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EDITORIAL: ESSENCE AND ARCHITECTURE

TOM SPECTOR

Those of us who had given up on talk of essences, because they always seem to depend on some inaccessible, mystifying core, are in for a pleasant reawakening. Essence(s) is(are) back. In retrospect, this turn was inevitable. Continential philosophy's militant perspectivalism, starting with Nietzsche, was bound to invite a backlash. Meanwhile, an influential cohort of architects has become frustrated "that architecture is increasingly justified solely by its relations and not by its own particular and autonomous qualities."[1] That is to say, to the degree that architecture is justified by its performance, it recedes into the background as a mere tool, as 'equipment' in Heideggerian terms, and it loses its potential as a foreground element in the process.

Concerns for architecture's autonomy usually emanate from economic recessions, but, interestingly, not this time. Times are good in the profession, architects have plenty of work, and yet their ambitions for their work are still frustrated. This suggests that something else is afoot. That something else may be the sheer oppressive weight of performance expectations these days: climate, social betterment, profit motives, work productivity, context, and more besides that coalesce to crowd out conceptions of what architecture *can be* by those of what it *facilitates*. Those pushing the performative aspects of architecture think that giving up a little autonomy for a lot more relevance is well worth the trade. But it is a question of degree.

Thus, architecture and philosophy have found

new common ground. Each author in this volume approaches the topic of essence uniquely in order to demystify what they see as a thoroughly useful concept.

The opening essay, Benjamin Bross's Essentialism and Spatial (Re) Production, argues that the essence of space and place does not have to be approached holistically but can be usefully analyzed into component parts without losing the overall in the process. So, for example, a door: It's formal properties are an obvious source of its essence. But also, What is its final cause--what was it brought into the world to do? What is its efficient cause--who creates it and how do they do this? And what are its temporal properties both in its production and its use over time? Taken together, he thinks, these properties tell us the door's essence in a way that becomes normative. That is, they help us tell a good one from a bad one.

Clearly, Bross is attempting an essentialism quite different from the one the Pragmatist tradition sought so strenuosly to put to bed. Pragmists disliked essences because they seemed to presume a metaphysics of objects beyond all human intentions that in turn required a complicated epistemology merely to explain how we come to know of these essences. Bross's project is perhaps better thought of as determining an object's functional essence—a much more tractable problem. His ultimate purpose is to identify the "essential parts (that) can contribute to the continuation and innovation of spatial production."

In Ashley Woodward's explanation of Jean-François Lyotard's thoughts about architecture, it is the keenly felt absence of what at one time, and in a more hospitable context, were the essential boundaries of domesticity and of the town that drive his thinking about architecture. In the face of an example such as Southern California, Woodward explains, Lyotard is dismayed that "Space is no longer between a 'here' (home) and 'elsewhere' – the border zone seems to have expanded indefinitely, such that 'there is nothing left but surroundings.'" Dismayed, and yet simultaneously (and so typically Lyotardian) he is suspicious that nostalgia for those idealized enclosures may lead to violence against perceived others. Certainly, recent refugee crises at the U. S. Border with Mexico and across Europe testify to the reality of such suspicions. Since idealizations of cities are inherently suspicious in his view, architects should eschew projects that trade in such wishful thinking in favor of "non-projects" born out of an attitude of non-domination over others.

In case Object Oriented Ontology (OOO), as promoted by Graham Harman and others, has passed underneath the reader's attention, the conversation here transcribed between Harman and Simon Weir will

serve as a good introduction to the thought of SCI-Arc's Distinguished Professor of Philosophy (and more recently, the school's Liberal Arts Coordinator.) Among the tenets of OOO is that objects have qualities, but they cannot be reduced to their changeable qualities, hence they have an essence. Humans are also objects--a realization that should lead to collapse of the subject-object distinction and towards a de-anthropocentric outlook. Harman recognizes the roots of these ideas in Aristotle, but also that he departs from Aristotle. "I emphasize the inaccessible elusiveness of real objects, and while Aristotle has more awareness of that than many people realize, he does not emphasize the gap between the mind and the object to the same extent that OOO does (coming as we do after both Kant and Heidegger)."

"HARMAN RECOGNIZES THE ROOTS OF THESE IDEAS IN ARISTOTLE, BUT ALSO THAT HE DEPARTS FROM ARISTOTLE."

An important interest in OOO for architects should come from its promise of restoring a degree of non-instrumental dignity to buildings. Although created by humans and for humans, once created, buildings have their own trajectories that are impossible to reduce to the intentions of any particular human constituency. As Harman asserts, "you just can't reduce any object, including an architectural one, to its backstory as a project."As Mark Foster Gage observes of the attraction of OOO: "That architecture and discrete buildings are connected to the larger world is not in dispute, but whether buildings can be legitimized as architecture by these relations should be."[2] Take, for example, a building's LEED score, carbon neutrality or other measures of its environmental performance. No level of environmental sensitivity it exhibits could actually justify its existence, because the ultimate environmental sensitivity is to not exist in the first place. The reasonable conclusion to draw then, is that a work of architecture must justify itself *qua* architecture—assuming we understand and can defend what that means. Because a work of architecture's essence exceeds (or withdraws from)all

attempts to definitively encapsulate it, including attempts by its creators, it is suggested that architects do well to allude to what it might be.

A further aspect of the interest in OOO for architecture, however, is not so much in the building objects themselves, but in what Harman postulates happens when two objects collide or otherwise make contact. A sensual object functioning as an intermediary emerges from these collisions. Architects are dreamers of both types of objects. To round out this foray into the thought of Graham Harman is a book review of a volume edited by Joseph Bedford on the relevance of OOO for an architectural audience entitled *Is There an Object Oriented Architecture? Engaging Graham Harman.*

Taken together, the pieces in this issue begin to explore both the benefits and hazards, what is potentialy gained and what may be lost, when architecture deals in essences and when essentials are applied to architecture. While each essay chips away at the mystique that often accompanies talk of essences, and in the process allays some concerns, what is not yet settled, however, is whether those concerns can be dispelled altogether.

This issue, 5.2, with fewer essays than past issues, has given *Architecture Philosophy* a chance to experiment with longer-form pieces. It's production also crosses paths with the 5th biannual ISPA conference (postponed one year by Covid) held at Monte Veritá overlooking Lake Maggiore in Ascona Switzerland. Despite travel restrictions and other uncertainties, the conference was an impressive demonstration of both ISPA's staying power and its creativity. By the time this issue is in print, work will have begun on readying the thoughts and ideas for print emanating from that successful event.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark Foster Gage, "Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture," *Log* 33. 2015, 95.

2. Gage, 100.

ESSENTIALISM AND SPATIAL (RE) PRODUCTION

BENJAMIN BROSS

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Globalization continues to strengthen and spread across socio-cultural community boundaries, resulting in homogenized cultural landscapes. As Henri Lefebvre pointed out, spatial production[1] exhibits a society's value systems through the spaces (and places) it produces. One of the principal effects of a technology-driven flow of information on spatial production is that it has increasingly become a binary proposition: either design practice contributes to a *sense of place* by being rooted in place-based iterative socio-historical spatial production processes or, it follows Modernism's rejection of history and tradition in order to disrupt consciously the socio-historic context. The former asserts the continuation of localized spatial traditions and the latter producing design that participates in a larger globalized contemporary aesthetic. Yet, if spatial production is to (re)produce spatial traditions, how do we recognize what is *essential* to the identity of space?

The purpose of this essay is to produce an analytical approach that examines site-specific spatial design that results in *placemaking*: a unique physical spatial experience defined by the relationship between various spatial objects and

their properties. Together, these objects, usually typological spaces, and their qualities produce a sense of environmental and geographic spatial identity that distinguish a place from other spaces. The spatial production of objects that acknowledge and utilize their contexts help counteract the increasing homogeneity of globalized space. The question is then, how do we determine if a spatial product (a door, a house or a city plaza) belongs to, and hence continues, a specific spatial production tradition or context? How do we answer the question: *What is it?* What follows describes spatial products as knowable by the *nature* of their properties.

This article uses the philosophical concept of essentialism to develop a framework to analyze and generate designs that are rooted in context and history. The paper explores "Aristotelian" essentialism, focusing on the efficient and final causes, to define the *nature* of a spatial object. The essay continues by explaining the role of *time* in identifying spatial products. Finally, anchored in the previous analyses, the essay proposes three modes of spatial production: *discontinuity, continuity,* and *innovation*, that describe contemporary spatial production based on the deployment of essential properties of an object. These three modes allow designers to reflectively engage in the practice of spatial placemaking.

ESSENTIALISM

Introduction to Essentialism

Modern *essentialism*, as part of part of the "scientific realism" tradition, can be applied to explain the *nature* (see below) of objects. First, it is important to remember that as Lefebvre notes, "nature creates and does not produce."[2] This is important to note because my essentialist argument focuses on the essential qualities of produced objects and not that of created things of Nature. Hence, the essay is not about *natural kinds,* but rather, about the essential qualities of produced spatial objects. This philosophical approach seeks to document qualities including those that go beyond the "appearances in order to discover the hidden causes of things."[3] Thus, objects are defined by characteristics/properties that are bound in the *essence* of the object. Essentialism requires first an affirmation of the object's characteristics/properties and thus distinguishes those properties that are intrinsic and necessary for *being* the object from those which are *accidental*; the latter defined as a "p*roperty of an object* …. it happens to have but that it could lack."[4] Necessary properties, in turn, are "primary or secondary qualities" where "primary qualities are properties of the objects themselves. The secondary qualities are manners in which we are affected by things in the process of perceiving them."[5]

Hence, all essential properties are intrinsic, but not all intrinsic properties are essential. Moreover, as Leibniz[6] argued, and more recently Baruch Brody,[7] intrinsic properties can only be essential if they are possessed at *all* times by the object. Therefore, attitudes towards spatial objects are in themselves accidental, that is, susceptible to the passage of time and the concurrent evolution of value-systems.

An attempt to describe an object by what it is not would ultimately be fruitless, because all objects lack an infinite number of properties. Rather, it is imperative to search for properties, characteristics, or qualities that the object must possess to be categorized as a part of a specific spatial production tradition. The question then becomes, *how* do we identify the *essential* qualities of a spatial product?

ARISTOTLE'S CAUSES

Aristotle's "causes"[8] provide an important approach to applying essentialism to spatial production. Aristotle proposed "four categories of cause" that explain physical reality and the nature of things: material, formal, efficient and final.[9] The material cause, as the name suggests, explains the material content of the object; the formal cause explains the shape of the object. With efficient cause, Aristotle attempted to describe qualities that are not necessarily revealed at the surface of the object itself but are imbued into the object during its production. These qualities include socially constructed value systems acting through the individual or groups producing the object: rituals of production, skillsets, aesthetics (value judgements of beauty), logistics (including location, tools and facilities) and temporality (duration and time frame). The final cause, or the purpose of the object, is the designed purpose or function of the object. Because material and formal causes are somewhat self-evident, the essay focuses on the role of efficient and final cause in determining spatial essence.

"ALL ESSENTIAL PROPERTIES ARE INTRINSIC, BUT NOT ALL INTRINSIC PROPERTIES ARE ESSENTIAL"

EFFICIENT CAUSE

In an Aristotelian context, one of the ways we can explain essential properties of the object is by understanding the object's efficient cause or its process of production. First, efficient cause explores *who* produces the object, and more importantly, *how*. Under this interpretation, efficient cause is the combination of the producer and the process (steps) of production itself.[10] At its most expansive scope, a culture is defined by its traditions and rituals (what it does), and at its most granular, fabricators are defined by their knowledge; hence the carpenter is *identified* as the carpenter because she knows how to do carpentry.

Efficient cause analysis requires the development of identifiable proprietary sets -a group based on identified shared properties. *Who* may start with a general category, for example, an ethnic, national, or other productive group, i.e. "the French", and can finish with definitive specificity, such as a particular or individual producer -i.e., Jean Nouvel. As in Set Theory, related groups of specific examples are part of the greater general set, with each set containing kinds.[11] Specificity in the set is only as relevant as required by the analyst to demonstrate the validity of the general set's essential and related properties.[12] *Who* produces the object is then an *essential* property of the object itself -even anonymity of production is an *identifiable* property of the object (i.e., when we do not know or cannot know who made the object, when anonymity is a requirement of production, or when anyone can produce an object). As Walter Benjamin[13] noted, who or what produces an object is a fundamental property when determining authenticity (see replication below), hence it is an essential component of identity. The appearance of "Black Swan"[14] exceptions to any specific set, do not invalidate the original set, but rather, create a new independent subset within the larger general set or alternately, widen the sorting criteria. Identifying who produces the object is limited only by the Venn diagram-like qualifiers that are used to form a kind set: i.e., profession, religious or hierarchical status, socio-cultural and political membership, etc. When analyzing a spatial product, such as a church, we might investigate who designed, built, blessed, and funded the product, noting that each of these *producers* had a specific *role* because of their knowledge in the process of production. We might further investigate requirements to participate in these roles, for example, to bless a religious shrine, it is a requirement to be an ordained priest of that religion.

Another aspect of efficient cause is the '*how*' or the *process* of production. In essentialism, the object's *essential* identity may embody the processes of production if deemed relevant by the individual maker

or society as a whole. These processes include but are not limited to rituals or traditions and their associated codes (rules) of execution. For example, it may be *essential* that the object be produced following specific manufacturing steps or associated rituals that may or may not be visible in the object itself; at specific periods of time, such as the first full moon of the year, or when a comet appears in the evening sky. As we shall see below, these codes of production, may significantly overlap with the *final cause,* i.e. the designed purpose, as often *how* something is produced is part of *why* an object is produced. Hannah Arendt[15] has argued that the *how* also includes socio-political value systems, including capital production contexts, codes, and working conditions. Like production rituals, these characteristics may or may not be visible in the product itself, and overlap at times with other Essentialist Causes. For example, a church façade may be made of the stone of a specific quarry, such that its Material Cause is stone, but its efficient cause is that the stone must be from a particular quarry associated with a sacred mountain. Finally, efficient cause might incorporate "constructal"[16] logic, where the object is the *natural* (that is obeying *Natural Laws*) result of a production process. Once again, it is necessary for the analyst to propose and bound the relevant parameters in developing *identity* sets.

"LIKE PRODUCTION RITUALS, THESE CHARACTERISTICS MAY OR MAY NOT BE VISIBLE IN THE PRODUCT ITSELF, AND OVERLAP AT TIMES WITH OTHER ESSENTIALIST CAUSES."

FINAL CAUSE

Aristotle describes final cause as the object's purpose or telos. Purpose can be divided into two parts: what it *should* do, for example "a house *should* provide shelter"; and what it *can* do (beyond its primary purpose) because of its intrinsic properties, such as materiality, shape, dimension, volume, color etc., for example, "a house *can* be a museum." The *should* makes explicit intent, while *can* acknowledges an object's possibilities, but is

void of designer intent. As we shall see below, this is a critical idea as it lays the foundation for a constructed system of values. Furthermore, fundamental to the idea of what an object does, is an incorporated history of all previous actions, which taken as a sum, enable present and future actions of the object (hereafter, called *functions*). These historic, present and future *functions* become the "signs" by which semiotic analyses ascribe various degrees of *meaning* and ultimately the collective memory inherent in the *social contexts* of spatially produced objects.

Another important aspect of final cause exists in an object's potential purpose, such that as the object fulfills its purpose, what was initially an extrinsic object quality, thereafter transforms the object's essence, and now forms part of its intrinsic properties. It is important to note that regardless of the transformation, the object retains its initial properties even while gaining new qualities.[17] In that sense, the object acquires new purposes, that are fundamental for describing the object's nature. This is especially important when the object must then be able to perform the new intrinsic purpose as its reason for *being*. While considering an object's purpose—and hence describing it—space-time contexts must be identified clearly: What the object *has* been, what it *is*, and what it *could* be are properties of the object. These contexts are necessary to establish categorical boundaries of *being*.

To illustrate this point, let us examine the "Western Wall"[18] in Jerusalem. (figure 1) As a material cause, the wall is made of limestone "Jerusalem Stone" blocks quarried near the site.[19] Turning to the wall's efficient cause, the wall's stone blocks were placed side by side to form long courses, with each successive course rising away from its bedrock foundation. Though parts of the wall have been built and rebuilt by different rulers and their corresponding subjects over the last 2000 years, historic records show that King Herod ordered the initial construction[20] of the wall; hence, members of Judean society ranging from priests to slaves initially built the wall. At each instance, the tools and technology that were used to construct the wall correspond to the time and cultural corpus of the people working on the wall. In terms of its final cause, the wall was designed and erected as a structure capable of holding back soil in order to support a large temple surrounded by ceremonial grounds.

Once the wall was finished sometime between 19 BCE and the end of construction of the Temple Mount in 64 CE, it fulfilled its telos. Yet in 70 CE, 6 years after the Temple Mount was finally completed, the Second Temple was destroyed.[21] After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, only portions of the retaining wall and Temple Mount were left

FIGURE 1:
WESTERN WALL, JERUSALEM

–though eventually the latter were also removed. However, as F.M. Loewenberg notes,[22] the portion of the retaining wall that did survive, did not acquire an "aura"[23] of symbolic and theological importance until nearly 1500 years later; that would happen four years after the 1546 earthquake, when houses and other lean-to structures collapsed and revealed the original retaining wall. Sultan Suleiman I, the Magnificent, instructed his engineers to clear away debris and prepare a prayer site for Jews. Thereafter, the once extrinsic property –its spatial relationship to the Holy of Holies- became an intrinsic quality, i.e. no longer was it simply a retaining wall, but rather, as a physical remnant of the Temple and its grounds, over the centuries increasingly becoming Judaism's holiest site.

CRITIQUES OF ESSENTIALISM

In his essay, "No Route to Material Origin Essentialism?"[24] Nic Damnjanovic critiques Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity,* pointing out arguments made against essentialism's apparent inability to determine the "sufficiency" or minimum

properties that an object must possess to be considered essentially *that* object. First, it is important to note his criticism is primarily directed at material cause, and concludes "any argument for (EMO) [material origin essentialism] that relies on a sufficiency principle is bound to fail."[25] Damnjanovic notes that any essentialist argument that depends on exclusive material properties of objects alone is not enough to identify an object as unique, or belonging to its own set. Instead, an object's identity essence is derived from material, the other three causes, and its resulting intrinsic *compossibility*.[26] Simply stated, an object´s essence does not rest alone on its materiality, but in the sum of the properties that are present in its production, and its ability to sustain relationships (interactions) with other objects.

Other critics note that essences do not seem to be observable and hence verifiable. David Oderberg, citing Locke as the source of the confusion, counters that the fundamental question that must be answered is "what is meant by observability."[27] He continues by discussing an object´s *quiddity*, pragmatically noting that objects do possess *intrinsic* properties that do manifest themselves *extrinsically*. As such, these intrinsic properties cannot be separated from the object, and hence flow forth from it, revealing its *essence*. He writes "…*what* a thing is does determine *how* it is –in the traditional terminology, function follows essence. Essence just is the principle from which flows the characteristic behavior of the thing. And a thing´s numerical identity as particular member of a kind determines its particular behavior…"[28] Objects must be evaluated by what they *are* and *do*, and on that basis, analyses reveal how and why an object behaves as it does. Therefore, designers can utilize modern essentialism to identify spatial production traditions not only by their form, but also equally as important, by *what* they do, and *how* they achieve designed functions. As we shall see below, this is of paramount importance when attempting to avoid "pastiche" aesthetics.

THE ROLE OF TIME

In the reductionist tradition, Time is a descriptive property of a spatial product (object) indicating the specific status of *being* (existing) in an object's production, use and relationship with other objects. In this sense, an object possesses five distinct (but related) qualities of time: embodied, existence, contextual, production, and use.

Embodied time describes the passage of time incorporated since the object's creation.[29] For example, in the case of the Itsukushima Torii[30] (figure 2) the columns are made from Camphor tree trunks. These

FIGURE 2:
ITSUKUSHIMA SHRINE TORII

Camphor tree trunks are at least two hundred years old *before* they were cut down. The embodied time property is neither accidental nor incidental, as width, height and loadbearing requirements for the Itsukushima Torii necessitate trees that must be at least 200 years old to fulfill its final cause in the same way as past Torii iterations.

Existence time is the descriptive characteristic of the object's age from production inception going forward. This is because objects can be said to be in existence once they have been produced and function (see final cause). *Existence* time criteria is fundamental to understand the value systems which are imbedded in the production of spatial product. For example, use may be the primary production criteria when choosing materials prioritizing their point of obsolescence, thus enabling future market-oriented consumption. The Itsukushima Torii's *existence* time begins once the tree trunks are transformed into columns, and all other components are integrated to form the new whole object of the Torii. In this way, we describe the age (measured flow of time) of the components either

as independent of human interaction (created), or dependent on the production process.[31]

Contextual time is determined by the occurrence of other events that demarcate the beginning, continuation and end of specific periods. In contextual time, we note referential time points, as in the *past, present,* and *future*, but more importantly, by a proposed generally accepted historic identifier such as *Neolithic* or *Roman*. Contextual time is indispensable to understand spatial identity as belonging to an identifiable set of criteria to which the spatial product belongs, and as such, denotes and connotes particular spatial identity; it allows us to examine the characteristics of the social, cultural and political contexts in which an object has been, is, and will be produced. Contextual time is often considered the prevalent criteria for membership in an identity group, as we often refer to qualities of context when describing an object's identity. As such, we state the object *belongs* to, *emulates* (simulates, but is not authentic), and disrupts the time qualities of objects belonging to the same identity groups. If matched with efficient and final causes, we derive a cross-reference of who, how, and why, as related to the contextual time frame in which they are produced. *Who* in contextual time, may reference the larger set of people whose cultural spatial making is identified with the production of an object, such as the "Edo" or "Meiji" periods. Equally importantly, is the iterative nature of contextual time, since the production of an object reinforces the notion of a specific period of production: for example, when archeologists suggest that a ruin dates from a specific time frame because its physical characteristics match those of other objects known to have been produced in that time context.

Production time refers directly to the time that is necessary to produce an object. For example, one salient characteristic of Fordism[32] is the mass production of consumable products in a specific calibrated amount of time. In this manner, we can describe the time it takes to produce a spatial object as a specific, descriptive quality. In the case of a Torii, we could distinguish within the context of efficient cause, between those that are handmade (longer periods of time and labor intensive) and those that are machine-made (rapid production and serially made).

As the name suggests, *use time* describes the measured amount of time an object performs its *functions*. Whereas *existence* time is a measure of the passage time of the object, *use time* measures the duration of each *function*. Recalling that *function* applies equally to what an object *should* and *can* do, we can similarly note that *use time* applies to the carrying out of activities that are intended and unintended. At first sight, the latter might suggest an

extraneous consideration, yet if we recall the example of the Western Wall, construction of spatial myth is often the result of built environments performing time-based unintended activities. Such activities become fundamental in understanding the shaping of human perception derived from the essence of the spatial product. For example, a farmer's field that temporarily becomes a brutal battlefield; though comparatively insignificant to the *existence* time of the field, the *use* time of the Rummel Farm[33] as a battleground during the U.S. Civil War transformed the farm into a spatial component of the Gettysburg National Military Park. Such a spatial transformation includes the corresponding changes to site's spatial essence legibility.

DEVELOPMEN OF SETS

Sets are collections of objects that share criteria-based common properties. To apply essentialism as sorting criteria requires considering objects' intrinsic properties. Sets are made through the analyses of spatial production for *identification* purposes based on the *cause* properties (discussed previously) of the objects. For example, "Set Doors" is composed of the physical object "doors," such that all doors are contained in "Set Doors." As a first step, the designer defines a door through its final cause essence: *What* does a door *do* that makes it a door? *What* must a door perform to be considered a door? A second step is to sort doors by *efficient cause,* answering *who* must produce the door, and *how* must they produce it to be perceived as a door, and more specifically a particular type of door? A third, but certainly not final step, would be to generate *time* criteria that further restricts set membership: in what *context* time is the door produced, and what is the use time for a particular door? One possible next step is to identify what is a door by formal properties: dimensions, materials, configurations, ornamentations, colors, components, etc. Each answer generates additional

> "USE TIME DESCRIBES THE MEASURED AMOUNT OF TIME AN OBJECT PERFORMS ITS FUNCTIONS."

sets defined by commonalities between member objects, and differences with objects of other sets, while all objects are generally still considered doors. Taken to its logical end, we can visualize how on one hand increasing complexity leads to increasing differentiation and ultimately uniqueness in an object, while on the other hand, we can determine as many sets as necessary to establish what is *essential* in a spatial *identity set.* At the larger scale, the quantified and qualified identification of sets allow observers to assert that an object belongs to a specific tradition of spatial practice because of its essential properties.

Once a set has been determined by specific criteria, essentialism becomes normative when applied to generate design. First essentialism describes what is, and then, what it should be based on established rules of belonging to the set. The more limited the set of explanations available for each property, the easier it is to *identify* the uniqueness of the type to a society, and in some cases, the singularity of the object itself. These properties are often expressed as normative regulations: to be considered a part of an object's set, a shared minimum of characteristics must be evident. The more specific the *set*, the clearer the revelation of the *essential* nature of the object to a society, and within a society's total production.

Set development reveals constructed value systems not only for the set, but for the set developer as well. A central aspect of set development is the privileging of some properties over others to generate a set identity. In other words, *why* properties are chosen is as important as *what* properties are chosen. The deconstruction of property privileging reveals meaning through semiotics. For example, Amos Rapoport (following Hall) categorized human spatial production based on their physical permanence into fixed, semifixed, and non-fixed components.[34] In his methodic approach, he proposes a system that identifies the object's essential final cause properties in terms of its *existence* time to derive meaning. Designers can utilize his system to generate spatial production that follows the essential property rules to generate similar objects.

As we shall see next, such an approach presents an opportunity for designers to continue a spatial tradition by *(re)producing* that which has been classified as belonging to a pre-existing contextual set; or, innovate designed components rooted in context or history yet exemplifying contemporary expressions of functions, materiality and/or form.

DISCONTINUITY, CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

Having described essentialism as analytical tools to examine the identity

of spatial products, we can now propose how these analyses are applied through design. Generally, we understand spatial production through three general modalities: Discontinuity, continuity, and innovation. Each of these modes of production display varying degrees of commonality, from none to total, with the latter a high reliance or emulation on the proprietary qualities of contextual spatial production. Specifically, we are able to categorize spatial objects because sets (see above) contain objects that relate to each other through causal qualities at the exclusion of objects that do not share properties. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, citing Thomas Kuhn, explains that:

> According to Kuhn's theory, references of kind terms are determined through a network of similarity and dissimilarity relations, which specify what properties an entity can and cannot have in order to qualify as that kind. Similarity-dissimilarity sets do not entail any principled distinction between essential and superficial properties. Although the original formation of sets does not require any description, the descriptive content stored in the sets is subsequently needed to keep the boundaries between kind categories sharp.[35]

"HAVING DESCRIBED ESSENTIALISM AS ANALYTICAL TOOLS TO EXAMINE THE IDENTITY OF SPATIAL PRODUCTS, WE CAN NOW PROPOSE HOW THESE ANALYSES ARE APPLIED THROUGH DESIGN"

Because sets are determined by selecting specific parameters, designers must engage in the selection of properties that may be produced or re-produced during object production. Obviously, certain parameters are impossible to replicate, such as *contextual* time. Yet, as we will see below, the inability to possess the same *contextual* time disqualifies continuity only as far as it limits an object´s authenticity for a specifically bounded time context, but not in its tradition of making or embedded value systems (i.e. building codes).

With the rise of Modernism in the 19th century and onward, as exemplified by Adolph Loos' treatise *Ornament and Crime,* designers and artists willfully turned away from the past and its traditions. Moreover, contemporary spatial production practices, even in the Postmodernist period, continue to question the value of establishing a continuity or innovative relationship with historic and contextual environments. Lebbeus Woods had gone so far as to declare "I am at war with my time, with history, with all authority that resides in fixed and frightened forms."[36] It is this rejection of spatial history and context that creates spatial *discontinuity*, as it privileges objects that are dissimilar to their environment. Discontinuity is a modality of spatial production where contextual *essential* qualities are obviated in favor of the production of a consciously differentiated spatial product.

Discontinuous spatial production exhibits the absence of the various properties of the spatial products such as time, materiality, history, purpose, and value systems. Differentiated objects exhibit contextual relationships that are limited to either their physical presence, enforced embedded value systems, or functionality. Perhaps one of the best examples of discontinuous spatial production is Adolf Loos' Steiner House. Built in 1910 in a Viennese suburb, it radically differentiates itself in its façade design and plan development, a precursor to his *raumplan*,[37] from the neighborhood's preexisting houses.

For the purposes of our discussion, spatial production requires that objects occupy physical space over time.[38] Because of the physical relationship between objects, there is an ontological reality of perceived existence, regardless of the design intention of the produced objects. Simply stated, a new office building whose design embraces a differentiated essence and hence façade from its context, has a relationship with all the other buildings in its proximity by virtue of its physical existence, during the time that buildings in proximity exist. It is this condition of physical-time existence that allows our built environment to be understood as a palimpsest: layer upon layer of spatial production that in summation exhibits Aldo Rossi's "genius loci."[39]

Another baseline shared relationship is the enforced embedded value systems during the production of spatial objects. Discontinuous objects share imposed values systems, such as fire codes, ADA, setbacks, design review directives, or other legislation that all objects must obey. In that sense, all spatial products of a specific time and place exhibit the constructed

FIGURE 3: ISE JINGU SHRINE

value systems of the participative groups who enact, promote and enforce codified production rules. Yet, other constructed value systems are often suppressed or removed from the production process itself, diminishing or eliminating bonds between objects. Finally, discontinuous objects tend to relate to other objects by their functions. Hence, we can see how houses built in the 18th century through the 21st century *should* provide shelter but, often do so at such differentiated processes that the function provides any meaningful relationship across time and space. Altogether, discontinuous spatial production generates environments of disconnected spatial objects, standing silently apart from each other, in the same space, but without a *sense of place.*

CONTINUITY

Continuity is the act of producing objects that directly exhibit object-property kinds revealed by the essentialist qualities of an existing environmental context. This production can occur by either *replacement, replication* or *resemblance*. The intent is

to go beyond surface-first qualities and define design composition through essentialist frameworks in the way of making that embed value systems associated with spatial production.

To *replace*, is "to take the place of,"[40] and –ment, indicates the action itself. Replacement is literally an action where an object´s spatial component are exchanged *in situ* by components whose qualities are materially *identical* to those that are being displaced. Component qualities obey causes with the possible exception of contextual time. Because components are bound to the historic period in which they were produced, all objects not produced at the same time as the original components can be determined to be different, unless the period is expansive enough to be considered part of one space-time continuum.*41*

Replacement components themselves are subject to further analysis: they may have been produced at the same time as the original components, but stored for later use, maintenance and upkeep. For example, roofing tiles might be produced and stored specifically for later use, at the same time as a first set of tiles are installed; these stored tiles are then used to replace older tiles as these reach the end of their useful life. The replacement tiles, though installed years or decades later, would still belong to the same *contextual* and *production* time as the first installed tiles. Alternatively, identical components may be produced millennia later, to replace failing components. The question in this case is a larger one, when we consider *who* installs them, and *how* they install them. This analysis becomes relevant to those who seek to establish parameters of authenticity. *Who?* is not an innocent question, as it identifies groups that seek to appropriate or consolidate socio-political power through the affirmative control of historic spatial products. *How* must be understood too, as we analyze forces of capital and labor involved in production and replacement: we must consider the final cause of replacement itself, especially when accounting for social, cultural and political agendas.

Replication is a spatial production process by which an object´s physical components are produced in an identical manner to the original but, in a separate physical space and time. Unlike replacement, replication production does not occur *in situ*. Similar to replacement components and objects, replication products are bound by the specificity of their time qualities. For example, the Jingu Shrine in Ise is replicated during the Shikinen Sengu ceremony occurring every 20 years (figure 3). Junko Edahiro notes,

Its underlying concept—that repeated rebuilding renders

> sanctuaries eternal—is unique in the world. In the occidental way of thinking, creating something durable would normally involve building a structure with robust stones, bricks, and concrete. At this shrine, however, the structures are made exclusively from wood and, by being rebuilt over and over again, can last forever. Also, in the process of rebuilding, the skills of shrine builders and craftsmen in various fields (carpentry, sacred treasures, apparel, etc.) are also passed on from generation to generation.[42]

“PRODUCTION BY REPLICATION CONNOTES MEMBERSHIP IN THE LARGER GROUP”

Viewed as part of the final cause, the Jingu Shrine object's *use* time prescribes that its Torii pillars be used in the sanctuary for twenty years; once dismounted from within the main shrine, they are used another twenty years as gates at the Uji Bridge. While any variation of this use time may not eliminate the Torii *essence* of the object, it would however, prevent it from being considered specifically an Ise Grand Shrine Torii, because the deviating iteration would no longer be bound by the required use time characteristics.

Mass replication (in series or concurrently) by non-mechanical and non-automated means of production, precisely because of implied labor concentration in *production* time, evokes the sense of a process-centered spatial production unity. In mass replication, spatial production is accretive to the individual maker at the personal level, but also accretive to the larger scale society. Specifically, production by replication connotes membership in the larger group. Presently what we mostly see, however, is mass replication by mechanical and automated processes that obey the logic of capital as its main identity. This continuous spatial production approach is prevalent in projects that produce large amounts of units in a standardized and rapid manner (thus providing the largest

number of costs efficiencies). For example: mass housing projects whose constituent components, entire buildings, and even neighborhoods, are produced identically and serially (except for their physical location within the overall urban project).

On one hand, as Walter Benjamin[43] noted,mass replication has provided unprecedented access to all types of works and spatial products for the largest number of people. Yet, Benjamin points to the failures of mass replication, where spatial production is driven by the logic of capital, leading to vanishing authenticity. Similarly, Aldo Van Eyck has pointed to mass replication in urbanism as its main challenge in placemaking. He notes "[w]e must continue the search for the basic principles of a new aesthetic and discover the human meaning of number. We must impart rhythm to repetitive similar and dissimilar form, thereby disclosing the conditions that may lead to the equilibration of the plural, and thus overcome the menace of monotony."[44,45]

There is a final mode of continuity, that neither replaces, replicates, but relates to the context: *resemblance*. Michel Foucault recalls that until the "end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in knowledge of Western Culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretations of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them."[46] At first glance, reaching back to the sixteenth century and its Aristotelian tradition[47] might seem an anachronistic approach, but attempts to contemporize once archaic forms of understanding yields fruits in present postmodern discourse. Spatial production is perceived as continuous because it resembles preexisting contextual components. Though varying from object precedent/context, they do so in such a way as to present the observer a sense of unity or belonging to a greater group of objects. Resemblance in objects requires the development of parameter-defined *kinds* criteria; individual essential properties that permit identification of the object, or what Foucault calls the "signature." Moreover, resemblance joins spatial objects to each other, over distance and time, creating what Foucault names *sympathetic* links -rendering *contextual* time a non-essential quality of the product. In resemblance, spatial products with similar fundamental properties form sets whose objects exhibit specimen variations to generate object individuality, while retaining membership through what Wittgenstein called "familiar relationships."[48] For example, we can readily recognize a brownstone neighborhood in New York, but we can also distinguish individual dwellings frome each other. Wittgenstein notes that we as observers

recognize similarities between objects, writing that "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail."[49]

INNOVATION

The third major modality is that of *innovation*. Unlike *resemblance*, where properties may vary superficially or minimally from object to object, but retain *essential* familiar similarities and hence belong to the same "set," *innovation* represents a wider variation in material cause and an outright departure from an object's historic efficient cause *essence*. Often, changes in material realities are catalysts for changes in production processes. *How* and *who* exhibit contemporary labor, production technology, and social value systems while maintaining *essential* formal and final causes. By modifying the efficient cause properties, designers propose spatial relationships that simultaneously relate to the contextual precedent, while modifying an object enough to imbue it with a sense of contemporaneous production –i.e., the *zeitgeist*. Thus, objects are produced with *essential* modifications that address new or contemporary social, cultural and political contexts.

"INNOVATION REPRESENTS A WIDER VARIATION IN MATERIAL CAUSE AND AN OUTRIGHT DEPARTURE FROM AN OBJECT'S HISTORIC EFFICIENT CAUSE ESSENCE."

This looking back to history but being part of the present is the hallmark of *innovation*. In Koestler´s *Ghost in the Machine,* he relates a story describing the process of production attributed to *Bios*.[50] However, where Nature *evolves*, spatial producers *innovate*. Following his narrative, spatial production processes innovate by incorporating simpler processes into the production of increasingly complex objects. We can directly relate the original production process and its resultant spatial product with each new iteration because of contextual time and the changing efficient cause of an object to achieve intended *functions*. Innovation allows for, even promotes, the notion that design can reveal the

contextual essence of things, and still be produced in its own time context.

Critical Regionalism, for example, as defined by Kenneth Frampton, approaches place making through *innovation* that seizes on the *essential* aspects of spatial production and steers away from what he calls "nostalgic historicism" and "sentimental" attachments to place. Instead, Frampton's focus is on "elements derived indirectly from the peculiarities of a particular place."[51] Confronted with the inability to match contextual time, selected properties are extracted, decanted from contextual objects, to reveal causes that create sympathetic commonalities from spatial object to object. Essential components are not formed from the impulse of replication, but rather, from the material cause of location, the efficient cause of the producer, and the final cause of its functions. Where focus is placed solely on the form as perceived, with disregard for other causes, spatial production becomes "pastiche," and ultimately void of any content other than the act of aesthetic continuity resemblance.

An example of spatial innovation is Urbanu's Tulou Housing (2005-2008) (figure 4) in Guangzhou, China. Hakka migration between the 12th and 20th century produced the "*tulou* …. a dwelling type unique to the Hakka people."[52] The oldest examples are "O" shape building typology, built with compacted earthen walls that look inward in fortress-like relationship with their exterior context. This meant that living units faced inward. That orientation, along communal programming in the central courtyard, provides a rich social environment. After studying traditional Hakka dwellings in the Chinese provinces of Jiangxi, Fujian and Guangdong, Urbanus developed a housing project that *innovated* on the traditional typology. While preserving the final and formal causes (cantilevered roofs over a circular housing block with centralized programming) they also embraced contemporary construction processes and materials such as poured reinforced concrete walls and slabs and steel guardrails.

CONCLUSION

The above text is an attempt to explain an essentialist design approach to *spatial production* in order to achieve context-based placemaking. The sum of essential qualities is the *spatial identity* of the *essential components* of a society's secretions. As Globalization continues to strengthen and spread across socio-cultural community boundaries, places are reduced to geographic accidents: increasingly, locations fail to reveal the *essence* of cultural spatial production, and therefore, they fail to reveal their uniqueness.

FIGURE 4: TULOU HOUSING

Ultimately, all spatial production reveals embedded value systems: *what* is important in the production of space. For those who prioritize not only preserving but also enhancing the qualities of place, especially in the context of contemporary market-driven considerations, the practice of spatial production requires the capacity to go beyond the surface image of objects. It requires the ability to peel away each layer to reveal Aristotelian causes that define design criteria sets of proprietary qualities and functions –and then apply them. These sets, each with their own object-derived properties, form the basis of the sum of the parts to create a greater *sympathetic* whole. Each object, be it a teakettle, a house, or city park, is then the sum of its essential parts and can contribute to the *continuation* and *innovation* of spatial production.

If Modernism's, and Postmodernism's rejection of the past, including its traditions, and context continues, and what is valued and therefore prioritized is the differentiated spatial object, we will eventually be confronted with a world where little or no cultural production differences exist. The long shadow of homogeneity will have spread

over our communities, and we will only find the mythical trace of what was once place through the nostalgic science of archeology.

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NON-PROJECTS FOR THE UNINHABITABLE: LYOTARD'S ARCHITECTURE PHILOSOPHY

ASHLEY WOODWARD

Jean-François Lyotard remains best known for his association with the postmodern, and in many circles there is little awareness of the significant difference between the way he used this term and other influential uses of it. Also little known are Lyotard's writings on architecture, despite some casual recognition of his apparent relevance to this field due to the prominence of postmodernism in architectural theory.[1] My aim here is to provide an introduction to Lyotard's practically unknown contributions to architecture philosophy, and to suggest two ways in which his work might be thought to make an original and interesting contribution to the field. First, Lyotard critically intervenes in phenomenology, which has had an influential place in the philosophy of architecture. [2] He challenges the values that tend to be accorded to the relations of the body to space in this tradition, celebrating dislocation over location, on the grounds that architecture should be understood as an art and should challenge the body to new experiences. Second, Lyotard's understanding of the modern and the postmodern cuts across the way these terms are typically deployed in architectural theory, inviting a fresh perspective through the reorganization of critical categories.

Lyotard's writings on architects and architecture are relatively scant: there is an essay on Le Corbusier, a couple of pieces on Arakawa and Gins, an interview, a dialogue with the architect Piero Derossi, and a short contribution to a group dossier in an architecture journal.[3] However, this field is broadened if we also consider reflections on the nature of the city and the built environment in general,[4] which we can find in various forms throughout Lyotard's writing career, from his early discussions of the political space of the "ideal city," through his writings on the notion of the pagus, his reflections on California, and on ideas such as the *oikos*, *domus*, and megalopolis. I will focus here, first, on some of these main general ideas about space, the built environment, and human habitation, before moving on to a review of the main ideas which emerge from Lyotard's writings on architecture as an art. These themes will then draw together with the critical comparisons with phenomenology and postmodernism which help to situate Lyotard's reflections on architecture. As with Lyotard's treatments of other arts—most famously, "the unpresentable" of postmodern sublime art[5]—he signals his point of interest in architecture with privative terms, in particular the uninhabitable and the non-project, for reasons which will be elucidated.

SPACES: *HABITUS*, MEGALOPOLIS

Lyotard develops a thesis on the transformation of our lived space, the space inhabited by human beings, broadly consistent with his reflections on postmodernity in its other manifestations.[6] This is a transformation from a rural or agrarian way of life and the villages or cities it involves, through the development of modern metropolises, to the postmodern "megalopolis." Lyotard's primary thesis is that this last is not simply a quantitative extension of the metropolis, but a qualitative transformation. Employing a device typical of continental philosophers, Lyotard elaborates these ideas using classical terms, drawing out suggested meanings in his own unique way. The value of doing this is that it gives the concepts an ontological status, and resists a simple reduction to the empirical which might be risked by using contemporary language. Lyotard conceptualizes a "traditional" way of inhabiting space under the various names of *oikos* (Greek), *domus,* and *habitus* (Latin). While *oikos* and *domus* could literally be translated as "house," Lyotard uses these terms to indicate a manner of inhabiting space, a way of life or being much more general than the term "house" tends to invoke, and which can be understood to apply to spatial situations which are not literally houses.

We find an evocative description of the way of life indicated by the terms *oikos, domus,* and *habitus* (which Lyotard tends to use interchangeably) as a kind of domestic idyll in the essay "*Domus* and the Megalopolis":

> Let's suppose that it's pretty hot outside. The courtyard is surrounded by walls and farm buildings. A large tree of some kind, willow, horse chestnut, lime, a clump of pines. Dovecots, swallows. The child raises its eyes. Say it's seven o'clock in the evening. Onto the kitchen table arrive in their place the milk, the basket of eggs, the skinned rabbit. Then each of the *fruges* goes to its destination, the dairy, the cool scullery, the cooking pot, the shelf. The men come home. Glasses of fresh wine. A cross is made in the middle of the large loaf. Supper.[7]

In this "domestic" model of space, there is a border between the inside and the outside. It is porous and non-exclusionary: strangers may be welcomed into the domestic space and offered hospitality. This extension of hospitality is in fact characteristic of the space of the *oikos, domus,* or *habitus*.

On this traditional model of the space of the human environment, outside the *habitus* is the *pagus* – the surrounds of the village which acts as a permeable boundary. Lyotard explains:

> *pagus* always means the country, the region, the opposite of *Heim*, of home, that is, of village. It is moreover a very beautiful word, the word that gives us *pax, companion,* etc. It is precisely the place where one forms pacts with something else (it is the same root; let's from time to time put up with parody-etymologies; this one in any case is "true"); it is a place of boundaries.[8]

The *pagus* is described elsewhere by Lyotard as the *zone*; it refers to the area surrounding the village or city walls, which acts as a "zone of contact" between those belonging to the *habitus*, and strangers who come from other regions.[9] The main distinction organizing this space is that of home/elsewhere, which can also be formulated as culture/nature, or more generally as inside/outside. The idea of nature is key to this traditional, rural, pre-industrial mode of existence: the *domus* is "[a] mode of space, time, and body under the regime (of) nature."[10] It is a way of habitation in which domesticating a powerful, often hostile nature, and organizing life according to its rhythms, is the predominant concern.

The great mutation in this model of space that Lyotard identifies is not between the rural village and the metropolis—he understands the latter as maintaining intact the inside/outside, and the border between them. The *metropolis* is only a "complication" of the space of the *domus* insofar as different suburbs become their own center, and the borders between them act to both link and separate them in relation to other suburban centers. The change, rather, comes with the transformation of the metropolis into the *megalopolis*. Lyotard has in mind here most specifically California, which he understands as a new model of space, one that has undergone a *qualitative* change. It is a model spreading to span the world:

> Through means of communication and of telecommunication, the great urban conglomerations extend like a dense network along the coast of California and will soon cover the globe, from San Francisco through Yokohama and Singapore as far as Ankara and Milan, and from Milan through the Ruhr, London, and New York as far as Los Angeles.[11]

California is a space of "conurbation": suburbs connected by highways, one after the other, without reference to any urban center. As the quote above suggests, technologies of communication and information also play an important role, as they liberate ties to fixed physical times and spaces, and connect things in a decentralized, "free" manner.[12]

The transformation Lyotard sees here is the displacement of the border and the decentering of the center. Human community is similarly diffracted and dispersed. Space is no longer divided between a "here" (home) and "elsewhere," an inside and an outside – the border zone seems to have expanded indefinitely, such that "there is nothing left but surroundings."[13] The "outside," understood as nature, or as the place where the stranger or

the other dwells, also disappears. The implication is that there is no longer an idea of an external reference point, a *nature* which would provide a rhythm to regulate the ordering of the *habitus*. The space of the megalopolis is entirely artificial, if that term even continues to have meaning. Relations between different human groups are no longer structured through a mediating border which allows hospitality: while we might say that the megalopolis is certainly a space of integration or assimilation, of peaceful multicultural coexistence, Lyotard in fact emphasizes that the relations with other cultures in the megalopolis are also often "based on distrust, on conflict, on a latent state of war that explodes, at times, into violence."[14]

What interests Lyotard is how the minorities, outsiders, or "remainders" of human communities are positioned in these different organizations, representations, or structurings of space. This leads him to a characteristically complex position on the relation of the *domus* to the megalopolis, in which neither is unambiguously touted as better than the other. First, Lyotard asserts that, contrary to what one might think, a space for otherness or the remainder is better preserved in the traditional *domus* than in the contemporary megalopolis. There, otherness not only existed outside, in the *pagus* or beyond, but was welcomed into the home as a guest. Moreover, Lyotard points to the otherness at the heart of the home, of domestic life, in the fact that it is the traditional location of the intrigues and dramas represented in tragedy.[15] In this manner, in the privacy of the *oikos* a certain otherness or remainder is secluded and protected from the public life of the *polis*. In the megalopolis, by contrast, everything becomes a matter of public exchange, and there is no longer a space removed from this circulation, public scrutiny, and transparency. This accords with the capitalist economy in which everything can be translated into exchange value

> "CALIFORNIA IS A SPACE OF "CONURBATION": SUBURBS CONNECTED BY HIGHWAYS, ONE AFTER THE OTHER, WITHOUT REFERENCE TO ANY URBAN CENTER."

and sold on the market, and also to the all-pervasive sphere of human rights in which every aspect of life is expected to have a rational accounting and legitimate defense.[16] The idea of the *habitus*, Lyotard suggests, today arouses our nostalgia, and this nostalgia can act as a kind of resistance to the contemporary system and a spur to thought and creativity. [17]

However, Lyotard also maintains a strongly critical and vigilant attitude towards such nostalgia. First, he acknowledges that it is probably nostalgia for something which never really existed; a projection from the position of the contemporary megalopolis.[18] Second, he warns of the danger of believing that the world of the *habitus* could be restored, aligning such a belief with Heidegger and the politics of National Socialism. He thus sees danger not in the old organization of space and society itself, but in the nostalgic desire to restore it. ("*Homo re-domesticus* in power kills in the street shouting 'You are not one of ours: He takes the visitor hostage. He persecutes anything that migrates'.")[19] The task for thinking in the megalopolis is, for Lyotard, to resist the homogenization of thought along with the homogenization of space. In this way he sees a parallel between philosophy and architecture.

ARCHITECTURES: PROJECT, NON-PROJECT

In a conversation with the architect Piero Derossi, Lyotard suggests that the task of both philosophers and architects has changed with the shift from the *habitus* to the megalopolis. Modern philosophers (and here the quintessential model is Descartes's *Discourse on Method*) assumed an architectural model of thought. Descartes describes how thought was like a city which has been built up through generations, with conflicting designs, and what is needed is to raze the city to the ground, to begin again and, on a secure foundation, to build a city according to a consistent rational plan. Modern philosophers also thought that they could give prescriptions to architects and urban planners in terms of a general representation of an ideal city which would instantiate an ideal human community. Similarly, modern architects followed the model of believing that everything human beings need for dwelling well together can be rationally planned out in advance, and given to a population which will be perfectly suited to its use. We can recognize here the great modernist architectural projects of the early to mid-twentieth century, such as those of Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and so on, in which cities are planned, all ornamentation is sacrificed to function, and a single style is imposed everywhere (the International Style). In painting, Lyotard notes, there is also an analog insofar as urban planning has been represented using

a uniform organization of space – such as in "The Ideal City" by the school of Piero della Francesca (circa late 15th century), one of the first to apply the principles of perspective prescribed by Alberti's *On Painting.*[20]

Today things are quite different in philosophical thought, first of all because modern philosophy —in the sense of a project of finding a secure foundation for thought, and building a consistent and homogenous structure of knowledge upon it— has been radically cast into doubt. Along with this, the possibility of political philosophy presenting an ideal for human community has also been seriously questioned. According to Lyotard, the philosopher today is no longer in a position to be able to prescribe to the architect a *project*, understood as a model of human community which could be followed as a guide for what to build to ensure an ideal being-together.[21] More strongly, Lyotard suggests that this term "project" implies a control or *domination* over "the totality of phenomena in the world and over human phenomena."[22] Such an attitude of mastery and control has also been subjected to extensive critique (as, for example, in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* or Heidegger's reflections on technology).

Lyotard suggests that the architect, now in a similar position, can no longer believe that design for a human community is something that can be entirely thought out in advance. Both philosophers and architects are united in asking the question, "What can a community be today?" and in not knowing how to give an answer to this question.[23] Without a concrete answer, the model of the ideal city must be abandoned, and along with it the very idea of a "project" as something that the architect can plan from scratch. The architect must then find a new way of working, which Lyotard suggests might be something like a "non-project":

"LYOTARD SUGGESTS THAT THE TASK OF BOTH PHILOSOPHERS AND ARCHITECTS HAS CHANGED WITH THE SHIFT FROM THE habitus TO THE MEGALOPOLIS."

> As you see we are dealing with a project that in the end is not even a project. Rather it is a sort of attitude, a frame of mind, that is, to be precise, an attitude of non-domination over the thing to be built or thought. We could say, a sort of passivity, or better still passibility, that seems to me an essential part of art, of the artistic attitude, and certainly of thought as well. I do not know whether we can still give everything the name of project, project of the non-project.[24]

While fleeting and tentative, these suggestions put the architect in a position closer to that of the painter or the musician, insofar as they must open themselves to a "passibility," as he says here – that is, to trying to feel and make judgements about what is to be done which are not based on any predetermined rule. No doubt there has *always* been much of this in architectural invention, but Lyotard's model of the megalopolis suggests that this aspect of architecture must be accentuated today. Architects must become artists, because they can no longer work with an ideal model of human community. When they engage in (non-)projects, they must be attentive to the contingencies of the situation in which they build, the conditions which already pre-exist, the complexities of the communities they build for, and they must be willing to be open to the possibility that the effects their buildings will have, once actualized in the community, will be to a significant degree unpredictable.

ARCHITECTS: LE CORBUSIER, ARAKAWA AND GINS

Let us consider now some of the architects Lyotard discusses explicitly, and treats as artists. Despite his opposition to the modernist architectural project of the "total plan," this does not prevent Lyotard from seeing a tendency contrary to total planning—and thus, the artistry—in the late work of Le Corbusier, one of the dominant figures of modernist architecture. In an essay on Le Corbusier—"*Conventus*," from 1994—Lyotard repeats but also reconfigures some of the main ideas he had previously made in his fleeting encounters with architecture. Lyotard's focus for the essay is a single work by Le Corbusier—the convent at La Tourette in Lyon, completed in 1961 (figure 1)—yet the scope of this short piece is ultimately much broader. Although the term is not used, we see the great modernist Le Corbusier positioned here as an architect of the *non-project,* insofar as he opposes his "free plan" (*plan libre*) to "the project." The idea of "the project" is here described in terms of an "Egyptian" ideal of space, where

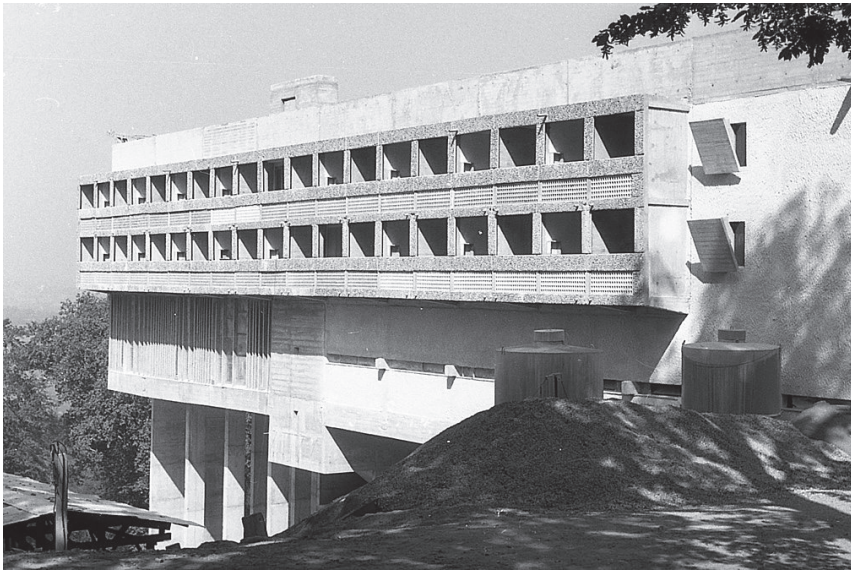

FIGURE 1:
LA TOURETTE

all of urban planning is centralized in and unified by the fixed "block" of the pyramid: "Geometric plan, blind facades, identical in all directions, tons of amassed stone weigh on the land of the living. […] All this crushing of time and space …"[25] "The project" is evident here as a fixed and homogenous idea of space which is imposed on all space and lived relations in a dominating way.

In contrast, Lyotard presents Le Corbusier's architecture as led by the ideal of a "free plan," which he describes as a "variable" space conceived in terms of waves or vibrations: "Question of frequency. This is a variable of vibration: it's the number of times by unit of time that a mobile object animated by a wave movement passes on the axis of its propagation."[26] Despite this apparently precise physical definition, the use of the terms "waves" and "vibrations" is largely metaphorical, and concerns space as conceived and lived. These terms work simply to open architecture to alternative ways of conceiving the nature of materials and the experiences of bodies in space.

Le Corbusier decomposes the supposed unity

of space into component volumes, and considers these as having a "free" relation to each other, a relation not determined in advance. The emphasis in this essay appears largely to fall on the *habitus*, the problem of the habitation of space; of how architects can design buildings in which we can feel ourselves to be at home (thus recalling *oikos* and *domus*). But with Le Corbusier—or at least, Lyotard's interpretation of him[27]—this turns out to be a matter closer to what he will call "the uninhabitable." With the decomposition of the plan and the consideration of space in terms of vibrations, the question of habitation becomes one of the "resonance" of the body with the built environment, of the sensing body and the sensed architectural space: "In order to be my home, it need only resonate with the vibrations of my whole body. I only need it's resonance with my rhythms in order to inhabit it."[28]

To explain this idea of resonance, Lyotard plays on the similarity between *frequency* and *frequentation*.[29] To be at home in a space is not a matter of inhabiting it in the manner of a homogenous body's fixed relation to a given space, but of a variable relation, in which frequencies would be "modulated" by the body's frequentation, its comings and goings, in that space. Describing the way we might get up in the night, half asleep, to get a glass of milk, and successfully navigate the space without turning on the lights, Lyotard writes that "[t]here, where I can be a sleepwalker without error, is my home."[30] Yet in posing the "at home" in terms of frequencies and frequenting, there is something which is never truly at home, at least as conceived on the old model of a natural fit between a given body and a given space. In this sense, being at home is a matter of "inhabiting the uninhabitable"—a degree of habituation to a space that will never settle into a fully tamed *habitus*, because it is always a matter of variable resonance between bodies and spaces which are never completely stable of fixed.

We can note here a first contrast with phenomenology. While schooled in the phenomenological tradition and a some-time follower of Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard criticized the latter for an overly *harmonious* view of the relations between the body and space, which he believed limited both the phenomenologists' ability to explain *disharmonious* experiences (such as sleep and orgasm) in which the body doesn't make sense of its surroundings, and art as the creation of the new.[31] If art is understood as witnessing "the birth of perception," as Merleau-Ponty contends, then this limits the scope of what kinds of art are viewed as legitimate. For Lyotard, art—and this includes architecture—should destablize the body's habitual relations to the world by giving it disharmonious, challenging experiences.

It should dislocate the body in space, not simply help it to feel located. In the context of architecture, this disharmony and dislocation which produces new aesthetic sensations is precisely what he calls "the uninhabitable."

The uninhabitable is more heavily accented in Lyotard's treatment of the experimental architecture of Shusaku Arakawa and Madelaine Gins. In their collaborative architectural projects – such as the *Site of Reversible Destiny* (Yoro, 1995), the *Reversible Destiny Lofts* (Mitaka, 2005), and the *Bioscleave House* (New York, 2008)[32] – Arakawa and Gins seek to "reverse destiny" with respect to the human body. They created spaces in which the body will decidedly not feel at home, in order to provide it with constant stimulation. This sensori-motor stimulation is thought, in turn, to stimulate the brain and the immune system, and to keep the body young and healthy by promoting brain plasticity and freedom from disease. In their avant-gardist hyperbole, Arakawa and Gins announce a hope for defeating mortality through an appropriate architecture: "We Have Decided Not To Die" and "Making Dying Illegal" are two of their slogans.[33] What interests Lyotard in their work is not this rhetoric of immortality, but the dehabituation of the body as conducive to provoking an aesthetic experience.

Arakawa and Gins develop the concept of the "architectural body," which is the body considered as ontologically continuous with, and shaped by, its architectural environment.[34] What interests Lyotard is the way that they conceive architecture as having a direct effect on the body, and of its capacity to make art of inhabitable space. Lyotard conceives of their work as a mutation of three-dimensional space, just as painting is a mutation of 2-dimensional space, or of color itself. This mutation, which is an artistic event in lived space, is precisely the uninhabitable: "For one instant, the body, the everyday body,

> "DESPITE HIS OPPOSITION TO THE MODERNIST ARCHITECTURAL PROJECT OF THE "TOTAL PLAN," THIS DOES NOT PREVENT LYOTARD FROM SEEING A TENDENCY CONTRARY TO TOTAL PLANNING—AND THUS, THE ARTISTRY—IN THE LATE WORK OF LE CORBUSIER"

the body of the habitus, is exposed to the uninhabitable."[35] In order to feel the effects of this mutation, the body must undergo an "ascesis" in relation to the habitable[36]—its habits and habituations must be undone. Arakawa and Gins seek to produce this ascesis, for example, by making space difficult to navigate – introducing steep inclines, or placing barriers in unexpected places. (figure 2) The functional approach of modernist architecture is reversed. The aim is not to obliterate *all* function, however, but to introduce difficulties to be overcome by the body in its attempts to achieve its goals. Summing up and generalizing these conclusions from Arakawa and Gins' work for all architecture, Lyotard writes:

> [A]rchitecture seeks to transfer into inhabitable space a power of habitation that is not itself inhabitable. This art cannot offer human beings any topos where they might live and be sheltered, that is to say, where they might escape from this elsewhere. Architecture as an art cleaves space-time in such a way that there and then are at home here and now while still being far away.[37]

Riffing on Lyotard's well-known theme of "presenting the unpresentable,"[38] the problem or stake of architecture as an art would then be how to "inhabit the uninhabitable." The question for the architect would be: how to construct a habitation in which the uninhabitable can be encountered?

COMPARISONS: PHENOMENOLOGY, POSTMODERNISM

Now that we have surveyed Lyotard's relevant texts, we are in a position to draw out the critical contrasts announced at the outset. We have already noted Lyotard's relation to Merleau-Ponty, but his challenge to phenomenology may also be extended to Heidegger, whose writings on dwelling have been highly influential in architectural theory. In a rare text on Lyotard's writings on architecture, Rob Shields notes some similarities with Heidegger.[39] However, there is also an important contrast to be made between Lyotard and the German phenomenologist. In short, we might see the Heideggerian perspective as expressing a nostalgia for the *habitus*, as Lyotard's referencing of Heidegger in this regard suggests.[40] While we have noted that Lyotard does not believe this mode of dwelling in itself, nor a nostalgia for it, signal anything worrying, we also saw that the same cannot be said for the attempt to *reimpose* it. And so we might well think that for Lyotard, any architectural model based on the Heideggerean notion

of dwelling will risk being out of step with the transformations of time, space, and being-together that the megalopolis has effected.[41] At worst, such architectural projects might be conceived as conservative, even "fascistic," in their attempts to make the body feel at home in a fixed place, with others who are part of an autochthonous community, while keeping strangers beyond the borders (or welcoming them only on the strictest conditions).

FIGURE 2:
SITE OF REVERSIBLE DESTINY--ARAKAWA AND GINS

Although there are no explicit references to this in Lyotard's writings (as far as I'm aware), it is easy to see his notions of space as linked far more closely to Emmanuel Levinas.' In his essay "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us," Levinas bemoans the Heideggerean notion of place, with its fixed horizon, as ethically problematic, and instead celebrates the exposure of Gargarin—the first person to space-walk—to a space without fixed horizon as analogous to the nomadism of the Jewish peoples.[42] Certainly Lyotard's comments about Husserl's notions of Earth, body, and space in his short text "Habitus" seem to head in this direction. According to Husserl, the relativistic discoveries of physics regarding time and space do nothing to change our body's perception that "the earth does

not move," the existential truth that we are grounded on an Earth with a fixed horizon.[43] Rather than opposing the existential truth of the body to the scientific truths of reason, Lyotard instead asserts:

> There is no need for the bodies to form a nature that would hold the secret of distances, and still less that the focal point they form should be a home. On the contrary, the failure of this metaphysics liberates another truth, one that can be reconciled with the relativism of the physicists. The focal point of the field is in the field and does not stop moving, just like everything that is in the field.[44]

For reasons that are both ethical and political, then, as well as artistic, Lyotard challenges the dominant phenomenological views of the body and space.

Because of Lyotard's own deep association with the postmodern, there is the obvious need to compare his views with those of the famous postmodern architectural theorists, such as Robert Venturi and Charles Jencks. The latter is an especially interesting comparison to make, since Lyotard explicitly sought to distance what he meant by the postmodern from Jencks' use of the term. For example:

> As for the 'trans-avantgardism' of Bonito Oliva and the similar currents one can observe in the USA and (including Jencks's 'postmodernism' in architecture, which the reader will do me the favour of not confusing with what I have called 'the postmodern condition'), it is clear that behind the pretext of picking up the tradition of the avant-gardes, this is a pretext […] to encourage the eclecticism of consumption. Mixing the same surface neo- or hyper-realist and abstract, lyrical or conceptual motifs means that everything is equivalent because everything is good for consumption. […] What is called on by eclecticism are the habits of magazine readers, the needs of the consumer of standard industrial images - this is the spirit of the supermarket shopper.[45]

As Lyotard makes abundantly clear here, he sees Jencks' architectural postmodernism as nothing more than a market-driven eclecticism consistent with trans-avantgardism in painting (which was also sometimes called postmodernism). Certainly, if we compare some of Lyotard's ideas on architecture which have emerged above with those of Jencks and other representatives of the "popular" form of architectural postmodernism,

we can identify at least some significant points of similarity. Most notably, with both we see a critical break with the modernist ideal of total planning for an ideal community. Jencks famously proclaimed the death of modern architecture and the birth of the postmodern with the demolition of the Pruitt-Igoe housing estate in St. Louis, USA, at 3:32 pm on 15 July, 1972. For him, this demolition of a characteristically modernist project after the years of social dysfunction it had housed signaled the end of the modernist dream of planned community, and ushered in a new era, in which ornamentation and locality-specificity returned.[46]

However, Lyotard rejects this kind of clear linear periodization which seeks to delineate the modern and the postmodern, and—as we have already seen with the example of Le Corbusier—his concerns with the arts incorporate much that is usually delineated as "modern." Briefly glossing a complex topic, Lyotard extols the virtues of experimentation in the arts, and highly values this dimension of modernism, but he critically rejects the tendency of modernism to construct a narrative of progress, with a particular style and an ideal of purification or perfection. Rejecting such notions does not mean for him the end of new developments in the arts and a pastiche of past styles, but a free pluralism of experimental creation.[47] Lyotard's approach to the postmodern then invites a more nuanced view of how different architectures might be understood and judged.

"(LYOTARD) SEES JENCKS' ARCHITECTURAL POSTMODERNISM AS NOTHING MORE THAN A MARKET-DRIVEN ECLECTICISM CONSISTENT WITH TRANS-AVANTGARDISM IN PAINTING"

ENDNOTES

1. See for example William M. Taylor and Michael P. Levine, "Philosophy of Architecture," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* https://iep.utm.edu/architec/#SSH3ci

2. As noted by both Taylor and Levine "Philosophy

of Architecture" and Saul Fisher, "Philosophy of Architecture in Historical Perspective" (supplement to "Philosophy of Architecture," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* 2015. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/architecture/perspective.html

3. These texts are, respectively: "*Conventus*" in *Misère de la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); "Reserves of Spatial Events" and "Dear Neverending Architectonic Reflective Wherewithal" in *What to Paint?,* ed. Herman Parret. Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists 5 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012); "Dwelling and the Postmodern: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard," Skala 22 (1990): 36-41; "What Are We Looking For?: A Conversation Between Architect and Philosopher," *Lotus International 73* (1992): 67-75; and "Habitus" – contribution to "Il paradiso perduto = Paradise Lost," Lotus International 79 (1993): 102-131.

4. Following for example Le Corbusier, who writes: "I consider architecture and city planning together as a single concept." *Precisions: On the Present State of Architecture and City Planning.* Trans. Edith Schreiber Aujame (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), p. 70.

5. See for example Lyotard, "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

6. Most famously in *The Postmodern Condition.*

7. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time.* Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 191.

8. Jean-François Lyotard with Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming.* Trans. Wlad Godzich (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 42.

9. See "The Zone" in Lyotard, *Postmodern Fables.* Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). Previously published in *The Dimensions of Play: Ways of Thinking Architecture and the City.* ANY : Architecture New York, 12. New York: Anyone Corporation, 1995.

10. Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* p. 192.

11. Lyotard, "Habitus," p. 110.

12. For Lyotard on these effects of communication technologies, see for example "*Logos* and *Techne*, or Telegraphy" in *The Inhuman.*

13. Lyotard, "Habitus," p. 110.

14. Lyotard, "Habitus," p. 110.

15. See the essay "Oikos" in *Jean-François Lyotard: Political Writings.*

Trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). And in "*Domus* and the Megalopolis" we read: "In the lowest depths of the domus, rumour of anti-nature, threat of stasis, of sedition. Father, mother, child, female servant with the heart of gold, niece, old man-servant, shepherd and ploughman, gardener, cook, all the figures of wisdom, the corner of the park under the fig tree, the little passage for whispering, the attic and its chests – everything is matter for obscene crimes. Something in the domus did not want the bucolic." Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* pp. 195-6.

16. See Lyotard, "The General Line" in *Postmodern Fables.*

17. Lyotard, "*Domus* and the Megalopolis" in The Inhuman.

18. Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* p. 201.

19. Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* p. 197.

20. See Lyotard's discussion of this in "Painting as a Libidinal Set-Up," translated by Kieth Crome, in *The Lyotard Reader and Guide.* Ed. Keith Crome and James Williams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

21. Derossi and Lyotard, "What Are We Looking For?," p. 70.

22. Derossi and Lyotard, "What Are We Looking For?," p. 69.

23. Derossi and Lyotard, "What Are We Looking For?," p. 70.

24. Derossi and Lyotard, "What Are We Looking For?," p. 72.

25. Lyotard, *Misère de la philosophie,* p. 199. Translations from this text are mine.

26. Lyotard, *Misère de la philosophie,* p. 200.

27. Lyotard openly acknowledges that his interpretation takes a great deal from that of Jacques Lucan. See the latter's "Tout a commence là" in *Le*

Corbusier, une encyclopedié. Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1987.

28. Lyotard, *Misère de la philosophie,* p. 201.

29. "Fréquence" and "fréquentation" in French.

30. Lyotard, *Misère de la philosophie,* p. 201.

31. On Lyotard's relation to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, see my article "Lesson of Darkness: Phenomenology and Lyotard's Late Aesthetics," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* vol. 50, no. 2 (2019): 104-119.

32. Some of these projects were realised only after Lyotard's death, but embody earlier ideas on which he commented.

33. See Arakawa and Gins, *Pour ne pas mourir / To Not To Die* (Paris: Éditions de la difference, 1987) and *Making Dying Illegal* (New York: Roof Books, 2006).

34. See Arakawa and Madeline Gins, *Architectural Body* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002).

35. Lyotard, *What to Paint?*, p. 407.

36. Lyotard, *What to Paint?*, p. 391.

37. Lyotard, *What to Paint?*, p. 407.

38. See Lyotard, "Answering the Question."

39. Rob Shields, "Oblique Views and Heterodox Spaces: Le Corbusier's *Conventus*" in *Rereading Jean-François Lyotard: Essays on His Later Works.* Ed. Heidi Bichis and Rob Shields (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p. 111.

40. Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* p. 195.

41. See Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in Martin *Heidegger: Basic Writings.* Ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993). A key distinction here that could be pursued is that of the boundary, which is essential to Heidegger's account of space, locale, and dwelling, and which is the distinctive feature that disappears in Lyotard's account of the space of the postmodern megalopolis.

42. Emmanuel Levinas, "Heidegger, Gagarin and Us" in *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism.* Trans. Sean Hand (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

43. See Edmund Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, The Earth Does Not Move." Trans. Fred Kersten in *Edmund Husserl: Shorter Works* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1978).

44. Lyotard, "Habitus," p. 111.

45. Lyotard, *The Inhuman,* p. 127.

46. Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture,* 4th edn. (London: Academy Editions, 1984), p. 9. In a later interview, in fact, Lyotard does seem to present Jencks' architectural postmodernism as broadly in line with his own thinking of the postmodern insofar as both reject the *tabula rasa* approach of modernism, and instead connect with tradition. See "Dwelling and the Postmodern." This would be a point from which to take up further comparison.

47. On this topic, see my article "Lyotard on Postmodern Music," *Evental Aesthetics 5.1* (2016): 118-143.

ARCHITECTURE AND OBJECT-ORIENTED ONTOLOGY

SIMON WEIR IN CONVERSATION WITH GRAHAM HARMAN

WHAT IS, AND WHAT ISN'T, AN ONTOLOGY ?

SW: Ontology is a word that, wherever it goes, changes its meaning. So, to avoid unhelpful confusions - some confusions are generative - what is an ontology? I tend to think of an ontology mathematically, as the set of all things with nothing outside the set.

GH: Whereas metaphysics is an Ancient Greek term famously coined by Aristotle's editors, the word "ontology" first appeared as recently as the 17th century. One aspect of my relation to language is that I like to have a number of synonyms available for every philosophical term in order to avoid repetition. I don't like the sort of pedantic precision which demands that each term have a single meaning that the author is obliged to define exactly at the outset. As an example, many people draw a sharp distinction between "object" and "thing"; Heidegger is the most prominent of these, using "object" in a pejorative sense and "thing" as a more positive term. But I prefer to use object, entity, thing, and unit interchangeably. I also use metaphysics and ontology to mean the same thing, though Heidegger and Derrida have turned the word "metaphysics" into a kind of insulting nickname for everything that ought to be left behind.

SW: To frame object-oriented ontology's position, let's begin with realism. Most people understand realism: we are in direct contact with the things we touch. Once we recognise there are sounds we can't hear, lights we can't see, and that there are all sorts of illusions and misapprehensions, we might easily accept that our view of reality is not so direct, but mediated. We produce some kind of image of reality within us, so it might be called representational realism. What may be surprising to readers without philosophical training is that this too is rebuked by the philosophical tradition of anti-realism.

GH: My position obviously isn't a form of direct realism, since for me it is not only humans who cannot make direct contact with reality: the same holds true even for inanimate entities. Object-oriented ontology (OOO) is better described as a form of what you call representational realism, with the surprising proviso that not only humans and animals do the representing. When two inanimate objects make contact, they cannot do so directly, since neither has direct access to the features of the other. The idea behind OOO's realism is that reality is so real that it can't be exhausted by any particular depiction of it.

Realism is usually defined as a "belief in a world external to the mind." But this way of putting it betrays an anthropocentric bias: why should the mind be the only thing with an outside? Realism should be treated, instead, as a general theory of objects and relations, such that objects are always withheld from these relations and need a vicarious third term to make relations possible. Insofar as reality withdraws from all relation, object-oriented realism might also be called an infra-realism.

SW: So object-oriented ontology is an infra-realism. Since the real is withdrawn, how do we know it's there, or how have you induced the presence of a real that cannot be touched directly?

GH: This is the same question that led the German Idealists to abandon Kant's thing-in-itself: "If we claim to think a thing outside thought, isn't this already a thought? Therefore, there is nothing withdrawn from thought." In this way, the thing-in-itself implodes into something internal and negotiable, whether in the form of a mere external shock or trauma (Fichte, Lacan) or in terms of a provisional and immanent limit eventually

overcome by the labor of the negative through the course of history (Hegel).

The problem with this popular assault on the realism of the in-itself is that it forgets what philosophy is about: philosophia, meaning the love of wisdom rather than wisdom sensu stricto. Socrates does not jest when he says that he only knows that he knows nothing, that he has never been anyone's teacher, and so forth.

Readers of Plato may recall "Meno's Paradox," in which Meno repeats the old Sophist's argument that you can't look for something if you already have it (because then there is no need to look) and you can't look for it if you don't have it (because then you could never recognize it if found). Socrates responds with what is really the foundational insight of Western philosophy: you never really have or fail to have something absolutely, but you have it to a certain degree and are called upon to enter further into its depths.

> "HEIDEGGER AND DERRIDA HAVE TURNED THE WORD "METAPHYSICS" INTO A KIND OF INSULTING NICKNAME FOR EVERYTHING THAT OUGHT TO BE LEFT BEHIND."

According to object-oriented philosophy, there are a number of ways in which we can know the real without knowing it directly. This happens in cases where the real falls out of joint with its surface qualities: as in Heidegger's case of the broken hammer, or in metaphor where the object is ascribed strange properties and therefore becomes unknowable yet vaguely compelling. Language is often used to hint or insinuate rather than to state directly, though the modern era hates rhetoric so much that it forgets how crucial insinuation and innuendo are to everyday speech. The arts, too, are well aware that many things must be hinted at subtly rather than stated in literal terms. Lovers know this as well when sending alluring messages, and comedians know it when telling jokes. To spell

things out in literal terms is just one of the tools of human cognition, and not the one most important for philosophy.

CAUSATION AND PERCEPTION

SW: Some of the principles of OOO are: there are objects everywhere, all objects are inside other objects, all objects have objects inside them, objects have qualities, but objects are not only their qualities, it is not possible to encounter a quality without an object bearing that quality.

GH: That's a nice list. I would add that humans also count as objects, even if objects of an unusually interesting sort; for this reason, "objects" do not exist in opposition to "subjects." Also, objects and qualities both come in two kinds (real and sensual), and both kinds of objects can have both kinds of qualities (again, real and sensual) so that reality consists of four possible object-quality pairings. On top of this, objects have only a loose relation with their own qualities. Aesthetics is first philosophy because it studies these loose relations: how they are generated and under what conditions they break apart. Real objects cannot make contact unless mediated by a sensual object, and sensual objects only make contact when mediated by a real one. This still isn't a complete list, but I can never remember everything at once. As our conversation progresses, more features of objects will undoubtedly arise.

SW: Are qualities objects?

GH: The short answer is "no." It goes back to one of the many valid insights still to be found in Aristotle's philosophy. He tells us that whereas sad is always sad and happy is always happy, Socrates can be sad one day and happy the next. That's one major indication that Socrates is a substance. A substance remains what it is even if – within certain limits, of course – its qualities vary widely. By "primary substance" Aristotle means individual things. My parallel term is "real object," which also refers to individual things. Of course, there are a number of differences between the two phrases. First of all, I emphasize the inaccessible elusiveness of real objects, and while Aristotle has more awareness of that than many people realize, he does not emphasize the gap between the mind and the object to the same extent that OOO does (coming as we do after both Kant and Heidegger). Second, Aristotle is more comfortable with natural than artificial things as primary substances, whereas I don't think the natural

vs. artificial divide matters very much: an airplane or a city are real objects no less than a raindrop. Third, Aristotle does not think there can be primary substances inside of primary substances: he holds that the parts of a substance are only potentially individuals, not actually so. For OOO, however, composition in the part/whole relationship does not negate the individuality of the parts, which remain real objects in their own right even while belonging to larger wholes. Despite these differences, OOO is a philosophy of individuals in the same Aristotelian line that passes through some of the Islamic philosophers, some of the Medieval Christians, and Leibniz.

But the long answer to your question is that anything can become an object. That is to say, any quality can turn into a sensual object as soon as we treat it as something enduring that undergoes variation in details. For example, the red of my Mazda CX-5 is initially a quality of the car that can be changed without destroying the car or giving it a new identity. But I could focus instead on the rather unique metallic red that Mazda came up with for this car, and substantify it by focusing on current variations in the red across the car's outer surface, or by variations over time when we compare the car's red when straight from the factory as opposed to now, four years later. Furthermore, there is always a point at which sensual objects can become real, often through the mechanism of social acceptance. The Joker was initially a sensual object, but is now a real one: not in the sense that such a character actually lurks in the night of New York, but in the sense that movie audiences are able to judge which actor's portrayal of The Joker is the most true to the character, which ones are completely insufficient, and so forth. In this respect even qualities such as "green," "strong," or "macho" become real objects

> "OBJECT-ORIENTED ONTOLOGY (OOO) IS BETTER DESCRIBED AS A FORM OF WHAT YOU CALL REPRESENTATIVE REALISM"

that even have their own social histories.

SW: Causation in the OOO schema is the interaction of two or more real objects. Whenever real objects causally interact, a sensual object is generated by their contact, and this sensual object acts as the intermediary between the real objects. This is known as vicarious or occasional causation. Also, causation can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Symmetrical causation is all kinds of contact and causation as we normally think of it, and is well described by Newtonian physics; asymmetrical causation is perception.

GH: Actually, causation in OOO can only have two terms. The reason is that all causation begins with the interface between one real object and one sensual object, which is then modified in such a way that there is an indirect influence of one real object on another or of both on each other. I'm aware that people like to give seemingly subtle analyses in which there are multiple causal factors for any event. These days, multiplicity has a very good press and duality a very bad one, so it's not surprising that everyone goes running for the multiple and the many whenever philosophy is being done. But in fact, when there are multiple factors they must combine beforehand in such a way that only two objects end up confronting each other.

SW: This multiplicity is understandable. When I (a real object) am watching (asymmetrical causation) a movie (a real object), the factors are combined. Yet when I consider myself as comprised of subcomponent objects, my ears hear the sounds, and my eyes see the images, et cetera. It may be the case that all causal events are multiple causal events, and vice versa. The singularity or multiplicity of causal occurrences looks like a question of perspective.

GH: As for symmetrical causation, yes, so-called "physical" causation provides all the easiest examples of this. In fact, I think the symmetry of causation is the important factor here, and what we call physical reality may just be a vulgar nickname for symmetrical causation. But no doubt there are other forms of symmetrical causation than the kind we associate with "matter," which for me is an almost worthless concept. No one really has any idea what matter would be; for OOO there are only forms. Likewise, the human realm provides most of the clearest examples of asymmetry: I as a human can observe long-dead stars, which thereby have an effect on me

even though I can't possibly affect them in turn. But there are probably asymmetrical phenomena even in the so-called physical world. In short, I suspect that the overworked boundary between physical and mental is an accidental product of modern philosophy: not because "all is one," but because the most important dividing lines are located elsewhere.

SW: My work in OOO has been drawn from perception to the problem of memory and consciousness.[1] Consciousness can turn sensual objects into real ones by making memories of them, and vice versa. Consciousness is a machine for making post-sensual objects into real objects. When we think about asymmetrical causation, about perception, the difference between a real object and the sensual object of its perception would vary a tremendous amount depending on the real object. Looking up at the night sky, it's obvious that our sensual object is an infinitesimally small thing, and a profoundly different thing, compared to the real object that is out there. But with much simpler objects like the number 5, for example, what would you say are the differences between the real 5 and a sensual 5?

"WHENEVER REAL OBJECTS CAUSALLY INTERACT, A SENSUAL OBJECT IS GENERATED BY THEIR CONTACT"

GH: Let me first say that I wouldn't agree that when looking up at the night sky the sensual object is an infinitesimally tiny thing. This is true only in the limited sense that our field of vision doesn't cover much of the sky and can't penetrate any further than a small portion of the Milky Way. The sensual object, for me, isn't limited to what is covered by the senses. The term is "sensual," not "sensible," after all. Edmund Husserl is the one who says that the senses can only experience the shifting adumbrations of perceived objects while the intellect is able to dig all the way down to the essential properties. For OOO, by contrast, the senses and the intellect are both on the sensual side of the equation rather than the real

side.

As for the number 5, I can't say that there is a fully developed object-oriented model of mathematics at this point. I do agree with most mathematicians that mathematical objects have real existence (this is one of the few points where I am a Platonist). But I would not agree that we have some sort of Cartesian intellectual intuition that allows us direct contact with the real number 5; that's Quentin Meillassoux, not me. The question, then, is how we would describe the supposed difference between the real and the sensual 5. One possible path is shown by Imre Lakatos in *Proofs and Refutations,* where he argues –among other things– that mathematical definitions have to be revised in light of mathematical experience, which suggests that mathematics is more similar to natural science than we might expect.[2] If we start to view mathematics in those terms (and I will admit there are certain problems in doing so) then it is easier to see why direct access to the number 5 is less plausible than one might think, just as direct access to gravity or electromagnetism is refuted (in my view, at least) by continued revolutions in these areas.

SW: In causation, sensual objects contain real and sensual qualities, so is it possible that causation involves the transfer of some real qualities? Can we reliably infer the real from this?

In the case of some real objects, like the number 5, are they simple enough that we can locate the real qualities within the sensual object? If I add two 5s in my mind to make a real 10, have real qualities been engaged and retained? Do we have a situation where there is no meaningful difference between a real quality and a sensual quality?

GH: All sensual objects have both sensual and real qualities. It was Husserl who first gave technical precision to this idea. Imagine that I rotate a tennis ball in my hand, at different times of day and in various fluctuating moods. These are "adumbrations," as Husserl puts it: the German Abschattungen. No matter what the adumbrations of the ball may be at any given moment, I continue to recognize this ball as one and the same. Since we are simply talking about experience here, not about reality, I am the one who decides whether or not it is the same ball. If it turns out later that I was wrong, that someone quickly replaced the ball with a different one while I wasn't paying attention, then this pertains to the level of the real object, which is not what we are discussing.

But along with the sensual qualities or adumbrations of the tennis ball, it must also have real qualities. There are certain features that could arise that would convince me that it's not the same tennis ball I initially thought it was: I might realize that my roommate replaced It with another, or maybe it turns out to be a fake tennis ball produced by an artist, or perhaps other such scenarios. Husserl's great error was to hold that the senses give us the adumbrations while the intellect gives us the real qualities. This is merely a symptom of Husserl's rationalist and mathematicist prejudices: he found it inconceivable that there could be any layer of reality impenetrable even to the intellect.

> “ALL SENSUAL OBJECTS HAVE BOTH SENSUAL AND REAL QUALITIES. IT WAS HUSSERL WHO FIRST GAVE TECHNICAL PRECISION TO THIS IDEA.”

Returning to your question, there is no possible case where real and sensual qualities are one. This is only possible if we believe in intellectual intuition, which I do not. Why not? Because I hold that any intuition requires a translation of form. Here's what I mean. People who think that intellectual intuition is possible think that we can clearly and distinctly see, before the mind's eye, the essential properties of a tennis ball or a dog. Now, such people would never claim that they are bringing the actual ball or dog into their brains. What they are saying, most often, is that they are extracting a knowable form from an object and bringing it into the mind, leaving behind only the “matter” of the object. But there is no proof that anything like formless matter exists. In fact, the notion of matter was only invented as a crutch to prove the existence of direct intellectual access! That is to say, the difference between a tennis ball in reality and the tennis ball in the mind is said to consist in the lack of “matter” in the second case, but this is a mere alibi that allows us to think that the form remains the same when extracted and removed from an object. Yet the form always undergoes translation, and this is why

intellectual intuition is impossible. In the words of Bruno Latour: "There is no transport without transformation."[3] There is always the question of whether mathematical objects are a special case, whether they alone permit of direct intuition. I suspect not, but all I can do at the moment is suggest this, not prove it.

SW: Yes, certainly. It is only in the axiomatic case of simple numbers that I cannot see any difference between some of the real and sensual qualities. Unlike all other objects, they seem to be stripped of all depth. Continuing with perception, since we, as individuals, are real objects, we only have access to sensual objects which are created by contact with other real objects, and therefore we are truly surrounded by the unreal. Even when we look at ourselves, we can only see a sensual object. It seems as if those Buddhist and Hindu expressions - see without seeing, hear without hearing - are onto something. Without such effortless, causeless perception, we are truly imprisoned in a simulacra wrapping the withdrawn real. This isn't what Baudrillard meant by the term simulacra - since he is a nihilist anti-realist - but in the context of infra-realism, the simulacrum would be the enveloping sensual world around every real object.

GH: Baudrillard meant a lot to me when I began graduate study. And even though I am now a hardcore realist, I'm still impressed by him. His denial of reality doesn't bother me that much; in a sense, Husserl was already a theorist of simulacra. But there is a reality in Baudrillard nonetheless– the reality of the one who observes the simulacra and is seduced by them. We must always remember that Baudrillard is the philosopher of seduction no less than of simulation. And what's so important about seduction? The point is that when we become fascinated by something, we grow so attached to it that we and that thing form a new object, a compound made of ourselves and the thing. Why do I call that relation a new object? Because it meets all the criteria of objecthood established by object-oriented philosophy: it has emergent properties not found in either me or the thing separately, it is impenetrable to outside description or understanding, and it can have different features at different times. In short, the world of simulacra becomes a realist world as soon as the observer starts becoming personally involved with it, and that's what aesthetics is all about.

SW: If the simulacra become real by becoming a compound with the observer, is that an ontological solipsism? It sounds like psychological

growth, and broadening experience, makes more of the world real, which certainly seems to accord with our experience.

GH: It's not solipsism, since my experience of an object and yours are still referring indirectly to the same real object. But there is the same difficulty here as with theories of autopoiesis (Maturana, Varela, Luhmann) since we need a clearer understanding of how the real object, despite being cut off from the sensual realm, is nonetheless able to affect and possibly be affected by the new object that is the compound between simulacrum and observer.

> "WE MUST REMEMBER THAT BAUDRILLARD IS THE PHILOSOPHER OF SEDUCTION NO LESS THAN OF SIMULATION."

PHILOSOPHICAL DE-ANTHROPOCENTRISM

SW: One of the aspects of your work that has been broadly supported is its anti-anthropocentrism, the refusal to accept anti-realism's separation of everything into two categories, human and other.

GH: We have learned much about the vast size of the universe. On top of that, there are now reasonable musings about possible other universes, whether on the interiors of black holes or in other dimensions invisible to us here. All of this tends to indicate that our species and planet, even our entire galaxy, are fairly minor constituents of reality. By contrast, modern philosophy revolves around the centrality of humans. The reason, of course, is that it is thought we have direct certainty of human experience but only mediated access to everything else, which suggests a crucial status for human thought. In this way, there is a contradiction between the royal importance of humans on the one hand and our speck-of-dust cosmic tininess on the other.

SW: I've never been sure what to make of the assumption of direct access to experience; my own experience never seemed direct to me. I used

to presume that maybe some other people, like Descartes, actually had direct experience, but later after learning some sleight of hand magic, you see that there are always presumptions built into perception, and these presumptions can be activated and challenged.[4]

GH: The other day I saw an amusing remark on Twitter. When Hollywood depicts interracial couples, so the person asked, why does there always have to be a white person in the couple? Analogously, I would ask of philosophy since Kant: when philosophy discusses a relationship between two entities, why does a human always need to be one of them? The answer is that it doesn't need to be. The relation between two inanimate objects isn't different in kind from the relation between a human and an inanimate object. The latter sort is not in any way clearer or more immediately given. Our access to our own experience is also mediated rather than direct. But since the days of Kant, Alfred North Whitehead is one of the few major philosophers to have seen this point clearly.

Let me just add the following response to some of OOO's critics, who make the political complaint that OOO shifts its focus away from human subjectivity at the precise moment that previously subaltern humans are finally gaining full dignity: as if OOO were pulling the rug out from under the feet of the previously oppressed in their very moment of triumph. I would say that this remark is counterintuitive in the bad sense of the term. When OOO shifts the scope of inquiry from humans to the cosmic vastness of all entities, are human differences of race, culture, and gender not shown to be rather minor, and therefore isn't our human equality more emphasized than ever before? By contrast, if we stick with the modern focus on the human subject, it seems to me we are destined to dwell in the narcissism of small differences, to revel in all sorts of micro-hierarchies within our tiny human sphere.

SW: There are a lot of assumptions packed into the political critique of OOO's infra-realist anti-anthropocentrism that require longer discussion. Politics typically engages in motivated reasoning, looking for effective language. But philosophy, like many forms of research, is often focussed differently, looking for something resembling truth, whether truth defined as logical consistency or paradigmatic coherence or something else. In The Rise of Realism you discussed Lee Braver's 2007 book, A Thing of This World with Manuel DeLanda, and you both disagreed with the traditional

realist axiom that truth is correspondence with the external world.[5] How would you describe truth in the context of OOO?

GH: I'm interested in reality rather than truth. People who favor the word "truth" are usually the ones who think they already have it, and what they call truth becomes a cudgel to beat up those who disagree. Reality interests me more because it implies that there is something with which we make peripheral contact: something that disrupts our current model of the world without it being entirely clear what is happening. There are multiple ways to do justice to any reality we encounter, whereas a focus on truth implies that there is only one way. Certain portions of mathematics and logic seem to have a very strong claim to truth, but these results are often overexpanded in an effort to formalize the whole of reality in ways that aren't very successful.

"I WOULD ASK OF PHILOSOPHY SINCE KANT: WHEN PHILOSOPHY DISCUSSES A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TWO ENTITIES, WHY DOES A HUMAN ALWAYS NEED TO BE ONE OF THEM?"

SW: You have mentioned that you borrowed the term "ontography" from a fictional character, Parkins, a Professor of Ontography. Parkins practices anthropogeography, and diagrams the relationship between humans and their landscapes, an example of anthropocentric philosophy mapping human-object relations without attending to object-object relations. Noting the diagramming aspect of Parkins' work, it seemed that ontography could also describe any ontology-oriented art. This is similar to what inspired Ian Bogost about the term. For a while you both were doing these poetic ontographs called Latour Litanies, these poetic strings of ostensibly unrelated words, like - to make one up on the spot - box jellyfish, love, gravel, jedi, street lighting, asteroids. The aim, and correct me if I am wrong, was to produce a list where the objects could not be associated with each other, so humans were not presented as central to all relations, and this was an expression of a flat,

non-anthropocentric ontology. With my long immersion in surrealism, I immediately recognised the careful systematization of these lists. As Freud supposedly said, in a classical painting I always see the unconscious, in a surrealist painting I only see the conscious. So before reading your later work, I associated the word ontography with these poetic practices with a very personal and slight surrealist flavour to them. You don't seem to have used these litanies recently. Has your feeling about them changed?

GH: I am utterly stunned by how stirred up and annoyed some people become by these Latour Litanies. For instance, there are critics who say that we do nothing more than produce random lists of objects, or who assert that "a list of objects is not an argument." Of course not. The Litanies are simply a useful rhetorical technique, and I mean "rhetoric" in the good old classical sense of addressing people's background assumptions, not in the trivial modern sense of devious manipulation. Latour Litanies are useful for reminding the reader of how many different types of non-human entities exist, and that's the purpose they serve whenever they appear in a OOO text.

ARCHITECTS AND PHILOSOPHY

SW: In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche famously stated that architecture is the expression of power and that architects are enamoured with power, which appears to have a subservient tone until you see that in the unpublished *Will to Power,* everything is an expression of the "will to power," so architecture is not special in this regard.

GH: I've never been all that interested in the concept of power, other than in high school when I was reading Nietzsche and taking him too literally like everyone else at that age. Maybe that's because the most interesting things happen to me when my mind is passive and absorbing unexpected insights from others. The intellect is not really about mastery, but about finding new drifts or currents or hidden gemstones in the world, and letting them compel you to new insights. Believing that one does not yet have enough power to do anything is too often an alibi for not doing the things already within your grasp.

SW: How do you see anti-realism influencing architecture?

GH: Primarily in the sense that form and function (or program) are usually misread in an anti-realist way, in terms of the aspect they present to human beings. A realist reconception of form and function would have to de-relationize them into "zero form" and "zero function," as I call them.

SW: How do you see infra-realism offering alternatives to anti-realism for architectural theory?

GH: We need an improved sense of form that is neither purely visual, nor purely conceptual, nor purely about the deliberate subversion of function (as in some of Eisenman's houses). But in fairness to architects, philosophers repeatedly make the same misstep. Husserl draws a distinction between intellect and sensation, as though there were really such a big difference between the two. Heidegger does the same with practical handling on one side and explicit looking or theorizing on the other, which again isn't that big a difference. OOO demands a difference between reality itself and any form of human access. Whether architects find significant things to do with this in their work is really up to architects.

"A REALIST RECONCEPTION OF FORM AND FUNCTION WOULD HAVE TO DE-RELATIONALIZE THEM INTO "ZERO FORM" AND "ZERO FUNCTION"

SW: You have in the past remarked about architects making puns of philosophical ideas. I'm not averse to the occasional pun, and have even made my own OOO pun in the form of occasionalist tectonics, taking two elements and sandwiching a wholly new formal language between them.[6] Sometimes visual or formal work that is purely illustrative lacks depth and subtlety, but some works of art that are truly remarkable started out as illustrations of ideas but somehow hold far more allusive and elusive qualities. Was your remark pejorative, or is there something more to this?

GH: It wasn't meant as pejorative. I was mostly relaying the complaints I'd heard from architects I know, who were bothered for instance by the literal use of folds on buildings in the period where Deleuze (author of *The Fold*) was widely read in the field. But insofar as puns can verge on literalism, that's a problem. I like your occasionalist tectonics idea, and also like Tom Wiscombe's idea of half-inscrutable "objects in a sack" hiding behind a building's outer envelope.[7] But OOO is really about the tension between objects and qualities, and there are some ways of deploying such tension that don't involve anything being hidden in the least.

SW: Yes, Wiscombe's "objects in a sack" was a lightning strike when I first heard it. Probably the most coherent arguments connecting OOO and architecture are found in the writings of Wiscombe, David Ruy, and Mark Foster Gage, architects I find fascinating. Their ideas might seem strange to people outside architecture's current education system, but are very relevant to those inside it.

They all appear to share a fondness for OOO because it provides a rationale for valuing architecture for its qualities rather than its associations. (This is rather like Eisenman's concern for architecture's interiority, for what is exclusively architectural. Eisenman's approach was a kind of de-anthropocentrism, but it was framed as anti-humanism, which is quite different.) Gage also argues that buildings should be judged as buildings, not as diagrams.[8] This is apt for architecture education. I wonder if this arises from the tension between being an effective academic and the art of architecture. When you have a lot of projects to assess, one can feel the need to hurry and it helps if you can understand a project quickly, but individual works of great architecture are captivating and even mystifying, and they refuse our attempts to understand them easily, they require study and reflection, and even personal transformation.

GH: There are a number of other architects who have played around with OOO: Peter Trummer is one here at SCI-Arc, and elsewhere I've had multiple discussions with Ferda Kolatan and Michael Young, among others.[9] In Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything I highlighted Gage and Wiscombe because they represent the two most pronounced and opposite tendencies.[10] As mentioned, Wiscombe favors hidden objects surrounded by palpable surface qualities. Yet Gage isn't about hiddenness at all: he gives us a fiesta-like abundance of qualities

inscribed on the surface. In Weird Realism I argued that H.P. Lovecraft's horror fiction uses both of these techniques, even though the first is the only one people usually mention.[11]

SW: What do you think now of Wiscombe's point in "The Object Turn" about an architecture inspired by OOO having a suspicion of any form of mapping exercises that seem to conjure architecture from the context or from the map itself.[12] For many years, architecture students have been fabricating abstract maps of things and using these as visual prompts for design. A weakness of this method is its meaninglessness, and the insistence to look outside architecture. Yet I am ambivalent in this critique. Leonardo da Vinci recommended artists stare at the infinitely subtle shades and markings of rough, stained walls and allow their imaginations to inventively see figures, scenes and events. Similarly there is a subtly creative act in seeing turtles, buildings and faces in the shifting forms of clouds. These work as psychological exercises to prompt creativity, and even have a little surrealist flair, but they belong to the earlier, passive and automatist side of surrealism rather than to the later, more active side where effects are actively sought. Now that you've worked in an architectural school for a number of years, what observations do you have about architectural design processes and the results they entrain?

"THERE ARE A NUMBER OF OTHER ARCHITECTS WHO HAVE PLAYED AROUND WITH OOO"

GH: Wiscombe did make that point, as did Ruy when he argued against architecture becoming a subsidiary of ecology: as if buildings were nothing more than local outcroppings of the broader environment. I agree completely on this score, since no building can be completely site-specific. Certain choices have to be made about which aspects of the environment to include or exclude. And of course, Rem Koolhaas has pointed out that a building also

presses back against its environment and changes it in turn.

You ask what I've noticed after teaching at an architecture school for five years. Quite a few things, actually. Architects tend to be very articulate in explaining their ideas, even more so than philosophers, in my opinion. Architects are under more pressure to innovate, and therefore they have their antennae out for new ideas more than philosophers do. On the pedagogical level, what strikes me most is that students have a hard time defending forms in their own terms. When pressed, they will usually give a genetic backstory for how they arrived at the form now before our eyes: they started with some everyday object, put it through four or five transformations, and this was the result. This just goes to show how hard it is to speak allusively or indirectly about something, which is precisely what architectural form demands. The best art and architecture critics need to have the souls of poets, because in this case literalism won't do the job.

SW: One of the things you're known for are the terms overmining and undermining.

GH: It is often assumed that the goal of all cognition is knowledge, and ultimately there are just two kinds of knowledge. If someone asks me what something is, I can (a) tell them what it's made of, or (b) tell them what it does. I call the first of these techniques "undermining" and the second "overmining."

I mentioned earlier that Socrates practices philosophia (love of wisdom) rather than sophia (wisdom). There is no Platonic dialogue in which Socrates ends up with the correct definition of anything. Nothing is ever quite definable. As Aristotle puts it, things are concrete but definitions are made of universals, which means there will always be an imperfect fit between reality on one side and thought or language on the other. Philosophy fundamentally does something other than produce knowledge. and this is even clearer of the arts. There is no way to avoid "mining" in direct propositional speech, since this kind of speech (which I call "literal") involves making true statements about the properties a thing possesses. But philosophy and the arts are not literalist disciplines, and have more to do with producing a gap or fissure between an object and its qualities.

SW: Often overmining and undermining are misunderstood as critiques.

Overmining and undermining are critiques of other ontologies, not of thinking or philosophical work as such.

GH: By no means is OOO anti-knowledge. Knowledge is good and necessary; it simply gives us an incomplete picture of human cognition. To know something is to explain it in terms of something else: its parts, its history, its uses, its effects, its properties, how it looks to us. All of this is great. It allows us to create medicines, build aircraft, analyze social data, and so forth. But we've reached the point where many people assume that if something isn't "science," isn't knowledge, then it's just rubbish. These days we enthusiastically encourage students to pursue STEM subjects, while aesthetic taste is left sadly undeveloped. This means that the students who are open to it end up having to learn it on their own. Granted, that's often the best way to learn things. It's how I learned philosophy, for instance.

"OVERMINING AND UNDERMINING ARE CRITIQUES OF OTHER ONTOLOGIES, NOT OF THINKING OR PHILOSOPHICAL WORK AS SUCH."

SW: Gage has used overmining and undermining as critiques of architectural culture and architectural education, and this leads us to interesting territory. Universities rightly pride themselves on bestowing knowledge, but art and architecture are not forms of knowledge, yet this fact too needs to be taught and understood. How do you think about reconciling this dilemma?

GH: It's probably not something well understood enough yet to be codified in the schools. There is still some intellectual work to be done in grasping the relation between knowledge (which I define as detecting the qualities a thing possesses) and the very different kind of cognition that includes both the aesthetic and the philosophical (defined as grasping or producing a gap between any object and

its qualities). But philosophy is more often guilty of mistaking itself for a form of knowledge than the arts and architecture are.

SW: Back in 2017, you wrote a reply to Bruno Latour and Albena Yaneva's actor-network theory of architectural design.[13] Have your views on that changed?

GH: No, they have not. It's always stimulating to read an actor-network approach to any topic, and the Latour/Yaneva piece is as interesting as any.[14] But you just can't reduce any object, including an architectural one, to its backstory as a project– which is what they try to do in that article. There they are following Latour's familiar strategy of referring to any object as a black box that can be opened, revealing all of the historical complexity within. The problem is that a black box doesn't just hide its internal components. It also renders many of them irrelevant, while also having new emergent properties that can't be equated with what's inside. Stated in architectural terms, not all aspects of a building's history are relevant to the final building, and a building has features that its history does not. Latour and Yaneva offer a fine vision for an ethnography of architecture, but I doubt there is much that actual architects can do with it. And I say this as someone who yields to no one in my admiration of Latour, who in my view is the most important living philosopher, bar none.

SW: Finally, how do you seen the anti-anthropocentric aspect of OOO engaging with architecture?

GH: We're starting to see more architecture that isn't aimed directly at humans, such as the "Vulkan Beehives" of Snøhetta. But what I'm more interested in is de-anthropocentrizing the heart of architectural discourse: namely, the concepts of form and function. The irony is that while these terms seem to be meant as opposites in architectural history, they are both relational in character: the form of a building is supposed to be its visual look to the observer or user, and its function is supposed to be the purpose it provides for the client. But in a OOO context, the visual look of a thing is simply an expression of a deeper form, and the specific use is simply one possible incarnation of a deeper functional landscape. What OOO looks for can be called "zero-form, zero-function," as discussed in my forthcoming book Architecture and Objects.[15]

1. Simon Weir, *The Ontographers* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, forthcoming 2022).

2. Imre Lakatos, *Proofs and Refutations : the Logic of Mathematical Discovery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

3. Bruno Latour. *Aramis, or the Love of Technology,* translated by C. Porter. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 119.

4. Simon Weir, "Art and Ontography," *Open Philosophy* 3/2020, 400-412.

5. Manuel DeLanda & Graham Harman, *The Rise of Realism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017).

6. Simon Weir, "Object-Oriented Ontology and the Challenge of the Corinthian Capital," in *Make Sense,* (Sydney: Harvest, 2020), 114-116.

7. Tom Wiscombe, "Discreteness, or Towards a Flat Ontology of Architecture," *Project,* 3/2014, 34-43.

8. Mark Foster Gage, "Killing Simplicity: Object-Oriented Philosophy in Architecture," *Log*, 33/2015, 99.

9. David Ruy, "Returning to (strange) objects," *Tarp* 2012, 38-42; Peter Trummer, "The City as an Object," *Log,* 27/2013, 51-57.

10. Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London: Pelican, 2018).

11. Graham Harman, *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2012).

12. Tom Wiscombe in: Todd Gannon, et. al. "The Object Turn: A Conversation," *Log,* 33/2015, 82.

13. Graham Harman, "Buildings Are Not Processes: A Disagreement with Latour and Yaneva," *Ardeth* 01 2017, 113-122.

14. Bruno Latour and Albena Yeneva, "Give me a Gun and I will Make all Buildings Move: An

"LATOUR AND YANEVA OFFER A FINE VISION FOR AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF ARCHITECTURE, BUT I DOUBT THERE IS MUCH THAT ACTUAL ARCHITECTS CAN DO WITH IT."

ANT'S View of Architecture," *Architectural Design Theory,* 1/2017, 103-11.

15. Graham Harman, *Architecture and Objects* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming 2022).

Book review:

Is There an Object Oriented Architecture? Engaging Graham Harman
edited by Joseph Bedford
Bloomsbury Academic, 2020
194 pages, Hardcover $103.50

reviewed by Tom Spector

The application of Graham Harman's theory of things in the world, given the moniker Object Oriented Ontology (or OOO), is in its nascent period in architecture. Is it nascent because people don't yet know what to do with it, or is the inability to make use of it what keeps it nascent? This is a fundamental question that editor Joseph Bedford seeks to shed light on with contributions by Harman himself, and authors Adam Sharr, Lorens Holm, Jonathan Hale, Peg Rawes, Patrick Lynch and Peter Carl. The authors came together at the Swedenborg Society event devoted to discussing OOO in 2013. Towards this end, much credit must go to the book's editing and organization which allows for essays interspersed with responses by Harman and further give-and-take discussion that does much to clarify what OOO entails and points to how it could be applied. This admirable organization gives the book a pleasant variety and rhythm often lacking in such compilations.

Harman's premise is that objects have existences that always exceed our ability to quantify, narrate, use or otherwise apprehend them. This recognition of an existence that always "withdraws" therefore, from human understanding, is supposed to promote

a certain attitude, a certain humility, towards objects. This humility is born of, he asserts, a rejection of Heidegger's (and his inheritors') idealism towards the primacy of the human, as opposed to Harman's "realism" which "by contrast, promises to shift the balance between humans and non-humans towards an equitable centre ground, in which philosophy addresses all things in the universe with equal weight and promises a new ethical accounting as a result." (5) –a pretty tall order. This important realist feature of Harman's outlook also makes it at least somewhat hostile to traditional phenomenology, which may start out from an equally humble wish to take in the world as it presents itself, but tends then to privilege those elements which present themselves to *us* while neglecting the properties of objects, and their interactions with one another, that are proper to them. Harman's insight regarding objecthood which escapes our human schema is well-placed as a corrective to theories, such as Latour's Actor-Network Theory, which tend to collapse things into effects and relationships. He wants us mindful that the thing has an existence which exceeds effects on other things.

This is fine as a critique of philosophy and possibly social theory, but does it promise anything for architecture? While architects will tend to want to try out these ideas on the objects of their infatuation, namely, buildings, Harman is quick to emphasize that the concept of an object can span a wide gamut, from buildings, to be sure, to works of fiction, to characters within those works of fiction, to interpretations of those characters within those fictional works, to criticism of those interpretations, and so on, in what clearly risks vertigo of objecthood.

To go a bit deeper into Harman's critique and his assertions about OOO, Harman thinks that much modern thought makes the mistake of either undermining objects by dissembling them into their most fundamental constituent parts—to the point where they cease to be recognizable, or else they tend to "overmine" them by relegating them to their effects as events, or networks, or power relations. (or sometimes both at the same time.) An object, he concludes, "is simply that which cannot be reduced downward to its pieces or upward to its effects."(79) These rejections, then, (and a penchant for list-making) form the basis for holding that non-human objects always have a degree of existence that is immune from analysis either as a form of *withdrawal* from our ability to ensnare them in conceptual schemas or else as a degree of internal, inaccessible *finitude*. This recognition should be reason enough to strive to overcome anthropocentrism in our relations to objects.

Anthropocentrism has certainly been a favorite target from a

variety of philosophical disciplines for some time. Environmental philosophers credit it with leading to an instrumentalist attitude towards nature that gives rise to such aporia as global warming. Nietzsche liked to emphasize it as the end of ethical certainty. And Graham Harman has made its rejection a tent-pole of OOO by insisting that the human perception of things not only provides no direct correlation to understanding them but also is only one legitimate perspective among many. But living without some mild form of anthropocentrism is tough, and it's often worth questioning whether the alternatives aren't worse than the problem. This is true of Nietzsche's gleeful insistence that humanism provides no moral touchstones or the tendency of anti-anthropocentric environmentalism to lead into a conceptual thicket. In any event, there is a massive difference between normative anthropocentrism which insists that only humans convey value on the world and epistemic anthropocentrism which holds that adopting the point of view of non-humans is at best a guess. How we could know that objects have their own finitude without projecting some good ol' anthro- on them remains unclear. Because if we assert that we know, or can observe their independent existence, then BANG!-an anthropocentrist-generated concept has just been launched. A more thoroughgoing anti-anthropocentrism would seem to require us to hold that objects may or may not have such finitude, but we can never know for sure. The anthropocentric starting point for knowing things is far from foolproof, far from being able to exhaust the existence of things, and certainly subject to bias, but despite these handicaps is, as best as we can tell, more reliable and less speculative than other starting points. Harman sees this as a battle between anthropocentric idealism and object-oriented realism. OOO tends to treat its realism as a hard-won achievement.[1]

Harman believes he has charted a way out of anthropocentric idealism. He thinks that there

> "HARMAN IS QUICK TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE CONCEPT OF AN OBJECT CAN SPAN A WIDE GAMUT, FROM BUILDINGS, TO BE SURE, TO WORKS OF FICTION, TO CHARACTERS WITHIN THOSE WORKS OF FICTION, TO INTERPRETATIONS OF THOSE CHARACTERS WITHIN THOSE FICTIONAL WORKS, TO CRITICISM OF THOSE INTERPRETATIONS, AND SO ON, IN WHAT CLEARLY RISKS VERTIGO OF OBJECTHOOD."

must be more to objects than their constituent parts or their effects, a third way of conceiving them that allows them their own independent, and only partially or indirectly knowable, existence. Now, here's where Harman's theory for some jumps the shark from a reasoned critique of 19th and 20th century philosophy to a normative theory of how we should behave towards things. From the recognition that things have an independent, though largely unknowable existence, he writes, "*I think we need to place the human-world relation on the same level as the world-world or object-object relation.*" (emphasis his, 20) and by this he doesn't mean epistemologically only, but also morally. This idea has been attractive to environmentalists, who struggle to overcome anthropocentric instrumentalist views towards nature and want us to value nature on its own terms. One can also see the immediate attraction to architects of such an idea, for now they can assert moral standing to their products independent of those products' utilitarian benefits for humankind. (The moral standing of artworks, of course, has long been an interesting seam of study between ethics and aesthetics.) But more than that, as Adam Sharr asserts in his chapter, "The Circus, the Canon and the House with One Wall," OOO is attractive because its decentering of the human "offers a series of productive fables that allow us to imagine our surroundings differently. This is exactly the kind of storytelling – the production of imaginative worlds – to which architects devote their work lives." (40) Sharr recognizes, however, that "while architects, who deal in the design of things, might be comfortable with a world where objecthood is paramount, this is where Harman's cosmos seems most challenging to many academics," (44) precisely because of the flattening of ontological and moral distinctions between the human and other objects. Nevertheless, Sharr applauds the ability of OOO to spark the imagination and enable a "heightened reality." He writes, if OOO "can help us to sharpen our appreciation of those objects and their effects, then it is certainly worthy of architects' attention." (55)

Lorens Holm's chapter "Architecture and Its Objects" brings up the topic of space as a thing. This topic is certainly well-placed and in need of further explanation in OOO because we architects can think of and employ space in so many different ways: as the absence of things, as the distance between things, as figure-ground, as an axis, as perspective space, as a picture plane within a perspective, or as a thing in itself. But conceiving it as a thing that can withdraw into itself, even under the generous terms Harman grants things' existence, is dilemmatic. Did it become a thing when we thought it into existence? Did the "thingness" of space exist before a human recognized it? Does this way of thinking help us, as Sharr would ask, to tell stories around it? Perhaps, we might hope, the questioning it generates

is service enough. But we should resist the urge to assert that, since architecture is vitally interested in space, and Harman extensively employs spatial metaphors, we therefore have correspondence and ultimately relevance. Ultimately, Holm finds OOO at least potentially useful "because if you could understand your allegiance to objects, the ones you are designing for and the ones you are making, and find the integrity of your work in the contemplation of the object as opposed to always having to outside the object, looking over your shoulder to the user, we would probably have a more beautiful world, and more importantly, one that works better for users." (86)—thus constructing an indirect utilitarian argument for taking OOO seriously.

> "THE POINT IS TO SEE THAT ARCHITECTS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN DEALING WITH OBJECTS MORE URGENTLY THAN PHILOSOPHERS HAVE."

Jonathan Hale's "Buildings as Objects and Buildings as 'Tool-Beings'" takes a more directly critical approach. He thinks that Harman misses something important to architecture in its binary lack of appreciation of the transitions between pure utility or pure sensory qualities on the one hand and the object's mysterious core on the other. Hale thinks much of architecture is appropriately concerned with cultivation of that transitional strangeness—not entirely withdrawn objects, but not entirely reduced to smooth facilitators of utility either. Hale doesn't worry much about the intrusion of usefulness into consideration of objects because, he reasonably proposes, "Perhaps this is the closest we can ever get to understanding objects as they are in themselves – by using them and re-using them we continue to explore their inexhaustible depths." (96) Hale also worries that, at least in instances, OOO requires privileging non-human agency over human agency. Harman thinks this a non-problem. It only requires "treating them both in the same way ontologically, not politically." (99) and therefore substantive value judgments have been avoided. But have they? Isn't asserting ontological parity itself a value judgment? Can you simply point out

that things have extra-human existence and then make it a mere factual observation that makes them ontologically on par? For many, deciding to place things on par with humans is itself a value proposition. It is easy to see how this would be so for architects. For many, this question is something worth arguing over. Defining it out of existence will seem high-handed.

The final three sections, each in their own way, make little effort to directly engage Harman's theory. Peg Rawes' "Non-Human Architectural Ecologies" opts instead for a feminist outflanking of his approach as lacking the kinds of differentiations feminists bring to the discussion. She cautions that while we may be inclined to think that OOO opens up a multiplicity of voices by allowing all kinds of things their own agency, there may be both good and bad agency. The bad perpetuates universalist assumptions about objects that all too often serve to silence other voices. She thinks we need a triple-O that welcomes and unlocks those other perspectives and notes that "object-oriented practices already" exist in architecture and they are not always forces for emancipation. "As it stands, much environmental architectural discourse, especially, technological, biological and computational forms, perpetuates" the repression of difference. (113) From this essay, it's not clear that she has actually done much reading of Harman, which is a hazard of invited panels. Sometimes the panel member is too keen to discuss his or her favorite topics to spend much time on the subject at hand. When Rawes observes that the aims and objectives of architecture and philosophy "should not just be mapped onto each other." (129) the reader may wonder who actually thinks this. Harman tries to defuse the argument by replying that "the point is not for a philosopher of objects to force architects to think about objects against their will. The point is to see that architects have always been dealing with objects more urgently than philosophers have. On this point philosophy is the student and architecture the teacher." Gratifying to architects, but to what result? Surely it's a demonstration project with mixed results. Both Patrick Lynch and Peter Carl in their sections prefer to critique Harman's interpretation of Heidegger than directly engage his original thought. Lynch objects to conclusions Harman draws from *Being and Time,* while Carl argues that Harman's unique interpretation doesn't do justice to the thought of such Heidgger inheritors as Latour. Since Harman has a large intellectual debt to Heidegger, there is some common ground for discussion even though not much opportunity for productive dialogue. In a symposium about Harman's thinking, one wonders why a contributor doesn't at least try to link his or her prior interests to the topic at hand. It's perplexing, but this sort of thing does happen at academic conferences. Unsurprisingly, neither exchange takes us close to architecture.

Happily, Harman gets the last word, actually an "Afterword," that attempts to draw out a few lessons that OOO may hold for architects. Works of architecture have depths and connections that cannot be reduced to performance measures nor to relationships because there is always something important remaining after all the relationships have been unearthed and performance measures analyzed. For these reasons, architectural works make paradigm examples of object oriented ontology. Further, he thinks that architecture and OOO share an orientation to the renunciation of the distinction between pure thought and material works—there is no priority nor superiority to thought. This may all be both true and interesting. But is this sympathetic orientation enough to generate an architectural difference? I'm not hopeful on this point, but that is the question to be worked out over time. It remains to be seen whether Harman successfully "makes the petition for OOO as a practical philosophy and social theory that may provide novel avenues for the ails of our times."[2]

ENDNOTES

1. Harman calls his position "ardently realist" in Manuel Delanda and Graham Harman, *The Rise of Realism. Polity* Press, 2017, 3.

2. Steven Umbrello, "A Theory of Everything?" *Cultural Studies Review* v24 n 2, 2018, 184-86. 186.

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