotext(e)* issue. So I couldn't blame him for not wanting to talk to me. He rightly directed me to the *Art Forum* interview he gave on the topic some time earlier – which he didn't feel he needed to rehash in a second interview. Anyway, I went to interview these three people. And it was odd, the other two were present in each interview. After this, Sylvère featured in my mind as a Wizard of Oz figure, but curiously he emailed me out of the blue 2 years ago saying that one of the current *Semiotext(e)* editors had seen my *Log* article from 2010 on Deleuze and was excited that this story had been revived. And I was vindicated because in his email, he wrote: Simone “you've certainly made the case that it was the architects who brought Deleuze to America.” So, my project started as a series of interviews about Deleuze and architecture, beginning with the idea of subjectivity. And one of the things to come out of this first study, this attempt to historicise Deleuze and architecture, was it turned out architecture was instrumental in the American Deleuze discussion. Now, you should also know that it was many years after the interviews that I mustered the energy and courage to produce a coherent essay and it was 2 years after I submitted it to *Log* the first time that they actually published it at the back of issue 18 when Gavin Keeney was their editor. The first time I submitted it was ignored. Then a year later I edited it and tried to pitch it to one of their theme issues. They ended up accepting it for an earlier non themed issue. Again, I don't recommend you follow my footsteps. It was slow and arduous. And ultimately, by 2010, Deleuze was irrelevant, certainly in Australia. Cynthia Davidson said, this is a story that has to be told, but in an editorial of hers in a recent *Log*, she describes the current architectural culture – and says almost as an aside that we are no longer interested in Deleuze.

At the end of 2003, I returned to Australia to do my PhD with my tail between my legs. This is the first time I've been in America, thanks to Claire, after a ten-year exile in the motherland. I finished the PhD, which was examined by Anthony Vidler and John Rajchman in 2007. And it was a bitter sweet experience, finally coming to the end of this long and difficult project, finding oneself without a job, without any publications – most PhD students publish essays while they're writing their dissertation – I worked in a monk like way, and only started publishing long after graduation. So really, I had no idea how to write for a journal, if you go and read my actual dissertation, I have chapters that are 20,000 words long. Three years later, I finally got my first academic job, and I managed to get a book contract with Ashgate on the strength of my sample chapters: one was the first PhD chapter printed in *Log*, the other was an essay published in *JAE* which really presented my theory with several works, for the first time, and the third sample chapter was the chapter on

Guattari and psychoanalysis. In 2011, there was a flood in Brisbane, and we had to move into a new apartment in Spring Hill the week the manuscript was due. Everything shut down, and I basically pushed out the final manuscript in this hotel room, which in the end Ashgate let me email to them because Australia Post had shut down.

As a PhD, this project is probably viewed as quite peculiar, but I always saw this project as a series of essays that would be published in book form. This is why it was not organised in the usual way around a body of work. It's a series of essays like you will see in so much contemporary French philosophy. I also *needed* to publish a book, for personal reasons. 1. I felt I had suffered and sacrificed over the PhD and I wanted some sort of tangible object to come out of it, so I could move on and leave the project behind. And 2. I couldn't get a job, because I hadn't figured out a way to pitch myself based on a project people scarcely understood, and a book was a way of getting people to see that my theory on Deleuze was a serious project. Ironically, I got my job in the end before getting a book contract, but the manuscript was under review when I had my first interview at QUT.

So since then, I've published just one more essay on Deleuze, before moving away from Deleuze, I hope permanently: for those die hard Deleuzians here, my last Deleuze essay is called "Equipments of Power: The Road and the City" printed this year in MIT *Thresholds* 40 on Foucault, Deleuze, and Francois Fourquet's dialogue on the French Roadway which they call an "*équipement du pouvoir*" for normalisation and control. Written at the same time as the Venturis' book on the Las Vegas Highway.

The impression I have is that by the time my book came out it was woefully passé. That all the best Deleuze books had come out in the late 1990s and by the 2000s it was over, both politically and culturally. And it's not solely an issue of cultural currency: I no longer believe in the Architecture AND Deleuze project. You cannot succeed by writing *on* Deleuze. As a pure aesthetic theory that refers to Art History, my book is robust. But I feel my book didn't win the war of ideas for me in architecture – simply because the moment for architecture and Deleuze had already passed by the time it came out. I was aware of it early on.

I was recently reading in the book *Fascist Visions* that the French anarcho-syndicalist figure Georges Valois condemned nomadism, which he imagined as an infinitude of steppes—endless treeless plains. And I realised, what I hadn't seen before, that Deleuze and Guattari's very title *Mille Plateaux* used endlessly is a response to early French fascism and the revolutionary right – Plateaux meaning a highland. In Australia, I think we all read Deleuze as pure French literature, like reading Proust. But the whole point of literature for Deleuze was a kind of demonstration, against fascist thought after Adorno and Benjamin, when the traditional Marxist and Freudian method was no longer possible. Deleuze was popular because he turned his mission into art and created a new language for my generation. When I could see that editors were dismissing my work as gauche and not serious intellectual work - I quickly soured to the project as forcefully as I had thrown myself into it for ten years. Deleuze's contribution which I tried to convey but that was ultimately missed is the importance of the production of subjectivity - because this is the site of domination and therefore the place to begin any architectural critique.

So, last year I decided I would begin a new project on fascism or authority in architecture. I had really tired of radical discourses on the Left, and I thought it might be more interesting to look at the political project on the Right. In fact, fascism originated in France, and developed out of a split within the revolutionary Left, going back to Sorel. And I don't think this has been properly understood in architecture. We already have an understanding of the contribution of Deleuze's generation to the architectural discipline. The blindspot remains authoritarian thought of *homo fascista*— and this is no accident — it's much harder to investigate fascism and adduce evidence of its operation in aesthetic production. Because unlike activism, Authority is covert.

The important studies on the contribution of twentieth-century fascist ideology to the modern avant garde lie outside architecture, in art history, French and German studies etc. Within architecture, the writers who have dealt with politics and modern architecture provide a dominant reading whose focus has always been the ideology of socialist utopianism. What I'm proposing is the possibility of a Fascist Genealogy of Modern Architecture centred on France, which examines the problem of architectural modernity and concepts of violence, the master (*surhomme*), palingenesis, purity, and so on. The premise is that Modernism and fascism bear similarities not because they occur alongside each other, but because they arise from a shared fascination with authority. Some people argue that modern architects' involvement with State politics is about patronage, career and self-promotion. But I'm interested in how powerful concepts in a fascist philosophy contributed to modernist ideation.

The project begins with an essay in progress on the meaning of La Révolution in Le Corbusier's early thought which is one of the readings. Contrary to the received industrial-utopian technocratic genealogy for Le Corbusier's model, in my reading, I wanted to explore the influence on Le Corbusier of the Fascist revolution and Mussolini's March on Rome in 1922, that took place a year before Le Corbusier's first book *Vers une architecture* came out, in which Le Corbusier uttered his refrain "architecture or revolution." So this is a starting point for the project.

I am also working on a second essay on Le Corbusier and Georges Valois. Le Corbusier participated with the first group in France to call itself fascist, Valois's militant Faisceau des Combattants et Producteurs, the "Blue Shirts," inspired by the Italian "*Fasci*" of Mussolini. Thanks to Mark Antliff, we know the Faisceau did not misappropriate Le Corbusier's *plans*, in some remote quasi-symbolic sense, rather Valois's organisation was premised on the redesign of Paris based on Le Corbusier's schematic designs. Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* was considered the "prodigious" model for the fascist state Valois called *La Cité Française* — after his mentor the anarcho-syndicalist Georges Sorel. Valois stated that Le Corbusier's architectural concepts were "an expression of our profoundest thoughts," the *Faisceau*, who "saw their own thought materialized" on the pages of Le Corbusier's plans. The question I pose is, In what sense is Le Corbusier's plan a complete *representation* of La Cité? For Valois, the fascist city "represents the collective will of *La Cité*" invoking Enlightenment philosophy, operative in Sorel, namely Rousseau, for whom the notion of "collective will" is linked to the idea of political representation, meaning to 'stand in' for someone or a group of subjects i.e. the majority vote. The figures in Voisin are not empty abstractions but the result of "the will" of the "combatant-producers" who

build the town. Yet, the paradox in anarcho-syndicalist anti-enlightenment thought – and one that became a problem for Le Corbusier – is precisely that of authority and representation. In Le Corbusier’s plan, the “morality of the producers” and “the master” (this transcendent authority that hovers above La Cité) is flattened into a single picture plane, thereby abolishing representation. I argue that La Cité pushed to the limits of formal abstraction by Le Corbusier thereby reverts back to the Enlightenment myth it first opposed, what Theodor Adorno would call the dialectic of enlightenment. So that’s what I’m working on. **[I also want to add, one of the reasons for my trip is to tell people about our PhD program in Australia, if you know any undergrads who might be interested in doing a PhD in Australia let me know.]**