DESIGNING A COMMON WORLD: PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY AND THE AIM TO OBJECTIFY ARCHITECTURE

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INTRODUCTION

Many architectural offices today tend to present their works as the inevitable result of the program brief and building site. Often, they showcase their designs on their websites, in architectural magazines, in lectures, or on internet blogs as the sum of a few logical steps, adjusting a simple volume (the possible envelope according to local restrictions) towards a final form (a response to programmatic and site-specific characteristics). These design-narratives often are illustrated with simple and schematic line-drawings, emphasizing the logic of the final result. It is of course a simplified version of the design process, a 'narrative' only possible in hindsight. The tendency beyond, I think, is an eagerness to withdraw from the 'subjective,' with its associations as grounded in mere personal preference in the presentation of the project, in favor of reason and logic, which operate in the open, outside the subject. The same tendency can be recognized in the effort by other offices to present their projects as the outcome of working methods grounded in a strict and seemingly scientific analysis of big data, made possible by the unprecedented power of computers to envision and manipulate data (in real time), and

to map and manipulate information flows. (figure 1) Once again, some of these offices use such computational models to evoke the impression that the design work is the logical, even irresistible, outcome of an objective and extensive analysis of information. Some even suggest that in the (near) future architectural designs can be generated through artificial intelligence. No architects required (or better said: only software engineers needed)! And thus, the narrative goes: the design process will be objectified in such a way that the obvious subjectivity of the designer is excluded from the process in favor of the much more subtle subjectivity of the computational model. It is the old quest of 'architecture without architects', this time not in favor of a vernacular architecture, local traditions and spontaneous building processes, but in favor of the promises of the black box of Big Data. To these two claims that aim to overcome the subjective aspects of architectural design (or as stated, of the architectural designer) we might add a third direction: the renewed interest in participation trajectories. Both in scholarly research, as well as within architectural practices, there is a growing interest in the development of open design trajectories wherein stakeholders (beyond the usual: clients, investors, and planners but also future residents and users) are invited to intensely participate. This interest in participatory design, moreover, is not limited to the design phase. The product itself, the building, should be built in an 'open' system, where users can easily adapt the spaces to their wishes in time. Many examples of the tendencies above can be given, both from the field of practices as well as from academia. However, as I do not want to pinpoint offices to a singular take, I leave it to the imagination of the reader to frame these tendencies in architectural practice to actual cases.

Although these three attempts are very different in character, a shared aim can be recognized: the aim to reduce the subjective aspects of architectural design by (in theory) minimizing or altering the role of the designer from creator to something more like 'facilitator.' Such a 'humbleness' that emerges from the field functions as a corrective to the era of 'starchitects', wherein the creativity and genius of a single architect was emphasized, alongside a worldwide inclination towards the 'new', 'novel', and 'original.' The 2008 world-wide financial and economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in the USA made very clear how hollow such a perspective was. Architecture simply had become an empty shelf: the 'surplus' aesthetics attached to buildings, the icing on the cake. Although this can be understood in economic (and even Marxist) terms as the 'surplus' value, which could be made profitable in terms of marketing and branding, it of course hardly can be seen as a 'proper' understanding of the significance of architecture for inhabitants, users, society. After

all, due to the crisis, it immediately became clear that such a surplus value was only profitable in the case of the few designers that had become a brand in themselves. Or better said: there seemed to be no language left wherein the significance of architecture could be explained, neither to the inhabitants and users, nor to society as such, and, in line with that, also not to clients, constructors, investors, developers. Architecture had turned into a 'statue of Nebuchadnezzar': beautiful, spectacular, impressive, powerful, glamorous, but only loosely rooted in society (if rooted at all).

FIGURE 1:
GRASSHOPPER PROGRAM
COMPUTATIONAL ARCHITECTURE

Consciously addressed in articles in the media and (new) assignments to architects, or unconsciously touched upon in discussions, it seemed that the 'subjectivity' of the architectural designer was to blame. And thus, we can understand (and probably also value) the above-mentioned ways to organize and present design differently: they are mostly sincere attempts to overcome the crisis in architecture and to (re)connect to the client and user, to each other, as well as to society. The subjectivity of the designer has become the 'whipping boy' of architectural design. These reflections implicitly divide architectural practices into two very different approaches: the artistic practice versus the engineering practice. Schematically, both positions can be seen as the outer ends of a spectrum. On the one side the architect is presented as creative genius producing original and unforeseen (architectural) proposals (model: the 'starchitect', Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead*) which need to be characterized as 'art', while on the other side one would find the architects that simply understand their practices as consultancy offices, and their work as a form of engineering. These architects get the project done, straightforwardly fulfilling the wishes of the client (model: a 'service
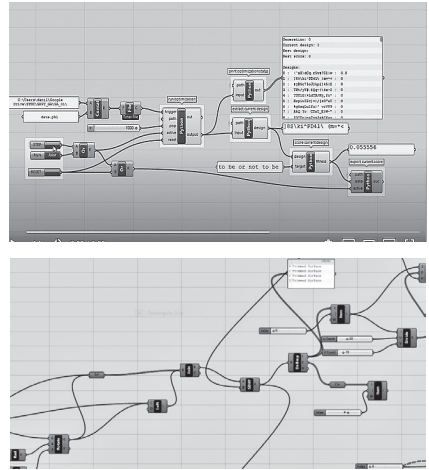
" THEY ARE MOSTLY SINCERE ATTEMPTS TO OVERCOME THE CRISIS IN ARCHITECTURE AND TO (RE) CONNECT TO THE CLIENT AND USER, TO EACH OTHER, AS WELL AS TO SOCIETY. "

office').² Whereas most of the architectural offices, obviously, operate in the grey zone of this spectrum (aiming to do a good job with regard to both ends of the spectrum), the above signalized tendency in practice heads towards this latter end of the spectrum.

This tendency walks a dangerous path because the removal of subjectivity entails the loss of the underpinnings of architectural responsibility. In order to unravel this idea I will lean upon two perspectives offered in the writings of the philosopher Hannah Arendt. First I will use her distinction between the earth and the world. This distinction and her understanding of the world as a world-of-things offer a perspective wherein the practice of architecture can be understood as world-construction, a valuable external reference frame for the professional field of architecture. This perspective at first sight might seem to offer an argument to reduce subjectivity in design, but that, as we will see, is at odds with Arendt's own perspective. A certain balance between objectivity and subjectivity is needed. In order to define that balance, I secondly will use her unfinished reflections on the human faculty of 'judgment'. This last perspective offers a key to the aspect of subjectivity in design, wherein subjectivity and responsibility are intertwined. This perspective is important, as it opposes the move to align architectural design with the repressive and dangerous tendencies endemic to technocratic engineering.

Before I set up this argument, three brief remarks. First: the tendencies described above are not novel at all. Amongst others, the writings of the architects George Baird and Giancarlo De Carlo and historians Kenneth Frampton and Robert Gutman have stressed the tension between the artistic and the functional throughout the 19th and 20th century, and pondered attempts to either transform architecture to a more scientifically or socially 'just' professional field, or reduce it to a solely artistic one. Current trends, while not novel, are intensifications of these tensions.³

Secondly, it is the subjectivity of the designer that I focus on even though it must be recognized that the building process is shot-through with subjectivity: subjective are the aims and wishes of the client, investor, developer, of the public official that formulates the restrictions for a particular site, and of the politician that wants to develop a lasting monument before time in office has finished. Design, however, is a particular instrument within the building industries. It is a tool that architects have, a tool that bridges the different viewpoints. This is an important given. Even in times wherein the subjectivity of architectural design is under attack, we need to understand the unique capacities of design.

Third, it of course is clear that this 'designer' almost never is a single

architect. In most cases, design is teamwork, work of an office with project architects, assistant designers, interns, drafters. So when addressing 'the architect', I have in mind both the single designer, as well as the collaborative.

THE THINGS OF THE WORLD

How can we understand the context of architecture: What is its significance beyond the beautification of buildings, urban spaces, and cultural landscapes? The writings of Hannah Arendt offer an appropriate perspective in this regard, through which the cultural and political meaning of the profession can be understood. The Canadian architect and theoretician George Baird stated in his 1995 book *The Space of Appearance* that Arendt has been one of the very few philosophers of the 20th century to include "the things of the world"[4] in her political philosophy. In other words, within political reflections in philosophy and other academic fields, theories hardly grasp the tangible world, the things that surround us. Arendt's perspective then stresses the tangible world as politically relevant. In order to understand this relevance, let us first explicate what she meant by 'things of the world'. In her writings, Arendt distinguishes the 'world' from the 'earth', a distinction she partly based on the writings of philosopher Martin Heidegger, who had been her professor during her studies. The distinction roughly is between the natural and the cultural, the globe versus the human interventions, human affairs, and relationships. But where Heidegger offers a negative reading of this distinction, Arendt ponders the world in a clearly positive perspective.[5] Where Heidegger takes the classical philosophical stance and understands the humble and stumble, rumour and noise of public life, as disturbing the

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vita contemplativa, she, on the contrary, aims to celebrate the participation in public life and the engagement in the world and its wanderings, the *vita activa.* A perspective overlooked and neglected within philosophy, according to Arendt – and not without consequences. The whole political development in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century urged her—as a Jew born in Germany, searching for refuge in France and the United States—to become politically aware, and publicly active.[6] So what does the distinction mean for her? To her the earth stands for the natural circumstances of the globe, depicted by the cycle of nature. For Arendt this is not an idealistic situation, as she stresses the need to transform that globe into a habitable place. This transformation establishes the world. The world thus is the earth made fit for human habitation and the human community.[7] Through human intervention, through the creation of artefacts (houses, furniture, infrastructure), the earth is transformed into a human world. The distinction between the two terms thus roughly corresponds to the natural and the cultural spheres. Arendt emphasizes the different qualities that belong to both entities: it is the cyclicality of nature versus the perpetuity of culture, the survival of species versus the permanence of the human artefacts. For Arendt 'things' are not just objects, but they are part and parcel of that artificial 'world'. Human artefacts establish the world. In addition to this basic principle, Arendt draws attention to two perspectives of artefacts that qualify this world, which also turns them into a prerequisite for sensible political life —the relationship Baird stressed.

1.   For Arendt the world always is a world shared with others. Or in her terms: the world always is 'in-common.' Human artefacts, that at once establish a world, immediately also establish commonality. "To live in the world," Arendt writes in a famous quote, "means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time."[8] Arendt stresses that this 'table' not only is to be seen as a spatial commonality (to be collected around an artefact-in-common)), but also as a commonality that stretches in time (we have the object not only in common today, but we share it also with previous generations, as well as with those to come).[9] Both continuities (or commonalities) of the world are rendered by Arendt as prerequisites for sensible political life. The intangibility and vulnerability of "action and speech," that Arendt frame as the crucial activities of political life, requires a durable and common stage.[10] Politics, for Arendt, does not

primarily relate to parliament and government, to town hall and council, but to "the coexistence and association of different men," which certainly relates to the intangible interaction between human beings (like in the political arena) but also is related to the tangible (public) artefacts and institutions that structure and organize the world and orients their inhabitants.[11] The world of things, in other words, is at once the stage of politics as well as the concern of politics.

2.   While the first point stresses artefacts as such, delivering a stable stage for the realm of politics, the second perspective qualifies these artefacts. They are not neutral atoms in space, but have a particular shape, history, tactility, or to be short: presence. They appear to the human being through their form—a form that is particular and recognizable, and that can revive particular memories and narratives.[12] According to Arendt, this particularly counts especially for such artefacts as memorials, monuments, and works of art. She thus underlines the capacity of artefacts—in particular: works of art—to reify stories and narratives, to memorize actions of the past, and to make history present today. Artefacts are carriers of meaning, memory, heritage, orientation, order, and identity, they can revive (collective) memories and evoke remembrances.[13] This aspect of the 'things of the world' is related to a crucial capacity of the human being; the possibility to tell a story. The life of the individual—a narrative in time between birth and death—is an example of such a story, but also the 'the life of the polis', which obviously is the story of particular histories. The crucial aspect of the narrative is not only the possibility to contemplate actions within time, but also that it can be shared with others. This, for Arendt, transforms the life of the *polis* into a political life.[14] This capacity to tell stories is foremost a capacity of the human being,

but, as Arendt also stresses, such narratives are the "everlasting essence of the work of art" in the context of politics.[15] Needless to say that works of art indeed often consciously reify (historical) narratives, and that such works of art have been important to the realm of politics and the self-understanding of human communities. However, we do not have to limit our understanding at this point to figurative art, Greek poems, or the plot in movies. The particular shape of artefacts (works of art as well as everyday artefacts) can be a 'holding place' for narratives: objects can evoke remembrances, and thus are able to make particular histories present, but they also can evoke future perspectives, which unfold and are addressed in stories too.

To summarize, artefacts not only offer stability and permanence, but also memory, remembrance, structure, and orientation in the world. Both layers of understanding of the 'things of the world' value artefacts in a very sensible and concrete way, engaging aspects of spatiality, materiality, tactility, tangibility, and the capacity of narration, as well as the inherent aspects of production and use. All these aspects in one way or the other may contribute to the commonality and durability of a political community or disturb it.

ARCHITECTURE AS WORLD-CONSTRUCTION

This perspective upon the 'things of the world' offers a valuable path to construct a cultural and political—and therefore also ethical—framework to understand the work of the architect, not only for architects working on grand cathedrals, but also for those developing and designing not-so-grand bicycle sheds.[16] Arendt stressed that works of art are the most worldly human artefacts, particularly since they are objects not intended for commonplace utility but only to be accessed in a disinterested attitude, and therefore will not be damaged through use and spoiled by use or consumption. Works of art therefore are, if kept well protected from natural influences, the most durable objects on earth, and thus will offer the most stable underpinnings for society.[17] Arendt nevertheless does not limit the twofold aspects of the 'things of the world' solely to works of art, but only placed them in hierarchy above the other works of the human being.

With these concepts in mind, let us stretch Arendt's perspective to the field of architecture. We first need to recognize how important architecture is with regard to the establishment of the world (and in the

context of an existing world, the maintenance and continuation of it). The built environment after all literally shapes the world for its inhabitants. It constructs the everyday places of human life, as well as the monuments that structure political life, the memorials, the buildings of the parliament, the offices of public institutions. It structures the cities and neighbourhoods, where people live, work, enjoy a movie, or go to court, as well as the landscape, where the food grows, the natural reserves are, the slopes for skiing. Architecture builds the museums, where the works of art are exhibited, and it delineates the public squares, where people can gather. Architecture, in other words, mediates between the human being and the earth, as well as between the human being and the human community. It creates the private spaces of the home, as well as a context for meaningful collective life. It offers room for actions to unfold, for stories to be enacted, for history to take place, for experiences to be gained —and by doing so, through all the events that take place on their stairs and balconies, their wooden floors and tile pavements, against their walls and columns, (hi)stories are written. The patina of the materials, the traces of use on the stairs and floors —they are not entirely negative, as Arendt seems to argue: it is particularly through these traces of decay and use that history is made present, that memories and remembrances of users, inhabitants, and communities are evoked.[18] Buildings and cities, landscapes and works of infrastructure—they all first accommodate the human community, but second also offer a 'holding place' for memories from the (recent) past.

Works of architecture (both grand and humble), we might conclude, simply relate users and inhabitants with the earth and with each other spatially through the placing of walls, doors, windows, roofs, pavements, and so on. This relation not only is established at this point in time, but also over time, with generations of the past as well as

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of the future. Architecture plays a role both in a tangible and material sense (by the very structures), as well as in a mental sense (by being sites of heritage, memory, and so on). Architecture, therefore, should be understood as 'world-construction.'

If architecture, a term which here includes the fields of planning, constructing, urban design, and landscape architecture, is world-construction, then it needs to carefully engage with the world it brings into existence in order to keep it fit for human inhabitation and political interaction. Architectural design then cannot be indifferent to the world-in-common, but requires an attitude of engagement towards the worlds it both touches and creates. From this perspective, we can usefully define three tasks for the professional field of architecture:

1. This perspective stresses the value of the existing (built) environment as the context of the social network of the inhabitants as well as a 'holding place' for stories, memories, remembrances. It thus offers an argument for a careful renovation, restoration and refurbishment of existing buildings, urban structures and cultural landscapes. The existing built environment is not a tabula rasa, nor neutral ground, wherein architecture intervenes.

2. Importantly, this is no argument for stasis. In her reflections on culture, Arendt stresses that two perspectives align in culture: the careful maintenance of the existing intertwines with the intervention that creates room for the new. The second task for architectural practices thus is to embed the new in the existing.[19] This of course creates a new composition, a new entity—but with respect to what has been, and how that has been established.[20]

3. For the third task, we need to take one step further. To acknowledge that through the shape of artefacts narratives can be told, is to challenge the architect to both understand and take responsibility for the narratives inherent in their proposals. This charge, of course, counts for all interventions in the world, but from a political perspective, it particularly counts for the design of public buildings. After all, public buildings—townhalls, schools, libraries,—through their form also reify particular narratives, as for example a well-designed public school will narrate the importance of education in our society (moreover, the structure of the school does influence the possibilities of education, but also narrate what educational system we are after—think of the early school-designs of the Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger), while a rundown public school building simply seems to show that public funding of the school is not prioritized.[21] Just as townhalls of the past perfectly reify the relationship between local power and the citizens and cathedrals do the

same for religion and the community of believers, new townhalls and churches also reify comparable narratives.[22] They are carriers of the organization of the current human community and thus expose what has been assigned as important for this community. As political philosopher Bonnie Honig argues in her recent Sydney Lectures in *Philosophy and Society*: "Public things are the infrastructure of democratic life, and they underwrite the signs and symbols of democratic unity, that, for the moment, still survive." And while she relates this perspective with the previous mentioned need for a stable underpinnings of the political realm, she writes: "things … stabilize the web of meanings in which we live and into which we may act."[24]

These three tasks: valuing the existing built environment for its embedded meanings, sensitively engaging that environment with new revisions, and care for the narrative quality of architecture, are crucial assignments for every architectural intervention in the world. What designers propose never is neutral. It must always deal with structures from the past, as well as their inherent narratives, while at once adding new narratives that in their turn reify the current relationship to the earth (and its environmental issues) and the world (as a world-in-common).

THE CHALLENGE OF SUBJECTIVITY

According to George Baird, this perspective "electrifies the architectural project," ethically. Rightly so: while individual wishes, needs and ambitions as well as commercial perspectives, profits, and business cases are the genesis of most architectural assignments, there is always spillover.[25] Architecture—even in the most isolated circumstances—always is tethered to the world-in-common, and thus is establishing, maintaining, and intervening in the world, which in turn has

political and cultural meaning. Architecture thus is an inherently political and cultural endeavor, the import of which forms the basis for its unique ethos, for not only does it assert that architecture significantly establishes or maintains the world-in-common, but also that architecture can become an agent of destruction to the commonly shared world. It can disturb the possibilities for establishing political life and obliterate the (collective) stories that are stored in the world.

This is what justifies holding that the architectural project thus reaches beyond the immediate interests of the stakeholders: through its impact on the commonly shared world. This of course not only offers an ethical perspective upon the architectural designer's work, but also is applicable for other parties involved in the building process, from commissioner to building manager, and from constructor to politicians who decide upon the building regulations, or the ambitions with regard to urban renewal, social housing, or public buildings. Arendt's perspective offers a framework for a (self)critical approach to each building assignment—a horizon against which a project (from program brief to design, and from construction to demolition) can be evaluated, challenged, and valued, as it both challenges the 'what/why' as well as the 'how' of a project.

Although this perspective of 'the world in common' might call for sensitivity amongst designers to the larger context of their work, it does certainly not plea for objectivity in design. Baird, argues that neither a radically subjective position, nor a supposedly objective approach are appropriate responses vis-à-vis the idea of a shared world.[26] Obviously, to develop participation processes, create open-building structures, make use of data modelling, and present architecture through a logical explanation can be valued positively as exhibiting awareness of a certain architectural ethos. These strategies are particularly welcome against an architectural era that uncritically engaged with the new and the novel, the *oeuvre* and the artistic. However, there is a clear downside to these attempts to wipe out subjectivity as well: if objectification of design is the endgame, it comes with a reductionist perspective and risks dissipation of design-responsibility. This assertion is based on three considerations:

1.   According to Arendt, the world is characterized by plurality: it is site-specific and time-specific due to the natural circumstances of the earth, the development of the world, the cultural and political development and engagement with the world, the development of tools and instruments (technology) that make minor and major interventions possible, as well as through the histories and events that unfolded within the world and thus upload the world with narratives. Although the 'facts' of these differences

can be traced in comprehensive analyses, or can be collected in the numbers of 'big data', their cultural, social and political meanings, that is to say, what gives them ethical import, are out of reach of these instruments. Without acknowledging the personal and collective narratives, the cultural and political aspects of the built environment, architecture is stuck in reductionist and purely materialist perspectives. This particularly is the case if the design-instruments (as data-mining, logical reasoning, participation) are magnified, and rather than being mere tools to achieve an ethical end become regarded as self-justifying processes. In all of the mentioned cases in the introduction to this article, there is the risk to reduce the reality of the world to objective facts: either to the 'factual' perspective of participants in the development process, or to the overwhelming amount of 'facts' that are collected through data mining, or finally to the 'facts' that are seemingly the inevitable result of logical investigation in program, site, and use.

2. Simultaneously with such a reductionist perspective, these methods and attempts to objectify architecture also disturb the ethical understanding of architect's practice since the process of 'design' is misunderstood. When the design-method is so magnified, the process should follow its predefined path. Such a process is repressive; it strongly steers while diminishing the freedom to do things differently, to be surprised by one's findings. This steering both removes opportunities for personal reflection and simultaneously taking responsibility for one's decisions. One can hide behind the outcome of data mining, the wishes of the participants, the facts that are taken from the context and program, or behind the investors or client—any of which somehow 'automatically' lead to the proposed project. This of course is a bit of a simplified presentation: there still is 'design', but it operates on a higher level of abstraction: the design of the used methods and instruments, the selection

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and development of the computational program, the selection of data scraped, the way data are connected, the 'architecture' of the algorithm. This is a way of defining the organisation, a matter of decision making, and interpretation—and their impact on the world can be devasting. However, now the design decisions do not operate in the open, but are kept at a remove from the actual projects. A new and obfuscating layer, defining the algorithm or the structure of the design method, is added between the designer and the end-object. It distances challenging and subtle matters of subjectivity, biases, ethical dilemmas from the actual design task. This remove easily hides the subjective and ethical aspects of the project from the public eye, particularly if these methods and instruments are seen as objective, even if not scientifically truthful, and thus are neither challenged nor questioned—not in the discussions within the designer's office, nor in the (everyday) talks to clients, neighbours, and society.

This, I would argue, is hiding behind the instruments, and behind the outcome of the application of these instruments, without taking responsibility for one's own decisions (not on the level of the design of the method and instrument, nor on the use of the outcome of the implementation of these methods and instruments). In other words, if method and instrument are presented as factual and scientifically truthful, the outcomes easily can be understood as 'objective facts' too. What then is left to the designer except implementation? The architect will operate a design-machine, and needs to follow what is prescribed—simply turning the diagrams or directions into structures (if this is still needed, one might imagine that artificial intelligence even this step in the design process can take over). He or she probably will follow a self-prescribed path (through the definition of the algorithm)—but without taking responsibility that this path is inherently subjective and hence to be challenged continuously.

3.   Arendt's perspective of the world-in-common clearly at once both challenges the subjective intervention in this world, as well as the aim to be objective. It not only provokes the idea that design simply can be the 'just' interpretation of big data, or that it can be the application of computational models and logical reasoning, but offers a 'critical' reading to all other instruments through which the professional aims to define a more or less 'objective' underpinnings of his designs. Arendt also is critical of the immediate and unquestioned application of theories, dogmas, philosophies, particular design methods, and so on. All these 'instruments' can form an obstacle between the designer and the world, particularly when the tools are overvalued and the complexity of the world is reduced to singular perspectives. Architectural design, understood as 'world-construction'

is a matter of immediate engagement with the world-in-common, and reflection on its existing structures, meanings, its rootedness in the past, and how it can be strengthened, enhanced, continued, while immediately offering space to new needs and wishes. Architects simply are challenged to apply their work with caution, not to destroy the precarious threads that connect us with the past, neither to insert the failure-projects of tomorrow, nor to lose their rooting in society.[27]

This, for architects seeking to execute the ethical fullness of their charge, clearly is a balancing act between the objective and the subjective. The perspective that design deals with concrete artefacts that are in-common challenges designers to organize the ethical questions as clearly and concretely as possible within each design project (and not hidden in abstraction, or obscured in the instruments and methods), while communicating openly and accessibly about the subjective aspects of the activity of design (and how to deal with them from an ethical perspective).

ARCHITECTURAL JUDGMENT

How then can we understand architectural *design*, if it is a balancing act between the objective and the subjective? The design process often is understood as a black box, wherein imagination and experience, taste and other subjective aspects, play a role. Generally speaking, architectural design is not understood by the broader public, as is tangible in all sorts talks about architecture in the media or in personal conversations in which the architect after all never is never challenged by his audience to respond to the costs of one iconic building, the terrible leaking of another, the un-functionality of again another spectacular building? However, if we zoom in to the actual process of design, we obviously immediately understand that the design first and

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foremost is embedded in the wishes of the client. Architects actively define and shape the intervention in the existing environment according to a program brief, along the lines of wishes of clients, investors, developers, and other stakeholders. This perspective at first sight seems to limit the responsibility of the architect. After all: most of the outcome of the design-process is already given and predefined in a program brief (particularly in complex projects, these program briefs are like books containing hundreds of pages with prescriptions). However, design is not simply *the* answer to a particular program brief, as there are many answers to that same program brief, as architectural competitions clearly show. [28] This simple given of the multiplicity of possible outcomes already shows how crucial the position of the designer is, despite his currently often limited power in the process of development. Besides the very activity of sketching and investigating, two aspects of design are crucial with regard to the world-in-common:

• Through the design process, often contradictory and conflicting viewpoints and insights evolve, as the needs of the client are addressed as well as the wishes of the future users and inhabitants, the concerns of the neighbours, the ambitions of local politics, the constraints of the existing situation, the regulations of local rules and laws, and so on. Design investigates possibilities and opportunities, and through these investigations, new, unforeseen, and unthought-of perspectives open up— perspectives that might unite contrasting positions.

• Through design, moreover, the question of imagination is posed: what do we envision as the outcome of the project, what should it narrate, what does it stand for (and how does it contribute to the world-in-common)? In one way or the other, decisions have to be made upon the directions of the design process. To treat these issues as jigsaw puzzles that can be solved through mathematical logic, smart reasoning, or through complex computation is to abdicate architectural judgment: to make choices, to decide upon what is important, to value the several perspectives, and to be able to discuss these issues publicly.

It will be useful to introduce at this point another term borrowed from Arendt's writings: her reflections on political judgment. These reflections, although not fully developed because of her sudden death in 1975, incorporate ideas about the public access as well as the inter-subjectivity of such judgments. In particular, two aspects of judgment— the accessibility of the decision as well as its intersubjective character—are pressing questions regarding architectural design.

Arendt based her understanding of political judgment on Immanuel Kant's proposition of aesthetic judgment. The crucial feature Arendt

adopts from Kant's perspective is his idea of the "intersubjective validity [of judgment] in the public realm."[29]   Aesthetic judgment, for Kant, is not limited to the application of personal taste (although the development of taste is crucial), but always is related to the larger context of society. It requires an active engagement with this community, particularly through the application of an enlarged mentality. This latter term open to an important perspective, particularly in regard to the activity of design. What is important at this point is that Arendt also argues that politics, upon which she is focused, should not be understood as a realm of 'truths' in a scientific sense. "Truth in the sciences is dependent on the experiment that can be repeated by others; it requires general validity. Philosophic truth has no such general validity. What it must have … is 'general communicability'."[30]   Surely, facts do play a role in the realm of politics—as clearly can be derived from the omnipresence of 'alternative facts' in today's political institutions. However, even if all participants stick to the same facts, paradoxical and even contractionary perspectives can be developed. Facts after all require both interpretation and validation. In politics, it is much more about the weighing of facts and understanding their relationships, particularly in relationship to the world and its wanderings, than it is about finding and defending *the* truth. In politics, moreover, understanding the facts and their relationships does not lead to a political program or decisions that can organize society in all its plurality. On the contrary, for Arendt the political arena is not about facts and figures, but about conflicting interpretations and contradictory perspectives. This approach thus requires the capacity to make decisions not solely on the basis of facts, but also with regard to conflicting perspectives and within complicated situations. Political judgment, Arendt therefore argues, is bound to a certain community. One judges "as a member of this community and

not as a member of a supersensible world."[31] Being part of a community urges us to understand the subjective aspects of our own position in the world, and urges us to take "the viewpoints of others into account."[32] Arendt stresses that the capacity to acknowledge other perspectives rightly requires a specific human capacity that she calls after Kant the "enlarged mentality." "The 'enlargement of the mind' is accomplished by "comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgments of others, and by putting ourselves in the place of any other man."[33]

The striking perspective Arendt stresses here is that she seems to take this process of judgment very literally. To take other viewpoints into account is not to think *about* other perspectives (or to take note of these perspectives), but literally means entering the problem at hand *from* the standpoint of other positions in the world. This describes a process of active engagement: to re-place oneself to another position, to re-write the story from that very perspective. Judgment requires the ability to place oneself in the place of others, in order to think from their position in the world. This is a crucial perspective: judgment implicitly requires a public. The plural public is at the heart of judgment processes—if not literal, then through the human faculty of imagination. "By the force of imagination it makes the others present and thus moves in a space that is potentially public, open to all sides."[34]

The crucial point for our reflection on architectural design is Arendt's next step: it is one thing to replace oneself to other positions, and to be able to think from within these positions, but the question how to *judge* is still open. It still requires judgment to make up one's mind and to make decisions. Judgment requires a space to reflect, think, test other points of view, as it eventually also requires expertise, experience, knowledge, and intuition. Such a judgment requires engagement and reasonable training, as it does not depend upon general rules but on "thinking the particular." Since in judgment imagination and intuition are involved, it is understood as requiring faculties of the human being that are shaped through active engagement in the world and participation in public life, as well as fueled through experience and knowledge. Through such an engagement in the world, one is able to recognize the particular, and to imagine the particular from different points of view. It is only through such a process, Arendt argues, that judgment becomes "communicable:" It can be communicated to others, as it is based on the thinking from different perspectives and on the development of and reflection upon multiple possibilities. This communicability takes the form of a persuasive activity: it is able to appeal to the variety of perspectives within society, even if it has judged that some

of the perspectives seem to be other than just.[35]

If we now turn back to architectural design, we easily can see the parallel. On the architect's drawing table literally lay a variety of perspectives at hand: the client's, the users', the inhabitants', the local politics' perspective, and the neighbors'. The architect listens to their voices and challenges the project from their point of view. In the end, however, it is the design that needs to bring these (often conflicting) perspectives together, against the horizon of the world-in-common (in space and time) and not the design tool, the algorithm, the survey, or the sorted data. Design is an activity that sometimes unfolds somehow in solitude (within the office, at the drawing table, in meeting rooms, and so on), but that inherently also requires a continuous, imaginative conversation with its context, with the world-in-common. It requires imagination to "make the others present," and by doing so making the architectural office and the subsequent meeting rooms (of clients, engineers, planners, politicians) where the design is developed, a public space.[36] It is through the making present of the public at the heart of the process of design, that the design also can be made public, that the design is communicable, that it is accessible to be discussed publicly.[37]

CONCLUSION

Returning to the three examples of resistance against subjectivity I described at the outset: Obviously, we can't lump all three examples together as a singular tendency completely. Especially the attempt to open up the design process for the participation of future users and inhabitants seems to stand out. New technologies appear especially promising in this regard where they help to streamline processes of interaction, discussion and debate, and how new techniques, developed in the

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gaming industries, also can be applied to architectural and urban planning processes. Moreover, in several countries around the world new ways of developing buildings appear, where in cooperative ways future inhabitants strongly work together, and are completely involved in the processes of developing and designing, and even financing and constructing their future housing. However, this does not diminish the role of design in these processes. Moreover, it is clear that if all these voices have to be heard, the complexity of the design process increases. How to incorporate the different and often opposing viewpoints into a single design? It is in this perspective that we can validate the parallel between architectural design and political judgment, as pondered by Hannah Arendt. Judgment requires the training of the human faculty of 'enlarged mentality' and imagination. To judge means to be able to think from different perspectives, not to define the average of these perspectives, but in order to come to an informed judgment.

A similar case can be made for design. Design requires the ability to think from the perspective of the stakeholders, as well as from a more general context (as the world-in-common). It requires imagination to make these perspectives present. However, in the end it needs to judge, it needs to make decisions. Such 'informed' judgments do not only mean to be informed about the different perspectives at stake, but also are informed through personal experiences, taste, knowledge, skills, and so on, that is to say, subjectively. All attempts that aim to diminish the subjective from design will fall into the trap of technocratic engineering, wherein a reductionist and materialist vision is embraced, and responsibility is endlessly displaced. It is particularly in the very moments where the subjective enters judgment that a public and political discussion on architectural proposals is possible, and that architects can be held responsible for their ideas and proposals. Conversely, architectural design requires balancing between stakeholders and the public, between the earth and the world-in-common, the world as it is gained from the past, and the world as it can be in the future. This balancing act requires personal engagement in the world, which will feed the architectural knowledge that can be gained through studies and experience, which is gained through extensive practicing, studying, and reflecting upon the world.

ENDNOTES

1. Many examples of the tendencies above can be given, both from the field of practices as well as from academia. However, as I do not want to pinpoint offices to a singular take, I leave it to the imagination of the reader to frame these tendencies in architectural practice to actual cases.

2. Cf. Dana Cuff, *Architecture: The Story of Practice* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991), 28-35d.

3. George Baird, '"La Dimension Amoreuse" in Architecture', in: Charles Jencks and George Baird (eds.). *Meaning in Architecture* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, The Cresset Press, 1969); George Baird, *The Space of Appearance* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995); Giancarlo De Carlo, 'Architecture's Public', in: Peter Blundell Jones, Doina Petrescu and Jeremy Till (eds.) *Architecture and Participation* (Abingdon: Spon Press, 2007); Kenneth Frampton, 'The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects: a Reading of The Human Condition', in Kenneth Frampton, *Labour, Work, and Architecture. Collected Essays on Architecture and Design* (London, New York: Phaidon Press, 2002); Robert Gutman, *Architectural Practice: A Critical View* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998).

4. Baird, *The Space of Appearance,* 21.

5. Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 77.

6. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Why Arendt Matters* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2006), 82-84.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 2.

8. *Ibid.*, 52.

9. *Ibid.*, 167.

10. *Ibid.*, 173-174.

11. Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction into Politics', in: *Hannah Arendt, The Promise of Politics* (New York:

Schocken Books, 2005), 93.

12. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 73

13. *Ibid.*, 95; cf. Paul Holmquist, 'Towards an Ethical Technique: Reframing Architecture's "Critical Call" through Hannah Arendt,' in: *The Plan Journal,* 1 (1) 2016, 19.

14. Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt,* 41.

15. *Ibid.*, 41.

16. I of course refer here to Nicolaus Pevsner's famous distinction between architecture and building, as defined in the first paragraphs of his book on the history of European Architecture: Nicolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmonstworth: Penguin Books, 1968), 15.

17. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 167.

18. Every architect today will at this point hear an echo of Aldo Rossi's famous reading of the monumental buildings in a city as the carriers of (collective) memory. Aldo Rossi, *The Architecture of the City* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2007 [1962]).

19. Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance', in: Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York 2006 [1961], Penguin Books), 208-210.

20. Hannah Arendt, 'Culture and Politics', in: Hannah Arendt, *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 190.

21. See Herman Hertzberger, *The Schools of Herman Hertzberger* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2009).

22. This of course is perfectly understood by the Trump Administration and their attempt to 'Make Federal Buildings Beautiful Again' – although one can question whether the choice of narrative is appropriate. See: https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/14466-will-the-white-house-order-new-federal-architecture-to-be-classical (accessed March 12, 2020).

23. Bonnie Honig, *Public Things, Democracy in Disrepair* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 42.

25. Baird, *The Space of Appearance,* 22.

26. *Ibid.*, 22.

27. *Ibid.*, 285.

28. This of course is one of the reasons that design cannot be brought back to a formula: program briefs as well as the local circumstances require interpretation, and thus judgment from the designer. There are as many

answers to an assignment as there are architects (and even more, as also architects themselves often come up with multiple possibilities).

29. Seyla Benhabib, 'Judgment and the Moral Foundation of Politics in Hannah Arendt's Thought' In: Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (eds), *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics* (New York/ Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 194.

30. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

31. *Ibid.*, 67.

32. *Ibid.*, 42.

33. *Ibid.*, 42-43 (Arendt quotes Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, §40).

34. *Ibid.*, 43.

35. *Ibid.*, 72.

36. *Ibid.*, 43.

37. *Ibid.*, 67.