

ANDREW BALLANTYNE'S BOOKS INCLUDE

Key Buildings From Prehistory to the Present: Plans, Sections and Elevations, 2012

Architecture in the Space of Flows, 2012 (co-edited by C. Smith)

Deleuze and Guattari for Architects, 2007

Architecture Theory: A Reader in Philosophy and Culture, 2005

Architecture and Experience: Radical Change in Spatial Practice, 2004

Architectures: Modernism and After, 2004

Architecture: A Very Short Introduction, 2002

What is Architecture?, 2002

Architecture, Landscape and Liberty: Richard Payne Knight and the Picturesque, 1997



ANDREW BALLANTYNE AND STEFAN KOLLER

TRYING TO THINK IN A CONNECTED SORT OF WAY

ANDREW BALLANTYNE IN CONVERSATION WITH STEFAN KOLLER

QUESTION: *You've written Deleuze and Guattari for Architects, you've written on architecture philosophy, but originally you've written things that were maybe not so clearly yet situated within the philosophy of architecture. How did you eventually come to that material and why?*

ANSWER: It is difficult to summarize, but my doctorate and my first book were about Richard Payne Knight and the theory of the Picturesque. I was interested in the topic from the point of view of architecture theory, but it turned out to be the theory of everything else as well. Especially the theory of landscape design, people's relationship with their environments, people's relationship with ideas, and the ideas that they use to think about things, think about places, think about nature and how they engage with nature. So I found myself going on a very wide-ranging study of Knight's ideas.

I first encountered him as a theorist of architecture through Peter Collins' book, the *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture* where he's positioned as someone who thought all rules were wrong. That seemed to me to be so evidently sensible. I didn't understand why anyone would every have moved on from that position. So I wanted to find out about him, and through a very rich, very rewarding character who turned out to have lots of interest.

Now of course I do understand why people moved on from that position. Because if you have rules, it simplifies things, it cuts down the range of choices. Often what you want as a designer is a reason to limit what you're interested in so that the

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question isn't as multifarious as it could be, but it's focused on the issue of the day, or of the issue that we decide to make the issue of the day, and that simplifies things. It resolves the question into what we're dealing with now.

Q: These are all inherently, genuinely, legitimately philosophical questions. At what point does moving on and engaging with people like Deleuze and Guattari become a move towards philosophical questions? Or is it more of the same that just happens to be concerned with authors who are recognized by others as having philosophically dealt with the built environment?

A: I'm not sure, but what I want to pick up on in that question is the idea of the variety and multifariousness of the world as we know it, of things, and the way we need to simplify it in order to deal with it. What I'd hope that I try to do is engage with lots of things and the big complexity of what we are immersed in and then fasten on different things to focus on in each text.

So, we hone in on something and try and address some sort of questions, but I do want the background richness and the background, complexity or chaos – whatever it is – I want that to be part of my life, part of my intellectual outlook, and so there's a tradition of dealing with those things. Deleuze and Guattari very nicely formulate it as nomadic thought where you move about, you change the set of ideas that you're using to deal with the world from one occasion to another, and you use the ideas that are the most effective at the given time, given what you are trying to do, what you're trying to think about, what you're trying to engage with and then move on from them and use a different set on another occasion.

Q: Deleuze's book on Nietzsche talks about taking other peoples' insights like arrows that have landed on the ground and that we can just pick them up and shoot them off again. So it seems you instrumentalize the arrows and you make them do the things that you want them to do for you. In the sense there is a tradition that engages these broader questions more narrowly or in a more design-oriented context, is that one way to draw on and instrumentalize the philosophical tradition? In order to pose, articulate, and sometimes answer questions within the tradition of architecture that may be harder otherwise to unearth?

A: My first reaction is to think, 'I don't know, I'll have to go away and think about that'. But, what I do know is that I don't read philosophical texts as a philosopher. I read them, however I do read them. There are some things that jump out and seem interesting, seem compelling and I somehow latch on to and they seem like something that I've got to do something with. If what I'm doing with that concept is just explaining it in exactly the same terms that the philosopher has presented it, then

I have no role, there's no point in my doing that. Other people can do that. The philosopher has done it already. Why would it be interesting just to repeat back what the philosopher has said? What I'm interested in doing is taking it up, picking up that arrow, firing it to a new place, and seeing where it lands. It's an instrument for exploration of something. You find that it will do something, and I'm not always clear what it's going to do, but I have this feeling that something is going to happen with it. We find out as we progress with the text, with the thinking, with exploring that idea, seeing what it leads up with, and seeing where it lands.

Q: *In Deleuze and Guattari for Architects you quote from a novel by Bernard Malamud where he reads Spinoza. Malamud reads Spinoza with great speed and says, 'sometimes I wouldn't understand a sentence and I would go through it and afterwards I felt I wasn't the same man anymore'. So there's a transformative potential of philosophy here which doesn't require Malamud's character to read Spinoza's text the way academically trained philosophers might feel compelled to do (line by line). So it's a way to open up something about architecture without knowing where it will lead you, but also without feeling compelled that for philosophy to do this, you have to follow an academic philosophical attitude of engaging the text. Is that fair to say?*

A: Yes, it is fair to say, but also I would say that one of the things that I like about listening to philosophers is that methodical presentation of an argument and leading me through step-by-step. I hope that's something that I can learn from and can follow that sort of procedure. I'm not sure that it always works out that way, but I would hope (to have) that clarity of thinking and the precision of thinking that philosophers are so good at demonstrating. That's something I'd aspire to do and that I'd hope that I could learn from.

The way that I come across philosophers being used by architects, far too often, is of imperfectly understood ideas being collaged together. I know

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that if I hear the names of more than three philosophers in a sentence I panic. I just know that I'm not being presented with something that's being thought through. I'm perfectly comfortable with the idea that I don't know everything, and I'm perfectly contented with the fact that there may be philosophers who've thought the way I've thought before, and I'm not referencing them; that doesn't invalidate the argument. What I'm really keen on doing is trying to think in a connected sort of way like philosophers do. It's *that* I want to learn from them more than anything.

Q: What I find so interesting is the way you characterize your work, the way you characterized what you sometimes find in the field, and what I think many of us have encountered. Of course, that is nothing at all peculiar to architects. Philosophy belongs to the public and to a readership well beyond the academic establishment, which means that people engage with it without scholarly scruple. Perhaps in the same sense that they read novels without having to feel the need to attend a seminar on say French literary theory first.

Sven Olov-Wallenstein's book on bio-politics contains a history of all of Enlightenment philosophy. That's not a presentation, or representation, of someone like Kant or Locke in these pages that is recognizable to a trained philosopher, but at the same time it would be extremely effective, and has been extremely effective in opening up some questions to ask of architecture, or to confront architecture with.

That's exactly the same mixture of not being too scrupulous with the source material to be able to arrive at something original. That is something that Olov-Wallenstein does, in a very short space, and I understand that you give yourself and your own philosophical explorations much more space and fewer authors to work with. But compared to your work, is the Olov-Wallenstein example a difference in degree, or difference in kind?

A: Well, I don't know my way around that text, but I would guess that the substance of it, if it's doing something valuable, probably isn't in those introductory remarks. That's setting the scene and if it is doing something valuable then it would have to be thinking through things in a more careful way than that. It may be giving a few broad-brush strokes to set things up. There may be something inaccurate or wayward in that, but maybe that's not important, that's just background. The key to it would be the central argument where the ideas are properly engaged. I don't know, but that's my suspicion from your description there. There's always something that's in the background that you don't know about but you might need to make reference to it, just as something maybe out of focus in the background which nevertheless is helpful in establishing some sort of context.

Part II of this interview will appear in Vol. 1, No. 2 of Architecture Philosophy.