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**delaying the
image:
towards an
aesthetics of
encounter /**

alberto altés arlandis

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Title / Título:

Delaying the Image: Towards an Aesthetics of Encounter
(Retrasar la Imagen: Hacia una Estética del Encuentro)

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alberto altés arlandis

Throughout the last 18 months, while I was approaching the last steps towards the completion of this PhD dissertation, various forms of violence have emerged around me and fallen on me in ways that have interfered with my work and seriously affected my life, my health and my motivation to teach and to research. Unfortunately, I was not the only subject of such violence, and a number of my closest colleagues have been and are still victims of it too. As if the growingly violent and idiotic dictatorship of ideological administrative power were not harsh enough in their endeavour to eradicate experimentation, thinking, play, and most of all, love, expelling all trace of them from our universities - now come managerial enterprises and benchmarked machines of conformity - we still had to suffer (we are still suffering), simultaneously, the violence of leviathanic, envious, mediocre, and ruthless evil, exercised with the complicity of the administrative and bureaucratic powers of the university. At the time I am writing these words, there is still hope that justice will be done. One thing is for sure: we know, we play, and we love. They don't. A quote once badly misused during this nightmarish trip deserves, I believe, to be now timely rescued:

“The time has come to tell the truth. Again. There is no love without justice. Men and women who cannot be just deny themselves and everyone they choose to be intimate with the freedom to know mutual love. If we remain unable to imagine a world where love can be recognized as a unifying principle that can lead us to seek and use power wisely, then we will remain wedded to a culture of domination that requires us to choose power over love.”
(bell hooks, 2002, communion: the female search for love)

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Introduction /



Intro

Choices, Distances, Exceptions

Delaying the Image: Towards an Aesthetics of Encounter

Alberto Altés Arlandis

Fig. 01/
Hiroshi Sugimoto, Theater series, LA Paramount

"I'm a habitual self-interlocutor. Around the time I started photographing at the Natural History Museum, one evening I had a near-hallucinatory vision. The question-and-answer session that led up to this vision went something like this: Suppose you shoot a whole movie in a single frame? And the answer: You get a shining screen. Immediately I sprang into action, experimenting toward realizing this vision. Dressed up as a tourist, I walked into a cheap cinema in the East Village with a large-format camera. As soon as the movie started, I fixed the shutter at a wide-open aperture, and two hours later when the movie finished, I clicked the shutter closed. That evening, I developed the film, and the vision exploded behind my eyes."

1. Badiou, A. (2013). *Cinéma*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, p. 61.

"Space, then, as the designated place of the real, resists any sensible representation. Captured in the figures of absence, of enigma, of fragmentation, the real tends to be subject to accounting operations, as a proof of its certainty. Yet we are very well aware that the real can't be measured, that we can't be certain about it: we can only choose to be a part of it."¹

This thesis, as part of a movement towards the degree of PhD (a becoming Doctor of Philosophy), is constructed and approached as a philosophical situation, which is always about an encounter between terms that are foreign to each other. In this case, through the exploration of the interplays of space, film and politics, a multiplicity of foreign terms and such encounters will emerge and take us along a journey through places, movies and architectures, to discuss the ways in which architecture and other spatial practices think, imagine and produce the worlds we live in and the ways in which we live together.

Quite differently from what has usually been the focus of explorations of the relationships between film and architecture – namely an approach to their connections as formal constructions and compositional techniques – I will approach cinema as a form that thinks, as an apparatus of spatial critique and as a material that is capable of activating a time and a space of encounter: one in which people are enabled to meet reality at a distance from that in which they are presently becoming. Film is here an encounter

with otherness, and allows thinking in and through the distance that separates the viewer from the screen and from the spaces and realities presented on it. It does so by means of its form. It is a form that thinks. Through its thinking, cinema can change the ways in which we conceive of territories and places; it can change the ways in which we conceive of architecture, helping us move from understanding it as a discipline or an 'it' to seeing it as an action or a verb: to architect. Cinema can help us gain the critical, social, political and utopian impetus we are missing in our 'movement' towards the establishment of the common.

Philosophy has, according to Badiou, three tasks in relationship with situations: first, it has to help us clarify the basic choices of our thinking; second, it has to help us clarify the distance between that thinking (truths as creation) and power; and third, it has to help us clarify the importance of the exception, the rupture, the event. Choice, distance, exception.

One could also see in that sequence a relationship to the main three parts of this research, the first part is about choices: an archaeology of the present that forces us to choose between different things in order to approach what I will call 'pragmatic dissent'; the second part is about distances: a filmic, spatial and affective journey in which we take a distance from that present in order to encounter reality, and we do so by exploring and developing an 'aesthetics of encounter'; and the third part is about exceptions: an exploration of other images and other spaces, alternatives and events in the conception, thinking and production of spaces and images, a journey through these exceptions that will become a discussion of two interrelated notions: anarchic metapolitics and what I will provisionally call 'ethics of encounter'. Or in other words, a different way of conceiving and addressing our becoming 'of' the world as architects and the responsibilities we have in relationship with its transformation through the thinking, construction and organization of our coexistence. //



Fig. 02/
Hiroshi Sugimoto, Time Exposed- #367
Black Sea, Inebolu (1991)

1

Objectual Imageries: An Archaeology of the Present /



Fig. 03/
Apartment buildings Wozoco
MVRDV, Amsterdam, 1997

Objectual Imageries

Introduction

*“You will hardly suggest that my opinion of the present is too exalted and if I do not despair about it, this is only because its desperate position fills me with hope.”*¹

*“Images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a partial way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and as such, the autonomous movement of non-life.”*²

The recent and on-going transformations of cognitive capitalism have changed the ways in which cultural and artistic production takes place. While the impact of culture - and therefore of architecture - in the production of immaterial values is constantly growing, the effects of this production are more and more embedded in the terms and demands set by neoliberalism and the market, and for that reason, further and further away from their true functions, namely the production of knowledge, emancipatory value(s) and education, and the articulation of life.

¹ Marx, K. (1844) ‘Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge, May 1843’, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*

² Debord, G. (1995), ‘The society of the spectacle’, p. 12

The worrying and disappointing disconnection of architecture and other spatial practices from the social and the political – a disappointment that is one of the starting points of this research – is not unrelated to a number of equally worrying conditions in which this disconnection and other transformations take place: on the one hand, a formidable process of liquefaction or cultural dissolution which is not only leading to a disinvestment or dis-involvement in the making of social relations, but also to affective saturation and the near collapse of love and desire³; on the other, the extreme, superficial and at times cynical individualism that characterizes the inhabitants and producers of today's toxic capitalism; and no less importantly, a complete loss of interest in the realities that may or may not lie behind the appearances.

Among their many effects, these factors push us towards a world in which – apparently - the only valid thing is the image, what is represented, the symbol, the sign. A world in which the interest for the metaphysical understanding or perception of what surrounds us is progressively disappearing at the same speed at which the interest and care for the things that are really close to us also melts in the air. A world in which there is very little or no interest in reflection and reflexivity. No interest in the idea of truth, or truths, which has been simply abandoned and substituted by radical relativism, opportunism and cynicism. A world in which, as Bernard Stiegler is dedicated to explaining, our condition must be thought in relationship with the workings of the technologies of the mind – what he calls psycho-power in reference to the networks of radio, television and digital technologies – and the ways in which they are effecting a systematic capturing and destruction of human memory, attention and care.⁴

In such a liquid and disaffected second modernity, constant change is the only certainty, truth, if it exists, is in the image itself. *“Truth now no longer seduces through image, but as image. [...] The signifier has supplanted the signified, the representation has usurped the original, the semblance has displaced the essence, and verisimilitude has ousted truth. Deprived of its former metaphysical certainties, the eye, that actively searching, documenting organ, has taken on immeasurable importance”*.⁵ At a time in which appearances are capable of displacing the very being of things and even more, their ‘becoming’; visuals seem to determine our existence. Our fragmented postmodern society is individualistic, multicultural, multifaceted and anonymous at the same time. This culture has no place for metaphysical

3 Here we should not only think of the work carried out by the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, but also for instance that of the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, to whom we will often return in our exploration/archaeology.

4 See for instance: Stiegler, Bernard (2012) *Care: within the limits of capitalism, economizing means care*, in Cohen, Tom. (ed.) (2012) *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change*, Vol. 1. Michigan: Open Humanities Press, MPublishing, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor.

5 Bouman, Ole and Roemer van Toorn (1994), *The Invisible in architecture*, (London New York, N.Y: Academy Editions Distributed by St. Martin's Press) 515, p. 12



Fig. 04/
Snøhetta. King Abdulaziz Center of Knowledge and Culture.
Copyright Snøhetta. 2008.
Eikongraphia.

thoughts, less for universal truths. What is acceptable today is acceptable on the basis of the relative validity of an idea or a value. And such a lack of definition, such indeterminacy, allows infinite individual worlds of meaning to emerge and be understood in their singularity. This relativist promiscuity is seen by some as an opportunity for larger freedoms and emancipation, and effectively, there is perhaps a possibility for individual self-determination, but only for those who can afford it. In the meantime, the world continues to become more and more uniform, more and more homogenous. The cult of this fake-pluralism and the search for difference are elevated to an absolute law, resulting in a fetishized “I”(or me)-culture, which facilitates the conservatism and perpetuation of the social mechanisms of cultural and economic production; a culture whose products seem to have become nothing but representations.

Today’s cultural dynamics has turned culture into cultural production, and the products of this process into images and representations. Architecture, emancipated as Art, has become one more cultural product. Autonomous, but still subjected to the limits of the discipline, it tries to escape the everyday through superficial aesthetics, appearances, attractive and/or controversial shapes, by offering a kind of exclusive ‘high’ product, what results in a brutally competitive race aiming at the production of difference for the sake of difference: being different and original, being up-to-date.



Fig. 05/
¥€\$ Culture. Image extracted from the
publication 'Content' by Rem Koolhaas /
OMA.

Architecture is thus producing autonomous objects that are disconnected from the social-reality in which they are produced and located: object-images. And it tries to validate its own mechanisms and procedures through the addition of discourse, which is superimposed to the object in an illustrative – or simply opportunistic and fake – way, generating a profound discrepancy between the complexity of reality (the outside world) and the interiority of architecture as a discipline or a thing. This way of operating opens up a wide spectrum of interpretations, functions and approaches, which of course contribute to the perpetuation of the discipline's autonomy, but the resulting architectures have nothing to do with cultural analysis, a critique of the current social conditions, or a concerned engagement with the world.⁶

Instead, it seems as if a whole generation of architects had grown up in a landscape of extreme pragmatism, several decades of continuous 'yes' to everything (the so-called '¥€\$-culture')⁷, of progressive 'liberation' and of losing touch first with the political, then with the discipline, with the local, with history, with technology, ethics and even with style. A land of mild and smooth computer graphics and deceitful witty diagrams. A landscape of facts and data, of information without concerns, of images lacking content, manipulated and manipulative, superficially suggestive, images that stuff minds and crush the possibility of deeper reflection and true progression. A distressing landscape and scarce means of

⁶ I will be often referring to the notion of 'worlding' understood as the complex task of researching, thinking and enacting ways of making the world. Note that 'worlding' would thus refer to an understanding of the world as an event and not as a given; it would be related to creative action (poetry/poiesis); and it would point to an relational and processual ontology in which rather than 'being', what exists is always a collective coming-into-being in which action and philosophy (making and thinking) cannot be separated. (See for instance: Nancy, Jean-Luc (1998) *The Sense of the World*; (2000) *Being Singular Plural*; (2007) *The Creation of the World or Globalization*).

⁷ Koolhaas, Rem (2004), *Content*, (Köln: Taschen) 544, p. 241

Fig 06/
Shoes designed by Zaha Hadid
<http://www.unitednude.com/collaborations/zaha-hadid>

8 Surf, applied to architectural practice and the exploration of new markets and possibilities, was introduced by Rem Koolhaas in S, M, L, XL, and has been paraphrased and repeated by many, like the former dean of the Berlage Institute, Alejandro Zaera, who openly declared his sympathy for this and other ideas of the Dutch architect and tried to incorporate them into his, at the time, politically correct 'professionalism'. See the interview with Wiel Arets and Alejandro Zaera by Roemer van Toorn in Van Toorn et al. (2003) *Hunch 6/7, The Berlage Institute Report* (Rotterdam: Episode Publishers)

9 It would be necessary to discuss whether those practices that claim to be 'projective' – as opposed to critical - are in fact so or not, and also which are the uses and definitions of the term 'projective' that have been hi-jacked and which are those we would like to reclaim and/or refer to. Given the power of the term 'projective', it remains an important *project* to rescue it from opportunistic and cynical manoeuvres.

10 This I recall was the term proposed by Roemer van Toorn in the context of discussions and reflection about criticality and projectivity during the opening conference of the Delft School of Design (DSD) at TUDelft in 2004.



orientation. No content, just cynicism and opportunism in linguistic or visual disguise.

In the most successful and celebrated cases of such cynicism and opportunism, architectural practice has been understood as a negotiating process and as the ability to explore new markets, possibilities and worlds in which to 'surf'⁸ with complicity and the only aim of becoming even more productive. The misnamed 'projective'⁹ approach has entertained and distracted in its unstoppable search for newness, while feeding a whole generation of theorists avid of 'new newness' to be analysed, dissected, and commented upon through the invention of new terms, dualisms and other tricks. But where is the progress, the forward movement to be obtained from all of this newness? Is there any progress at all? Are there any real concerns addressed? Any thing that really matters today that architecture can claim being part of making or solving?

Those who have signed up for or aligned with the 'projective' have driven the discipline either to a 'zero-degree of the political'¹⁰ (as in the case of MVRDV), or in more respectable cases to a certain degree

of the politically correct in architecture, or of what could also be referred to as ‘projective autonomy’¹¹ (such as that of Claus en Kaan for instance), although more and more often to disrespectful, arrogant and shouting interventions. To be sure, these approaches have pushed architecture towards solitary, autonomous, personalized and opportunistic reactions to a set of given, or for that purpose made-up, forces. Without questioning, without commitment or fidelity to the truths and concerns of the situations in which they were conceived and/or located.

Wouldn’t it be necessary to engage in a deeper and more committed practice than the merely superficial and pseudo-aesthetical? What is the use of keeping architecture and urbanism ‘pure’? Why such an opposition and resistance to confronting real themes, issues that really matter, real questions and problems that affect the architectural, urban and planetary spheres? Where is the substance?¹² How can architecture become a medium of critical activity again?

As we will see, the proposal will be to ‘bring things back to life’¹³ where the substance really is, and to shift our attention from images and objects to the flows of sensory awareness in which all images are conceived, and to the flows of matter out of which ideas of objects are extracted. In short, to shift our perspective back to movement and action.

This first part of the thesis is also conceived as a kind of movement: although the chapters are constructed as ‘worlds’ in their own right and as separated episodes that deal with certain dimensions of the image, there is an ambition to generate a transversal movement across them which establishes the grounds for the articulation of a hypothesis based on the definition of two operative concepts, or categories, which are understood as ‘tools for responsible’¹⁴ worlding’.

The aim of this archaeology is therefore not only exploratory but also reflective, critical and speculative: while diving into the many lives of the image and its various and promiscuous relationships with today’s architectures and spatial practices, I will try to formulate relevant questions that can lead to the opening of critical ‘worlding’ paths and concerned engagements with practices of *thinking-feeling-making*, while simultaneously constructing an introduction to and approaching a definition of those two operative categories, which will be built around the notions of encounter and dissent.

¹¹ This is the term used by Roemer van Toorn in his critique of the lack of utopian impetus in recent Dutch architecture. See Van Toorn, Roemer (2007) *No More Dreams: The Passion for Reality in Recent Dutch Architecture... and its Limitations*, in Saunders, William S. “The New Architectural Pragmatism” Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. pp. 54-74

¹² Ghirardo, D. (1996), *The Architecture of Deceit*, in Kate Nesbitt, *Theorizing a new agenda for architecture: an anthology of architectural theory 1965-1995*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press) 606.

¹³ Although I will come back to this at length later, I would like to refer already to the work of Tim Ingold and his book on “*Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*” (London: Routledge) in which he develops his views on this ‘return to life’. Ingold’s views on this matter have deeply influenced my own and his work is one of the main sources for this investigation.

¹⁴ I intend to progressively unpack the exact meaning and implications of the word ‘responsible’ here, which will not be exactly what we normally understand in its immediate use, but diffracted through ideas of engagement and the notion of ‘matters of care’.



Fig. 07/
Model Sasha Pivovarova in a Prada advert from the autumn/winter campaign 2007, designed by AMO (Rem Koolhaas and Jeroen Koolhaas). There are two things to be commented: On the one hand the complete inexpressivity in the slovakian model, that might as well have been substituted with a manequin, but at the same time is used here for precisely that which she herself represents, her symbolic subjectivity; and on the other hand the fact that famous architectural offices and architects are starting to be wanted in the field of publicity as expert creators of images.

Asymmetries, inequalities and injustice gain ground today. Cynicism, hopeless resignation and despair surround us. The relationships of the various dimensions of the image with architecture and spatial practices generate, more often than not, troubling, disquieting and unfair situations. And the condition of the image today, embedded more and more in an increasingly all-encompassing and numbing spectacle is itself upsetting and unfair. The realization of these visual, aesthetic, spatial and, of course, political ‘wrongs’ can only lead to disagreement. And such disagreement turns into *pragmatic dissent* – the first category – as soon as we take the decision and the risk of truly and responsibly inhabiting our ‘close’ (immediate) environment. Once we are directly involved in the world around us – the ground under our feet but also affinities afar and things that really matter – once we establish bonds, perhaps fragile ones, with the situations we live in and also with those in which we can get to intervene from within, pragmatic dissent emerges from the knowledge and understanding of those situations and their relationships with the material and symbolic misery of a world in decadence. Soon after, dissent becomes the engine of our designs, thoughts and actions.

For this involved stance, for such an engaged dissent to emerge, there must be first a care and an attention for the situation and its conditions. The articulation of and the dwelling in this care and this atten-



tion is what I will be approaching through the second category: *aesthetics of encounter*, a distribution of what can be said, heard, seen and done that privileges the encounter as a mode of creative becoming, and at the same time a fidelity to situations that emerge from such distribution and such encounters.

The order in which I have presented them is purely a narrative convention, for it is impossible to tell which one occurs first. They are, as I see them, intertwined, simultaneous and interrelated. Pragmatic dissent is both fuelled by and producing a certain 'aesthetics of encounter', it leads to and works through encounter in several ways, firstly, in the act of meeting the things we disagree with – this disagreement being related to a notion of distance; secondly, in our meeting with the close environment and its inhabitants – which speaks of a certain proximity; and thirdly, in seeing the connections between what we are doing everyday and those alienated, distant things we disagree with. Connecting with those things and actors that are immediate, and sometimes close to us, is possible only in the encounter; such affinity emerges and unfolds *as* encounter.

Throughout the chapters, I will be exploring the condition of the image today, and its tendency to proliferate in constellations that wrap our understanding. I will discuss their lack of depth and their phony

Fig. 08/
Poster from UK branding campaign in relation to the redesign of newspaper Financial Times in the spring of 2007

‘nature’: it may be they are no images after all, but something else. I will be suggesting the possibility of ‘delaying the image’, and putting forward a redemption plan which, based on its complexity and openness, calls for a renewed hope and fidelity to cinema, as the site of production of images that think and preserve.¹⁵

I will be looking at the relationships of the eye and the senses with the image, and the possibilities of thinking and enacting a non-aggressive gaze understood as a touching encounter, and as a weak exploration that does not aim at consuming its object but at the establishment of a meeting duration.

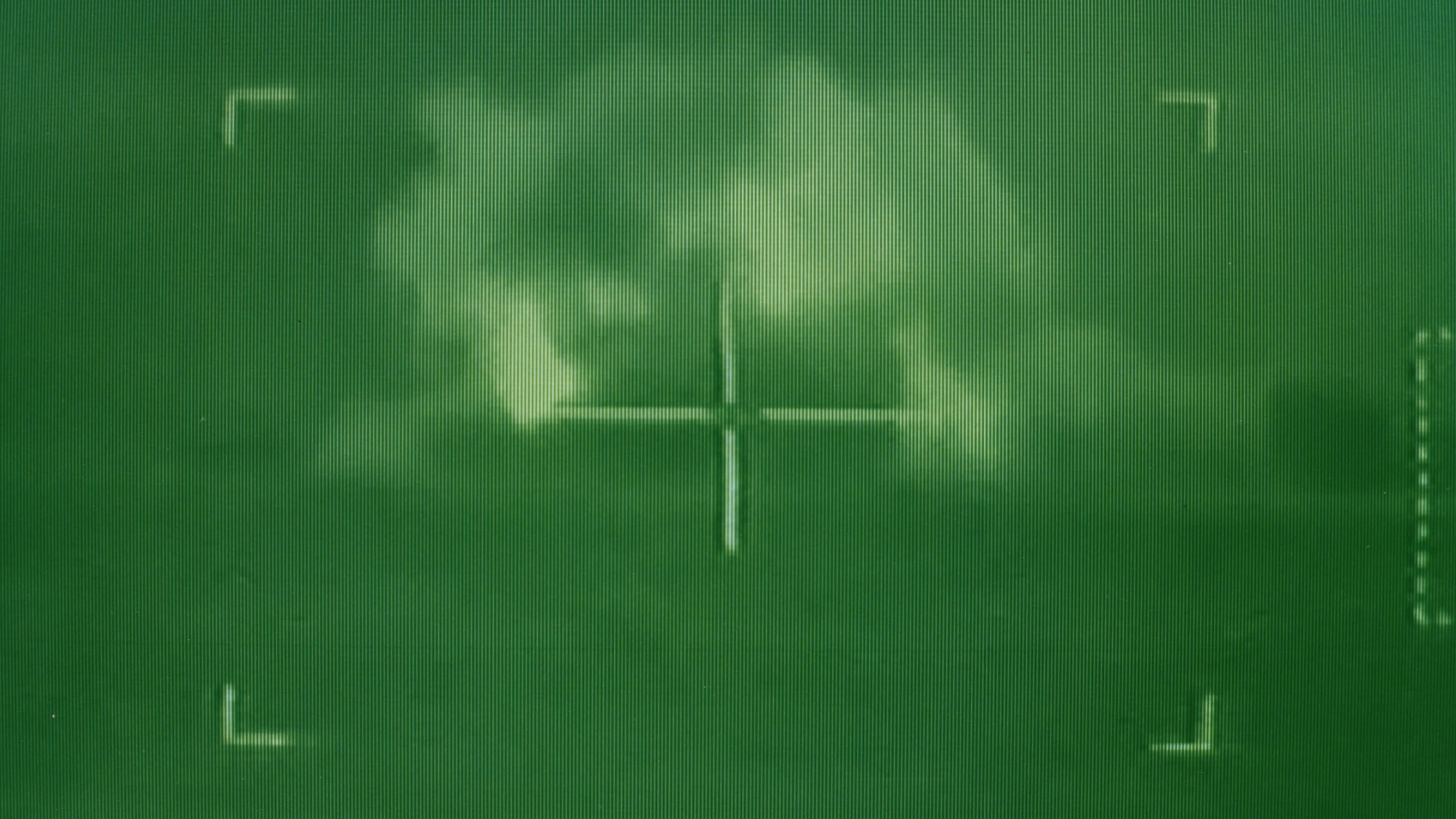
I will address the fraudulent mistake of making signs pass as images, which reduces and simplifies the inherently open and inexhaustible nature of the image, and, as we know, has had disastrous consequences in the production of architecture of the last decades.

Screens will be explored as masks and sites of encounter, beyond and against the hyperbolic narratives that make them ultimate symbols of the domination of the spectacle and the promise of digital technologies.

I will also be discussing the alienating powers of imagery and its destructive effects on the affective and mental dimensions of the (still) modern self. Beyond today’s reigning cynicism, the critique of ideology remains a paramount task, all the more so in front of the proliferation and extension of a spectacle that has now turned not only immaterial but digital.

The question of interpretation and the relationships of the image with reality today will also be addressed, with the help of current development in the phenomenology of perception as well as radical realist and process-based ontologies. All in all, the journey will try to locate and discuss some of the harms and traps of the proliferation of objectual imageries, which are to be resisted and superseded with the proposed categories of pragmatic dissent and aesthetics of encounter, and also, at times, through a fragile, but stubborn delaying of the image.

15 I will return to this later but I am referring here to the letter that Gilles Deleuze wrote to Serge Daney, as the preface of Daney’s book ‘Ciné Journal 1981-1986’, published by Cahiers du cinéma in 1986, in which Deleuze refers to cinema as capable of producing an image that preserves, understanding preservation as the creation of something additional, a supplement. See Deleuze, Gilles (1995) *Negotiations*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 69-79



Images and Imageries

Chapter 1.1

Fig. 09/
Under Fire, Jordan Crandall (2004)

¹ Ransom, J. C. (1968), 'The world's body', xiv, 390. This quote appears also in a slightly different formulation in Sutton, W. (1963) 'Modern Criticism: Theory and Practice', p. 221, and a part of it has been also used by Cy Twombly in one of his paintings (Untitled, 1990) CT Aug 1690, in which he writes: "*The image cannot be dispossessed of a primordial freshness, which ideas can never claim.*" I first came across this painting by Cy Twombly and the quote through Per Nilsson, who used it to introduce one of his lectures at UMA. I am thankful to him for making me aware of the relevance of the quote, what came about through later discussions.

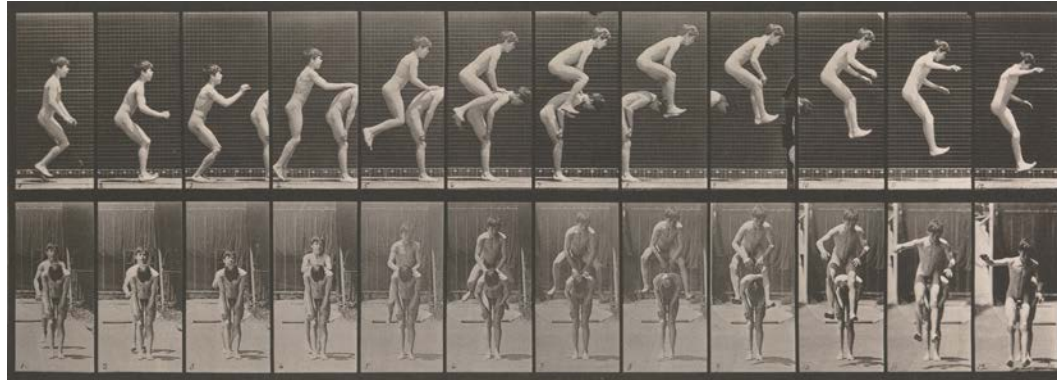
*"The image is the raw material of the idea. [...] It cannot be dispossessed of a primordial freshness, which ideas can never claim. An idea is derivative and tamed. The image is in the natural or wild state, and it has to be discovered there, not put there, obeying its own law and none of ours. We think we can lay hold of the image and take it captive, but the docile captive is not the real image but only the idea, which is the image with its character beaten out of it."*¹

In order to begin with this first part that wants to explore a present of what I have called 'objectual' imagery, it is necessary to look at the broader condition of the image itself. And I think the culture of the image today can be addressed by comparing the concept of image with the idea of constellations and sets of images in plural. One must start by acknowledging that when we use the term 'image' today we do not always refer to the same thing. We could continue by agreeing with the French philosopher Jacques Rancière that it is one of the tasks of art to articulate all those possible definitions, uses and functions. How do we position ourselves as human beings, perhaps as architects, in the context of a proliferation of images to an extent such that some have announced the end of reality? Are images the only thing that we are left with? If that were the case, the notion of image would be absurd and empty. But there has hardly ever been more attention and discussion dedicated to the image. Images are there,

everywhere; but they are not at all the same, they are not conceived and produced according to the same procedures and they do not have the same powers or effects. Not all of them have the same capacity to establish and dwell in the same kinds of relationships with other things, discourses and people. This is one of the reasons why, as we will see below, some thinkers and artists distinguish the idea of 'image' as capable of referring to an 'Other', from the idea of 'visual' which would refer only to itself.

For Rancière, the problem of images has stopped being that they hide secrets that are not secrets anymore, but rather the fact that *"they no longer hide anything"*. (Rancière, 2007:22) They have become, according to him, empty signifiers. The proliferation of images and visual materials in which we seem to be immersed has been the object of various and serious criticism, some of which I will try to address throughout this first part of the thesis. And some of which seem to be, according to Rancière, not helping us move any further. Many of these critical positions have been inspired in and/or have drawn from the astonishingly accurate and foretelling masterpiece written by Guy Debord in 1967, *The Society of the Spectacle*, in which he relentlessly describes how the total occupation of social life by the products of the economy has both allowed and produced a total transition *"from having into appearing: all effective 'having' must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d'être from appearances"*. (Debord, 1994:12)

Debord's ideas and reflections seem to describe the world we live in today even better than they did the one of the times in which they were written. At the time of the explosion of star-architecture and their celebrity figures, when people are first 'invited' and then slowly encouraged and co-opted to construct their own self-marketing identities and broadcast them in real-time through all kinds of media devices and networks, the commodification of every aspect of life that he announced is closer than ever before. The example of the proliferation of media identities and social network profiles - which are effectively transforming the actual lives and subjectivities of those who use them to design their 'selves' in order to compete in the social and economic markets - is perfect to illustrate the ways in which this flood of images, this society of spectacle is by no means 'just' a thing at which we passively look, but rather a process that we are part of, and that increasingly determines the way in which we build and perceive our own lives, and the very relations that we set up and articulate in it.



“For one to whom the real world becomes real images, mere images are transformed into real beings tangible figments which are the efficient motor of trancelike behavior. Since the spectacle’s job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society’s generalized abstraction. This is not to say, however, that the spectacle itself is perceptible to the naked eye even if that eye is assisted by the ear. The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle reestablishes its rule.” (Debord, 1994:17)

This critique has itself been criticized for being disempowering, paralyzing or blocking, and in the same line even for being cynical, since, it is claimed, it would assert the impossibility of distinguishing between image and reality, the impossibility of fighting the beast. I believe it is this critique of the critique that is in fact cynical. The occupation of life by the spectacle is of course not complete, and any such reading of Debord’s work is interested, tendentially biased and metaphorical, or simply too literal.

Fig. 10/
‘Boys playing leapfrog’
Eadweard Muybridge (1919)

Our critical task is precisely to identify, or rather, create the gaps and the cracks within the spectacle in which true life can be still developed. And for that matter, the critique of the spectacle is one of our empowering tools. Provided of course that we don't look at it from the cynical eyes of lazy postmodern nihilism: as if the spectacle were simply *there* and there were no way out of it. It is our practical task to actualize the critique of the spectacle and re-invent it inside each of the situations we live in, and to constantly and stubbornly question the images and imageries that surround and make us.

The critical reading of images and the unveiling of the sometimes deceptive messages they conceal or, simply and directly, present, is still a very valid, urgent and, furthermore, absolutely possible task. The assertion of the exteriority of spectacle by Guy Debord is still important (Debord, 1994:23) perhaps more than ever before, as the separation he brilliantly described is more and more perfected. What is cynical, and dangerous, is to align with the postmodern relativism that embraces the end of truth. There are still quite a number of tasks to be seriously undertaken in relationship with that separation, such as understanding how radical (or how weak) this separation is, or what are its (real) effects in the here and now of the situations we inhabit and experience. To what extent are the fictions we live in structuring our reality? Or what are the performative powers of the symbolic fictions that structure the socio-symbolic reality we take part in? And there remains, indeed, truth. Or rather, truths – as Badiou shows us – within the situations we live in, and around the intensities of the events we contribute to producing.

Confronting the negative and passive view of spectatorship that informed Debord's work, Rancière proposes a different concept of spectator with which he aims at avoiding that active/passive opposition. In his book *"The Emancipated Spectator"*, Rancière works out an application to theatre of the theories of his previous book *"The Ignorant Schoolmaster"*. In both books, the French philosopher relies on his work on equality, and proposes the equality of intelligence as the grounds for emancipated education, one in which intelligence would proceed under the guidance of a will in order to construct an act of attention that does not depend on divisions between the knowing and the ignorant or the capable and the incapable. In the same way in which all students would therefore be intelligent and capable of *"learning by themselves"*, guided by the sole force of their wills; all spectators would also be, already, active: *"[T]he spectator also acts, like the pupil or the scholar: she observes, selects, compares, interprets"*. (Rancière, 2009:13) What this otherwise well-intentioned confidence in the capacities of human beings



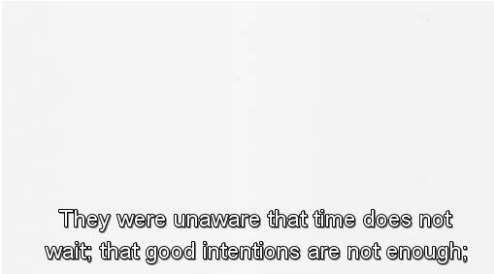
is leaving aside is, among other things, situated-ness. By speaking in such universal terms (the equality of intelligence and the freedom of all students and spectators to learn by themselves and to look actively by themselves) Rancière is approaching a rather unified subject and does not take into account the particularities and singularities of the situations in which one or another subject might or might not be entangled or trapped.

As Manuel Asensi brilliantly shows us in his sharp and forceful critique of Rancière's *Ignorant Schoolmaster*,² neither students nor spectators are ever 'alone' to be able to learn, or to become active "by themselves", as Rancière proposes. The presupposition of equality ignores all the historical situated-ness that has already shaped and constructed various inequalities in all of us, which in turn will determine, greatly and to be sure, the extent to which we are or we aren't capable of accessing a school, or the spectacle in question, let alone becoming active spectators or learning by means of our own will.

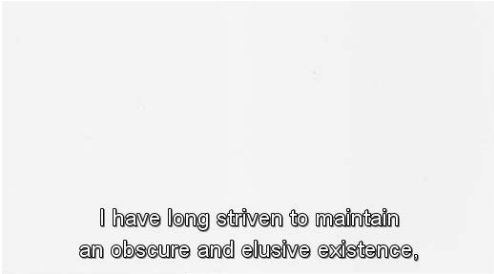
As long as the utopia of universal equality remains a horizon to actively strive for, we will be needing serious critique, mediated explanation and dialogue, just as much as new alternative tools to keep on

Fig. 11/
In Girum - Guy Debord (1978)

² Asensi Pérez, M. (2011), 'El ignorante del maestro: sobre ignorancia y emancipación', *Desacuerdos* 6



They were unaware that time does not
wait; that good intentions are not enough;



I have long striven to maintain
an obscure and elusive existence,



I had no interest in awarding diplomas
in some sort of fantasized orthodoxy,

In Girum - Guy Debord (1978)
Film stills from left to right:
1h/21'55" 1h22'46" / 1h21'41"

inventing ways of addressing and making images that contribute to the activation of life instead of to its freezing.

On the other hand, and going back to the apparent negativity of Debord's critique of the spectacle, we must acknowledge that Debord's own practice both in the artistic and in the political fields proves that his conception of spectatorship was not as simple as to despise all spectators as passive-in-essence and therefore bad. The active/passive opposition should be understood as an unresolved dialectics that must be actualized in every concrete situation in order to invent other ways of being in the world. Debord's ideas about street theatre ³, for instance, can be read as a way of conceiving a kind of inverted-spectacle of non-actors intervening in urban life as a way to produce a performative break that would allow the people in the city to join, inhabit, interact with and transform the performance, and by extension, their own lives. In this conception, the spectator is deconstructed into an agent of the performance, which is also changed from pure-spectacle to various forms of events capable of hosting life. This is of course close to the idea of constructed situation that was at the core of the activities and proposals of the Situationist International, and which indicates again a very 'open' understanding of what a spectacle and its performers/spectators are or can be.

Most of Debord's films are also examples of quite successful attempts at transforming the film spectator and the very situation of watching the film into a more active and dialogical event. He believed that cinema could be used to create situations of dialogue and discussion that would invite the audience to engage actively. His films were thought and conceived for spectators, and many of them for spectators that would be willing and capable of focusing and engaging in the dense narrations and reflections of a Debord that would read throughout the film the text that he had written for it.

Some of his films were conceived mostly as pure provocations and in that sense as attempts at breaking through the layers of the spectacle and reaching a level of adversarial communication that signals the encroaching of real life into art. Even in the cases of these radical provocations, the working of the image aims at the identification and construction of gaps and cracks of encounter into which life can be inserted or, put more simply, in which life can take place; a constant and never ending process of questioning and challenging the image, from and within the image itself.

³ See for instance Puchner, Martin (2004). *Society of the Counter-Spectacle: Debord and the Theatre of the Situationists*. Theatre Research International, 01, pp 4-15; and also Debord, Guy and Wolman, Gil J. (1956) A User's Guide to Détournement, in *Situationist International Anthology*, translated by Ken Knabb.



Fig. 12/
Like a Fire that consumes all before it
Cy Twombly

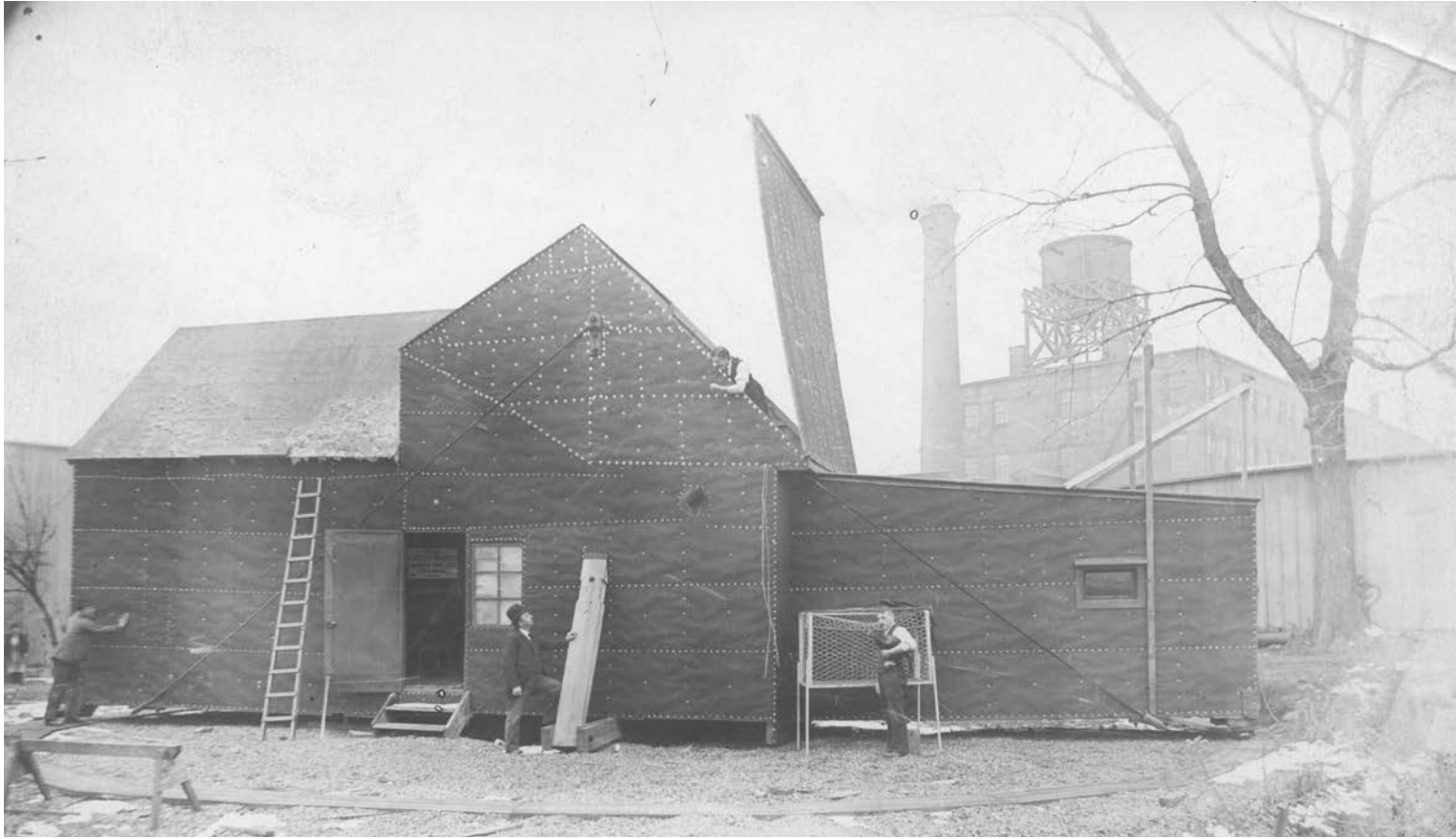
In a world of spectacle and separation that enhances and amplifies our discontinuity, we should strive for as much continuity as we can. We can do so by means of true commitment and fidelity to the situations we inhabit, by developing here-and-now situated truths that emerge from our commitment to a situation, to an encounter. We must, also, manage to discover and share the image(s) in their wildest, and most raw state, as a means to communicate our experiences of space, encounter and life.

The image, or aesthetics, is in fact the only real way to communicate our experiences of encounter, which are epistemologically impossible to tell.⁴ It is in and through the image, through an aesthetics of encounter, that we can get closer to the truths of the Event.

Instead, what we are bombarded with and what architecture seems not to cease to produce, is more and more senseless imagery. A never-ending collection of perfectly functioning un-ambiguous and flat *visuals*, what Serge Daney has very aptly differentiated from images and described as the optical verification of a procedure of power. *“The visual is at once reading and seeing: it’s seeing what you are supposed to read. [...] So I call image what still holds out against an experience of vision and the visual. [...] The visual is the verification that something functions.”* (Daney, 1997:610) Clichés and stereotypes would belong to this world of the visual as much as the render, the ad, the icon, the architectural photograph devoid of people, many architectural drawings, and the iconic shapes of much architectural production. Imageries that in their attempt at showing everything are in fact not showing anything at all; Daney says that *“[they often] serve to paste over a void, to decorate, to supply what I now call the visual – but not to show anything”*. (Daney, 1997:617) Narcotic tricks and ruses that we, and the market(s) and power(s) produce and weave around us in order to substitute our close environment with a remote and deceitful horizon. What would otherwise be at hand disappears. The chair and the table, the floor and the ceiling, the walls, and the lips of the one we kiss, disappear. In their place: a fake horizon full of holes through which the spectacle appears.

But how could we escape the emptiness in this flood of visuals? How could we avoid, Daney asks, *“the ready-to-think, the cliché, the already-seen”*? Leaving the space empty, rejecting the participation in the making of any visuals whatsoever, substituting them with a totally blank space, might be a way to show the possibility of not pasting over. But even a totally white or totally black ‘picture’ is still a picture.

4 For an excellent insight into the possibilities of ‘aesthetic reduction’ in relationship with communication and continuity, see Per Nilsson’s chapter on ‘Intensity’ in his book “Non Serviam”, particularly pages 117-119. Nilsson, Per (2015) *Non Serviam: Philosophical Essays on the Art of Living*. Umeå: H:Ström.



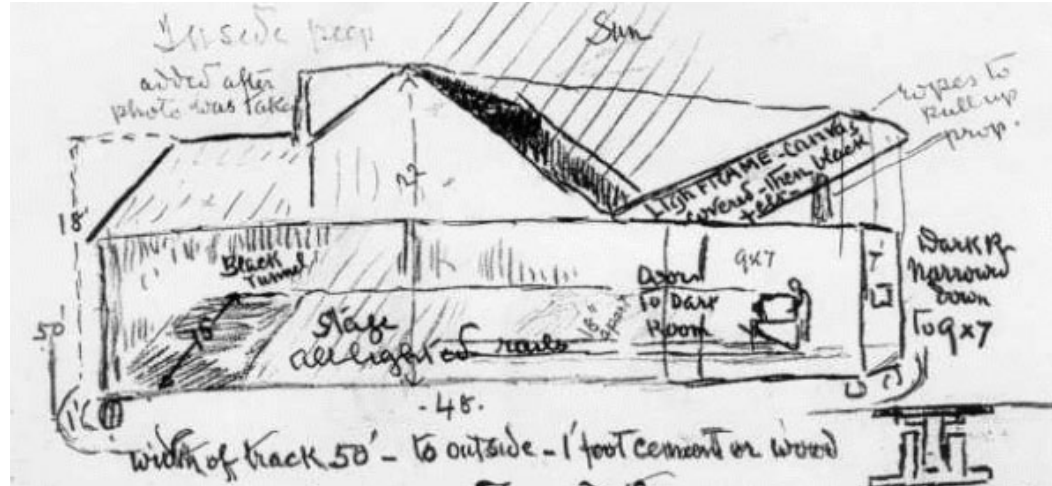


Fig. 13/
Diagram of Edison's Black Maria

Opposite page:
Fig.14/
The Black Maria was Thomas Edison's movie production studio in West Orange, New Jersey. It is widely referred to as America's First Movie Studio.

And perhaps this strategy, like the increasingly long sections of silence over a black screen in Debord's "Howlings in Favour of De Sade", is not valid anymore, at a time in which the media are preventing us from thinking and deliver to us the already flattened images and their 'wrong' but all-encompassing explanations. There are many missing images today, but our fear of the void is so strong that we no longer demand those missing images to be shown or opened up. We are pushed to forgetting these gaps. (Daney, 1997:618)

I do believe that this dialectical opposition between 'images' and 'visuals' can be extraordinarily productive if we are to continue engaging in the responsible (and challenging) task of the critique of images. Not in order to kill the image, or to announce the end of this or that kind of image, but simply to continue working our way through the images we encounter. And with Rancière, I think we must expand the field of the image acknowledging the interrelations, crossings and conflicts at play between art op-

erations, the ways in which images flow and are distributed among and around us, and the discussions and critical discourses that connect both with their hidden truths.

In our task of ‘architecting’ the world, we can look into cinematic images in order to encounter the spaces and situations that we might otherwise not be ready to see, read, grasp or experience. We can adopt cinema in order to, as Daney suggested, let it adopt us in return and teach us how to bridge, “*with our gaze, the distance between ourselves and the place where the other begins.*” (Daney, 2007:35)

Instead of continuing to produce captivating and seductive architectures of formal configuration and visuals that imagine on our behalf and leave no space for interpretation, thinking or demanding – architectures and visuals that do not ask any questions, but simply stand up there as if saying: “Look at me, here I am. A powerful shape, an original building” - we must strive to think through images and things responsibly, creatively and honestly, in order to make architectures and images of action and life, embodied images of encounter, spatialized experiences of life.

We must strive, also, to understand the conditions in which the images and the architectures we produce are produced, and how will they be distributed, as well as their symbolic, discursive and other real effects. What are the contradictions? What are the conflicts? What do they mean? What do they want? For whom and for what are they conceived? And most importantly, what do they do? Can they be like “*[S]cenes of dissensus, capable of surfacing in any place at any time [?] What dissensus means is an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all. It means that every situation can be cracked open from the inside. [...] To reconfigure the landscape of what can be seen and what can be thought is to alter the field of the possible and distribution of capacities and incapacities.*” (Rancière, 2009:49)

Are these images and these architectural actions capable of questioning what is, and suggesting ways of approaching what could be or what ought to be? Are they simply objectual-imageries? Object-Images? Flat, commodified visuals? Or are they contributing to the production of breaks in the nearly all-encompassing spectacle? Can our images and architectures, our architectural actions and interven-

tions become acts of 'dissensus' founded on our disappointment and disagreement? Can these actions become agents in a process of political subjectivation as the one imagined by Rancière: one in which unexpected abilities and forces are capable of breaking the unity of the given, the obvious and the visible, in order to introduce a blurred sight of the possible?

We should proceed, perhaps, by *delaying the image*. We might need to simply embrace our movements and relations within the situations we inhabit, and think through our encounters not by projecting images onto them and those situations but by giving ourselves to the situations and enabling the image, probably images in plural, to emerge.

What if, in order to architect the world, instead of designing buildings by thinking through images, we choose to think through the actions of those involved in the situations that will host those buildings, and to care about the movements of things and discourses within those situations, in order to, slowly and progressively, allow images to emerge and take shape? What if we wait for the image to come? What if we learn to delay the image? What if we learn to refuse to see it in our heads? Even if it were only a moment. Here. /



Theaters of the Visual: The Eye and the Senses

Chapter 1.2

“The postmodern is a cinematic age; it knows itself through the reflections that flow from the camera’s eye. The voyeur is the iconic, postmodern self.”¹

“Film renders visible what we did not, or perhaps could not see before its advent. It effectively assists us in discovering the material world with its psychophysical correspondences. We literally redeem this world from its dormant state, its state of virtual non-existence, by endeavoring to experience it through the camera. And we are free to experience it because we are fragmentized. The cinema can be described as a medium particularly equipped to promote the redemption of physical reality. Its imagery permits us, for the first time, to take away with us the objects and occurrences that comprise the flow of material life.”²

Fig. 15/
Blow Up, M. Antonioni (1966)

¹ Denzin, N. K. (1991), ‘Images of postmodern society : social theory and contemporary cinema’, xii, 179, p. 155

² Kracauer, S. (1997), ‘Theory of film: the redemption of physical reality’, lix, 364, p. 300

Today’s world is variously described as one of visual affluence. The society of the spectacle, a rainfall of images, an addicted social body sick of images, the civilization of the image... Many of the prevalent discourses on visual culture are dominated by negative narratives that present the visual as an oppressing, alienating, stupefying, superficial and violent regime. Such accounts of the hegemony of the image and its role in the construction of our spectacular frame are very often based on a too-quick equating of visuality and visuals with a one-directional and homogenous scopic domain based on Cartesian perspectivism and an ontology of knowledge in which seeing is possessing or owning the thing that is seen.



Fig. 16/
Elephant
Gus van Sant (2003)

We should of course acknowledge the difficulties of looking at something or someone without violating it/them, and take into account the implications of our philosophical traditions and the ways in which we have thought the production of knowledge in relationship to the act of looking and seeing. We know that drawing from these traditions, the scientific gaze has been conceived, conceptualized and practiced as a scanning, scrutinizing and inspecting tool whose ultimate aim is of course to grasp, to hold, to own the thing that is investigated, in a process that is not free of violence, and not independent of an impulse to possess the object of the gaze. But we cannot conclude that this is the only way in which the visual, visibility, and the gaze can be conceptualized or thought. We cannot agree with totalizing and univocal descriptions that present ‘the gaze’ as one. *There are many gazes, and many different ways of looking.* There are also many different ways of approaching the construction (and representation) of knowledge through visibility. And as we will see below, there are gazes and scopic regimes that are not necessarily interested in or aiming at the production and representation of knowledge. Not all gazes aim at the possession of the object they are looking at.

Everyday, we take part in the co-production of a theatrical field of multiple and multidimensional visualities and gazes, that shifts and expands, opens and contracts, in order to accommodate our (very diverse) subjective needs. In this field of relations, encounters and exchange, the eye is clearly not enough.

In his study of 20th century American cinema and what he has called the ‘cinematic society’³, Norman K. Denzin focuses instead on a critique of the gaze understood as power, and as a power that emanates from both the eye of the camera and the eyes of the spectators, that take turns or simultaneously exercise their control as vigilant and scrutinizing observers, or *voyeurs*. The raw power of the gaze is, according to him, making us all willing participants in the tasks of surveillance and control that determine the stage of the societal spectacle we inhabit. Although he admits this gaze can take more or less sophisticated forms, he develops his analysis of filmic culture on the basis of the affirmation that cinema has made us all (spectators) into voyeurs, and in relationship with the above mentioned tendency to equate visual contact with knowledge (I see therefore I know), or even with hermeneutical understanding.

³ Denzin, Norman K (1995), *The cinematic society: the voyeur's gaze*, (London; Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications) 247.

Upon the arrival of the photographic image and cinema, the human eye was deemed inadequate and imperfect, unable to grasp the complexities of the world with precision and accuracy. The cinematic lens was automatically qualified as a scientific tool that would show us the truth of the real instead of a distorted or incomplete reality. (Denzin 1995:25) In postmodern, cinematic times, “*the voyeur becomes a metaphor for the knowing eye who sees through the fabricated structures of truth that a society presents to itself*”⁴. The gaze of this voyeur aims at uncovering and exposing the truths of the social order. It is the gaze of power. A gaze that aims at uncovering the wrongs of private life to make them public. The gaze of societal surveillance and control.

The cinematic gaze that Denzin analyses developed through narrative films that often presented the voyeur as a problematic social character within the film. A sick, often violent person that is obsessed with looking and is incapable of respecting the rules of ‘normal’ life in society. But at the same time, films would transform spectators into voyeurs eager to look at the cinematic screen in order to ‘see’. The cinematic apparatus worked as a technology of power and subjectification, by showing these audiences the ‘right’ stories, producing and encouraging patterns of behaviour and ways of doing and thinking that most of the times were in accord with dominant discourses. Cinema worked thus as a technology of class, gender and race, reproducing the structures of patriarchy, racism and class roles and enabling a violent voyeur’s gaze that made women and non-whites the objects of male and white gazes.

Not only Denzin but also other authors have written about postmodernity as the time of the ‘cinematization of life’, when the movies became a force capable of structuring and organizing everyday life through the staging of the ‘adequate’ patterns of behaviour in each situation, the construction of dominant narratives of social success and failure, the presentation and representation of ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ role models and the construction of easily identifiable and powerful characters that would creep into the very core of ‘real’ life, co-producing it. Society so described is first a staged reality, and whatever takes place in it is judged by comparison and reference – even if unconscious – with its filmic and fictional counterpart. “*The metaphor of the dramaturgical society or ‘life as theater’ has now become interactional reality. [...] Art not only mirrors life, its structures and reproduces it.*”⁵

⁴ Ibid., p.2

⁵ Denzin, N. K. (1991), ‘Images of post-modern society : social theory and contemporary cinema’, xii, 179, p. X



At some point, cinema started showing stories about people who told stories and made news, blurring the borders between storytelling and everyday life. Until then, film had been primarily the locus of illusions and fantasies, stories that would not/could not happen in real life. Many films of our present time have challenged and entertained us with stories in which the gaze of the voyeur defines the normal gaze, as if every one would ‘naturally’ tend to look and scrutinize other’s activities and behaviours. In some cases this can be related to a reflexive critique that questions the ability of cinema itself to portray and tell the world with accuracy and tries to find another gaze, that of the voyeur, in order to explore and understand society. This ‘reflexive’ cinema places the spectator in a more interesting position, that of doubting about the nature of what has been seen and about the camera’s truth-telling abilities. Denzin’s account focuses on the analysis of the possibilities and potential of this kind of reflexive cinema to challenge the ‘texts’ that claim to represent reality with precision and accuracy, but it is nevertheless constructed around a too negative and univocal view of the gaze as a problematic tool of power that has to be ‘resisted’ and whose evil intentions and flaws must be unmasked.

His negative critique is not alone; many other postmodern authors have also worked around the ontology of the gaze, deconstructing its dangers and evils, and effectively equipping us with numerous tools

Fig. 17/
‘Cache’, (fragment).
Michael Haneke (2005)

to unmask its powers and to avoid its violence. Nevertheless, an excessively pessimistic and univocal take on what the gaze is, and most importantly, what it does, is preventing us from understanding the possibilities of constructing and defining other ways of looking and other visualities that might be capable of emerging and operating around strategies of encounter and interpellation instead of pure one-directional observation and contemplation.

Instead of conceiving the gaze as necessarily voyeuristic and/or vigilant – only capable of producing knowledge through a scrutinizing violation of its subject – we can and we must imagine other ways of looking and other gazes, that do not aim at investigating and exploring everything, but rehearse a more *fragile* approach and try, precisely, to approach their object, to come closer, to get slowly and progressively entangled with the object of their look. The gaze is then a form of proximity instead of a form of distant control. This gaze is a form of sensitivity that can also be seen as vulnerable and fragile. This gaze is almost like a caress in the Levinasian sense, touching not to hold and possess but ‘just’ to search. Visuality so understood is not anymore the exclusive realm of the eye but opens up to the other senses. Seeing and touching merge. We ‘see’ through our senses.

The resulting ‘weaker’ gaze is nevertheless also capable of producing knowledge. Another kind of knowledge, perhaps a more situated, precarious and intimate knowledge. Perhaps just the kind of knowledge we need.

Although there is a whole ontology of knowledge that has been built around ideas of visibility and the gaze as a violent apparatus in which looking aims almost exclusively and inevitably at owning and possessing, the fact is that it is not really possible to look without being seen. The gaze needs an external ‘something’ that affects it. Feeling, imagining, remembering and thinking are embodied abilities that qualify human existence and define the ways in which we get to know and understand the world around us. Doing any of those things, aided by our eyes and our gazes does not leave us unchanged. ‘Seeing’ changes us substantially. The gaze transforms both the thing that it is directed at and our own self as ‘gazers’. Although seeing or looking at something is owning it to some extent, it is impossible to look without being possessed by the thing we look at.

Looking is being exposed and being vulnerable. It implies always the possibility of our gaze being returned by the object we are looking at. In fact, everything is effectively looking at us. This gazing and gazing back establishes an aesthetics of the gaze that is articulated around encounter and exchange, experience and interpellation, that refuses to accept the division between an active gazer and a passive side, object of the gaze. The gaze of the other on me makes me unable to continue conceiving myself as 'in myself', I am now another one, opened and exposed to the radical exteriority of the other. We are all vulnerable in looking.

The gaze is 'lo sguardo' in Italian, and we keep the ancient verb 'esguardar' in Spanish as a synonym of 'looking' (mirar) and at the same as a word that can refer to taking-something-into-account or paying-attention-to-something. There is also a sense of care in this way of referring to the gaze. The term can also be read as a combination of the latin 'ex-' and the German '-warten', with an Indo-European root in 'wer', which refers to both caring and waiting for something external or something beyond. In this acceptance, the gaze is a caring action and not an act of possession. It is the expression of care for the thing we look at and wait for. In this caring and waiting gaze, we give ourselves by opening up in generosity, the generosity of an opening that makes us vulnerable and exposed. If we look through this caring gaze - if we look well - we are immediately also the objects of the gaze of the thing that we are looking at. We are looked back in appreciation and encounter. This gaze is also a waiting, and in waiting, the gaze encourages and gives space not only to a gazing back but also to the possibility of listening, and therefore to dialogue.

The face of the other – which, we should not forget, does not necessarily mean the 'face' of a human other, but could be the face of a thing, an object, an animal or the work of art or image we are looking at – has an ungraspable dimension that resists a reductive gaze. The possessive gaze that wants to look and say: 'oh, yes, I know you now' is in fact incapable of knowing, because the face re-presents a presence that is alive and is therefore infinitely larger than what the reductive gaze sees and believes to grasp. There is a possibility here of conceiving the gaze, with Derrida and Levinas, as hospitality. Not only as reciprocity in the sense of a gaze that is responded by a gazing back – a reciprocity which would always be asymmetrical since the conditions of production and intentions of one and the other gaze must be separated by an irreducible difference – but also as an act of hosting and hospitality ('here's

my face, please look and join me, your face and your gaze are also welcome'). This act of hospitality is performed by the face of the other, that constitutes itself not only as what we see (the face) but also as what 'it' sees. *The face is only a face in the face-to-face.*

*"The face is not only a visage which may be the surface of things or animal faces, aspect or species. It is not only, following the origin of the word, what is seen, seen because it is naked. It is also that which sees. Not so much that which sees things – a theoretical relation – but that which exchanges its glance. The visage is a face only in the face-to face."*⁶

The gaze understood (and practiced), not by itself but in collaborative action with 'the other', becomes a responsible getting-closer, an approaching that searches by moving toward the invisible, not to reveal, but just to search, to continue this movement and this encounter. The subjectivity that emerges from this hospitality of the face and from a gaze-as-encounter is a responsive subjectivity, one that responds to events and experiences, instead of one that aims at building objects.

In order to think and to practice such a gaze, such a way of looking as encounter, the eye is not enough.

Against spectacular transparency, the enigma of the image is also the enigma of the other. The other is a mystery that subordinates the gaze, which cannot be that omniscient and vigilant voyeur, because the other is an inaccessible mystery that can only be 'experienced' in and through the encounter.

Although not exactly in the same way, but inspired by the phenomenological tradition and particularly by the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa has dedicated an important part of his work to the task of expanding the understanding of the image in architecture through a return to experience, the body and the senses. Merleau-Ponty pushed us to locating and treating the body as the primary site of perception and knowledge of the world. Displacing 'consciousness' as the source of knowledge, he proposed a relational understanding of life constituted in the interactions of the body with the environment (or more precisely, with all the other bodies of things, animals, plants, people, etc. that constitute the primordial material and site of experience: the flesh of the world), with

⁶ Derrida, Jacques (2001), *Writing and difference*, (London: Routledge) xxiii, 446, p.112

'consciousness' as a result of these interactions, and language as an articulation and expression of the embodied energies and processes that take place in and through the body.

Pallasmaa has tried to bring some of the ideas of Merleau-Ponty and others to the grounds of the architectural discipline, discussing architectural images and production and challenging their almost exclusively visual focus and their exploitative nature. In his latest work, the Finnish architect has focused on what he calls 'the embodied image' that according to him refers to "*an evocative, affective and meaningful sensory experience that is layered, associative and dynamic, and in constant interaction with memory and desire*"⁷. He thinks that today it is necessary to criticize the exploitative nature of most architectural imagery in order to defend and protect the poetic or embodied image as the core of artistic experience. According to him, the speed and short attention span characteristic of our times, along with the fragmentation and overload of information, are bringing about a weakening of our imagination, our senses and our abilities to dwell in the encounter and to be open to 'seeing', understanding and embodying these images. The autonomy of our imagination is progressively replaced by the 'passivating' imagery that in the case of architecture, produces a world of architectural fictions where even gravity and materiality seem to be denied, distracting us from the ethical encounters that could inform the construction of our values and the living of our lives.

Pallasmaa believes that the image has been understood primarily as a representational and perceptive tool, but much less as a medium of thought. While in music and dance, thinking and communication takes place through hearing, movement and proprioception, "*architectural education has consistently undervalued these ways of thinking and experiencing space, as well as the embodied and sensory dimensions of our existence and thought*"⁸. He proposes that sensory impact and emotional content should also be taken into account at the time of assessing architectural actions and production, instead of the limited positivistic approach that focuses on 'scientific' and empirical matters. The embodied or poetic image does not conform to rational or linear readings; it resists domestication and manages to keep its freshness and rawness. It has the power of awaking and connecting with our radical imagination and is fundamentally incomplete, awaiting our encounter and ready to be activated through our own experiences of the world.

7 Pallasmaa, J. (2011), *The Embodied Image: Imagination and Imagery in Architecture*, p. 41.

8 *Ibid.*, p.34



Fig. 18/
World Trade Centre | Hiroshi Sugimoto
(1997)



The embodied image is also, sometimes, a non-visual image, one through which other kinds of exchanges take place involving sound, taste, touch or haptic qualities. Encountering a situation always generates this kind of unconscious exchange that Pallasmaa links to a very interesting notion of ‘unfocused gaze’. The unfocused gaze is the result of the dynamic vagueness, constant exploration, shifting and absence of total focus that are characteristic of our vision. We see through exploration, and by constructing associations and building collage-like situations in which things/parts that appeared unrelated take unexpected roles and meanings through encounter and dialogue with other things/images. As suggested above, we ‘see’ with all our senses, and ‘sight’ and all our other senses are, fundamentally, various forms of *touch*. We touch the world in different ways through our presence.

Throughout his book on the embodied image, Pallasmaa explains several times how he sees works of art, literature and architecture originating “*in the body of the maker*” and then returning to the body in the experience of the listener, reader, or audience, with the mediation of the artistic image. But, is it really like this? Or does the work of art happen in the encounter, in the relationship that emerges in-between the person that is experiencing it and the thing, the work or event created by the artist? How is reception taken into account here?

Fig. 19/
‘Révolution 008’ | Hiroshi Sugimoto
(1990)

Architecture and the architectural images can also be an invitation for action, when architecture addresses and enables our bodies, our senses of balance and equilibrium, tension and movement, affects and proprioception, in order to host life. Here, too, the work, the architecture, happens in the encounter. Not in the physical structures of the buildings, nor in the images we create or we take of the building, but in the relationships we enact with it and with the other things involved in a particular situation.

In what I see as a much more problematic thread, Pallasmaa also talks about an organic coherence and biological essence of the image, that cannot be accessed but through “*subliminal perception and understanding*”. I cannot agree with the notion of a “*biological essence*” of images, and less with the idea that the completeness and integrity of images would emerge from such subliminal perception, but I find interesting the efforts he makes to try to approach a description in which the experience of the image is some kind of process or ‘organic’ event in which diverse embodied and material elements or ‘things’ are involved and act together. Although he does not say it explicitly, one can imagine the artistic or poetic image that he talks about not as an isolated entity but as an entanglement of things that makes the experience of perception, communication and understanding possible. This is closer to the idea of encounter that I am exploring in this thesis, but still, in other moments and parts of his text(s), Pallasmaa seems to rely heavily on conceptions of the image as an isolated entity that has an essence and that can be ‘complete’. This image is for him also related to bio-historical grounds and to the core of existence and survival, in ways that tend to take for granted a kind of universal human being that is not situated, and are based on equally universalist claims of the natural sciences.

Whose is this ‘body’ that he is talking about? Where is that body located? And, more importantly, what kind of images has that body felt, seen and been shown before? In page 44 of “*The Embodied Image*” for instance, he refers to the mental and sensual appeal of fire that according to him “*surely reflects deep and primordial experiences of pleasure*”. The essence of ‘the image of fire’ is linked here to a primordial experience of pleasure on the basis of an appeal to bio-cultural history. According to this description, a (universal) subject would therefore see ‘fire’ essentially as something pleasurable and comfortable, regardless of their own experiences, history, mood(s) and current situation, what leaves out not only the obvious dimensions of race, class and gender – that, to be sure, will determine to a certain extent the

way(s) in which a given subject develops a relationship with fire or ‘sees’ it – but also the more subtle, situated, immediate, affective and emotional dimensions that do contribute to making his experience of fire and his relationship to images of it, very different from yours, and mine.

All in all, Pallasmaa seems to focus excessively on the image itself, as an independent thing or an object, constituted around an essential core that can and must be apprehended only by ‘capable’ viewers, that have the ability to project and experience the imagined reality of the image. This in my view distracts us from the real event, the meeting of viewer, image, location, time, along all the other elements, discourses and moods that ‘enact’ the experience of the work of art. As I will explain below, by shifting our attention towards the relations these ‘things’ that are participating in the construction of the experience establish and hold, we encounter the actual material of the world.

At a time of abstraction and uncertainty - when we are, on the one hand floating in a sea of liquid unknowns without solid values, principles, truths or responsibilities; and on the other, in contact with reality through the mediating distance of abstraction and reduction, be it linguistic, epistemological or ideological – film has the potential to become an interesting and powerful tool to understand the world by taking us closer to it. In one of his most important (as well as criticized and debated) works, the German thinker Siegfried Kracauer explored the qualities of the cinematic medium from the point of view of what he referred to as “material aesthetics”. In his “*Theory of Film*”, Kracauer carries out an exploration of film based on his understanding of it, first, as a medium that is primarily concerned with physical reality, and second, as an alternative public sphere. Film offered an alternative “because it engaged the contradictions of modernity at the level of the senses”, it was at the time a tool for the restructuring and rethinking of perception, experience and subjectivity.

Although we cannot take Kracauer’s highly criticized book as a general theory of film, I believe it is an extremely powerful document when understood as the theory of a particular kind of cinema, one that approaches reality and engages in an exploration of the material dimension(s) of that reality. One that is capable of addressing the viewer’s sensory and bodily perception and confronting him/her with images that question his/her assumptions about the world.

Films are mostly made of sights of the material world, details of the everyday life, seemingly unimportant physical things. Cinema, according to Kracauer, “*seems to come into its own terms when it clings to the surface of things.*”⁹

The ‘aesthetic materialism’ of Kracauer’s reflections and proposals is not very far from the attention to experience discussed above, nor from the idea that the aesthetic reduction (the image) is the only real way to communicate our experiences of encounter (with the world), as shown in the previous chapter. The construction of knowledge is a slow progressive process that requires intimate implication. This ‘clinging to the surface of things’ and the attention to the material reality of the world, can be read as an attempt at negotiating the conditions for the experience of things in their situated concreteness. Encountering something concrete that happens, being part of an event, requires both detached and intense participation in it, it requires from us to be in it, but also to be capable of apprehending its meaning and its concreteness, in a similar way to those in which we produce and experience art.

We can only experience the reality at our disposal, immediately close to us, and we want to do that in full. Not just superficially, through distant abstractions, but from within, up close. Getting rid of abstraction will not bring any ideological certainties back, but might help us encounter “*something really important in its own right: the world that is ours*”¹⁰, the physical and material world that we experience and are part of.

“*In recording and exploring physical reality, film exposes to view a world never seen before, [...] which cannot be found because it is within everybody’s reach. [...] Strange at it may seem, although streets, faces, railway stations, etc., lie before our eyes, they have remained largely invisible so far.*”¹¹

According to Kracauer, the spectator is not always dreaming or absorbed by the narrative or characters of the film. Cinema has a chance to occupy the gaps in the distracted and decentered perception of its audience. It has the ability to confront us with the common things of everyday life in ways that do not match those in which we are used to imagining or experiencing them. Cinema has the ability to bring us face to face with real-life events told otherwise, and with things we are not necessarily comfortable with

9 Kracauer, S. (1997), ‘Theory of film : the redemption of physical reality’, p. 285

10 Ibid., p.296

11 Ibid., p.299

even though they might be deeply familiar. But according to the German thinker, for film to be capable of truly bringing us closer to reality and to an encounter to the material world, its images must “*show what they picture and reject the lies of art.*” Here Kracauer is perhaps relying too much on an idea of art as a formal operation that does not blend too much with the physical reality of everyday life that he is interested in. Nevertheless, what he suggests is that film must not aim or claim an autonomy similar to that of the ‘auratic’ works of art, but must be incomplete, imperfect, full of mistakes, noises and disturbances, in other words, it must be as life-like as possible. I understand this way of imagining film’s potential in relationship to notions of fragility and vulnerability as discussed above. Film so understood is not driven by a cinematic voyeur’s gaze, but rather by an unfocused and distracted gaze, that is capable of getting closer and focusing building up moments of intimate implication, as well as to slowly progress by leaving a distance for listening and encounter by simply showing what lies before our eyes but has been, for that reason, largely invisible until its arrival. According to Kracauer, films proceed in this way from below to above, starting with an exploration of physical data, the material dimension of life, and slowly allowing these seemingly unimportant bits and things to drive us as if speaking, working along them in order to reach a problem, a belief, a value or simply a situation.

*“Guided by film, then, we approach, if at all, ideas no longer on highway leading through the void but on paths that wind through the thicket of things.”*¹²

These images of bits and moments of the material dimension of the world can be of course meaningful in their own right - entangled as they are with many other things and relations - but films take another, more crucial dimension when we are capable of, in the encounter, weaving what their images present to us into our own experiences, situations and existence.

Although criticized by some on the basis of too narrow readings of his very particular kind of materialism – otherwise brilliantly studied by the film scholar Miriam Bratu Hansen, who described it as a combination of “*Jewish messianism, Gnosticism and Marxist thought*”¹³ – what Kracauer proposed was in fact an experiential theory of film, through which cinema is described as potentially capable of enabling us to encounter our world in the midst of the challenges to subjectivity posed by the technological

¹² Kracauer, S. (1997), ‘Theory of film : the redemption of physical reality’, p. 309

¹³ Hansen, Miriam (2012), *Cinema and experience : Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley: University of California Press) xxiii, 380.



revolutions that have marked the age and the project of modernity, and that, we could add, continue to challenge the construction of our own subjectivities today.

Kracauer's acknowledgement of this ability of film is not built around representational verisimilitude, i.e. thinking that film could provide us with the ultimate perfect 'image' of the world, but rather on a simultaneously historical and phenomenological project: we should read film as an apparatus of experience, as a matrix for sensing and perceiving that can both bring us close to the material dimension of the world by resembling it, and confront us with different versions of it, which film is also capable of decomposing or opening up and taking a distance from. In his view film has not only the power of giving an account of the flow of life and of the material realities that must be experienced together, through encounter, but is thus also capable of challenging the integrity of individual identity, involving and addressing the spectator as a corporeal being, and asking questions about the organization and politics of sensory perception, which remains a crucial task in our times of sensory and image overload. Do we encounter the world as images or as words? Can we encounter the world as 'event' instead? What if we could see the world as made of actions and phenomena?

Fig. 20/
Film socialisme - Jean Luc Godard (2010)
Film still: 1h25'47"

In her ground-breaking work across science studies, philosophy, feminist studies and physics, Karen Barad explores questions similar to those mentioned above and develops what she calls ‘agential realism’, a relational ontology that is the basis of her performative metaphysics, an account of material bodies that rejects representationalism (the division of the world into the domains of word and things, whose linkage has to then be elucidated) and proposes instead “*a relationality between specific material (re)configurings of the world through which boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted (i.e., discursive practices, in my posthumanist sense) and specific material phenomena (i.e., differentiating patterns of mattering).*”¹⁴ She proposes that we refer to the relationships between the apparatuses of material production and the phenomena produced as “*agential intra-action*”. Drawing from Niels Bohr’s philosophy-physics, she proposes a world that is made of phenomena (i.e., things that happen, or events) and defines them as ontologically primitive relations, which is to say that nothing else pre-exists them. For Barad, therefore, there are no pre-existing relata (components of the relation) or things, but only things-in-phenomena, or more precisely, phenomena.

In the local and specific context of what I have referred to above as ‘a situation’, when an event takes place, when a phenomenon happens, the boundaries and properties of its components get defined by what Barad calls an ‘intra-action’. “*A specific intra-action enacts an agential cut (in contrast to the Cartesian cut – an inherent distinction – between subject and object) effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’.*”¹⁵ The general ontological indetermination or indeterminacy, is resolved, locally, within a specific situation,¹⁶ so that in the very specific ‘here’, relata-within-this-phenomenon emerge.

This is obviously a phenomenology of performance, rather than one of perception. What we are looking at here, within each specific and situated intra-action, is at the action itself, and at its effects. How does the phenomenon take place? What does it produce? What are its effects? How does it perform? And what is it related to?

By focusing on performance, we can move from the impossible task of solving the correspondence between ‘descriptions’ on the one hand, and ‘reality’ on the other, to matters of doings, actions and practices. We can move from judging the world on the basis of what things look like to encountering it on the basis of what things do. This focus on the event and the radical acknowledgement of the entanglement

¹⁴ Barad, Karen (2007), *Meeting the universe halfway : quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*, (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press) p. 139

¹⁵ Barad, Karen (2003), ‘Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter’, *Signs*, 28 (3), 801-31, p. 815

¹⁶ One is tempted to write here ‘at a given moment’, but Barad’s ontology also rejects, interestingly and accurately, the existence of determinate time, that is nothing more than another abstract term that aims at representing the supposedly pre-existing reality of ‘duration’.



of matter and meaning questions the dualisms that place nature on one side and culture on the other, asserting also the inseparability and entanglement of matters of fact, matters of concern and matters of care.¹⁷

“A performative understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist believe in the power of words to represent preexisting things. Unlike representationalism, which positions us above or outside the world we allegedly merely reflect on, a performative account insists on understanding thinking, observing, and theorizing as practices of engagement with, and as part of, the world in which we have our being. Performativity, properly construed, is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.”¹⁸

In a world in which scientific realism on the one hand and social constructivism on the other seem to continue to operate by looking at the world through mirrors, i.e., by setting up a distance between one and the mirror, a separation between subject and object, and constructing objectivity around the mirror images so produced, it is not surprising that the eye(s) - human or mechanical - required to look into and scrutinize those images, have gained such a prominent position. It is easy to understand also how the image, or more precisely, visuals, have proliferated and taken an importance equal to or greater than that granted to words.

Instead of thinking of the theaters of the visual, or for that purpose, any theaters in which images and movements are pre-scripted and staged, one could think for a moment of the ‘image’ of a theater of life, made instead of non-scripted actions and events. In this performance, the event and the phenomena just happen to happen, and our only option is to engage, responsibly, in the uneasy task of taking part in this on-going intra-action. /

Fig. 21/
Ivan's childhood - Andrei Tarkovsky (1962)

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, María Puig de la Bel-lacasa, Barad... see interview in *New Materialism...*

¹⁸ Barad, Karen (2007), p. 133



The Primacy of the Sign

Chapter 1.3

*“The era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes.”*¹

*“Here is the formula at its most elementary: ‘moving’ is the striving to reach the void, namely, ‘things move;’ there is something instead of nothing, not because reality is in excess in comparison with mere nothing, but because reality is less than nothing. This is why reality has to be supplemented by fiction: to conceal its emptiness.”*²

Fig. 22/
Tianducheng or “Oriental Paris” in Hangzhou, China

¹ Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. p.2

² Žizek, Slavoj (2012) *Less than Nothing*. p. 4

If we search for the definition of a sign in any dictionary, the most common acceptation is something like *“an object, quality or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else.”* (Oxford Dictionary, 2015) This ‘common sense’ definition establishes the relationship between two things: the sign and something else to which it refers. Past common sense,

the development of semiotics reveals that things are in fact a little bit more complicated than that. For semioticians, “*since the sign is what every object presupposes, and since semiotics studies the action of signs, perhaps the best definition of semiotics would be: the study of the possibility of being mistaken.*” (Deely, 2001) The sign is thus seen as the universal instrument of communication no matter whether this communication takes place inside us or in concert with others.

The American scientist and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, who is often referred to as the father of pragmatism, developed a comprehensive theory of signs based on his view that human experience consists of an ever flowing mix of feelings, reactions and thoughts.³ Each one of these ‘types’ he associated to one of the three central categories for his theory: firstness, secondness and thirdness. Firstness being the category of the pre-reflexive and the immediate, an emotional experience that does not depend on anything else, a pure potentiality, an open yet clear perception such as a pain before we start analysing its cause or specific location; secondness being the category of reaction and of the other recognized as other, the practical experience of something that relates to something else within discontinuous time, a reaction to an event, the effect of an action such as a slap in someone’s face; and thirdness being the category of mediation and relation between events and therefore that of representation, language, habit and law.

Peirce established very clearly the difference between the actions of signs and the actions of bodies: while dynamic actions take place between two subjects, the action of signs – which he called semiosis – is instead the result of the interaction of three relata, namely the sign, its object and its interpretant, and this interaction cannot be simplified into ‘smaller’ actions between any two of the three participating subjects. *Sign* is therefore a shortening of ‘sign-action’; the object refers to the sign’s subject matter; and the interpretant is the sign’s meaning, effects or interpretation.

Ferdinand de Saussure, considered the father of modern linguistics, proposed instead a dualistic theory of signs in which the signifier is the form or the word, and the signified is the mental concept. In a considerable break with previous philosophies, Saussure didn’t see a necessary logical connection between sign and meaning, but conceived the sign as an arbitrary relation⁴, one of the reasons why he became very influential among the post-structuralist philosophers.

³ See for instance Peirce, C. S., 1839-1914. *Philosophical writings / selected and edited with an introduction by Justus Buchler*. New York : Dover Publications, 1955.

⁴ See for instance Saussure, F. D. (1857-1913). *Course in general linguistics*. (New edition / translated and annotated by Roy Harris. ed.). London: Bloomsbury Academic. p. 76



Fig. 23/

Left to right: Bernard Tschumi, Helmut Swiczinsky, Wolf D. Prix, Daniel Libeskind, Rem Koolhaas, Zaha Hadid, Mark Wigley. (Photo: © Robin Holland)

In spite of the efforts of semiologists and semioticians to make of everything a sign, the complexity of the problem of cognition and its ontological implications continues to be a philosophical issue that exceeds the realm of the sign.

Deleuze, following Bergson, will posit a field of representation that is included in a more general field of production, linking the former to the realm of the Actual, and the latter to the realm of the Virtual, (the production of recording and the production of production). For him, there is, *first*, an ideal field of the present which he calls *Chronos* that is the field of pure materialism (physical qualities, bodies, tensions and actions) and immediacy, and cannot host a logic of causes and effects (there is no time for anything to precede or to come after another, this is an eternal, undivided and continuous field); and, *second*, a chronological field in which events take place as cuts. “[...] *the brain does not manufacture representations, but only complicates the relationship between a received movement (excitation) and an executed movement (response). Between the two, it establishes an interval.*” (Deleuze 1991:24) This second field of events is a field of singularities that Deleuze has also called ‘multiplicity’.

A body or a quality, an action in the ‘chronic’ field (the first), is the cause of an event in the chronological field, although of course within the chronological field, events can have a cause-effect relationship with other events, and Deleuze calls them for that reason quasi-causes. *“The event subsists in language, but it happens to things. Things and propositions are less in a situation of radical duality and more on the two sides of a frontier represented by sense.”* (Deleuze, 1990:24) The relationship of matter to mind is for Deleuze one of topological shift and not one of cause and effect or dual opposition: the relationship of the ‘chronic’ field with the ‘chronological’ is that of a shift from a realm of depth to a realm of surfaces, with time as the ingredient that enables perception and consciousness. *“The difference between event [the chronological quasi-cause] and body [the chronic cause] - immaterial effects and material causes – however is not the one between a causation or a generation of body from mind or vice versa. Rather, it has to do with two different topologies of time that concern the same field, once as infinitely cut and once as ideally continuous; once as virtual [chronic and without any form of perception/consciousness] and once as actual [chronological and traversed by an infinite number of levels and forms of perception/consciousness].”* (Berresem, 2005)

The chronological field in its multiplicity cannot be simplified to matter, nor to information. In this field, human and non-humans take part in the co-production of events, signs, force-fields, etc... either by affecting the situation or by being affected. For Deleuze, instead of a separated psychic realm, there is a conjunction of psychic+physical realms. Instead of understanding the unconscious as something that belongs to the realm of representation, he sees it as part of the chronological field and not exclusive of humans. Sense is therefore here a transitional device between production and representation, and consciousness something that cannot be separated from the situation and surroundings in which it happens. Sense is produced within a field of multiplicity in which many other things are produced at the same time.

For the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, things are ‘slightly’ different: drawing from the German idealism of Hegel and the critical psychoanalytical theories of Lacan, he thinks ‘reality’ cannot be identified before and in separation of the human subject, but it is in fact constituted by the traumatic experience of a subject in formation. He explores the implications of the relationship of us subjects with the world in the psychological, political and social dimensions of life, and posits an ontology that is founded on



Fig. 24/
Dubai City (<http://7-themes.com/7033863-dubai-skyline.html>)

incompleteness and inconsistency, an ontology of what he calls the ‘parallax gap’ or the tension of “*the minimal difference that marks the non-coincidence of the One with itself*” (Zizek, 2006:36) and can be compared to the Lacanian Real as the gap between the multiplicity of perspectives on it, something without substantial consistency.

In this Real of non-coincidence, Zizek locates three main modes of the ‘gap’: the *ontological* difference that structures our experience/perception (there is always a distance between what we think or perceive an object to be, and what this object really is); the *scientific* gap or difference between the experience of something that happens in the world and the scientific account of it; and the *political* gap which corresponds to the non-reducible, real, difference between antagonistic agents of society, which was once referred to as class-struggle.

For Žižek, the Real is a cut that aligns the Imaginary and the Symbolic, both the excluded and impossible outside of the Symbolic and its non-sensical core. Access to the real is therefore impossible.

“The Real is thus an effect of the symbolic, not in the sense of performativity, of the ‘symbolic construction of reality’, but in the totally different sense of a kind of ontological ‘collateral damage’ of symbolic operations: the process of symbolization is inherently thwarted, doomed to fail, and the Real is this immanent failure of the symbolic.” (Žižek, 2012:959)

In the end, the semioticians’ agenda of studying the possibility of being mistaken is not that disconnected from this description of the real as the immanent failure of the symbolic.

The gap of Žižek’s (and Lacan’s) Real leaves us at the edge of a kind of abyss, but what it also does is that it affords us the possibility of engaging in its exploration and the constant establishment of fragile and precarious hypothesis, while simultaneously keeping us alive and active, in the sense of always at work through this gap.

A much more pessimistic and I would say also cynical view and attitude is the one that results from the assertion of a closed-off, finished, impenetrable and totalizing simulation such as that described by Jean Baudrillard, who basically concludes that reality and meaning have been replaced by symbols and signs, transforming all human experience into a huge simulation.

According to his account, the image has gone through a series of stages which have progressively transformed it: *first*, the image worked as a reflection of a profound reality and also informed us of the characteristics and positions of objects in the world; *then* the image becomes an unfaithful copy that hints at the existence of an obscure reality that it helps to mask and denature; *thirdly*, what the image starts to mask is not the profound reality but its absence, the image claims to be the representation of something while this ‘something’ does not exist, there is no profound reality; and *finally*, in what he calls the order of simulation, the image starts “*to dissimulate that there is nothing*”, the sign “*has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum*”. (Baudrillard, 1994:6) This absence of referent at which Baudrillard arrives in the order of simulation is what is often referred to as hyperreality.



The most widely used example of Baudrillard's hyperreal – the generation, by means of models, of a real without reality – is probably the film *'The Matrix'* by the Wachowski brothers (1999), in which humanity has been trapped by machines that live on the energy and heat produced by the human body while they keep everybody prisoner within a completely simulated and artificial reality.

"The Matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now, in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work... when you go to church... when you pay your taxes. It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth." (Morpheus, in *'The Matrix'*, 1999)

The sign is elevated here to the category of the image and turned into a nightmarish machine of production of fake illusions that hide the absence of true meaningful reality. The Matrix is somehow reproducing Plato's cave in which humans are tied as prisoners and allowed only to experience the world through shadows. In the Matrix – which could be seen as metaphorically alluding to late capitalism's alienation – the prisoners that manage to escape, like Neo, do not find the light outside of the cave, but are confronted with what Baudrillard called *"the desert of the real"*.

Fig. 25/
The Matrix - Wachowski brothers (1999)



“[S]hould we historicize The Matrix into the metaphor of the Capital that colonized culture and subjectivity, or is it the reification of the symbolic order as such? However, what if this very alternative is false? What if the virtual character of the symbolic order as such is the very condition of historicity?” (Zizek, 1999: 11)

We will return to Zizek and the character of the symbolic order, but first we need to look into the effects of hyperreality, and the Baudrillardian primacy of the sign in its fourth phase, on the sphere of architecture. Hyperreality signals a disappearance of vital intensity, the closure of the capacity to imagine things and the end of the creative and affective energies of the subjects that inhabit it. Both its subjects and its cultural and social spaces are mined and degraded into a kind of lower energy state in which the hyper-sign, the representation that is no longer referring to anything, is simply accepted and taken for the real thing. Are not these precisely the same characteristics and logics of contemporary architecture’s derailment into the incessant production of iconic buildings that we are witnessing? Is not ‘star architecture’ simply another name for the forces responsible for the literal materialization of slick drawings and renderings into their built versions? Has contemporary mainstream architecture turned into a kind of matrix of production of the (built) hyperreal?

Fig. 26/
The Matrix - Wachowski brothers (1999)



Fig. 27/
Zizek sits in Neo's armchair to ask for a
third pill.
The Pervert's Guide to Cinema
Sophie Fiennes (2006)

⁵ This is of course still under discussion, as we are witnessing a shift in the interest of many architect and some of the well-known ones to issues of affordability, sustainability and context, probably as a response to the fact that more and more people (potential clients) are interested in those topics. Whether this is again some kind of 'pose' or a real engagement with these issues is also to be discussed. See for example Maguigan, Cathleen (2010) "The Death of Starchitecture", Newsweek, 6th of October; or Li, Roland (2012) "The Death of Starchitecture? Critics move to the Small Scale", International Business Times, 28th of February.

"The cultural logics of capitalism erode the civic sphere, turning it into a political economy of signs which commodify self, other and valued social relationships" (Denzin, 1995:216)

In 2009 right after the financial meltdown that started the crisis we are still in, and with the TVCC building in Beijing on fire, several critics announced, perhaps optimistically soon, the collapse of global 'star architecture'. The golden age of an elite of architects of the global city, who were until then dominating the markets of contemporary global architecture and had become the distributors and providers of the urban iconographies that were progressively defining a global urban image and the visible face of the planet, was over. Or was it? I say optimistically, because in many ways it would be not only interesting but also heartening to witness the end of a complexly knitted framework which only benefits the members of that selected club of global architects, politicians and other power masters. And too 'soon', because as it seems, in spite of the symbolically charged fire that destroyed the TVCC building, and the damage caused by the global (economic) crisis, global architecture and its hollow products continue to sell and profit successfully, even today. ⁵



Fig. 28/
Fire in the TVCC building by OMA, 9th of
February 2009.
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beijing_Television_Cultural_Center_fire)

“The fire at TVCC was rapidly interpreted worldwide as the symbol to mark the end of the golden era. The alignment of elements was too perfect for it not to be: a global recession was setting in, credit had run dry, thousands of projects around the world were being either frozen or cancelled, Dubai had cracked and architects were pouring out (lawyers pouring in), and in the midst of this, one of the world’s premier pieces of global architecture was burning down.” (Hornsby, 2009:36)

The collapse of architecture in general can only be avoided if the profession decides to go beyond a mere facilitating the arrival of the new while washing its hands regarding everything else, and engages actively and firmly in the transformation of reality in order to make it better, fairer and more habitable. Contemporary architecture is today another form of production within cultural capitalism. Architectural products, almost alien to constructive, cultural and local traditions, quote on international and global markets, where values are money, image and power. Architecture today produces disengaged static objects-image. Expensive objects that materialize self-worshipping visions and power yearnings of cunning capitalist architects; and empty immobile images that aspire to become the next milestone, built or projected ‘shoutings’, expression of the self-inflicted blindness of a cynical and oil-drunk society.

Architectural images today, by the hand of new representation and construction technologies, and thanks to the enormous accumulation of political and economic capital, forget the inherent limitations of representation and dilute the difference between what is represented and what is built, restricting, almost eliminating the possibility of interpretation. The most fantastic and impossible drawings ever imagined are literally built, suddenly appearing in the middle of the desert; complete islands are conceived, materialized and urbanized in a few months or years.

“This integration, that erasure, is a deterritorializing of image and space that depends on a digitizing of the photograph, its loosening from old referential ties (perhaps the development of Photoshop will one day be seen as a world-historical event), and on a computing of architecture, its loosening from old structural principles (in architecture today almost anything can be designed because almost anything can be built: hence all the arbitrary curves and biomorphic bob designed by Gehry and followers). As Deleuze and Guatari, let alone Marx, taught us long ago, this deterritorializing is the path of capital.” (Foster, 2002:24)

The ability of representations such as good architectural drawings to awaken curiosity towards the promised reality is vanishing. Drawings do not contain anymore those ambiguous points in which to dive allowing imagination and curiosity to approach the reality to which the representation refers.

Dull diagrams and slick renderings prevail through the force of the icon and with the help of superimposed discourses. The rhetoric of void and wrapping is camouflaged underneath surfaces and skins, and articulated through fantasy, deception and magic. All at the service of “*classic intentions to accumulate wealth*” (Easterling, 2005:6) which is a common and main feature of what the Dutch architect, critic and photographer Roemer van Toorn has very accurately named “*fresh conservatism*”, a game of opportunistic and selective participation and withdrawal that embraces the worst kind of a-political cynicism, avoids being polemic and getting “*dirty hands*” and is “*producing nothing but advanced entertainment*”. (Van Toorn, 2006)

An interesting and not so discussed case of these kind of dynamics of production of opportunistic images is that of the competition and subsequent evaluation of the proposals for the future of the ‘Ground Zero’ area in New York, in what used to be the site of the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan. In an article published in the issue 22 of Harvard Design Magazine, in 2005, Reinhold Martin explores the case in order to contribute to the then on-going debate around the terms ‘critical’ and ‘projective’.⁶ The debate was probably initiated by the anti-critical writings of Michael Speaks (in another article published in Architectural Record on January 2002) as well as Robert Somol and Sara Whiting’s infamous “*Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism*”, which was also published in 2002, as part of the issue 33 of Perspecta. Speaks, Stan Allen and Sylvia Lavin have also been involved in subsequent anti-critical episodes which have continued the chain of reactions to the now canonical text by Michael Hays, “*Critical Architecture: Between Culture and Form*” published in Perspecta 21 in 1984.

In an excellent article, George Baird elegantly criticizes the generational opportunism and utilitarian attitude of the proponents of the ‘projective’ approach, announcing the foreseeable quick involution of “*this new architecture towards the merely pragmatic and the merely decorative.*” (Baird, 2004) Martin’s article continues the critique where Baird left it, aiming at unveiling the reactionary and neutralizing opportunism of the so called ‘post-critical’, whom he characterizes as the defenders of “*non-opposi-*

6 See MARTIN, Reinhold (2005) *Critical of What? Toward a Utopian Realism* in Perspecta 22, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Graduate School of Design)



tional, non-resistant, non-dissident and thus non-utopian” positions and approaches to the production of architecture. He uses the case of the competition for the ‘Ground Zero’ area as an illustration of the cynical opportunism he wants to denounce. An exhibition in New York organized by MaxProtech (today Meulenstein) in 2002 gathered fifty-eight proposals by different teams of architects, designers and artists including several representatives of the ‘post-critical’. Martin highlights the proposal by *Foreign Office Architects* (FOA) which openly declared their intentions not to consider the option of remembering what had happened and presented their proposal as the materialization of the opportunity to give New York the tallest building in the world again, because that’s “*what it deserves.*” According to Martin, both their proposal and Greg Lynn’s – which embraced the rhetoric of war and preparedness through a defensive skyscraper that would materialize the ultimate effective conflation of every day life and military warfare – were excellent examples of the opportunistic professional exploitation of (any kind of) new possibilities within the media and capital flows of techno-corporate globalization.

Shortly after the exhibition both Greg Lynn and Alejandro Zaera-Polo (principal of FOA) joined forces with a few other to be part of the international team ‘United Architects’, invited along 5 other teams by the “*Lower Manhattan Development Corporation*” to produce innovative and visionary proposals for

Fig. 29/
Lower Manhattan September 11th 2001



Fig. 30/
Proposed entrance building of the Yongsan
Dreamhub project in Korea. "The Cloud" –
MVRDV [http://www.nydailynews.com/
news/design-korean-towers-evokes-ex-
ploding-wtc-9-11-architects-mrvdv-apolo-
gize-wasn-intentional-article-1.989391](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/design-korean-towers-evokes-exploding-wtc-9-11-architects-mrvdv-apologize-wasn-intentional-article-1.989391)

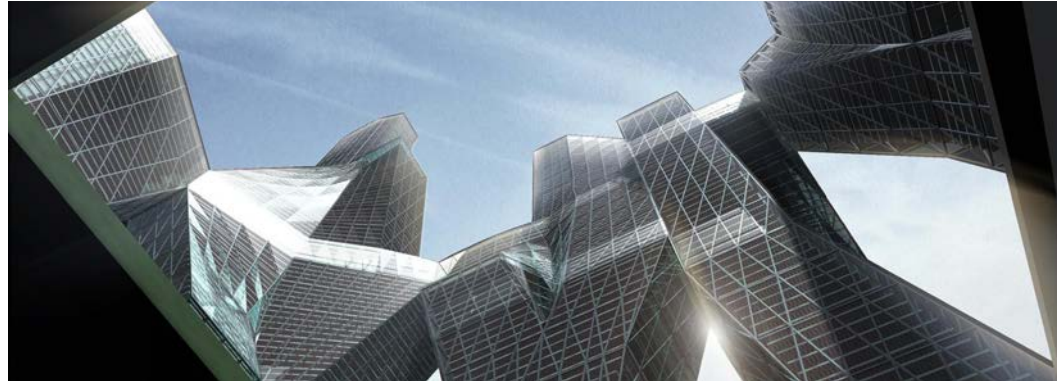


Fig. 31/
United Architects' proposal for Ground
Zero

7 Van Toorn, R. (2004). No More Dreams? The Passion for Reality in Recent Dutch Architecture... and Its Limitations". *Harvard Design Magazine*, 21. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Graduate School of Design

the Ground Zero site. United Architect's proposal consisted of a set of five towers that were linked and connected to form one continuous building that could be easily read as a family of skyscrapers holding hands.

Although the proposals for the 'Ground Zero' competition might reveal the ethical void of global architecture in a more extreme and crude way, the sad truth is that the kinds of architectural images and strategies used by most of the participants and the opportunism of their protagonists is worryingly similar to that of many other architectural competitions and design processes around the globe.

Paradigmatic in this sense are the proposals and designs of the Dutch office MVRDV, which Roemer van Toorn places in a category of extreme pragmatism aiming at the production of representations for the enjoyment of all, or what he calls 'projective mise-en-scène'. In one of their recent proposals for the South Korean DreamHub in Yongsan (Seoul), Maas, Van Rijs and De Vries presented a cloud of pixels which obviously exploited the potential media impact of an absurd, gratuitous and formally banal allusion to the 9/11 attack against the twin towers at WTC. The rain of criticism that the proposal received



was dealt, as many other times, with unbeatable skill and pragmatic intelligence by the Dutch architects, who remain indifferent and unaffected.

It is disappointing that the graphics, images and discourses used by these and many other architectural offices operating in quite disparate locations are practically identical and all equally fake. It is tiring to continue to witness the same mechanisms, tricks and functions facilitated by the ultimate software application used to construct pseudo-representations with more or less the same - and equally mistaken – aims: the mimetic anticipation of an architecture that will literally materialize the drawing.

In these and many other cases, one can see the effects of the combined dynamics of the architectural profession and its inner fight for global architecture commissions on the one hand, and the corporate market of architecture as cultural production and urban management tool on the other, both at the mercy of the neoliberal prevailing regime. The urgency to produce and adequately brand an image of the city capable of providing the visual and financial capital that is required to fuel and carry out the urban and economic development projects and desires of politicians and avid developers, turned the cat-walk of architectural design in one of the hottest and hippest market showrooms. The speeds at

Fig. 32/
BIG's Koutalaki Skiresort, Lapland, Finland (official images from BIG)

which things move leaves little or no time for actual design development or the discussion of projects in depth. Instead, architects – frequently assisted by skilled and underpaid or simply exploited architecture students – are only allowed to ‘design’ these images. Jury members in evaluation committees and assessment boards, also forced to operate quickly, must choose productively among the most ‘attractive’ proposals, i.e. in most of the cases, those that are capable of shouting the loudest in one sense or another.

Perhaps the ultimate example of such dynamics is the current development of the now well-known Saadiyat in Abu Dhabi; a 27 square kilometre island that will host the cultural district of the capital of the United Arab Emirates. The development is planned to be finished by 2020, and will include built versions of the corresponding renderings of a Zaha Hadid Performing Arts, a Foster and Partners National Museum, A Frank Gehry Guggenheim, a Tadao Ando Maritime Museum, a Jean Nouvel Louvre, and around 20 other cultural pavilions. The whole project is of course conceived to attract global (and affluent) cultural tourists. Just as it happens with the architectural containers, their cultural contents and art works – mostly inexistent in Abu Dhabi – must also be acquired in the global markets.

“The Jean Nouvel Louvre building, at US\$108m, is a relatively small element within a US\$1.4bn Louvre package, which includes US\$548m for the use of the word “Louvre”, and a further US\$747m for Louvre art loans and management and curatorial services.⁷ These loans represent a primary cost for the project given that there is no art of particular note in Abu Dhabi to suggest building a gallery, or to hang in it once finished. Rather the gallery, the visitor, and the works on display are all drawn from the global context. The actual siting of any of this on Saadiyat Island is a pure property play.” (Hornsby, 2009:38)

In these extreme versions, global architectures reveal themselves as an absolute denial of place (if place is understood relationally and holistically) and are exclusively based on the global dynamics of desire, particularly the desires of global cities and their developers to be desired (and visited). Architecture and planning turn into an almost magical process.

“Under such circumstances, and generously bankrolled, architecture becomes a process of magical thinking – of white lines drawn on black screens, and utopic client-architect dictatorships. Spatial con-



Fig. 33/
Saadiyat Island, aerial view

cerns play themselves out in a world of pure space, where the obsession with the world class allows a wordlessness of approach” (Horsnby, 2009:39).

While individuals withdraw from reality in order to obtain their pleasure-fantasy dose, architects and planners withdraw from their real task by engaging in cold uncritical practices that carry out whatever client or developer demands, to then deny responsibility for the real (social, spatial, political, environmental) consequences and implications of their designs. The results are disconnected, out of context, bizarre enclaves of oblivion; lawless examples of a kind of spatial withdrawal that allows and co-produces exception states, banal fantasies and exotic lies.

Dubai City is a staggering example of such a non-place, one that has become the very icon of lavish extravaganza in tourism, and at the same time one of the world’s fastest growing cities. The United Arab Emirates are expected to have 11 million inhabitants in 2015, most of them in Dubai, although the native population represents only an astonishing 10%; a new breed of ‘tourists’ and ‘slaves’ make the numbers complete. By 2012, Dubai will have more than 30 skyscrapers with a height of above 300 meters and will be the home of the world’s highest building, the world’s 3 highest hotels, the world’s largest shopping centre and the biggest amount of artificial land ever constructed in the ocean. It is run much more like a business - a profit-producing urban and financial resort – than as a city: no real citizens, no social investments, only informational and economic flows.

Similarly, in other fast growing areas of Asia and in different, scattered locations around the globe, we can see the emergence of other spatial products that are tests, variations, and tourist oriented versions of the free zone. (a note on the zone needed here pointing towards Keller Easterling work?) These places take advantage of relaxed regulations and tax reductions, and their very existence as tourist enclaves depends on the availability of cheap oil and the constant flow of visitors that make up a significant part of the population. The collapse of energy availability will transform these and similar fake-voids into ghost-like holes. The empty fantasies will suddenly turn into painfully real but equally empty remnants.

“The architecture of warfare [...] is similar to our own familiar offshore real estate cocktails, with their devices for security and territorial conquest. Like any camp or zone of conflict, the next free trade zone,

data haven, tax shelter, or residential golf development seeks immunity as an exceptional condition, a legal lacuna or island entitled to special sovereignty and exemption from law.” (Easterling, 2005:4)

So we have on the one hand the ambitions of a global elite of architects that are immersed in a race to get the big commissions in order to produce their latest iconic fantasies, and lending themselves to the complicit co-production of an image of the global city that is monotonous and superficial; and on the other, the proliferation of a constellation of territorial islands, in which, through the creation of specific conditions and exemptions, it seems to be possible to literally build the hyper-real. These processes seemingly benefit an elite of powerful actors that, detached from the real, material and situated implications of the construction of these architectures, appear as the ultimate orchestrators and administrators. But what is the alternative? How can one still find the energy to oppose these forces and establish the grounds for a different life, a different kind of space, and a different species of the image? How can we approach an image that is not a symbolic reduction of image to sign and/or a hollow device for the systematic concealment of the emptiness behind and around it?

Like in *The Matrix*, it seems like we are immersed in a process of fleeing (withdrawal) from the desert of the real to the anesthetizing ecstasies of hyperreality. Twenty minutes into the movie, the legendary computer hacker Morpheus asks Neo if he wants to know what the Matrix is and gives him the option of accompanying him on a trip to the other side of the Matrix where he will learn the full extent of his imprisonment. He can choose to discover the nightmare of the prison in which humanity is trapped, or to stay inside the computer simulation and forget everything in order to continue with a ‘normal’ life.

“This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill - the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill - you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes.” (Morpheus, in ‘*The Matrix*’, 1999)

In the passionate and compelling documentary “*The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema*”⁸, Slavoj Žižek discusses precisely this moment in relationship with the meaning of the whole movie and its symbolic and ontological implications. He explains how although the matrix is a computer program that produces the fictions that the humans are trapped in, the choice between the blue and the red pill cannot be a choice

8 Fiennes, Sophie (2006) 150’. Documentary film featuring Slavoj Žižek as himself discussing and analyzing a series of famous films and their ideological implications.

between illusion and reality, because the fictions that the Matrix produces already structure ‘our’ reality. *“If you take away from our reality the symbolic fictions that regulate it, you lose reality itself”* (Zizek, 2006) In the documentary, he immediately goes on to demand ‘a third pill’, which would be the one enabling us to grasp not the reality behind the illusion – the terrible prison in which we are supposed to live – but the reality in the illusion itself.

In an earlier text in which he deals with the movie in a detailed analysis, Zizek explains how the movie fails to exploit the opportunity for a truly critical and intelligent narrative, and how it is filled with ideological inconsistencies. The two possible readings of the Matrix that the movie offers are both false: either a metaphor for the virtual symbolic order, a kind of Big Other that structures our world and controls us and everything; or the externalization of this Big Other in the form of a super-mega computer that has taken us all hostages and is responsible of producing the virtual reality we are forced to live in. (Zizek, 1999:13)

Once Neo accepts to take the red pill, Morpheus takes him with him and shows him ‘the truth’. The movie shows a white screen in which Morpheus and Neo seem to float, and to which Morpheus brings the simulation of some 1950’s furniture and even a ‘Radiola’ TV, to then show him both the images of what he thinks that the word looks like, and the ‘real’ image of the remains of a desolated Chicago, welcoming him to *“the desert of the real”*.

The real behind the virtual reality simulation that Morpheus shows Neo is not the ‘true reality’, but the gap that gives reality its ontological incompleteness. According to Zizek, we should read every attempt at positing another reality behind the incomplete one as a strategy to conceal the inconsistency itself, which, as stated above, affords us the possibility to stay ‘awake’ as it were.

“What the film renders as the scene of our awakening into our true situation, is effectively its exact opposite, the very fundamental fantasy that sustains our being. We are not dreaming in VR that we are free agents in our everyday common reality, while we are actually passive prisoners in the prenatal fluid exploited by the Matrix; it is rather that our reality is that of the free agents in the social world we know, but in order to sustain this situation, we have to supplement it with the disavowed, terrible, im-

pending fantasy of being passive prisoners in the prenatal fluid exploited by the Matrix. The mystery of the human condition, of course, is why the subject needs this obscene fantasmatic support of his/her existence.”(Zizek, 1999:25-26)

Mutatis mutandis, Zizek also inverts the explanation of the September 11 attacks to the World Trade Center in New York, suggesting that instead of understanding them as a disruption of our illusory world with the crude dimension of the Real, one should acknowledge that what really happened was that the image of the explosions, a fantasmatic irruption entered our reality shattering the symbolic coordinates that structure it. (Zizek, 2012:13) The majority of people lived this event as a TV experience, as a virtual entity. The constant process of virtualization leads to a moment in which ‘real reality’ is also experienced or perceived as virtual. In Zizek’s description of the attacks, the terrorist themselves were not doing what they did in order to cause material damage or to destroy the real epicentre of economic power or to cause chaos, but rather for the spectacular effects and impact that the attacks and their images would have. “[T]he collapse of the WTC was an image, a semblance, an ‘effect’ which, at the same time, delivered the thing itself.” (Zizek, 2012:22)

In the end, what is crucial in relationship to the image is to locate it beyond the sign and the symbol, because what we are suffering from in these times of the primacy of the sign is a reduction, a simplification of the image to signs, or the proliferating attempts at making simple signs pass as images.

It might be important to return here to Gadamer and to approach the ontology of the image from his perspective, through which it is possible to locate the image somewhere in between sign and symbol.

The sign is doomed to a short existence dedicated to pointing towards something external to it; its ontology is therefore that of its function. Once the sign has indicated what it is supposed to indicate, it disappears as it were. The image on the other hand invites us and affords us a stay within it. Even though it also refers to something different than itself, the being of the image is also part of what it presents. *“The difference between a picture and a sign has an ontological basis. The picture does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents.”(Gadamer, 2004:146)*

The symbol instead, does not point to something else but it represents it by taking its place, by substituting it. Although like the image it makes an absence present, the symbol is not capable of evoking this absence. *“Through their mere existence and manifesting of themselves, symbols function as substitutes; but of themselves they say nothing about what they symbolize.”* (Gadamer, 1996:147)

The image represents by increasing the meaning of ‘the original’ that it refers to; the image has the power to bring what it represents more fully into our presence. Gadamer places therefore the image somewhere in-between the symbol and the sign, as a complex entity that cannot be reduced to a mere or pure reference to something (like the sign) nor to a pure substitution by taking the place of something (like the symbol). The image has something of both these dimensions and yet it contains a surplus of being which is related to the fact that their meaning emerges also from what they are in themselves, and not through what Gadamer refers to as ‘institution’. *“Artificial signs and symbols alike do not—like the picture—acquire their signifying function from their own content, but must be taken as signs or as symbols. We call the origin of their signifying function their ‘institution’ (Stiftung). In determining the ontological valence of a picture (which is what we are concerned with), it is decisive that in regard to a picture there is no such thing as “institution” in the same sense.”* (Gadamer, 1996: 148)

To understand or interpret images as merely signs or symbols is therefore a reductive and simplistic move, for the image opens up a space of contemplation that is not exhausted with its reference to or substitution of something, but as a space of/for the emergence of sense, meaning and action based on what the image is *itself*. The obvious implication of this open ontology of the image is that the way to deal and work with images is not so much about the disclosing of the clear and distinct ‘meanings’ or messages that the image might carry, or the exact nature of its relationship with the thing or things that it represents and/or substitutes, but rather about attempting to encounter the image through a difficult act of equality in which we open ourselves also to it, embracing the encounter. To allow the image to do its part, but also to find a hybrid space, in-between, in which the encounter allows for a thinking-feeling that was not there before, but is an emerging result of these combined generousities. An image is much more than a sign. /



Beyond Screens

Chapter 1.4

“The screen is not a frame like that of a picture but a mask which allows only a part of the action to be seen.”¹

“Like a formless elastic membrane, an electromagnetic field, or the receptacle of the Timaeus, the screen makes something issue from chaos, and even if this something differs only slightly.”²

It’s dark. What appear to be the figures of two persons move awkwardly against the backdrop of an opening, which leads to the bright outside. One of them seems to be holding an animal with the help of a rope; the animal precedes them as if pulling to escape. But they hold their ground. In approaching the door, light clears things up slightly. It’s a pig. The man on the left holds the rope with his right hand, and the pig’s tail with his left. The figure on the right repeatedly touches the animal’s body perhaps in an attempt to soothe the fear, as the group proceeds through the door and into the courtyard. Out in the open, the pig squeals and grunts in dismay. More figures are waiting. Fast feet moving. A rope is quickly made ready and some experienced hands tie it around the animal’s mouth. The pig is forced to stand still and face up. The man on the left leaves the rope now to the other figure and turns quickly in

Fig. 34/
‘Another version of the Truth’
Robert Sheridan (2007)

¹ Bazin, André (1967) *What is Cinema?*
Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California
Press. p. 105

² Deleuze, G. (1993). *The fold: Leibniz
and the baroque*. London: Athlone. p. 76



search of something. He is soon back on the other side with a shiny short metallic cylinder in his hand. A cattle gun. He places the end of the cylinder against the forehead of the pig. Flat. Holding it with both hands as if a pump, he adjusts the position. The pig screeches loud. We hear a sudden blast. The pig's head jumps in reaction as its body drops on the ground. The animal shivers in convulsion, and the blood 'rivers' through the courtyard's ground. Dogs bark... Suddenly, the image on the screen freezes. The video footage is fast rewound, back to the moment in which the pig was standing. Silence. The image starts moving again, slowly. The cylinder appears back in the frame and progressively approaches the pig's head. We hear the strange noises of the scene in slow motion. The blast sounds now like an endless explosion, and the barking, an obscene and gloomy distortion. The pig is dead (again). The footage ends abruptly and we are confronted with the random horizontal patterns of electronic white noise on the screen.

This is the starting sequence of the film "*Benny's video*", the second in the so-called 'glaciation' trilogy³ by the Austrian director Michael Haneke. Seconds after we are left with the 'snow' on the screen, the title of the film appears superimposed in big red letters, disclosing the authorship of the videotaped re-

Fig. 35/
Benny's Video - Michael Haneke (1992)

³ Trilogie über die Vergletscherung der Gefühle: Der Siebente Kontinent (1989), Benny's video (1992), 71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls (1994).



ording we have just been submitted to watching. The unedited footage from a hand-held video camera makes the violence of the real death of the animal even more real. And the screen immediately points out elsewhere. Somewhere, not here, the fourteen year-old Benny is rewinding his own tape of the slaughtering of the pig in order to watch the death again, in slow motion.

Benny is one of the two sons of an affluent Viennese couple and the main character in the film. His parents do not spend much time home, and his older sister takes advantage of their absences to organize dinners and parties during which she promotes pyramid schemes. Benny spends his days in his room watching videotapes, films, television, news broadcasts, and the live feed of a video camera that looks out to the street through the window. The shades are permanently down, the room always gloom, and Benny seems to be always there, unconcerned. He appears unemotional, with no feelings, incapable of relating to anyone or anything but his recordings and screens.

Haneke has mentioned in several interviews that he aims at constructing anti-psychological films, in which the characters are “*less characters than projection surfaces for the sensibilities of the viewer*”, and that “*blank spaces force the spectator to bring his own thoughts and feelings to the film*”.⁴ These

Fig. 36/
Benny's Video - Michael Haneke (1992)

⁴ Haneke, Michael (1992) "Film als Katharsis" in Bono, Francesco. Austria (In) felix: zum österreichischen Film der 80er Jahre. Graz: Blimp. p. 89



intentions make many of his characters ‘opaque’ in the sense that it is hardly possible to conceive of their motivations. Benny’s perception is mediated through technology, for him recording *is* perceiving. He seems to fit in Baudrillard’s description of a postmodern subject who can no longer understand or even create the limits of his own being, a subject who can no longer produce himself as a mirror, but has turned into a pure screen.

“[T]oday the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead, there is a screen and network. In place of the reflexive transcendence of mirror and scene, there is a nonreflecting surface, an immanent surface where operations unfold the smooth operational surface of communication.” (Baudrillard, 1983:126)

It is indeed this world of screens and communicative failure that Benny inhabits and represents. Benny is the alienated subject that Baudrillard talks about. The multiplicity of screens that surround him used to be a sheltering distraction to compensate for his parents’ absence, but have now turned into a destructive mediation that absorbs and numbs him, rendering him unable to distinguish whether what is on the screen is actually happening or not, and whether what he is experiencing is part of a screened action or not.

Yet the magic of Haneke’s cinema is that he does not surrender to the power of what he is criticizing, and he manages to keep control of the effects of what is shown on his screens. The screen of his cinema is a place of encounter for his audience to meet him and think through the effects of what his films are demanding, and about the questions he is posing.

In Benny’s video, Haneke disappoints the expectations of the audience by not showing the violence on the screen but forcing everyone to imagine their own versions of what happens out of field, but is nevertheless carefully ‘staged’ through sound(s).

The film proceeds from the raw footage of the pig at the outset, along the ambiguity of blurred boundaries between the videos recorded and/or played by Benny⁵ throughout the movie and the film itself, to end with the cold and aseptic view provided by the surveillance cameras of the police station.

Fig. 37/

Benny’s Video - Michael Haneke (1992)

⁵ Here it is possible to see the parallel: while Benny does not distinguish anymore between the TV screen, the camera footage, or reality, we as audience thrown into a space of ambiguity in which a similar confusion is induced. We don’t know if we are watching ‘Benny’s video’ (the film) or one of Benny’s videos inside “Benny’s video”. And this of course places us in an uncomfortable position that forces us to think and question what we see and where we stand in relationship to our understanding of it.

Like in many other films later, Haneke creates an open space for reflection, posing questions, and explicitly critiquing the epistemological and ontological status of what is shown on the screen, and of the screen itself.

We can speak here at least of two different screens, and at least of one that is just like the mask that Bazin refers to above. Or perhaps even several superimposed masks. Haneke's screens are always carefully staged 'cracks' through which only a piece of the whole can be seen. Other 'holes' and gaps are simultaneously constitutive of his screen: we know, we have learnt, that there is more going on beyond what we see on the screen, and we are confronted with the constant demand to fill in the empty spaces and to venture answers, not about the possible solution to the mysteries of the stories or the fate of his characters – since his films are not psychological thrillers – but about our own position as audience and as human beings vis à vis the critique he is waving and our emotions or reactions.⁶

The screen is therefore not only a mask but also a place with a depth that exceeds that of what is shown and that of what the seen refers to or is based on. The film is not exhausted with the image that it shows and its function is not simply to entertain and distract but to activate, to disturb, to force a thinking-feeling that is also and simultaneously the result and the signal of a hope.

Hopelessness is instead what seems to emanate from the postmodern epic descriptions and analysis of a process of proliferation of screens that are said to surround our lives in an all-encompassing and irreversible transition to passive contemplation and information overflow. These screens, main interfaces of an uncontrolled ecstasy of communication and information, would have led, according to Paul Virilio, to a blurring – almost disappearance – of spatial dimensions and physical separations, as part of what he refers to as a process of dematerialization.

“Deprived of objective boundaries, the architectonic element begins to drift and float in an electronic ether, devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion. From here on, people can't be separated by physical obstacles or by temporal distances. With the interfacing of computer terminals and video monitors, distinctions of here and there no longer mean anything.” (Virilio, 1984:544)

⁶ It could be interesting here to think of Lacan's way of imagining the screen as a site of mediation, where the objects that we see through the screen are also effectively looking back at us. There could be much said about the implications of this Lacanian relationship of the subject of representation with a gaze that returns, but I will move on here to other aspects of the screen. For further clarification, see for instance Lacan, Jacques (1978) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W.W. Norton “Only the subject—the human subject, the subject of the desire that is the essence of man—is not, unlike the animal, entirely caught up in this imaginary capture. He maps himself in it. How? In so far as he isolates the function of the screen and plays with it. Man, in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze. The screen is here the locus of mediation.” (Lacan, 1978:107)

Although we must concede that the proliferating media screens are to some extent disabling and anesthetizing, encouraging the viewers to adopt a passive stance and simply watch, it is crucial that we realize that screens and media can perform us in many other (also damaging) ways. It would be too dangerous not to acknowledge for instance, the ways in which media are simultaneously keeping us awake, constantly tuned in, connected, prepared... Rather than turning us into passive contemplators, screens and information are performing us into ever-active, sleepless machines of interaction, processing and communication. Effective and productive consumers, we are encouraged to be always watching, always working, always doing something, and always moving and changing. What our constant coupling to media devices and screens is causing is a disability to establish any real bonds with the locations that happen to host us and with the people that happen to be around us. More over, stupefying and constant visual overflow is also affecting our ability to understand images and particularly to relate them to what is going on around us. *“The contingency and variability of the visible world are no longer accessible. [...] There has been a disintegration of human abilities to see, especially of an ability to join visual discriminations with social and ethical valuations. [...] 24/7 disables vision through processes of homogenization, redundancy and acceleration.”*(Crary, 2013:33)

In the well-known novel ‘Fahrenheit 451’, by Ray Bradbury, published in 1953 and set in the 2050’s, the state keeps citizens under control by means of strict censorship and a planned strategy to keep them constantly distracted by means of screens, images and sounds. Firemen go around locating homes and/or people that have books and burning them. Most homes are organized around ‘parlour walls’, which Bradbury describes as overwhelmingly large screens showing soap operas without stop. Mildred, the wife of the main character Guy Montag, dreams of a fourth parlour wall, while spending her days taking part in the new TV shows that come with printed scripts so that people can ‘act’ a part from their living rooms. Montag tries his best at reconnecting with his wife, but she is no longer interested in anything outside the screens.

When reading the book, even though the parlour walls are not described in great detail, it is easy to imagine them as immense, wall-size TV screens. In the adaptation of the book to cinema by François Truffaut in 1966, the screens shown on Mildred’s wall are more or less the size of the average flat TV



today. Most homes in western society today have a screen of that size that does precisely what Bradbury's described as part of a science-fiction dystopia: 24-hour a day empty, nonsensical broadcasting.

One of the keys to the magic of the book is precisely that it does not focus excessively on the specificities of the 'parlour' itself, the medium, but shows instead in great detail the effects of the network of structuring structures, systems and rules – within which the TV is embedded – that have transformed human beings into disaffected, docile and dumb organisms. The size of the screen is not the most relevant issue and is certainly not determining anything. Rather than focusing exclusively on the technological object itself – what Stiegler has called 'temporal object'⁷ – it is crucial to go again beyond the screen, in order to understand: *first*, the network or arrangements and environments within which these technologies are integrated and consumed; *second*, the modalities of operation and use that allow these technologies to affect and perform us not only in one pre-determined way but as a result of our interactions with them (we should not agree with Virilio's hyperbolic assumption that a multitude of screens leads inexorably to a passive population, at the risk of missing the important power and damaging effects of certain media modalities, which require an active engagement from their users in the form of management, exchange, review or tracking demands)⁸; *third*, the material effects of these technolo-

Fig. 38/
Fahrenheit 451 - Francois Truffaut (1966)

⁷ See Stiegler, Bernard. (1998). *Technics and time*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

⁸ Virilio could be seen here as simultaneously 'too pessimistic' and 'not pessimistic enough'. Too pessimistic in relationship to his exaggerated, one-dimensional reading of the dystopian consequences of media proliferation which leave no space for intervention, and not pessimistic enough in the sense of not realizing that the dangers are multiple and multiform rather than just simply related to the sheer size and number of screens and their anaesthetizing effects.

gies and objects in the lives of people, including the isolation into non-communicating micro worlds, their detachment from 'functional' social life and the serious deterioration of their mental ecologies; and *fourth*, the occupation of individual time and experience and the disastrous consequences it has for subjective singularity and creative imagination and participation. "*Most important now is not the capture of attentiveness by a delimited object – a movie, television program, or a piece of music, but rather the remaking of attention into repetitive operations and responses that always overlap with acts of looking or listening.*" (Crary, 2013:52)

Screens are of course more and more around us, at work, in public spaces, at home, on our bodies... and this is evidently affecting us. Our critique should be sharpened and developed in order to approach and grasp the material effects of their presence in our environments and lives, but always focusing on the ways in which their presence and action is enabled or encouraged, and the ways in which their effects are enacted. The screen cannot be seen as an isolated technological object, or as 'just' a technology. It must be understood within and in concert with the network of arrangements that make its functioning and spreading possible. How did the screen arrive there? What is the screen doing? How is it doing it? Who is doing the editing?

Virilio's systematic exaggeration (Thrift, 2005:342) has guided him and many followers through their extreme statements and negativism to the construction of an epic of disaster and despair that is not based on the accurate analysis and observation of specific situations, but rather on metaphors, illustrative examples, and generalizations which do not contribute to the identification of possible gaps or directions for action, and seem to be devoted instead to the construction of a closed – and successful – narrative style. Conflating the diverse multiplicity of screens into one single '*apparatus of projection and reflection*' – and sometimes fascinated by the very objects he is describing as the cause of our announced destruction – Virilio has developed a rhetorics of dematerialization and disappearance which describes the apparent dissolution of material space. "*The cathode window and the matrix screen are able to displace doors and physical means of communication, because cinematic representation has already displaced the reality of the effective presence, the real presence of people and things.*" (Virilio, 1991:99)

In his account, architecture is of course a direct victim of this process and is doomed to disappearing, or at least being relegated to an imperceptible noise in the background. The city stops being an inhabited place that hosts meetings, commercial transactions and information exchange, to turn into another screen: “*the cinema of city lights*” (Virilio, 1991:64) Architecture, according to him, dissolves into an endless movie.

In his descriptions of architecture’s fate, Virilio mentions the importance of glass and transparency as a condition of the profession – as if these were universal, shared values of architectural practices today – to then read this condition as a metaphor of the disappearance of matter and refer then to extreme cases of buildings in which screens have been used as the primary elements of entire facades. While there might be buildings integrating or incorporating media screens extensively – and in spite of the very real impact of imagery and media in our lives and culture – solid matter is and will continue to be the material of architecture. Buildings and architectures will never be made entirely and exclusively of screens, and as we will see below, the material condition of screens of any kind is simply self-evident. According to Virilio, architecture dissolves into what he calls the ‘wall-screen’, producing confusion between the reception of images from a projector and the reception of architectonic forms. (Virilio, 1991:69) But these are not comparable things. Architectonic forms are not simply ‘received’, they are experienced. And they are not the only element or dimension that architecture produces or is based on. Architectures are also atmospheres, materials, experiences and affordances. Instead, Virilio’s understanding of perception clearly privileges ‘sight’, trapped in the power of the very media and interfaces that he is describing and whose effects he seems, at times, to denounce. “*The only sense that is fast enough to keep pace with the astounding increase of speed in the technological world is sight. But the world of the eye is causing us to live increasingly in a perpetual present, flattened by speed and simultaneity.*” (Pallasmaa, 2005:21) Our task will be, therefore, at least twofold: to imagine creative ways to inhabit that speed and those screens in order to transform them from within, and to challenge them by slowing down and by embracing the gratifying and invigorating uncertainty of the direct, face-to-face encounter. There is architecture after the TV and there is architecture in and beyond the screen.

The distance at which Virilio seems to produce and locate his work, as well as the lack of specificity of his descriptions and texts, along with the lack of engagement with real people’s lives, makes it of little



use when we are to imagine ways in which to develop alternatives or intervene. What is interesting about Virilio's and others' denunciation of the evils of the screen is the discussion of the insurmountable distance that the screen falsely bridges: although they transport and re-present the images and appearances of people, things and (other) locations, often in real-time, media screens cannot effectively eliminate the physical distance between us and those things or places. The illusion of bypassing, bridging or eliminating this ontological difference upheld and promoted by the screens and their fascinated ambassadors, contributes to the further enactment of an ever deeper gulf: now it is not simply the qualitative separation which signals the impossibility for us to physically travel to the actual locations and events that the screens re-present, but also that our interest to do so seems to be dissolving. We are distracted. The screen, particularly that of television, separates us from the realms of reality that host what is shown – only after appropriate editing – on the screen. This is relentlessly pushing us into the extension of indirect experience and perception, under the guise of 24/7 realism – i.e. with the pretension of veridical, real-time, continuous and neutral information – progressively blurring the borders of visual modalities, making it more and more difficult for us to re-connect. This relentless process of

Fig. 39/
 'Hyper reality' from the blog Critical Design
 by Keiichi Matsuda
<http://km.cx/projects/domestic-robocop/>

detachment from the ground, the land and the territory, from real people and real events, is what should be the object of our investigations and critiques.

While Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) could be placed along Orwell's *1984* (1948) in the brilliant depiction of worlds dominated by a totalitarian state that keeps its citizens under control through repression, censorship and vigilance, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931) predicted a dystopian future where no such state was needed. People actively participated in their own numbing by taking their pills and no one was interested in reading books. In 1958, Huxley wrote a reflective essay about the book in which he explained how many of the things he had imagined were just about to happen in reality. *"In regard to propaganda, the early advocates of universal literacy and a free press envisaged only two possibilities: the propaganda might be true, or it might be false. They did not foresee what in fact has happened, above all in our Western capitalist democracies - the development of a vast mass communications industry, concerned in the main neither with the true nor the false, but with the unreal, the more or less totally irrelevant. In a word, they failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions."* (Huxley, 1958:60)

It is relatively easy to fall in the trap of technological fascination, where the apparatus becomes the recipient of almost holy redemptive powers and is presupposed to have the ability to solve crucial societal and personal problems, without the slightest suspicion that by embracing them we become the naïve victims of planned strategies of control and distraction. Technologies are not simply neutral tools to be used in whatever ways we find fit to our needs, but programmed and structured apparatuses through which we are 'kindly invited' and persuaded to self-administer our time and our lives. Instead of blindly embracing screens and their supportive structures and networks of information and communication on the basis of a faith in their emancipatory potential or the illusion that we will once succeed to outplay the relationship of dependence on them, instead of succumbing to the fascinating appeal of glossy screens and lavish profusion of technologies to announce our total defeat and the end of material world, we must stubbornly scrutinize the specific capabilities of each of these screens and technologies, the specific conditions in which they have been devised and manufactured, the specific structures and arrangements of networks that make their functioning possible, and the specific consequences that their use has on specific individuals and communities.

The fascination with technologies is somehow almost always coupled with an equal fascination with a false sense of ‘the real’ or ‘reality’. There is often an unspoken assumption of the ultimate technology’s ability to deliver the ultimate experience of the ‘real’. Or even the more real than the real. High resolution, 3D video, surround sound, larger and larger screens that promise to wrap us within the ‘action’, reactive screens capable of reading our gestures, etc. ... all of course coupled with carefully designed programs of planned obsolescence that make these devices and technologies obsolete and/or dysfunctional at ever increasing speeds. Techno-trash. It is interesting to see here the differences between creative approaches to invent ways in which specific technologies can be incorporated into situations, tasks and ongoing processes of production which can be imaginatively enhanced, and cases in which technologies come first and are the sole engine and environment of entire situations, processes and worlds. From security protocols and routes entirely conceived and constructed around the workings and ‘agencies’ of new bio-metric and eye scanning devices, to the arrangements of living rooms and homes designed to host screens in specifically central dispositions, or today’s fascination with the ultimate film productions entirely based on 3D and digital technologies.

An interesting example that Stan Allen touched upon in a collection of essays on architecture and representation originally published in 2000⁹, is that of the film ‘*Waking Life*’ by Richard Linklater. As opposed to the exclusively digital and high resolution worlds built by the largest animation and production studios such as Pixar or Dreamworks – in which incredible amounts of time and resources are dedicated to the construction of worlds of fantasy that feel and look ‘real’, populated by characters, monsters and other creatures that incorporate the most sophisticated and human-like motions, gestures and facial expressions – ‘*Waking Life*’ was shot with a hand-held digital camera in real spaces with real actors, and was then put through a collaborative process of superimposed animation based on the technique of ‘rotoscoping’. The principle of this technique is to draw over footage, frame by frame, in order to be able to compose the live, moving elements onto backgrounds that are treated differently and separately. For ‘*Waking Life*’, an ingenious computer-assisted technique for interpolated rotoscoping was developed, which not only allowed the director and art director to save some time, but also to adjust its construction and form to the spirit and topic of the film, which deals with philosophical issues such as the nature of reality and the workings of consciousness or the function of dreams.

9 See Allen, S. (2009). *Practice: architecture, technique + representation* (Expanded 2nd ed. ed.). London ; New York: Routledge. pp. 88-89





Figs. 40 & 41/
Waking Life, Richard Linklater (2001)

¹⁰ It is important to credit the art director Bob Sabiston, who developed Rotoshop in 1997 for an animation contest. After the success of Bob's 1999 short "Snack and Drink", Linklater hired him to help him make "Waking Life".

By allowing a team of artists and illustrators to draw over the digital video footage of the actors, Linklater managed to give the film a dream-like motion and evocative blurriness as well as a conceptual and affective density – the film features intense philosophical dialogues that are often aided by diagrammatic and figurative ‘drawings’ that accompany the characters’ actions and speech – that matched his ambitions, all with the sole help of off-the-shelf Apple computers and a custom made application called ‘Rotoshop’.¹⁰ Instead of aiming desperately at *making the fantastic look and feel real* – regardless of the amounts of energy and resources needed – as in the case of Pixar productions such as *Monsters, Inc.*, Linklater uses imagination and creativity to bring in ‘some’ technology where it is needed, resulting in an artful and mind-challenging cinematic experience that *makes the real fantastic*. Again, we see here the gap that allows the audience to fill in and imagine, like in a dream, the parts that the artists and illustrators chose not to draw... Besides Bazin’s mask granting us access only to a part of the action, the screen includes here a second mask, one which materializes the mismatch between the footage of the real actors and the superimposed artistic drawings. The non-coincidental outlines of footage and drawings, the inaccurate, rough tracings of the latter, the impossible, wavy, at times dizzying separation between landscaped backgrounds and the talky, dynamic, speech and character-focused action,

is the ultimate metaphorical manifestation of the insurmountable parallax gap that divides reality from its phantasmatic support. One can easily imagine here a ‘Zizekian’ turn: this mask, this ‘rotoscoped’ layer that we have referred to as ‘fantastic’, the drawings of the artists, could be seen not as some kind of impossible, unrealistic and non-existent fantasy, but precisely as the condensed capture of the very real traits, features and facial expressions of the actors, the keys of their actions and visual impressions generated by the discursive material of their discussions. We might have to see the drawn animations as the actual material existence (wavy, dream-like and inconsistent just as real life is) and accept that the utopian, non-existent and impossible is in fact the ‘real’ of the video footage.

Diametrically opposed could be the case of ‘google glass’, and other real and imagined versions of augmented reality wearable technologies, such as for instance iGlass.¹¹ These wearable micro-computers integrated in (almost) standard-looking glasses would make use of LCD technology to project images onto a glass in a way that would provide an illusion of total immersion in the image. Notifications, tags, icons and other information about the places and people looked at by a person wearing the glasses would be superimposed to them, floating in front of this person’s eyes. Although someone could argue that this the same principle of superimposition of layers used in ‘Waking Life’, the intentions are totally different, and the claim is that augmented reality would deliver the information one needs in relationship to one’s position and gaze, complementing what one sees with the information available on the internet, in short, with a ‘functional’ purpose that the rotoscoping-based animations could not claim to have. Instead of providing gaps for creative imagination to speculate with and fill in like ‘Waking Life’ does – or like we can do while we walk around in the street and we are curious about certain people, objects and places about which we ask ourselves questions – these glasses would claim to be filling in *all* the gaps, co-opting as it were our experience. As if all the necessary information could be already provided and ‘visibly’ attached to the people, places or any other objects of our gaze. The screen/glass of these glasses would be a kind of anti-mask, in Bazin’s terms, a screen that we should understand not as a mask that provides us with a glimpse of the world, but as a screen that pretends to be showing us and giving us ‘everything’ at once, not only what is visible, or what we can touch, but also what is not present, all the informational details available for each corresponding person, object, location. Such manifestations and developments of ‘useful’ and ‘functional’ technology should make evident the need we have, more than ever, for ‘useless’ art, theory and philosophy.

¹¹ Reportedly, Apple, Inc. has been working on the development of technologies that would make a head-mounted display able to project images on a glass screen placed directly in front of the user’s eye, or perhaps even directly into the user’s eye. Although the project does not have an official name or official information released by the company, there is a US patent with number 8212859, and numerous rumours and speculations about Apple’s plans to release some kind of glass device. See for instance <http://www.businessinsider.com/apple-iglasses-2013-9?IR=T>, checked 2015-08-04.

As we can see in some of the cinematic examples I am using – constituting one of the main contentions of this investigation – (good) cinema is quite some steps ahead of architecture in finding ways out of the traps of technology and the dictates of the screen, at a time when screens are understood in some of the limiting ways outlined above (messianic tools of progress, deliverer of the real of reality as a whole, the connection with fantastic virtualities, the only door to the information we need... etc...) Architecture seems instead to be not only stuck within these technological traps, but also becoming an important factor in the production and maintenance of further detachment, enhanced by a progressive disengagement with sites and locations on the one hand, and by a focus on the design and conceptualization of surfaces and skins on the other. These surfaces become the only ‘actual’ and material ‘sites’ of architecture. The façade, the envelope, the skin, the outline, are referred to as the sites of encounter between two differentiated realms or worlds –the interior and the exterior – and these in turn associated with the artificial and the natural, respectively.

The conceptualization of the architectural skin as the most important aspect of architecture in contemporary discourses and practices has led to various theoretical positions and a multiplicity of buildings that have focused almost exclusively on developing formal, constructive, aesthetic and technological experiments with façades and their components, which have resulted in more or less innovative, more or less shocking, changes and novelties at the level of appearances, leading only in very few cases to true innovations related mostly to the energetic behavior of buildings. A focus on the envelope of architecture has amplified the already existing tendency to embrace formalism(s) and to reduce architecture to the appearance of buildings and their ability to become embodied representations or symbolic/ iconic monuments.

More recently we have seen demands for an approach to architectural envelopes that stops seeing them as mere surfaces, and starts understanding the complexity of their depth and their constituting layers as a richer and more crucial problem than the appearance of the building. In some cases there seems to be a willingness to assess also the ways in which the envelope works beyond the morphological, with investigations claiming to take into account the political and social effects of the shapes of these envelopes.¹² Although somewhat more sophisticated (as well as opportunistic) these approaches continue to work around aspects ultimately emerging or related to the way in which buildings look and

12 See for instance Zaera-Polo, Alejandro. (2008) *The Politics of the Envelope* in Volume #17: Content Management. Amsterdam: Stichting Archis



Fig. 42/
'Tri City Drive-In, San Bernardino' - Hiroshi Sugimoto (1993). Sugimoto travelled around the United States in the beginning of the 90s visiting movie theaters and photographing entire movies in a single frame.

the consequences of particular formal arrangements, or, worse, claim to do so while relying entirely on abstract metaphors which do not take into account the material and relational workings of the world as it happens and is experienced.

Princeton's former dean Alejandro Zaera-Polo for instance, aims to illustrate his approach to a 'phenomenology of the envelope' by referring to how "*a more intricate design of the limit between private and public increases the contact surface between both realms*", what reveals a formalist bias that makes him imagine 'contact surfaces' between the public and private 'realms' as really existing 'shapes', when in fact the public or the private realms are complex realities that include people, places, discourses, regulations, situations, traditions and habits, and most importantly the relations between all of them, and cannot be delimited or located within or outside a certain 'space' or enclosure which could ever have a 'contact surface' with another one. These metaphors, moreover, presuppose a somewhat stable condition of these realms, as if they could be assigned a more or less 'intricate' limit, when in fact they are always shifting, always becoming, moving 'situations' or 'environments'. The limit between public and private realms, in short, cannot be designed, but is simply enacted relationally. It is not the envelope or the skin of the building but *the very act of building* that demarcates the land, and produces a variation in the conditions of the areas enclosed by the building in respect to those of the environment outside, enabling different activities to be held in them.

Giuliana Bruno's latest book, revealingly entitled 'Surface'¹³, is another, even more sophisticated approach to screens and architectures, which embraces the current trend of thinking and theorizing 'materiality'. Speaking about the materiality of the surface in what she refers to as *the virtual age*, Bruno argues that materiality is not about materials but about the substance of material relations, (Bruno, 2014:2) proposing to investigate materiality as the surface condition of diverse media, and surface as a site of mediation and transition between something material and something that is not material.

Paradoxically, the insistence on 'materiality' – which one would expect to be related to an engagement with our interactions with materials – is combined with abstract and metaphorical language that describes the ways in which different ideas about sensuality, tactility, tension, depth and memory are evoked by and linked to diverse surfaces. Or in other words, attention is put to develop a speculative

¹³ See Bruno, Giuliana. (2014) *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality and Media*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



hermeneutics that ‘reads’ screens and other surfaces of media as mentally connected to certain ideas projected onto them, what reenacts quite clearly the split between a physical world (nature), and the world of ideas (culture). The characteristics of the materials that make up, say a projection screen, are for instance interpreted to convey ideas of lightness, crossing or folding, and suggestive readings of films are derived from their ‘textured’ image which is understood to be constructed as if it were a textile fabric.

Bruno’s approach is to defend a screen whose surface is sensual and whose skin matters, as if it were a meeting place. But for whom? The screen is according to her a mediation with the world, and as the number and characteristics of screens increase, new and expanded ways of relating to the spectator are also created: the screen is, for her, the site in which visual and spatial arts are connected through the materiality and tension of the screen. But this is an imagined and metaphorical encounter. We are asked to imagine that these things, the design of the space in which the screen is located, and the design of the screen itself, meet and are connected, and to associate that connection – metaphorically – with the tension of the surface of the screen.

Fig. 43/
Martyrs, Installation by Bill Viola, 2014

This account and approach is unfortunately leading to a notion of depth that is only imagined, and to a notion of encounter which is metaphorical and which does not include us but focuses exclusively on the interpretations of the interplays of diverse objects with visual projections. The illusion of materiality leads to a fascination with objects and our interpretations or projections on them, instead of an attention to the materials they are made of. “[M]ateriality, in short, is an illusion. We cannot touch it because it is not there. Like all other creatures, human beings do not exist on the ‘other side’ of materiality but swim in an ocean of materials. Once we acknowledge our immersion, what this ocean reveals to us is not the bland homogeneity of different shades of matter but a flux in which materials of the most diverse kinds – through processes of admixture and distillation, of coagulation and dispersal, and of evaporation and precipitation – undergo continual generation and transformation.” (Ingold, 2007:7) Instead of trying to project life onto things, we must acknowledge, with Ingold, that *things are in life*.

The thinking-feeling encounter I am after is not an encounter with the materiality of the screen, or with the screen itself. It is not an encounter with the qualities or characteristics that I manage to read or interpret in the surface or construction of the screen either. It is not an encounter, symbolically represented by the material presence of the screen as projection surface. Instead, the encounter takes place in the middle. In-between. Somewhere in life, in the relations of the flows of sensory awareness powered by the stories contained in and emerging from the images projected, with the flows of light and air and other materials that make the projection possible, with the tiny particles that constantly arrive and depart to and from our bodies and the bodies of things around us and in the air we breathe, with our previous memories and experiences, with the possible and very real presence of other people and/or living beings close to us in the situation, and with the unrealized potentiality of what we feel and think that could be possible or perhaps ought to be.

This encounter takes place in the very event of thinking and its unfolding duration. Particularly, in the gaps and spaces that a screen conceived and understood as a creative mask generously offers for us to fill in with life and open thoughts, feelings and imaginations. /



Imagery, Alienation and Everyday Life

Chapter 1.5

“The spectacle is the acme of ideology, for in its full flower it exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life. Materially, the spectacle is ‘the expression of estrangement, of alienation between man and man.’ The new potentiality of fraud concentrated within it has its basis in that form of production whereby with the mass of objects grows the mass of alien powers to which man is subjected.”¹

“We urban dwellers (and we are now all, or nearly all, urban) we suffer from this psychic and collective congestion, and from the affective saturation that ‘disaffects’ us, slowly but ineluctably, from ourselves and others, disindividuating us psychically as well as collectively, distancing us from our children, our friends, our relatives, from our own, all of whom are constantly moving away from us.”²

In 1979, Robert S. Davis inherited 80 acres of land in the Northwest cost of Florida and decided to use the land to build a ‘traditional’ beach town entirely from scratch. In 1981, in the middle of a large real estate recession and at the time in which Ronald Reagan had just become the president of the US, the project took off under the name of ‘Seaside’, aiming at a slow, progressive development of the town, street by street, and the rehearsal of an ambitious and radical ‘social’ plan, which Davis carried out with the help of his family, collaborators and a group of architects proponents of ‘New Urbanism’. His fantasy was to build a small town that would attract people tired of sub-urban life.

Fig. 44/
Untitled (Worthington Street)
Gregory Crewdson (2006), from the series
‘Beneath the Roses’

¹ Debord, G. (1994). *The society of the spectacle* (D. Nicholson-Smith, Trans. 1st paperback ed.). New York: Zone Books.

² Stiegler, B. (2013). *Uncontrollable societies of disaffected individuals*. Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity Press.



Truman Show - Peter Weir (1998)
Film stills from left to right:
1h29'57"/1h31'32"/1h31'46"
1h35'11"/1h35'00"/1h35'16"

Around 1996, another fantasy, the one depicted by the film “*The Truman Show*” was to be ‘constructed’ in the town, after director Peter Weir got to know about this master-planned community and realized that it would fit perfectly as the setting for the film. Starred by Jim Carrey, the film tells the story of a man who, legally adopted at birth by a media corporation, becomes the protagonist of a reality show that follows him around the clock for almost 30 years, while he is kept totally unaware. Finally, Truman discovers that the world he knows is not ‘true’ and manages to escape.

The film seems to enact a critique of a world dominated by powerful media who are capable of constructing illusions that we are made to believe, presupposing that there exists a real reality behind those illusions that we can possibly access if we are determined and truly honest to ourselves. The life in the enclosed world of the show could be thus seen as the metaphor of ideology, while the final scene, with Truman managing to exit the studio set, would correspond to the emancipatory moment of discovering true reality, outside ideology. But is it really like that? At the end of the film, Truman breaks through the fake sky-like background of the studio set after literally crashing against it in a boat, and shortly after, decides to leave through a set of stairs and a door he finds. The film shows how, right after his exiting through the door, the people watching the show live on TV are all celebrating this happy ending regardless of age, profession or interests. Everybody is watching, and everybody agrees. Understanding that Truman is now “free” and, at least from our perspective as film audience knowing that he will be meeting his newly found love on the other side, everyone ‘feels’ happy and relieved with this happy ending. But what if, as Žižek has suggested³, this is precisely the utmost example of pure ideology? The idea, the belief that there is a ‘true’ reality into which one can enter after the necessary and determined steps out of another, enclosed, ideological world in which we seem to be trapped, is the actual fantasy.

The critical force of the movie is precisely that it insinuates to its audience that their very real social life, taking place in the average ‘American’ town as part of consumerist society, is rather a sort of an un-real nightmare, a fake life in which everyone else is an actor or an extra of a never ending film, staged as part of the process of expansion of an unstoppable capitalism which has now managed to colonize also life itself. “*The underlying experience of ‘Time Out of Joint’ and of ‘The Truman Show’ is that the late capitalist consumerist Californian paradise is, in its very hyper-reality, in a way unreal, substanceless, deprived of material inertia.*” (Žižek, 1999:43)

³ In a text about the film ‘The Matrix’, Žižek also mentions “*The Truman Show*”, proposing such an interpretation, which he then relates to Phillip K. Dick’s “*Time Out of Joint*” (1959). See Žižek, Slavoj (1999) *The Matrix, or Malebranch in Hollywood*, in *Philosophy Today*, 43, pp. 11-26



As we know, the concept of alienation refers to an idea of withdrawing or separation of a person from an object or position of attachment. This idea can be applied to various things, the separation from one's own self, from the results of one's work, from social relations, from nature, etc. ... Feuerbach explained the risks of religious alienation when men separate from themselves and from their activities in order to worship god, to whom they attribute their (best) human qualities.⁴ Marx continued and expanded his work explaining the effects of capitalist working conditions on workers and their social relations. In his critique of political economy, the social character of the work of a worker - the relationship of the worker and his hands or tools with a piece of wood that is transformed into, say, a table, and the relationship of the worker with the capitalist for whom he/she works – is presented to them as the objective relation between things; things, which are, by this very process, turned into commodities. Commodities are then treated in society as if their value emerged from themselves and not from the added labour. *“There, the existence of the things quâ commodities, and the value relation between the products of labour which stamps them as commodities, have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relations arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”* (Marx, 1990:165)

Fig. 45/
Seaside, Florida

⁴ Feuerbach, Ludwig (1841) *The Essence of Christianity*



Obviously, this separation is the basis for Marx's theory of alienation, by which he explained the process through which the worker in a capitalist system is progressively alienated from the product of his work, from the production itself, from himself as a producer and from other workers/people. As a mechanistic part of a social class, the worker loses his/her ability to determine his/her life: increasingly, he/she must follow the steps dictated by those in control of the means of production.

In 1967, Guy Debord published *'The Society of the Spectacle'* in which he developed a critical analysis of society that was strongly influenced by Marxist theories, particularly focusing on the notions of commodity fetishism and alienation. Radical witness of the extraordinary and simultaneous development of advanced capitalism and the mass media, Debord captured in utmost perfection the effects of these developments in social life, which according to him had been entirely replaced by representation. A total reign of market economy complemented with new governmental and political techniques had taken people even further down the road of alienation, and now, by the hand of images and representations. *"The spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life."* (Debord, 1994:29)

Truman Show - Peter Weir (1998)
Film stills from left to right:
03'28"/03'33"/03'48"

Twenty years later, in 1988, when it was more than clear that all his theories had been verified, Debord published a smaller book entitled *‘Comments on the Society of the Spectacle’*, in which he described the ways in which the spectacle had increased its strength in all aspects. At times substituting the word ‘spectacle’ for ‘media’, Debord explained how the successive forms of concentrated and diffuse spectacular power had then been combined into ‘integrated spectacle’, one that has integrated itself into all spheres and aspects of life to an extent such that reality does not feel it anymore as alien.

“The ‘becoming-image’ of capital is nothing more than the commodity’s last metamorphosis, in which exchange value has completely eclipsed use value and can now achieve the status of absolute and irresponsible sovereignty over life in its entirety, after having falsified the entire social production.”(Agamben, 2000:76)

In his short *‘Marginal Notes on Comments on the Society of the Spectacle’*, Agamben thus gives another name to that fatal, although expected, transition to an all-encompassing, integrated spectacle, while crediting Debord for his decision – in opposition to the rest of the Marxists of the time – to base his analysis in the ‘fetish’ character of the commodity and its secret, immaterial center.

The analysis of commodity fetishism, the Marxist critique of ideology, and Debord’s theory of the spectacle are, in my view, still useful tools to approach an understanding of the role of images and imagery in the maintenance and enhancement of the alienation that characterizes the contemporary subject. At a time that many are referring to as that of the decadence of industrial democracy⁵, it is paramount, though, that we extend our critical and interventional tools in order to grasp the processes we are embedded in and – in spite of the increasing co-optation of the intellect and programming of imagination – to imagine other modalities of becoming that disagree, resist, avoid, surpass, dissolve or totally subvert the on-going tendencies to liquidate both the self – as a thinking-feeling entity – and its collective counterpart, a ‘we’ capable of feeding and enabling a process of individuation that relies on the breeding and negotiation of singularities.

Ideology is not anymore some kind of naïve misrecognition, a fake layer of manipulation that effectively hides the truth of reality, as it could be initially read in the case of ‘Truman Show’, but something quite

⁵ See the first volume of Bernard Stiegler trilogy ‘Disbelief and Discredit’. Stiegler, Bernard (2011) *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, Cambridge: Polity Press

different: a “*phantasmatic support for the real*”, as Žižek would have it. The critique of ideology is therefore not a debunking process that leads to the discovery of what lies behind the mask of ideology, but an exploration of the ways in which the ideological deformations are actually constituting reality itself.

It seems to be necessary to further expand our understandings of ideologies and their effects with the help of Peter Sloterdijk, who has described our times as those of planetary cynicism. The cynic is today an enlightened modern individual at the edge of melancholia: hidden in the margins of anonymity and discretion, equipped with intelligence and sophisticated knowledge, ‘understanding’ the futility of any questioning action or honest stance, he/she prefers to disappear into the crowd and keep on working silently, hardly coping with keeping depression away. The provocation and self-confident sarcasm of the ancient ‘kynic’ is, according to Sloterdijk, forever lost; now it is the time of blunt egoism and of a withdrawal that accepts the circumstances in spite of a clear understanding of their absurdity and/or evil.

Ideology works today more and more on the basis of cynical modalities. Rather than something that we mistakenly believe in or think is true, ideology is now something that we have chosen to pretend is true. “*The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he non the less still insists upon the mask.*” (Žižek, 1989:25)

Instead of the description given by Marx: “*We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it*” (Marx, 1990:49), we must now think of cynical ideology as something like: “*we know very well what we are doing, but still we are doing it.*”⁶

What is interesting is the way in which Žižek proposes to develop both Marx’s and Sloterdijk’s takes on ideology, in order to challenge the now too common conclusion that we live in a post-ideological world. According to him, the level of ideological fantasy through which reality is structured remains fully in place in spite of any detachment that cynical reason may be capable of: the ideological illusion is on the side of the ‘doing’ and not on the side of the ‘knowing’ in the Marxian quote above. People know very well (for instance that money is not a magical thing but an expression of social relations), but still they act as if they didn’t know it (as if money were the material embodiment of wealth). (Žižek, 1989: 27-29)

6 For a longer and deeper discussion of cynicism as a form of ideology and the implications of Sloterdijk’s ‘Critique’, see Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London, New York: Verso. pp. 24-55.



Dogtooth - Giorgos Lanthimos (1998)
Film stills from left to right:
22'14"/22'17"/22'44"
22'52"/22'53"/22'56"

The cynic goes on supporting structures and ways that go against what he/she really believes or sees as true. He/she uses ‘truths’ to ‘lie’, carefully justifying his/her ideology-driven actions and trying to rationalize the violation of his/her own principled beliefs. (He/she would say: I don’t like TV, it’s crap, but I watch it just to be informed and know what it’s going on; I don’t like to spend any time in social media, but I do it to be in touch with some friends and people; etc...) This ultimately leads to split individuals, whose actions and deeper longings, desires and convictions do not match but are actually disparate.

This individual is further split, attacked and alienated, not only through the proliferation of images, but also through the construction of (images of) fear and guilt and the further establishment of relations of exploitation and domination that come along the development of society into a financial economy of debt. The ‘indebted man’,⁷ as Maurizio Lazzarato has called him/her, is not only a human being in economic debt, but one who is alienated by means of imaginations of default, the end of social status, or his/her collapse as a successful ‘entrepreneur’ of him/herself. The fear of default, fear-through-debt, is also an image; an imagination that has been installed in almost every one today, for the financial economy has become part of not only the lives of workers in need of cash to pay their homes, but increasingly, the trap of consumers, producers, retired people, welfare recipients... anyone, with debt literally associated to the production of every product or service today.

According to Lazzarato, the financial economy is like a machine that transforms rights into credits: “*Instead of getting a raise in salary, you would get a credit. Instead of having a right to retirement, you would get an individual life insurance. Instead of having a right to lodging, you would get the right to a mortgage. These are techniques of individualization.*” (Lazzarato 2009, 1) In this sense we can see here the profoundly ideological dimension of capitalism – particularly in the neoliberal stages we are witnessing – which on the one hand exploits and extracts as much as possible from people, making them poorer through frozen salaries and reduced welfare, and on the other hand creates a fantasy of enrichment through credit. As a machine for the extraction of rent from work, debt operates also as an apparatus of subjectification, as a technique or a series of techniques that aim at producing and managing a particular kind of subjects, be it collective or individual. Perhaps the most advanced and effective technique of government, combining bio-politics and noo-politics into one⁸, debt manages to produce a subject whose autonomy is seriously constrained if not totally erased and whose state of mind is

⁷ Lazzarato, M. (2012) *The making of the indebted man: an essay on the neoliberal condition*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Semiotext(e).

⁸ I am thinking here about biopolitics in the Foucauldian sense of the government of life, the increasing inclusion of human life in the calculations and procedures of power; and about noopolitics understood as the government of the mind, the general intellect but also our mental positions and dispositions. For an interesting collection of essays on the implications of a shift towards noopolitics for architecture see: Hauptmann, Deborah (2013) *Cognitive Architecture: From Biopolitics to Noopolitics. Architecture and Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*. Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, and Wallenstein, Sven-Olov (Forthcoming) *Architecture, Critique, Ideology: Essays on Architecture and Theory*, Stockholm: Axl Books

1 Objectual Imageries: An Archeology of the Present / 1.5 Imagery, Alienation and Everyday Life



You, the living - Roy Andersson (2007)
Film stills from left to right:
1h07'16"/1h07'20"/1h07'31"
1h07'35"/1h07'38"/1h07'41"

governed by fear and anxiety. As Lazzarato has tried to condense with the term ‘immaterial labor’, in today’s so called ‘cognitive capitalism’, while factory work is relocated or outsourced to distant and cheap (labor) locations, the core of production shifts and is now directly oriented at the production of subjectivity: not only our imaginations, desires, dreams and beliefs, but also and primarily knowledge at large.

We become, increasingly and relentlessly, cynical, alienated, melancholic, split, depressed, in various degrees and combinations. An overwhelming dissatisfaction, and yet, hardly a re-action. We are distracted and in many ways enslaved by attention thieves. Our attention is captured. We are unable to care. Even less for the long-term. We have stopped believing there is anything we can change. We have, almost, stopped feeling.

The French philosopher Bernard Stiegler has spoken about ‘disaffected individuals’, who have almost lost their ability to “*love practically and socially*”. Not practicing what we really feel makes us lose contact with ourselves.

The new economy is occupied and concerned with the psyche of the worker, no longer centered around his/her ability as producer. The worker’s psyche, our psyche (of all of us) is progressively industrialized and externalized not only through the proliferation of images, and images of thought, but also through the destruction of attention by the hand of what Stiegler calls ‘psychotechnologies’. Culture and language are progressively incorporated and absorbed by technics (the artificial). This complex set of artificial systems, institutions and practices that make us human, has become a sort of essential component of a paradoxical humanity, as it is, in fact, the other of the human – what is manufactured and artificial – that takes the place of human essence.

Aesthetic experience was possible in a movement toward the discovery of another feeling, on the basis of creative acts that would show or enact another ‘way’⁹ and initiate a process of construction of ‘sympathy’ and “*an inquiring us of an aesthetic community to come.*” (Stiegler, 2014:3) But aesthetic conditioning has now replaced aesthetic experience and most of the population ‘feels’ according to the dictates of marketing instead of thanks to their aesthetic ambitions. This downgrading of aesthetic

⁹ One can think here of the concept of ‘dissensus’, used by Rancière to explain the process of creating a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established limits of perception, thought and action with the inadmissible, which will polemically reconfigure what he calls the distribution of the sensible. It is also possible to bring in here the idea of the event in Badiou.



Fig. 46/
Stills from music video for
Adam Freeland's 'We want your soul'.

experience is what Stiegler calls ‘symbolic misery’, which generates in turn the loss of the capacity to establish aesthetic attachments to singularities (the loss of primordial narcissism).

“ Being increasingly constituted by the images and sounds that the media streams through my consciousness, as well as by the objects (and relationships with these objects) that these images lead me to consume, my past is less and less differentiated from that of other people. It loses therefore its singularity, which is as much as to say, I lose myself as singularity. Once I am deprived of my singularity I can no longer love myself.”(Stiegler, 2014:6)

Social life according to Simondon’s processual theory of individuation consists in the ongoing relations of an individual subject and a collective subject – an ‘I’ and a ‘we’ – which, separated by a difference that acts as the dynamic engine of this relationship, engage in a process of reciprocal, and engaged, interpellation. This engaged interpellation is also, in other words, attention; the ability to concentrate in an object or a thing. Concentrating, focusing on something requires not only attention but also care. In what Stiegler has called the hyper-industrial society, the three dimensions of individuation – psychic, collective and technical – are more and more externalized and formalized by means of calculation. This society causes the individual to be separated from (among other things) technics, because there is an externalization of functions. In a similar way to that in which the development of libraries in the 16th century immediately required the invention of a series of systems that were con-substantial with them – such as reading systems based on note-taking, the archival of bibliographical cards, and orientation systems determining the position of books and the routes to find them – so too we can see today how many other functions of the intellect, similar to those of reading and imagining, are increasingly externalized and performed by apparatuses and systems of calculation.

One is tempted to think here for instance of what has happened to hand drawing and handwriting. Or even more literally, about something that is happening as I am writing these lines, when a specific music track ‘arrives’, at it were, on my desk: it is the song “*We want your soul*”, a breakbeat track composed in 2003 by the DJ and producer Adam Freeland, which has now been remixed by the Austrian duo Klangkarusell. As I think and write about externalization and the imposition of psychic images and materials that we are increasingly submitted to, the song’s lyrics¹⁰ strike me as they are painting an accurate and

10 Freeland, Adam (2003) “We want your Soul”: (fragment) “your cellphone, your wallet, your time, your ideas / no bar-code, no party, no ID, no beers / your bankcard, your license, your thoughts, your fears / no SIM card, no disco, no photo, not here / your blood, your sweat, your passions, your regrets / your profits, your time off, your fashions, your sex / your pills, your grass, your tits, your ass / your, laughs, your balls, we want it all (we want your soul) / your cash, your house, your phone, your life (we want your soul) / tell us your habits, your facts, your fears / give us your address, your shoe size, your years / your digits, your plans / your number, your eyes / your schedule, your desktop, your details, your life / show us your children, your photos, your home / here, take credit take insurance, take a loan / no cookies, no stray, no drop-outs, no gays / no lefties, no lunnies, no opinions, no way / no bankers, no teachers, no facts, no freaks / no skaters, no tweakers, no truth (we want your soul)”

evocative picture of the destructive side of consumer culture, which fits perfectly not only with Stiegler's analysis, but also with the technological coordinates and modalities that deliver the track to my desk.

It is not a song I have chosen to listen to. It just came. Spotify's "*Discover Weekly*", recently developed in collaboration with 'Beatport' – a well-known online music store specializing in electronic music and culture – is the carrier of the song, included in my 'personalized' playlist of the week. Spotify, the leading platform in the world of music streaming, announced this new service in July 2015, consisting of a two-hour long playlist that will be delivered weekly to its users based on their musical tastes. The company speaks of 'music curation' when referring to this service and compares it to "*having your best friend make you a personalized mixtape every single week*".¹¹ Shockingly in line with Stiegler's description of our age of symbolic misery, the service is one of the latest examples of externalization. The development of information and communication technologies has resulted in nearly all the music in the planet being digitalized, and unlimited access to Internet for an increasing number of people. Still, these developments, in combination with our sleepless life and the capture of our time, has not led – as one would have liked to imagine – to a generation of musical genius, nor to an increase in music literacy, or even to an expanded 'love' for music. Instead, we submit to a service that allows us to continue 'not-thinking' and finds, chooses and delivers the 'right' music for each situation, hassle-free. No need to search for anything, compare, listen to our friend's advice or reports from what they heard the other day. Nothing. No more tapes from best friends.

Provided with readily available fresh new tracks that one has most likely never heard before, it is relatively easy to just listen and flow. Flooded with sounds, musical images of immediate notes, we don't know what we are listening to, we can hardly remember what we heard or saw a moment ago. Soon, it will be Monday again, and with the day, a new, algorithm-generated playlist and its new sounds will arrive, substituting the previous one and erasing the tracks of which I have not had time to check titles or authors. Gone.

"With consummate skill, the spectacle organises ignorance of what is about to happen and, immediately afterwards, the forgetting of whatever has nonetheless been understood." (Debord, 1990:14)

¹¹ Time magazine online, <http://time.com/3964451/spotify-discover-weekly-playlist/> Accessed 2015-08-13.



Fig. 47/
Natural Born Killers - Oliver Stone (1994)

¹² Instagram has 300 million different users monthly, who spend an average of 21 minutes each per day on the mobile application, exclusively dedicated to sharing and looking at 'private' (public) images. 70 million photos are posted every day and a total of more than 300 billion photos have been shared so far. (<http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>)

The exteriorization that takes place in the age of symbolic misery does not allow anymore for a correlative process of interiorization. The whole point is that we just acquire the new habit of letting the algorithm do the job. Adopting the new technique. Releasing another piece of our intellect. We are not given the time to interiorize, optimization is adoption and consumption. According to Stiegler, we have not left modernity yet, rather than a post-industrial or post-modern time, we live in a hyper-industrial age, in which we are increasingly dominated by *“the extension of calculation beyond the sphere of production along with a correlative extension of industrial domains”* (Stiegler, 2014:47) which, formatting every-day life functionally in order to meet the needs of the business world and the company, results in nearly insurmountable obstacles to the process of individuation.

In order to make the split even more dramatic, today’s media and culture seem to not only promote but also privilege a superficial approach to happiness and well being that disinclines and hinders any concerned engagements. Feeling bad is generally a sign of personal and shameful failure, or perhaps an attitude problem. Everyone is constantly pushed towards the publication and broadcasting of an image of themselves¹², a profile, which shines with exuberant and joyful freshness and ‘curated’ success. Everyone, of course, is hectically updating their status and posting, images of their great lives. *“In a so-*



ciety of consumers, turning into a desirable commodity is the stuff of which dreams, and fairy tales, are made.” Bauman, 2007:13) And those who prefer to care for the invisibility or choose not to be exposed in the same way, are of course, soon excluded or rejected.

Disaffected, cynical individuals are also more and more individuals with a lack of passion. Cynicism and externalization progressively block the ability to be affected, to enjoy, to feel real anger. Enjoying or getting upset is a sign of a ‘belief’ and engagement that is considered naïve and weak. An unnecessary fragility. In order to inhabit hyper-industrial society one must be capable and ready to understand the mechanisms and procedures of the production ‘games’ and social reality, and simply play along smartly. And only at the level of complicity, and provided that we agree to pretend, enjoyment is allowed and possible.

American journalist and anti-war activist Chris Hedges – Pulitzer price winner and author of many books, such as for instance “Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt” in which he presents a chronicle of the alienation of what he calls ‘waste zones’ in America and the decline of the nation in the 21st century –

Fig. 48/
The Bling ring - Sofia Coppola (2013)



Fig 49/
wangyin, or internet addiction, is considered a clinical disorder in China. Sometimes called “digital heroin,” it is said to afflict 24 million young people. Image from a rehabilitation camp.
<http://www.motherjones.com/media/2015/06/chinese-internet-addiction-center-photos>

13 On the 23rd of June 2013, the 3D virtual world ‘Second Life’ celebrated its 10th anniversary. By then 36 million unique user accounts had been created and the total time users had spent in Second Life added up to 217 266 years.

has written also about the division of society into two halves, one still hardly able to separate truth from illusion and another one fully installed in the depths of fantasy. According to him, reality is dismissed as a kind of obstacle to success, a negative insistence that halts progress. *“Those who question, those who doubt, those who are critical, those who are able to confront reality and who grasp the hollowness of celebrity culture are shunned and condemned for their pessimism.”* (Hedges, 2014:27)

Images are of course a great component of such an escape into fantasy. The spectacle of imagery and objectified relations among images progressively substitutes a world of real human relations and actions. The arts are turned into commodities and commercial activities, aesthetic and cultural value into commercial value. As calculation and hyper-industrialization produce more and more homogenous environments and lives, people increasingly choose to escape to irrelevant, distant fantasies. *“Wherever we happen to be at the moment, we cannot help knowing that we could be elsewhere, so there is less and less reason to be anywhere in particular. Spiritually at least, we are all travellers.”* (Bauman, 2000:13)

People escape not only to the parallel realities of ‘second life’¹³ or their isolated private environments, but also move and travel in search of manufactured, extreme or tamed, illusory experiences that allow

them to escape their frustrating, alienating, or, simply, known and familiar everyday lives. They move in search of new experiences and new environments. They want to know about things they did not know before, see things they had not seen before. Everyone seems eager to find and consume the ultimate relax experience, to take the ultimate break, to escape from the high levels of stress built into our work environments and ‘regular’, average, postmodern everyday lives.

The content of the package, though, is not as fulfilling as expected. Nothing more than a mere substitute, a real that cannot be reached: *“a substitute satisfaction of a genuine need – that could otherwise prove creative and deeply ethical: the need to top up the proximity of otherness with recognition of shared humanity and enrichment of its contents.”* (Bauman, 2003:214) These are times of ‘de-differentiation’, when previously well-demarcated boundaries between different activities or realms are increasingly blurred or even eliminated. Obviously the ones around tourism, leisure and recreation, but also and increasingly, those between work, leisure and everyday life.

While individuals withdraw from reality in order to obtain their pleasure-fantasy dose, architects and planners withdraw from their real task by engaging in cold uncritical practices that carry out whatever client or developer demands, to then deny responsibility for the real (social, spatial, political, environmental) consequences and implications of their designs. The results are disconnected, out of context, bizarre enclaves of oblivion; lawless examples of a kind of spatial withdrawal that allows and co-produces exception states, banal fantasies and exotic lies.

Instead of taking part in the construction of these ill fantasies, and the mere production of buildings, architecture and its architects must engage in every-day life and focus (again) on the invention and articulation of coexistence, in the production of spaces for being together and living together. This project might require some building, some construction, but it will surely need much greater doses of irony and poetry. At a time in which we are witness to the decomposition of the social and people are increasingly denied access to and participation in the production of symbols and the distribution of the sensible, we need poetry more than ever to set the basis for the construction of another sensibility, to insinuate the beginnings of other forms of understanding and new shared meanings. In front of that relentless breaking down into bits and pieces – decomposition, grammatization – and its progressive externalization

to technologies of de-individuation, we must courageously resist and bypass symbolic misery by simultaneously and actively engaging in the movement of life in at least two different, although interrelated, ways: first, through a re-appropriation of the image in its full complexity and depth, second, through the occupation of the symbolic realm by poetic subversion.

“In a period in which the decadence is itself undergoing some very interesting revaluations, it only seems appropriate in the present context to recall beauty’s subversive role in a society marred by nascent commodification. [...] Surely what characterizes postmodernity in the cultural area is the supersession of everything outside of commercial culture, its absorption of all forms of art high and low, along with image production itself. The image is the commodity today, and that is why it is vain to expect a negation of the logic of commodity from it [...]” (Jameson, 1998:135)

Contrary to what Jameson seems to suggest here, we must not abandon the image. For its total absorption by the spectacle, its transformation into a commodity by capital, are based on the illusion of its simplified understanding. The image that Jameson refers to, the ‘commodified’ image, is not an image, but a sign, or a pseudo-image, or a part of an image, but there is more in the image than that image. As I have started to suggest above, and as we will continue to discuss, we must perhaps proceed by delaying the image, slowing down, short-circuiting the speeds of capital and disaffection. *Waiting*. Allowing the image to emerge in its duration, and enabling its full, open potential to host our thoughts and drive us to the unexpected. We have to combat the (fake) image in the realm of the image, and as I will argue, with the help of cinema. *“Cinema occupies a unique position in the temporal war that is the cause of contemporary symbolic misery: at once industrial technology and art, cinema is the aesthetic experience that can combat aesthetic conditioning on its own territory.”* (Stiegler, 2014: viii)

It is paramount that we invent new ways of signifying that are based on or close to the unexpected and ambiguous powers of parole and poetry, shielded against the calculative (bad) intentions of capital and industrialism, in their sensuous and exuberant ‘excess’. Words and images that cannot be replaced, that cannot be cut and that cannot be captured save for through a time-unrelated inhabiting of the event of their encounter. Berardi: *“Poetic language is the occupation of the space of communication by words which escape the order of exchangeability: the road of excess says William Blake, leads to the palace of*

wisdom. And wisdom is the space of singularity, bodily signification, the creation of sensuous meaning.” (Berardi 2012:22)

Techno-linguistic and symbolic automatisms, the co-optation of memory and the entire collective intellect must be first dodged and then stopped through the articulation of spaces – *and times* – for shared vibrations, amphibian¹⁴ and ambiguous intensities and the establishment of affinities and solidarities within autonomy. It is a question of creating the spaces and the times for proper, real, concerned, images and dreams. Not those produced as the result of the hijacking and co-optation of our psychic realms and the numbing of our bodies, but the dreams of sensible, collective and fragile freedoms that will enable, again, the duration of singularity, and the infinite joy of the unexpected. /

*Constantly risking absurdity
and death
whenever he performs
above the heads
of his audience
the poet like an acrobat
climbs on rime
to a high wire of his own making...*

Lawrence Ferlinghetti (1958)
Constantly Risking Absurdity
in ‘A Coney Island of the Mind’, sct. 15

¹⁴ Nilsson, Per (2009) *The Amphibian Stand*. Umeå: H:Ström



Perception and Judgement: Real, Actual, Virtual

Chapter 1.6

Fig. 50/
Nostalgia, Andrei Tarkovsky (1983)

¹ Bergson H. (1911). *Creative evolution*. (authorized translation by Arthur Mitchell 1983) Lanham, MD : University Press of America.p.296

² Although I am jumping now into another reading of the words in the title which focuses on representation, I will return later to this point and dwell in the implications of a much more 'performative' approach to perception, which understands reality as the ever unfolding activities in a field of relations, in which what is crucial is what reality does and how it does it: the action, the phenomena, and its/ their modalities.

“Matter or mind, reality has appeared to us as a perpetual becoming. It makes itself or it unmakes itself, but it is never something made. Such is the intuition that we have of mind when we draw aside the veil which is interposed between our consciousness and ourselves. This, also, is what our intellect and senses themselves would show us of matter, if they could obtain a direct and disinterested idea of it. But, preoccupied before everything with the necessities of action, the intellect, like the senses, is limited to taking, at intervals, views that are instantaneous and by that very fact immobile of the becoming of matter. [...] Of becoming we perceive only states, of duration only instants, and even when we speak of duration and of becoming, it is of another thing that we are thinking. Such is the most striking of the two illusions we wish to examine. It consists in supposing that we can think the unstable by means of the stable, the moving by means of the immobile.”¹

The words ‘Perception and Judgment’ in the title of this chapter could be read as an allusion to our relationship with the world and the ways in which we deal with our experience of it, how do we grasp it on the one hand, and how do we go about with our tasks and lives on the basis of the assumptions we make about the truthfulness, stability or functionality of the things we perceive. What is reality? Or rather, what is reality doing, and how?²

Nevertheless, in the framework of an investigation about the condition of the image today and its implications for architecture and other spatial practices, the same words resonate not only in relationship with theories of perception, but also and very importantly with regard to theories of representation and the experience and interpretation of images of art (and architecture).

In architectural education, theory and practice, in which representation has been one of the main fields of study, the words ‘perception and judgment’ will immediately bring forth the names of Edward Panofsky and Ernst Gombrich, whose work was dedicated to the study of the images of art and the conditions of representation.

The three elements that make possible the function of the image, according to Ernst Gombrich - already present in the Durer’s engraving “*Der Zeichner des liegenden Weisses*” – are the mental set, the medium and the principle of equivalence, which can be related to subject, object and reference, respectively. This articulation determines a fundamentally uncertain condition of the image, which according to rationalists like for instance Hans-Georg Gadamer, can and must be deciphered through interpretation.

When facing the problem of the construction, fabrication and production of images, we must start from an acknowledgement that none of those processes are a translation of an outer world carried out by an eye understood as a machine or device for perception, but rather the result of a process of selection through which the producer (artist, architect, etc.) chooses the closest equivalence on the basis of the prevailing social conventions and hegemonic order. “*To the artist the image in the unconscious is as mythical and useless an idea as was the image on the retina. There is no short cut to articulation. Whenever the artist turns his gaze he can only make and match, and out of a developed language select the nearest equivalence*”. (Gombrich, 1977: 288) An image is not the copy of nature, and our visual organs are no mirrors. We don’t recognize something through a bottom-up process but we construct, top-down, an image of the outside world, extrapolating in our imagination from the visual information obtained through our visual organs.

The work of Gadamer, fundamental in the education of so many architects, and specialists in architectural representation, is founded precisely on the idea that any image of art, any art, *is saying some-*



thing. Understanding what is being said - and how and to whom - becomes therefore the problematic and demanding task of hermeneutics. Less studied within the discipline of architecture but undoubtedly revolutionary in his proposals and expansions, Paul Ricoeur combined hermeneutics with phenomenology, to develop an understanding of hermeneutics much more as a practice of a kind of philosophy of reflection than as a search for the truth of an image. This approach confronted what he saw as the two main traditions of interpretation: one focused on the identification and 'restitution' of a meaning contained in the image and addressed to its viewer in the form of an interpellation; and the other as a process of 'demystification' that aims at reducing or unveiling the illusions and messages hidden in the work of art.

"According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, or as is sometimes said, a kerygma; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion. [...] From the beginning we must consider this double possibility: this tension, this extreme polarity, is the truest expression of our 'modernity'." (Ricoeur, 1970:27)

Fig. 51/
Etching of a 'perspective machine'
'Draughtsman Making a Perspective Drawing of a Woman' Albrecht Dürer (1525)



Fig 52/
They live - John Carpenter (1988)

On these grounds, it starts being possible to assert the provisional, fragmented and tentative character of any act of interpretation, which is never commensurate with the richness of the work of art.

The world seems to be more and more understood through images, while the difference between vision and representation dissolves. The images of our visual culture are complex, open and always interrelated with other images; they are multiple and unstable. They have turned opaque. They are no longer copies of reality, but 'presentations' and thoughts. Such complexity requires an equally complex gaze, one that looks across, from within, backwards, from other disciplines... It is necessary to consider a multiplicity of gazes and their intersections: observations will be valid on the basis of their subjectivity, and only to the extent in which these subjectivities will be manifested and shared with those to whom the observations are addressed, or with whom they are shared.

There have been and continue to be developed many critical revisions and examinations of these hermeneutical traditions, as well as of conceptualizations of the aesthetic experience based on a contemplative model, which presupposes a passive and static reception. One of them is that of Hans Robert Jauss and what has been referred to as 'Rezeptionsästhetik' or reception theory, which proposes a critical revision of the principle of aesthetic autonomy and emphasizes the social and communicative function of aesthetic experience.

Through this approach, the work of art is the result of the confluence – or the encounter – of the work+author with the viewer+context, among other things. Meaning emerges then from the encounter of author, work and reception, what challenges other conceptions that believe in the work as the bearer of an eternal and monumental meaning. Here the artistic practice is understood as a dialogical and intercommunicative activity, which demands the active and co-creative participation/engagement of a viewer who contributes to the work becoming an additional dimension of it. Jauss develops also the notion of 'Erwartungshorizont' or 'horizon of expectations', which would define the predisposition of the recipients to receiving the work in a certain way, on the basis of their previous aesthetic experiences.

Other proponents of the reception theory have also studied what they called 'Appelstruktur', or interpellating structures, which are the strategies and techniques present in a work, which demand the



active and collaborative attitude of the receptor.³ Interpellation would then lead to intersubjective participation and to openings for relational experiences that may contain a political dimension. As we know from the last decades of contemporary art, the possibilities of these understandings of the condition of the work of art and its reception have been widely explored through many and diverse mechanisms aiming at the opening of the work to uncertainty, and involving the ‘audience’ in different ways. The work of art cannot be defined anymore only through what it says or shows, but must be faced first of all in relationship with the strategies it deploys in order to make itself accessible to the audience. Works can fully and explicitly incorporate the spectator as an integrating part. The work of art is therefore something ‘virtual’ that cannot be reduced to the reality of the thing/art object, neither to the (pre-) dispositions of the audience. The work is actualized in the encounter; it is the constitution of the text in the consciousness of the reader. (fig: Antoni Muntadas’ work: ‘Atencion: La percepción requiere participación’) Virtual is also the ‘implicit reader’ of which Wolfgang Iser speaks, as the set of structures and strategies of the work through which one or a number of positions for the reader (receptor) are configured, and through which the reader can establish a link with the work.

There are many interesting examples of works of art that explore the physical and direct active participation of the audience since the 60’s to learn from, but it must be also acknowledged that this is not the only way for the recipient to take part in the work of art in relationship to its structures of interpellation. We could also see as virtual (dimensions of the work of art), the spaces of indetermination, voids and openings of a work that allow and invite the audience to engage actively in its constitution. These spaces result in an open work that cannot be encountered anymore as a totality. (Eco, 1989)

Although it always seems possible to find in Gadamer’s work the traces of (the beginning of) an understanding of the dialogical evolution of thought and reflection, there seems to appear always a horizon of consensus in all his theories of interpretation, with which we cannot agree. As shown throughout these chapters, the rationalist consensus must be replaced by an acknowledgement of and an engagement with an encounter with the work and its openness, followed by or paired with an endless process of dialogical ‘dissensus’, which constitutes the engine of movement and life as well as the possibility of the new.

Opposite page:
Fig. 53/
Work of Lygia Clark (1920-1988)

³ See for instance Iser, Wolfgang (1970) Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Prosa. Konstanz, Universität Konstanz.

It is hardly possible to speak of images, perception, representation and judgment today, without referring to the work of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and in particular to the psychoanalytical orders that he developed in the 1950's. The imaginary-symbolic-real triad establishes the grounds and the landscape for Lacan to locate and interrelate psychic activity, but also to conceptualize the ways in which the subject, understood as a system of perception, deals with and relates to an external world and other subjects.

Under the subject/object paradigm that still governs our modern world – in spite of the most radical forms of critical contemporary art and their attempts at relationality – we are still confronted with the problem of the constitution and transformation of the subject and its relationship with the social reality in which he/she dwells. Along post-structuralist and feminist critical theories, Lacanian psychoanalysis continues to be one of the tools to approach these problems.

Lacan's three orders (imaginary, symbolic and real) and his concept of the mirror stage, constitute a set of tools to conceptualize and explore the process of formation of the self and its relationship with a world that is seen as external to it, accessed always through the symbolic mediations of language and other signifiers, and the affective and pre-verbal foundations of the imaginary, which as a kind of internalized idea of the self or the ego, operates as the necessary mediator between internal and external world. The real for Lacan is what resists representation or capture, what cannot be symbolized.

According to Lacan, social laws and norms civilize people by cutting away some of their primal desires, and subjects develop unconscious fantasies in order to cope with this traumatic loss. Žižek, who uses many of Lacan's concepts to develop his political philosophy, works with the category of fetishist disavowal to describe today's ideological cynicism, and constantly refers to the power of fantasy, ideology and the symbolic fictions that structure our reality. Žižek's persistent critique of ideology, combined with his efforts to deconstruct those fictions, as well as the mechanisms that make them effective at a political level and in our everyday life, also constitutes a powerful tool to deal with the images and imageries of modern existence.

Although Lacanian psychoanalysis was first introduced in film theory in the 1970's with the work of Laura Mulvey and others, Žižek has been the real cause of its popularization, probably in relationship with his controversial interpretations of both Lacan and cinema. For Žižek cinema is a metaphor for the Symbolic. The film screen is reality. He has worked most importantly with the notion of fantasy, and most notably focusing on the ways in which it structures intersubjective relations and exploring its relationship with ideology which, according to him, must always “*rely on some phantasmatic background*” (Žižek, 1997:xxiii)

Firmly grounded in the continental tradition of critical theory, materialism and German idealism, Žižek's approach to ‘the subject’ – its position in the world and its ability to perceive – is mostly based on philosophical conceptualizations that rely on the translation of reality and its images into words.

Others have questioned whether the efficacy of art images depends so much on their translation into words or concepts, or it is rooted and entangled in our ability to feel those images, or in our intuition. Concepts such as receptivity of sensibility and spontaneity of reason, that combine perception with sensation or other affective dimensions, become then crucial for the understanding of images and reality. Rather than trying to interpret or read it, the question would be then to ‘experience’, to live, and to ‘feel’ the image.

What takes us back to the beginning and the definition of ‘perception’, which, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is “*the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses*”, and also “*the way in which something is regarded, understood or interpreted*” – coming from the latin *percipere*, which means ‘to seize’, or ‘to understand’. This brings the common acceptance of perception close to an idea of taking possession, apprehending with the mind or senses. Accepting this definition would involve placing the senses as the mediators between the data obtained from the external world of objects and the sensations processed and then interpreted by the body. It would mean accepting that the world is made of objects that are external to us and of course that their presence is what is manifested to us through the information that our senses perceive, this uninterrupted flow of data being what our mind – separated from those objects – would process and interpret.



Is perception then what allows us to make sense of the world through the experience of our senses? Is perception a process that takes place inside us, in our minds? Or is perception, as Alva Noë proposes, something that we do, “a skillfull activity of the body as a whole?”⁴

According to Noë’s enactive approach, perceptual content is not given all at once, but is the result of an organism’s active inquiry and exploration (Noë, 2004:33) Perceptions are therefore actions. The enactive approach proposes that our ability to perceive depends on and is constituted by our capacity to move in skillful ways in order to enact perception. “*The basis of perception, on our enactive, sensorimotor approach, is implicit practical knowledge of the ways movement gives rise to changes in stimulation.*” (Noë, 2004:8) We move in various ways to get access to an improved gazing position, or in order to smell or taste or grab something that we find interesting or that is simply in front of us. “[F]or perceptual sensation to constitute experience—that is, for it to have genuine representational content—the perceiver must possess and make use of sensorimotor knowledge.” (Noë, 2004:17)

In order for perception to take place, it is not enough with sensations – which are of course necessary – but we need also sensory motor knowledge. Perception is not simply about having sensations, but about having them and knowing what to do with them. (Hickerson, 2007) To perceive is to be able to track patterns in the kinds of sensations one obtains in relationship to their connection to one’s shifting position. It is not possible anymore, if we agree with this approach, to separate the capacities of perception, thought and action, as the corresponding steps to: an input from the outside world to our minds, the mediating process of understanding that input, and the output of action from the mind to the world, respectively. “*Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to the perceiver’s skillful activity.*” (Noë, 2004:3) This approach clearly locates perception as an activity in the environment; the appearance of something being not a relation between that thing and a particular mind, but resulting from the relation of a thing with its environment. In order to grasp things, to perceive them, an organism must actively explore the environment in which that thing is located and the appearance or appearances of that thing in it.

As Noë properly acknowledges in his book, his position and research is rooted in the phenomenological tradition, and particularly in the work of Merleau-Ponty. Noë’s work is also heir of Gibson’s ecological

Opposite page:
Fig. 54/
After Lygia Clark, Senselab CA

⁴ Alva Noë is a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, whose work focuses on the nature of the mind and human experience. See Noë, Alva (2004) *Action in Perception*. Cambridge: MIT Press



approach to visual perception. In his 1979 influential study⁵, Gibson challenged the idea of the mind as a data processor working with the information obtained from the external world to construct representations inside our head, and proposed an approach to perception as the achievement of the organism as a whole within its environment. Gibson could not accept the idea of the mind as a separate organ, and proposed instead to understand it as something distributed in the environment. One could say that both Gibson's and Noë's are 'relational' approaches to perception, which is understood as an event that takes place in an environment (a field of relations) resulting from the complex interactions of various organisms within the specific conditions of such environment.

Just as it has happened and continues to happen within the field of art, developments in the philosophy and psychology of perception tend to move as we see in the direction of an increasing acknowledgment and discussion of performative and relational approaches.

In order to approach the becoming of the Real of which Bergson speaks in the quote from 'Creative Evolution' that I have used to start this chapter, we must combine and expand this relational emphasis with an understanding of movement as the fundamental condition of life.

Fig. 55/
'From One to Many' Michelangelo Pistoletto. In the work of Pistoletto, the spectators have no choice but to be absorbed by the work which integrates them dynamically into images that are constantly producing new images.

⁵ Gibson, James (1979), *The ecological approach to visual perception*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin)



If we want to challenge the problematic but deeply settled division of western thought between humanity and nature – mind and matter – it is not enough to try to combine the sociocultural and biological dimensions of human existence and then ask psychology to explain the ways in which our human mind relates these two dimensions. Social anthropologist Tim Ingold shows us in his extensive and lucid assault to the persistent misconceptions that structure human sciences and, largely, western thought itself – the now almost ‘classic’ “*The Perception of the Environment*” – that we should start by following the steps of James J. Gibson’s ecological approach to perception, and Gregory Bateson’s ecology of mind. But understanding human beings as organisms within ecological systems, and persons within social systems, to define anthropology as the discipline dedicated to the study of the relationships between these two systems is not enough either, as it maintains unwanted dualisms such as person/organism or society/nature. Ingold proposes, following Bateson, that instead of dividing human life into ‘person’ and ‘organism’, we must acknowledge that the person *is* the organism, what requires a relational understanding not only of the person – which certain strands of social anthropology are already doing – but also a relational view of the organism, and therefore a new biology dedicated to the exploration of the relations of interdependence between organisms.

Fig. 56/
Swimming Pool - Francois Ozon (2003)

Under this paradigm, the characteristics of the organism emerge in the course of development within a field of relations in a specific – situated – environment. Ingold explains that the human being can be seen as a site of creative growth in an always shifting and unfolding field of relations. For him, skills are both biological and cultural, and they are not acquired but ‘grown’ and developed in/through practice. This practitioner must be understood as an organism actively engaged with his/her surroundings, what he calls a “dwelling perspective”.

“Moreover I believe it is necessary that we take these steps, that we descend from the imaginary heights of abstract reason and resituate ourselves in an active and ongoing engagement with our environments, if we are ever to arrive at an ecology that is capable of recovering the reality of the life process itself. In short, my aim is to replace the stale dichotomy of nature and culture with the dynamic synergy of organism and environment, in order to regain a genuine ecology of life.” (Ingold, 2000: 16)

The steps towards this ecology of life must include the assault to and dismantling of “*the most fundamental opposition of all, between form and substance*”. And an environment must be seen, according to Ingold, as a relative term, as depending on the actors, as a situation – or a ‘site’ in the expanded sense in which I have used the term earlier.⁶ The set of ‘organism’ and ‘environment’ must be understood as an ongoing process and as a whole, an ‘organism-in-its-environment’, and “*organic life [...] [is] the creative unfolding of an entire field of relations within which beings emerge and take on the particular forms they do, each in relation to the others. Life, in this view, is not the realisation of pre-specified forms but the very process wherein forms are generated and held in place.*” (Ingold, 2000:19)

“According to Kant, to perceive is not merely to have sensory stimulation. It is to have sensory stimulation one understands.” (Noë, 2004:181) *“[But] to suppose that all perceptual content is conceptual is to overintellectualize perceptual experience”* (Hurley 2001 in Noë, 2004:182) We are capable of perceiving even when we are babies and have not yet developed concepts, just like non-human animals who lack concepts to work with. Concepts are also according to Kant, “*predicates of possible judgement,*” (Noë, 2004:183) we don’t need them to experience perception.

⁶ I am referring here to the notion of ‘expanded/expansive’ sites that I have explored and developed with Oren Lieberman in our work with postgraduate architecture students. See Altés, A. and Lieberman, O. (2013) *Intravention, Durations, Effects: Notes of Expansive Sites and Relational Architectures*. Baunach: Spurbuch Verlag

There are several implications of the approaches and proposals outlined above which are crucial for our own spatial, critical and vitalist interests. One of the most important being that our perception and development are inextricably entangled with and bound to specific environments and situations. *“To have an experience is to be confronted with a possible way the world is. [...] Perception is a way of thinking about the world.”* (Noë, 2004:189)

To be in the world – to become in the world – to be part of the Real and to perceive the world is to explore it with the help of our ever-growing sensorimotor and conceptual skills. *“The root of our ability to think about the world is our ability to experience it; but experience is a mode of skillful encounter.”* (Noë, 2004:208)

It seems necessary as Erin Manning suggests to return to a medieval conception of art, understood then as the way or the manner, *“locating art not at the level of the finished object, but in its trajectory”* (Manning, 2015:53). We must shift from a focus on objects and images to one on movement and flow, so that perception is more like a moving-thinking-feeling (Massumi, 2013) and being-in-the-world starts referring much more to our active engagement in ‘worlding’ practices. This thinking-feeling can be seen as the combination of sensitivity and responsiveness to the ecology of an environment or a situation, in Ingold’s terms, a ‘sentient ecology’, perhaps an intuition. *“Simply to exist as sentient beings, people must already be situated in a certain environment and committed to the relationships this entails. These relationships, and the sensibilities built up in the course of their unfolding, underwrite our capacities of judgement and skills of discrimination, and scientists – who are human too – depend on these capacities and skills as much as do the rest of us.”* (Ingold 2000:25) We must also *“reorient the question of knowledge away from the idea of subject/object, which is to rethink the place of matter within experience”* (Manning 2015:56) Acknowledging art, knowledge, or any other practices – and therefore life – as the processes they really are, means also embracing the potentiality of the virtual.

We learn from Deleuze that the virtual is the modality of reality that signals and enables the emergence of new potentials; it is the realm of change and the event. The virtual is the potentiality of what is to come, what exceeds the actuality of a situation. *“The virtual is the space of emergence of the new, the*

un-thought, the unrealized, which at every moment loads the presence of the present with supplementarity.” (Grosz 2001:78)

The virtual in a process of architectural design could be, as it is often seen, the potential of the built work understood as a thing, signaled by its abstract representations – drawings of various kinds – but it could also be, in further virtuality if one will, the potentiality of the experience of encountering the building, either visually for those who briefly experience it, or as lived interiority for those inhabiting it. According to Massumi, the task is to dwell into and work out the virtual in order to enable the new, and for this to happen *“the built form cannot resemble its conditions of emergence”* (Massumi, 1998) Do we need a poetics of dwelling?

Instead of dealing with the appearance and inhabitation enabled by a building by means of resorting to its meaning and signification, or to the phenomenological implications of its form and its function, it is possible to consider questions of perception, experience and consciousness otherwise. Perhaps through the unplanned, the open, the diffractive, the transversal, through an understanding of architecture as a kind of enabling infrastructure, through a focus on the movement and becoming of life... How can architecture take place within phenomena without imposing preconceived forms and technological solutions to the sites and activities we encounter? Could architecture emerge from our interactions with the spaces, times, materials and other organisms that take part in it? Could ‘a building’ be the triggering of a new process rather than its final result? What kind of relational conception of co-construction and inhabitation could one imagine and set in motion in order to actualize the virtuality of such a process? How could a ‘we’ emerge that would enable the co-production of a space of possibility and action? *“How to keep architecture open to its outside? How to force architecture to think?”* (Grosz, 2001:64) How to make architecture incorporate the real of its moving and its becoming?

Drawing on the work of Arakawa and Gins, H  l  ne Frichot has written about the construction of an architectural body as a tactical procedure that allows us to tentatively approach incomplete but joint forms of the organism/environment continuum. In their book “Architectural Body”, Arakawa and Gins propose an ‘organism-that-persons’, a moving-thinking-feeling entity of the kind discussed above, which would *“actively participate in the creative and poetic constructing of her immediate, and even her not so im-*



Fig. 57/
The purple rose of Cairo - Woody Allen
(1985)

7 In the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, what exists is change, or 'becoming'. Becomings are either occasions, or events – which are sets or series of occasions – taking the form of 'concreteness' or concrete togetherness. Perception does not happen to one as an already constituted subject, but is something that constitutes its subject a new. (I am the emerging 'superject' of this event) (Add here a reference to Whitehead's Process and Reality)

mediate, built surrounds". (Frichot, 2011:113) Following Deleuze, Frichot imagines this construction as a process of experimentation in which the organism-that-persons acts on the basis of her immediate awareness, and endures throughout the thinking-feeling of her actions. Reading the architectural body as a 'mode' and drawing upon Deleuze's idea of elasticity as the relationship and limits of our abilities to affect and be affected, she pictures this body as one that endures responsibly in a constant making of the world. *"This elastic threshold demarcates the shifting ratio between our power of suffering and our power of acting. The ethical question for Deleuze is then a matter of how we produce active affections and proportionally reduce our passive responses."* (Frichot, 2011: 115) If we approach the experience of cinema also as a process, it is possible with Bergson, Deleuze and Whitehead to conceive of a cinematic brain that is the 'subject-superject'⁷ conflation of the cinematic automaton of film and the spiritual automaton of the human brain. This cinematic brain is thus capable of creative thought.

"Cinema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind. [...] The brain is unity. The brain is the screen [...] Cinema, precisely because it puts the image in motion, or rather endows the image with self-motion, never stops tracing the circuits of the brain." (Deleuze 2000:366)

The image of film is not perceived as a series of snapshots to which movement has been added, but



as an image in motion, what Deleuze calls a movement-image. In the string of any-instants-whatever in which time has been conceptualized in modern times, particularly by modern science, cinema is capable of offering a possibility for understanding privileged moments as singular extractions that can represent the emergence of the new. *“When one relates movement to any-moment-whatevers, one must be capable of thinking the production of the new, that is, of the remarkable and the singular, at any one of these moments [...]”*(Deleuze, 1986/1:7) This extraction of the singular, which Deleuze develops from the theses on movement that Bergson presented in ‘Creative Evolution’, lead him to assert that it is thus possible to use, understand and experience cinema not as a machine for the production of illusions, but as a device for the construction and perfection of a new reality. (Deleuze 1986/1:8)

“Cinema does not just present images, it surrounds them with a world. This is why, very early on, it looked for bigger and bigger circuits which would unite an actual image with recollection-images, dream-images and world-images. [...] If we take this direction to its limit, we can say that the actual image itself has a virtual image which corresponds to it like a double or a reflection. In Bergsonian terms, the real object is reflected in a mirror-image as in the virtual object which, from its side and simultane-

Fig. 58/
‘Warning: Perception requires Participa-
tion’ Antoni Muntadas (2012)

ously, envelops or reflects the real: there is 'coalescence' between the two. There is a formation of an image with two sides, actual and virtual." (Deleuze, 1989/2:68)

Cinema has the potential to offer a space and a time that can host our thinking-feeling and an encounter with another version of reality that, without suspending the movement of our present becoming, creates a gap, provides a distance and takes us to an elsewhere that is also here; in the midst of things, but also closer to the unexplored potentials of the virtual understood as yet to come. Through its automatic subjectivity, film shocks and transforms our thinking modes and our thoughts, it triggers the construction of an(other) place in the world. Cinema is also an invitation to and the beginning of a co-production of a transition from a world of objects and (static) images to one of movement and flows. As both image and duration, it is the potential site of a philosophical situation to think through the potentialities of both the flows of matter and the flows of consciousness contained in duration on the one hand, and the fragile but complex construction of what we still call human subjects on the other. At any rate, reality will continue to unfold in the encounter, in action, in and through our engagement and care. //



Aesthetics of Encounter and Pragmatic Dissent

Chapter 1.7

Fig. 59/
“Tatlin’s Whipper #5”
Performance, Tania Bruguera (2008)
Turbine Hall at Tate Modern

¹ Rancière, Jacques (2001) *Ten Theses on Politics*, in *Theory & Event*, Vol.5(3), Thesis 8, paragraph 22

² Paz, Octavio (1956) *El Arco y La Lira*, Mexico D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, p. 7 (Translation: “From the time when I began to write poems, I wondered whether it was worth while to do so: would it not be better to transform life into poetry than to make poetry from life? And poetry – cannot its proper object be, more than the creation of poems, the creation of poetic instants?”)

“Move along! There is nothing to see here!” – “The police says that there is nothing to see on a road, that there is nothing to do but move along. It asserts that the space of circulating is nothing other than the space of circulation. Politics, in contrast, consists in transforming this space of ‘moving-along’ into a space for the appearance of a subject: i.e., the people, the workers, the citizens. It consists in refiguring the space, of what there is to do there, what is to be seen or named therein. It is the established litigation of the perceptible, on the nemein that founds any communal nomos.”¹

“Desde que empecé a escribir poemas me pregunté si de veras valía la pena hacerlo: no sería mejor transformar la vida en poesía que hacer poesía con la vida? Y la poesía, no puede tener como objeto propio, más que la creación de poemas, la de instantes poéticos?”²

An encounter is not very different from Rancière’s politics; it is a situated duration (a passing of time – be it abstract or imagined/suspended – in a given location – physical or figured) in which the clashing of moving things (flows of conscious awareness or material flows) in/and their environments, turns the situation into a space and a time of appearance that enables the emergence of the new. An encounter is also, then, a refiguring of what is, and an opening to what could be. “[P]olitics is an aesthetic matter, a reconfiguration of the way we share out or divide places and times, speech and silence, the visible and the invisible.” (Rancière, 2003:203) The movements – any movements – of those moving things (materi-

als or conscious awareness) are ways of reconfiguring the frameworks of the visible and the invisible, of what can be said and heard and felt, or sensed.

An encounter is a disagreement in itself, in the sense of mismatch, or what Rancière refers to as '*la mésentente*', a non-coincidence, the emergence of a field of potential which tends to be independent from pre-existing constraints. The encounter is also dissent in as much as it is a proposal to trespass or violate pre-existing distances; it is an invitation to dwell in the intimacy of closeness and in the tension of conflict. It indicates the possibility of exploration.

An encounter is the momentaneous intensification of the relationality of our movement. A dissenting opening in our on-going and never-ending state of development and learning. Rancière says that politics is a situated activity which is always precarious and depends on the conditions around it; it is always at the verge of disappearing, and, therefore, fragile. An encounter is an unexpected invitation to dwell in this precarious fragility.

"This gentleman, it seems, has just come from a distance," said she. "He feels quite lost in your scampish Paris. I dare say you might be of service to him." Then she at last took her departure, feeling pleased at having left the two men together. Claude looked at Florent with a feeling of interest. That tall, slight, wavy figure seemed to him original. Madame Francois's hasty presentation was in his eyes quite sufficient, and he addressed Florent with the easy familiarity of a loungeur accustomed to all sorts of chance encounters." (Zola, 2006:66)³

And generally, it seems, we prefer or we choose to believe we don't have time to dwell in the encounter or the situation. Everyone seems to be in passing. Quick, superficial floating. An aesthetics of encounter promotes and enables a waiting, it is the foundation, the creation, the making of a possibility to dwell and to endure the delay of this waiting. And it is also the possibility of dissent, for the dwelling, the being-there, generates a pool of knowledge(s) and affects which will inform a renewed understanding and feeling of what is, which will necessarily differ from that of those who cannot, or choose not to, wait and endure.

³ Zola, E. (2006). *The Fat and the Thin*. Quoted from the EBook #5744 as published by Project Gutenberg. Original version in French from 1873, First English translation from 1888,

Waiting and listening, and feeling. Wanting to wait and wanting to listen. Choosing to wait. Feeling those choices. Embracing an encounter means turning ourselves to an other, and also embracing the possibilities of opening ourselves, of questioning our own selves now challenged by the felt presence of that other. An aesthetics of encounter reaches out towards the forms-of-life⁴ that will become in the relations of exchange that the encounter will enable and produce.

⁴ Beyond Wittgenstein's 'Lebensform(en)', the term 'forms-of-life' has been used by Giorgio Agamben to refer to a life that cannot be separated from its form, and therefore one in which is not possible to isolate what he has referred to as naked life. The term has been used also by the collective/space 'Tiqqun' – very influenced by Agamben – particularly in their "Introduction to Civil War", where they explain how "My form-of-life relates not to what I am, but to how I am what I am." Tiqqun (2010) *Introduction to Civil War*. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e). The combination of these understandings leads me to seeing 'forms-of-life' as modalities of singularization, as ways in which singularities can be enabled and produced.

⁵ See Tim Ingold's playful essay "When ANT meets SPIDER: Social Theory for Arthropods" in which he introduces SPIDER (Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness) in opposition to ANT (Actor Network Theory). Ingold, T. (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, New York: Routledge, chapter 7, pp. 89-94

"Aesthetics is a non-dogmatic foundation, not only for ethics and morality, but also for epistemology divulging the ambiguity of human life, an ambiguity that is the hallmark of art and ars vivendi. Ambiguity and multiplicity are important and enriching, providing hope that the realm of possibility is never depleted." (Nilsson, 2015:135)

Aesthetics of encounter and pragmatic dissent are the provisional names of two sets of fragile tools for combined thought and action, aimed at a committed exploration and inhabitation of life as a making process, both in the general sense of making life and making the world, and in the sense of making ourselves. Such self-making, grounded on a fragile balance of autonomy and responsibility, would in turn call for an emergent ethics of encounter which – consequent with the movement, contextuality, praxical and sociohistorical constitution of thought – grows out of a situation and returns to a holistic understanding of life as a total process that cannot be broken into 'bios' and 'zoe', but must be actively inhabited. These tools for thought would guide us, in my view, toward responsible forms-of-life. Philosophy as an art of living. Dwelling. Life and Architecture.

At a time in which the spectacle of imagery is, as we have seen, nearly all-encompassing, and the development of capitalism increasingly co-opts the realms of affectivity, perception and the intellect – not to mention our very biological existence – it is crucial to understand aesthetics again as sensory perception and experience, including the general question of feeling and sensibility, but also that of the making of oneself through a process of development of embodied responsiveness. Experience is therefore not about a subjective feeling, but rather about the development of skills in concert with things and their environments.⁵

The more our conscious and unconscious rhythms, memories and thoughts are controlled, mediated and captured through the actions of audio-visual and digital technologies of aesthesis, the more we must pay attention to experience, activity and life, to escape the trap of taking the aesthetic objects resulting of such de-individuating capture for the activity and processes which actually make life.

Attention to experience is not pushing us away from philosophy and knowledge; it is not an impossible abyss, or as it has been named '*the myth of the given*' (Rorty), but the beginning of a process of understanding how aesthetic mediation is our only means to encounter the movement of the world. "*The worlds we are living in are aestheticized versions of[...] immediacies. [...] If we then apply an epistemic reduction to these different aesthetic mediations, a reduction claiming generality, we reach, in the case of the self, self-objectification, and in the case of space, geometric, endlessly extended quantitative space within which these objectified selves can be distributed as objects among other objects.*" (Nilsson 2015:119)

This attention to experience and this will to reconnect with life are grounded on an understanding of a world that is not made of objects but of activity and events. A non-objectual world. A world of things happening, passing events. If we look at the world as a collection of objects we are complicit in an abstraction that reduces its complexity as '*passage*' (Massumi 2011:10), as becoming.

We must focus on and nurture singularities while simultaneously striving to establish a common aesthetic ground in which being together can also be feeling together. This is not an anti- or post-critical project, but rather one that asserts the crucial importance of a renewed critique. It is not a project of technophilic, post-humanist immersion in processes of technological modernization, but one that aims at a holistic understanding of our entanglements with apparatuses, not the least important of which is our own body. It is not a project of deconstruction or linguistic determination, but one that seeks to incorporate the effects of the inextricable relationships of discourses with events, and the role of diverse forms of communication in our negotiation of discontinuity.⁶

It is, in short, not a project of dualistic exclusions, or of taking sides – either here, or there – but rather one of pluralistic, transdisciplinary, and responsible engagements with the complexity of life and its

6 Do I need to explain what I mean with discontinuity here? The inescapable condition of not being continuous with others, the distance, the abyss that separates us from our immediate or distant neighbours, from our environment, from the things we see or touch or smell, from ourselves, from our thoughts. The fact that we can't fully 'meet' or coincide with anything, the parallax gap of ontological, scientific, linguistic, and practical indetermination.

transformation. One that starts from the middle, from the inescapable inside-position of our participation in the making of the world (worlding), and our own simultaneous and co-occurrent self-making. (A self understood here, with Simondon, as both individual and collective.) It is not a project of either/or, but of a ‘both/and’ sensibility and responsibility. Of encounters, durations, and effects.

In his article “*Noopolitics, Life and Architecture*”, published in 2010 as part of the introduction to the book “*Cognitive Architecture. From Biopolitics to Noopolitics. Architecture and Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*”, Sven-Olov Wallenstein⁷ evaluates the positions and problems associated to what he sees as a wave of recent theoretical developments that have proposed “*to connect architecture to a new kind of philosophy of life.*” (Wallenstein 2010: 46) Although some of these ideas have been associated with a rejection of the ‘critical’ tradition, Wallenstein is clear that critique is actually more important than ever. “[*T*]he problem of how to analyze politics, capitalism, and the possibility of resistance has not disappeared, but become increasingly acute, and it must now be reformulated at a depth that goes beyond inherited models of mind and consciousness.” (Wallenstein 2010: 47) While forms of government, control and power expand their objects and realms of intervention from those of bodies, populations and their practices into that of our individual and collective brains – increasingly aiming at the capturing and externalization of our memories, imagination and mind flows – the role of objects and visuals also becomes increasingly important. We need a radical shift of our attention from objects and visuals to processes, movement and activity, i.e. life. This is why, as Wallenstein points out, the re-emergence of vitalist themes in architecture and visual culture must be “*conditioned by a transformed understanding of the image.*” (Wallenstein, Forthcoming: Chapter 7) One of the aims of proposing an aesthetics of encounter is precisely to approach such an expanded understanding of aesthetics as experience, event and duration.

Contemporary capitalism aims at having a great capturing impact in our brains, in what has been described as a shift from biopolitics to noopolitics⁸, what demands that we urgently “*reflect on the way in which images, but also on what kind of ‘image of thought’, make this possible, not just as a passive causal effect, but as an active and constructive response.*” (Wallenstein, 2010:55) In many ways, the fragile tools proposed here and, to a great extent, my research as well as pedagogical and professional practice, are preliminary attempts at engaging in heuristic, learning, making, ‘intraventional’, in short,

7 Wallenstein develops these and other issues further in chapter 7 of his new book “*Architecture, Critique, Ideology: Essays on Architecture and Theory*”, forthcoming in 2015, to be published by Axl Books (Stockholm). I am indebted to Roemer van Toorn here, who invited Wallenstein to give a public lecture and a seminar at Umeå School of Architecture in the context of which we had access to a draft of this chapter, and obviously to Sven-Olov Wallenstein for his generous sharing of the draft with us.

8 See Hauptman, Deborah (2010) ‘Introduction’ in “*Cognitive Architecture. From Biopolitics to Noopolitics. Architecture and Mind in the Age of Communication and Information*”, Delft School of Design Series on Architecture and Urbanism, Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, p.11: “*While the former acts on body, or populations of bodies, and inscribes habits and practices specific to life (bios), the latter operates on mind (nous), on general intellect and mental disposition. Here the concept of noopolitics is broadly posited as a power exerted over the life of the mind, including perception, attention, and memory.*”

‘worlding’ practices which would follow Wallenstein’s accurate diagnosis and indications. In that sense, an aesthetics of encounter incorporates affective, somatic, and sensory dimensions, caring simultaneously about the effects of the on-going activity of the world, on our feelings, bodies and perceptions. “[A]isthesis is not the name of a specific reality, but rather the concept of a regime of experience that involves a certain mode of relating sensation, perception and meaning.”(Rancière, 2013)

It is indeed urgent to bring architecture back to life. It is paramount to connect architecture with life and movement. And not only in relationship with vitalism, the philosophy of life, or process philosophy – which are strands of thought that think through life and which we must surely embrace and incorporate into architectural thinking – but first and foremost in relationship with our engagements with(in) thinking/making practices of transformation (urban transformation, neighborhood transformation, territorial transformation, renovation and retrofitting, design, construction...) In all our engagements in the makings and the ‘thinkings’ of architecture as a practice, we must re-connect with life understood as movement. As activity and process. As experience. There is always something happening, and as James once famously asserted, we are in the midst of it. “[...] *We are tempted to affirm activity wherever we find anything going on. Taken in the broadest sense, any apprehension of something doing, is an experience of activity.*” (James 1912:161) Or as Brian Massumi has put it: “*Practice becomes perception.*” (Massumi 2013:11)

Such a focus on experience, practice and what is going on, is by no means a rejection of theory or philosophy, or the critical. For our actions and the material flows and movements of activity that make life, cannot be separated from our and their own ‘thinking’ activity. “*It would be misleading to claim that the noetic, affective and biopolitical dimensions of power would render theory unnecessary or useless; rather they demand that we invent a theory that would be able to analyze the modes of affectivity and subjection that occur within this new formation of power.*” (Wallenstein, Forthcoming, Chapter 7) On the contrary, an aesthetics of encounter is one that asserts the inseparability of practice and theory, of experience and thought, of activity and of thinking-activity.

An encounter is an unexpected and contingent element of existence. It is only the beginning of something. An aesthetics of encounter does not accept the determination of rationalist philosophies which



Fig. 60/
Urban Asymmetries container, TUDelft,
2004. Photo: A. Altés

9 Badiou, A. (2014) 'People cling onto identities... it is a world opposed to the encounter', interview with Clement Petitjean, published in the blog of Verso books. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1557-alain-badiou-people-cling-onto-identities-it-is-a-world-opposed-to-the-encounter> , accessed 6th of September 2015.

presuppose the existence of a scientific explanation for everything; nor does it fully accept empiricist accounts that aim at grounding everything on experience. The encounter is an element of unexpected contingency, it cannot be reduced to rationality and it is not simply an experience. The encounter is more than that. According to Badiou, the true encounter forces a choice: “*The miracle of the encounter is this paradoxical conjunction between the pure exterior – a person whom I encounter – and pure interiority – the consequences that I must draw by myself...*” (Badiou, 2014)⁹

An encounter is not an instance of interpretation; it is the experience of confronting an other in the environment, it is the duration of a particular way of becoming-with someone or something else. It is the intensity of taking part in the process of making the world, or in Massumi’s words “*the thinking-feeling of what happens*”(Massumi, 2013:39). It is the sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) required from us to dwell in the environment, combined with an openness to others in the process of making ourselves.

Thinking, thought itself, is what turns “*a form-of-life into a force, into a sensible effectivity.*” (Tiqqun, 2010:20)

“[A]n everyday life in thrall to the spectacle [...] should be understood as the systematic organization of a breakdown in the faculty of encounter, and the replacement of that faculty by a social hallucination: a false consciousness of encounter, or an illusion of encounter.”(Debord, 1994:152) When as Debord announced, our ability to meet and to embrace the encounter has been dismantled and erased, an aesthetics of encounter must search for and construct ways in which encounters can be enabled again, and ask questions about the power of these encounters to produce insurgent formations and emerging spaces and times of dissent.

Critique is absolutely necessary against the alienation, externalization and liquidation of our intellect. An aesthetics of encounter must be supplemented with pragmatic dissent understood as a renewed, and modal, form of critique. A critical, concerned stance must be added to the vitalist engagement with what is happening. A critique that cares on the basis of its involvement. Caring proximity. *“It is not the basis of elevated, distanced critique that achieves grand overviews but a stance of extreme closeness – micrology. [...] If things have become too close for comfort for us, a critique must arise that expresses this discomfort. It is not a matter of proper distance but of proper proximity. [...] Concernedness.”* (Sloterdijk, 1987:xxxiii)

Encounter. The clash of one thing with another. The act of meeting or finding someone or something unexpectedly. Opposition and contradiction. The clash of two distinct bodies as they progress. From ‘incontrare’, ‘incontro’. In-contro. Contra. Against. An encounter, as mentioned above, is already from the outset a mismatch, a disagreement. Dissent.

We could therefore provisionally approach ‘pragmatic dissent’ as a synergic fusion of experience and critique. As the combination of a committed engagement with what is going on, and a renewed and reformulated understanding of critique as the assessment of the appropriateness of modalities of action and government, i.e. of ways of doing and making, and the corresponding forms of control and regulations they produce or confront. Such a reformulation of critique as dissent is obviously inspired by Foucault’s definition of critique as the art of *“not wanting to be governed like that”* (Foucault, 1997:28) and his understanding of people’s engagement in the questioning of what is happening as *the politics*

of truth. An encounter can also be seen as an instance of a politics of truth: there is a flow of relations and communication which deal with the initial mismatch and aim at establishing a truth of the situation, inventing or re-constituting a way of operating, a modality of action.

According to Massumi, activity, or the event, must be understood as a qualitative-relational ecology of process. The relational dimension reminds us that there is a world pre-existing and that the event takes part in that larger world, everything intra-acts and is also related to other phenomena. (Barad) The qualitative dimension asserts the singularity and difference of the event. It tells us that the event is/was different; one. This qualitative side of ‘process’ could be also thought as aesthetic, while the relational dimension could be seen as political. In my rendition of a vitalist, engaged and caring philosophy of architectural action, both dimensions are also present: the encounter is an event and an aesthetic experience, it is an invitation and a demand for the establishment of new relations, and it requires a politics of engagement, listening and care, which enables a dwelling and a waiting that will make possible the co-responsible construction of a dissenting truth.

And dissensus is the transformation, the re-articulation and redefinition of the way in which a problem is configured: “[P]olitics, rather than the exercise of power or the struggle for power, is the configuration of a specific world, a specific form of experience in which some things appear to be political objects, some questions political issues or argumentations and some agents political subjects.” (Rancière 2011:7)

Pragmatic dissent is connected to the subversive pragmatism of the ancient ‘kynics’, who would confront the ruling ideologies with the facts of every day life, exposing the rawness of their thirst for power. Unlike the detachment of contemporary cynicism, *kynicism* was grounded on a concerned ironic stance. “*Kynicism [...] is more pragmatic than argumentative: it subverts the official proposition by confronting it with the situation of its enunciation.*” (Zizek, 1989:26)

Inspired by the empiricist and pragmatist resort to particular experiences – which I prefer to call ‘situations’ in an attempt to attend to their complexities and pluralities – pragmatic dissent is founded also in the belief that reality is an experience-continuum: “*The full facts of cognition, whatever be the way in*



which we talk about them, even when we talk most abstractly, stand inalterably given in the actualities and possibilities of the experience-continuum.”(James, 1909:152) The source of truth is an unfolding reality which is created day-by-day, always intra-acting with others, relationally, understanding experience and perception as action.

Pragma is a deed, an act, what has been done, what has happened. Pragmatism is therefore a modality of thinking and an attitude that leans toward experience, activity, and action, allocating greater importance to performance than to appearance. Pragmatism is about specific situations, about durations and effects. Pragmatism is in that sense a performative theory: the practical effects of a thing are what the thing is. Pragmatism is about action and transformation. Pragmatism says James, is *“less a solution, than a program for more work, [...] an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed.”* (James, 1907:99) An invitation to stay. Pragmatism acknowledges that the world is always already marked or ‘prejudiced’, so that interpretation or hermeneutics cannot be a quest to fix universal meanings, but an exploration of a particular situation. Again, an encounter.

“Understanding [...] does not require linguistic articulation; a proper reaction, a shudder or a tingle, maybe enough to indicate that one has understood. Some of the things we experience and understand are never captured by language, not only because their particular feel defies adequate linguistic expression but because we are not even aware of them as ‘things’ to describe.” (Shusterman, 1992:134)

Aesthetic experience understood within these pragmatist coordinates is first and foremost, immediate experience. The depth and richness of immediate experience. An aesthetics of encounter, in turn, understands experience as already and necessarily aesthetic, but also and at the same time discursive. Experience is also already discourse. Discourse/Event cannot be separated or even conceived without each other. A pragmatist aesthetics understands art not as the artifacts we tend to regard as art, but as the dynamic and experiential processes through which those ‘things’ are made and encountered. Art is so defined qualitatively, as a quality of experience: *“[Aesthetic experience] is rather a moving, fragile, and vanishing event, briefly savored in an experiential flux rife with energies of tension and disorder which it momentarily masters.”* (Shusterman, 2000:32) Such a pragmatic approach involves a pluralist openness that understands and embraces the range of possibilities ahead. Pragmatism is a

Fig. 61/
“Sånger från andra våningen”
Roy Andersson (2000)

forward-looking philosophy that focuses on change, effects and consequences. The embracing of such openness and the attention to what happens and to what is 'sensed' is also what I am referring to as aesthetics of encounter. Such aesthetics is also aiming at restoring some of their life and depth to images, understood no more as mere and fixed representations, visual imagery and superficial meaning but also as images of thought, as movement and duration.

“A critique of images that reduces them to mere ideological reflections seems to deprive them of life, in transferring all of the movement and intelligence to the one who reads them; against this, the theory of presence requires that we restore something of the encounter, the way images confront our bodies with their physical texture in a violence that belongs both to surface and depth, although organized differently.” (Wallenstein, Forthcoming, Chapter 7)

In order to make architecture a relevant critical activity today it is crucial that we move away from representational approaches, the superficial simplification of iconic architecture and what I have called objectual imagery, embracing instead the true complexity, depth and ambiguity of the image. Through an aesthetics of encounter, the image can be delayed in the duration of a waiting that chooses to inhabit the encounter and pushes away the anxiety to see and to represent, focusing instead on the thinking and the feeling of what happens. Letting the image emerge if it has to, if it wants to, once it is formed. Through pragmatic dissent and renewed critical tools, images and visuals must be constantly scrutinized and their deceptive messages uncovered.

An architecture that commits to the construction of daily life through aesthetics of encounter and pragmatic dissent must be actualized in every concrete situation in the form of architectural actions that generate images contributing to the activation and not the passivation of life. Instead of the visuals of senseless architecture, we must engage in the construction of architectural situations and encounters, out of which true images will later emerge.

An aesthetics of encounter also requires a different gaze, a different way of looking, perhaps one that is not so much about possession and knowledge, but a weaker gaze that works instead through appreciation and encounter. A caring and waiting gaze that proceeds through a responsible getting closer,

not to reveal but to search, in a movement towards the encounter. For such a curiosity-driven gaze to emerge, the eye is not enough. Seeing and touching must merge, we must approach an experiential seeing informed by all our senses.

The construction of true experiential and aesthetic knowledge requires concerned implication. Encountering something that happens, participating in an event, requires this other sensing participation that is simultaneously close and distantly patient. It is crucial to locate the image beyond symbols and signs, for once the sign has indicated what it is supposed to indicate, it disappears. The image on the other hand invites us and affords us a stay within it. Again an encounter. Even though it also refers to something different than itself, the being of the image is also part of what it presents.

We must work with images not aiming at discovering or disclosing their clear and distinct ‘meanings’ and messages, or the exact nature of their relationships with what they are supposed to represent, but rather in order to approach them through a difficult act of equality in which we open ourselves to them in the encounter.

In relationship with the aesthetics of encounter as described above, I am also proposing that we approach film as an apparatus of experience, and as a matrix for sensing and perceiving that can bring us close to the material dimension of the world, and confront us with different versions of it, which film is also capable of opening up and taking a distance from. In our task of ‘architecting’ the world, we can and we must look into cinematic images in order to encounter the spaces and situations that we might otherwise not be ready to see, read, grasp or experience. Film is a material that creates and activates a time and a space that enable people to encounter other realities than those in which they are presently becoming. It is an encounter with otherness. Film allows thinking in and through the distance that separates the viewer from those other realities. And it does so by means of its form. It is a form that thinks. Cinema is therefore not only a material flow (of waves of light and sound) but also a flow of conscious awareness. It is a thinking that flows and that is not complete, it was always, already from the outset, an experience to be shared. The thinking of cinema is not complete until it meets the thinking of its audience, only then, true cinematic thought happens: in the encounter.



"[...] Philosophy does not have to produce the thinking of the work of art because the work of art thinks all by itself and produces truth. A film is a proposition in thought, a movement of thought, a thought connected, so to speak, to its artistic disposition. How does this thought exist and get transmitted? It is transmitted through the experience of viewing the film, through its movement. [...] Of all the arts, this is certainly the one that has the ability to think, to produce the most absolutely undeniable truth. It is steeped in the infinite of the real." (Badiou, 2013:18)

There is something special about the relationship of cinema with the world that has to do with its ability to afford a certain contemporaneity with the world, and which constitutes also an invitation to think and learn. Films are like witnesses of human experience, confronting us with the presence of what exists.

What is the specificity of the cinematic apparatus? What is the impact of film on something called society? Is that what we are looking at? Or is it rather the encounter of a subject with the film? Or even the presence of the film itself as a thinking document, as a thinking-thing? The film thinks/feels, and offers its thinking/feeling as a possibility of encounter, as an opening into the infinite possibilities of aesthetic experience, thought and self-making.

"[...] Cinema is a metaphor for contemporary thought. [...] A thinking that's grasped in the mobility of its reflections, a thinking that absorbs human presence in something that exceeds it, that takes it over and projects it all at once. A representation of the world in which human presence is affirmed over against an extremely powerful exteriority". [...] Cinema is able to show in one and the same shot, [...] the indifference of nature, the aberrations of History, the turmoil of human life, and the creative power of thought." (Badiou, 2013:17)

An encounter with the question of the real...an encounter with present conditions, in order to approach the question of truth. Cinema as a sort of politics of truth negotiated in the encounter with its images and its 'thinking' with our own. It is not enough to look at cinema as image(s), we must embrace it further as thought, as a thinking process. The visible is only an index of the real. (And what is happening is not just simply what we 'see'.) Cinema goes beyond the visible when *"it demands a variation in the regime of the sensible."* (Badiou, 2013:193)

Fig. 62/
Hito Steyerl: How Not To Be Seen. A Fuck-
ing Didactic Educational .Mov File (still),
2013, HD video, colour, sound, 14 min.

The very question and task of cinema is to challenge the image through the image itself. To escape the seductive regime of appearances. *“The principle of the art of cinema lies precisely in subtly showing that it is only cinema, that its images only testify to the real to the extent that they are manifestly images. It is not by turning away from appearance, or by lauding the virtual, that you will have the chance of attaining the idea. Rather, it is by thinking appearance as appearance, and thus as that aspect of being which, by coming to appear, gives itself to thought as a disappointment of seeing.”* (Badiou, 2013:201)

Cinema is an invitation to embrace the encounter I have been describing above, the possibility and the beginning of an aesthetics of encounter. It constitutes a duration on the basis of the combination of total reality and total fiction. It combines a world of appearances, images, shots, immobile bits of the world’s activity, with the very real being of its own becoming in the event of its projection. Cinema produces new relationships between appearances and reality, constituting a philosophical situation in which we are invited to take part. Cinema confronts us with the Other in the world.

Embracing the encounter with this other – these multiple others – can be a way to expand our understanding of the current becoming of the world. Once we have accepted that film is a form that thinks and that it is offering its thinking for us not to only to look at but to dwell in and think through, then we can choose to wait. To endure. And to let the image emerge, somewhere. Later. /

2

Narrative Machines, Spatial Affects /

delaying the image: towards an aesthetics of encounter

Capsules/Fluids
Heat



Capsules/Fluids

Heat

“The hyper-industrial sphere extends to all human activities the compulsive and mimetic behaviour of the consumer, including all those activities that can be subsumed under the heading ‘free time’. Everything must become consumable – education, culture and health, as well as washing powder and chewing gum. But the illusion that we must create to install this situation can only prove to be deceptive, and to provoke frustration, demotivation, discredit, disgust and destructive impulses.”¹

“Heat is a good atmosphere for telling intimate stories.”²

/ It is really hot. A sudden push violently opens an old hollow timber door, and a guy in a tight shiny shirt walks into a dull washroom as if looking for someone. He checks in one of the separate toilets unsuccessfully and then moves to the other side where the urinals are, wildly hitting the condom dispenser as he steps through. He seems to have found his target, and waits behind while the other pees. / <Are you finished, piece of scum? What is your problem?> He threatens him and pushes him, and shouts at him. Smashing him against the wall aggressively, he orders him to stop looking at his girl. / We see her dancing to loud techno. Other guys looking at her. He pushes one of them violently. / A fight is started by the entrance of the place. The violence can be felt: heavy, disturbing, cold, very real. A third guy, perhaps a caretaker, gets involved and throws the first one and his girl out in violent pushes while they all shout. / A car accelerates and drives crazily on the highway. / The car stops. / They kiss. / He gets mad and shouts at the girl. He hits her. He insults her and throws her out of the car. She cries. / ... /

¹ Stiegler, Bernard (2011), *The decadence of industrial democracies*, (Cambridge ; Malden, MA: Polity Press), pp.111

² Seidl, Ulrich (2003), Interview, in Bear, Liza, *Ulrich Seidl's DogDays: The Power of Rebellion*, Indiewire. http://www.indiewire.com/article/ulrich_seidls_dog_days_the_power_of_rebellion



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
08'48"/09'37"/09'45"
09'52"/09'59"/10'09"

3 Throughout the texts corresponding to this second part, we will encounter various fragments such as this one, presenting a fictionalized description of a scene or a combination of scenes. Although based on the films, these fragments do not claim to describe the film accurately but to present images of thought in order to trigger further thinking and prepare the writing field for subsequent sections. Combined with these fragments, this part also includes sections of critical reflection and academic writing, and sections of fictionalized conversations/discussions between various 'instances' of the collective body of participants in 'our' filmic encounters. For reasons that I explain below, it is not possible anymore to discern who is talking or who is thinking. We think. We write. Together. (All 'participants' have been acknowledged at the beginning, and have contributed enormously to making these encounters and these thoughts possible.)

It's summer. It's Vienna. And it is really hot. / People are out in the sun. Lying immobile as if dead, eyes closed, sunbathing. An older couple sits outside looking up, their bathing suits on, sweating. The shutters are down behind them. We hear the rhythmical murmur of lawn sprinklers. A very fat old man lies with his arms wide open on the concrete roof of the plinth of his semi-detached house. In the background, we see the seemingly endless row of identical units of a suburban enclave of contemporary Vienna. His sweaty belly shines. He is breathing heavily. / And old fat man, wearing shorts, a white t-shirt and suspenders, cuts the extra long branches of the 3 meter high hedge around his house while standing on a tiny ladder. He waters the plants, and picks, one by one, the fallen leaves from the grass. We hear a couple arguing in the background, on the other side of the hedge. The old man complains. They drive him crazy. He decides to relax atop a deck chair. But the couple keeps on arguing and he is still bothered by their voices. [...] He brings in his lawnmower. He turns it on and places it by the hedge, right on the spot from where the voices come. He moves back into the house. After closing the double door-window to the garden and drawing the curtains close, he pulls the shutters down with a cracking noise. // ³

We are watching the film *Hundstage* by the Austrian director Ulrich Seidl as part of a course on architecture, film and politics given at a school of architecture in Barcelona. It is also warm outside, but we are sitting in the auditorium of the school, equipped with the largest, most adequate screen to watch films, and the walls, floor and stepped seating area – all made of concrete – make the air in the room rather chilly. Most of us are wearing warm sweaters that we have brought precisely to sit back and sink comfortably in the dimly lit classroom. But it's difficult to find comfort in the images on the wall. We are about twenty-five, maybe thirty people. Most of the students sit on chairs, closer to the screen, but some of them take positions on the steps in the back of the room. They came equipped with pillows to upgrade the hard, cold concrete slabs.

There is something strange and special about these sessions. Following a lecture, we encounter one or more films that are related to the topic of the lecture, and then everyone writes short comments/





Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
08'58"/09'09"/09'27"
Opposite page:
08'06"

reflections in a blog we share. On the basis of those comments, we start a discussion the following week, which generally ends up being difficult to stop, the conversation goes on. This is special not only because of the possibility of having such discussions, but mostly because of the very experience of watching those movies inside the school – a school of architecture – and being able to talk about them in relationship with relevant spatial problems and conditions, and in relationship to what we think, feel and know. Our concerns as architects and teachers and students, and citizens. It is a collective thinking process in the form of a multiple encounter: the films meet the topics of the lecture, and the lectures meet the films, we encounter the films in a special setting, the students meet me and I meet them, we progressively find out what we think about things, how we think, and we continue working our thoughts through the films and their own thinking. The discussions are intense, and in the end it is difficult to know who has said or thought what, it feels more as if we were thinking together. Even as we watch the films. We are there, and we know, we feel, that the others are there too, and that they are thinking. Thinking ‘happens’.

Seidl’s *Hundstage* is a film about human beings in our time and their condition. It is a film about heat, aggression and the everyday. Thrown into the suburban outskirts of Vienna, we are confronted with dull landscapes of endless rows of houses, highways, hypermarket malls, parking lots, boring middle class



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
10'12"/10'19"/10'22"

villas, heat, cracking asphalt, and sweat. Oddly human, lonely people. It is also a film about songs and games, about sex and about violence, about the isolation and loneliness that result from the decadence of industrial democracies, and about the loss of care. It is a film about the anxiety of love – a feeling of falling inexorably but not wanting to fall. About the spatial grounding of life portrayed in its vulnerability and intimacy. It is a film about people longing for love.

Seidl's work is relevant here in at least two ways: because of his firm and fearless critique of contemporary situations in their sheer complexity; and because of the ways in which his cinema proceeds very much in the direction of what I have referred to before as the construction of 'an aesthetics of encounter'. He says: "*Meine Filme bis Hundstage waren keine reinen Dokumentarfilme. Dies war nun ertsmals ein reiner Spielfilm, nach dokumentarischen Arbeitsmethoden gedreht. Es gab dazu ein Drehbuch, in dem die Szenen der einzelnen Episoden sehr genau beschrieben waren, jedoch nicht in ihrer späteren Vernetzung.*"⁴ (Seidl, 2013:155) (Emphasis mine).

His working methods are themselves based on different kinds of encounters. Between what he sees as inadequate/insufficient notions of documentary and fiction film, between professional actors and real people, between diverse methodological tools usually associated to specific filmic approaches and fields, between carefully conceived dimensions of his movies and the importance of improvisation, between his own fascinations and ideas and a strong desire to explore reality and its inhabitants. "*It is essential that I constantly plunge back into reality. My fiction films are nourished and often inspired by this. Getting to know new people and new worlds has always been and remains very enriching. Which does not mean that it is always pleasant.*" (Seidl, 2014:112)

The limits of these encounters and the distinctions between the elements taking part in them are blurred and/or questioned, in order to engage with the world and its contradictions, its shortcomings, its pathologies, its failures and its magnificent and infinite energies and potentials. For Seidl, the exploration of these possibilities through testing and improvisation is part of a way of approaching reality itself. "*All the dialogue was improvised on the set, but the scenes were carefully planned and written before, while writing the script. I chose this method (without written dialogue), because I wanted the actors to be as free as possible for improvisation. Concerning the non-professional-actors, I wanted them to be able to talk with their own words. I wanted them to keep their individual manner to express themselves. And, of course, spontaneity is a very important element of my staging.*" (Seidl, 2003)

⁴ "My movies until *DogDays* were not 'pure' documentaries. This one was the first 'pure' feature film in which I used documentary working methods. There was a screenplay, a script, in which the scenes of each of the episodes were described in great detail, although not in what refers to their subsequent interconnection."

Rather than being ironic, or interested in satire or mocking ridicule, Seidl is in fact serious and concerned. He cares. His films are as much narrative acts as acts of care for the state of the world and its inhabitants. He dwells in the situations, patiently waiting for the opportunity and the right time to record, and to tell the stories he wants to tell. He carefully embraces and explores the world, until he finds and meets the people that he needs for his films to tell those stories and to do so at the edge of reality. His staging of film situations is already a staging of a possibility of an encounter: he offers an opportunity to think, based on the concerns he shares through the film. The impact of his films, wrongly associated with provocation and exaggeration, is rather a function of their radical actuality: they hit us because they confront us with what we are, and with our own practices. Instead, we usually prefer to go on, unbothered, misguided by the masks and fictions we build, wear and painstakingly preserve and administer.

Ulrich Seidl's cinema of disturbance forces the otherwise passive spectator into an active role. By articulating an open space in the film, Seidl offers a chance to inhabit and explore the everyday life scenarios and grotesque episodes of ordinary Austrian people. But this freedom is also a trap, and viewers are often confronted with themselves, feeling afraid, or uncomfortable.

“No one lives like this, you find yourself hoping, even though you know otherwise. This kind of struggle to accept what you're seeing is part of the price of watching [...] Mr. Seidl offers little in the way of cinematic palliatives. [...] He is, unlike many others, embracing the world, not in retreat.” (Dargis, 2009)

Seidl's work is not exclusively about individuals, offering also an explorative and forceful critique of contemporary spatial, social and emotional conditions. He offers an unprecedented look through a series of unexplored cracks and gaps, effectively attacking the overwhelming totalitarianism of indifference, which seems to rule our times. Seidl stubbornly and carefully explores the situations that emerge from today's dysfunctional, irresponsible and toxic 'capsular society'⁵, depicting the truly disturbing effects of a total breakdown of communication. As society keeps on becoming more segregated, polarized and capsularized, an interior and an exterior are defined and separated. Fear then drives to further capsularization, which in turn generates more fear. Isolated cells need however to communicate, but capsules force to a mediated communication through diverse representational devices and thus to failure.

Seidl follows individuals in their particular falling trajectories toward the innermost isolation of their 'capsules', brilliantly capturing the deadening flow of everyday life, in a way in which the everyday human oddness of the Viennese characters is amplified, in order to create the necessary distance that enables spectators to engage the situation and avoid being sucked-in by the film.

As in an attempt to encounter Brecht's '*Verfremdungseffekt*', Seidl recreates an epic distance that, opposing the fascinating display of luxury and fake illusions to be found in so many films today, confronts us with the rawness of ordinary, self-destructive and decadent 21st century life.

Seidl enacts his critique through a reverse image, "*an image of everyday reality, taken in its totality or as a fragment, reflecting that reality in all its depth through people, ideas and things which are apparently quite different from everyday experience, and therefore exceptional, deviant, abnormal.*" (Lefebvre, 1991:12) In the midst of familiarity, we think we know the people around us as well as their/our environment. But the familiar is not necessarily the known or understood. "*Das Bekannte überhaupt ist darum, weil es bekannt ist, nicht erkannt.*" (Hegel, 1807:xxxvi) What is familiar conceals human beings and makes them difficult to know by giving them a mask we can recognize, a mask that is merely the lack of something. The discussion around the 'oddness' of Seidl's characters – or that of the mix of professional and non-professional actors and non-actors that he works with – as well as that of the locations and situations in which he shoots, is ultimately a discussion about our own oddness or normality. A discussion that is much more related to the masks we create for ourselves and for those characters, than to a supposedly 'normal' or flawless ideal or standard.

"The socially acceptable [...] is only a veneer. Beneath that is the private, the real truth, real life. If extremes form the core of [a] film, it is because I believe that this 'extreme' in one form or another, in a modified or diluted form, applies to us all. [...] Wherever people are allowed the possibility of exercising power over others, you find oppression, humiliation, exploitation and abuse." (Seidl, 2014:112)

Seidl work is not about 'weird' or 'disturbed' individuals, it is not about extreme locations and places, but about an alienated, pathologically irresponsible society. Hundstage's episodes and characters are the means to construct situations of encounter within this condition, at a distance that might enable 'something' else. Yet, Seidl is wise enough to provide some humor, and above all, some hope.

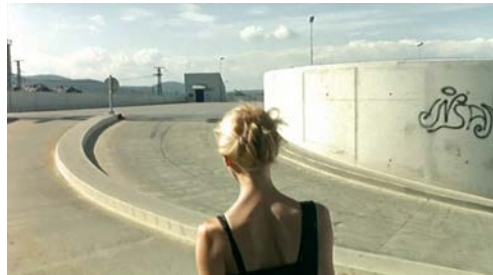


Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
1h07'25"/1h07'28"/1h07'29"
1h07'30"/1h07'34"/1h07'37"

Against the generalized trend of idealizing the environment of those single-family, detached-housing developments and presenting them as the dream of each and every middle class family – often referring to the inherent security, privacy and community values that they are supposed to guarantee – it is important that someone dares to describe them precisely as the very locus of some of the worst contemporary horrors: the suburbia of isolated, detached houses is, in fact, terrible; not only the voluntary enclosure of its occupants in capsules of exclusion, but also the expression of spatial, social and communicative failure derived from extreme forms of individualism and capitalism.

Zygmunt Bauman explains, in a remarkably eloquent way, the process that leads people to opt for such a degree of isolation: “*The drive towards a ‘community of similarity’ is a sign of withdrawal not just from the otherness outside, but also from commitment to the lively yet turbulent, invigorating yet cumbersome interaction inside*” (Bauman, 2003:110) In order to denounce then the problems and side effects of such a retreat, which would seriously and decisively affect the ability of their protagonists to co-exist: “*The longer people stay in a uniform environment – in the company of others ‘like themselves’ with whom they can socialize perfunctorily and matter-of-factly without incurring in the risk of miscomprehension and without struggling with the vexing need to translate between distinct universes of meaning – the more they are likely to ‘delearn’ the art of negotiating shared meanings and a modus convivendi.*” (Bauman, 2003: 111)

The disturbing filmic constructions of the Austrian director offer a perfect illustration of such horror. Through diverse narrative devices that reinforce the potential of film as an alternative apparatus of spatial critique, Seidl reveals the nightmarish within the familiar and the known, presenting the everyday lives of the inhabitants of suburban Vienna in such a way that their various forms of human and everyday oddness are amplified, with the intention of generating the necessary distance from the audience to avoid a passive spectator. His work masterly explains how the fright of such a capsular society is rooted in a sort of communicative collapse: “*Since they have forgotten or neglected to acquire the skills necessary for living with difference, it is little wonder that such people view the prospect of confronting strangers face-to-face with rising horror.*” (Bauman, 2003:111) “*Mixophobic paranoia feeds upon itself and acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If segregation is offered and taken up as a radical cure for the danger represented by strangers, cohabitation with strangers becomes more difficult by the day.*” (Bauman, 2003:113)



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
1h07'41"/1h07'48"/1h07'49"
1h07'51"/1h07'54"/1h08'04"

/ She wakes up looking and feeling terrible. She remembers. She cries again. She shuffles down the stairs. The phone is ringing. She turns around and goes back upstairs. Her make up is all messed up around her eyes; she tries to wash it all away. Her mother brings the phone to the bathroom for her. It's him. She reminds her that she looks terrible, she doesn't eat, and her room is a mess. / Are you crying? She says. / No. Can I talk first? / Hurry up! / He says something nice to her on the phone. She smiles, maybe. / She looks out from the balcony. Detached villas, green grass, trimmed hedges. Fat-men-in-shorts-and-no-shirts-pushing-their-lawnmowers. Swimming pools. Noise and boredom. / She doubts. / There is nothing to do there. / Annoyed, she walks back in. She puts the blinds down. She leaves. /

She walks across the fields towards the next development. In between highway crossings and billboards. Along fences and weeds. In her tight, short, armless red dress – upswept hair and tiny handbag – she walks on the edge of the asphalt jungle through to the access platforms of the commuter trains. She opens an orange door leading to the parking ramp instead. She walks out and up the ramp. It's empty. / Leftover, infrastructural space. A grey, hard, non-place. / She-is-walking. / Straight, over the island separating both lanes of the ramp, and up to the top. Lamp posts, parking lines, and a perimeter parapet. The parking is also empty. She walks on. A distant engine roars. Screeching wheels. Suddenly a car seems to be approaching quickly. The roar is now with her, coming from behind. She is scared. The car drives very close to her, fast, accelerating, breaking, sliding. Turning. Stressed, she walks on. Forced to shift her trajectory, the car almost hitting her. / It's him of course. / He continues to drive acrobatically and loudly around her. She seems to be annoyed and frightened. / She walks towards the edge of the parking. He drives past and stops ahead of her. The copilot door opens for her. She walks away. He accelerates the engine while standing. She stops and turns. She walks towards the open door and gets in. They take off. He smiles. She doesn't. No words. High paced music in the car as they speed-drive through the suburbs. / You look good today. / He says. //

Someone feels trapped. // *It is like a double trap. Enclosed in walled up gardens trying to block off all signs of human expression, avoiding the slightest possibility of encounter with the neighbors. Enclosed in supermarkets, clubs, cars, or suburban apartments. And then through the film, also, locked into yet*





Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
1h30'03"/1h11'59"/1h12'02"

another closed space, forced into a reduced frame of vision that keeps us trapped in the environments of the characters, almost as if in their minds. // These characters, which in some cases are not actors but 'real' people, seem to be all searching for a place, or a non-place, to which they dream of escaping. They feel like escaping what is happening to them, a reality that is certainly not what they wanted. And in their blind, hasty fleeing, they disappear, falling even deeper into their own capsules, further and further away from communication. // Are we moving towards a society in which people are more and more afraid of each other? What comes first, capsular architecture or capsular minds? // This is obviously not 'just' an architectural and/or urban problem, we are talking about a malaise of much greater proportions. We are taught to be prepared, to be ready, to fear, to distrust. We are taught to become isolated, fearful individuals. We are pushed into all kinds of spatial, physical and mental capsules. // I can recognize these capsular environments and these houses-like-capsules. All possible openings are hermetically closed: doors, terraces, windows, views, common spaces... even when the weather allows. Streets are frightening. Devoid of walking people, smiling people, other people, they look as if decorated for a theater play. Recreations of cities more than actual urban places. Fake, empty samples of suburban life. //



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
1h08'04"/1h08'10"/1h08'16"
1h08'51"/1h08'58"/1h09'00"

And yet, the film is like a big opening. An offering to take part in the spaces of reflection that unfold, heavily, in front of our eyes. An invitation to think together. And to care. Again. // *What are we turning into? We all need capsules, places where we can be on our own for a while, for a moment, but do we need them as our way of life, as our constant, mediating location from which to relate to the rest of the world?* // The patterns of spatial organization that we are offered and that we choose to embrace or accept, and our fears – our constant fear – are at the root of our disease. “[The] loss of consciousness and affect, induced by cognitive and affective saturation, which constitutes the appalling reality of spiritual misery, at the very moment when the planet must confront and resolve so many difficulties, is what characterizes the lost spirit of capitalism. Today there are disaffected people just as there are industrial wastelands. Such is the daunting question of the industrial ecology of the spirit. And such is the enormous challenge that befalls us.” (Stiegler, 2013:90)

But someone else seems to be upset. She leaves the room while the film is still playing. She is disgusted, probably disturbed. I noticed she was listening carefully before. She is obviously sensitive. But what happened? She writes reflectively. // *Has there ever been a time in which capsules didn't exist? Isn't this an issue that goes back to the origins of civilization? To the first cities and their zones? Land classification systems, social groups, associations, more zones, capsules and more capsules. Delimitations of the territory. Circles and societies within society. We are relentlessly closing in on ourselves more and more.* // Lately, things seem to be getting worse, faster. Capsularization is getting extreme. Beyond the physical and architectural dimensions, it reaches all the way to our thoughts, affects and minds. Down or in-to the realm of the noetic. It is not anymore the room that is a capsule in which relations, experiences and communications are enclosed, but our feelings and thoughts that lock us in. And while we are capable of sharing a house with someone else we detest, or our bodies with strangers, or a car with an unknown hitchhiker, we lose control when someone dares to invade the space marked by our emotions, fears, insecurities or doubts. // *I have been thinking about this too, and I don't think it's always been like this, these neighborhoods are now all around us, we choose to live in them unaware of their absurdity. There are so many gated communities, urbanization and cities out there.* // The film is offering us only a glimpse of what happens. *For us to think.* We are all longing to escape, to disappear. We just don't know how to, but we try, desperately. And we fail. We-are-sick.



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
13'42"/14'42"/14'50"
15'04"/15'08"/15'19"

/ It is a relatively dark room. The wallpaper shows images of tropical beaches, blue skies and palm trees. One of the walls is covered by what appears to be a section of the sea. A killer whale is emerging from the water and many other smaller, colorful fish are swimming around. A big heart shaped crown of red, soft lights is hanging on the wall, superimposed to the beach. These red bulbs are the only source of illumination. / On the floor, lying or kneeling, a numerous group of people are having sex. There are couples, trios, and larger groups. They almost don't fit in the room. We can hear the moaning and panting, although the atmosphere is strangely calm and heavy. Too silent and lacking passion, the bodies move mechanically as if robots or androids. / A sudden cut takes us to another room. Reflections indicate we are behind a glass, it's very dark but we see a couple on a bed in a room on the other side of the glass. The camera pans through the dark room and we are confronted with another glass window. Now it is a trio. Two persons stand in the dark room. Against the windows. Watching. Through a third window, we see now a middle aged woman with sunglasses on. She rides a man that is lying on the floor, with her back to his face; and while she holds the legs of another man that is standing close to her, he masturbates on her face. / After a third cut, we see now the same woman in a locker room. Alone. She takes her clothes out of the locker, puts them on and grabs her bag. She leaves. She pushes a door open and exits into what looks like a basement parking. Arrows are painted on the grey floor. She walks up to a red metallic door. She opens it and she enters the space of what appears to be a shopping mall. She hesitates briefly as she walks into the mall, she looks sideways, and finally walks leftwards in the corridor along the shops. In between people, she moves on. /

// We are obsessed by safety and security. We protect things. But there is no care left for life. The orgy is an extreme example. One would say that it requires each participant to trust each other in order to be open and feel comfortable. But then the woman gets changed in isolation in an impersonal locker room, showing how the event was devoid of any real connection between those taking part. //

The film is also an invitation to think about other things: it made me think about schools of architecture and the way in which they also work like capsules, not really participating in the world they are supposed to engage with and transform, but turning instead towards themselves and their autonomous



practices and discourses. How absurd! Architecture depends on so many things. // *The stories in the film are about things that might happen once in a while, here and there, behind closed doors. Nobody knows how often of course, but, surely, even if this is a part of reality, it must be a small part. It's an exaggeration.* // I don't think it's an exaggeration. Someone else said. This is a movie that explores limits. The limits of human existence, the limits of society, the limits of our feelings, the limits of space. A collection of people – definitely not a community – reaching their limits. And the film forces us to explore ours too. Antisocial behavior, violence, seclusion, loneliness, addiction, alienation... all presented in a magnificently crude way. This is a movie about attempts and failures to communicate.

// Although I'm sure the things that happen in the movie are not happening to any of us, it is still true that we seem to live more and more in individual bubbles (the car, the house-garden, the supermarket, the office, etc...) and we are only connected through consumption. When the old man in the movie chooses to hear the roar of his lawnmower instead of having to listen to his neighbors, one realizes that we are all progressively becoming that person. // How can you be so sure that these things are not happening to any of us? How much do you know about all of us? It is easy to question whether what the film shows is really the life of people in the suburbs of Vienna. But if you think a bit more you soon start asking yourself whether the life in the suburbs is so different from the life in the city? Is the life of these Austrians so different from lives in other places? Is the movie so different from our own lives?

We see what we want to see, even in ourselves. Glossy magazines and Hollywood stories make a lot of people feel good, because even if they are far from our own reality, it feels familiar in its correspondence with the masks we wear and the expectations we have. When we see our own, true, personal selves and behaviors, when we encounter true humanity – at a distance or close – we cannot even recognize it. We see it as odd. As we were discussing this movie, many talked about the characters in the film as 'odd' and about their behavior as somewhat 'disturbed'. // *Maybe we are all odd and disturbed, but there is something about the people in Seidl's movie that seems quite... human.* // Anyone who is trying to fit perfectly into the frame of the flawless, well-adjusted human being will fail in one sense or another. The difference between the ones we call 'normal' and the ones we refer to as 'odd' is usually the fact that the first hide their disorders and the second choose or dare to display them. The outsider is not the one who sometimes behaves strange, but the one who exposes this behavior. Rather than showing disturbed people, what Seidl is trying to show us is how disturbed our situation has become.



Hundstage - Ulrich Seidl (2001)
Film stills from left to right:
1h39'05"/1h39'10"/1h39'44"
1h39'47"/1h39'54"/1h40'03"

“Control societies [...] are not sustainable. If humanity is today subjected to a miserable symbolic condition, which places humans beings into a situation of voluntary servitude where they are demeaned by the reign of stupidity [...] then this symbolic poverty leads to a spiritual poverty that itself leads to the reign of destructive drives – to extreme social tensions, to the most varied and most disturbing transgressions, to terrorism, and tomorrow to war and perhaps, firstly, to civil war, that is, to the destruction of control societies themselves.” (Stiegler, 2013:11)

Anna the hitchhiker seems to be the only one daring to meet the world without a shield, equipped with her handbag and a cassette she dares to explore and break into the capsules of others, defying social conventions in search for authentic, direct communication. She is actually exposing the illusion of the bubble. She brings the outside in. She asks uncomfortable and inappropriate questions, she talks out, she breaks in. She puts her head out through the car window to feel the air on her face. She is able to reach in. She wants to interact, to share, but the world is not ready for her. The world does not tolerate her openness. Naked, unaccepted openness turns into extreme vulnerability. And in the end, she is brutally punished. Still, her lively persistence prevails. Re-sis-tance. A glimpse of hope fades in.

“As always with my films, you set out on a journey into the unknown, into unknown places and people. [...] You plunge into reality. [But] for me it’s never about illustrating that reality; I instead want to discover my own view of the reality I find. [...] With my cinematographic gaze I try to approach my protagonists and to gather filmic fragments of reality, none of which is complete or definitive.” (Seidl, 2014:113)

/ A hitchhiker suffers. She can’t stop talking, she talks all the time, she talks in and out. She encroaches into people’s spheres and violates their stupid norms and conventions. She is raped. She appears different; she doesn’t speak the same ‘language’. She is constantly misunderstood, unwanted, judged and excluded. And yet, she is the most skilled for communication, she knows how to explore and adapt. She inhabits life. At a given point, she discovers she can even ‘talk’ with the streetlights. And then the rain comes. A couple swinging in silence. Glimpses of awareness. Distance. Pain. It rains, finally. It rains. //

delaying the image: towards an aesthetics of encounter

Disjuncture/Difference/Exclusion

Hate



Disjuncture/Difference/Exclusion

Hate

*"[T]o differ from oneself or to be absolutely different is also, indeed, to differ from any difference that has been ascribed to the singular by narratives of domination and objectification. It means not to be identified with the marks of difference: 'colour', 'character', 'heredity', 'dispositions'."*¹

*"The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights."*²

/ After a walk through the neighborhood and various encounters, Saïd and Vinz follow Hubert up the stairs of an empty building and onto the roof. As they exit through the final trap door, they can hear the music and the voices. / Graffiti on the walls, boxes, car wheels and other things lie around and along the pipes and chimneys of the building. / Lots of people are already there. / They hang out in small groups. A guy is selling sausages, and we can see the distant hills in the background. / They all know each other. / It's 'Hubert's building' so he can get a hot-dog for free. / Saïd runs away after stealing a sausage, and his older brother takes care of the situation. / A helicopter hovers above their heads. But the music goes on. / Saïd sits among others on reclaimed car-seats, sliding and slapping hands with everyone. / Beer cans, and cigarettes. / Someone is asking for a couple of francs in the background and some teenagers share some coins with him. / Saïd wants to know more about the conversation. A cop has lost his gun during the riots. / *I don't know the pig who lost his piece. / But I'd like to know who found it. / No joke!!* / They laugh. / Suddenly the kids start shouting. / They look down to the square where the major is walking in with other authorities. / Kids shout at them and throw

Fig. 63/
Chanteloup-les-Vignes. (www.yannarthusbertrand2.org)

¹ Balibar, Etienne (2005), 'Difference, Otherness, Exclusion', *Parallax*, 11, (no. 1), pp. 26

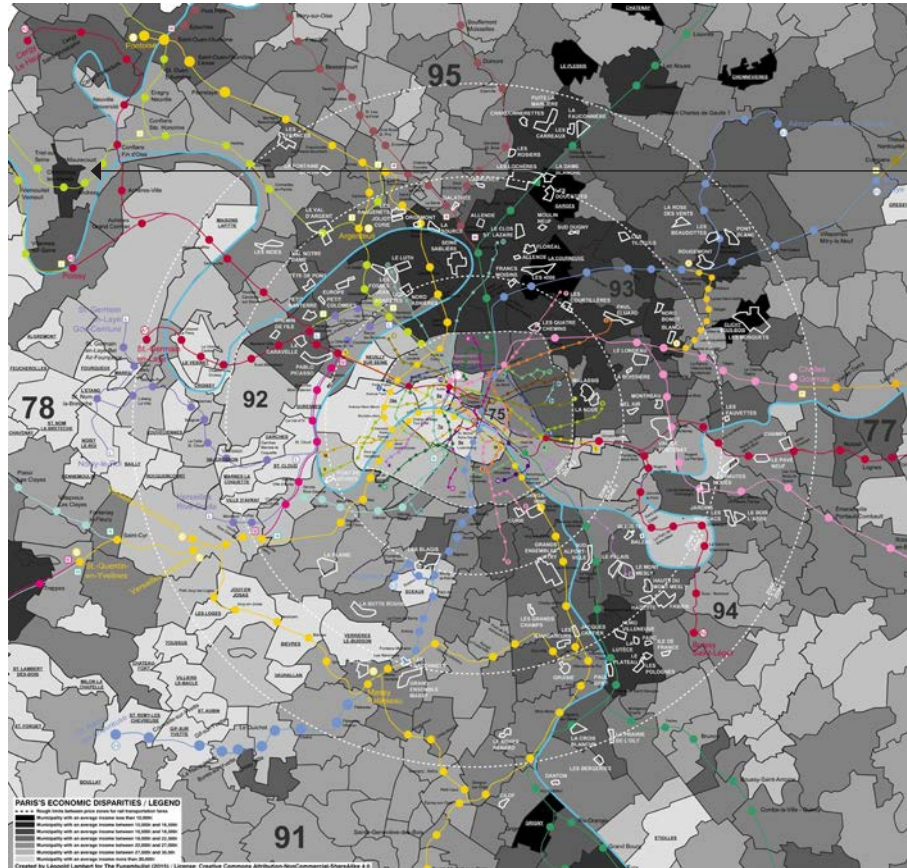
² Harvey, David (2008), 'The Right to the City', *New Left Review*, (53), pp. 23.



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
14'56"/14'58"/15'11"
15'47"/15'58"/17'21"



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
17'44"/17'45"/17'46"
17'48"/17'58"/18'02"



Chanteloup-les-Vignes (Paris)

Average yearly income:
between 10.000€ and 16.500€

Fig. 64/
Paris Economic Disparities Map
Leopold Lambert for The Funambulist
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La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
18'06"/18'14"/18'22"

³ HLM (Habitation à loyer modéré), a system of rent-controlled housing in France, created in 1950 as a response to the post-war housing crisis. Mostly consisting of high-rise tower blocks, and long wall-blocks, of the lowest standard in France. There are approximately four million residences of this kind in France.

stones, and almost simultaneously, policemen arrive in the roof. / *Cut the stereo! Who's in charge here? / Do you think you are in Disneyland? You must go down now. You are not allowed here. / Faces of surprise and disgust, the youth are only hanging around, eating, drinking, talking, 'zoning'. / The tension grows. / The police insists in the provocation and the locals get nervous. / We are not causing any trouble. / Still, you must go down now. / Nordeen, an influential, slightly older guy, takes control. / Who's gonna force us down? Your goons or you in your little uniform? / Pushes. / The youth, outnumbering the police by many, aggressively shout them out of the roof. / The party must go on. / It's just 12:43, and the clock is ticking. /*

La Noë – the *banlieue* in which the film 'La Haine' takes place – was built in 1972 as an experiment, and it consists of smaller, curved buildings and carefully designed urban spaces. It was conceived by their designers and planners as an alternative to the brutal linearity of the grand ensembles typical of the HLM³ developments. Nevertheless, the development resulted in a rapid increase of the population of the municipality in which it was sited, Chanteloup-les-Vignes, which passed in just a few years from 2.000 to 10.000 inhabitants. The development took place at a distance from the old village, and no plans were made as to how to connect it with the new areas. Instead, in line with the sociological ideologies of the time, educational symbols were integrated in the urban spaces of the area: in a new



Fig. 65/
La place de la Coquille, (Chanteloup-les-
Vignes). Partially destroyed today, it was
defined by the gable walls of six buildings
decorated with the portraits of the great
French poets of the 19th century. (Image:
© Région Île-de-France, L. Kruszyk, 2006,
ADAGP)



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
 Film stills from left to right:
 26'23"/24'05"/25'34"
 'the future is us'
 'the city is all of us'

square (la place de la Coquille) defined by the headings of six of the buildings, murals of the great poets of French literature were printed in the ending facades of the buildings, which form a circle around the square. “A gesture typical of the laudable intention but spectacular miscalculation of this kind of urban design: why should the people of Chanteloup-les-Vignes not enjoy the symbols of great literature?” (Vincendeau, 2005:112). The portraits of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Hugo, Mallarmé, De Nerval and Valéry are almost insulting.

The French word *banlieue* appeared around the 12th- 13th century and designated the space outside the limits of a town that was nevertheless still under the jurisdiction and control (ban) of the town’s powers and lords. It has now become the term used to refer to most of the suburbs outside the central areas of French cities, and particularly in Paris, those areas between the 20 *arrondissements* and the outer edge of its metropolitan conurbation. Today, Chanteloup-les-Vignes is a predominantly black African suburb, and the ‘*banlieues*’ have become more and more important in France as material, spatial and racial enclaves and markers of political and economic crisis, social fragmentation, crime, violence and conflict.

However, in spite of the manipulated and false representations of the *banlieues* massively spread by the media, and in spite of their territorial disconnection and socio-political isolation, some of these suburban enclaves are sites of intense and lively coexistence, cultural fusion, and political imagination.



From left to right:
Fig. 66/ ZAC de la Noé, 1976. (© Région
Île-de-France, L. Kruszyk, 2008, ADAGP)

Fig. 67/ Renovation of 151 apartments
at Chanteloup-les-Vignes, by Claire
Doré&Jean-Paul Scalabre, 2013.

'La Haine' was born as a filmic project in 1993 when Mathieu Kassovitz started writing inspired by the killing of Makome M'Bowole, a 17-year old Zairian that was shot 'by accident', while handcuffed to a radiator under police custody. The title of the project was initially 'Droit de Cité' (rights of citizenship), already informing of a concern with the situation and lives of immigrants and an intended focus on the suburban condition and the difficulties of life in the outskirts for many. Kassovitz's interest in the problem(s) of 'the right to the city' in combination with his background, engagement and sensitivity led to the production of an open, caring film, which allows us to encounter and think through the intensely lived spaces of the banlieue and its inhabitants.

Lived space is the space that emerges the moment it is operated. The space in which lives take place and are inscribed. The space in which ordinary 'practitioners' of the city operate, making use of spaces that cannot be seen, "*their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms*". (De Certeau, 1984: 93)

For De Certeau, these practices refer to specific ways of operating, characteristic of the city, a myriad of interactions happening 'down' there, at street level, in spaces that are not designed but emerge out of re-appropriation. These swarming practices that the town planning system was supposed to manage and/or suppress through functionalist organization, on its way to disciplinary space, tend to "*reinforce themselves in a proliferating illegitimacy, and combined in accord with unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constituting everyday regulations and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by the frantic mechanisms and discourses of the observational organization.*" (De Certeau, 1984: 96)

According to De Certeau, the city stages an endless, constant and silent battle between the apparatuses of disciplinary space, responsible for the structuring of social life, and the various individual and collective modes of re-appropriation, multiple and "*multiform, resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline without being outside the field in which it is exercised.*" (De Certeau, 1984: 96) These tactics and practices of re-appropriation open up the way to another city, to another space, a space away from the clear text of the planned, readable or visible city. A space where another, invisible city lies.

Such an 'invisible' city belongs to the realm of lived space. Life, the actual practices and relations taking place, the people inhabiting space, enact a multiplicity of other spaces that provide the locus for other



desires, needs, ideas, transitions, becomings, changes, actions and processes that would not find their place otherwise: a somewhat invisible but fully lived space.

Rather than the possibility of sheltering closed and static resistance, the most important characteristic of these ‘other’ liminal spaces is their potential to be used and re-appropriated and, away from control, be articulated through the spontaneous (or carefully staged) actions of different groups and individuals, with diverse aims that escape those of the hegemonic order. Most importantly, they often have unexpected, and thus difficult-to control, effects and results. Such spaces are spaces of encounter; and can be also seen as spaces of collaboration, spaces in which individuals and groups meet and perhaps discover hidden potentials and values of not only space itself, but also of their own situated knowledge and differences.

Hanging out in the roofs of HLM buildings and around ‘*espaces marchands*’ (covered commercial areas that are empty in non-market days), eating, drinking, listening to music, ‘zoning’ together, the inhabitants of the *banlieue* whose stories Kassovitz records in ‘La Haine’, are enacting just such spaces, inventing and operating, as they go, tactical and performative modes in which to appropriate and inhabit the spaces and times of their lives.

Above the level of the street, the roofs are temporarily outside the domain of police control and surveillance and are therefore a perfect location to meet and feel free, to invent a time and a form of life.

“[A]s second and third generation offspring of immigrant families, the youths whose struggles are featured in ‘banlieue’ films are especially adept at maximizing the possibilities presented by the urban topography. [...] The characters are, in fact, capable of escaping and/or subverting control (even if only temporarily) – of finding spaces within the city which are, so to speak, ‘hors-carton’ (outside the box).” (Fielder, 2001:276)

/ Riots and police brutality. / The vehicles are prepared for war. Policemen readied. / Stones flying. / Placards, and people dancing in the streets. / Fire. / The media present their story. / The TV footage is suddenly turned off. / Brutally, the image sinks with a click into the blackness of the cinematic screen. / It’s 10:38. / We meet Saïd. And the police. / Marley vibes in the background. / Fuck-the-police. /

Opposite page :
La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film still: 1h08’29”



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film still: 14'19"



/ A dialogue takes place in the square. / Saïd shouts from the street level towards the open window of Vinz's apartment. / On the fifth floor. / He asks his sister to wake him up and come out. / Other neighbors are bothered by the shouting and speak out. / There seems to be a familiarity, which is simultaneously violent and friendly. / They kind of know each other, and they don't hide anything. They say what they think. / Saïd goes up. / Vinz sleeps. / He is dreaming. / He dances his past of ballet and circus out. Jewish folk sounds. / He saw a cow. / *Are you talking to me mothafucka?* / Mirror gun games. / The city dreams. / The *banlieue* exists. /

// Capitalism and globalization have paved the way for a blissful dismissal of the social needs of those who don't have the chance to pay. Societal trends, the deadly flows of modernity, debt and accumulation, push them away. // Together with urbanization, 'anti-urbanization' emerges for those who can't afford the first model of city. These are the spaces of exclusion, places which are not understood as a part of our cities. // The film shows a fragment of another life, through the workings of three young

La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
1h27'20"/1h27'29"/1h27'34"



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
13'00"/13'13"/13'25"
13'33"/14'03"/14'37"

inhabitants of a Parisian *banlieue*, and their efforts to deal with the everyday problems caused by a society that marginalizes and denies all opportunities. // The relationship between these youngsters and their surroundings could be seen as one built up on love and hate: on the one hand, the place is *their* place, the place where they grew up, the place in which they fit, where their families and securities and affinities are located; but on the other hand, the site is the very symbol of violence, conflict and the lack of hope they are suffering from. // They try to escape to a city that has everything they think they are longing for. But that same city is the city that excludes them, brutally pushing them away. // Is the only way to deal with such frustration and numbing sense of impotence to resort to violence? // They always talk about these places as violent suburbs, but what is violence really? What are they talking about when they use these words? // *“Take up arms. Do everything possible to make their use unnecessary. Against the army, the only victory is political.”*(Invisible Committee, 2009:128) // I grew up in Paris, and I was very deeply touched by the ‘La Haine’. I recognize the situations, the language, the behaviors showed in the ‘Cité’ as very realistic and not at all exaggerated. I appreciate that the film shows how those spaces also enable inventiveness, creativity and community. And I realized while watching that although we grew up in different neighborhoods, there is a cultural common ground that is shared by all young population in Paris, and that is why I could laugh. I am familiar with the way of speaking and the jokes they make. The end was thus terrible for me: why, if we are able to understand each other and live together, is their fate so different from mine? // What is to be done in order to destroy the invisible barrier(s) separating us? // Then, when cultures start to merge in a globalized, more and more homogenous world, we think and talk about integration, but who integrates to what exactly? // How could we agree on what is the culture we are supposed to belong to? // Exclusion and segregation. The neighborhood shown is an active place, a location of strong bonds, meaningful exchanges, true affinities. It is the force of exclusion that turns these bonds into the traits of an outsider’s identity. And outsider within the city. // But what is the city then? What makes the city inside and the outskirts outside different? Who draws the line? Is there ever an outside? //

- - -

Many of the reviews, criticism and debate that the film caused at the time of its release – and continues to trigger today – have located ‘La Haine’ within a sub-genre or at least a category of films that has been referred to as ‘banlieue-film’. This has led to automatic and, I believe, too quick assumptions regarding



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
45'50"/45'58"/46'01"
40'05"/40'06"/40'14"

the intentions of the film and to various interpretations and readings that I find excessively prejudiced. In this respect, 'La Haine' has been unjustly accused of doing just as many other films had done until then or have been doing later: reducing the *banlieue* to the *cit *, focusing exclusively on groups of young men, amplifying the contrast between the city and the banlieue through stereotypes, or offering an extremely run-down image of the spaces and lives of the *banlieue*. In my view, the film offers a much more complex, carefully measured, and open account of what happens in the *banlieue* and it does so through sophisticated narrative devices and tools which are based on the articulation of a space of encounter between the film, its excellent cast and the audience.

Rather than simply repeating the well-known formula that opposes the city to the *banlieue* in a brutal black/white dichotomy, Kassovitz clearly and carefully presents the real problem: the distance and lack of physical (infrastructural) connection between the *banlieue* and the rest of Paris (or the world for that matter), its isolation. The journey is shown, the distance is a real distance, it takes time to get from the *banlieue* to the city, and in the train, Vinz, Saïd and Hubert think. They imagine things; they look out through the windows and let us see what that distance looks like.

Even in situations in which several characters are closely involved in the actions of a scene, Kassovitz tends to offer us the chance to 'meet' and join or follow one of them separately, as they seem to have chosen to distance themselves from the situation, to 'think' or to imagine something else. This is normally a door into an encounter with the thinking of the film, which tends then to happen simultaneously at various levels.

/It's 18:22. Vinz, Hubert and Saïd transition to the center of Paris. While they sit on the train moving, a billboard sign reads '*Le monde est   vous*'. / The three of them are now there. / Locked outside. / '*Le monde est   vous*' turns '*Le monde est   Nous*' under Saïd's verbal agility. / Is language their only weapon? / I don't know. / My mind is playing tricks on me. / / I feel like an ant lost in intergalactic space. /

In a similarly careful approach, Kassovitz shows us several layers of the life in the *banlieue*, obviously centered in and around the three main characters and their vicissitudes, but also including their interactions with neighbors, friends, colleagues and relatives. In these interplays, the film manages to convey





La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
49'48"/49'53"/50'11"

Opposite page:
La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film still: 48'29"

an atmosphere of extended familiarity, affinity and kin, which challenges the usual bleak and dystopian accounts: in spite of the difficulties, the inhabitants of the *banlieue* coexist intensely with each other; they know each other; they help each other; they have disagreements; they talk, they eat together, they visit each other and are known by their respective families. They know many people in their neighborhood by their name and in connection to other people and friends. The *banlieue* is not just simply the cite, the set of high rise buildings and their staircases or basements, but a complex set of activities, relationships, encounters and dis-encounters among its inhabitants.

Distance. Isolation. Exclusion. There is a specific isolated connotation of the French *banlieue*, different from the Anglo-American suburbs, and its specific Parisian dimension, determined by the concentric structure of the city and the threshold condition of the ring highway (*périphérique*), which enacts a sharp distinction between the city of Paris and its surrounding enclaves.

The distance: Chanteloup is not part of the regional network of commuting trains, it is not on the RER (*Réseau Express Régional*), so one has to take a not so frequent train from *Gare Saint-Lazare*, and face a 45 minute ride out of some of the most 'chic' Parisian quarters, and through to the modernist suburbs. On sight: the posh hilly and green suburbs of tennis courts and swimming pools. On arrival, even the suburbs have been left behind. The station stands alone, in complete isolation, atop an empty field.



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
40'23"/40'28"/40'33"
40'53"/41'02"/41'03"

Contradictory discourses surrounding the location of Chanteloup-les-Vignes collide: is it an ordinary place, or a hellish suburb? Kassovitz wanted to know about it from the inside, so he moved there with his entire crew for a few months. “The actors and I lived there in a three-bedroom flat in order to have a minimum of credibility in our own eyes. [...] *We slept there, we spoke to the blokes from the ‘cite’. Things went well during shooting, even though the situation was always ‘on the edge’. Stones were thrown at us, but it was just kids playing. [...] We were there for two months, they were there for life.*” (Kassovitz, 2005:15)

The arrival of Jaques Chirac’s right-wing government and a strong discourse of exclusion, as well as the tidal wave of unrest and riots in various French cities and particularly across the suburbs of Paris in the early 90’s, created an atmosphere in which Kassovitz’s project was complicated, to say the least. Many other riots took place shortly after the release of the film, and the film caused a great deal of controversy and debates.

We can’t deny the problems, which of course have existed and continue to exist in these places, but we should not blame and condemn the idea, the architecture, the organization and the form given to a system of life that enables and encourages coexistence. We should not simplify, we should aim at exploring and understanding the complexities involved in the emergence of conflicts in these areas, and allocate the corresponding responsibilities and failure-shares to the social isolation through distance, the lack of public transportation and connection, the specific siting – literally away from everything – on cheap, flat land, away even from the nearby pre-existing villages; demographic policies amounting to a sort of social apartheid; economic problems; the systematic allocation of ‘problematic’ families to these areas; and an incredibly high proportion of immigrant populations sent to the *cit  *. The problems are not the result of the ‘inherent’ violence, lack of education or clash of cultures, but the logical effects of unbearable pressure, social abandonment, and very serious planning and management mistakes. Undoubtedly, also, some of these decisions have been co-determined by a degree of racist foundations in a number of the responsible decision-makers.

In spite of the numerous evidence of an increased hybridity and the coexistence of ethnically mixed groups of young people in the suburbs, it is not possible to deny the existence of racism in those areas. Racism was and continues to be an important issue in France, and Kassovitz was obviously interested in



La Haine - Mathieu Kassovitz (1995)
Film stills from left to right:
41'57"/41'17"/41'26"
41'33"/41'40"/41'55"

addressing this problem in relationship with the exclusion of the people inhabiting the *banlieues* when he decided to start working on 'La Haine'. And he wanted to do so while depicting ethnic difference in its complexity, incorporating also the dynamic interactions between the characters and their environment. "Kassovitz insistence on Jewishness counters the reductive view of a 'white republican frenchness' that would be monolithically opposed to immigrants of African origins." (Vincendeau, 2005:31)

/ While everyone is playing or hanging out in the square, a DJ opens the windows of his apartment and moves the speakers outwards. / He is getting ready for a mixing session with H-Magnum's 'Police' and Edith Piaf's 'Non, je ne regrette rien'. / The vibes and beats fill the square and travel through the air over the heads of kids playing and people walking. / The music goes on. It moves on. As if flying through the banlieue. / And we fly along. / *He's intense*. / And Vinz sees the cow again. /

Besides the conflictual, violent and tragic aspects of life in the banlieue, Kassovitz felt the need to integrate in the film other aspects of every day life, a powerful space for reflection and poetry – sometimes hosting important oneiric and surreal moments throughout the film – and a heavily constructed, aesthetic and fictional dimension that renders the film much more effective as a site of encounter.

The three protagonists are constantly on the move as if in a road movie, going from encounter to encounter. Social interaction takes place in the street, on the roof, everywhere. In order to inhabit the *banlieue*, one must interact with others and establish alliances and bonds. One must know who is who. One must be known.

A clock appears every now and then, in-between scenes, marking transitions between situations and introducing a sense of urgency. Time goes by. As a fictional structuring device, it supports the movement of the three main characters throughout the day and the night, in the city and in the *banlieue*, and

it signals the inescapable exhaustion of their day – their Icarian fall – and their lives, as if foretelling the final, tragic landing.

The gun, that appears physically and always at the center of the screen, but also discursively in the stories shared and told, and goes along with the actions and events, constitutes perhaps the strongest symbolic apparatus of the film, but its significance remains open to inquiries and interpretations that make the film richer and friendlier.

The stories, and the very act of telling, are constantly present throughout the film in various forms, they can be understood as sites of encounter and markers of the importance of the process, emphasizing the ambiguity and refusal to define, give final answers or judge. Although it is possible to see the film as an inescapable loop of violence and exclusion that could be reduced to the final five seconds in which the tragedy of this violence is enacted – there is no escape, even if you surrender your weapon, you are deadily caught in the loop of exclusion and violence – it can be experienced also as the sharing of a collection of stories, the film itself is an act of telling, as the time necessary for those stories to be told and shared, an encounter that enables a telling-in-duration.

“The film’s interest lies more with a collective, social and symbolic violence than with individual, bloody infighting.” (Vincendeau, 2005:74) Actual violence is in fact mostly alluded to and filtered through self-reflective representation. ‘La Haine’ has been the object of various and confronted interpretations and readings, mostly aiming at revealing its supposedly ‘closed’ or predefined meaning. It is a wrong, failing enterprise to try to elucidate what is the fixed truth or message that the film would supposedly aim to deliver, for the film is in this case an encounter, and as such, open to becoming many things, taking unexpected turns and various paths of meaning. We should stop trying to disclose what a film ‘means’ or ‘is’, and embrace the encounter it offers, choose to inhabit its openness, to think with it and through it, and contribute to its narrative power and its unexplored potential.

‘La Haine’ offers the chance to think about the life of the people living in Chanteloup-les-Vignes, the people living in the suburbs, and their exclusion, about France, society, friendship, violence, hate, and music. I don’t agree with certain criticism that has accused the film of lacking social depth. The film

does not try to provide a clear and distinct description of anything, but an opportunity to think and to feel. The depth is again, on the roof, in the streets, among the break-dancers, with the kids. In the music. And in the stories told. The density of sounds, the rich background of voices, noises and music, testifies for an incredible richness of life. The fluid long takes speak of racism in the suburbs, of violence and exclusion, but also of hip-hop culture, of racial and cultural hybridity, of crossbreeding, generosity and innovation.

/ Hubert hits the boxing bag. The impact of the punches echo in the room. They continue to fill the room and the screen. / The gym has been burnt. Just like the school. / Empty parking lots, as they walk through. They meet and talk to kids here and there. / Everywhere. / They all seem to know each other. / Suddenly they stop to listen. / Saïd wants to guess it's a Yamaha, but Hubert knows that it is Mohammed's bike because he has heard that he just fixed the exhaust. / Yes, Farida's brother. / People greet as they go by in the streets. / It's 12:43 and they sit at the playground. They talk, but suddenly, they are interrupted by some journalists, who are looking for their story about the riots. / Hey guys, where you in the riots last night? Did you break anything? / Excuse me, lady, did we look like looters to you? / This is not Thoiry. /

/ Notre Dame meets Saïd and Vinz again. The policemen come out of the car and hit them. / They get Vinz. / He holds him and aims at him with the gun. He jokes about shooting him. / The gun goes off. / Perhaps accidentally. / But Vinz is now dead. / It's 6:01 / The cop seems surprised. / Hubert aims at the cop's head. The cop aims back. / We hear a shot. / Out of field. / And the clock is still ticking. /

⁴ The story with which the film started and Hubert has told differently in various moments, it's now changed again to speak about a society that disintegrates: "It's about a society falling. On the way down it keeps telling itself: so far so good, so far so good, so far, so good... / How you fall doesn't matter. It's how you land!"

*C'est l'histoire d'une société qui tombe
et qui, au fur et mesure de sa chute,
se répète, pour se rassurer:
Jusqu'ici, tout va bien.
Jusqu'ici, tout va bien.
L'important, ce n'est pas la chute...
C'est l'atterrissage.⁴*

delaying the image: towards an aesthetics of encounter

Exiles/Territories
Hope



Exiles/Territories

Hope

*“Cinema - although maybe we thought in the 1960’s it would change the world - will not change the world, because there are more direct instruments to change reality. There are politics, there are machine guns, they act directly on the real world. Cinema is a kind of reflection, a proposal. And it’s a good beginning; we have to start somewhere, to evacuate some of the hatred. So, it is always a kind of proposition, we ask people to give it a thought. And actually, I think the best films are the ones that start when the screening is over, they give us material, they work on our imagination. They provoke us to reinterpret. They are not something that is swallowed and digested instantaneously.”*¹

*“The élan that draws humans toward islands extends the double movement that produces islands in themselves. Dreaming of islands – whether with joy or in fear, it doesn’t matter – is dreaming of pulling away, of being already separate, far from any continent, of being lost and alone – or it is dreaming of starting from scratch, recreating, beginning anew.”*²

Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film still: 00’22”

¹ Gitai, Amos (2007), *Conversation with Peter Cowie*, (Berlin: European Film Festival).

² Deleuze, Gilles (2002), *Desert Island and other texts*, Los Angeles; New York: Semiotext(e), MIT Press.

/ A beautiful and powerfully plucked guitar sounds over a black screen that fades into the busy streets of Tel Aviv. / It’s dawn, seen from inside a car. / The sun starts shining as a guy crosses the street in front of the car. / More cars, lights, signs of activity, dust. / The voice of Avida Avidan breaks in, literally making our skin vibrate to the crude and melancholic power



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
01'59"/02'00"/02'02"

of 'Pri Ganech', a traditional Hebrew song that cries the loss of a son who never came back. / As the car continues its movement through the city, Amos Gitai, the director, speaks over and reads the opening titles listing the cast: "*Yael Abecassis, Uri Klauzner, Hanna Laslo, Ronit Elkabetz, Lupo Berkowitch, Amos Lavie, Liron Levo, Yosef Carmon, Amit Mestechkin, Lyn Hsiao Zmir in Alila, based on the novel by Yehoshua Kenaz 'Returning Lost Loves'.*" / Other voices get in the car from the street here and there, it is early, but the city thrives in movements. / Ezra, at the wheel, progresses slowly, and looks sideways to his son, who sits by him in the front. / He is taking him to the military service. / There are cars and vans everywhere, incorrectly parked. Open doors, lights, horn sounds, reflections. / The take delivers a sharp image of the inside of the car, while the view through the windscreen is blurred, providing a colorful, messy background. / They talk, and the doubts about the future and about the army surface. Again. / A lady is in the middle of the road. / The bus station seems to be the right place to look for Chinese workers. / When the camera pans, after taking a turn, the sounds of a commercial street and other music break into the atmosphere of the car. We look now sideways into the small shops and their clumsy chaos. Sounds mix and interfere, superimposed to the initial song, which is still present underneath. / We return to the car and to the conversation. / Ezra seems to be proud of his son. Eyali is confused and doubtful. / After another turn, it's now a street of nightclubs, red lights and other sounds. / Eyali questions the idea of being part of a combat unit. / *One day you will understand. [...] You will be abroad, somewhere, having fun. And you will miss these streets, these smells, this mess. / It's our country.* / Ezra finds his Chinese workers and takes them in the car, while Eyali leaves suddenly. / The director's voice comes back in, to remind us that the screenplay is by Marie-José Sanselme and him, Amos Gitai. / *The photography by Renato Berta. The editing by Kobi Netanel and Monica Coleman. The sound by Daniel Ollivier, Alex Claude and Gerard Lamps. Casting by Ilan Moskovitch. Line producer, Shuki Friedman. Costumes Laura Shein. Continuity, Sar Amir. Set design, Miguel Markin. Production by Laurent Truchot and Michael Tapuach. Producer Michel Propper. And the direction by me, Amos Gitai. Have a nice screening. See you. / /* While we see the sharp faces of the Chinese workers, bunched up in the van, two or three flickering, bright and colorful circles of light appear in the background. Blurred. / The music in the car is now some Chinese pop. / It's a single long take. The first sequence shot of forty. /





Fig. 68/
Map of Gaza strip and surrounding territories by Leopold Lambert, for The Funambulist, 2014
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Opposite page:
Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film still: 12'12"

Coming out of a period around the beginning of the year 2000 in which the negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis – mediated by the Clinton administration – were feeding hopes for a better, calmer future in the area, the arrival of Bush, the explosion of the Second Intifada in September 2000 and especially the election of Ariel Sharon as the Prime Minister in Israel in January 2001, left a landscape of greater instability and tensions which were at its peak at the time in which Gitai was about to shot 'Alila'. *"I am just an architect and I never studied film. I think the particular circumstances of this part of the world, the Middle East, pushed me away from the trade of my father who was an architect. The circumstances of the Middle East being always so dramatic, producing a kind of endless conflictual Phaeton by itself, squeezed me in, especially this incidence during the Yom Kippur War. And I decided that I wanted to relate to the experiences I was going through in a more direct way than architecture and that brought me to making films."* (Gitai, 2007)

His relationship to the place in which the film was shot was also special, as he had considered the buildings there at 69 Eylat Street in Tel Aviv as his logistical studio and headquarters since quite a long time, but they were torn down shortly after finishing Alila, and against Gitai's will.





Fig. 69/
Israel's 'separation barrier', deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004, is known as the 'Apartheid Wall' among Palestinians and their supporters. (Photo credit: Activestills.org)

Opposite page:
Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film still: 29'18"

3 See the introduction of the catalogue of a retrospective of Gitai's work by the director of the French cinemateque: Toubiana, Serge (2003) *Exils et Territoires. Le Cinéma d'Amos Gitai*, Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma

"We don't have firm territorial boundaries. Israel has a kind of open border on its eastern front since 1967, and it does not have firm cultural or mental borders; it's a fluid situation. This has a very destabilizing effect." (Gitai, 2001: 56-58)

He has worked for many years engaging in a committed exploration and critique of the conditions of life and conflicts in Israel, proposing sometimes to look at *"the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians through limited, microscopic elements."* (Gitai, 2001) Almost always using large blocks of interrelated pieces of work, he has basically organized his films in triads, investigating the interrelations within groups of films, in relationship with his own understanding of reality as a complex of angles and viewpoints that cannot be simplified or summarized, and in particular, in the case of Israel, approaching the thick complexity of a place constructed as a composite of points and situations.

Gitai seems to embrace cinema as an *'art of immediacy'*³ in order to capture the tensions, the beats and the shocks that shake Israel and the surrounding territories almost as they happen, right on top of the action, but always in combination with the fictional and subjective dimensions of historical research, memories and stories, which enable and inform his work. Consistently producing at least one film per year for the past few decades, Gitai combines this stubborn quickness with ambitious and experimental

aesthetics, based on “*the imaginary inscription of cinema as an element of resistance, as a symbolic counterweight, against the power of the media that contaminates this part of the world with imageries of propaganda*”. (Toubiana, 2004: 18)

Although his films are solid elements that can stand by themselves, they are always simultaneously interconnected and part of larger units, in which other stories are structured and enabled. Territorial traces, memories, geographical strata of such memories are interwoven with a mosaic of on-going events in order to facilitate the possibility of discovering another story: enabling a different history.

“There are no remote spaces on the planet which are enclaves to another existence. Everything is related to each other. This is the material for us filmmakers to work with. This is the reality. This is the fictional material, this is what writers also do, not just filmmakers or visual artists.” (Gitai, 2007)

40 sequence shots. Only long takes. A form – a very specific space, a very specific time and a very specific trajectory – which enables: first, the tight linking of spaces and the dense presentation of the promiscuity and saturated disorder of modern Tel Aviv (and Israel), and second: the encounter of characters and scenes, their intimate, incestuous crossings, and the construction of a fiction that describes the lack of distance, the extreme proximity between people at all times, a difficult density that signals the total invasion of private life.

Gitai is interested in making a cinema that lives and breathes reality in all its human dimensions. A cinema that thinks and offers its thinking for an encounter, on the basis of a questioning of the limits between fiction and documentary, inside and outside, intimate and collective, by awaringly introducing a third position that states cinema’s own subjectivity, and opens up a space for all of us to take and to explore. *“But to engage in the act of thinking [...] clearly does not mean to produce a withdrawn reflection, a meditation far apart from the world. To think is to act, to break with that huge dense cloud obscuring everything. [...] To think is to question the borders, to give them free play, to implicate them and to reorganize them. And among all these borders, the one that separates fiction from documentary is the same one that enables thought and therefore action by means of cinema.”* (Frodon, 2006:172)

Gitai explains how in order to be able to make a film one needs the tension that emerges between a feeling of being attracted by certain elements and situations, and a feeling of wanting to oppose certain other elements and conditions. There is a productive emotion and tension in this conflict. When the ten-



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film still: 15'09''

sion leans towards the side of opposing reality and this becomes the main motivation of a film-making process, Gitai thinks it is necessary to proceed through the construction of a tale or a story, a process that has often allowed him to approach dimensions, groups or individuals from which he was far, expanding his understanding of certain situations. In his particular exploratory and investigative journey through the confines of Israel, its history and the territories on which it is constructed, this approach has allowed him to question the brutality and the impersonal attitude of a State that is keen on resorting to violence and the use of force. “[T]o make films that face head-on the contradictions of the country in which I live, and to approach them with original cinematic forms. That is what makes my films exist, and what allows them, in a way, to make Israeli cinema exist.” (Gitai, 2010:24)

Alila (2003), Promised Land (2004), and Free Zone (2005), constitute another of the trilogies into which Gitai has usually organized his work. In this case, the group – which has been referred to as ‘The Frontier Trilogy’ – sets an extremely ambitious political and filmic agenda, aiming at a critical examination of the state of ‘borders’ in Israel. Yet, instead of directly addressing the geopolitical and historical dimensions from the outset (the 1967 borders of the country, the occupied territories, the settlements, Sharon’s walls, the division of Jerusalem, etc...) Gitai chooses to start by addressing the particular dimen-



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
21'12"/21'13"/21'13"
21'14"/21'15"/21'21"



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
22'49"/22'50"/22'51"
21'14"/22'56"/23'05"

sion of a specific situation – the everyday life in a working class neighbourhood in the south of Tel Aviv very close to Jaffa – in which the question of borders can be approached from the point of view of the experiences of amalgamated coexistence of a number of people who literally run into each other in an relatively chaotic old building. Their over-proximity testifies for the extremely cramped nature of life in Israel and particularly in Tel Aviv, introducing us to the rupture and collapse of the separation between public and private life, which Gitai identifies as an important aspect of the country's dysfunctionality and crisis. The critique of borders is thus initiated by embracing its full complexity: they separate and create distances, enabling also the establishment of individual partial autonomies, which are a fundamental precondition for human interrelations. The nearly total erasure of the limits between public and private life which is at work in the “*incestuous promiscuity*”⁴ presented in *Alila* – characteristic of modern Israel – renders common life ultimately impossible, through a constant and disturbing (violating) penetration of all aspects and cells of private life.

“So many people in such a little space, all encroaching on each other's space, neighbors squabbling for a few square meters, etc. It is all about filming a landscape, but a human landscape. It isn't so much a building or pretty Mediterranean faces I am filming. I am rather filming gestures, attitudes, expressions, the relationship between human beings and an open space. Ezra is a representation of his contradictory environment. Throughout the film, he makes the point why his son should fulfill his military service. But just at the moment he is about to deliver his son to the military, he is confronted with the reality of the country, the real one, not the ideological blah blah, and then he will renounce; finally the recognition of the real will conquer the demagogy.” (Gitai, 2010:25)

This overwhelming and cramped ‘mosaic’, which is obviously related to the bizarre mix of various European and Oriental cultures and traditions that conform the foundations of the state of Israel – and are further complicated today through the arrival of an even more diverse wave of immigrant workers of non-Hebrew origin, is both somehow claustrophobic and emotionally compelling. The chaos, the disorder and the extreme – touching – proximity to others are probably at the root of an incredibly sensuous humanity, perhaps best captured by the Hebrew word ‘balagan’.

Intelligently and freely inspired by Kenaz's novel “*Returning Lost Loves*”, the film confronts us with an array of colourful characters, expanding and conflating some of the original characters of the novel into new, denser personalities capable of communicating and presenting the lively and messy muddle of Tel

⁴ These are the terms used by the director himself in the synopsis and production notes released for the press. See Gitai, Amos (2003), *Alila Press Kit*, Ontario: Mongrel Media.



Aviv, where animosity and conflict seem to constitute the very material of reality. In spite of the saturated tensions, the confrontational atmosphere, and the near disintegration of the private sphere, humanity seems to endure persistently and against fatal odds. It's a very Mediterranean atmosphere of intense affects and loud voices – enhanced by the saturated colors and sophisticated and loaded soundtrack of the film – in which the extremes of city life blend with a mix of origins and temperaments, testifying for the shift to hedonism and materialism, the racial tensions, the displacement in exile and the emptiness of a secular society that derails, and of religious fanatisms that sink in their isolation, while simultaneously presenting the vitality, resilience and moral dilemmas of the people of Tel Aviv and Israel.

/ It's a cramped parking lot with cars all over the place. / The façade in the background is dirty and seriously neglected. / Someone is trying to park a car, but a bike gets in first. / People walk in between the cars constantly. / Ezra's Chinese workers are carrying things up and down towards the building. / Suddenly a guy on a scooter seems to be 'chasing' a lady while trying to talk to her. / Hello!? Why don't you answer? Do you live here? / No. / But you come often. / I have a friend here. / And you do the shopping? / Are you a cop? / No, I'm just chatting. / I'm shopping for a sick friend. I have the key. She's in bed. / Can I help you? / No, thanks. It's not

Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
04'50"/05'12"/05'29"



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
26'28"/26'30"/26'33"
26'35"/26'35"/26'36"



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
26'36"/26'40"/27'15"
27'21"/27'22"/27'59"



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
29'51"/29'53"/29'55"
30'01"/30'06"/30'08"



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
30'13"/30'15"/30'16"
30'18"/30'20"/30'21"

heavy. / She wears a perfectly curated hair-do and dark sunglasses. Somewhat jumpy, she walks in between the cars quickly and vigorously. / She appears both sexy and beautifully fragile, dressed-up in knee-high black boots, a short dress and a loose trench coat. / She carries a bag of groceries in each hand. / She walks almost into the camera, which records a close up of her voice slowing down as she speaks those last words to they guy in the scooter. / Now the camera follows her as she approaches the messy building. / And one of the neighbours, the old grumpy man, is waiting outside. / *Pay your maintenance, lady! The maintenance!* / She doesn't even look at him. / She goes in. / Her name is Gabi. / The camera follows her movement from the outside. As if cutting through the walls, continuing through a room of white walls, until it reaches the corridor through which she is now approaching us again. / It's dark. / *I'll pay you!* She says while walking down a few steps into the inner hall. / Another neighbour opens the door of his flat and steps out just to see her arrive. He is holding a dog in his arms. / Visibly annoyed and edgy, she looks for her keys in her bag while holding the groceries with difficulty. / She looks down. / The neighbour with the dog gets a step closer while hugging his dog. / She finally manages to open the door and rushes in. Leaving the bags on the table, she takes her coat off, throws the keys on the bed and rushes to draw the curtains. / She throws herself on top of the bed. Exhausted. / She sighs in relief. The door is still open. / The phone rings. / Smiling in excitement, she gets up and closes the door while she speaks on the phone. / Again: just one shot. /

There is no peace. We are confronted with a stressful, charged atmosphere, from the start. The air is saturated with the tensions of a conflict that has been there for so long that everything smells of it and carries it inside. / Alila: Hebrew for 'the plot', or 'the story'. / A dislocated society. No air to breathe in, and despair lurking under the surface of everyday life. A mixed, hybrid Israel of Chinese construction workers and Filipino women working as housekeepers. Obsessive and loud lovers shouting, construction work noise, a semi-legal building extension, police and political corruption. And lots of talking. Everybody is talking, loud, and at the same time.

It's Tel Aviv, a chaotic and run-down apartment building in the southern outskirts. It's hot and humid. The sour urbanity of saturation, a world in which the various characters struggle to conquer and inhabit



Fig. 70/
Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Press kit poster fragment

their own bits of space, people can get their neighbours out of their faces, and everyone is trying to survive the constant clashes of their conflicting agendas.

The anxiety of living in a guerrilla war zone for long is also in the air. A city teeming with life. Yet, no prospects of peace. Forty long takes cutting through the saturated and tensioned lives of a bunch of neighbours. The critiques towards the actors' theatrical performance are, in my view, inappropriate and irrelevant. Gitai encourages precisely that kind of approach in every other film, and the encounter takes a place in this case with a country's state of mind.

The multi-layered and complex view of Israel presented by Gitai defies the mythologies of identitarian homogeneity that are at the foundation of certain radical narratives of the construction of the state. Here, at the border between Tel Aviv and Jaffa, the differences are plenty, cultural, religious, racial and otherwise, and the transgression of boundaries, as much as the antsy urban activity, contribute to the creation of possibilities for a multiplicity of interwoven narrative threads, which constitute and structure the *parts-that-make-the plot*, which is the Hebrew meaning of Alila.

Radio reports in the background constantly remind us of possible terrorist attacks and insecurity, per-





Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
 Film stills from left to right:
 1h47'27"/1h47'32"/1h47'52"

Opposite page:
 Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
 Film still: 1h42'28"

haps hinting at the fate of those who are completely absent: the Palestinians. While foreign workers arrive constituting a very real and present, although ignored and marginalized stratum of society, the Palestinians continue to be expelled, also perhaps symbolically from the film, which silently shows their forced exile. The film records as well the disappointment and disillusionment of a generation that cannot anymore fully commit to the defense of the country and its security, progressively shifting focus to themselves and their selfish, individual interests. Some, though, have managed to recover their humanity, and their capacity to doubt, to wait and to embrace life in the open.

Ezra, who is the main, structuring – but also silently calm – character in the film, is a powerful link that ties spaces, situations, plots and people together. And in the end, his own reflective and caring sensitivity allows him to be touched and transformed by the power of the encounter: meeting Gabi redeems his self-esteem – a woman is now again looking at him – and this in turn allows him to re-discover his own humanity and find the path back towards an appreciation and understanding of his son and his doubts about society and the state.

“At the end of the film, in a certain way, [Ezra] sanctions his power. In Israeli terms, that’s really what it’s all about: through his own personal experience, he concludes that preserving humanity is what’s most important and not reacting only according to the State.” (Gitai, 2003:5)





/ Right by the entrance to the building, Ezra and his team are hectically working in the construction of an enclosed patio. Someone is welding the metal bars; someone else is finishing a section of walls made of big cement bricks. In the background, we can see another group working in the preparation of the mortar. / One of the neighbors comes out and asks Ezra to follow him inside. / Again, the camera follows their trajectory uninterrupted, through the walls, and we are now back in the corridor. / She wants him to check the roof. / Several other neighbors are also there in the corridor. / The old man complains about the noise. It is siesta time. / The woman seems to be annoyed. She tells him to go lie down and never get up again. / *They're all against us. What did we do to them?* Asks her husband. / *You are building a house here!* says another one. / *But, where else could we live?* / *You were just supposed to close the parking lot, no?* / *Yes, we'll close one side and open the other. Let me show you.* / And they all move out again. The camera following them. / A discussion takes place. She speaks energetically and quickly, aggressively and vividly. / Ezra moves through to continue his work. / The tone of the conversation shifts, becoming more and more hostile. / Everybody speaks at the same time. / They go back in, exchanging various threats. / One of the neighbors accuses them of building holes all over the neighborhood, to then rent them out as basement apartments as a form of business. / She shouts outraged. / *Business? We will build apartments in every hole! Under the earth, and on the roofs. And we will put 7 foot Arabs in them, and no girl will be able to live here. Is that what you want?* / She shoots words. / And then Gabi arrives. / *Here she comes again! Go on, go on, come on! Don't call me 'treasure',* she shouts, annoyed at Gabi's presence. / Gabi is intimidated and waits, looking around at the workers. / Finally she goes in again. / As she walks through the corridor towards her apartment, we can see the young couple arguing by their door, the Filipino woman playing the piano in the background, and the neighbor with the dog, Aviram, leaning against the wall and looking at her as she goes down the steps. He holds a cigarette in his mouth, and sighs in delectation. //

Various media representations try to tell us what this conflict is like, what it does to people, daring even to venture an assessment of who's right and who's wrong. The fictions and the stories in this film show us instead that we don't know much, and that things depend on who you look at, on your affections,



Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film still: 1h29'28"

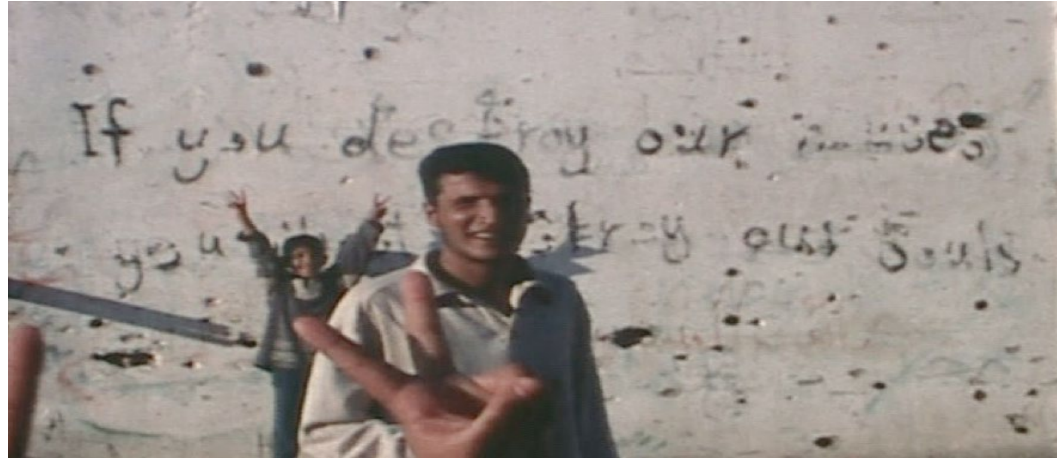
Previous spread:
Alila - Amos Gitai (2003)
Film stills from left to right:
1h49'04" / 1h49'38"

on the location of your on-going life. Still, the fictions of the movie seem to bring us much closer to an answer than the news with their distractions and lies. // There are though certain matters of fact, certain red lines, certain limits that can't be surpassed and violations and atrocities that must be not only opposed and criticized but also actively challenged. // Through Alila, it is possible to approach culture and life differently. Media representations are mostly concerned with the violence and brutality of the war, while Gitai focuses on the exuberance of life, which we can connect to even when it verges on the grotesque or becomes overwhelming. // Movement marks the beginning and the end of Alila. Most people live their lives moving through time and space at a relatively large distance from the political and social systems of power which structure and rule our collective existence. The political events are here distant and remote, almost removed from the forefront of existence. The film insists on showing life in its consistent going on, forward, in spite and around war. // How long can people go on disagreeing with something before they take action and truly challenge the structures that surround them and co-determine their lives? // Agamben says that the camp is the space that emerges when the state of exception begin to become the rule. It is like an extreme capsule: the capsule of exclusion. When sovereign power exerts its ability to 'suspend' legal order, the 'exception state' emerges as the immanent

principle of order. When such an exception state becomes permanent, the Camp unfolds: a piece of territory has been placed outside normal legal order. The exploration of these 'islands', both to define their position, shape and size, and to understand the logics of their complex dynamics, becomes then an urgent task. // What is exceptional within the state of exception? What a claustrophobic thought. Is there such a thing as an exceptional scream in a world where everyone is screaming? Imagine to be subjected to exceptional violence and be unable to cry for help, with your scream drowning in a sea of screams. It is terrifying. // Architecture and urbanism have been used as weapons aimed at the disintegration of a territory. They have been used to mark territories, to define and communicate the position of limits, to determine the conditions of everyday life, its movements and its trajectories, up to where it is possible to act, and how. Here the capsule is not something that shuts you off from the world, but the ultimate shelter, almost a proof of existence. // It is strange but comforting to verify, to notice the way(s) in which fiction can sometimes bring us closer to reality. In spite of its obvious fictional articulation, the film shows us a glimpse of the real, which defies what we see on the news and other media. // These stories have the ability to makes us aware and more open, perhaps bring us closer to the people that inhabit these situations, in contrast with the numbing and distancing effect of media depictions of war, violence and other conflicts.

The magic of everyday life is maybe the only thing worth fighting for. The close relationships with the people around us, the construction and articulation of our homes, the locations of our existence – our co-existence – and our connections and affinities, will always drive us and occupy our minds and our souls beyond geopolitical and economic conflicts.

In Alila, everyone seems to dream of a remnant of privacy, a small temporal capsule, slightly thicker walls. Of an instant, a time in which everyone else finally gets out of your face, of your nose. This might also be an extremely individualistic, decadent and selfish society, similar to the one captured in Ulrich Seidl's movies, but under radically different circumstances. Here, in Alila, people are literally forced upon each other, everyone constantly in conflict with each other, but this very sensuous promiscuity, although exhausting, allows everyone first to interact, then to learn to inhabit the encounter. There is at least, a chance, a prospect of escape, a glimpse of redemption. / Breathing... / Hope. //



“Every practice brings a territory into existence – a dealing territory, or a hunting territory; a territory of child’s play, of lovers, of a riot; a territory of farmers, ornithologists, or flaneurs. The rule is simple: the more territories there are superimposed on a given zone, the more circulation there is between them, the harder it will be for power to get a handle on them. Bistros, print shops, sports facilities, wastelands, second-hand book stalls, building rooftops, improvised street markets, kebab shops and garages can all easily be used for purposes other than their official ones if enough complicities come together in them. Local self-organization superimposes its own geography over the state cartography, scrambling and blurring it: it produces its own secession.” (The Invisible Committee, 2009:108)

Still life - Cynthia Madansky (2004)
Film still: 15'43”

Delaying the image: towards an aesthetics of encounter

Delay/Fragility/Affinity
Life



Delay / Fragility / Affinity

Life

*“[C]ourage as a virtue – that is, not an innate disposition, but something that constructs itself, and which one constructs, in practice. Courage [...] the virtue that manifests itself through endurance of the impossible. [N]ot simply a momentary encounter with the impossible: that would be heroism, [but] endurance within the impossible; time is its raw material. What takes courage is to operate in terms of a different durée to that imposed by the law of the world. The point we are seeking must be one that can connect to another order of time.”*¹

*“We have to do away with this notion of urgency associated with politics, because it’s the contrary of love. That’s where it starts. Politics is love.”*²

/ Clotilde is throwing Ventura’s things out through the black naked hole of a window in the first floor of a grey, dirty and derelict house, tightly packed against a few other in what looks like a backside courtyard. / It’s dark. A quiet evening. / Things crash thunderingly on the ground, and the harsh, cold noises echo in the emptiness of the patio and the stillness of the night. / She goes on. / An old trunk, drawers, a cupboard, a chair, the door of a wardrobe. / Clotilde is now standing half way down the dark staircase, looking up. / She holds a knife firmly in defiance. / Only the blade is visible, the handle entirely caught inside her powerful right hand. / *I was a young girl. I used to swim like a fish. My shoulders were wider than any boy’s in S. Felipe. None of the boys had the nerve to follow me. They would shout from the beach, “Sharks, Clotilde! Come back before they eat you!”/ Then they would sing: “Come back, my love, back into*

Juventude em marcha (2006) - Pedro Costa
Film still: 2h14’11”

¹ Badiou, Alain (2008), ‘The communist hypothesis’, *New Left Review*, (49), pp. 41

² Costa, Pedro



Juventude em marcha (2006)
Pedro Costa
Film still: 1h26'25"

my arms". / Sometimes, I'd take my oldest boy. Leave him sitting on the rocks and go in for a swim. / I never wanted to come back. / But I always did. / She now looks down and loosens up slightly. Thinking. / She remembers how her son cried and cried waiting for her to come out. / She would sit with him until the sun went down. / She now holds the knife up and the blade shines brighter, closer to her face. / I knew the boys were watching me from above. But they'd give up and stop signing. / Holding the knife up, she steps backwards down the stairs, slowly and carefully, with a fixed gaze, hardly sane. / We hear the water dripping. / It is so incredibly dark that she almost disappears in the black. / Her hand still shining, reflecting the crumbles of light. / And the knife. /

Through his dedicated, patient cinema, Pedro Costa finds a space within the flow of life, occupying briefly the privileged position of the one who touches the critical beauty of world in motion, offering a glimpse of the fragile, a piece of despair, a taste of lives that are about to fall but resist and rise up, once more, to fight their destruction, to challenge their end.

Costa constructs images that oscillate in duration, shifting through time, returning to the past, inhabiting the present, escaping definition or identification. Images that tell and do not tell at the same time. Images that collect stories, legends, poems and songs. Images that perform, re-enacting those memories, restoring our belief in this world. *"I know that realism is a harsh, difficult, problematic word these days, but I don't have a better one, really. This word actually means a very simple thing to me: being a realist means not being able to escape certain limits in which all human beings live and die."* (Costa, 2015)

He organizes spaces in which it is possible to explore reality. He slows down reality, revealing images of intimacy that the camera would otherwise preclude with its presence. He returns to reality, and generously invites us to return along. He works enabling a presence to emerge without pretension, an art in which form is tightly bound to the construction of a relation, by means of the articulation of something we all share: our very capacity of sharing. *"Patience, time, love, observation, and a few technical skills. And work, work, work. Stay a bit longer in a place. Stay with the person you are filming a bit longer, and refuse the kind of military raid which cinema has transformed itself into: coming to a location, conquering it, shooting it and then running away—that's how a film crew operates nowadays."* (Costa, 2015)



03'16" / 03'22"



04'01"/04'49"



Juventude em marcha
Pedro Costa (2006)
Film still: 1h51'36''



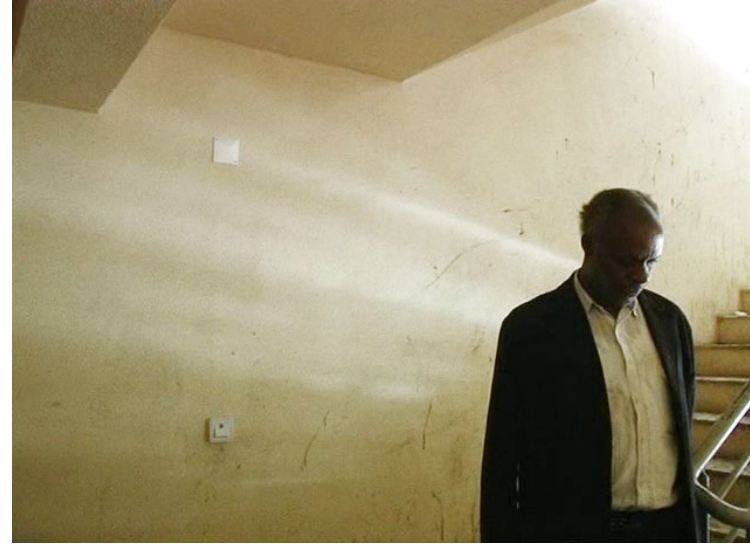
Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
19'45"/19'37"

Austere, long and fixed takes, framed and composed carefully with the means at hand. The camera stays. It cares. It waits. It disappears, or almost. It becomes part of it. Costa refuses to tell us what or how to think. Blurring the boundaries between film and life, through modalities of indeterminacy. It is not possible to discern, anymore, who are actors and who are inhabitants, or whether those definitions were actually ever possible. People. Respect for the singularity of their experiences, which constitute, step by step, the story to tell. A focus on the unfolding of existing situations, their life, their enactment, and then, perhaps, later, their multiple universes of meaning.

His is a cinema of near stillness, a bridge to the movement of reality. A realism of waiting. A cinema of delay. A delay that is founded on a care for the everyday. On an understanding of politics as love. Patience and attention, a generosity that stays, a willingness to understand: a listening fidelity. Anticipating what will appear later, we could also venture to say that it is *a cinema of filmic intravention*. A filming from within, from the inside. When asked, Pedro Costa speaks of the material aspects of the process of making a film, the very real difficulties that have to be solved in order to remain long times in the same places without protection, without supporting crews. Alone – in various ways – with your creativity. Alone in such a positive way that it enables those taking part in the making of his films to find time for



Juventude em marcha
Pedro Costa (2006)
Film still: 2h16'57"



Juventude em marcha (2006) - Pedro Costa
Film stills from left to right:
25'15"/25'17"

themselves to be creative, to think through what they are doing and what they are experiencing. Costa tends to think more about production than about direction. – *We need time.* – Working within these situations, one has to be careful, it is necessary to maintain a tension, every second, every day, a tension that is capable of noticing and grasping the inner trembling, the tremor, that according to him, takes everything. “*We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present. The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist.*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 108)

Moving away from representation, and towards the impossible of presentation, Costa offers of a space of encounter, a fraction of life. Encounters with reality and creative imagination. Fictional displacements of pseudo-realist fake pretensions. A filming not *about* but *with* the people, their stories, their lives, their territories.

These films are not about representing anything, but about being there, spending one's time and one's life *with* these people and in these places. Progressively becoming part of it all, gaining both a right and a responsibility to be there. Perhaps an enactment of equality through a connection to a different order of time: when modes of existence are at stake, it is important, it is necessary, to wait. Costa does not represent the people that appear in his films, but asks them to play themselves, and patiently creates the conditions for this 'intimate' playing to take place. This involves avoiding the truth claims and pretensions of documentary forms defined as such a-priori, as much as escaping subjectivist approaches in which identities are granted interiority through fictional accounts. When specific modes of existence are at stake, when houses are about to be torn down, when people are about to be evicted, when someone knows they will be expelled of the country in a few days, or when lives are thin like a thread, then, one must gain the right to be there by being there. By inventing ways of becoming a part. "*The people of Fontainhas—Vanda, Zita, and the others—play characters, embody parts. But Costa is already filming their pure presence in space, their strength, their resistance, capturing what is beneath the actors, the truth of the individuals.*" (Neyrat, 2010)

The point is absolutely not to eliminate fiction in order to access truth. But to truly and at once engage in the indeterminacy of story-telling. Embracing an act of telling that is both an involved, caring report and an invitation to join.

"For me the territory is space. It's tangible, it's real, it unites all of us. I found it to be a concrete territory. The territory that was very close to me, close to where I was and where I was living, although it was entirely invisible to me. However, it was a segregated territory. I started to work there: that territory became real, and it became a problem." (Costa, 2012)

Slow, measured steps. Monumental and feverish, steps constructed with a slowness and a rhythm attuned to the rhythm of life. More patience. A generous form of surrendering, to people and their places. A politics of listening and a politics of waiting. He shares the endless wealth of sensorial experience found in the humblest of lives, and he does it differently, he says it differently, through the dedicated patience of a camera that persists, *trembling*. He creates a space and a time, a moment, a duration that enables the capacities of the most displaced to regain their own destiny. A fragile and open invitation to start talking. "*I also tend to choose, to find, I would like to think that I am finding a place where fragility is something very important. Because I am working a lot in fixed shots. I'm not moving the camera*

a lot, because we don't have a lot of means. Sometimes I can do some small movements but otherwise I like to keep it simple. This idea that the shot is fixed and it doesn't move, I really don't think it exists. When you think of the films of Ozu, for me, is the biggest. Ozu for me is the guy who trembles a lot. Not only film people are trembling but Ryu Chishu or the girls are trembling. They just do this, and the whole film trembles. That's just my thing, so it moves, it's not fixed, it moves, so there's this really fragile place where your trembling eyes meet. And that frames your frame and it should be fragile, should be human. All the greatest filmmakers and photographers and painters tremble a little bit with this fragility. It's almost a nervous thing. It's not that steady. Actually, when it's steady, it's bad. (Costa, 2008)

/ Ventura seems to be sitting on the ground. / His gaze lost somewhere. Waiting. / The white walls of the new social housing blocks at Casal da Boba, and their telling shutters, almost all down, frame him violently. / Hurting bright white. / Another guy in a suit, tie and black sunglasses approaches him carrying a document folder. / From the heights, he asks: *Mr. Ventura?* / Ventura takes his time. He turns around, looks upwards, scrutinizes the presence and replies: *Mr. Ventura always. That's me all right. / Worker, Retired.* / The guy standing answers back: *André Semedo, locksmith, transferred to the administration.* / Bending to shake Ventura's hands he asks: *North or South Islands? / Totally South! Chao do Monte, Aguas Podres, Santa Catarina.* / *Principal, Cha da Horta, Tarrafal. Your wife's not coming?* / No. / Ventura looks away again. The guy checks the time and points at the building: *15:00h, November 1st, 2001. Third floor, right. The flat is full of light.* / We see now the door and its handle. Ventura's black hand struggles with they key. His head is spinning. / Pain. / Another hand opens the door swiftly. / Whiteness / Ventura's head is now leaning against a white wall, around an outward corner. His hand resting on the edge. His gaze lost again. / He walks into the kitchen, and the agent wipes the area of the wall on which his face was resting. / He cleans methodically and quickly. / He steps back to check. / Done. / Whiteness back on the wall / The agent praises the house and refers to the security of being protected. / Ventura complains. / It's a tiny place. / He stands holding the doorframe of the opening to the kitchen. / Legs crossed, an arm on each side of the door. / Tall and relaxed, like a mythical, ancient king. Untouched. / We hear the steps of the agent. / Ventura needs more rooms for his children. / The agent asks



21'05"/21'10"



21'12"/21'19"



21'21"/21'23"



21'35"/22'11"



Juventude em marcha
Pedro Costa (2006)
Film still: 1h51'13"

for their papers, because there is no mention of children in the files he has. / He stands still, rapidly taking the papers out of the folder and holding them up-straight, in front of Ventura's face. / *I want rooms.* / Everybody wants more rooms. / *I need them more than others.* / He turns around and leaves. / Walking down the stairs, slowly, visibly tired, looking down. / The light slides through the stained wall. Undisturbed. It's dirty, it looks old. / The steps get lost. A door is closed. /

Costa's work is an unresolved combination of oral histories, social encounters and mythic meditations. An essential encounter through which life expands, a felt presence, a spark of understanding, a shared engagement with the truth of human feelings and the exuberance, the greatness of life. At some point, after finishing the acclaimed '*Ossos*' (1997), Costa bought a Panasonic DV and went to 'Fontainhas' alone, every day, for years. He started to know people in the neighborhood when he came back from his trip to Cabo Verde – where he had moved to in order to make the film '*Casa do Lava*' (1995) – loaded with presents, and letters, and messages to deliver to friends and relatives of those he had met while abroad. Progressively, he got closer and closer to some of the inhabitants of this self-built enclave within the municipality of Amadora – in the northwest outskirts of Lisbon – and started to spend more and more time with them.

Shortly after the release of '*No Quarto da Vanda*' in 2000, and when the demolition of Fontainhas was almost completed, Costa met Ventura, who had been around during the shooting, just in time to make him the silent and powerful core of '*Juventude em Marcha*', and his closest cinematic guide from then on. The path towards the completion of the Fontainhas trilogy was then fully sketched: *Ossos* (1997), *No Quarto da Vanda* (2000), *Juventude em Marcha* (2006).

His work can be seen as the arrangement of time in various, ambiguous layers, attached to rhythms and actions, here circulating through Ventura's presence and discourse. An archive of the life of a people and their locations, their places, their situations. The area in which he films is of course a place, but it is not a setting. "*Instead what is filmed is the very crisis of action, the inability to act or respond in situations that overwhelm the characters' capacities, such as the demolition of their houses.*" (Maimon, 2012: 340)



Fontainhas, like many other quarters and areas in the outskirts of Lisbon, aroused from the spontaneous occupation of land in the late 40's, when rural migrants arrived in small groups and constructed the first tents. From the early 1970's, various waves of immigrants from Cabo Verde started to settle in the district, progressively transforming it into an intensely 'creole' neighborhood.

*/ How did you win over my mother? Bete asks. / I was at the Aguas Podres river, in Assomada. She was getting water in a can. I was riding my donkey. It took me three years to win her over. At first, she wouldn't even look at me. On July 5, the Independence day, she was there among the violins, flags, accordions and drums, and she started to sing: *Fifth of July, Raise your Arms, Liberty! Shout! Shout Cabral! Peoples of liberated Guinea and Cape Verde, raise your arms and shout, Liberty!* But she didn't know how to sing. I went up to her and started to tease her. *You sing off-key!* She wacked me with the flagpole and started to take to me. / Was she beautiful? / Yes, she was. / Am I beautiful or ugly? / You are beautiful. / It's a wonderful story. /*

In these neighborhoods, but particularly in Fontainhas, the landscape of narrow streets, extensions, and alleys, yields a difficult although very warm blurring of inside an outside, with the rooms, the hallways, the houses, businesses and other spaces seemingly merging into a complex, intricate social

Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
23'36"/23'42"



Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
23'50"/23'53"

meeting place which is also and simultaneously everyone's living room. "In Lisbon, the whole process of building new social housing blocks—"the new neighborhoods for the lower classes"—was done without a conscious plan, and without any real commitment. The architects and engineers who designed the new blocks were public officials, bureaucrats who were just going through the motions without much concern for the future residents. [...] The new houses are very precarious, very damp, and they are already suffering the terrible consequences of time passing. As usual, Ventura said it better: 'They made poor houses for the poor. It would have been better to let the poor take care of themselves.' The final tragedy is that in Casal da Boba—the new bairro where the people of Fontainhas now live—everybody says: 'I would much rather have my old shack in Fontainhas than live in this deserted, damp, cold, empty, white cube. I prefer a thousand times the rats and the stinking smell, but my house, the house that I built, with my people, my neighbors, my space, my stone.' The architectural organization of the space in Casal da Boba is violent in its core, in its intention. It is a space that was created to confine people, to break the bonds between people, to separate them."

In Fontainhas, the inhabitants had built the places themselves, with their hands, with help from some friends and neighbors. Now everyone was being relocated to Boba, to problematic, cold and damp



Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
1h20'59"/1h 21'25"



Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
24'48"/1h20'09"



houses. White houses. To places in which people didn't want to be. Some of these people had become Costa's friends to the point in which he explains his 'methodology' by saying that he simply "*cared about their health.*" Which is to say that there is no methodology.³ There is no method but a way, a modality of action. His method seems to be basically to be there, and ask them if they are ok. Without a script, to encourage them to pull their enactments out of the themselves. To go along their memories, their feelings, their fears. But all of that of course within a work relationship in which things are repeated, and routines are established. A relationship through and within which, the image is delayed. Through a waiting that cares. Costa says that he does not believe too much. He does not believe in a creative or imaginative force that is always there, constantly at work. His work is more based on a persistence of stubborn and regular movements, and doubtful, unpretentious endurance throughout time. Until the image comes. Until an understanding of how to do something arrives from within that time. Emergent.

Confronting history to history, speech to speech, meandering between the slums and the new developments, the regimes of conversation and of poetic creation, between past memories and present fears, memories of Africa and the colors of Portugal. A cinema that in front of today's profound social injustice is capable of breaking consensus. *A cinema that resists.* A cinema that dreams of becoming a trigger

³ Or at least I want to see it that way. And I can already feel/hear the roar that this insinuation will lead to.



Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
22'21"/22'30"/22'44"/23'00"

for justice. A cinema that thinks and feels. A cinema that takes the time and the risks to endure and to approach things and people. And a cinema that aims at not only witnessing and perhaps (partially) recording the exuberant wealth of the world, but also at returning something of that wealth in some other form: the light, the silence, the words of love, the magic instances of condensed time, the work. Simultaneously close and at a distance. In proximity, yet always keeping a respectful detachment similar to that of a person that is aware of his/her outsidersness and, although invited to take part, decides to stay at the edge of things, listening first. Doors that close and leave us guessing. “[S]ometimes in cinema, it’s just as important not to see, to hide, as it is to show. Cinema is perhaps more a question of concentrating our gaze, our vision of things. [...] Cinema is made for concentrating our vision. To concentrate means also to hide.” (Costa, 2004)

// Someone said it was tough. As if you had to look down after a while during those long scenes. Escaping from places you had not chosen to be in and you didn’t want to be in. Forced to be there much longer than you wanted to be. Enclosed spaces and those walls framing the shots and keeping us trapped. And even when you look down, you can still feel it; you know that the film keeps on happening even when you are not looking. // And of course it continues to happen. The film takes place along the lives of these



35'50"/35'59"



36'30"/36'36"



characters, their lives, their buildings, their homes, their sorrows, and their sharings. // But it is also about what happens to people and places when they are looked at in certain ways. // It seems to be a film that invites a waiting. For the story to appear, for the characters to move, for something, or someone, to arrive, or to leave. Long conversations that do not reveal things at once, that do not serve information or, less, entertainment, but can still offer many things. A progressive reduction of the distance to the people and the places that we see and hear. Somehow creating a sense of responsibility, almost as if the characters could see that we are there, looking at them, when there is no place to hide anymore, because all the tricks and the filters have dissolved. // The first time is perhaps more difficult. It can make you nervous. You need to have the patience for this slow tempo. One might start squirming in the



Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
41'10"/41'13"/41'21"/41'29'

seat. Unable to wait. Many people left the theater at Cannes in 2006 when the film was screened for the press. // Poor them, lazy, impatient, disabled. // But then you watch it again. And again. And things starting changing radically, it's a completely different experience. It is much easier when you are not expecting anymore. When you are not waiting for the action and the distraction, but just letting the film speak to you in its own rhythm. // In those long takes, during 'silent' sections, one hears new things. It is possible to notice the voices in the background, the music, the light, the shadows, the details of objects and faces and clothes and gestures. And words. As if words and images would finally merge. // And then, things start happening. Again. // And that contrast, between the slum and the new developments. Between the dark and the bright, the black and the white. Are they real? In fact there wasn't such



a big difference. None of those spaces seemed to be built for humans, or suitable for life. // Someone had jumped out of the window of one of the new flats, Vanda said. Small and claustrophobic spaces, oppressive, bright, white light. // Ventura has difficulties finding Vanda in the new development. Everything is white. Everything looks the same. He can't find her, so he has to shout her name. Eventually she hears him and responds. At Vanda's room again. Progressively we start to understand. Vanda talks. She talks and talks to Ventura. We listen. We are allowed to listen. She is not taking drugs since two years now. She loves her husband so much, and her daughter is now alright. // Later, it will be the three of them seating at her table for lunch. Vanda, her husband and Ventura. First she will complain about the sofas, and ask her husband to borrow a van. *Let's get rid of these*. Then, later, she complains about the 'whites'. *It's like having ghosts all around*. Her daughter sees them too, and she is scared and sad. //

"Pedro Costa does not film the 'misery of the world.' He films its wealth, the wealth that anyone at all can become master of: that of catching the splendor of a reflection of light, but also that of being able to speak in a way that is commensurate with one's fate. And, lastly, the politics here is about being able to return what can be extracted of sensible wealth—the power of speech, or of vision—from the life and



decorations of these precarious existences back to them, about making it available to them, like a song they can enjoy, like a love letter whose words and sentences they can borrow for their own love lives.” (Ranciere, 2009)

/ We can hardly see ‘Flight into Egypt’ by Rubens, hanging on the dark walls of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon. / It feels as if we had sneaked in there at night. / It is silent. / We see Ventura leaning against those walls. We hear him sniffing something. He takes it from a small container, and puts the container back into the inner pocket of his jacket. / He is almost touching the frame of the portrait of Helena Fourment, also by Rubens, and two meters away from the ‘Portrait of A Man’ by Van Dyck, hanging from the same wall. / We hear steps again. / A guard is walking towards him. / Ventura pays no attention. / The guard, also black, approaches him and whispers something in his ear. / Ventura seems annoyed and walks away, looking down, grazing past the guard. / The guard stands still and waits until Ventura has left the room. / He takes a cloth out of his pocket and wipes clean the piece of the floor on which Ventura was standing. / He walks on. / Ventura has now moved to another room. Upset and

Juventude em marcha - Pedro Costa (2006)
Film stills from left to right:
23’06”/23’25”/23’29”/23’34’

tired. / A clock chimes gently, while he sits on a French sofa with corner seats from 1784. / Looking upwards, he seems to be thinking. / The steps again. / And a dark figure that comes in the frame. / Standing, he looks at him. He extends an open hand, which Ventura eventually takes. / They walk away. / The guard escorts him outwards down the stairs. Air-conditioning noise. Maintenance exit. / A moment later they are both going up another flight of stairs towards the garden. / Ventura retells the story of his flight out of Cabo Verde along other immigrants. / He started working on the construction sector immediately after arrival, and took part in the arrangement of the land on which the Museum stands today. He helped lay its foundations and put up its walls. / *There were clouds of frogs here. Thousands of them. / Putting up the statues of Mr. Gulbenkian, the ground was muddy around their feet, so we planted grass to make it all more beautiful. / And we watered it. / I took a spill there. I slipped and fell off the scaffolding. / /*

The letter that Ventura speaks out loud and progressively constructs and reshapes throughout the film, is made of words that become in the act of saying, alive, in progress. These words and this process resist, in sharp contrast with the on-going destruction of the neighborhood which continues relentlessly, implacable. As the letter unfolds and turns, coming out and up of Ventura's mouth, his world comes gradually down into rubble. The loss of this derelict area, although dirty and dangerous, is the loss of a home for many. The letter, meanwhile, grows in the place of intensity. A magnificent love tale that exceeds the meaning of the words that make it.

The letter is in fact an open encounter. Combining a poem by Robert Desnos, written from a concentration camp, with fragments of a letter by an immigrant and his own fascinations and intuitions, Costa creates a structuring device that is capable of making space for exchange, movement, and coexistence. "*It is from that great circulation between here and elsewhere, between deported metropolitan militants and workers driven to exile, between literate and illiterate, sane and mad, that the letter is taken from to be entrusted to Ventura here.*" (Rancière, 2014:136) It is a complex and poetic process involving exchanges, interpretations, shifts, correspondences, and displacements. The way in which the letter is constructed implies that "*the art of the poor, of the public scribe, and of great poets are captured together in the same fabric: an art of life and of sharing, an art of travel and of communication made for those for whom*

to live is to travel." (Ranciere, 2009) According to Costa, Ventura explained how he was the one able to write the letters for the other workers. Love letters, chronicles, letters of friendship, whatever. He would feel terrible, dying, and writing those letters would keep him alive. The performance of an art of sharing, not so much the letter itself, but its very enactment: modalities of recitation and performance, improvisatory variations of a love letter which is also a space of relation. A space of learning, a space of action, a caring-in-duration. For Lento. And for himself. / Pedro Costa prefers not to know what the letter really says. He prefers to see the reaction in Ventura's eyes. The letter is a memory of something. / *An image that is delayed.* /

Paris .
 15 juillet 1944
 Mon amie,
 Notre souffrance nous volatilisait, et nous ne pouvions la considérer comme une maladie passagère et surmontable. Nos remarquables intelligences nous en font au moins deux ans. Et mon entourage prend une bonne gorgée de jusseau; je retrouverai ce goût d'amour et de fièvre. Pendant le travail, en anniversaire, mon anniversaire fut l'occasion d'une longue pensée pour toi. Cette lettre parvient-elle à temps pour ton anniversaire? J'aurais voulu t'offrir cent mille cigares blancs, deux robes de grande couturière, l'appartement de la rue de Seine, un appartement de la même maison de la forêt de Compiègne, celle de Bobo. Jote et un festin longuet à quatre vins. En mon absence, achète toujours le fleur, je te le rembourserai. Le reste, je te le promets pour plus tard. Mais, avant toute chose, bois une bouteille de Cognac et pense à moi. J'espère que nos amis ne te laisseront pas seule ce jour. Je te remercie de leur dévouement et

de leur ^{courage} ~~amour~~. J'ai reçu, il y a huit jours, un paquet de Jean-Louis Barrault. Ensi avec le visage Madeleine Renaud. Le paquet me prouve que ma lettre est arrivée. Je n'ai pas reçu de réponse, je l'attends chaque jour. Tu écris toute la famille, d'ailleurs, par Juliette, Coq, et tu remets la fièvre de Passau, ~~reçois~~ adresse lui toute mes amitiés et demande lui s'il ne connaît personne qui puisse te venir en aide, que deviens ton livre à l'impression? J'ai beaucoup d'idées de pièces et de romans. Je regrette de n'avoir ni la liberté ni le temps de les écrire. Tu pourrais cependant dire à Balthazard que, dans les trois mois qui suivront mon retour, il recevra le manuscrit d'un roman d'amour d'un genre tout nouveau. Je t'envoie cette lettre pour aujourd'hui.
 Aujourd'hui, 15 Juillet, je reçois quatre lettres, de Barrault, de Viala, de B. Renaud et de Daniel. Remercie les et donne moi de ne pas répondre; je n'ai écrit qu'à une lettre par mois. Pourquoi ne le fais-tu pas, mais il ne demeure pas

seulement de toi, ce sera pour la prochaine fois.
 J'espère à cette lettre et à notre vie amie. Mes amitiés, je t'embrasse ainsi tendrement que l'émotion te l'aurait permis.
 Sans une lettre qui passerait par la cour, mille baisers. As-tu reçu le coffret que j'ai envoyé à l'hôtel, à Compiègne?
 Robert.

Fig. 00/
 Robert Desnos' letter to 'Youki' (Lucie Badoud) from Buchenwald concentration camp 15th of July 1944, less than a year before his death.

⁴ The letter, translated into English: “*Nha cretcheu, my love, being together again will brighten our lives for at least thirty years. I’ll come back to you strong and loving. I wish I could offer you a hundred thousand cigarettes, a dozen fancy dresses, a car, that little lava house you always wanted, a three-penny bouquet. But most of all, drink a bottle of good wine and think of me. Here it’s nothing but work. We are more than a hundred now. Two days ago, for my birthday, I thought about you for a long while. Did my letter arrive safely? I didn’t get an answer from you. I will wait. Every day, every minute, I learn beautiful new words for you and me alone made to fit us both, like fine silk pyjamas. Wouldn’t you like that? I can only send you one letter a month. Still nothing from you. Some other time. I often get scared building these walls, me with a pick and cement, you with your silence, a pit so deep, it swallows you up. It hurts to see these horrors that I don’t want to see. Your lovely hair slips through my fingers like dry grass. Often, I feel weak and think I’m going to forget you.*”

*// Nha cretcheu, meu amor, o nosso encontro vai tornar a nossa vida mais bonita por mais trinta anos. Pela minha parte, volto mais novo e cheio de força. Eu gostava de te oferecer 100 000 cigarros, uma dúzia de vestidos daqueles mais modernos, um automóvel, uma casinha de lava que tu tanto querias, um ramallete de flores de quatro tostões. Mas antes de todas as coisas bebe uma garrafa de vinho do bom, e pensa em mim. Aqui o trabalho nunca para. Agora somos mais de cem. Anteontem, no meu aniversário foi altura de um longo de pensamento para ti. A carta que te levaram chegou bem? Não tive resposta tua. Fico à espera. Todos os dias, todos os minutos, todos os dias, aprendo umas palavras novas, bonitas, só para nós dois assim à nossa medida, como um pijama de seda fina. Não queres? Só te posso chegar uma carta por mês. Ainda sempre nada da tua mão. Fica para a próxima. Às vezes tenho medo de construir estas paredes eu com a picareta e o cimento e tu, com o teu silêncio. Uma vala tão funda que te empurra para um longo esquecimento. Até dói cá dentro de ver estas coisas más que não queria ver. O teu cabelo tão lindo cai-me das mãos como erva seca. / Às vezes perco as forças e julgo que vou esquecer-me. //*⁴



34'22"/34'46"



17'23"/18'56"



Juventude em marcha
Pedro Costa (2006)
Film still:
09'51''



Juventude em marcha
Pedro Costa (2006)
Film still:
1h33'14''

“The spoken text, the words are not more important than the different rhythms and tempi of the actors, and their accents are not more important than their particular voices, caught in the instant, struggling with the noise, the air, the space, the sun and the wind; not more important than their unintentional sighs or any other small surprises of life recorded at the same time, like particular sounds which all of the sudden assume meaning; not more important than the effort, the work done by the actors, and the risk they take, like tightrope walkers or sleepwalkers, going through long fragments of a difficult text; not more important than the frame in which the actors are enclosed; or their movements or positions inside the frame or the background in front of which they find themselves; or the changes and the leaps of light and color; not more important in any case than the cuts, the change of images, the shots.”

(Jean-Marie Straub)

3

Other Images, Other Spaces /



The Other, Coexistence, Common Life

Chapter 3.1

“The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be.”¹

“[...] Bodily exposure is not always a political good or, at least, not always the most successful strategy for an emancipatory movement. Further, we have to consider as well that some forms of political assembly do not take place on the street or in the square, precisely because streets and squares do not exist, or do not form the symbolic centre of that political action.”²

“[T]his is us, we who are supposed to say we as if we know what we are saying and who we are talking about. This earth is anything but a sharing of humanity. It is a world that does not even manage to constitute a world; it is a world lacking in world, and lacking in the meaning of world. It is an enumeration that brings to light the sheer number and proliferation of these various poles of attraction and repulsion. It is an endless list, and everything happens in such a way that one is reduced to keeping accounts but never taking the final toll. It is a litany, a prayer of pure sorrow and pure loss, the plea that falls from the lips of millions of refugees every day: whether they be deportees, people besieged, those who are mutilated, people who starve, who are raped, ostracized, excluded, exiled, expelled.”³

Fig. 71/
LiAi Norrland Fieldtrip, Lake Akkajaure,
(Lappland) 2014

¹ Arendt, Hannah (1998), *The human condition*, (2nd edn., Chicago: University of Chicago Press) xx, 349.

² Butler, Judith (2012), *Bodily Vulnerability, Coalitions and Street Politics*, in: Kuzma, Marta et al. (2012) *The State of Things*. London: Koenig Books; Norway: Office for Contemporary Art, pp.161-197

³ Nancy, Jean-Luc (2000), *Being singular plural*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press), p. xiii

Hanna Arendt presented her understanding of the city through the words of the opening quote already in 1958. The constitutive essence of the city lies in the set of complex relationships that take place among people. Relations that emerge, according to her “*from the doing and talking together*” and take place in authentic, real space: the one that exists “*in between people dwelling together for that purpose*”.

Instead, it seems like architects, urban planners and others insist in understanding the city and architecture as mere buildings, and furthermore, in the fact that these have nothing to do with people except for the ‘annoying’ fact that, once finished, they will be inevitably occupied by hordes of ‘stupid, ignorant and insensitive’ individuals. It looks as if the most important was to define, devise and, above all, formalize those objects-buildings, or in other words, an aesthetic, artistic, cultured and autonomous practice, that must not get dirty or contaminate with other issues of ethical, social or political nature that should not interfere at all in the resulting image-architectures.

If it is worrying to verify how contemporary architectural production and the debate associated to it have lost most of their social, critical, political and utopian impetus, the worries turn into indignation and disappointment when looking at the case of dwelling and the production of living environments. The results of many years of scandalous real estate, neoliberal and architectonic frenzy are now visible. The design of coexistence, the production of habitable spaces – undoubtedly the main task and function of architecture – has been abandoned in order to embrace: on the one hand, the serial and indiscriminate fabrication of non-architectures that repeat types, materials and structural systems on the basis of a pragmatic and productive juxtaposition of normative restrictions and the interests of bankers, investors, developers and builders; and on the other hand, the dazzling production of unique prototypes of image-architecture that satisfy the ill, self-worshipping yearnings of an elite of architects abandoned to the ceaseless luxury of formal exploration, in search of new opportunities to produce the new, the stunning, the original.⁴

It is difficult to understand how such an outlook along with the unsustainable situation and social emergency around the issue of housing in Europe, has not yet produced – in spite of the several real-estate bubble explosions, a firm, serious and critical reaction within the profession, schools of architecture, boards or even other, supposedly critical, institutions related to spatial practices. In and around these institutions, professionals and scholars, a lot more research, deep reflection and knowledge should

4 I’m not denying here the emergence, in rare occasions, of elegant, important and solid architectures resulting from rigorous investigations and determined takes on exploration and avant-garde, resulting perhaps of careful combinations of knowledge, sensitivity and desire; what I question and oppose is the current trend through which the production of “the new” and “the original” becomes and end in itself.



Fig. 72/
LiAi Balticgruppen Dinner, Umeå (2014)
Students and faculty at the LiAi organized
a dinner/encounter by the river with key
real state actors in the city. The setting and
equipment for the dinner was entirely de-
signed and built for the occasion.

be produced to question current housing policies and social housing models, to understand and explore the options of cooperative housing and other modalities of alternative co-habitation, to assess the potential of interesting initiatives of self-construction that have been almost eliminated from the catalogue of public housing solutions and, more generally to approach the needs, realities and possible futures of ‘living together’.

Architecture must engage responsibly in the thinking and the making of ‘coexistence’; we must invent and implement alternative approaches to the concept of ‘habitability’ in order to rehearse collective solutions and proposals simultaneously and transversally across situations and realms, from the room to the territory. In front of practices that either linger in the unstoppable race to produce the new and its new shapes and forms or align with neoliberal currents in the production and absorption of surplus value at the cost of the creative destruction of urban spaces and territories, we must engage responsibly and uncompromisingly in the task of organizing and co-constructing coexistence.

It is crucial and indispensable that we advance beyond the formal and the typological, incorporating not only already known discourses and experiences of sustainability, adaptability, dissociation, and other contemporary private rituals, but also and most importantly, the critical thinking, design and making



Fig. 73/
LiAi Salt Workshop in Sandhornoya, Norway (2014) with Sami Rintala and Joar Nango. Students and teachers designed and built shelters and a sauna on the beach during two weeks. The image shows the gathering around the stone-oven, after the first sauna session. Photo: A. Altés

of the common, the collective, the public and the shared. The transformative power of architecture must be used to rethink, imagine and produce spaces for being and living together. And in order to do so we must approach and explore the interplays of the notions of ‘the other’ and ‘difference’, intertwined with that of ‘coexistence’, to imagine wayfaring journeys towards the establishment of the common.

The other is the one not included if we speak of two or more. The other is the one remaining. The other is the different, the distinct from the one mentioned, or present or implied. The other is not-the-same. The non-identical, the second. Distant, diverse... It is impossible to think alterity without the idea of selfhood or sameness. When we speak of otherness we inevitably speak of selfhood. The relationships between these two are complex and problematic. Fear, hostility, domination, independence, representation, hospitality, exclusion, identity, etc... are often shaping those relationships in a long and often slow process of ‘othering’ in which sameness and difference are discussed, constructed or simply deployed.

“Differences [are] simply what there is, the question of what ‘ought to be’ must concern only what is valid for all, at a level of legitimacy that is indifferent to differences. Differences are; the Same is what may come-to-be through the disciplined adherence to a universal truth.” (Hallward 2001:xv)

So when the transformative power of architecture and other spatial practices is used in an open engagement with the situations of the world to inhabit and affect them, architecture ‘worlds’. Worlding is the practice of actively inhabiting and transforming the world through responsible making-thinking-feeling engagements. To world is to architect responsibly. To architect is to transform in order to inhabit. To inhabit is to care. To architect is therefore to care (for dwelling).

How do we live together? How are we to live? Here and now, on the basis of a world to come. In a world of infinite difference and alterity, when all there is is precisely that, difference, our task is to reflect and explore, to research, to find out, to establish what is it that is the Same in us. How can we enable and establish common life?

Coexistence is not common life. Just like difference, coexistence is the real ontological condition of existence. To exist is to co-exist, for it is impossible to think of existence in isolation, if there is anything, it must be in concert with something else – the one who is thinking and its context, the thing thought, the world – there is always more than One. There is always coexistence.

“Our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. The plurality of beings is at the foundation of Being.” (Nancy 2000:12)

To coexist means to exist together or at the same time, it is generally understood that it refers to a life in peace with each other especially as a matter of policy. It can mean also to coincide, to co-occur, to synchronize. Two quite distinct understandings of coexistence have guided my research and my work: first, one that reads it as designating co-occurrence in time or place, i.e. the fact of being or happening simultaneously or at the same location, a measure of the distance between things and/or people (the closer they coexist the smaller the distance between them); and second, another one that sees coexistence in relationship to an idea of living together that incorporates notions of sharing, collective plurality, and the common, a common dimension that goes beyond the instantaneous co-occurrence and aims at maintaining, developing and improving its potential and duration, through conversations, encounters and implicit or affective negotiations. *“[I]f Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the ‘with’ that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity as such. [...] Therefore, it is not the case that the ‘with’ is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the ‘with’ is at the heart of Being.”* (Nancy 2000:30)

To consider the other (and ourselves) as singular-plural and to consider the imperative of coexistence implies that, even before we begin to make sites for our worlding or architectural practices and interventions, we are already taking certain position and asking certain questions. First of all, these considerations ask us to understand difference as something not to be overcome, but to be embraced and understood, not to be subsumed under yet another agenda’s categorization, but to remain clearly particular and specific; difference must also be understood as the condition of what is (infinite difference is what the world is made of) in order to enable the thinking and establishment of what is the same and what is common. Secondly, contemplating others, difference and coexistence means a questioning of our understood assumptions of the (power) relationships between those who are coexisting. This means in turn that we are not only entertaining the possibility that what we may have understood to be the dominant, or ‘unmarked’ and the subservient or ‘marked’ terms in a relationship of coexistence need to be flipped around, but that we should do just that in order to explore and engender more even



(although not flattened) development of space as politically, socially and culturally ‘in common’ (although not uniform or homogenous).

We must thus try to discover ways of looking at and thinking the coexistences of various kinds that we encounter, remaking them, inventing other alternatives, rethinking and imagining ways of living together in our rooms, our flats, public space, our cities, our territories, the places of our planet.

”In my view politics constitutes a truth procedure, but one that centres on the collective. I mean that political action tests out the truth of what the collective is capable of achieving. For example, can it embrace equality? Can it integrate what is heterogeneous? Can it accept that there is only one world? Things of this kind. The essence of politics can be subsumed in the question: what are individuals capable of when they meet, organize, think and take decisions? In love, it is about two people being able to handle difference and make it creative. In politics, it is about finding out whether a number of people, a mass of people in fact, can create equality. And just as the family exists at the level of love to socialize its impact, at the level of politics the power of the State exists to repress its enthusiasms. The same prickly relation

Fig. 74/
LiAi Salt Workshop in Sandhornoya, Norway (2014) with Sami Rintala and Joar Nango. The ‘flipping’ sauna. Photo: A. Altés

exists between politics as a practical, collective way of thinking through the issue of power with the State as the instrument for its management and regulation, and the issue of love with the unbridled invention of Two and the family as the fundamental unit of ownership and egotism.” (Badiou 2009:53-54)

It is paramount that we reflect about and exploit architecture’s ability to provide, through its transformative power, conditions of possibility for the sharing of various spaces, times, processes and other things. Producing uncertainties, contingent relationships and unexpected effects can help define more positive value systems than that of the building-as-consumable-object. It is possible to understand the building as a relational object within a complex meshwork of things, people and technologies, and explore the notion of architecture-as-a-gift: a relational practice that enables encounter(s), and affords the sharing of moments, conversations and, why not, lives. Inhabiting the spaces, discourses and events of this common life, means developing a faithful and true care for the situations in which we are enmeshed, and perhaps discover ways to displace what is, in order to ‘architect’ what could be and what ought to be.

Homes are very close to us, we inhabit them with our bodies, emotions and thoughts, we make them and they make us. How much are we ready to share of our lives? What can we obtain from sharing? What can we share? Are there degrees of sharing? What is our role as architects and the role of architecture in affording such ‘sharings’?

There are various forms of collective housing that propose and rehearse many different forms of sharing functions, spaces and other things. Social and public housing usually encourage one or other form of sharing in search of affordability. Experiences of cooperative building often include shared facilities and spaces, some times shared activities. Student housing, women dormitories, workers dormitories, elderly homes, asylum homes, camps, monasteries, schools and other situations and forms of habitation offer multiple examples of diverse degrees and ways of sharing things through and in architecture. Multi-family dwelling, co-housing and many self-built initiatives and developments involve various degrees of shared and common spaces, often aiming at encouraging encounter, social exchange and collaboration. But can we think of other ‘cultures’ of living that are based on sharing and fuelled by relational architectures? Can we think of a city made of shared, rather than public, spaces? How can we think the common in dwelling and inhabiting?

While urbanization becomes more and more a planetary condition, life in the city has changed dramatically as a result of transformations such as an ageing society, financial crises, increased unemployment and inequalities, urban asymmetries, migration flows, the rise of the knowledge economy, the digital revolution... and particularly due to the increasing influence of neoliberal theories in the shaping and development of approaches to societal and economic organisation.

The meaning, access to and possibilities of using collective spaces have also changed. Public squares, streets, parks, gardens and other types of open spaces have become part and the object of corporate and political agendas of branding cities that have resulted in an almost complete commercialization of these once collective and public spaces, now entirely dedicated to the articulation of diverse strategies for short term profit (be it in the form of direct economical gains, political approval or social influence and prestige for those in control of their production and exploitation). An excessive and obsessive programming of urban space has rendered public space a trading device, another commodity in a global market: on the side of these commercial activities, previously shared open and truly public spaces are now the sites for the programming of more and more scheduled entertainment and leisure activities, which announces the triumph of the spectacle and the displacement or disappearance of every day life. Many are thus excluded from collective spaces not only because of the increasing costs associated to the use of these spaces but also due to the ever-growing obsession with safety and security.

The increasing commercial privatization and hyper-regulation of the spaces traditionally understood as collective (public squares, parks, gardens, streetscapes, etc...) seriously undermines the possibilities of genuine political disagreement that is eliminated through consensus-based management and policing of such spaces in what has been called by some ‘the post-political city’⁵. This is also increasingly generating alternative practices that engage differently in the production of other forms of collectivity that challenge public/private oppositions and imagine different ways of establishing the ‘common’. As these groups shift to the production and inhabitation of their own spaces, many of the traditional collective spaces become less plural and diverse, or are left, even more, in the hands of commercial interests. The relationship between these two interrelated processes has been one of the main strands of my research and my work with postgraduate students during the past few years, under the theme of ‘common life’.

Together, within and around the spaces marked by this theme, we have been exploring, intervening

⁵ See for instance Swyngedouw, E. (2011), *Designing the post-political city and the insurgent polis*, (London: Bedford) 60.

and thinking through the possibilities of inventing other ways of being and living together and of establishing the common, particularly in relation with ways of life, strategies for dwelling and spaces of coexistence.

On the one hand we have explored some of the existing forms of organization of life and tried to understand the conditions and distributions of collective and shared spaces in the city; and on the other hand we have tried to invent, enable and produce alternative situations, spaces and conditions for lives based on radical 'sharings' and common-life interventions.

Beyond the fundamental level of basic inhabitation and the housing question, we have also looked at the complexities of common life from three different perspectives: first, and in relationship with the total organization of our coexistence, the question of the State and the possibilities of thinking outside the space of capitalism; second, asking questions about the role of architecture in the production of new commons at a time in which even public infrastructures are increasingly privatized, can we imagine architectures as infrastructures of the common?; and third, in relationship with the very notion of dwelling and the ways in which life is sheltered and lived today, addressing the apparently unavoidable entanglement of urbanization and capitalism, in the light of recent occupations of the spaces of our cities, and the installation in our streets of semi-permanent camps organized around ideas of sharing.

Although this third part of the thesis is not addressing these issues directly and specifically, the theme of common life of some of the work done around it is clearly present within what follows, and fundamentally informs many of the tools and experiences presented below.

As announced at the beginning but also through the very title of this third part – other images, other spaces – the idea was to focus here in the value of the exception, offering a series of alternatives to the problems and toxic conditions discussed in the first part. In many ways, the following chapters are a collection of situational and situated tools, a thinking-making-learning-feeling toolbox, for the development of potential acts of architectural intervention and transformation in and of the world. These actions, always in the plural and always in-the-making, as worlding processes and practices, are conceived and lived – partly because of this open, experimental condition, but most importantly as a result of my hopeful convictions – as collective learning experiences.

After this first chapter then, I will first present the philosophical, operational and pedagogical tools

for a common life of intervention and infinite learning, by discussing the relations and the spaces of intervention, their effects and their durations, and by introducing the notions of performative *intravention*. Subsequently, in chapters four and five, I share reflective and critical accounts of experiences of interventions in various realms in which some of the above-mentioned tools are put to work, developing transversal concepts and techniques of intervention and critique that collect and echo some of the intuitions and proposals previously condensed in the notions of aesthetics of encounter and pragmatic dissent introduced in part one. Finally, in chapters six and seven, I return to my philosophical journey and to the theme of common life, discussing the possible role of the operations of ‘sharing’, ‘displacing’ and ‘caring’ in the construction of a different (non)-state of the situation, an other ‘an-archic’ world in which an ethics of encounter is allowed to emerge. Hopefully, the various interplays of what follows with what has been ‘said’ and shared above, will not be too obvious. Anything else would betray my own convictions and contentions, and come short of the infinite exuberance and possibilities of the maze.

“Being singular plural: in a single stroke, without punctuation, without a mark of equivalence, implication, or sequence. A single, continuous-discontinuous mark tracing out the entirety of the ontological domain, being-with-itself designated as the ‘with’ of Being, of the singular and plural, and dealing a blow to ontology— not only another signification but also another syntax. The ‘meaning of Being’: not only as the ‘meaning of with’, but also, and above all, as the ‘with’ of meaning. Because none of these three terms precedes or grounds the other, each designates the co-essence of the others. This co-essence puts essence itself in the hyphenation — ‘being-singular-plural’ — which is a mark of union and also a mark of division, a mark of sharing that effaces itself, leaving each term to its isolation and its being-with-the-others.” (Nancy 2000:37) /



107
Storgatan

Härabodningsplan

Intravention, Durations, Effects

Chapter 3.2

“Bringing things back to life [...] to switch our perspective from the endless shuttling back and forth from image to object and from object to image, that is such a pronounced feature of academic writing in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, to the material flows and currents of sensory awareness in which images and objects reciprocally take shape.”¹

“[...] Guardians of the history of emancipation in an intervallic period, historical riots point to the urgency of a reformulated ideological proposal, a powerful idea, a pivotal hypothesis, so that the energy they release and the individuals they engage can give rise, in and beyond the mass movement and the reawakening of History it signals, to a new figure of organization and hence of politics.”²

Fig. 75/

LiAi Flyttblock: Elevated Encounter. Umeå
Photo: F. Apuzzo

¹ Ingold, Tim (2013), *Making: anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture*, (London; New York: Routledge) p. 20.

² Badiou, Alain (2012), *The rebirth of history*, (London; New York: Verso), p.42

Inside a quiet cafe, in a well-known European city, a group of master’s students in architecture sit around a table while they wait for a guest to arrive. Everyone is a bit excited since the guest is a famous figure of architectural theory that will probably throw some light onto their ongoing discussions about something called ‘relational architecture’. They have invited the guest for an encounter / interview /

conversation. But the guest is quite late.

Students and teachers start a discussion partly initiated by some lines read from a transcription of an interview with the absent guest:

- “*Speculative theories are the basis to develop projective matter.*” reads someone aloud.
- “Yes, but aren’t we talking all the time about being concrete?” reacts someone immediately.
- “Wait, there’s something even more interesting here, listen: “[...] *more and more designers embrace pluralism and the endless relations that an intelligent system can generate. The danger is that their search for difference or the stimulation of the unpredictable is elevated to an absolute law, and the possibility of difference is fetishized.*” says the reader again.
- “What does he mean by fetishizing difference?” asks someone else.
- “Hmm... I think that would be if you start focusing exclusively on producing ‘difference’, no matter how small or unimportant that difference is, and that takes over everything else,” replies one of them. “As if for instance the fact that I am moving this sugar dispenser now...” and he takes the sugar dispenser in his right hand and moves it to another position on the table while he goes on... “was understood as changing the world”.
- “Well... but in fact, it is changing the world, isn’t it?” says someone else from the far end of the table.
- “Not really!” says another one that had been quiet until now.
- “I think it does change the world to some extent” adds one of them.
- “I am not sure that is true” says another.
- ...³

In order to think through the notion of ‘immediate architectural interventions’, it is necessary to complement the image offered by the opening ‘scene’ above with a couple of considerations. One of them

³ The sections quoted (recited) in the dialogue are by Markus Miessen and Roemer van Toorn, respectively, as found in Van Toorn, Roemer, 2009, “*Architecture as Political Practice: Roemer van Toorn in Conversation with Markus Miessen*” in Conditions: Independent Scandinavian Magazine on Architecture and Urbanism, #1, Strategy for Evolution. Oslo, Norway.)



addresses the architectural profession's progressive disconnection from the social, from the political, from history, from the local, from ethics, from the body, from the 'discipline' itself. A whole generation of architects seems to have abandoned the design of coexistence - undoubtedly one of the main tasks of architecture - and the discipline seems to be stuck in formalisms and detached autonomous practices of self-promotion, moneymaking and creative destruction. Immediate intraventions emerge from a critical view of what is being embraced through these practices and of the ways in which practices that perpetuate disconnection from lived lives.

Although setting up the 'other' as, in a sense, the unmarked term to talk about difference can be problematic, it may be helpful to speak about the differences in approaches to architectural production. To generalize for a moment: offices like Hadid's, or Foster's, or many others of smaller sizes and turnover, have a different ontological and ontogenic position than the one posited here. That is, they understand how a building comes into being, its processes and practices of development, in a particular way: how one procures work, how one organizes an office, how one communicates to different audiences along the way of building, etc. And, again, with the risk of overgeneralizing, they believe that the building is the center around which all else revolves. They perhaps understand that *it* will produce effects in both

Fig. 76/
LiAi Moveable Feast, by Joshua Taylor and
Rafaella Taylor.

its immediate physical and social contexts; however, these potential effects are not often considered seriously to be part of the building itself. There is a formalist tendency in much of the work, which may or may not produce beautiful objects, and may or may not produce positive effects. The buildings produced might be seen as interventions, but are they transversal? Or diffractive? They are certainly not *intraventions*⁴ in the way that I am defining them below.

Underlying this critique is a position that architecture is not an autonomous entity that is devised in the architect's studio on the basis of his/her capacities as 'genius' and through some kind of obscure, almost magical process and then deployed on a pre-existing piece of land. Rather, it is a complex and relational practice that comes about in various 'fields', and takes place in collaboration with things and people, and is always material as well as cultural *and* political *and* technological *and* artistic *and*, *and...* It is a practiced practice, involving many different actors, people, institutions and apparatuses.

The notion of architectural intravention, which will be explained in depth below, is a helpful tool to investigate, test and explore ways of operating 'inside' buildings, places, and territories – inside situations – with the aim of expanding the social, ethical and political relevance of architectural practices by means of a more responsible and performative approach.

Intraventions imply both the need to inhabit a situation throughout time in order to become part of it, and a performative approach that focuses on the transformative character of spatial practices and privileges what a thing does over what a thing looks like. These aspects are taken into account through the complementary notions of duration(s) and effects. Moreover, *intraventions* exist on the basis of an engaged understanding of the relations of things, materials and people within a given situation, which requires anthropological, ethnographic and aesthetic methodologies and tools as well as improvisational and speculative skills. This links the notion of 'intravention' with that of 'worlding', around a belief in the synergic and complementary agencies of anthropology, architecture and design. *Intraventions* are enactments of such relational complementarity.

Interventions

Our desire to intervene reflects this awareness and critique of these conditions of disconnection and distancing between people and the social, as well as between people and 'bodies' – their own or those of materials, technologies, and indeed discourses. Our desire to intervene is a desire to affect the world,

⁴ *Intravention* is a term that emerged in a conversation I had with Oren Lieberman in 2011. We coined the word while trying to reflect about and develop our work with master's students of architecture in the framework of the master's program 'Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention' that we co-direct at Umeå School of Architecture. The term allowed us to understand and conceptualize our approach, and 'intraventions' became the engine of a project that led to the publication in 2013 of 'Intravention, Durations, Effects: Notes of Expansive Sites and Relational Architectures' as part of the AADR series (Art, Architecture and Design Research) by Spurbuchverlag. An earlier version of this chapter was published in the book. The difference between intervention and intraventions is explained in detail below.



and resonates with the given that, as Antonio Machado says, *'we lay down the path while walking'*. We believe in the need to be 'inside', intervening here and now, close to where we are and with the tools we have at hand, with borrowed methodologies, and invented methods. We want *'to architect'*.

The 'tool' of intervention is indeed a powerful one. First of all it presupposes a place/time in which to intervene, that is, it takes, and makes, a position. But if we also believe that the very nature of being (and therefore, space) is understood to be always in the *coming-into-being* – laying down the path – how do we then contemplate something – anything – being 'there' in any sort of 'stable' way before our interactions with it? Well, we are not relativists, and we can and do establish contours that delineate particular conditions of architecture (for instance, its disconnection to the social, its abandonment of coexistence as a motivator, its production of elitist image-making, topographies, weather...). This is understandable and necessary, because we need to start somewhere, even if we say we are starting 'in the middle'.

We need to have an awareness of 'history' (and understand whose historiography we happen to be entangled with), in the sense that it is difficult to speak or act from a position, even to conceive of a position, if nothing was there before we 'arrived', and any such negation of the 'before' amounts to

Fig. 77/
LiAi Save the Boat, by Jana Dzadonova.

almost the same as a negation of history. In that sense we would claim that there are certainly many ‘things’ already there when we arrive, from some shared understanding of the material characteristics of the space, to the acquired memories recorded in those things and spaces throughout time, through the field conditions that determine, to a certain extent, those spaces and those things and, most importantly, our own embodied ‘skills’, acquired through time in a process of growth and development that enables us to act.⁵ A radical negation of the existence of anything prior to our interactions with things entails an additional risk: that of extreme individualism. Other people and other things were there before, and have been interacting with each other and with other things and people in turn, and the results of all those previous interactions will affect our here-and-now interactions in fundamental ways.⁶

The idea that there is a history, an ‘already there’, a site which we might say preexists *this* moment, this just *now*, is substantiated by our *attention* to it, an attention which makes (us part of) that site. And it is through a notion of *expanded site* – rather than a notion of scale with its predilections of hierarchy and nestedness – that we understand the extent of the intervention, i.e., the materials, institutions, social groupings, etc. of which we are involved and are ‘bracketing in’ to our considered purview. Through both the expansion of site into various concerns, and the simultaneous considered selection (the bracketing out, and in) of various actants, agendas, antagonisms and histories, we ethically and politically mark out and are entangled in the world. Where we want to intervene becomes a crucial question, in what site, how, for/with whom? So sites and the interventions that make them afford us the possibility to talk about judgments and political intentions as well as to measure effects. Do we want to enable a particular conversation? Do we want to challenge neoliberal worlds? Do we want to do both?

Inventions

This notion of attention finds resonance in Karen Barad’s work, where we find a focus on *intra*-actions rather than *inter*-actions. She posits not a world that is somehow unstable due to our inability to define moments and spaces, but proffers a world that is full of very precise phenomena produced through enacted *intra*-actions between things (including people, objects, animals, plants, etc.). Such an enactment – what she calls an ‘*agential cut*’ – locates quite precisely “... *a local causal structure among ‘components’ of a phenomenon in the marking of the ‘measuring agencies’ (effect) by the ‘measured*

⁵ For a more detailed account of the implications of attentiveness and “*developmentally acquired responsiveness*” i.e. embodied skilled practice, for the relationships between the concept of agency and the complexity of living organisms as opposed to inert matter, please check “*When ANT Meets SPIDER: Social Theory for Arthropods*” in Ingold, Tim (2011), *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*, (London; New York: Routledge) xviii, 270.

⁶ It will be at this point obvious to the reader that we are also thinking of concepts such as *habitus* or *dispositions*, as developed by Pierre Bourdieu. See: Bourdieu, Pierre (1990), *The logic of Practice*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press) 333, pp. 55-56

*object' (cause)."*⁷

So for us interventions both measure and make, existing as both separate entities (of a city, a street, an institution, a landscape) as well as effects. It follows that we could define interventions as apparatuses, enacting them, firstly, not as passive objects but as things which do things to spaces and times, and secondly, as carrying political 'power' through their desires and agendas.

Here again we are defining architecture not as an 'it' but as a process, or perhaps an apparatus. Again: architecture is a verb, i.e. *to architect*. Supporting this active stance, we focus on the transformational nature of the interventions that are performed in real times and places, and work through the concept of the performative (in relation to the speculative *projective* practices of most architectural production). Our focus on the performative in practice means that our bodies are explicitly entangled in our work, and underline our view that we are, in an ecological and expanded 'cognitive' sense, both 'distributed' through things and places and other people and discourses as well as somehow 'bounded'. So in relation to our matters of concern, we are interested in what we can 'do' with architectural interventions and understand them to be performative not only with respect to their transformative power but also to their ability to establish identities, which may be in agonistic conflict with others.

We posit a new concept to further our work in these 'conditions': *intra*vention, a word about which we are quite enthusiastic. Although it is only a matter of a couple of letters, *intra*'s focus on the 'within' clearly establishes *intra*ventions as already a part of the spaces and times in which they are 'intravening'; quite a different focus than the 'inter'. It is indeed a very productive notion which defines the (make-shift) limits of a specific situation with which we might interrogate/engage, and helps us deal with the apparently endless expandability of the relational meshwork of material and sensory flows, therefore allowing us to start 'doing/making' immediately. When we *intra*vene, we 'cut' (in Barad's sense) to both locate and make a site we inhabit. This is not a negation of transversality, but an embrace of it.

It also speaks about intentionality: one 'decides' what the *intra*vention includes or excludes. It is of course therefore an intensely political act, as well as an aesthetic one. Barad's notion of the 'cut' as a defining, parameter-setting tool is useful; in the work we have been developing at the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention (LiAi) – that I will be referring to throughout this part of the thesis – we cut in various ways, not the least of which is through the use of our 'matters of concern'. As cuts,

7 Barad, Karen (2003), 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs*, 28 (3), 801-31.

these are in themselves quite performative: the juxtaposition of particular terms immediately generates various and interesting interplays that in turn start setting the parameters of our discussions while at the same time they interrogate and help us judge the relevance of our intraventions. Our matters of concern are our ‘terms of engagement’, the ways in which we deal with the task of ‘architecting’ as a function, i.e. a process that is contingent on other processes and other ‘things’. If Badiou would say that architecture is a function of the generic procedure ‘art’ and the scientific category ‘geography’, we might well say that we see ‘architecting’ as a function of, or an amphibian stand⁸ between, philosophy and art, aiming at the transformation of our conditions of coexistence and at the articulation of spaces for being and living together. I will be referring to this later as ‘worlding’ practices. This speaks indeed of a need to question architecture’s position within the realm of technology or technique, as well as epistemologies that conceive it as a discipline or body of knowledge within art or science.⁹

Again, the performative nature of our matters of concern, and an understanding of architecture as a function, makes it part of the realm of the political, of choosing what and for whom we function, of taking responsibility, and of negotiating the implications of such choices.

The terms of our engagements are multiple, and the relationships among their components diverse and certainly not one of dialectical opposition but of productive entanglement: body/apparatus, critical/relational, agency/structure, the other/difference, the other/coexistence, transversals/micropolitics, aesthetics/politics, affordance/gift, diffraction/representation, discourse/event, fragility/affinity and documentation/judgment.

We investigate and encourage working with our oft-neglected body as an experiencing, a knowing, and a difference-making entity in the production of space. Heightening or consciously orchestrating our everyday ‘techniques of the body’ – that is, the ways our body negotiates and is implicated in our material and cultural apparatuses to create meaningful social interaction – can result in performative methods for *intravention*, questioning, and change. Being close to the sites of our actions foregrounds our bodies’ roles in the making of the world. And if the body itself can be seen as an apparatus, it exists always intra-acting with other things that co-determine effects. And this is no less true for the apparatus of the state than for a particular way of documenting.

We explore the possibilities of a relational approach to architecture that expands the critical vs. the

8 For a very interesting account of what such an amphibian position might be and its implications for research in the Arts, check: Nilsson, Per (2009), “The Amphibian Stand: An Philosophical Essay Concerning Research Processes in Fine Art”, H:ström Text & Kultur.

9 These reflections about architecture as a function and its relationship to the political have only been possible thanks to the interesting and sharp comments of our Spanish colleague, philosopher and architect Israel Casanovas, who was a guest at one of the LiAi seminars, and to whom we remain, as always, grateful.

projective debates that have been installed within the field for so long. We believe, with Teddy Cruz, that the future of urbanization will no longer be led by the production of new buildings, but will instead require a fundamental reorganization of socioeconomic relations, which is also a design challenge in which we must take active part.

Even if the complex and relational nature of the world cannot be disputed, it is often ignored, or at least relegated to a position at the bottom of the architect's list of things to interrogate and integrate. The relationships in any complex meshwork of people, places and things constitute the structure of durable practices, territories and fields. Various cultural, social, political and economic practices are maintained and sustained through these relationships. The discussion of the interplays and reciprocal entanglement between our ability to act and to choose how to act and for whom, i.e. agency, and the existing *habitus* of practices and conditions that co-determine and define the limits of such ability, i.e. structure, is enriched and becomes more relevant in the light of recent advancements in the fields of science studies and what is known as actor-network theory. An understanding and exploration of architecture in those terms turns out to be very productive for the development of our intraventions.

We address the notion of 'the other' through several dimensions. One relates to a kind of bottom line ethics of respect, and care for difference, for a multiplicity of actors and their beliefs; a basic understanding that others shouldn't be harmed. Another, related dimension for us can be highlighted in the difference between a belief that there is one truth, on and about which we can have our own perspective, and the belief that there are many worlds which of course can communicate and share things, but are in fact different. Yet another dimension would speak of the interplays between that notion of the other and the one of coexistence, to rethink the role of architecture in the production of spaces for being and living together.

Our engagement with transversality and micropolitics is not a minor one: the interlocking of, for instance, immigration policies in Europe, and Sweden, the arrival and presence of unaccompanied minors in homeland territories, the relationship between urban planning and the distribution of the population in space, discourses of integration and the presence of a certain number of asylum homes in a particular peripheral, urban enclave of Sweden's Norrland, appears to be also cut by discourses and practices of biopolitics, the position, shape and nature of a particular set of furniture, the size of a room and the configuration of a particular domestic space in which those minors live their lives, which might be only

accessible through some initial conversations with those kids and their ‘guardians’.

Architecture operates through making, and through making things visible; it produces and reproduces new and old spatial and aesthetic apparatuses. As we have said, it is not an autonomous practice but contingent and relational, it has to negotiate its position, it is, therefore, political. It is political also because it plays an important role in our distribution in space: it sets us together or apart. Architecture, as we will see, is in that sense a function, and participates in the complex interplays of the state and politics, as well as in other social and political problems.

Another of our engagements starts through our attention to architecture’s ability to afford us ‘things’ and conditions of possibility, as well as the relationship of the above-mentioned ethics of respect and care with affordability. These reflections make also possible to conceive of architecture as a gift, and to imagine the potential of architecture to be an embodied critique of building-as-consumable-object as well as to produce ‘uncertainties’, contingent relationships and unexpected effects which can help define more positive value systems.

The notion of diffraction helps us think of different things coming into contact with each other and producing effects through their mixing in each other’s medium. In terms of waves (light, sound, etc.), it is clearly different from that of reflection, which has waves bent back away from an encounter, remaining in their own medium. A focus on reflection then might be more about a typical understanding of representation’s mirror, rather than on diffraction’s transformation of the world, our ability to make a difference rather than displacing the same elsewhere.

The reliance of architectural production in representational techniques and approaches has distanced it from itself and its powers, lately in more than worrying fashion: architectural images today, by the hand of new representation and construction technologies, and thanks to the enormous accumulation of political and economic capital, forget the inherent limitations of representation and dilute the difference between what is represented and what is built, restricting, almost eliminating the possibility of interpretation, as if aiming to neutralize or control the interplays of the real and the fake. The most fantastic and impossible drawings ever imagined are literally built, suddenly appearing in the middle of the desert; complete islands are conceived, materialized and urbanized in a few months or years. The rhetorics of void and wrapping are camouflaged underneath surfaces and skins, and articulated

through fantasy, deception and magic.

The city can be seen instead as mixtures of immediate, singular, specific, enacted, practiced, diffractive, performative, interactive, transformational, improvisational, embodied, political, ethical, transversal, intervenient events, i.e., things that happen; and discourses of various sorts: histories, interpretations, commentaries, theories, disputations, categorisations and orderings. We will engage with and produce in 'real time' singular events, as well as the discourse that participates in the performance of those singularities. If the power of the event speaks, as Badiou tells us at the beginning, of a latent urgency and a memorable energy, such energy has to be combined with a shared demand and the working of, by means of discursive articulation, the problem of politics par excellence, namely, organization.

Methodologies of events, discourses of issues, *intraventions* and their effects must be made public in order to both enhance those effects and share the knowledge derived of their enactment. Documenting what happens is paramount and can't be left for a final, retrospective analysis or account. Since elements of judgment are involved already in the very first steps that lead to the invention of these sites, events, issues and interventions... so must be the stories and their methods devised and put-to-work in 'real-time' to explain the complex meshworks, including processes, implementations, outcomes and intentions.

Our matters of concern are indeed tools for cutting, for establishing the (shifting) limits of our expanded sites. They are full of intention, just as the terms themselves are in tension, setting up dialogues and arguments and different worlds that together make things common and common things. Intentionality is an index of the architect's position and aims. Like our matters of concern, the intention of the performer who *intravenes* informs the *intravention* and determines the (initial) limits of the ambit in which the *intravention* takes place. It initiates the definition of the *intravention*, even though these limits will necessarily change or evolve as we go. And, we shouldn't forget that this intentionality arises out of un/non-conscious aspects of our being, as well as out of 'affect-ual', bodily, and discursive, awareness.

We see *intraventions* as heuristic devices, as apparatuses that are imbued with a will to transform. The *intravention* is not autonomous but contingent and relational and dependent on many other things. The *intravention* is made as it happens, and it makes us at the same time. It takes place or happens in a situated field (the site), not on an endless/infinite meshwork, but as part of the relationships and

co-existences between the elements comprised within that ‘constructed’ site. Again: things, people, institutions, apparatuses, histories, events and discourses that we start to define through an initial ‘cut’.

If an *intervention* is an addition to what is an impossible condition of a pre-existing situation or event and therefore something that exists also before and ‘outside’ the situation/field/place where it happens, then an *invention* is born through that situation, it becomes. It is a becoming, it is unfolded as it happens within and part of the site, it is interior to that site (we don’t break in: as always, we are already there).

If Barad’s intra-action is defined through an agential cut in the on-going life of the world - everything is intra-action for her - our *invention* happens, to a certain extent, out of a willingness to engage in transforming/disturbing that life. It has the ability to produce change by transforming the site we are considering from within.

Criteria of *Inventions*

Paramount in the assessment of the *invention* is its relationship with time. We can think on the one hand of its ‘duration’, as literally the time it lasts, regarding both the materiality of the objects that make it and that of the meshwork in which the objects are entwined. In this first ‘side’ of temporal criteria we can also include the duration of the effects (for how long is the *invention* affecting/transforming the world?). On the other hand, if we think of it as a ‘thing’, we can speak of its ‘durability’, as its inherent ability to both dwell within the assemblages, clusters and meshworks in which it takes part, as well as to coordinate and curate those assemblages.

The duration of our *inventions* and their effects, which are crucial, are multiple. It might be, of course, that if something is around longer it has more impact ... but not always. Let’s take an example. We intervene with something a very short lifespan (for instance, we build something which remains for 24 hours and then is removed). Though physically present for a mere day, the things that this *invention* sets in motion, that is, the effects it has, might be significant. People of course remember it, but it might also be that people theorize it, that people begin to repeat aspects of it (e.g., an event which happened within it gets staged again in another setting), etc. And their duration and effects are evident in the

ability of *intraventions* to trigger and afford dreams, generating something that didn't previously exist. A common hope, an imaginary.

Another aspect of our *intraventions* is immediacy, a concern which transverses complex meshworks. We can do things that occur quite quickly, and quite closely. However, to understand quick only according to the clock would negate the various 'timings' of the world; to understand close only as physical distance would disregard emotional bonds, as well as social media's always now, always here. Because we see architecture as relational and connected to all those other 'things', we prefer to work in close proximity as our aim is to affect the world around us, to make a difference, and therefore the immediate, the here-and-now become important.

The *intraventions* that we are interested in ask questions of their effects and their duration, producing effects that matter. They endure, either through their effects - in the cases in which they are themselves short - or through their own lasting existence, that continues to effect a pressure in their surroundings and therefore transforms the world in meaningful ways. Our *intraventions* must ask questions about our complicity in others' agendas. They must challenge the order of things, confronting the status quo with the inadmissible, that, as Rancière puts it, "*reconfigure[s] the distribution of the sensible*"¹⁰. In that sense we are interested in *intraventions* that ask questions of both consensus and dissensus.

Intraventions must take the other into account. Various others. *Intraventions* treat these others seriously and emerge from a fundamental ethical drive that transpires in our encounters with them. *Intraventions* create situations of freedom, revealing ideologies and generating spaces for a freer existence through coexistence.

We are interested in *intraventions* that produce effects that matter, or the difference that makes a difference. It follows that we need some criteria to assess the effects and to decide what it means to matter, for what and for whom. We might say we need to 'assess', or, rather, judge an *intravention*, reflecting on what makes one more or less successful than another.

An essential criterion of the *intravention* is its transformative power, its 'worlding' capacity: its effects will matter inasmuch as they manage to transform the world in a meaningful way. In order to do so, we believe that *intraventions* must on the one hand oppose particular strong discourses and on the other hand involve and engage a multiplicity of other actors/people/things.



Fig. 78/
UMA Exhibition at Bildmuseet, Umeå. The
LiAi built the central space and organized
a series of public discussions to be held
in it.

The extent to which the *intravention* is explicitly enmeshed in both the material flows and the currents of sensory awareness that make life as it happens will also be an important measure, and reflects our focus on the performative. Our *intraventions* should be as fully integrated and entangled as possible, and must address public matters, that is, issues of public concern. Their singularity must be used to critique and question the multiple/the plural through/with the polemical. They must confront the conditions of ‘the many’ in/through potentially destabilizing, i.e. inadmissible, actions. Such radical *intraventions*, must aim at “*making more room in the world for new political forms [...and] new excitations of power*”.¹¹ They must test, and experiment with, unexpected forms of ‘effective togetherness’ that ask questions about the definition of the commons and what is public and what these definitions exclude, searching for forms of ‘grouping’ and/or ‘organization’.¹²

If these *intraventions* address ‘the public’, they must also have the power to involve ‘publics’, in the sense of managing to engage multiple and various actors. Often, this engaging of various actors is initiated/afforded by an ability to connect through aesthetics. *Intraventions* can operate not only through antagonism or dissensus, but also by being friendly and ‘cool’.

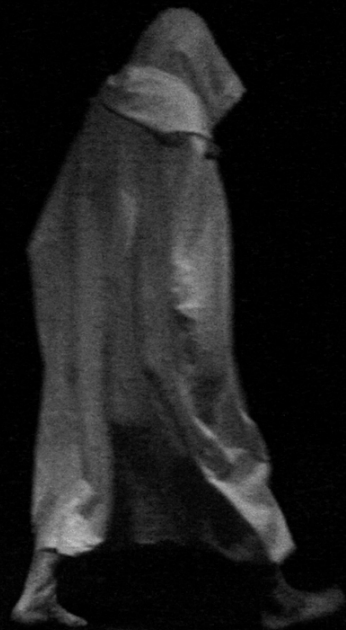
The various collective and distributed ingredients of the *intravention* should also lead to collaborative ownerships that are emergent rather than claimed. Such ‘self-distributing’ forms of ownership are both the result of and an active part in the establishment of alternative communities of practice.

We can then ask a series of questions: How are the changes generated by our *intraventions* establishing connections amongst the city’s inhabitants? How are our *intraventions* questioning ‘official’ discourses of public space in the city? How is the city ‘rewired’ through such *intraventions*? How are the proposed and effected transformations able to generate previously inexistent possibilities or ideas? How do they foster new ‘dreams’ about public, or rather, shared space? How could our *intraventions* guarantee the functional and discursive integrity/durability of such new public spaces? How would our *intraventions* incorporate, and further enable collaborative ownership and communities of practice?

These are some of the questions which keep us busy as we try ‘to architect’ our part in the making of the city and the world through immediate architectural interventions. The minimally different event is not enough. An Event needs an Organization and an Idea. To architect is a function and it is therefore political. *Intraventions* help us articulate those terms towards *architecting politically*. /

¹⁰ Thrift, N. J (2008), *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect*, (International library of sociology; London: Routledge) x, 325, pp. 22

¹¹ Thrift puts it this way: “How is it possible, in other words, to group around states that are neither dependent on lasting objects nor on fixed locations?”, in Thrift, N. J (2008), pp. 22



¹ Klien, Michael; Valk, Steve; Gormly, Jeffrey, 2008. *Book of Recommendations: Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change*. Limerick, Ireland: Faghda Dance Company, p.17.

² Cavalcante, Marcia Sá, 2012, *Dance: a Word*, in *Weaving Politics*. Marcia explained with these words the impossibility of capturing dance and the beauty of its on-going life, during the lecture she gave in the framework of the ‘Weaving Politics’ symposium which took place between the 12th and the 14th of December 2012, in Stockholm.

³ I am using the plural form ‘we’ in reference to my collaboration with Oren Lieberman at the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention (Umeå School of Architecture) between 2011 and 2015. The concepts and pedagogical approaches presented in this chapter could have never been developed without such collaboration. An earlier version of this chapter was presented in the form of a paper in the ‘*Transvaluation Symposium*’ at Chalmers School of Architecture, in May 2015.

⁴ Some people would prefer to use here the word ‘methodology’, but for various reasons which might be apparent already, I will be referring to modalities of action, apparatuses, or simply, ways of doing.

Performative Intraventions and Matters of Care: Choreographing Values

Chapter 3.3

“I will refuse to choreograph institutions into being, which bury fruitful uncertainty beneath false or sterile assumptions, the lazy dogma of reductionist thinking, illusory perceptions or presuppositions. In the universe I know, there is only the contingency of fluid and free-floating forces. When I conduct the orchestra of space, commanding figments of time in the temporary shelter of my quicksilver ideas, their containers are never erected with the stones of dead builders but are instead undetermined, undecidable, and potentially endless.”¹

“Say dance, no dance.”²

The relationship between what can be described as ‘making our way in/while walking’ (Machado) – ‘worlding’, and speculations, discourses, and dreams – ‘u-topos’, is one of mutual inclusion and intra-action (Barad), and resonates particularly with one of the sets of concepts we³ have been using: making/sense. These two terms and the slash that joins them conform, as I will explain in what follows, a performative (and philosophical) apparatus⁴ which we have used in our pedagogical practices and our research, condensing and invoking some of the key matters of concern of our work in architecture, rooted in a belief that making practices cannot be separated from thinking and feeling practices and experiences.

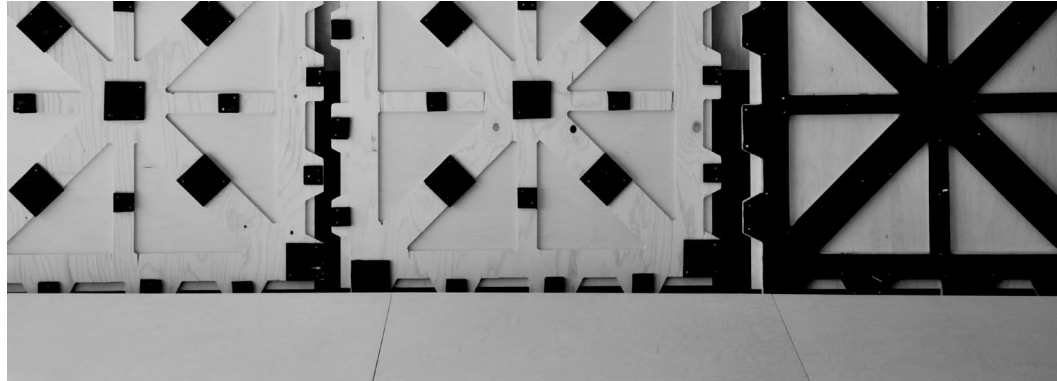
Although pedagogical practices are often assumed to be either separate from those of the profession or in service to them, we believe that they too are in intra-action: radical architectural pedagogies become alternative forms of practice in their own right. Students and faculty start caring in a different way because what they do matters – beyond the realm of the end-of-year exhibitions – and new value systems are therefore enacted.

In the work we have been doing with architecture students, we have been developing what we would rather call a ‘choreography’ of entanglement and production, rather than a teaching method. The literal meaning (from the greek) of choreography is dance writing; however, we are taking it to mean dance/writing, a dyad which expresses the fact that choreography is both the doing and the score for that doing, both the constructed shapes and movements as well as their plan, both the materiality of bodies (of various kinds: human, animal, inanimate) in motion intra-acting with other bodies and the framing apparatus which never denies its implicated transformative power.

I will focus here on the performative nature of the co-operation of material performative spatial practices and an array of matters of concern that we are using to afford speculative thinking and making. The choreography of these elements takes part both in the ‘redistribution of the sensible’ (Rancière) and in the making of knowledge and space, as well as in the evolution of the valuation of these matters as ones of ‘care’. This caring, an ethical third strand, could be understood as the virgule, the slash, between the two in a couple. It is the co-existence in co-operations, the value of being in and making the world, the separation which understands the autonomy in relations.

Architectural knowledge in universities is gifted with the best of intentions, we hope. Yet the institutional apparatuses are strong, and in their attempts to ‘make efficient’ and to have ‘parity’ and to secure definitions of human beings as located in ‘professions’ with standards, they often bottle and label and crate according to homogenising regulations and the language of the neoliberal market. The work we are architecting (i.e., the whats and the hows) acknowledges both our contribution to the constant and ever-changing becoming-into-being of the world and our critique of the values which are part of the complex ecology of both higher education and the architectural profession.

The shift we propose in architectural practices and pedagogies – toward a privileging of processes and modalities of responsible making and learning – starts with an active stance that focuses on the trans-



Cover page/
Fig. 79/

A performance of Samuel Beckett's *Quad* at ARTSaha! 2006 in Omaha, NE by the Blue Barn Theater's *Witching Hour*.

Fig. 80/

Anna Misharina's LiAi work: A portable dance-floor that was conceived as a new urban commons and is available for anyone to use.

⁵ For a discussion of the constitutive role of phenomena in reality, and a thorough account of the importance of thinking *things-in-phenomena*, see: Barad, K. 2007. *Meeting the universe halfway: quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press, chapter four.

formational nature of interventions performed in real times and places. Through the performative, we shift our attention from *what a thing looks like* to *what a thing does*, and from objects and artefacts to 'movements' as well as to the effects of our practices and actions in life. This transformational 'mode' is related to the category of *worlding* – with its accompanying history of 'indefinition' and indetermination as well as its clear co-responsive engagement in the making of the world – and locates us in the realm of 'situatedness', or inside phenomena.⁵ We are within, and active parts of, specific situations that we encounter in relationship to a series of concerns: things that really matter and that have to do with the on-going becoming of the world. Becoming inside these situations requires certain fidelity, certain willingness to stay and to endure; a caring in duration. In this duration it is both possible and necessary to develop situated knowledges, which emerge as 'ways-of-doing-and-making' from our engagement in worlding practices, practices which are also, for that reason, learning experiences.

Through the choreographing of our learning processes we create the conditions for engagement/entanglement and production/transformation, which are all modalities of movement and action. So we see pedagogical, architectural and professional practices as potential practices of transformation and co-learning. Dance – somehow both connected to and different than choreography – brings with it a

whole set of values, which we consider significant for the architectural pedagogy we enact. Lepecki lists the ‘constitutive qualities’ of dance as “*ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring and performativity*” (Lepecki 2012:15) He goes on to say that “[t]hese qualities are responsible for dance’s capacity to harness and activate critical and compositional elements crucial to the fusion of politics and aesthetics ...” (Lepecki 2012:16) His ‘compositional’ and ‘critical’ elements echo the event/discourse relationships within our pedagogy and in our use of choreography as dance/writing. These qualities allude to specific modes of engagement and making, and state particular values. We will use them to underscore our pedagogical modes, and develop them as necessary in a teaching practice which desires students’ engagement, empowerment, and caring.

In that sense, ephemerality can be related to immediacy and an engagement with the here-and-now which cares about effects and duration. Corporeality speaks of a body, but if we ask whose body or what body, then we can expand it to be any-body, in order to speak of matter or, more precisely, of *mattering* and *bodying*. Other names for precariousness can be fragility or vulnerability, somehow always already a condition of our impossibly immediate interventions. Scoring, which can be both a ‘writing’ and an unfolding, creates spaces and times and modes for and of improvisation. And performativity always returns us anew to movement, multiplicity, effects and life: “[...] *the body [...] continually transforms itself and is already not, at the moment when I speak of it, what it was a few seconds ago.*” (Laplantine, 2015:13)

These constitutive qualities of dance can be also seen as tools for an aesthetics of encounter and steps in the construction of another image, an ephemeral, precarious, performative and *delayed* image. One that will emerge out of the interplays of bodies with the scores of our movements. In that sense, the choreographic apparatus could be also described as an image-delaying device, which privileges the instant and its immediate effects, allowing images to subsequently appear and emerge, to later endure as memories.

Engagement, Empowerment, Caring

We are introducing here a choreographic turn to pedagogical methodologies and practices of transformation and what we have elsewhere called ‘intraventions’⁶, shifting the emphasis from valuing out-

6 More on ‘intraventions’ can be found in: Altés, A. and Lieberman, O. 2013. *Intravention, Durations, Effects: Notes of Expansive Sites and Relational Architectures*. Baunach: Spurbuch Verlag.



comes which might somehow ‘prove’ attainment of *knowledge, skills* and *understanding* to modes, processes and artefacts which resonate different overarching values: of *engagement, empowerment, and care*.

There are several ‘impulses’ which move us towards engaging in choreography and the choreographic, – for us, *dance/writing* – to re-evaluate, reconfigure and transvalue architectural pedagogies and practices. Firstly, the choreographic foregrounds *multimodal* engagements in the participation *in* and the making *of* the world, that is, in performative practices. These engagements range from the scored to the improvised, from the discursive to the acted, from the moving to the spoken, from the directed to the anticipated. Secondly, choreography with its firmly established connections to dance and the body focuses our attention on the importance of the corporeal in all we are, from the affectual engagements in the world to the body as part of a complex distribution of cognition, from an understanding of the social and geographic variations of rhythmic movement in time and the always engendering of space, to the deep (often ‘unconscious’) ethics of bodies-in-relation. Thirdly, defining choreography as *dance/writing* affords us a mode of engagement, a diagrammatic *score* for making differences in the world. Through this construction of *termA slash termB* (termA/termB) we connect to the various couplings of

Fig. 81/
Dance performance by Nomo-Daco on
Anna Misharina’s portable dance-floor.
Umeå School of Architecture.

words and concepts which form one of our main ‘beats’ in our practice: our *matters of concern*. We use these word pairs as dimensions of our making of, and engagement in, complex sites. Some of these dimensions pattern themselves upon the ‘figure/discourse’ relationship (Lyotard), which can be seen as related to the ‘making/sense’ mentioned above, clearly combining components of transformative practices on the one hand, which we could refer to as ‘worlding’, and conceptualizations, thinkings and projections of what could be, that we could locate within the notion of ‘*u-topos*’.⁷ And the virgule, the slash which is between the two terms, is no less important than the words themselves. ‘Dance’ and ‘writing’ are together, yet are “*orders of experience which are incommensurable*”. Manning + Massumi continue: “*Language cannot fully describe movement. Movement does not give itself over to the order of language, any more than it surrenders itself integrally to visible form.*” (Manning 2014:41)

We see this slash as the ‘gap’ in which ethics, the political, and values coalesce and *move*. Like two dancers, the two terms and their in-between not-excluded middle are together but not ‘one’.⁸ They can be ‘unstable, precarious, problematic.’ The two termed matters of concern accept “*the gap between each [other’s] respective sensibility [...] and in so doing resist[s] ... uniformization*” (Laplantine, 2015:87). But Laplantine does not abandon discourse: “*Giving sensations back their full place does not condemn to silence, but rather pushes toward recognition of a gap, a stimulating tension between perceptual, auditive, tactile, olfactive, gustatory activity, and its celebration through the acts of a speaking subject.*” (Laplantine, 2015:119) This gap is the singularity of the *ethical duration*.

The slash is also an index of another productive tension that we are interested in exploring, namely the double sidedness of the ethical dimension of *care*. On the one hand, care can result in the separation that is aware of autonomy in relations, with the slash as a gap that respects and frees, and the gap as the necessary distance for responsiveness and co-responsance: care as separation, discontinuity and mediation. On the other hand, care can be seen as the fidelity and affinity with the situation/phenomena/movement, a willingness to come closer and to listen and to remain that speaks of closeness, continuity and affect.

Such is the tension of co-existence in co-operations, or in Jean-Luc Nancy’s terms, the difficulties of ‘being-singular-plural’: “*That which exists, whatever this might be, coexists because it exists. The co-implication of existing [l’exister] is the sharing of the world. A world is not something external to existence; it is not an extrinsic addition to other existences; the world is the coexistence that puts these existences*

7 ‘Worlding’ and ‘u-topos’ were two of the main vectors or ‘lenses’ around which the symposium ‘*Transvaluation: Making the World Matter*’ was organized. The symposium took place at Chalmers School of Architecture from the 21st to the 22nd of May 2015, and constituted a very productive situation in which to organize our thoughts about what one could call ‘a performative politics of value’. An earlier and shorter version of this chapter was initially presented and discussed during the symposium.

8 Loraux as quoted in Laplantine, F. 2015 [2005]. *The Life of the Senses: Introduction to a Modal Anthropology*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic. p. 86

together.” (Nancy 2000:29)

Lastly, the focus on bodies, movement, and the *sensible* in choreography, on ‘modalities of enunciation’, help us think the fullness of learning and making to include affect, intuition, opinion, nuances, flows, *and* limbs, eyes, ears, skin, the nose, the mouth. And how a ‘bodying’ (Manning) choreography engages in the redistribution of another sensible, one that Rancière has already spoken about: “*Artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility.*” (Rancière 2004:13)

Choreography and Pedagogy

When we refer to pedagogy and choreography, we are aware that both terms are ‘contested’, though the former less so than the latter. Whilst the route through the Greek roots of pedagogy delivers us to ‘leading children’, and *andragogy* is sometimes used to refer to the education of adults, we will start here with a more general understanding of the term as the discipline that deals with the theory and practice of education, in order to approach an even broader – we think more precise – definition: pedagogy as the process of thinking through and engaging in/with *situations and modalities of learning*.

Before we look at choreography and at our way of thinking (through) it, more generally we can ask the questions: is it pedagogy *as* choreography? Or are we saying that pedagogy *is* choreography? In keeping with the underlying theme of dance/writing, of events/discourses, we would say both. Richard Schechner’s differentiation between ‘as’ and ‘is’ with respect to performance is useful: “*Everything and anything can be studied “as” any discipline of study [including performance] – physics, economics, law, etc. What the “as” says is that the object of study will be regarded “from the perspective of,” “in terms of,” “interrogated by” a particular the discipline of study.*” (Schechner 2002:34-35) And: “*Something “is” a performance when historical and social context, convention, usage, and tradition say it is.*” (Schechner 2002:30)

He expands on the *is* to include various performative practices including theatre which coincide with his definition of performance, and indeed concludes that there is significant blurring between ‘as’ and ‘is’.

For us, it is useful to consider pedagogy *as* choreography because it allows us to draw upon significant modes of engagement to interrogate what we do with students of architecture. At the same time, to say that pedagogy *is* choreography performs our pedagogical practices in particular, dance/writing ways.

Though the first use of the term choreography (by Feuillet in 1700) referenced its etymological roots in the ‘writing down’, or tracing, of dance⁹, it has generally come to refer to “*the ‘art’ or ‘practice’ of creating/designing movements of human bodies in which motion, form, or both are specified.*”¹⁰ Whilst ‘dance notation’ has replaced Feuillet’s meaning, choreography has been molded in different ways by creators of dance, and indeed it “... *has become a metaphor for dynamic constellations of any kind, consciously choreographed or not, self-organizing or artificially constructed.*”¹¹

If we consider architectural practice as artistic practice, it has been suggested “*[...] that choreography is a field of contemporary arts practice that provides not only vectors for new forms of trans-disciplinary arts research but also a locus for questioning the orthodoxies of contemporary art work and practice. Through this work choreography can now be seen to invoke, recuperate and incorporate other forms of cultural practice (both historical and contemporary).*” (Alssop and Lepecki, 2008:4) And resonating with our impulses, McCormack writes: “[R]esearch encounters with dance offer opportunities for thinking about three sets of issues: the relation between bodies and cultural geographies; the importance of affectivity in spatial experience; and the relation between the lived and the abstract.” (McCormack, 2008:1822-1836) Alssop/Lepecki and McCormack’s words elicit issues that we believe should become vectors of our work of ‘architecting’, if ‘architecting’ is ever to be socially relevant again beyond the production and exhibition of grand gestures and icons.

Again, in relationship to my proposal of an aesthetics of encounter, these issues resonate as clearly within the realm of what I have been describing as its necessary components and modalities: an awareness and implication of our bodies in their various entanglements with diverse technologies and apparatuses, a relational approach to activity that expands the possible range of ‘relata’ to include the environment and its situated components as well as its actors, and an embracing of the richness of attending simultaneously at what is going on – experiences and events – and the flows of conscious awareness and discursive, thinking, abstract action.

More specifically, we are attuned to *thinking in-the-making*. Manning and Massumi refer to “*tech-*

⁹ See Louppe et al. 1994. *Traces of Dance*. Paris: Dis Voir, for rendering of choreography and notation.

¹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Choreography>; accessed 01.03.15

¹¹ Klein, M. and Valk, S. 2008. Choreography as an aesthetics of change. In: *Choreograph.net. A state of dance.*

niques of relation’ – devices for catalyzing and modulating interaction – and these comprise a domain of practice in their own right.” (Manning, 2014:91) For us, the various modes we employ describe such techniques, which require substantially different learning tools for the development of architectural and spatial apparatuses of relationality. These are for instance ‘scores’ that – in the place of prescriptive ‘briefs’ with detailed programs and given sites – provide instructions to initiate actions and engagements, but require and demand improvisation, and a readiness and openness to engage ‘others’ and to follow the emerging effects (or what would be subsequent ‘contacts’ in choreographic terms) and trajectories that will keep the exploratory and situational currents flowing, ‘siting’ us also in site-making modes and eventually turning those flows and currents into ‘worlding’ practices. The techniques and scores might be enacted through exploratory urban mapping practices that involve, for instance, hugging cranes, or retelling the stories of urban transformation and lived space that oldest and youngest people in a certain area keep and recall, or the realization of constructive difficulties and the perceived properties and affordances of materials through direct, real time engagement in processes of improvisational construction of relatively complex architectures in relatively short times.

All these of course affect both on-going bodying/making as well as the discursive understandings and conceptualizations of what these materials and these practices mean, and what the urban is or could be, and what architectural construction entails or is about, fundamentally challenging the state of things in our discipline. We wish to create a particular ‘distribution of the sensible’ which has its power in a “*multimodally palpable, [...] unfolding composition of sense modes, spaces, roles, and rhythms of transition [which enter into] unaccustomed resonance*” (Manning, 2014:115) And we see our practices with students as a choreography which is “[...] *an intervention into the dominant patterns of action, consumption and experience and can be seen as an attempt to address the structures that govern the given ‘distribution of the sensible’ in society at large.*” (Wood, 2007:27)

The choreographer William Forsythe states that: “*Choreography is a curious and deceptive term. The word itself, like the processes it describes, is elusive, agile, and maddeningly unmanageable. To reduce choreography to a single definition is not to understand the most crucial of its mechanisms: to resist and reform previous conceptions of its definition.*” (emphasis mine) (Forsythe 2011:90) We draw upon both his notions of choreography and of the ‘choreographic object’: “[...] *a model of potential transition from one state to another in any space imaginable*” to inform an understanding and making of our pedago-



gies and their relationships to transitions, and durations, for instance in the gap (the slash). Forsythe's choreographic object describes both 'pedagogy' and 'pedagogies' in that learning is that state-to-state transition anywhere, as well as specific techniques of transitioning and transforming.

Instrumental Pedagogies in Architecture: Structures, Categories, Competencies

We believe that the language used in the structuring of pedagogy at university level both indicates and, if one is not careful, enacts particularly (proleptic) instrumentalist values. For instance, the structuring of 'competence' categorised under the headings 'knowledge, skills and understanding' in the quality assurance of higher education degrees goes back decades in the UK - but evidenced at least in the Dearing Report of 1997. In that report, Recommendation 21 explicitly calls for Higher Education institutions "[...] immediately to develop, for each programme they offer, a 'programme specification', which identifies potential stopping-off points and gives the intended outcomes of the programme in terms of:

- the knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have upon completion;
- key skills: communication, numeracy, the use of information technology and learning how to learn;
- cognitive skills, such as an understanding of methodologies or ability in critical analysis;
- subject specific skills, such as laboratory skills."¹²

Programme specifications quickly became the norm, and structuring of education shifted to the achievement of explicit, numbered learning outcomes, which can be clearly tested/assessed in an assessment component against explicit assessment criteria.

In the 'Dearing' view, the 'intended outcomes' of a program are certainly biased towards particular subjects whose knowledge bases are less obviously inclusive of body-knowledge (for instance, those subjects in which artefacts are made which more obviously involve the body's engagement, viz. art and design, or indeed subject areas in which the 'tool' is the body itself, viz. acting and dance). But more fundamentally, outcomes as put forward by Dearing neglect the sensorium and the body at any rate, focusing on a quite limited notion of cognition (i.e., here 'the brain', the mind), of verbal/discursive communication, of critical analysis, etc. and simply excluding many other, perhaps more important notions and values such as some of the one proposed here.

Fig. 82/
Spiegel, Wim Vandekeybus (Ultima vez)

¹² The Dearing Report (1997) (formally known as National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education) "Higher Education in the learning society". <http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html#01> accessed 01.03.15

This approach to knowledge and education based on measurement, evaluation and scrutiny ignores the wondrousness and fullness of being human in a complex world that cannot be measured. It is not commensurate with the dimensions and modalities of our lived life and experience of that world. It ignores the fundamental ‘excessive-ness’ of life which locates it outside the confines of discrete scrutiny. In Bataille’s terms: *“Beyond our immediate ends, man’s activity in fact pursues the useless and infinite fulfilment of the universe.”* (Bataille 1988:21)

In addition to this (apparently) ‘generic’ view on structuring education, architecture overlays the curriculum with criteria of its own. In the UK (and other European countries), the professional bodies (ARB and RIBA) base their criteria on the European Directive on the recognition of professional qualifications. The so-called ‘11 Points’ list the different competencies a graduate architect should have. The language of the directive echoes that of Dearing: the testing of attainment and achievement of ‘knowledge’, ‘skills’ and ‘understanding’ play out variously in all the points.

Schools of architecture tend to organize their educational programs around these generic guidelines, and continue to be quite influenced by the legacy of functionalist and rationalist approaches that originated in the work of Jacques-Nicolas-Louis Durand and his followers and that have been developed through several generations of polytechnical institutes and schools. These curriculums take for granted the need to separate parts and areas of knowledge and establish the paths for the required acquisition of competencies of architectural design, history and theory of architecture and art, architectural construction, structural calculation and physics, installations and services, project management, law and regulations, and a few other sub-fields, in separate and quite isolated compartments. In some cases, schools driven by design-believers tend to drift in the opposite direction offering design as a hook for everything else so as to integrate all these other things in the design studios. For us, there is a worlding, political and u-topian project in the attention to, not so much the definition and articulation of the different components of architectural education and the sequence of their attainment, but the dance/writing (choreography) of the pedagogy itself, the very design of the modalities of learning – each a choreographic object – which can enact many or few unfair exclusions and can be or not be based in matters of care and responsible imaginations of what the university could be and ought to be.

In his introduction to Laplantine’s ‘The Life of the Senses’, David Howes draws on differences between categorization and its desire to binary-ise, to make essential and identifiable, and other practices which

“focus on duration, modulation, and rhythm [...] ‘[s]ensible thinking’ or ‘modal thinking as [Laplantine] also calls it, is continuous with the world [worlding], sensitive to the slightest gradations and movements and effects.” (Howes, 2015:x) This focus on duration and modulation echoes my insistence in modalities of waiting in relationship with the encounter, as well as my proposal to ‘delay the image’. Again, we must slow down and claim our right to remain, to endure, to develop bonds and affinities, to dance on.

Laplantine quotes Marilena Chaui: “*Today one of the principal aspects of the fight against exclusion is to succeed in breaking the discourse of competency*”. (Laplantine, 2015:29) It is in part this very categorisation (knowledge, skills, understanding, competencies, etc.), which limits this way of thinking. There is an inherent separation between the intelligible and the sensible: “...*category thinking eschews that which is formed in crossings, transitions, unstable and ephemeral movements of oscillation. It opts, in a drastic manner, for the fixity of time, movement and the multiple [...]*” (Laplantine, 2015:56) At least, it should be clear that categories must be constantly investigated with a caring curiosity that wants to know and understand and explore relations: “*We need new category work. We need to live the consequences of non-stop curiosity inside mortal, situated, relentlessly relational worlding.*” (Haraway in Gane 2006:143) This curiosity is another form of care that sets us in a productive tension with situations both underscoring our responsibility – to take part, to stay, to care, to endure, to open up – as well as creating the conditions for learning. It drives us through a process of constant search and fight of the illegitimate in any knowing, describing, naming, and governing practices, both the ones we encounter and those of our own.

Assessment practices in higher education, biased as they are (as seen in Dearing’s list) along discursive, language-based conceptions of knowledge, skills, and understanding, have neglected the body and its location *in* and *of* situations. These practices do not explicitly engage in the complexities and contingencies of corporeal experiences which are ‘partners’ with ‘things’ in creating specific material contexts, and therefore remain incommensurate with learning (and making)-in-the-making.

Our work in our masters level architecture programs looks at the acquisition and evaluation (judgement) of knowledge, skills and understanding in the learning and teaching in architecture by including the body and its distribution through other ‘bodies’ (be they human, non-human, technological, artificial, etc.).

The assessment of the student's achievement of competencies at different levels has tended to foreground a predominantly discursive, language-based, and 'scientific' bias, one which echoes the exhortation on institutions to " ...*make learning explicit in the form of outcomes, level descriptors, and assessment criteria*"(Fava 2011:130) The *processual* learning which occurs in situations and through the body, i.e., the breadth of learning which is always in physical movements, gestures, postures, expressions, and exchanges with other bodies and things – which constitute the development of expertise in architecture – is absent in evaluations of student learning. Again, the very assessment of competencies is part of a discourse of exclusion, but also of what might be loosely rendered as neoliberal marketization of everything, which operates here through an almost exclusive focus on entrepreneurship, flexibility, self-reliance, self-transformation, competitiveness, market-responsibility, employability, efficiency, the products of knowledge and other values (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2001) which constitute what has been referred to as "*enterprising education*", ultimately pushing us toward some form of 'global corporate citizenship'. (Mccafferty, 2010)

Modalities of Intravention

In the work we have been doing with postgraduate architecture students we have been focusing on the relationships between performative and discursive practices and methods – between worlding and utopos – and how intra-actions within and amongst such practices engender other 'architectural' values. There are five main modes which shape our choreographic pedagogy: the body's role and development as a performative and implicative force in making; the discursive, graphic¹³ and diagrammatic development of positions/issues through mappings of matters of concern; intraventions of bodies and materials and constructions in live situations; preparation and discussions of readings aligned to our matters of concern; and the speculative imaginings and dreams of possibilities in projective designs.

Each mode is both singular and plural in that it can find boundaries and limits but is always delimited in relation to the others. And each mode can be understood as partaking of Lepecki's fusion of the political and aesthetics through his 'constitutive qualities' of dance referred to above: ephemerality, corporeality, precariousness, scoring and performativity. We often refer to the array of practices that emerge from these five modes as '*landscapes of actions*', which we use to emphasize the performative, multiple and transformational dimensions of our work, but also to question and challenge the illusion of 'wholeness' that the words 'design', or even 'building', normally evoke in architectural contexts. The question is of-

¹³ Although we are writing 'graphic', what we mean is 'related to the image in its full sense'

ten formulated as: “so, where is the design? (where is the building?)” To which we would like to answer “...design? What do you mean by design? What you see here is an account of a complex landscape of actions aiming at transforming the world through the articulation and enactment of material, discursive and non-discursive re-arrangements, and their effects in and of the world...what requires, sometimes, a degree of planning and design, but that occurs often also as a result of unexpected encounters and emerging affinities, all informed by our will and capacities to ‘architect’.”

The modes of our teaching include *the body’s participation* in explorations of and engagement with the urban and the world, attending to the values that we have referred to above such as immediacy, mattering and bodying, vulnerability, fragility, improvisation, performance, movement, multiplicity and becoming. The role of the body is scored through, for instance, an exercise that we like to call “*take an object for a walk*” and that aims at exploring the possibilities of ‘shifting agency’ and the power of ‘techniques of things’. Students are asked to choose domestic objects and to encounter them as they present themselves, so that they become ‘theorial objects’, or things that do theory without us imposing it on them. By walking with these things in the city in particular ways, students engage in processes of inquiry, experimentation and questioning that are driven by the ‘score’ of the thing - not primarily by their own desires - and in doing so, they make space in different ways.

But also in other modalities of urban exploration in which students, as we have suggested above, are asked to locate the cranes in the city – understood as indexes of on-going urban transformations and as markers of their sites – and then find ways to approach and ‘hug’ them. These practices of hugging, with their implication of care and love and bodies, require and engagement with the difficulties – or easiness – of situations, and the exploration of the conditions that allow (or do not) a safe approach to the cranes, through official or tacit permission from those in the sites or responsible for them, through a process of understanding and situated analysis of the complexities surrounding the cranes and their ecologies. Such bodily interactions highlight the entanglement of material, discursive and non-discursive dimensions, and the power of our fragile bodies to enact and interrogate those entanglements. “*If we start by moving, by thinking through moving, and by living through moving, we’ll arrive to that disturbing vision: that the predicament of dance is to be an art of erasure. Dance always vanishes in front of our eyes in order to create a new past. The dance exists ultimately as a mnemonic ghost of what had just lived there.*” (Lepecki, 1996)

Our *Matters of Concern*, (or MoC's), as combinations of words related by the slash (/), are capable of revealing certain preoccupations and predilections as well as of leaving spaces and gaps for their development in uncertain, sometimes complementary directions. They are currently: Body/Apparatus, Critical/Relational, Agency/Structure, The Other/Difference, The Other/Coexistence, Performative/Things, Transversals/Micropolitics, Aesthetics/Politics, Affordance/Gift, Diffraction/Representation, Discourse/Event, Documentation/Judgement, Making/Sense. These matters of concern are not only tools for mapping, or for exploring and delineating agendas and positions but are also very concrete instances of thought. They indicate realms of perception, thought and action, but they are open enough to allow the production of the unexpected, the exploration of the uncertain and the joy of speculative play. And: they are damn serious. They are ways of approaching crucial questions and learning apparatuses that invite us to work our way(s) through them and with them, exploring, discussing, speculating and testing as we go about proposing what they could be. We use them as dimensions of our research and in some occasions, for instance, we ask students to take them as descriptors of aspects of the city and its sites, and combine them with their intuitions, interests and understandings in a mapping, research and intervention project. In this exercise, the students' intuitions and interests must be understood as a function of "the other/coexistence" – our main matter of concern in the corresponding term – to produce a research question, and a selection of the matters of concern must be understood as a function of a location (for instance Umeå) to produce a set of maps. Just as in $f(x)=y$ and in $f(y)=y'$. The explorations and findings of these processes of production of 'multi-dimensional maps' are combined to both 'make sites' and to precisely locate/identify points of/for intervention. Through these 'functions', we are setting the score for a strand of interactions and exploration, and the students inhabit and perform them differently, as they think and feel serves their agendas and intuitions. This technique allows us to focus on the processual, as it reinvents itself in the unfolding of its practice, and shifts from the programmatic structures of so much architectural pedagogy and production to the realm of '*catalytic event conditioning*'¹⁴, a perhaps more modest and respectful setting of the starting conditions for responsible and curiosity-driven engagements with the world.

Another mode is the work around a set of texts related to the MoC's. We select readings that we dedicate to one of the matters of concern, which students are asked to interrogate, present and discuss. They are asked to bring in examples of situations and experiences that relate to the texts, and speculate about

¹⁴ See for instance Massumi, Brian (2002). *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham; London: Duke University Press. In particular Chapter 3.

their possible uses in the context of our on-going engagements, situations, interventions and projects. In the seminars, Kropotkin might meet Donna Haraway, and Connolly might help us approach very recent engagements of Butler with the politics of bodies in the street to think about the role of our body in the construction and establishment of something common.

Intraventions in live situations are our main form of engagement. We take part, from the inside, in the construction and articulation of ‘sites’ – expanded conditions, ecologies, locations and actors of a phenomenon – in which we operate ‘architecting’ as responsibly as possible. These are sometimes relatively quick and relatively small actions and/or events which yield a certain breed of effects, and sometimes longer processes through which material re-arrangements include the making of full-scale architectural constructions, the staging and curation of events, and generally the establishment of intense and enduring relations with various actors, institutions, apparatuses and other things.

Our engagements in worlding practices feed, and are fed by, critical fictions, dreams and speculations about how the world could be and how it ought to be, and a constant questioning of official discourses about public space, the city and the territory and about the ways in which the world is being made: *our projective speculations*. How are our intraventions capable of generating previously non-existent possibilities or ideas? How is the city re-wired through our intraventions? How do they foster new ‘dreams’ about public, or rather, shared space? How could they incorporate and enable communities of practice and collaborative ownership? How can architectural projections become tools for the engagement in the actual transformation of the world? And to what extent can they be tools for thinking as well as for the articulation, interrogation and challenging of discourse?

These modes are choreographed in a dance/writing sense, by combining very strict and accurate articulations of the corresponding scores, with gaps and spaces for improvisation and the incorporation of the quotidian and the unexpected. As a moving practice requires, action never stops and what we usually refer to as ‘performative projects’, taking place throughout a term without clear-cut interruptions, are a series of transitions. This duration of works is introduced and triggered through a moment of encounter with our ‘terms of engagement’, which sets certain conditions and provides a framework at the beginning of each term. It is punctuated by reading seminars through which we explore diverse ‘methodologies of engagement’ in moments of heightened thinking attention and tension, and the scores and scripts of specialized workshops and lectures, as well as the moments of shared physical



and bodily intensities in the enactments of constructions, activities and inhabitations.

“Let us put a stop to, or inject a new step into, habitual movement formed by outmoded frames of awareness. Let us align our being within an ecology of mind and start creating from the basis of such knowledge and freedom. One needs to dance to inscribe into oneself the possibility for such change. Turning water into words and thoughts into choreography, I wonder what patterns might it take to weave ourselves out of the soldier’s role we have reduced ourselves to?” (Klien et al., 2008: 27)

In our reading, Forsythe’s model of the choreographic object in its seeming simplicity captures the complexity of our pedagogical practice as/is choreography. The transitions to which he refers and the refusal to consider objects as static or stationary reflects a pedagogy of learning and making in movement and the transitory. It is precise in its location of specific situations and our engagements in and of them, in its rendering of singularities, while at the same time it engages in the immanent potential of a multiplicity of unknowns. It works to keep us attentive, entangled and engaged in the world; to be aware of our own power in moving things and people performatively; and to understand the need for a caring responsibility which should inhere in our practices of the making, speculating and dreaming. /

Fig. 83/
TURF FEINZ RIP RichD Dancing in the Rain,
Oakland Street, YAK FILMS. (Fragment)



Backsides and Backyards/

Immediate Critique: Learning not to want the city to be instituted like that

Chapter 3.4

“Rather than affirming the current condition of cities as the expression of transhistorical laws of social organization, bureaucratic rationality, or economic efficiency, critical urban theory emphasizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially contested and therefore malleable character of urban space - that is, its continual (re) construction as a site, medium, and outcome of historically specific relations of social power. [...] Another, more democratic, socially just, and sustainable form of urbanization is possible, even if such possibilities are currently being suppressed through dominant institutional arrangements, practices, and ideologies.”¹

“A revolutionary leadership must accordingly practice co-intentional education. Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.”²

‘Apberget’ or ‘The Monkey Mountain’ was a very well known public space in Umeå, a town of around 100.000 inhabitants in the North of Sweden that was the European Capital of Culture during the year 2014. It was designed by Ulla Nelson and built in 1987 as part of the activities of the housing fair Bo87³ which took place in Umeå at the time.

Fig. 84/

The site of our interventions at the crossing of Rådhusplanaden with Rådhusorget. Photo: Francesco Apuzzo.

¹ Brenner, Neil (2012). *What is Critical Urban Theory?* in *Cities for People, Not for Profit*, Oxon; New York: Routledge, p.11.

² Freire, Paulo (2005). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum, p.69.

³ Svensk Bostadsmässa 87, or Swedish Housing Fair 1987





Opposite page:
Fig. 85/
Apberget, Umeå 2012.
Photo: Per Landfors.

Fig. 86/
Demonstration at Apberget in support of the sausage vendors. Speech by Johannes Samuelsson, Artist. Umeå 2013. Photo courtesy of Johannes Samuelsson.

Fig. 87/
Skaters at Apberget, photo anonymous.

⁴ Local and regional media reported on the 9th of September both about the demonstration that took place that day and about the news that 'Apberget' was to be dismantled. See <http://www.vk.se/969746/stort-intresse-for-antiracistisk-manifestation> and <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/vasterbotten/apberget-kan-rivas> respectively.



The place, which consisted of a series of stone steps and a speaker's podium, was situated in the middle of the main street in front of the old town hall, in the crossing of Rådhusstorget (the town hall's square) and Rådhusplanaden (the town hall's avenue). Hans Åkerlind, the city architect in Umeå from 1960 to 1990, was the initiator of the project and personally interested in developing an urban infrastructure that would allow people to sit and look at other people, which according to him "*is something people do not get tired of, as they do of landscapes and views*". (Åkerlind, 2014)

The Monkey Mountain was built with the accord of the politicians that welcomed a new public space that could be used as a stage for political speeches, and the place soon became the preferred location for demonstrations, public actions and protests, as well as a very liked meeting point.

It was still one of the most important democratic places in the city when, on the 9th of September 2013, it was leaked to the press that the municipality had plans to tear it down in order to proceed with the works of installation of pipes and cables for the sprinkler system of the new commercial gallery 'Utopia'. The very same day, a demonstration against racist neo-nazis congregated more than 3000 people at 'Apberget'.⁴



The decision to tear down the Monkey Mountain generated a lot of protests and quite some reactions of groups of citizens that wrote in public media, congregated periodically at the place, and stood up for the conservation of this public space. In spite of the opposition, the municipality went forward as planned and dismantled the steps and speaker's podium. The demolition works started on the 16th of September 2013, and in a couple of weeks the area was flattened and fenced.⁵

Shortly after its tearing down, the politicians and the technical department of the municipality initiated the process to organize and conduct what they called a 'citizen dialog' to discuss future designs for the place, a priori excluding the option of rebuilding it.

The citizen-dialog process was conflictive and disappointing, with many participants feeling manipulated and drawn into a game in which the terms of the 'conversation' were already set from the start by one of the parts. During the process, local media reported on various and serious inaccuracies in

Fig. 88/
Apberget starts to be demolished. Photo
courtesy of Tobias Andersson.

Fig. 89/
Apberget has been demolished. Photo
courtesy of Västerbottens-Kuriren.

⁵ See particularly 'Apanfattas' (The monkey is missed), a Facebook-based platform to keep the memory of Apberget alive, which coordinated daily meetings at the place to eat lunch together and the documentation of events surrounding the dismantling of Apberget. <https://www.facebook.com/apanfattas>

Fig. 90/
The students worked with some scaled models after the initial discussion.
Photo: Josep Garriga

Fig. 91/
The construction work started immediately after the first tests. Photo: Josep Garriga

6 See for instance <http://www.svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/vasterbotten/politiker-kanner-sig-lurad-om-apberget> and <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?progrmid=109&artikel=5789418>

7 Official explanation of the municipality on why the Monkey Mountain had to be dismantled http://umea.se/download/18.6f3b390214107b691a16316/1379252779384/Varför+måste+vi+montera+ned+Apberget_infoblad_130912.pdf and the Press release from Umeå Municipality signed by Carl Arnö (Project Manager) and Karin Isaksson (Coordinator of Streets and Parks), explaining the reasons and process of dismantling of Apberget <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/umea/pressreleases/raadhusplanaden-renoveras-och-omgestaltas-902963>

8 See also <http://www.folkbladet.nu/792212/lasse-jacobson-politik-ska-handla-om-sakfragor-i-stallet-for-personangrepp>



the information presented by the civil servants in charge of urban transformation projects. It was then known that local real estate owners including the biggest and most powerful developer, constructor and real estate operator 'Balticgruppen', had met on the 17th of May 2013 with the civil servants and told them that they wanted to get rid of the Monkey Mountain. The project leader at the municipality at the time, Carl Arnö, was to inform the politicians in the technical board/commission of their views to initiate further discussion and actions, but apparently this never happened.⁶

A big controversy started upon the publication of the declarations of some of the involved politicians, denying any knowledge of such information and showing their disappointment on the process.⁷ Eventually, this led to changes in the positions of project leader (civil servant) and head of the board (politician) at the technical commission of Umeå Municipality, and profound disagreements amongst the members of the governing red-green coalition.⁸



Fig. 92 & 93/
Assemblage of the beams for transporta-
tion. Photo: Josep Garriga

9 As it has been made clear earlier, the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention is a 2-year Master's program offered at Umeå School of Architecture that I have been co-directing with Oren Lieberman since 2011, and in the framework of which some of the experiences and approaches presented here were developed and carried out. I want to acknowledge and thank our 2013-2014 class of master's students, who were the true protagonists of these actions: Nina Bäckström, Soumia Bouroucha, Jana Dzadonova, Stefanie Gruyaert, Nina Larsson, Andrea Lizakova, Ibrahim Mahmood, Hossein Rahmanian, Miguel Ros, Joshua Taylor and Rafaela Taylor.



Fig. 94/
Transportation of the beams towards the square. Photo: Josep Garriga

¹⁰ The program was conceived and developed upon request from Peter Kjaer, former rector of the school of architecture, by Alberto Altés and Oren Lieberman, who are still its co-directors. At the time of this intervention, the workshop and its associated exploration were run by Alberto Altés in collaboration with Josep Garriga, who was then a part-time lecturer in the program, and Francesco Apuzzo and Axel Timm from RaumlaborBerlin, who were invited as guest lecturers for the workshop. Javier Rodrigo and Aida Sánchez de Serdio have been involved in the program as guest lecturers in every edition since it started and their input has been crucial in terms of collaborative practices and urban struggles.

Following the events at a distance, some students at the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention (LiAi)⁹ got involved in the investigations leading to the publication of articles in the local media. As directing faculty¹⁰, we decided to dedicate a workshop to the topic in order to contribute to the investigation and take part in the process.

The program at the LiAi consists of four terms along two years. During each of the first three terms, students are confronted with two intense 1-week workshops: one of them focuses on more theoretical and/or discursive aspects, while the other one is dedicated to the design and construction of something that is conceived to be part of an architectural intervention. In this occasion, we thought it would be interesting to have a workshop focusing on the construction of an alternative 'Monkey Mountain' to be placed, if only temporarily, at the location in which the old one stood before it was dismantled. The workshop would be an opportunity to rehearse construction techniques and work with specific materials but also to participate in the discussions about the ongoing transformation of the city, of which the dismantling of 'Apberget' was a tiny, although meaningful and symptomatic episode.



Another 'Apberget'

Already from the outset we fixed a number of conditions that we thought would help engaging successfully with the place, the situation and the conflicts surrounding it. We also invited our friends Axel Timm and Francesco Apuzzo from RaumlaborBerlin to help us in the development of the workshop. Together we decided that the structure would be made of small pieces, in order to be able to transport them easily, but also so that the steps could be arranged and rearranged in different ways.

Many options and materials were discussed until we agreed upon 45x220mm construction beams in timber as the only material. The parts did not turn out as small as we had thought in the beginning, and therefore wheels were needed for the transportation of the whole. The beams were left uncut in their original lengths but connected simply to form much more stable and resistant U-profiles. A few shorter units were made and wheels attached to one of their sides, so that the other units could be stuck into them to create two cart-like structures with the help of some straps.

Fig. 95/
Transportation of the beams towards the
square. Photo: Josep Garriga



This design allowed us to very quickly arrange the beams for transportation, which could be done by pushing and pulling the carts. Once on site, it was also possible to deploy them in minutes by releasing the straps and moving the beams. Straps, timber, screws, wheels and pavement were all part of our interactions with the 'Apberget' situation. (Ingold, 2012) This had a very strong performative dimension, requiring two persons to coordinate their actions to move each of the beams, and the group in turn to discuss and take decisions while in action about the position of the next beam and its relationship to the other beams. The process caught considerable attention and attracted passers by and other citizens that would stop and ask, sit or engage in moving the beams together with the students and us.

Performing the square

Although the fabrication of the pieces took place in the workshop at the School of Architecture and we had the plan of moving the beams on wheels to the square, we had not asked for an official permission for our 'intervention'. Upon arrival in the square, we started immediately to deploy the beams, focusing

Fig. 96/
Deployment at the square.
Photo: Francesco Apuzzo

The screenshot shows a news article on the SVT.se website. The header includes the SVT logo, navigation tabs for Program, Nyheter, Sport, and Barn, and a search bar. The main headline is "Här bygger studenter ett nytt Apberg" with a sub-headline "7 mars 2014" and "3 bilder". The main image shows a group of people gathered around a large wooden structure in a public square. Below the image is a photo credit: "Foto: Stefan Brännström/SVT." The article text discusses architecture students building a new 'Apberg' in Umeå. To the right of the article are social media sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, E-post, and Skriv ut. Further right is a sidebar with sections: "Senaste nytt" (latest news), "Mest läst" (most read), and "Mest delat" (most shared). At the bottom right is a "Titta på" (watch) section with a video player showing a 5-minute 1-second video titled "Senaste sändningen Västerbotten".

SVT.se Program Nyheter Sport Barn SVT Play Öppet arkiv Väder TV-tabell Sök på svt.se

OMGODAG 15 JULI svt Nyheter Västerbotten

Nyheter Sport Kultur Regionalt Opinion Väder

Här bygger studenter ett nytt Apberg

7 mars 2014 3 bilder

Foto: Stefan Brännström/SVT. 1/3

Arkitektstudenter i Umeå bygger ett eget nytt Apberg - på samma plats som det gamla har stått. Anledningen är att man vill skapa debatt.

Idag har ett gäng arkitektstudenter byggt ett eget apberg, mitt i centrala Umeå. Anledningen är att Apberget har plockats bort, som varit en populär och uppskattad mötesplats för många Umebor. Nu vill studenterna testa gränserna.

- Det är ett experiment. Vem bestämmer, vem bygger staden och hur medskapande kan den lilla människan vara?, säger Nina Larsson, en av studenterna.

Har ni tillstånd för bygget?

- Vi har läst lagboken och tolkar det som att det är okej så länge vi inte bryter mot detaljplanen och så länge bygget är mobilt, säger Larsson.

Hur länge får ert apberg stå kvar?

- Det vet jag inte. Vi har inte bestämt det. Vi vill se vad som händer, säger hon.

Har ni fått någon respons?

Facebook Twitter E-post Skriv ut

Senaste nytt

- 21:01 Här dubblades användandet av rutavdrag
- 21:19 FN:s specialrapportör till Rönnbäcken
- 20:47 Fortfarande på fri fot

Mest läst

- 1 Vill bygga hus med 3D-skrivare
- 2 Kvävdes till döds i sömnen
- 3 Två avlidna personer funna på båt

Mest delat

- 1 Grillen - den ultimata knottfällan
- 2 Nu kommer den spanska matadorhettan
- 3 Hagamannen får återvända till Umeå

Titta på

Senaste sändningen Västerbotten igår 21:26 5 min 1 sek

Fig. 97/
Local news covering the actions at the square practically on real time. Screen capture.

on our own coordination and discussions to decide how to arrange and place them in order to create a functional set of steps/seats, but also an interesting and inviting forum.

We engaged in conversations with different people that stopped and looked or asked, and we managed to go up to the top of the former town hall building to follow the process from the heights. From up there, the collaborative negotiation took another dimension: it was as if a community of ants were engaged in the construction of a structure made of sticks, involving all kinds of movements and exchanges of information between the participating ants but also between those and other ants that would at times interact with the first ones, in a seemingly incomprehensive dance. (Lepecki, 2012)

During the day, we were visited by the local and regional TV, Swedish Radio, and the local newspapers, leading to several images and reports from our actions being published in these media that very same day, with considerable repercussion. Many of the web-based versions of these media gathered also comments by inhabitants in relationship with the coverage of our new 'Apberg'.

Finally, the ants seemed satisfied and the new steps had taken what looked like a stable form. With the help of some straps, we introduced compression forces onto the beams, stabilizing them further and making them work a bit more like a whole. (The straps bracing all the beams vertically allowed us to 'tie' them together and compress them, so that they would less likely move out of their positions in case someone would jump or quickly move on/through them).

The Municipality (also) likes the new 'Apberg'

Two days later, one of our students¹¹ got a call from the project manager of the technical board of the municipality. He told her that in normal circumstances he would be calling to ask us to remove the intervention, but this time they had really liked it and had also understood from the media and the reactions of people that it was quite liked in the city, so that they were interested in discussing with us the conditions for the intervention to remain where it was. Our student replied explaining that the intervention had been developed by the group of LiAi students and faculty and that we would have to discuss his call together and call him back. Since it was taking some time for us to think about it, our student got another call from the municipality with an explanations of the conditions and issues that they had discussed among them in the technical board.

¹¹ Because of their own interest and involvement in the topic and in the investigations about the actual reasons for the dismantling of Apberget, but also because of their being Swedish and from Umeå, our students Nina Larsson and Nina Bäckström were the persons in contact with the project manager of the municipality.



Fig. 98/
A new 'Apberg' emerges.
Photo: Francesco Apuzzo

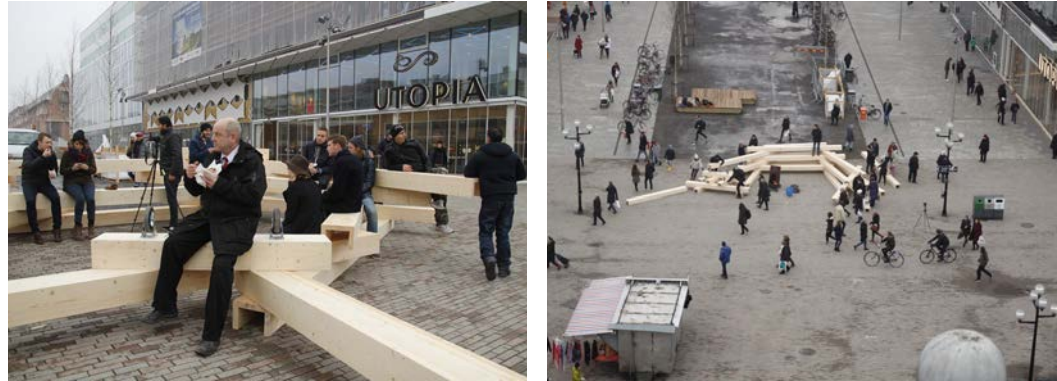


Fig. 99 & 100/
People using the new Apberg and a view
from above.
Photos: Francesco Apuzzo.

They wanted us to move the structure backwards, out of the square and into the street, until it would rest on top of some gravel that was there since the excavation works were finished. They wanted us to screw all the different beams together and therefore give them a completely fixed position. They wanted us to take responsibility of any possible accident that could happen in/at the structure while it was there. And they wanted us to apply for a permit and pay a fee for the use of public space, as if we were a restaurant or a bar installing their tables there or a business selling food or advertising their products.

After hearing these demands, the students decided to meet and discuss, and agreed on a number of issues that they would not accept. Basically none of the demands of the municipality seemed logical or reasonable to any of us, so it was easy to agree on the definition of 'our limits'. We were all ready to take the structure back 'home' to the school, if it was necessary, or to take it elsewhere. They had said that they liked it and they were interested in it, so we decided to call the project manager back and ask him to meet by the intervention to discuss everything there, at the Monkey Mountain.

This disposition to move elsewhere with our structure relates to Foucault's *modal* description of critique: what we didn't want was 'to be governed *like that*', by the municipality, in the absurd ways in



which they were trying to continue to police and transform the city. (Foucault, 1997: 28) Although we didn't want to be governed like that, we didn't have an alternative idea of 'government' and we were ready to engage in a process of constant struggle "*actualized as a fundamental critique of the institution*" (Raunig, 2006). Unlike Raunig though, and as we will see below, we do not think such a constant struggle is also a permanent process of instituting.

A discussion on city planning and public space

The meeting was agreed for the next day in the afternoon. The project manager came with another civil servant and an interesting conversation developed between them and us, led by the students. Each of their requests were discussed at length, and the students repeatedly managed to take the conversation to points in which the civil servants had to admit that "*this was the way things were done and had to be done*", even though throughout the discussion the students had shown the irrational, inconvenient, unnecessary or incomprehensible character of the demands and the interpretations of the regulatory structures they were based on.

Fig. 101 & 102
New Apberget in use.
Photos: Karin Berggren.



There was no need to move the structure backwards onto the gravel, and precisely the point was to be close to the square and to the places through which people were walking, in order to let those sitting at the new 'Apberg' look at the people walking; still, they would claim a risk of accidents of people 'crashing' onto the steps if we were to 'invade' the square and the 'trajectories' of the pedestrians on the street with the new Monkey Mountain. It was not necessary to screw the beams onto each other if we were to use the straps as proposed, but the civil servants would argue that the straps could be unlocked by anyone and that this was dangerous. One of the points was precisely to invite people to adjust the structure according to their desires in order to avoid a final, completed design and to have instead a shifting monkey mountain that could be transformed by their users.

One of the most heated discussions was around the issue of responsibility: Why should we as faculty or students - or the school of architecture for that matter - be made responsible of possible accidents happening around or at the structure? Wasn't the municipality simply liking the structure and therefore deciding to 'install' it temporarily in public space? What was the difference between this structure and other public space furniture or park equipment? If anyone were to have an accident the responsibility would be theirs and solely theirs, just as anyone tripping over in the middle of the street. But the civil

Fig. 103 & 104
Feminist demonstration at the new Ap-
berg. Photos: Karin Berggren.



servants would argue again that public space was regulated to protect the municipality from possible complaints and lawsuits and that they wanted us to take full responsibility.

Finally, the issue of the permit and the fee came up, and the discussion gained both momentum and temperature. It was obvious that our activities were not profit-driven, or even 'profitable' in economic terms, so why were we asked to pay a fee? We were replacing the void left by the dismantling of 'Apberget', with another version of it: a semi-mobile, half architectural/half artistic, timber construction that was intended for people to sit on comfortably and naturally. Our intervention was contributing to the furnishing of public space in an affordable, functional and collaborative way. The only 'problem' was that nobody had asked or assigned us to do it; it was an unsolicited intervention, which was of course bringing attention to one of the urban sites of struggle and discussion. Since the reactions of the inhabitants had been positive to our intervention, the municipality - afraid of possible (further) protests - did not dare to intervene forcefully and remove the structure, and decided instead to show a friendlier face while hiding the same intentions: public space was not to be used for anything unplanned, unregulated or free of charge.

Fig. 105/
A view of the new Apberg in use with the
old town hall in the back.
Photo: Josep Garriga



Fig. 106/
The new Apberg taken by the town's kids.
Photos: Karin Berggren

The discussion of this last point initiated an exchange about the condition of public space and different understandings of public-ness, which led to moments in which the civil servants admitted that the way things were was a bit absurd in terms of the regulation of what could and could not be done in public space and under which conditions, immediately to insist that *“in any case, there are some rules that say that if you want to use public space for any activity, you have to apply for a permission and then you have to pay a fee depending on the time, location and size of the space you intend to use”*. Since we were occupying a part of public space with ‘our’ structures, we had to apply for the permission and pay the corresponding fee.

The discussion ended with the students firmly sustaining their positions and suggesting that if those were the requirements, they would rather take the steps back to school with them. The civil servants seemed surprised about this firmness and tried to continue talking, but our students had developed into stricter positions during the discussion, perhaps inspired by the knowledge gained throughout it. In the end, the civil servants told us to leave the beams there for the moment and that they would contact us back with a confirmation of what their decision was. They wanted to discuss everything with their colleagues.



Fig. 107/
Transportation of u-beams.
Photo: Alberto Altés

Back to School

The temporary 'Apberg' we had installed in Rådhusstorget stood there for 4 more days during which it was intensely used. It hosted a feminist demonstration during the weekend, and for a few days allowed people to sit and improvise various ways in which they thought it was appropriate, fun or convenient to use it.

In the same way in which it was installed, a group of us unstrapped and loaded the beams back up into the wheeled elements and 'drove' them back to the school of architecture, where the timber beams stood for a while in the garden as a set of improvised benches. Later on, some of the beams were used in the construction of a collective park in the neighborhood of Ålidhem, in which some LiAi students were also involved.

Apberget as a symptom

Although some of the students, and many of the protesters were very interested in the thing itself - Apberget in its specific appearance and materiality - and were convinced that the right way to go would be to have it rebuilt in the same way and in the same place, one of the things that became clear to us throughout the process was that we felt less and less interested in the preservation of 'Apberget' as a thing (its materiality, its location, its precise history) and more and more drawn into exploring the possibilities emerging from the situation we had gotten ourselves into. The 'Apberget' conflict was a field of which we progressively became a part, and the new 'mountain' - the wooden u-beams we had arranged as steps - was another element in that conflict. Most of all, our intervention (or *intravention*)¹² was creating the conditions for an unprecedented discussion about the making of the city, and allowing us to transform the street into a classroom in which challenging and interesting pedagogical situations were emerging as unplanned consequences of our presence and the presence of these objects we brought with us in the street and in the conflict.

What felt more important and what we learnt to value then was the possibility of witnessing and taking part in a conversation with the project manager of the technical board (Carl Arnö) in the middle of the square, just at/on/in the structures we had built. This conversation happened in a way in which it was possible for us to discuss the specificities of that structure and the conditions in which it could or could not stand there according to the municipality, and the conditions under which we were ready to accept

¹² See chapter 3.2 for a detailed explanation of the term 'intravention'. More about it can be found in Altés, A. and Lieberman, O. (2013)

that it could stay or not... At the same time, it was possible to get a glimpse of the ways in which the city was governed and planned and made by the very people we were talking to. It all felt like an incredibly valuable insight into what was really happening - into an understanding of what the transformation of Umeå was like - which constituted a very important (and different) form of knowledge. (Barad, 2007) These things were in our view overshadowing the perhaps also valuable specificities of the 'original' Apberget.

It seemed to be that the regime of truth (Foucault, 1997) was a regime of opposition between those in power who had decided to tear down 'Apberget' and shape the public space of the city according to the needs of shop-owners and developers, and those who wanted to restore Apberget and the area around it to its original state in order to 'resist' that power, of course in the name of the historical memory and symbolic significance of that particular place and its stony steps. It was quite difficult to find a crack in which to be allowed to express a wish, a desire, an intention or an understanding of the situation that would not coincide with one or the other of these two sides.

Not caring about 'Apberget' as a thing was quickly dismissed as insensitive, almost disabling anyone to care about other things, such as the ways and modalities in which the city was being planned and transformed. In our view, the events around 'Apberget' and its dismantling could and should be taken as a symptom, an index of a way of doing things, an indicator of the lack of responsibility and integrity of the municipal politicians and civil servants, an illustration of the lack of respect for the city's inhabitants and their desires. It was a way to learn how it is that we don't want to be governed and how it is that we don't want the city to be made. Instead of seeing it as a thing or an urban artifact to be preserved and fought for, we proposed to inhabit the situation around it to develop an immediate critique of the ways in which things (and the city) were being done/made.

Immediate interventions as critique and possibility

This critique might or might not led to the production of a stable alternative to the original 'Apberg', but it could certainly give us a chance to understand the conditions of our coexistence much better, while creating an actually existing alternative to everything that was supposed to be possible. Suddenly, our intervention could signify the possibility of the possibility: it was able to materialize, for a short instant,

a different piece of public space - conceived and made entirely by its inhabitants - that would stand there safely available for anyone to use. A material proof that it was possible to do things otherwise, and the beginning of a conversation that was to generate a different knowledge of what the city was like.

It was in the very act of confrontation with the urban regulations and their absurdity – as well as the absurdity of a condition in which we (architects, students of architecture, artists, researchers and university teachers) were not given a possibility to develop a real conversation or any space whatsoever for things to be done otherwise – that we understood and learnt what Apberget really was, and what was really going on in Umeå. Another horizon of knowledge emerged.

“The critical practice does not well up from the innate freedom of the soul, but is formed instead in the crucible of a particular exchange between a set of rules or precepts (which are already there) and a stylization of acts (which extends and reformulates that prior set of rules and precepts) This stylization of the self in relation to the rules comes to count as ‘practice’.” (Butler 2004:626)

Ultimately, the intervention at Rådhusorget did not aim at establishing a new, permanent, or alternative ‘Monkey Mountain’ in the former location of the original one, nor was it put in motion to restore a memory or fight some kind of urban amnesia about what this place represented or was or the activities it hosted. Instead, the intervention engages with a situation in order to encounter the place and the actors involved in it, to endure as long as the emerging relations are there and to contribute to its effects.

The perceived wrong was for most of us a post-political, neoliberal, patronizing and commercially oriented agenda in the development of the city and the procedures through which decisions about urban public spaces and the making of the city were being taken. This was a ‘general’ wrong, not the specific act of dismantling ‘Apberget. It was the atmosphere in the city, the background for an investigation of urban life and the role of architecture and spatial practices today. Confronting the existing regulations with unexpected interventions that did not oppose (aggressively) the actions of the municipality - or at least did not enact this opposition as an act of protest - but rather engaged in the direct transformation of the city forward, introduced an element of immediate disruption and dissent. The authorities perceived that something was wrong and wanted to control and neutralize the intervention, but the existing regulations did not seem to be the best tool at hand since they were not conceived to expect the ‘inadmissible’.



“I will say that critique is the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth. Well, then!: critique will be the art of voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability. Critique would essentially insure the desubjugation of the subject in the context of what we could call, in a word, the politics of truth.” (Foucault, 1997: 32)

Aesthetics of encounter and dissent

Aesthetics of encounter here allows us to engage with a situation and discover urban regulations and procedures, ways of doing things, ways of making and governing the city that we don't like. Enduring and displacing these regulations through immediate actions allows us to further our understanding and increase our knowledge. It gives us the opportunity to discover more while pushing the limits of the existing norms. In this process, we are transformed as subjects while the city is also transformed: perhaps for an instant if we only think of the presence of certain wooden beams and its material arrangement, although much longer if the memories and currents of sensory awareness of the city's inhabitants are taken into account.

Fig. 108/
Discussion and lunch at the new 'Apberg'.
Photo: Alberto Altés

Additionally, a pedagogical situation emerges in which notions of ‘the urban’, public space, and city planning are re-discovered and/or understood in their material, discursive and political reality. We are suddenly involved in and enacting the discussions we have had in the classrooms about the transformation and hyper-regulation of public space, and about the commodification of the city. We meet the ‘real’ actors that are responsible for the current forms of operation and transformation of the city, and we produce a space for exchange and influence that did not exist previously.

While today’s neoliberal, late capitalist and multicultural world seems to revolve around a social space that is increasingly defined and conceptualized on the basis of various approaches to notions of flexibility and difference (Badiou, 2001), it is interesting to reflect about the simultaneous and opposite obsession to regulate, control and fix the material world and the way in which we go about transforming the built environment.

At the same time we are invited and forced to embrace ever-shifting and increasingly precarious economic and work-related conditions and fields, and we are taught to enjoy and desire the rush and excitement of constant change and flexible, open-ended relations - particularly within the personal sphere - we bear also witness to an increasing hyper-regulation of public space, a bureaucratization and subsequent distancing of processes of urban development and an ill-fixation with control and fixity of the spaces of the city and territory, which are supposed to be as ‘free of risk’ as possible, with risk here associated precisely with open ended-ness. The result being that basically nothing can actually happen in the spaces of the city spontaneously. Everything must be planned and organized in advance, and permission for it obtained from the corresponding authorities and the police.¹³

¹³ An extreme example of this, which is also the object of quite some criticism and protests, is the law that regulates dancing in Sweden, which makes it practically impossible for anyone to dance in public space without an authorization to do so. As dancing is associated with potentially dangerous and aggressive behavior, anyone dancing without permission risks being fined or even going to prison. See ‘danstillståndet’.

For citizens in general and for artists, dancers, architects and urban planners in particular, it is increasingly difficult to engage in activities that involve an actual transformation of the cities and spaces they live in. As spatial practitioners, we are confronted with a regulatory system that seems made for the big corporations and their ways and modalities of operation. A system that apparently disables us to intervene in the ongoing transformation of the places we inhabit, and that makes it more and more costly and complicated to make the city after our heart’s desire (Lefebvre, 1968) (Harvey, 2009), or to make it at all.

While these spontaneous actions are rendered more and more difficult, a whole spectacle of (fake) citizen participation is put in place in order to pacify and distract populations, asked to dream about possible futures or to engage in role-play games and to brainstorm about what a specific place could be like or what kinds of amenities the city should be equipped with, while politicians and experts continue to execute their (interested) plans.

The immediate as fragile inadmissible

In this context, it seems pertinent to resort to the category of the immediate, which triggers and enables the encounter and the unexpected on the basis of an a-priori inadmissible act, the actualization of a situated (partial) utopia. The immediate lacks the strength of the instituent, it does not aim at consolidating, stabilizing or fixing a position or a conquered space. It does not aim to claim or reclaim a space for a permanent use, or to impose a final state. It does not intend to install a 'state' at all. (Bey, 1994) The immediate is instead fragile, it embraces the risks of the encounter without a fixed idea of the outcome and without the intentions to install anything it all. (Diprose, 2002) It is a means to initiate and endure an encounter to which we are open and therefore fragile.

"[...] self-making and desubjugation happen simultaneously when a mode of existence is risked which is unsupported by what [Foucault] calls the regime of truth." (Butler 2004: 613)

It is hardly possible to ultimately avoid the partial consolidation of everything, and even the most fragile of encounters evolves in and around the small progresses that each participant makes in the sense of gained knowledge and understanding of the situation.

Slowly and progressively, the participating subjects start understanding who they are becoming in that situation. These steps forward are also a kind of 'micro-instituent' efforts, phases in the setting up of a particular arrangement of things that is decided by those participating in the event, a conversation in this case. Still, when compared to what is usually referred to as instituent practices, these tiny and fragile efforts to stay afloat in the maelstrom of becoming, do not seem to us illegitimate. They respond to a bare minimum of survival and communicative exchange. But they do not aim at establishing anything (permanently).

Efforts to institute tend to define and establish something more or less permanently, what leads sooner or later to some form of exclusion and pushing. (“Apberget must be again like this or like that, it should be here and it should be this way because ‘we’ want to remember ‘these’ events and ‘these’ thoughts that ‘we’ have decided are the ‘identity’ of a social class or a group, or a city, etc...”). These attempts at defining and fixing what something is and/or should be hold inside a core of illegitimacy, which is founded on the unsolvable problem of the definition of the collective subject of such an object or practice: who is that ‘we’ and why should they decide what the most important memories of the city are?

The immediate focuses instead on displacing and becoming, it embraces the encounter through a disappointed critique of what is, and the enactment of an open alternative - a commitment to what could be and what ought to be - and it endures its transformation both co-producing and inhabiting its effects. It starts an unfinished process of insurrection that avoids too precise definitions and the fixing of identities “[...] since ‘critique’ is precisely a practice that not only suspends judgment [...], but offers a new practice of values based on that very suspension. (Butler 2004:610)

Even from within the MA program, in which we try to encourage the students to embrace this notion of immediacy, it is difficult to avoid the progressive sedimentation and fixing of an identity of the program or its practices, which to some extent become, also, if only partially, instituted. Through the notion of fragility discussed above and its relationship to ‘affinity’ - as opposed to identity - we try to gain awareness of our entanglement in instituent processes and micro-fascisms or exclusions, and to minimize their effects and durations.

Our ‘intraventions’ aim at transforming the world through immediate, responsible and often fragile acts of engagement with matter, movement and life. In this occasion, our care and attention was directed to the ongoing transformation of the city of Umeå and its public spaces, and our energies dedicated to investigating the modalities of operation of the actors and powers involved in the making of the city. Our presence in the situation around ‘Apberget’ was of course fueled by our willingness to exercise our right to the city, and our conviction that the world is ours, and for us to make. We see our engagement in these ‘worlding’ practices, and the practices themselves, as learning experiences, and although ‘the monkey’ is still missing – and missed – we have learnt a lot about how we do not want the city to be and how we do not want it to be governed. We have also learnt lots about how we do like to learn together. And for a while, the city was made and lived - and danced - otherwise. It was again alive. //



Out of Field / Technologies of Experience and Invention: An Impossibly Floating Silent Room

Chapter 3.5

Fig. 109/
Photo by: A.Altés

¹ Ingold, T. 2011. *Being alive: essays on movement, knowledge and description*. London; New York: Routledge, p.10.

² Stiegler, B. 2009, *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, p. 7.

³ The influence in this respect of the work of Jacques-Nicolas-Louis Durand has been enormous and continuous to structure architectural education in the functional tradition of many polytechnical schools and universities. For an in-depth discussion of the problem of technology and science in architecture see for instance Pérez, Gómez, A. 1983. *Architecture and the crisis of modern science*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

“The forms the humans build [...] arise within the currents of their involved activity, in the specific relational context of their practical engagement with their surroundings.”¹

“Contemporary disorientation is the experience of an incapacity to achieve epochal redoubling. It is linked to speed, to the industrialization of memory resulting from the struggle for speed, and to the specifics of the technologies employed in that struggle.”²

Technology in architecture and in architectural education has been and continues to be approached more often than not from the point of view of epistemic traditions that tend to embrace the positivism of science, turning theories of construction, technology and architecture into operational rules that are taken for granted, and following paths that tend to reduce architecture to a science of building efficiently, economically and functionally.³

Architectural technology and theory have relied strongly on understandings of the world as representable through ideas and interpretations, along many assumptions based on conceptualizations of the



relations between materials and design based on Aristotelian hylomorphism - which sustains that every thing results from an operation through which (preconceived) forms are imposed onto raw (inert) matter – and overtly mechanistic views of causality that privilege invariance and certainty, seen as the condition of possibility of scientific knowledge.

Technology seems to have become a dominating force, pushing architecture toward conceptual and material efficiency, the celebration of technique as an end in itself, and the cult of productivity⁴. Even in more recent and sensitive approaches to the conceptualization and pedagogy of architectural technology and construction, such as that of the now considered ‘bible’ of construction edited by the Swiss architect and professor Andrea Deplazes, *‘Constructing Architecture: Materials, Processes, Structures’*, technology is presented as a problem of ‘shaping’ and “*the competence to create coherence regarding content and subject*” on the grounds of a clear separation of invariable scientific knowledge from unpredictable nature and inert matter, and the subjective dictates of the designer/architect. The handbook is therefore based on a number of “*technical and structural basics which establish a set of rules and regulations of construction principles and know-how that can be learned and which are wholly independent of any particular design or construction project*” (Deplazes, 2005: 11)

Figs. 110-114
Photos by: J. Garriga

⁴ A separate paper could be dedicated to the influence of the building industry in contemporary architectural production and in society in general.

⁵ For a comprehensive presentation of the role of materials in form-making processes, please check Ingold, T. 2012. *Toward an Ecology of Materials*. In: *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol.41, p.427-442

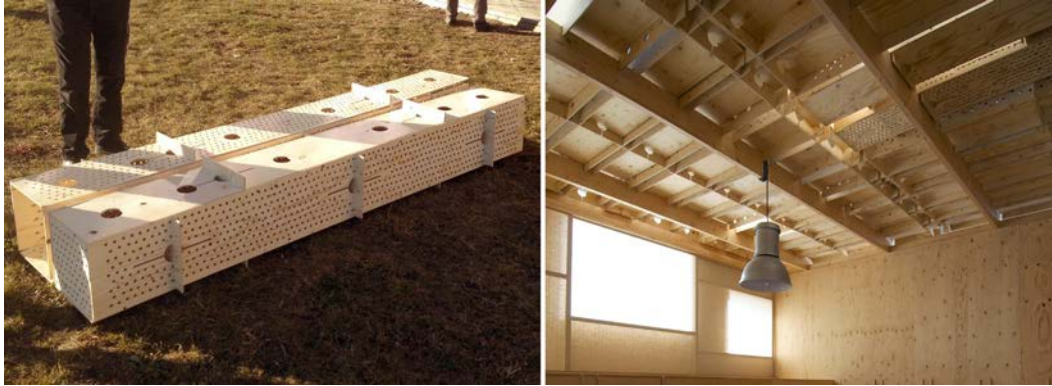


6 Co-responsible in the development of this pedagogical approach and the subsequent associated 'making' practices and research projects are primarily Oren Lieberman, involved mainly in the development of pedagogical and conceptual approaches from 2011 to 2015, and Josep Garriga, who has been a tireless companion of construction workshops, design processes and teaching adventures from 2013 to 2015. Josep has played a key role as co-author and teaching companion in the 'Silent Room' project that I am presenting in detail below. Additionally, during the period 2011-2015, I have also had the pleasure of collaborating with Claudi Aguiló, Roger Tudó and Sergi Serrat, who have been involved in various ways in some of the workshops, contributing with their expertise, sensitivity and energy.

On the contrary, the very Greek origin of the word *tekhné*, referring simultaneously to notions of art and skill, locates technology in the realm of practice, as the primary human activity: the collaborative construction of reality. Human beings, we have learnt from Heidegger and Foucault, are primarily constructed through the non-discursive practices in which they take part, and a domain of knowledge is constituted for each technology that is deployed along these practices – thus the insistence and interest of Foucault in the importance of the inseparability of power and knowledge.

Along these lines, and inspired by the mobile and experiential philosophy of Bergson, as well as by more recent developments in the philosophy of science and technology that engage with explorations of the continuity between perception, thought and action, and understandings of life as movement, I have been trying to develop a series of experiments aiming at the development of alternative approaches to architectural technology and its pedagogy based on a performative and caring engagement with situations and experience, and a passionate interest in materials and their ecologies.⁵

Together with some of my colleagues at the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention (LiAi)⁶ at Umeå School of Architecture, I have engaged in the development of a line of research and 'making' practices that we have referred to as '*technologies of experience and intravention*' and '*architectures*

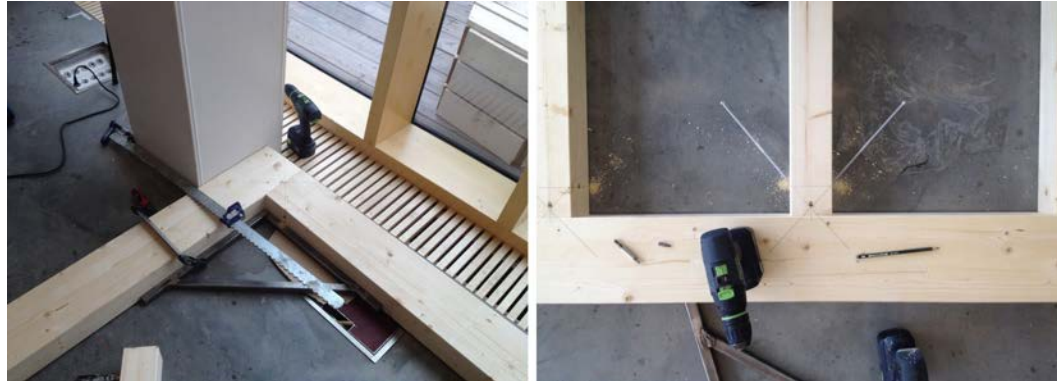


of affordance, aiming at exploring alternative and performative understandings and theorizations of material and architectural technologies as emergent apparatuses that operate within a specific situation in order to afford certain experiences rather than solving pre-defined technical problems. Our experiments have often involved the development and construction of full-scale prototypes through which we have tested various hypotheses while taking part in ‘real’ situations, combining diverse interests and fields of exploration such as: the specificities of timber construction and its supportive technologies to explore and link the local and regional traditions, skills and techniques with current situated needs and ideas of immediacy, affordability and availability; the possibilities of wood construction to enable collaborative work through practices of making and building together and the sharing of skills, knowledge, times and spaces of experience and encounter; a performative and experiential approach to architecture and technology through the notion of *intravention*, as well as theorisations of technologies and buildings as assemblages of materials that respond to architectural situations and specific lives.

Combined with the notion of ‘intravention’, the aims and intentions outlined above have led to the collaborative design and implementation of a number of small-scale architectural projects within very spe-

Fig. 115/
Photo by: Ibrahim Mahmood

Fig. 116/
Photo by: A.Altés



Figs. 117 & 118/
Photo by: A.Altés

7 The technification of the building, even though it was probably conceived to provide conditions of comfort, ends up turning the school into an unhealthy environment that is uncomfortable to inhabit and difficult to live with.

cific situations and contexts, such as small pavilions, urban structures and interventions like ‘Aperget’ or the ‘Flyttblock’⁷, free-standing public saunas, small shelters, or the room that I am presenting below.

The notions of *technologies of experience* and *technologies of intravention* have allowed us to designate our approach and reflect about the ways in which we articulate and inhabit the processes of transformation of the situations we work with, always based on our ambition to enable pedagogical situations in which technology, theory and design are integrated as seamlessly as possible, leading to ‘worlding’ practices of responsible transformation.

In what follows, I will be presenting and thinking through the collaborative process of conceiving and making an ‘impossible’ room inside the building of Umeå School of Architecture: a small, more intimate, warm and silent space – a room that floats in the air – thought as an alternative to the very open, cold and loud spaces of the building. The room is at the same time a u-topian space and a practice of transformation of the world: an impossible room both in the sense of the difficulties of its materialization and in its performance as a critique of the discursive, regulatory and regulated space of the university, and an act of construction that operates not only through material re-arrangements and the



physical transformation of the spaces of the school but also with important effects regarding symbolic capitals, relational ecologies, the lives of involved actors and the establishment of the common.

Affordances, Constructions, Architectures

“ [...] An affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer.”(Gibson, 1979: 129)

The project of construction of this room is part of a series of workshops entitled ‘*Affordances, Constructions, Architectures*’ through which we are developing a more experiential approach to architectural technology. During the academic year 2013-2014, after having been in Umeå and inhabited the building of the school of architecture for more than two years, we had the idea of dedicating a series of workshops to the design and construction of an additional room that could improve our open and loud environment.

Fig. 119/
Photo by: A.Altés



Fig. 120/
Photo by: A.Altés

8 The technification of the building, even though it was probably conceived to provide conditions of comfort, ends up turning the school into an unhealthy environment that is uncomfortable to inhabit and difficult to live with.

The impulse to make such a *thing* emerged from our lived experiences of the building in relationship with our teaching and researching activities and the many hours passed in it: increasingly, the lack of appropriate rooms for lectures, seminars and other similar activities was more and more pressing, as the school was growing in numbers of students and programs and the needs of different groups were hardly impossible to combine without conflicts in the booking of the three available lecture-ready rooms in the building; the very open design of the building, so attractive for architecture magazines and their fans, was proving to be problematic in a number of aspects such as the noisy environment, the lack of intimacy, the constant atmosphere of activity and stress and other consequences of the impossibility of ‘escaping’ its very openness; the slick and hard surfaces of white walls, glass, and polished concrete floors were starting to annoy us in their coldness and indifference, affecting also the motivation and moods of our students who were much more ready to engage in vivid discussions or interesting design processes in the few occasions in which we tested outside or off-campus locations, and who had complaints about the atmospheric qualities of the existing rooms, the hardness of surfaces and the strange quality of the air in this so-called intelligent building.⁸



Key to the very possibility of acting within the conditions of this situation were also the specific qualities of the architectural design of the building, which includes a number of double height, open spaces in certain areas of its relatively simple, 7 x 7 meter grid-structure of steel pillars and beams of square section. The typical situation in the building consists of prefabricated concrete 'T'-beams resting on the upper side of the steel-plate beams to configure a structural floor. In some areas, these 'T'-beams are absent and double-height spaces appear generating very different atmospheric and functional conditions. On the basis of the 'availability' of such volumes of air within the building – the double-height signified for us the possibility of occupation – we decided to intervene by thinking and exploring the possibilities of introducing a 'floating' room in one of them, a room that could cling on to or rest on the existing beams and simply 'float' there, not touching the floor and, very importantly, not perforating, modifying or attaching itself to the existing structure by any means. The proximity and availability of wood products as well as the existing local and regional traditions of timber construction, together with the relative simplicity and immediacy with which it is possible to engage in making processes with this material, made us feel the need of focusing on timber as the main, if not the only material, and eager to explore the limits of its supportive technologies.

Figs. 121-123/
Photos by: A.Altés & LiAi Students



Duration and Effects

As I will try to explain below, one of the most interesting aspects of the project is the way in which the activity and movement(s) it entailed have progressively generated various and multiple effects beyond the production of the room itself. These effects include not only the co-production of challenging pedagogical situations, and moments of intense coexistence among students, faculty and things during the different phases but also: the motivated engagement – far beyond their responsibilities – of technical and administrative staff as well as other actors; the interest of students and faculty from other programs and years and the generation of diverse situations of encounter and exchange between them and us; the emergence of conflicts with a number of students and faculty that, working in the proximity of the room, felt threatened and disturbed by its presence and our presence – making us realize that we had not calculated its power in that sense but had only thought of its friendly sides and its gift condition; conflicts with other members of the faculty who felt excluded from the process and decided to act against it through regulatory structures, almost managing to stop the construction; the reactions of those who subsequently took sides in these conflicts and stood up to defend the room or looked aside;

Figs. 124-126/
Photo by: A.Altés



the sudden involvement of instances of the administrative apparatus of the university, which had not been involved in any other matters until that moment but were awakened by the threat of conflict and unknown risks; the emergence of previously un-signaled limits to what was and was not possible to make/build in the school; and many other...

The first in the series of technology and design workshops was presented as an exploration of the possibilities and limits of wood construction and classroom architectures, to generate an experience of silence, intimacy and comfort, and develop a silent reading/seminar room to be built with a limited amount of materials and resources and a number of additional conditions, such as an approximate surface of 25 m² to host around 25 people, a maximum of 3m³ of glue-laminated timber in different sizes (obtained through an agreement with a local producer), a budget of 20.000 SEK, a fixed position 2.2 m above the ground of floor 3 in the school of architecture, and the need to solve not only the structural challenges of resting on top of the existing beams and breaching the seven meter span between them, but also the acoustic and environmental challenge of making the room 'silent', while ensuring adequate conditions of ventilation and light.

Figs. 127-129/
Photos by: A.Altés



Figs. 130-131/
Photos by: J.Garriga

⁹ Claudi Aguiló and Roger Tudó are architects and partners in dataAE and H-Arquitectes, respectively, architectural practices that have received numerous awards and great reviews. Both teach architectural design and construction at the ETSAV School of Architecture in Sant Cugat, Barcelona.

¹⁰ Glue Laminated Timber: Glu-Lam. Structural timber made of a variable number of layers joint together with durable and moisture-resistant structural adhesives.

Technologies of Experience

This first workshop, run in collaboration with our colleagues Claudi Aguiló and Roger Tudó, proceeds through a series of lectures on architectural technology and experience, materials, energy flows and more specifically timber construction, mixed and combined with discussions, conversations and design group-work organized around specific aspects such as the structural stability and supporting strategies, the discontinuities in the 'envelope' of the room, and the energetic strategies to deal with air, light and heat. The workshop locates technology at the center of a triangle of matter, energy and experience, and sets the terms for an exploration of possible strategies of organization, comfort and support that privilege *actions*, *affordances* and *atmospheres*, as dimensions of experience.

The outcome of the workshop is a design that combines some of the reflections and findings of the work done in the groups as a result of intense discussions aiming at an embracing of complexity: a shape that behaves well structurally in relationship with its specific situation and the seven meter span while simultaneously solving its programmatic requirements as a small stepped seating 'arena', with a constructive section that works both for the facades and the floor, and a different and experimental roof solution. The room consists of two main walls that are conceived as structural trusses, made of 'glu-lam'¹⁰



profiles and cladded with construction plywood boards. The trusses are then joined transversally with simpler ‘glu-lam’ beams that bridge the shorter span and stabilize the whole with the help of the roof.

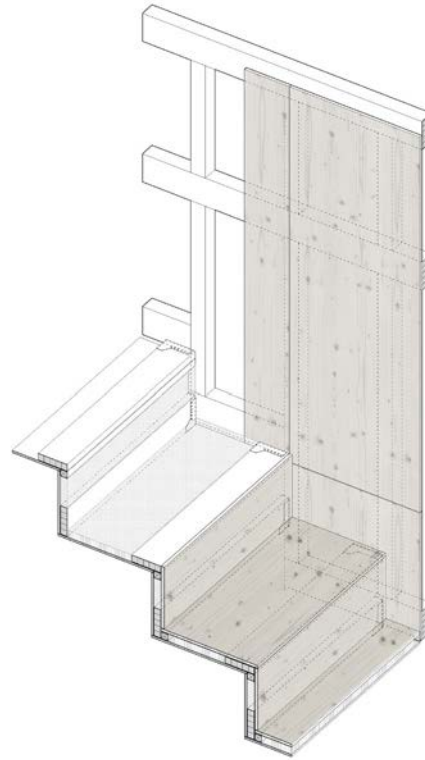
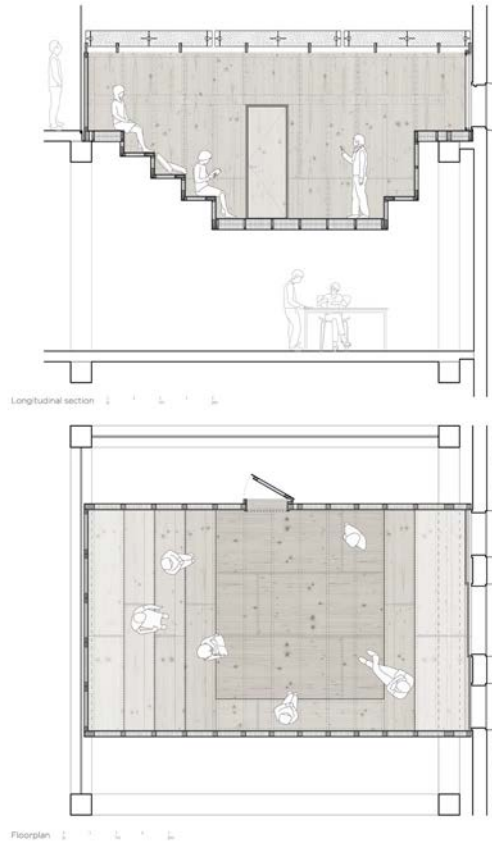
The roof solution deserves some attention as it illustrates quite well the approach followed to combine diverse challenges related to energetic, material and experiential aspects in search of what Bergson would call qualitative multiplicities. It consists of an experimental reformulation of the functioning principle of the silencer through which the roof is treated as a permeable membrane made of distinct (box) elements: it allows the air inside the room to exit upwards as it gets warmer as a result of the heat released by its users, while preventing (to some extent) the intrusion of the ambient noise which is caught inside the boxes through small holes like those of a silencer; it filters the light that gets in the room and acts simultaneously as structure and cladding. The 36 acoustic box elements are constructed and assembled without screws or nails, through an ingenious system of rotating ‘keys’ that close the boxes while giving them the stability they need to rest on 6 glue-laminated timber beams. The design of the boxes was improved and developed in a dedicated 1-week long, timber construction workshop and they can be replaced, improved or transformed further at any time, one by one.

Beyond design

A subsequent graphic expression workshop provided an opportunity to construct a set of architectural drawings to exhibit and explain the silent room to the rest of the school but also to reflect about and develop the proposed constructive solutions. In this workshop, standard graphic tools and drawing documents are questioned in order to explore alternative, more complex drawings that combine the atmospheric qualities and the performance of the room with the constructive layers and the narrative sequence of the building process.

The design of the room is further developed through tests and discussions in the framework of daylight and structural workshops with the presence of expert guests. *Authorship starts blurring*. The symmetric disposition of the longitudinal section of the room is questioned in relationship with the asymmetric light conditions of the location, and the section finally adapted to incorporate 3 of the windows of the school building and filter the light that comes through them, creating also a differential space to seat or rest by them. The structural skeleton of the room is rethought and adjusted to fit the dimensions of the available ‘glulam’ sections, and the main longitudinal walls are decomposed into two elements: an

3 Other Images, Other Spaces / 3.5 Out of Field, Technologies of Experience and Intravention



Detail Connection Floor-Wall

Fig. 133/
Plan, section and detail by LiAi

upper truss working under compression and resting on the existing steel beams, and a lower secondary truss-like structure that hangs from the upper truss under tension. Plywood boards are then used as the cladding and finishing surface with a structural, load-bearing function of connecting the two parts of the truss (which are also additionally connected with structural screws used internally 'glulam').

Executive Development and Symbolic Capital

At this point, and for a number of weeks, we engage as coordinators of the project in a phase of executive design development that requires the articulation of all the advices and changes into a new set of complete construction drawings, basic structural calculations, and the reestablishment of communication with Martinsons AB (the local wood producer with whom we have an agreement to get structural wood) to discuss their involvement with technical support.

Another key moment arrives when members of staff and faculty linked to the working environment committee decide to raise questions regarding the silent room project in working environment meetings, reporting what they see as potentially dangerous situations in the construction workshop planned, which involves working together with the students in the construction of the room. This alarms the whole administrative body of the Faculty of Science and Technology to which the school of architecture belongs, and results in the establishment of a number of (tough) conditions for us to comply with in order to be able to proceed with the scheduled workshop. This happens just a few weeks before the scheduled dates for the workshop, and forces us, through an official communication of the acting head of the department at that moment, to provide a proof of a structural check of the resistance and load bearing capacity of the steel beams, and to elaborate a document specifying and evaluating all the possible risks associated to each of the planned steps of the construction.

In the available time, while we were working on the production of the safety and security documents, we contacted the architectural office responsible for the design of the school (Henning Larsen) and the building engineering company in charge of the structural calculations (Tyréns) and asked them for information about the structural design of the building without success. We never got any information back. We calculated the total weight of the room, around 2700 Kg, and its working loads, and made some basic checks, particularly in relationship with the connection of the plywood boards to the 'glulam'



trusses through screws and the shear forces involved and, aware of the large safety margins we had due to both the geometry and the dimensioning of the 'glulam'¹¹, we finally managed to set up a meeting involving the care-takers of the school building and engineers from the company that owns the building that the university rents (Balticgruppen). After some negotiations, they accepted to check the structural behavior of the existing steel structure in relationship with the added load and forces that our room would generate, and a few days later, we got an email with a screenshot from the calculation software showing how the maximum load and stress capacity of the steel beams were many, many times that of the forces introduced with the room. The information was circulated to the administration of the school as well as to the wood producer and a decision was taken to continue as planned and proceed with the construction workshop provided that the safety documents were in place before we started.

The working environment group continues to get involved in the process now demanding us to walk around the school and inspect the areas in which we will work and assemble the parts, as well those in which we will place desks with tools and equipment. This creates tensions among certain master's thesis students who have not been informed by their studio coordinators of our agreement with them to use the space for two weeks. The students don't feel like moving from where they are and it takes some discussion and work to finally have them accepting a temporary allocation in one of the seminar rooms, which is less noisy and exposed than the spaces in which they were. The complete lack of activities of the working environment committee for a long time due to the turmoil and transitional state generated with the dismissal of our rector Peter Kjaer, contrasts radically with a sudden awakening and a will to take part/interfere in the process of building the silent room, which affects incredibly the amount of work that we are forced to put into the project just to make it happen and reveals tensions and disagreements that we weren't aware of.

The room, even before its construction, is already having powerful effects in the symbolic and relational ecologies of the school and its inhabitants, performing our colleagues and us in unexpected ways, and forcing us to improvise and devise alternative paths, directions and procedures.

First Construction Workshop: Becoming a Team

Working and assemblage areas are marked in the school a few days in advance of the workshop, and Martinsons delivers the structural wood profiles and steel connections according to the last set of draw-

Opposite page:
Fig. 134/
Photo by: A.Altés

11 We were aware of and confident with our safety margins both in terms of the design – that solves the span through the form of the trusses – and in terms of the over dimensioning of the 'glulam' profiles which we had to adapt to the available sections at that moment. Since 'Martinsons' was not able to spend time in the processing of the glue laminated beams and cut bigger sections in half, we had to go with the smaller sections readily available, which were larger than the ones we had originally designed.



ings on the Friday prior to the starting of the workshop which is scheduled for Monday 12th of May 2014 at 9.00h. During the weekend, we check the delivery and carry out some tests to show the students the kinds of joints that we will work with and the steps in their execution. We realize that some beams/parts are missing which means that in order to have all the necessary pieces, we will have to include an extra 160 km trip just before starting on Monday to go and get them from the factory in Bygdsiljum.

The workshop starts as planned with a general introduction, safety and security instructions, the assignment of tasks to the different groups and a tour through the different working areas. We carry out a few tests with the machines that will be used to remind the students how to operate them (all of them have gone through a course at the beginning of the year that introduces them into the intricacies of the workshop.)

In these first steps, the size and characteristic of the joints of 'glulam' elements requires the invention of screwing techniques, as well as the re-appropriation of technology and things such as a steel pillar for instance. Working together is absolutely necessary and some decisions have to be made as we go.

By the end of the first day, the four parts of the main structural elements – the trusses – are assembled and transported from the working areas to their future location. This happens in an atmosphere of collaboration, contained joy and excitement, as the tensions and difficulties were well known by all and everyone now silently acknowledges that we are in fact building the room!

During the second day, the frames of the trusses are connected with structural screws and with plywood boards on one of the sides, and then flipped. Cellulose-based insulation is placed in between the frames and the trusses are closed with plywood boards also on the inside. Finally, the metallic joist hangers are also screwed in place, as we learn that the mini crawler crane that we had agreed to have in order to lift the trusses in place cannot make it until the 4th day instead of the 3rd day as planned. We dedicate the third day to preparing the site for the lifting of the trusses and collaboratively turning and sliding them around until we lift one of them and leave it leaning against the steel beams. The beams are cleaned and rubber plates are fixed to them in the right positions to receive the trusses.

On Thursday, a ramp has to be quickly improvised to allow the crawler to go up the stairs to the site, and difficulties arise during this process. The machine is very heavy and the ramp needs additional timber 'bands' to increase the traction of the crawler. Some of us have to push and balance the machine

Opposite page:
Fig. 135/
Photo by: A.Altés



to make sure it actually goes up. We are all sweating and nervous but there is great expectation in the school and students from all years as well as our colleagues join us around the site during the preparations for the lifting. Excitement is again contained in the focus and the tension of the situation, we are all enjoying it but we all understand it is a crucial moment. We can see students taking responsibility, clearing up areas, and organizing some of the processes that they have themselves understood as necessary and crucial.

Håkan Hansson and Kent Brodin, our workshop technician and care-taker, play an important role in the process of enabling the operation, coordinating the crane company with our process and helping us communicate our plans, they are also fully engaged in the difficult process of actually lifting the trusses in place, which requires several attempts and our help in pushing/holding the truss up to release some of the load from the machine.

At times, we are side by side with Håkan, sweating in focus and effort, and our gazes meet in understanding. We already know what to do next. And the process is challenging but attractive and interesting. We all understand that we are learning, together.

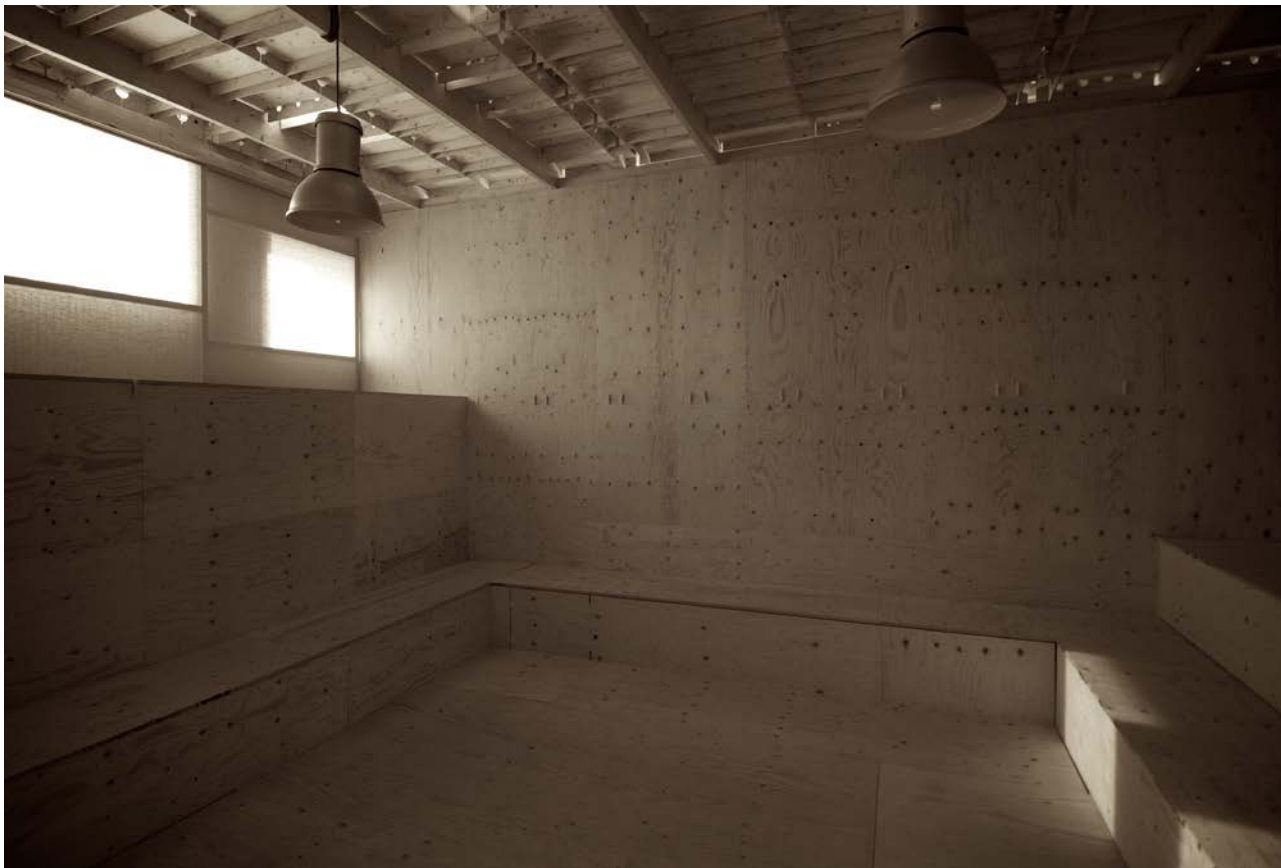
The trusses are finally up in place and the following day is dedicated to placing the floor beams and cladding them from the interior with plywood boards. We use a whole extra week, now with the help only of a couple of students, to finish the cladding and a place the roof beams in order to prepare the room for a first preliminary opening.

We present the project and the process to students and faculty, and we decide to have our Spring Final reviews in the room, what turns out a great success.

Second Construction Workshop: Love and Leviathan

During a second construction workshop, after the summer, we invite newly arrived students in the program to join the process and meet the other class that is now starting their second year in the masters. As a warm-up construction workshop, they take care of finishing the insulation of the bottom of the room and the exterior cladding, as well as sliding fabric-based doors to control the relationship with the windows and filter the light that goes into the room. We also take care of the door of the room, and draw an electrical wire in so that we can plug computers and screens for the reviews and seminars. A

Opposite page:
Fig. 136/
Photo by: A.Altés



team takes care of improving and finishing the roof boxes and puts them in place and the room is finally ready for a proper opening. We improvise a system to hang up A1 prints on the walls with the help of clothespins, and shortly after we are all enjoying our first reading seminar inside when one of our students sighs and says out loud: “*I love the silent room!*” We all laugh in approval.

During the summer, and without our knowledge, the working environment committee reports to the facility management unit of the university – *Lokalförsörjningsenheten* – the existence of the room (something that we explicitly announced we would do once the room was properly finished), and they decide to carry out an inspection of the room while we are not there and before the room is finished (this happened before the second construction workshop described above). The inspection results of course in the detection of a series of deficiencies, and later during the Autumn term we are told by the acting head of the department that we the room can’t be used and that most likely it will have to be taken down. After a number of great reading seminars inside, the whole class is extremely disappointed about having to go back to the cold spaces of the seminar rooms, but the orders are executed and the room is even locked with a chain.

The main deficiencies have to do with fire regulations, as the room hangs in the way of several sprinklers and in the case of a fire starting below the room, the sprinklers would not be able to put it out. The room lacks a specific fire treatment of its inner and outer surfaces and a fire safety plan has not been attached to its design and construction. Now suddenly the experimental construction of a 1:1 prototype inside a school of architecture is treated as if it were a regular building project, like an extension of the school’s facilities, and compliance with all building regulations is demanded. But the workshop was authorized and the school is always hosting all kinds of 1:1 prototyping activities, which had never been questioned or evaluated in this way. What has happened? What has changed? We ask ourselves. What kind of symbolic and regulatory borders has the room crossed or broken so that the representatives of the apparatus of bureaucratic and managerial control which have never before been interested in or visited our school are suddenly eager to intervene, monitor and police our activities? What would have happened if the working environment committee in our school had stayed inoperative and dormant as it was before the silent room project started? Why is the project of the room seen and experienced differently from those of other 1:1 interventions and prototypes developed and built in other spaces and times of the school?

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Fig. 137/
Photo by: A.Altés

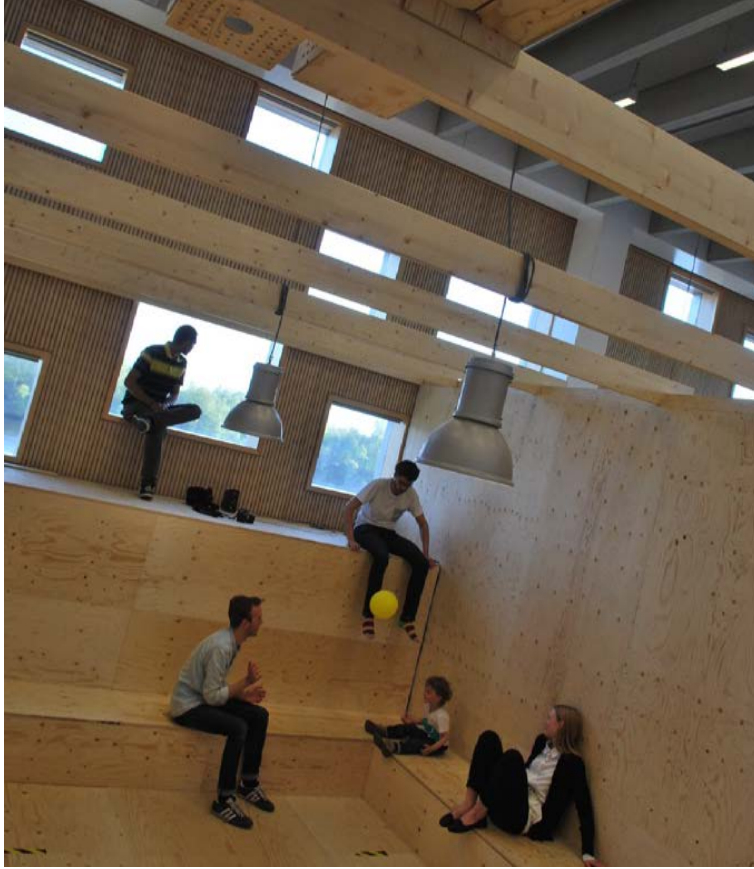


Fig. 138/
Photo by: A.Altés



More Durations and More Effects: Diffracting Values

We would like to look at and understand the room as a complex thing, but also, more interestingly as a situation and as an event or phenomenon, as a complex set of *“agential intra-actions of multiple material-discursive practices and apparatuses of bodily production”* (Barad, 2007:140) where the things, the apparatuses, the room, the crane, the regulations, the tools, are not mere instruments of observation and measurement but *“boundary-drawing practices – specific material reconfigurings of the world – which come to matter.”* (Barad, 2007:140) Understanding it in these terms and including the process of thinking, making and feeling it, it is possible to evaluate its performance in multiple ways disclosing an alternative set of values. The project challenges the notion of class-room, combining the categories of prototype, 1:1 architectural model, sauna, reading seminar and extension of the school’s facilities, the room is almost immediately included in the booking system of the school and used by us and other members of staff and students as one more available, functional and warm space, although it is only equipped with a temporary access in the form of a detached stair case and is not as silent as one would have wanted. It affects the mental ecologies of actors present in the school but not directly involved in

Figs. 139-140/
Photos by: A.Altés

the situation – its symbolic status perhaps drawing people into the situation and encouraging acts of sabotage and interference, which in turn sharpen our attention and push us into a careful practice of attention to safety and organization.

It challenges, if only momentarily, the hierarchy of academic situations and university roles, creating spaces and times of shared co-responsibility and hand-in-hand shared tasks, expertises, and bodily efforts - knowledge, or rather understandings, are collectively produced. It establishes bonds and affinities with local actors, people, companies and institutions that go beyond the mere “*we did something in your institution once*” into the realm of actually getting to know the other and establishing a more solid link. The articulation of the process and the design approach based on relatively simple and straightforward constructive solutions makes it possible for everyone to actually engage actively in the making of the room, and enables the construction of a cooperative and collaborative atmosphere and a sense of collaborative ownership: the physical and mental intensity of the workshop and its tasks bring students and faculty together, sharing, exchanging and helping each other – since the situation affords active participation and meaningful contribution, involved actors are more likely to develop a fidelity to the situation that conjures a sense of responsibility and shared ownership.¹²

The room is also an interesting architectural *thing* which not only constitutes a new seminar facility but also defines a new working area under it with a different wooden ceiling and atmospheric qualities. It can host different activities and be used in multiple ways (lecture hall, discussion room, meeting place, calmer atmosphere, resting space, as a room for reviews or projections, as a room in which one can lie, relax, take a nap or simply take a break while looking at the river through the windows...). It is the result and the proof of collective expertise and know-how developed during a few years of exploration of an alternative and integrated approach to architectural technology that shows that it is actually possible to engage in similar projects successfully if we cooperate. It has managed to awaken the interest of the owners of the building as well as of the local press that published an article about the room, and in some ways, the room and its stories have become a kind of material-manifesto of the laboratory, embodying and articulating many of the matters of concern and categories with which we are working at the LiAi, and drawing the attention of the students in other programs and years as well as of our colleagues, who have approached us with questions and comments and initiated conversations and discussions about what we do and its intentions or values.

¹² Among our ‘criteria of inventions’, we include the need to test and experiment with unexpected forms of ‘effective togetherness’ in order to ask questions about the definition of the commons and what is public and what is collective, as well as in search of other forms of organization. In this case, a particular community of practice operates in ways that enable a sense of collaborative ownership to emerge, and this, is our thesis, has to do not only with the proximity of bodies, the intensity and the sharing of spaces and times, but also with the relative simplicity of the constructive solutions, which allow everyone to take part meaningfully. In this respect, see also: Thrift, N. J. 2008

¹³ During the summer of 2015, the project was published in the 4th issue of the Nordic Journal of Architecture, along other projects developed with students at the Laboratory of Immediate Architectural Intervention (LiAi), and a text presenting the position, pedagogical approach and values nurtured and explored at the LiAi and through our work. Unfortunately, at the time of writing these lines, the Silent Room has been totally dismantled by an external company, following instructions of Umeå School of Architecture's new rector, Ana Betancour, who, shortly after her arrival, gave orders to restore the building to its original state. Along the silent room, other interventions developed by the students such as the LiAi Saunas, and a series of small interventions related to the windows of the studio spaces – aiming at creating slightly more intimate areas combined with storage solutions for the studios – have been also dismantled without discussion or our involvement. Even though we suggested the possibility of carrying out a 'deconstruction' workshop, in which the students could have learnt some things about 'safety and security on site', and about 'demolition techniques', an external company was hired and paid to do the job. Thanks to our relationship with Håkan Hansson, responsible of the workshop facilities in the school, it has been possible to 'save' a large part of the glue laminated timber beams and some of the plywood boards, with which we plan to continue imagining and implementing other 'intraventions'.

The experience of building the room has changed us probably just as much as we have transformed the world through it. We believe that it constitutes an example of *how to become collectively* through the establishment of relations of responsibility that emerge from close coexistence, from proximity and closeness to others – human and non-humans – within practices of making the world; a case of responsible engagement in a practice of architecting that proceeds unwaveringly of distinctions between thinking/making/feeling and caring, through "*an ethics of worlding*" (Barad, 2007: 392) that cares about what matters.^{13/}



Sharing, Displacing, Caring

Chapter 3.6

“The raw awareness that you have the power to change the world is more important than any other resource. Self-determination must be established on a daily basis, by acting back on the world that acts upon you - whether that means calling in sick to work on a sunny day, starting a neighborhood garden with your friends, or toppling a government. You cannot make a revolution that distributes power equally except by learning firsthand how to exercise and share power - and that exercising and sharing, on any scale, is itself the ongoing, never-concluded project of revolution. What you do today is itself the extent of that revolution, its limits and its triumph.”¹

“We shall say that a truth forces knowledges. [...] Since the power of a truth is that of a break, it is by violating established and circulating knowledges that a truth returns to the immediacy of the situation, or reworks that sort of portable encyclopaedia from which opinions, communications and sociality draw their meaning.”²

Fig. 141/
Man Alone, WTO 1999, by J. Narrin

¹ Crimeth Inc. (2004). *Recipes for Disaster*, Salem: CrimethInc. Far East, p.11.

² Badiou, Alain (2001), *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London, New York, Verso. pp. 70

The optimism emanating from the opening quote, which I fundamentally share, confronts a grim landscape of universal cynicism, toxic capitalism and liberal, fake ethics. Those seem to be the reigning kings of the world we live in. Or in other words, *shit-is-fucked-up-and-bullshit*. The sentence, as found in the placards of some of the Occupy protesters, can be read in different ways. On the one hand, one could see it as the epitome of modern cynicism, which Sloterdijk has famously described as “*enlight-*

*ened false consciousness*³; in this case, the informed consciousness that “shit is fucked up”, i.e. things are going quite bad and everything is out of control, we are not in control - no one is in control - and those in power are ‘bullshitting’ us while selling out to investors. There is no way out... we can’t do anything but continue expressing our cynical critique and turning our back on reality to focus on our own, already difficult, survival. On the other hand, the sentence could also be understood as the necessary denunciation of an unacceptable state of things, a loud cry that signals a profound disappointment and acts as the starting point of a search for justice, one that could thrust things towards what Simon Critchley has recently called an ethics of commitment and political resistance⁴.

It is certainly an active stance that I believe we should take, and one that avoids falling on the side of active nihilism: it is not about bringing this world down, destroying it and putting a new one in its place, but rather about transforming it radically from within. We have to imagine (and make become) another future, using the imaginative space of architecture, but through the direct engagement in here-and-now situations. My suggestion is that sharing, displacing, caring might be important and necessary ingredients of such a demanding endeavour. In what follows below, I will try to sketch out what I mean by each of those verbs and the implications of such a performative approach for spatial practices.

In the second version of the ‘*ars industrialis*’ manifesto, Bernard Stiegler describes a process through which capitalism has become structurally self-destructive, or in his own terms, toxic. The speculative logics of the system in which we live have progressively shifted to a radical short-termism that manages to dissolve all notion of responsibility. A society of carelessness is produced, according to Stiegler, in a relentless process of ‘dissociation’ or dismantling of society.

In his account, the consumerist model enters into a self-destructive crisis because of its inherent need to instrumentalize desire. Desire is ultimately turned into drive, which steers both the speculator’s disinvestment and the consumer’s practice and sense of disposability. The manifesto says: “*Like the behaviour of the speculator—who is a capitalist who no longer invests—the behaviour of the consumer has become structurally drive-based. The consumer’s relation to objects of consumption is intrinsically destructive: it is founded on disposability, that is, on disinvestment. This disinvestment liberates a drive to destruction of which the consequence—insofar as it is the destruction of fidelity to the objects of desire [...]—is the spread and the systemic and destructive articulation of the drive-based behaviour of consumers as well as speculators, and such that it engenders a kind of systemic stupidity or beastli-*

³ “*Cynicism is enlightened false consciousness. It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered.*” Sloterdijk, Peter (1987). *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. p. 5.

⁴ See Critchley, Simon (2008), *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, London, New York, Verso.



Fig. 142/
Shit is fucked up and bullshit

⁵ See Stiegler, Bernard (2010), *Ars Industrialis Manifesto*, <http://arsindustrialis.org/manifesto-2010> accessed 30th of July 2013.

⁶ See Stiegler, Bernard (2012), *Interview: from Libidinal Economy to the Ecology of Spirit*, in *Parrhesia* 14, pp. 9-15

ness.”⁵ In a society in which everything becomes waste, which Stiegler calls “a toxic and addictogenic society”, the victims/addicts can no longer take care of themselves, less even of other things or people around them. They become absolutely and chronically irresponsible.

The manifesto continues with a plea for a renewal of the genuine impulse to “take care of the world”, and the proposed solution is referred to as an “economy of contribution”, an articulation of a series of conditions and procedures for exchange in/through which it is possible to care for oneself and for others again, a new economy that would therefore produce “positive externalities” on the basis of a fundamental re-thinking of the techniques and technologies of the digital world, that should be put to work for the construction of a new “public power” (*Chose publique*)⁶.

Although I find Stiegler’s critique and description of the process of dissociation quite useful and compelling, and I am particularly sympathetic to the notion of contribution, I disagree with his almost exclusive focus on economy and his apparent acceptance of capitalism as a given that is here to stay. I think it is useful to recall the validity of the scientific analysis of capital carried out by Marx, which tells us that any fights against capitalism must be carried out in the sphere of the political. The crucial question is therefore: Can we imagine a politics that differs radically from the demands of capital? Badiou dis-

agrees with Stiegler regarding the sites of our endeavor: “[T]here can be no economic battle against the economy. [...] All the efforts to construct an alternative economy strike me as pure and simple abstractions, if not simply driven by the unconscious vector of capital’s own reorganization. (...) [E]very proposition that directly concerns the economy can be assimilated by capital, [...] since capital is indifferent to the qualitative configuration of things.”(Badiou, 2001: 40)⁷

Global capital is not interested in the qualities of space, but sees it merely through its potentialities for surplus. Globalization has in fact generated broken territories, it continues to fragment and disintegrate spaces, places and lands. Instead, as spatial practitioners – and as inhabitants of the world – we must be (we are) particularly interested in the qualitative potentials of space and we must therefore start by inhabiting the places in which we are intervening. We have to acknowledge the specificities of the particular locations in which we happen to develop our actions. In short, we must engage actively in ‘making’ sites. And when I refer to ‘locations’, I am not thinking of them in reference to the oppositional logics of global/local, nor as a kind of multiculturalist fascination for the exotic qualities of some or other ‘different-local’ that has to be protected, recuperated and/or tolerated; I am thinking about them as expanded and expansive ‘sites’, as localized complex assemblages of intra-acting things, people, spaces, discourses and events, that change with us as we act within them. I am thinking about them as sites of encounter.⁸ The economic analyses or proposals are not enough: politics requires a demand and a location.

We have to exercise and share our power in such sites of encounter. A power that relates to other powers alike and confronts those that are hegemonic. A power that challenges and *displaces* hegemony. And we *make* such sites through our presence, our interests, our care and our gaze; in and through encounters, these sites emerge, shift and become alive, traversed as they are by lines and relations. A multiplicity of actors acts together in these sites. Subjects develop as subjects in their commitment to the situation, as a reaction to an emerging demand. We are, as subjects, both distributed and somehow bounded, and our minds are always extended in and through the relations we have with everything and everyone else. These sites we make are necessarily relational and political. This is why I prefer to imagine and think of a *relational ecology of contribution* than to entertain alternative, albeit alienated ‘economies of contribution’.

Sharing and caring are closely related, we share because we care, we care through sharing. In relation-

7 Badiou, Alain (2001), *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London, New York, Verso. pp. 105

8 See for instance, Bourriaud, Nicholas (2002), *Relational Aesthetics*, pp. 21, where he says that: “*In observing contemporary artistic practices, we ought to talk of ‘formations’ rather than ‘forms’. Unlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a signature, present-day art shows that form only exists in the encounter and in the dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise.*” Unfortunately, in spite of these good intentions, Bourriaud’s approach to the notion of ‘relationality’ is rather superficial and stuck in the realm of what I would rather refer to as ‘interactive entertainment’. As shown in Part 1, my understanding of encounter goes beyond simple interaction and involves openness, engagement, commitment, endurance, care, waiting, dwelling, and delaying, among other things.



Fig. 143/
‘I predict something’, by Jane Stockdale.

9 Badiou, Alain (2001), *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, London, New York, Verso. pp. 40

10 (According to Donna Haraway, affinity is precisely *not* identity: “related not by blood but by choice, the appeal of one chemical nuclear group for another, avidity.” and “In that sense, my kinships are about keeping the lineages going, even while defamiliarizing their members and turning lines into webs, trees into esplanades, and pedigrees into affinity groups.” HARAWAY, Donna (2004) *The Haraway Reader*, New York, London, Routledge. pp. 13 and 6, respectively.

ship to our ‘sites’ and to our spatial practices, the kind of sharing that I am imagining is not so much about material things or means, but rather about a sharing of ourselves, an openness to sharing ourselves in the situation, an openness to ‘openly becoming’ in the situation, i.e. letting others take part in that becoming, an openness-to-being-open. All of this sharing implies that the ‘sharer’ in question cares about the situation. Or as Badiou will put it, he/she is ‘faithful’ to the situation. For in Badiou’s ‘ethics of truths’, someone commits him/herself to a situation on the basis of an event that will place an (ethical) demand on him/her.⁹ His, is an ethics that shifts – like I am proposing to do in architecture – from the nominative to the active: the subject ‘becomes’, in his/her fidelity to the situation; the ethical subject is formed in the process of remaining faithful to the event. *A subject that shares.*

This subject and this ethics displace, respectively, a dominant privileging of distance and objectification that is characteristic of modernity, and a moralizing, abstract universality of a liberal ethics imposed from without. She inhabits the situation, she gets close, she cares, she gets entangled in it and with things and people with which she intra-acts and develops relations of affinity.¹⁰ She endures. And she does that with and through her body. Equipped with her ethics of commitment, she resists the



Fig. 144/
Cova da Moura, Self-built neighborhood
in the northwest outskirts of Lisboa, (mu-
nicipality of Amadora) with an important
presence of immigrants from Cabo Verde,
and one of the most interesting youth
associations in Portugal: Associação
Cultural Moinho da Juventude. Their leit-
motif: 'djunta mo'.

<http://www.moinhodajuventude.pt>

science of enlightenment and objectification, because “[t]he price of objectivity is the loss of closeness. Scientists lose the capacity to behave as neighbors of the world; they think in concepts of distance, not of friendship; they seek overviews, not neighborly involvement. Over the centuries, modern science excluded everything that was incompatible with the a priori of objectifying distance and intellectual domination over the object: intuition, empathy, spirit de finesse, aesthetics, erotics. Out of all this, however, a strong current has remained effective in genuine philosophy for ages; in it, to the present day, flows the warm current of a convivial intellectuality and a libidinous closeness to the world that compensates for the objectifying drive toward the domination of things.”(Sloterdijk, 1987: 140)¹¹

Something of this libidinous closeness to the world operates and is part of the sharing and caring that I am thinking. There is warmth, intimacy and closeness. There is a becoming that embraces an internal duration but that suspends abstract time. – *We must slow down* – And this closeness can be seen as a form of generosity; another step towards our unfolding ecology of contribution. A generosity in which what we give is our openness, our caring and our sharing, one in which the gift is not what we give but an unexpected emergence that depends on what we share, on what we contribute. Or what Rosalyn Diprose has called ‘corporeal generosity’: “an openness to others that not only precedes and establishes communal relations but constitutes the self as open to otherness. Primordially, generosity is not the expenditure of one’s possession but the dispossession of oneself, the being-given to others that undercuts any self-contained ego”¹² (Diprose, 2002: 4). This way of thinking generosity challenges our individualistic economy of exchange: the impulse to share and the fidelity to the encounter pre-exist the situation; generosity is in Diprose’s terms “a pre-reflective, non-volitional openness”, and as such it is entangled with our sensibilities, affectivities and bodies. It precedes and exceeds the terms of what Badiou calls ‘the state of the situation’, or the dispositions of normative and existing, hegemonic power¹³. It signals another opening for its potential displacement.

These forms of generosity, sharing and caring are interested in the radical contingency of small and not so small encounters – in fact, encounters in plural and regardless of scale – they rehearse a politics of (active) listening: one that unfolds not as a passive position but precisely as a caring attention that enables engaged response and further action. This attitude is also necessary to understand the potential for radical innovation that is forming in a situation and to mobilize it in order to transform the world.

Our situation, our relational and political site, has allowed a subject to emerge through her fidelity. Her

11 (Sloterdijk, Peter (1987) *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. pp. 140)

12 Diprose, Rosalyn (2002) *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche*, New York, State University of New York Press, pp. 4

13 The knowledges, structurings, classifications, distributions and divisions that dominate a given situation on the basis of the interests of those governing the situation is what Badiou refers to as ‘the state of the situation’.

declaration of fidelity to the situation enacts her commitment: she is now an active component of the site. And she is committed to act responsibly. Her disposition to share and to care – her generosity – allows her to develop a situated knowledge which enables her to engage in responsible actions.

This situated, formed and informed interest to participate and contribute to the situation in order to transform it meaningfully puts the subject in a privileged position: one from which it is possible to push and displace the state of that situation, challenging the established powers and normative structures that define it. From such a committed position, she questions what ‘is’, she cares about what could be and what ought to be. An anarchic non-acceptance of the state of the situation emerges from a caring generosity that opens up the subject’s self to the situation, making her responsible again.

Situations, that are generally thought and structured on the basis of descriptions and prescriptions of ‘objective knowledge’, as well as through binary oppositions of the either/or kind, can be therefore questioned, activated and re-thought. Illegitimate power can be located and resisted. Alternative descriptions of the situation can be given, or invented. Objective descriptions can even be suspended. Instead, conflictive and situated conversations of a more dialogical kind can be articulated, and binary oppositions displaced by more playful, inclusive and amphibian¹⁴ *both/and/it-depends*.

For instance, where we to randomly select a site such as that of contemporary architectural theory and practice – or else, science studies... or philosophy – with their actors, structures and hegemonic powers, we would find ourselves amidst proponents of radical autonomy on the one hand, and radical contingency on the other; in-between those who advocate a return to the critical tradition, or those who claim the new religion must be projective and post-critical; those who are convinced we should operate from within, and those who think we should remain pure and purely outside; those who will fight for radical difference, and those who will cry for equality; those who might “*dry out and die on the high ground of a dogmatic certainty of absolute (linguistic) knowledge, or drown in the sea of skeptic (unjustified praxis-oriented) relativism*”¹⁵. (Nilsson, 2009: 80)

Instead, I would rather choose to keep a degree of independence, autonomy and freedom while simultaneously acknowledging and caring about the contingencies of the smallest details and encounters, just as I would prefer to work from within but entertain various ‘distractions’ that could bring me into ‘moments of outsider-ness’ and perhaps an unplanned critical distance, very helpful in practices of

¹⁴ See Nilson, Per (2009) *The Amphibian Stand: A Philosophical Essay concerning Research Processes in Fine Art*, Umeå, H:ström, pp. 80

¹⁵ Nilson, Per (2009) *Ibid*, pp. 80

documentation and judgment. Discourses of radical difference can be enriched and expanded through serious engagement with the notion of the Same; the so-called projective practices in architecture run the risk of devolving into “*the merely pragmatic, and to the merely decorative, with astonishing speed*”¹⁶, unless they develop alternative or parallel models of critical assessment and engagement, and furthermore, both critical and projective are to remain extraneous and incidental unless they embrace the embodied and active registers of the performative, expanding their knowledges, fields of practice and abilities to make/sense. It is possible to imagine “*amphibian creatures*” (Nilsson, 2009: 81) whose practical and situated knowledge can not only adapt to the liminal landscapes that emerge in and around these combinations, but are formed and developed precisely in the multiplicities of these encounters.

This amphibian creature, like our situated and faithful subject, creates herself through her movement/practice, along the lines of relations and through “*littoral landscapes*” (Nilsson, 2009: 81) and in the unexpected energies of encounters, gifts, and events. Nevertheless, she has to create herself with others. While she inhabits the situation, she dwells. She necessarily co-exists.

“*Self and Other complement and complete one another. There is no Absolute Category, no Ego, no Society – but only a chaotically complex web of relation – and the ‘Strange Attractor’, attraction itself, which evokes resonances and patterns in the flow of becoming.*”¹⁷ (Bey, 1994: 3)

A tension emerges here between self-creation and dwelling, between an individual process of becoming and a necessarily collective co-existence or dwelling-together-with-others.

An ecology of contribution might be a non-oppositional, amphibian way of managing such a tension, something that we could think through contemporary developments within anarchism pointing towards existential or ontological anarchy, as the creative construction of an entire art of living, or the deployment of poetic imagination in everyday life: “[A] *condition of free creativity generated through motility and revolt, can only be conceived and realised by the poetic imagination and, as far as words are concerned, can only find expression in poetic language.*”¹⁸ The ‘contributors’ participate in their ecology on the basis of their individual and faithful commitment to a situation, one in which they are genuinely interested. They contribute as part of their own subjective development and only in as long as they continue to be interested. *Contributing as becoming.* Yet, contributing is also a part of something else

16 Baird, G. (2004), ‘Criticality and its Discontents’, *Harvard Design Magazine*, 21, pp.16-21.

17 Bey, 1994:3) Bey, Hakim (1994), ‘Ontological anarchy in a nutshell’ in *Immediatism*, Edinburgh: AK Press

18 Moore, John (2004), *Lived Poetry: Stirner, Anarchy, Subjectivity and the Art of Living*, in Purkis, Jonathan (2004) *Changing Anarchism: Anarchist Theory and Practice in a Global Age*, Manchester University Press, p.57

that emerges out of the interplays of all contributions. This something else cannot be fully determined a priori, not can it be fully controlled. It is born out of the relations and free-flowing contributions, and it exceeds the powers, expectations and possibilities of those who contribute. This something else is only possible through the real time articulation of the contributions, displacements and care shared by the subjects that take part. It is not an individual that forces others to adapt, it is not a collective that forces the individual into forms of co-habitation, but an ever-shifting balance based on sharing, displacing and caring in which contribution is the active register. *Contribution as performative.*

Besides being performative, I believe that contribution is necessarily *fragile*. Even more, it must endure its fragility. There is something fragile about the fact that it all depends on the individual contributions, something that cannot be guaranteed. Yet, this lack of guarantee, this fragility, can only be dealt with or eliminated through the setting up and deployment of various mechanisms of power and control. It is only in its fragile uncertainty that contribution remains a free-flowing ecology. Fragility is its power. A different power. A power that resists and challenges traditional, managed and administered power, by means of distributed, emergent and partial ownerships, contributions and dispositions – by means of a resilient fidelity that is capable of locating and resisting the diverse forms of corruption and wear that can threaten the continuity of an ‘evental’ site.

An ethics of encounter is not a universal ethics, a totality or a frozen set of moral principles that steers our behavior, but a passion for reality, a fidelity to the encounter as a situation, as a site, as an event. The ethical demand raised is precisely to stick to the encounter, to care about the meeting. To endure.

As I have started to sketch here, such an ethics could emerge from the articulation of sharing, displacing and caring; respectively understood as a sharing of oneself in the situation and with others; as an ability and a force that pushes the state of things and questions what ‘is’ by focusing on what could be and what ought to be; and as a fidelity to the situation, a persistence and a willingness to stay put and to care about the things that matter.

Imagining such an emergence might seem again too multiple a desire, but all the terms are necessary if difficult or dangerous. We must embrace the logics of *both/and/in-different-ways* to become simultaneously ‘of-the-world’ and critical; situated, grounded and in constant movement: “*So, I think my problem, and “our’ problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for*

*all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own “semiotic technologies” for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a “real” world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness.”*¹⁹

Enduring fidelity, enduring the encounter, enduring fragility. Or in other words, a special kind of stubborn persistence: “[...] *it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don’t know, I’ll never know, in the silence you don’t know, you must go on, I can’t go on, I will go on.*”²⁰ //

¹⁹ Haraway, Donna (1988). “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, in *Feminist Studies* Vol. 14, No. 3. pp. 579

²⁰ Beckett, Samuel (2010) *The Unnamable* pp. 287



Anarchic Metapolitics and Ethics of Encounter

Chapter 3.7

“‘[T]he heteronomous ethical experience of the relation to the neighbor is anarchical, the other posits me under their demand despite myself and before any act of the will.’”¹

“The movement of genesis traverses the State and issues in absolute knowledge, which fulfills consciousness. The notion of anarchy we are introducing here has a meaning prior to the political (or antipolitical) meaning currently attributed to it. It would be self-contradictory to set it up as a principle (in the sense that anarchists understand it). Anarchy cannot be sovereign, like an ‘arche’. It can only disturb the State – but in a radical way, making possible moments of negation without an affirmation. The State then cannot set itself up as a Whole. But, on the other hand, anarchy can be stated. Yet disorder has an irreducible meaning, as refusal of synthesis.”²

The truth of the event, the power of the break, the energy of an interruption are anarchic in as much as they challenge the state of the situation in which they take place, i.e. they challenge the conditions, namings, structurings and distributions that determine what the situation is, and the ways in which the situation is governed or can be ‘entered’. They take place, regardless or in spite of the state of the situation.

Fig. 145/
Nine Inch Nails Ghosts, Rob Sheridan.

¹ Critchley, Simon (2008). *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*, London; New York: Verso, pp.122.

² Levinas, Emmanuel (1991), *Otherwise than Being or, Beyond Essence*, Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer Academic Publishers, pp. 194.

This ‘an-archic’ taking-place signals the potential for transformative action and innovation that is contained in any situation. This potential and the irreducible and infinite mesh of life in movement can be dealt with, or inhabited, through an aesthetics of encounter, which reaches out towards the various forms-of-life that will emerge out of the relations that an encounter enables and produces. This infinite and anarchic field of relations is both prior to and beyond any ideological, communicative or communitarian definition of politics, and can be therefore named ‘meta-political’.

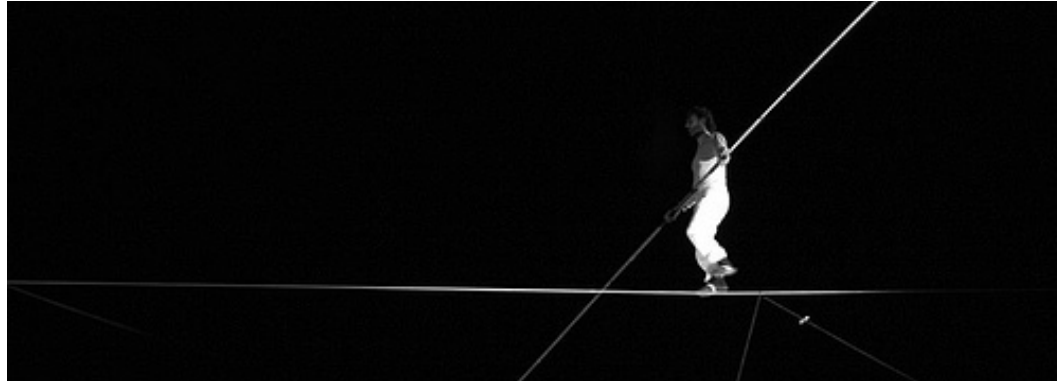
Inhabiting the relational field of anarchic metapolitics in a situation, guided by an aesthetics of encounter as described above, leads to the emergence of an ethics of encounter: a situated, engaged, responsible and caring ethics that comes second to aesthetic mediation. An ethics that makes its subjects in and of the encounter. *An ethics that helps the truth of the encounter to persist.*

Metapolitics is closer to a form of truly local, engaged and situated politics understood as militant care than to the global issues preferred by moralizing, neoliberal, fake ethics. Given the proven weaknesses of all social bonds today, real politics must engage, according to Badiou, in processes of minute and methodical *unbinding*³: acts through which various subjects break with the structures, habits and ways of proceeding to which they are accustomed – and in which they are trapped – as well as with outside interests, learning again to actively inhabit the world. Empowering themselves collectively in and through networks of affinity and care.

These breaks take place following an anarchic logic of invention, expansion and ramification, constructing expedient techniques that produce effects through an open exchange with sites and their actors. Other bonds, although fragile, are established instead with the land, places and territories.

“An open exchange...is guided by a pragmatic philosophy. The tradition adopted by the parties is unspecified in the beginning and develops as the exchange proceeds. The participants get immersed into each other’s ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving to such an extent that their ideas, perceptions, world-views may be entirely changed — they become different people participating in a new and different tradition. An open exchange respects the partner whether he is an individual or an entire culture, while a rational exchange promises respect only within the framework of a rational debate. An open exchange has no organon though it may invent one, there is no logic though new forms of logic may emerge in its course.” (Feyerabend 2010: 237)

³ Badiou, Alain (2005), *Metapolitics*, (London ; New York: Verso), pp. 68-77.



Working within a situation, politics is not about taking its ‘State’ at once, but about displacing it, placing it at a distance, in fact, creating that distance. A distance between the situation and its local and universal conditions. The situation’s location, its site, its place, becomes therefore not only crucial but constitutional and grounding. True politics is based on a demand and a location. Metapolitics is then an articulation of modes of taking-place. A situated politics-there (*politique-là*). An interior politics that opposes representative politics, and focuses on the time of the situation, the time of places and effects. A performative politics. “*The essence of politics is not the plurality of opinions but the prescription of a possibility in rupture with what exists.*” (Badiou 2005: 24)

Anarchic metapolitics is a politics of resistance. A rupture with what is and a rupture with oneself. In that sense, it is an encounter. And its demands allow an ethics of encounter to emerge. By being there, in the situation, a subject emerges that knows, very well, what is happening. His/her judgements are judgements of truth and not mere opinions of an spectator or philosopher. Political judgements emerging from a complex cycle of relationships between the infinite possibilities of the situation, the infinity of the State, and the infinity of an Event, can be judgments of truth, for their subject is constituted through the political process itself.

Fig. 146/
Funambulist, by Ricardo di Gianni.



Fig. 147/
Odradek, by Jeff Wall

An ethics of encounter is a relational ethics, an ethics in which there is no real subject but only process. An ethics based on the stubborn persistence of a care understood as fidelity to the encounter. The encounter disturbs the state of the situation, it changes the conditions of the field and its stories, it transforms the immediate dimensions of the world. It is a taking place of an ontological disagreement, the taking place of primary dissent. The encounter brings things together into a situation, but does not bind. The pragmatic thinking-feeling of what happens in the situation is stronger and realer than the state of the situation. The politics-there that emerges in this encounter rejects the 'state'. Metapolitics are anarchic because they unbind.

A transitional relationship can be established therefore between what I have named above 'aesthetics of encounter' and the 'ethics of encounter' that I am introducing here: one leads to the other anarchically. The attention and the perception of the encounter, the sensibility developed as a result of an openness and generosity to the encounter, evolves into a care for the encounter, a situated ethics that emerges from an engaged 'acting-there'. In a similar way, pragmatic dissent can be linked to anarchic metapolitics: pragmatic dissent is the subjects' critical engagement with (his/her non-acceptance of) the state of the situation, a dissenting politics of truth that can be named anarchic.

Anarchic metapolitics is a politics of undoing, unbinding, the un-making of the bonds that tie subjects to states – the predefined limits and conditions of a situation. An endless process of terminating bonds and affirming the infinite possibilities of the encounter as a site of new affinities among a multiplicity of capacities.

The ecology of this politics is precarious and fragile. Its anarchic and open condition demands a constant care that resists corruption. The openness of the encounter requires a persistent fidelity from its subjects, also vulnerable, engaged and committed, almost subjects-left-behind.

The various unbindings and undoings, the caring persistence, the openness, all render both sites and their subjects fragile: the vulnerability of interdependent bodies, and the unstable precariousness of an always-shifting site of common life without 'arché'. And yet, this fragile openness it is power, the infinite potential of the maze, the turbulent abundance of endless life.

We must strive for "[...] *the unbound multiplicity of consciousness, its anticipatory aspect, [...] the precariousness of the bond rather than its firmness. [...] It is the bond that we must terminate, and what*

needs to come about is nothing but the affirmative multiplicity of capacities”. (Badiou 2005: 75)

For architecture and other spatial practices to become truly relevant tools in the responsible transformation and organization of our coexistence, it is not enough to focus our attention on the processes of material transformation that are so easily referred to as ‘making’ practices today. Making is always already thinking, and thinking is making too. But this apparently perfect coupling is incomplete, unless we include the affective dimensions of our experience: making/thinking/feeling. To inhabit the world responsibly is to experience it and to take part in its making. We encounter/experience the world first aesthetically: we are affected, we feel. Making practices transform and create. They produce difference. But we need to listen and wait, we need to feel, in order to discern and understand what is different: to distinguish the difference that makes a difference.

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As I stated at the very beginning, a philosophical situation can be thought of as the relation defined through an encounter between terms that are foreign to each other. In this case, architecture, film and politics – not entirely foreign to each other of course – have met to enable a thinking through the condition of the image and the organization of our coexistence in order to imagine ways of architecting responsibly. This responsibility, we have seen, emerges out of an openness that readies us to embrace the encounter and evolves into a situated and persistent form of care.

Our encounter with film has been placed primarily in-between, in the middle, corresponding to a second part that acts almost as an interruption that has the power to create both a separation and a connection. This moment of distance and encounter, sits in between the first and the third part, which approach the philosophical tasks of exploring the choices of thought and the value(s) of exception, respectively.

The first part proposes to delay the image, turning a detached and autonomous aesthetic theory into an aesthetics of encounter. Paradoxically, delaying the image is what allows us to put aesthetics first. Aesthetic experience *is* the first experience, our discontinuous experience of being-in-the world – i.e. our ontological inability to become ‘one’ with anything else, to understand an ‘other’ fully, to grasp anything completely – is always first mediated through an aesthetic encounter. A first reduction of the infinity of the Real is exerted here, and subsequent reductions follow (epistemological, rational or else). In a journey through the life, conditions and limitations of the image today, and its affairs with archi-

ture, we have been confronted with the decision of choosing to settle with the quick and often tricky offerings of visuals lacking depth and duration, or to slow down: to wait and to endure in order to delay the image, to extend and inhabit the encounter.

In the third part, after asserting the fundamental role of architecture in the organization of coexistence, I have presented a number of methodological, operational and pedagogical tools to see and *to architect* otherwise, on the basis of a dissenting embrace of movement and the openness of life, and along accounts of two architectural situations, one slightly more interior, intimate and domestic and another one more exterior, public and urban, in which some of those tools are activated in desired but also unexpected ways. Additionally, this part reflects about the affinities and relations of making, thinking and feeling – material and conscious processes and flows, their subjects, their affects, their lives – in order to explore the power of sharing, displacing and caring in practices of engaged and responsible transformation of the world.

The first part can also be understood as corresponding to ‘aesthetics’, an aesthetics of encounter that comes first; and the third part as corresponding to ethics, a caring, persistent and situated ethics of encounter, that emerges second. These two parts are both separated and connected by the relational and filmic gap of an encounter with film as thought, in a second part that seeps in from the middle outwards to question our assumptions, enriching and informing the discussions, reflections and proposals of this thesis.

If we delay the image, and truly inhabit the encounter, we can think through the neutrality of *being*, and stubbornly leave ourselves behind. There *is* nothing then, but the movement of *life*. //

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