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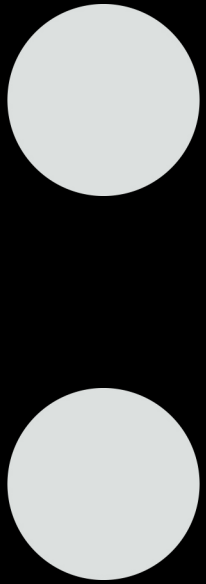

Why Write?

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to our readers

In a recent lecture at GSAPP, Jacques Herzog spoke of the inadequacies of writing within architecture: "You cannot say anything about architecture using words, unless it is a poem. A poem is a poem. It, in and of itself, is like a monument. A poem is much better than a theory about architecture because, like architecture, which has its own reality, its own medium, the word is the medium for literature or poetry."[1] Herzog clearly stakes his ground in regards to the so-called schism between the experience of architecture and its written account, yet we find ourselves staring curiously back, agilely transgressing the gaps only the blind choose to see.

As we desperately run from words to diagrams, models and drawings, writing, as both a text and an act, continues to infiltrate our discussions and mediate our design process. We have seen the way in which architects have historically used writing to control and mediate the critical reaction to their work, and therefore the image of the work, and therefore its experience, and therefore the architecture. Writing, and by extension the discursive practice of architecture, is inextricably linked to the experience of it.As architects we would be as foolish to swear off writing, as we would be to swear off the computer. Arguably this school's greatest asset is what lies between the pages beneath our seats, Avery library is what makes architecture Architecture.

The second installment of : attempts to understand this

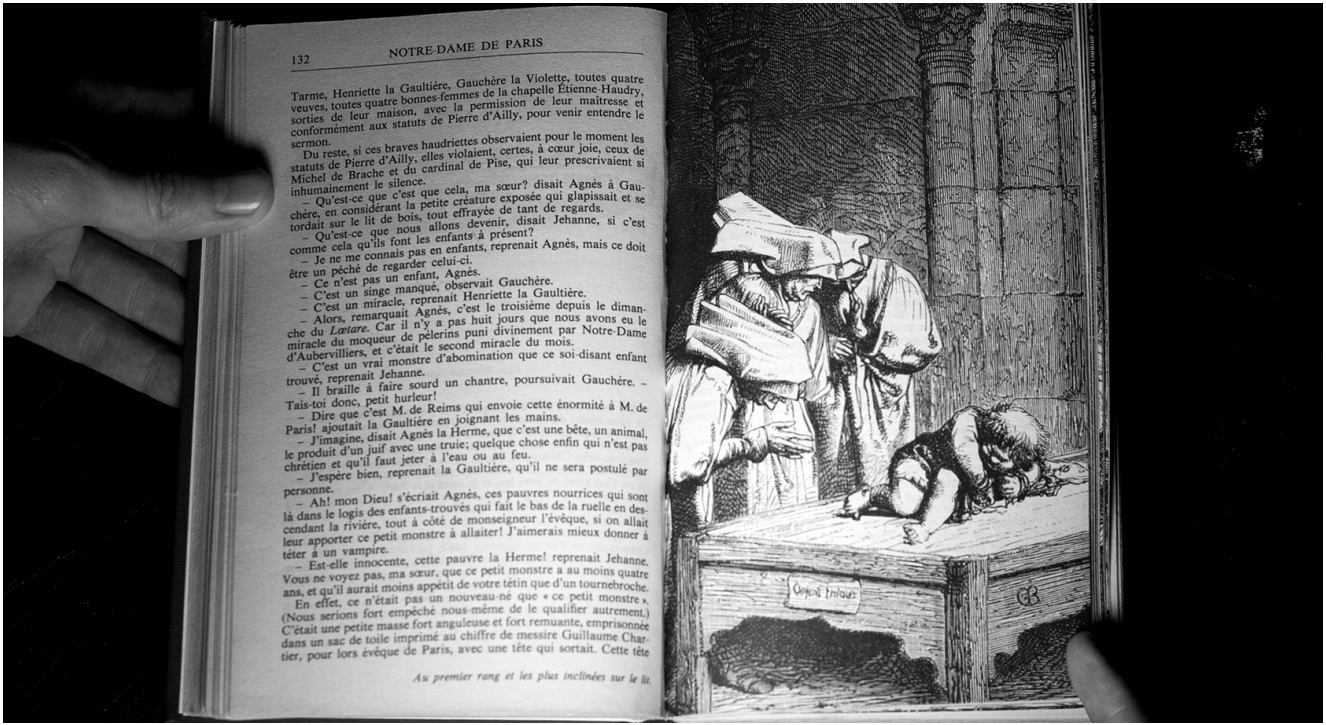
discursive relationship between architecture and writing. If an architect's primary task is to build, then why do we write? Who do we write for? What constitutes a history, theory or criticism of architecture? What other forms can this take? One inevitably encounters a vast array of literature, from ancient treatises to 20th century French theory, from the architectonic metaphors that philosophers use to the material circulation of printed matter. Our goal is not to establish a theory about the role of writing, but to understand our motivations to write.

?'s intention is in many ways to challenge the distinction between architecture as a material practice distinct from historical and theoretical discourse. To do this, our mode of operation is the dialogue – a form of responsive, two-directional engagement that is inherently different, and perhaps more valuable for our purposes, than writing a monological essay. The dialogue, be it a verbal or written interview, a conversation, email exchange or g-chat conversation, requires a level of acute preparation, and forces us to step back from our subjective motivations to critically analyze a work. The dialogue is the essential mode in which questions are posed, power redistributed, discoveries made, and contradictions revealed. To question is to create an opening in which the established edifice of knowledge is destabilized in order to see and think about the world in a new way. The transcribed, translated, written product hopes to regain the form of architectural critique, and reconstitute the written word's position in the production of architecture. The aim is to provoke and be provoked. Like a classic Socratic dialogue, Aporia is the destination.

We ask ourselves why write? We interview an interviewer about interviewing with Thomas de Monchaux. We examine the relationship between theory and architecture, and architecture and theory with Daniel Sherer and Yehuda Safran. We expose the limits and realities of writing in image with Jimenez Lai. We inquire about the difference between being literary and being literal with Matteo Pericoli. We discuss the role of the architectural critic with Paul Goldberger. We explore the cult of the architect with Mosette Broderick. We contemplate writing as a process, and writing as a medium with Mark Morris. We provide a caption on captions written by Christoph Kumpusch.

This printed document attempts to manifest the dialogue in a new way. With content also available online, it is performative rather than representational. Unfolded, it is cacophonic and sporadic. Each page and thereby each exchange is uprooted from its logical place in the overall conversation. Folded, the content may be read in sequence. But this linear reading of the text requires the reader to suspend, for just a moment, the haphazard flipping of the page. To flip, to fold, to rotate is to feel the discomfort that occurs when the mindless performance of reading is interrupted.

1 Herzog, Jacques. "Myths and Collaborations over Time." Columbia University. Avery Hall, New York, NY. 9 September 2013. Lecture.



Tarme, Henriette la Gaultière, Gauchère la Violette, toutes quatre veuves, toutes quatre bonnes-femmes de la chapelle Étienne-Haudry, sorties de leur maison, avec la permission de leur maîtresse et conformément aux statuts de Pierre d'Ailly, pour venir entendre le sermon.

Du reste, si ces braves haudriettes observaient pour le moment les statuts de Pierre d'Ailly, elles violaient, certes, à cœur joie, ceux de Michel de Brache et du cardinal de Pise, qui leur prescrivaient si inhumainement le silence.

– Qu'est-ce que c'est que cela, ma sœur? disait Agnès à Gauchère, en considérant la petite créature exposée qui glapissait et se tordait sur le lit de bois, tout effrayée de tant de regards.

– Qu'est-ce que nous allons devenir, disait Jehanne, si c'est comme cela qu'ils font les enfants à présent?

– Je ne me connais pas en enfants, reprenait Agnès, mais ce doit être un péché de regarder celui-ci.

– Ce n'est pas un enfant, Agnès.

– C'est un singe manqué, observait Gauchère.

– C'est un miracle, reprenait Henriette la Gaultière.

– Alors, remarquait Agnès, c'est le troisième depuis le dimanche du *Lætare*. Car il n'y a pas huit jours que nous avons eu le miracle du moqueur de pèlerins puni divinement par Notre-Dame d'Aubervilliers, et c'était le second miracle du mois.

– C'est un vrai monstre d'abomination que ce soi-disant enfant trouvé, reprenait Jehanne.

– Il braille à faire sourd un chantre, poursuivait Gauchère. – Tais-toi donc, petit hurleur!

– Dire que c'est M. de Reims qui envoie cette énormité à M. de Paris! ajoutait la Gaultière en joignant les mains.

– J'imagine, disait Agnès la Herme, que c'est une bête, un animal, le produit d'un juif avec une truie; quelque chose enfin qui n'est pas chrétien et qu'il faut jeter à l'eau ou au feu.

– J'espère bien, reprenait la Gaultière, qu'il ne sera postulé par personne.

– Ah! mon Dieu! s'écriait Agnès, ces pauvres nourrices qui sont là dans le logis des enfants-trouvés qui fait le bas de la ruelle en descendant la rivière, tout à côté de monseigneur l'évêque, si on allait leur apporter ce petit monstre à allaiter! J'aimerais mieux donner à téter à un vampire.

– Est-elle innocente, cette pauvre la Herme! reprenait Jehanne. Vous ne voyez pas, ma sœur, que ce petit monstre a au moins quatre ans, et qu'il aurait moins appétit de votre tétin que d'un tournebroche.

En effet, ce n'était pas un nouveau-né que « ce petit monstre ». (Nous serions fort empêché nous-même de le qualifier autrement.) C'était une petite masse fort anguleuse et fort remuante, emprisonnée dans un sac de toile imprimé au chiffre de messire Guillaume Chartier, pour lors évêque de Paris, avec une tête qui sortait. Cette tête

Au premier rang et les plus inclinées sur le lit.

there is no architecture without writing

Conversation recorded January 24th, 2013

C: Everyone loves to mention Victor Hugo and how writing killed architecture, and I think to some degree it's true. But it's not that writing killed architecture, it's that architecture changed. Now it's an interpretable art, it's not a representational art, it's not an immediate art like it was. Now we have an architecture that's so caught up in its own theoretical underpinnings that it requires a voice or explanation for it. Sometimes this voice comes from the architect and sometimes, more frequently, it comes from critics and theorists. When we look at a building today, does that building have a meaning in and of itself, or is that meaning something that's applied by Kenneth Frampton or Michael Kimmelman or whoever it is? The editor Cynthia Davidson recently suggested that written discourse provides architecture's intellectual wealth, that there is no architecture without writing.[1] So there's going to be a discussion, there's going to be a voice, there's going to be a theory, there's going to be a criticism that's applied to these buildings externally – and we should provide them for ourselves as well, this is a conversation we need to be taking part in.

SL: But you can't ever prescribe meaning absolutely and I don't know if you should. Any movie, book, song, theatre production is always criticized by people who have no part in it, and is understood differently from its original intention, and a building doesn't differ. And it's OK. You don't necessarily go

rotate + flip

to a ballet and need to read something about it to understand it.

C: But there is always going to be someone giving that explanation.

SL: There is, and that can deepen your understanding of it, but you don't need it. So a building that requires a written explanation, does that make it worse? Does that make it better?

IKL: Another way of framing it would be like Walter Benjamin did, which is that people experience architecture passively in a state of distraction. Much of your experience or understanding of space is formed through habit. So you walk around the city unaware and unconscious of your surroundings, whereas with art you go with the intention of actively trying to understand it. Even with film as you passively absorb images on a screen you are at every moment constantly trying to digest a narrative or something. There is intent to interpret at every second. So that might be the problem now, there's a lack of consciousness in the way people experience architecture. It lost its need to be understood.

W: Just because - for the passive architecture - people aren't listening doesn't mean it isn't saying something.

IKL: Yes of course.

LV: Well, that's the point, architecture molds minds passively. Architecture isn't made for those that want to go visit your project, its made for those who live there, that go there without thinking that they're going there.

SL: Like any good film though, it would cater to both audiences.

Q: The written word is an integral part to adding to these discussions that are going to be happening about our work once it leaves this building. And whether or not the opinions are the correct ones, or the right ones, or the final, or the definitive explanation is not important. The insistence is being a part of the conversation in the first place.

W: And its also not just our work, it's the work that comes into our domain, that we're influenced by. Everything that comes into our consumption, images, references, it's the discussions about those. The conversations are already happening, we're just trying to give them topics and shape.

SL: There's also the type of writing that's pure provocation, you write something just to get a reaction. But a manifesto is different, it is also a provocation, but more importantly it's a call to an action.

W: They're asking people to join, they're not just throwing something out and saying 'react to that.'

C: Something specific about publishing anything is that it is time stamped - it's released in 1986, or 1909 and that was that moment, after that time period it's always historical.

SL: It's immediately dated.

C: Or perhaps even irrelevant. Something about a paper is that as soon as it comes off the press or out of the printer it's old and unchanging.

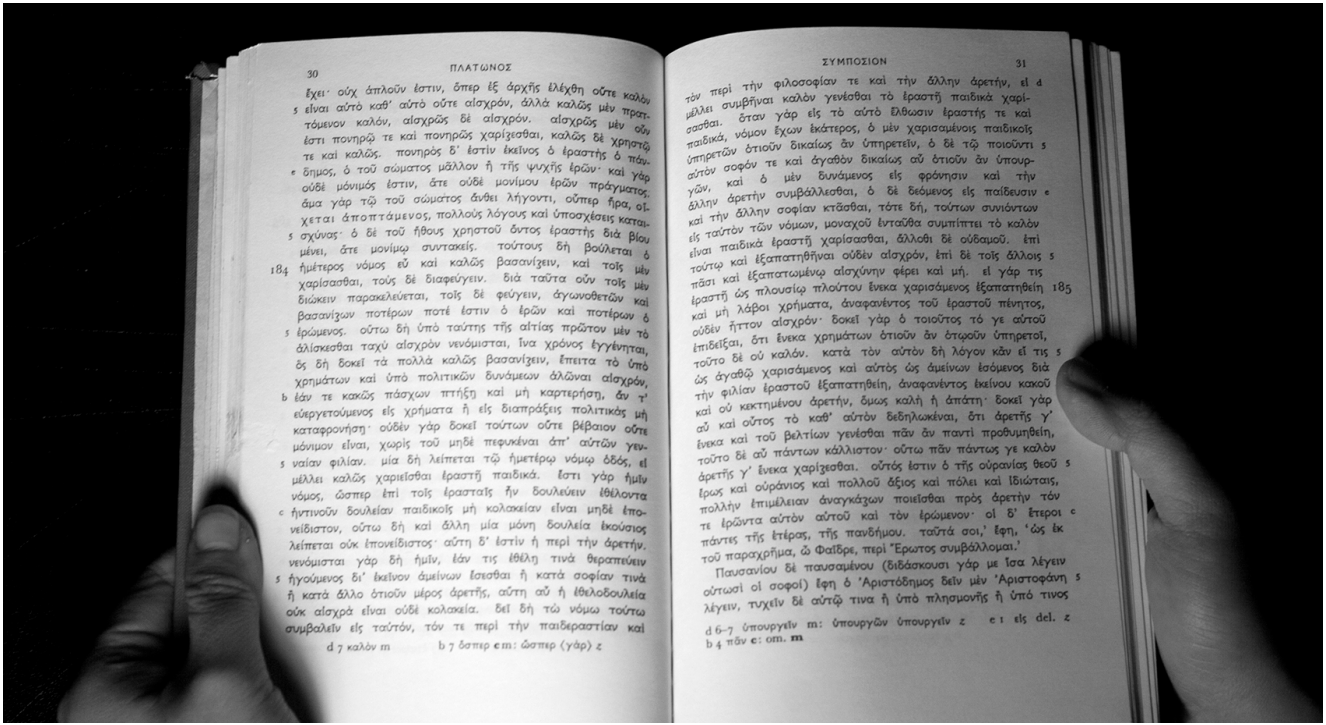
IKL: It's archival. You edit and constantly revise design like you do a paper – it becomes evidence – a way of marking that process. In the same way that we want to build things that exist, this is something tangible, it exists.

Q: We readily acknowledge both mediums [architecture and writing] as an evolution of an idea. Sketches, study models, red-lines for the one, drafts, revisions, editions for the other, yet each seems to ignore the other when both are needed for a more complete understanding of the moment. And this is not just historical, it's to understand the context while living it. We have at our disposal a vast range of languages to communicate, perhaps now more than ever, whether they are architectural, diagrammatic, written, spoken or filmed. For every class, project and idea there's a blog, website and youtube video, the infinite outlet of the internet is all welcoming.

infinite outlet of the internet is all welcoming.

LV: The drawing is not simply a step : the drawing is the project itself. We don't need to actually build it to be able to talk about it in terms of architecture. So that can be transferred, can words be architecture? Can printed matter be architecture even if it doesn't deal with the drawing itself or the building itself.

1 Davidson, Cynthia. "Writing Architecture: The Common Ground of the Printed Page." Biennale Architettura 2012. Venice, Italy. 26 September 2012.



30 ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ

ἔχει· οὐχ ἁπλοῦν ἐστιν, ὅπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐλέχθη οὔτε καλὸν
5 εἶναι αὐτὸ καθ' αὑτὸ οὔτε αἰσχρόν, ἀλλὰ καλῶς μὲν πραττόμενον καλόν, αἰσχρῶς δὲ αἰσχρόν. αἰσχρῶς μὲν οὖν
ἐστι πονηρῷ τε καὶ πονηρῶς χαρίζεσθαι, καλῶς δὲ χρηστῷ
τε καὶ καλῶς. πονηρὸς δ' ἐστὶν ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἐραστὴς ὁ πάν-
e δημος, ὁ τοῦ σώματος μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐρῶν· καὶ γὰρ
οὐδὲ μόνιμός ἐστιν, ἅτε οὐδὲ μονίμου ἐρῶν πράγματος.
ἅμα γὰρ τῷ τοῦ σώματος ἄνθει λήγοντι, οὗπερ ἥρα, οἰ-
5 χεται ἀποπτάμενος, πολλοὺς λόγους καὶ ὑποσχέσεις καται-
σχύνας· ὁ δὲ τοῦ ἤθους χρηστοῦ ὄντος ἐραστὴς διὰ βίου
μένει, ἅτε μονίμῳ συντακείς. τούτους δὴ βούλεται ὁ
184 ἡμέτερος νόμος εὖ καὶ καλῶς βασανίζειν, καὶ τοῖς μὲν
χαρίσασθαι, τοὺς δὲ διαφεύγειν. διὰ ταῦτα οὖν τοῖς μὲν
διώκειν παρακελεύεται, τοῖς δὲ φεύγειν, ἀγωνοθετῶν καὶ
βασανίζων ποτέρων ποτέ ἐστιν ὁ ἐρῶν καὶ ποτέρων ὁ
5 ἐρώμενος. οὕτω δὴ ὑπὸ ταύτης τῆς αἰτίας πρῶτον μὲν τὸ
ἁλίσκεσθαι ταχὺ αἰσχρὸν νενόμισται, ἵνα χρόνος ἐγγένηται,
ὃς δὴ δοκεῖ τὰ πολλὰ καλῶς βασανίζειν, ἔπειτα τὸ ὑπὸ
χρημάτων καὶ ὑπὸ πολιτικῶν δυνάμεων ἁλῶναι αἰσχρόν,
b ἐάν τε κακῶς πάσχων πτήξῃ καὶ μὴ καρτερήσῃ, ἂν τ'
εὐεργετούμενος εἰς χρήματα ἢ εἰς διαπράξεις πολιτικὰς μὴ
καταφρονήσῃ· οὐδὲν γὰρ δοκεῖ τούτων οὔτε βέβαιον οὔτε
μόνιμον εἶναι, χωρὶς τοῦ μηδὲ πεφυκέναι ἀπ' αὐτῶν γεν-
5 ναίαν φιλίαν. μία δὴ λείπεται τῷ ἡμετέρῳ νόμῳ ὁδός, εἰ
μέλλει καλῶς χαριεῖσθαι ἐραστῇ παιδικά. ἔστι γὰρ ἡμῖν
νόμος, ὥσπερ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐρασταῖς ἦν δουλεύειν ἑθέλοντα
c ἡντινοῦν δουλείαν παιδικοῖς μὴ κολακείαν εἶναι μηδὲ ἐπο-
νείδιστον, οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἄλλη μία μόνη δουλεία ἐκούσιος
λείπεται οὐκ ἐπονείδιστος· αὕτη δ' ἐστὶν ἡ περὶ τὴν ἀρετήν.
νενόμισται γὰρ δή ἡμῖν, ἐάν τις ἑθέλῃ τινὰ θεραπεύειν
5 ἡγούμενος δι' ἐκεῖνον ἀμείνων ἔσεσθαι ἢ κατὰ σοφίαν τινὰ
ἢ κατὰ ἄλλο ὁτιοῦν μέρος ἀρετῆς, αὕτη αὖ ἡ ἑθελοδουλεία
οὐκ αἰσχρὰ εἶναι οὐδὲ κολακεία. δεῖ δὴ τὼ νόμω τούτω
συμβαλεῖν εἰς ταὐτόν, τόν τε περὶ τὴν παιδεραστίαν καὶ

d 7 καλὸν m b 7 ὅσπερ **e** m: ὥσπερ (γὰρ) z

ΣΥΜΠΟΣΙΟΝ 31

τὸν περὶ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν τε καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετήν, εἰ d
μέλλει συμβῆναι καλὸν γενέσθαι τὸ ἐραστῇ παιδικὰ χαρί-
σασθαι. ὅταν γὰρ εἰς τὸ αὐτὸ ἔλθωσιν ἐραστής τε καὶ
παιδικά, νόμον ἔχων ἑκάτερος, ὁ μὲν χαρισαμένοις παιδικοῖς
ὑπηρετῶν ὁτιοῦν δικαίως ἂν ὑπηρετεῖν, ὁ δὲ τῷ ποιοῦντι
αὐτὸν σοφόν τε καὶ ἀγαθὸν δικαίως αὖ ὁτιοῦν ἂν ὑπουρ-
γῶν, καὶ ὁ μὲν δυνάμενος εἰς φρόνησιν καὶ τὴν
ἄλλην ἀρετὴν συμβάλλεσθαι, ὁ δὲ δεόμενος εἰς παίδευσιν e
καὶ τὴν ἄλλην σοφίαν κτᾶσθαι, τότε δή, τούτων συνιόντων
εἰς ταὐτὸν τῶν νόμων, μοναχοῦ ἐνταῦθα συμπίπτει τὸ καλὸν
εἶναι παιδικὰ ἐραστῇ χαρίσασθαι, ἄλλοθι δὲ οὐδαμοῦ. ἐπὶ
τούτῳ καὶ ἐξαπατηθῆναι οὐδὲν αἰσχρόν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις 5
πᾶσι καὶ ἐξαπατωμένῳ αἰσχύνην φέρει καὶ μή. εἰ γάρ τις
ἐραστῇ ὡς πλουσίῳ πλούτου ἕνεκα χαρισάμενος ἐξαπατηθείη 185
καὶ μὴ λάβοι χρήματα, ἀναφανέντος τοῦ ἐραστοῦ πένητος,
οὐδὲν ἧττον αἰσχρόν· δοκεῖ γάρ ὁ τοιοῦτος τό γε αὑτοῦ
ἐπιδεῖξαι, ὅτι ἕνεκα χρημάτων ὁτιοῦν ἂν ὑπωοῦν ὑπηρετοί,
τοῦτο δὲ οὐ καλόν. κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ λόγον κἂν εἴ τις 5
ὡς ἀγαθῷ χαρισάμενος καὶ αὐτὸς ὡς ἀμείνων ἰσόμενος διὰ
τὴν φιλίαν ἐραστοῦ ἐξαπατηθείη, ἀναφανέντος ἐκείνου κακοῦ
καὶ οὐ κεκτημένου ἀρετήν, ὅμως καλή ἡ ἀπάτη· δοκεῖ γὰρ
αὖ καὶ οὗτος τὸ καθ' αὑτὸν δεδηλωκέναι, ὅτι ἀρετῆς γ'
ἕνεκα καὶ τοῦ βελτίων γενέσθαι πᾶν ἂν παντὶ προθυμηθείη,
τοῦτο δὲ αὖ πάντων κάλλιστον· οὕτω πᾶν πάντως γε καλὸν
ἀρετῆς γ' ἕνεκα χαρίζεσθαι. οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τῆς οὐρανίας θεοῦ 5
ἔρως καὶ οὐράνιος καὶ πολλοῦ ἄξιος καὶ πόλει καὶ ἰδιώταις,
πολλὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἀναγκάζων ποιεῖσθαι πρὸς ἀρετὴν τόν
τε ἐρῶντα αὐτὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸν ἐρώμενον· οἱ δ' ἕτεροι e
πάντες τῆς ἑτέρας, τῆς πανδήμου. ταῦτά σοι,' ἔφη, 'ὦς ἐκ
τοῦ παραχρῆμα, ὦ Φαῖδρε, περὶ Ἔρωτος συμβάλλομαι.'

Παυσανίου δὲ παυσαμένου (διδάσκουσι γὰρ με Ἴσα λέγειν
οὕτωσί οἱ σοφοί) ἔφη ὁ Ἀριστόδημος δεῖν μὲν Ἀριστοφάνη 5
λέγειν, τυχεῖν δὲ αὐτῷ τινα ἢ ὑπὸ πλησμονῆς ἢ ὑπό τινος

d 6–7 ὑπουργεῖν m: ὑπουργῶν ὑπουργεῖν z e 1 εἰς del. z
b 4 πᾶν **e**: om. **m**

the silence was incredibly noisy

Thomas de Monchaux interviewed by LW. Recorded October 25th, 13

LW: Two weeks ago you told me that I should interview you. Why do you think so?

TdeM: Aw… that is a fun question.

[Silence]

TdeM: It's probably because it gives me a chance to interview you, which is more interesting for me. The dynamic in any architecture school is that the instructor gets more and more boring and the student gets more and more interesting, which is as it should be.

LW: Then why for this particular issue about writing?

TdeM: Partially because if I had to describe my own practice, whatever else it is, it is also a practice of writing: an awful lot of journalism and criticism, discursive work about architecture. I forgot who said that talking about music is like dancing about architecture. It is very inadequate and almost inappropriate to describe the spatial, immersive, phenomenological experience of architecture with this extremely limited medium of words. It is essentially ridiculous. Yet, as architects we are continually describing. Why do we relentlessly describe what is already there to be seen? There must be something about the very act of

rotate + flip

describing, the seemingly inappropriate or misfit relationship between language and spatial experience. I am not sure what it is, but I find the descriptive impulse that architects have, even to describe what's right in front of them, very interesting. Somehow it is incomplete unless it is also narrated to you. I am not sure why. Conversely, describing what is not there to be seen.

[Silence]

LW: What else?

TdeM: What else. You have to give me a little more to go on.

LW: Okay. In this issue, in the second installment of our "working document" in which we are exploring what : is and could be by doing, I am not only interested in the content or ideas being discussed, but also the forms and structures of these conversations. I am trying to understand why we are so interested in this kind of discourse and the different forms that these dialogues could take. Have you done a lot of interviews?

TdeM: Yes.

LW: What are your techniques in doing interviews?

TdM: Silence. Silence is the only technique. I once worked with an investigative journalist, not in architecture, but a very experienced reporter in the world of political affairs, scandals and diplomacy. I asked her the same question and that was her answer. Her primary tool was shutting up. If she had a very specific question that she needed answered, generally, the best way to get the answer was to never ask the question. The source knows what the question is, the source is not an idiot. You know what the question is, you are not an idiot. The method of discourse is to simply produce the silence into which the answer can be spoken. The journalist would have the phone to her ear and she would just say "uh huh." The source would think she was done questioning. She would let the silence stretch and stretch, beyond awkward and into a terrifying abyss. At this point the source would answer the unspoken question because the silence had become too irresistible.

LW: If the goal is to understand an idea or someone's work, what do you think the roles of the interviewer and the interviewee are?

[Silence]

TdeM: In some ways the objectives are very much opposed. I think, consciously or not, the interviewee wants to say what he or she has said before. Whereas the interviewer wants the interviewee to say something that he or she has never said before or never even thought about before. You have this

rivalry between perfect repetition and absolute newness. Both of which are kind of awful.

LW: Uh huh.

TdeM: And the irony is that both also want the other thing. The interviewer likes repetition, because it produces a very well articulated result. The interviewee also, consciously or not, desires some kind of authentic discovery within the ritual. This is partly why you stage a ritual, so that you can be disrupted. Somewhere between these conscious and unconscious desires for perfect repetition and perfect disruption is a disturbance. That disturbance is probably the substance of the best interviews.

LW: As someone who is being interviewed right now, what have you done to prepare for this interview? Or have you prepared at all?

TdM: I think my main preparation was having the flu and losing my voice.

LW: Okay…

TdeM: And it enabled me to endlessly delay this conversation. Even within the interview itself, the primary tool is delay. You are delaying my ability to speak by asking a question, and I am waiting for you. And you are waiting for me to either say something interesting or to shut the hell up so that you can bend our conversation back to some other objective. So, yes, my main preparation was losing my voice and delaying.

LW: What is it supposed to do to the person interviewing you?

TdeM: That's a good question.

[Silence]

TdeM: Part of it is that I am choosing my words even more carefully than I normally would because I know and I only have so many of them to speak before I run out of voice again and my flu takes over. I also think that every conversation that happens inside an architectural school, like the one we are having now, is somehow already a desk crit. It's the essential ritual, the only thing we do here. We have final reviews in order to have desk crits before them, and we have assignments in order to have desk crits after them. In some mysterious way I am giving you a desk crit now. What distinguishes a desk crit from an interview? Basically that's an interview, right?

LW: That's exactly what I was going to ask!

TdeM: Good! I am glad I stopped you from asking. Generally students suspect the instructor has the answer and is

withholding it. Like the investigative journalist, he or she is trying very skillfully to extract the answers. But if the instructor is doing a good job, the instructor either has the answers and withholds them, or, even better, the instructor sincerely does not know the answer to the question and expects the answers to emerge from the conversation. There is this dynamic of suspicion and withholding.

LW: I would like to go back to the question of questions. What we have learned from : so far is that posing a question, especially a good one, requires almost as much effort and research as writing a text. Embedded in a question are layers and layers of anticipation for possible directions that the conversation would go. It is almost like drawing an imaginary road map. I am wondering if one could pose a question without asking a question. Also, is it possible to ask a question without some hypothesis already at work?

TdeM: I am sincerely not sure.

[Silence]

TdeM: Like I said before, everyone generally knows what the questions are. In many ways the key question does not have to be asked, even if you are just talking around it. You could also ask a question by giving the interviewee a way of hearing what they said, as simple as reading back the last sentence they just said…

LW: Reading back the last sentence they just said.

TdeM: Yes, just like that— to create this moment of repetition, reproduction, distortion and translation. The interviewee would correct you and therefore correct himself or herself. The other strategy I have, unless the circumstance requires it, is that I never use one of those.

[Pointing to the recorder]

LW: Really?

TdM: Never use a recorder, if you can. Something about the act of continually writing and taking notes generates energy for the conversation in a mysterious way that I cannot fully explain. The same way taking a photo of something means you haven't seen it, recording a conversation means you haven't heard it. The act of continuous note taking is an essential part of interview practice, quite apart from the fact that it creates a document.

LW: But what was your final product? Was it a transcript?

TdeM: Yes, one makes a transcript from the short hand notes. The interviews that I record are the worst ones.

LW: Okay, maybe I will try next time. This brings me to another question that I want to discuss with you: what is the relationship between spoken and written words? There might be a paradox, if you will, in this issue because while it is about writing, no one really writes for the publication in the narrow sense of the word, excluding perhaps one or two contributions. But :'s main mode of operation is the conversation, a format that we cherish. We read, then talk to people, record these conversations and then transcribe them so that they can be circulated in printed matter to be read. I wonder to what extent can we call it writing. When does writing start in this case?

TdeM: I think in this particular building [gestures around at Avery Hall], in this particular century, we can stipulate that there is no such thing as writing narrowly understood. There is nothing that is not writing—perhaps we can say that. The written word is inherently different than the spoken one. This difference of form is so acute that it becomes a difference in content. I am not sure what that difference is.

[Silence]

TdeM: I am circling back to your fundamental question, why write? For architects writing is the ultimate disappointment. If you can't build, you draw; if you can't draw, you speak; if you can't speak, you write.

LW: So writing is an architect's ultimate disappointment…

TdeM: I suspect so. It is what we start doing when we can't do anything else. This is just a theory. There is something about being an architect that makes the act of speech inherently disappointing. Like the best pin-up presentation is the one that requires you to say nothing, because the work is so self-evident that any articulation would be redundant. There are some architects who cultivate silence, say as little as possible, as the closest proximity to apparent wisdom.

LW: Uh huh.

TdeM: Someone once told me about the magic of the Mies van der Rohe desk crit, in which he— late Mies at IIT in America, in his three-piece suit and smoking his cigar— would lumber to your desk with his stool and look at your work and just breathe. You would imagine what he was thinking, trying so hard to evaluate your work through his eyes. The silence was incredibly noisy. And then he would get up and leave without saying a word.

LW: To what extent do you think that is productive?

TdeM: It helps to be Mies van der Rohe, to have a celebrated body of work that is much spoken about. It also helps to have a body of work that has the virtue of silence.

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LW: Almost nothing.

TdeM: It's almost nothing, very still.

LW: But it also presupposes that the student already knows what is significant in the critic's work and that he or she understands what architecture is about.

TdeM: Let's tell my other favorite teaching story, in part because it totally contradicts what I just said. My brother, who studied architecture a few years ahead of me, took the last studio co-taught by Michael Graves and Peter Eisenman. The students were generally divided into Team Tuscany and Team Zig-zag, with a familiarity, fascination, or frustration with the formal language of one of those two architects. What I loved about the discourse in the studio was that if you read the transcript of the reviews and pin-ups you would never know whether the work on the wall was a row of Tuscan columns or an explosion of the zig-zag. Words like axial or oblique or module or hierarchy. These two designers had such a robust yet precise common language that it could be applied equally to both formal modes. The language was so extraordinarily particular, coming from twenty years of shared discourse, that it was equally tuned to both modes, like a skeleton key that fits both locks.

LW: That also speaks to the very limits of language as well.

TdeM: Absolutely. I think in some ways it was what the studio was about: the limits of language. If you told them that Michael Graves would laugh at you and Peter Eisenman would say, "right on!" Their modes of teaching were both extraordinarily articulate and extraordinarily quiet.

LW: Speaking of two critics teaching together and having conversations. What do you think the difference is between a conversation and an interview?

[Silence]

TdeM: My inclination is to give you a Foucauldian answer: a difference of power. Generally, a conversation is a peer-to-peer experience whereas an interview, within the narrow definition of power, presents a disparity between two participants. You are the president of the United States and I am the reporter…

LW: Or vice versa.

TdeM: Or vice versa. Who actually has the power? If we are following Foucault, every conversation is an interview, because every relationship is related to power. Therefore there is no difference.

[Silence]

TdeM: Also, pleasure: an interview does not have to be pleasurable, while perhaps everyone assumes a conversation should be a pleasure—an aesthetic pleasure, a social pleasure. On the other hand, there is an incredible camaraderie that comes from shared unpleasantness. Something both participants must endure, as we are enduring here…

LW: Well, I am doing it with much pleasure.

TdeM: Good. Me too! I think the other answer I can give you is a very Romantic and old-fashioned one: our oldest philosophical texts are dialogues. There is some ancient relationship between conversation and truth.

LW: Exactly. Dia-logos: not logos as such, but one that is passing through, cutting across.

TdeM: In all those dialogues there is always the idiot: the silly dummy who says, "of course the sun is made of cheese." I remember falling in love with those guys, with the wise-fools, the believers, the straw men. The more you read the dialogue the more you suspect it is those characters who have the answers.

LW: My favorite is Aristophane.

TdeM: What do you like about him?

LW: In my mind there is this moment in the Symposium when Aristophane has unstoppable hiccups and can't speak at all. In that scene he is completely silent other than having the hiccups, and he has to delay his speech.

TdeM: Silence and hiccups. Perfect.

terer Umstand ein wahres Glück war für die Entwicklung der Physik. War diese Formel richtig, so erlaubte sie mit Hilfe der Maxwell'schen Theorie die Berechnung der mittleren Energie E eines in dem Strahlungsfelde befindlichen quasi-monochromatischen Oszillators:

$$E = \frac{h\nu}{exp(h\nu/kT) - 1}$$

Planck zog es vor zu versuchen, diese letztere Grösse theoretisch zu berechnen. Bei diesem Bestreben half zunächst die Thermodynamik nicht mehr, und ebensowenig die Maxwell'sche Theorie. Was nun an dieser Formel ungemein ermutigend war, war folgender Umstand. Sie lieferte für hohe Werte der Temperatur (bei festem ν) den Ausdruck

$$E = kT.$$

Es ist dies derselbe Ausdruck, den die kinetische Gastheorie für die mittlere Energie eines in einer Dimension elastisch schwingungsfähigen Massenpunktes liefert. Diese liefert nämlich

$$E = (R/N)T,$$

wobei R die Konstante der Gasgleichung und N die Anzahl der Moleküle im Grammmolekül bedeutet, welche Konstante die absolute Grösse des Atoms ausdrückt. Die Gleichsetzung beider Ausdrücke liefert

$$N = R/k.$$

Die eine Konstante der Planck'schen Formel liefert also exakt die wahre Grösse des Atoms. Der Zahlenwert stimmte befriedigend überein mit den allerdings wenig genauen Bestimmungen von N mit Hilfe der kinetischen Gastheorie.

Dies war ein grosser Erfolg, den Planck klar erkannte. Die Sache hat aber eine bedenkliche Kehrseite, die Planck zunächst glücklicher Weise übersah. Die Ueberlegung verlangt nämlich, das die Beziehung $E = kT$ auch für kleine Temperaturen gelten müsse. Dann aber wäre es aus mit der Planck'schen Formel und mit der Konstante h. Die richtige Konsequenz aus der bestehenden Theorie wäre also gewesen: Die mittlere

tunate for the development of physics. If this formula was correct, it permitted, with the aid of Maxwell's theory, the calculation of the average energy E of a quasi-monochromatic oscillator within the field of radiation:

$$E = \frac{h\nu}{exp(h\nu/kT) - 1}$$

Planck preferred to attempt calculating this latter magnitude theoretically. In this effort, thermodynamics, for the time being, proved no longer helpful, and neither did Maxwell's theory. The following circumstance was unusually encouraging in this formula. For high temperatures (with a fixed ν) it yielded the expression

$$E = kT.$$

This is the same expression as the kinetic theory of gases yields for the average energy of a mass-point which is capable of oscillating elastically in one dimension. For in kinetic gas theory one gets

$$E = (R/N)T,$$

whereby R means the constant of the equation of state of a gas and N the number of molecules per mol, from which constant one can compute the absolute size of the atom. Putting these two expressions equal to each other one gets

$$N = R/k.$$

The one constant of Planck's formula consequently furnishes exactly the correct size of the atom. The numerical value agreed satisfactorily with the determinations of N by means of kinetic gas theory, even though these latter were not very accurate.

This was a great success, which Planck clearly recognized. But the matter has a serious drawback, which Planck fortunately overlooked at first. For the same considerations demand in fact that the relation $E = kT$ would also have to be valid for low temperatures. In that case, however, it would be all over with Planck's formula and with the constant h. From the existing theory, therefore, the correct conclusion would have

nothing more human than language

Yehuda Safran and Daniel Sherer in conversation. Moderated by IKL and LV. Recorded October 7th, 2013

IKL: We're going to pose a provocation and then have you both discuss it.

LV: Let us start with this statement: "there is no architecture without writing." This statement can be broken down into two parts. First, architecture by itself is unintelligible and therefore requires a supplementary medium through which it can manifest and be understood. Second, it assumes that architecture is a thing to be written— it needs an author.

IKL: We are especially interested in this relationship between theory and practice and between theory and writing; theory as not just something applied to form. Is there theory without writing? And if so, what other forms can it take?

DS: In class today, we talked about the phenomenon of the semiliterate and non-literate architect in the Renaissance, who could however be extremely "literate" and eloquent through a drawing or a model. So you could say that architectural writing or language is in the representational conventions of architecture itself and it doesn't need a supplement. On the other hand, there are other aspects, which are equally important, such as the Vitruvian idea that there is a theory before practice. However, even Vitruvius was a military

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engineer who drew on his own empirical background. So, I prefer to emphasize that practice is in a certain sense prior to theory. After which a dialectic is set up. Therefore writing, drawing and building are all caught up in a complementary cycle. You can enter that cycle at any point. It is true though that over the course of architectural history it would be rare to find as erudite a theorist as Vitruvius, who supposedly was not a very good architect. Alberti, whose architecture is at best experimental and fragmentary, was the most theoretical writer. In the modern period, Mies wrote very little. What he wrote was simply a reflection of his practice. He was very terse. Corbusier was more like Alberti. He's an extraordinary writer— literary and theoretical. But really, it was his practice which drove him.

LV: So you're saying Le Corbusier's theory didn't drive…

DS: This touches on something Jean-Louis Cohen brings up in the new translation of *Vers Une Architecture.* He says that Corbusier's theoretical and written production is more famous than his actual built work. I thought to myself, this is a counterfactual argument. We can't imagine Le Corbusier just as a theorist. That's absurd. And do you remember what Leonardo said? He said theory and practice are two legs and they walk together… Yehuda, what do you think?

YS: I think there is a discomfort about the relationship between theory and practice or writing. It is like physics, which up until the 20th century was known as physics, and then beginning in the 20th century, there was something called…

DS+YS: Theoretical physics.

YS: And very fast, theoretical physics became more important, scientifically speaking. Theoretically, the breakthroughs since Einstein were not made in a laboratory but in your head, in thinking and writing…

DS: So it is more of a conceptual approach…

YS: Einstein was not a great writer, but he wrote. What he wrote made more of an impact then anything else. And in fact, some people didn't accept that the origin of physics is made in the mind and writing. For example, the slightly older Ernst Mach, rejected the interpretation of the atoms as the real structure of matter in the name of empirical evidence. Unfortunately he died before the empirical evidence came through fifteen years later when Eric Chaisson, the English astronomer, went to small island opposite Brazil and observed deviation of light beams in celestial bodies close enough to the sun to have visible effects.

DS: So you are saying the empirical proof of Einstein's theories gave it more credence…

YS: For ordinary people…

DS: Yea, but not for Einstein.

YS: He couldn't care less… Concerning your other question, it has been said that there is nothing more human than language. How could there be something that addresses itself to human issues without language? It's inconceivable. The role we play in a particular time in a particular world is varied, but you cannot doubt the singular importance of words. As the poet says, it is not enough to do something. You need someone who will put it into words.

DS: Yes.

YS: Even Adam in the Old Testament is given a task of naming all the animals.

DS: This brings up another important point about language and architecture. This is the origin of crisis, the origin of the hired or operative critic who has to be paid to praise, when in fact the architect could also be a theoretical animal naming himself in a way.

YS: Like Palladio…

DS: Palladio is a good example. Le Corbusier, too, wrote about himself under a pseudonym…

YS: Palladio had done his work before making his criticism.

DS: And then he altered his work to make it look good, "idealizing" it in his treatise.

YS: There was the word "promotion." You see, it is very complicated because some people didn't write much, but were surrounded by people who did write and speak… for example Mies van der Rohe.

DS: Great example.

YS: His first client was a philosopher, Alois Riehl, and he was the authority in Berlin on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Mies was invited to supper regularly because, like Riehl, he had no children of his own. At these dinners he met people like Heinrich Wolfflin, and in fact, Wolfflin was engaged to a young woman and Mies stole her from him…

DS: Well, the young lady sounded like she was willing…

YS: Other people like Robert Musil, who was a student of Ernst Mach, came to these dinners. So Mies did not write very much, but he was fully engaged with people of letters.

DS: I also wanted to address another aspect of your question. You talk about the authorial identity, however identity is not a good word — I would rather say the status of the author. The architect as an author. I would say you can be an author without having written in two dimensions. Yehuda used to study under a professor of architectural history and theory named Joseph Rykwert. He wrote two texts in the 70's that were very intriguing. One is called "On Adam's House in Paradise," which is about the obsession with origins, primitivism, etc. The other is called "The Idea of a Town," which is a very important book. He also wrote a small essay in the 80s called, "On the Oral Transmission of Architectural Theory." The essay discusses how architectural theory could be transmitted orally in the medieval, classical and even the Renaissance period without any writing. In a way, you could be the author of a discourse without writing.

YS: You could say that any tradition on any subject is both written and oral.

LV: I would say that when the spoken word is the dominant mode of transmitting an idea, the single author becomes obsolete.

DS: No, I disagree. Vico pointed out, in the *New Science* of 1744, that the fact that Homer sang doesn't mean he is not an author. It is a collective authorship. It's strengthened and unified, not dispersed. The Greek imagination is transmitted orally and then it is written down in a later period. But the fact that it is written down is almost a contingency. Now if you want to go into a Derridian argument, which is based upon the opposition between phonocentrism versus logocentrism, then that's a different story. But I am more of a Viconian. I dare say you are too. You are more interested in Vico, Yehuda, or am I overstating the case?

YS: Derrida is not to be compared with Vico.

DS: No, I am talking about the oral versus the written.

YS: That Derrida objected to the oral and insisted that there is only the written is an exaggeration.

DS: Total exaggeration. He would say, of course, that we are exaggerating the Viconian side.

YS: He probably arrived at this point in despair. The despair was to make a place for himself.

DS: There is the idea in the era of the structuralism and post-structuralism— even though I don't like the term post-structuralism because it's too general and lumps everyone together— the death of the author doesn't mean that the author dies as such. You have a discourse that lives.

YS: It's more complicated because the big turning point is the status of rational thinking— the demise of structuralism as a framework.

DS: As a paradigm.

YS: Rationality has a very complicated trajectory. You can imagine that in the early 20th century, it became even more complicated and doubtful. One of the most important books, Adorno and Horkeimer's…

DS: *Dialektik der Aufklärung.*

YS: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* precisely brings out the dark side of this problem. People who did the most terrible things were not people who dislike reason, nor did they like the possibility of losing instrumental knowledge. When knowledge becomes so instrumentaI, the crisis ensues. I mean, think of the reaction, for example, of the German scientist who did not produce the atomic bomb while they could have. When they were rounded up at the end of the war in a farmhouse in northern England, north of Cambridge, they heard of the bomb on the radio and they were in tears on the floor. They said to each other, " how is it possible that our good friends in America made it when we didn't?" Very few physicists, like Wolfgang Pauli for example, called the physicists who participated in the Manhattan project "the gangsters." Why am I saying this? It is because instrumental knowledge was in terrible crisis in the 20th century. Not just conceptual, but a human, and hence also an existential crisis.

DS: Ethical.

YS: Yes, an ethical crisis. It's profound, and that is why the question of authority comes up and why the question of hermeneutics as a system of interpretation comes up for questioning. As Hans Georg Gadamer famously asked, "*was ist Hermeneutik?*" What is the theory of interpretation? Hans Robert Jauss answered this question by stating "hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation in the absence of authority."

DS: Even though he became a Nazi.

YS: That's what he did as a young man. But my point is that in the foreground of your question is also the question of authority.

DS: And the crisis of rationality.

YS: The use of language to establish authority is very common I would say.

DS: That makes perfect sense. I agree with that. On the other hand, when you use the term "demise of reason," I wouldn't

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say reason has undergone demise, I would say it has undergone a crisis. The Adorno-Horkeimer argument would say that reason is not over with. It is not dead. It has just gone under a terrible eclipse.

YS: No, reason cannot die. Just as human beings are capable of language they are capable of reason.

DS: But as to your reading of the degradation of reason through its reduction to instrumental rationality as opposed to the relation to ethical rationality— I totally agree with that.

YS: I think that what we have is a kind of rational insight. I think that every human being is born with a rational insight.

DS: A potential for it.

[Enters Kenneth Frampton]

KF: I like that!

D: Oh Ken! Come sit down and have a talk with us.

KF: I'm late! I'm late!

YS: It is like *Alice in Wonderland*, "I am late."

[Exits Kenneth Frampton]

DS: He is totally the march hare! That means I must be Alice and you must be the Red Queen. Off with his head! Isn't it true that Martin Luther said that reason is a whore, she would give herself to any argument.

YS: Martin Luther understood early on that the reason is whore. Well, also in *Alice in Wonderland*, who tells Alice that if you pay a word extra…? And many architects tried to engage other people, such as writers and patrons, to make their argument for them. And some were doing it outright explicitly and some were doing it more discreetly. Everyone is engaged in this kind of war of attrition. Every architect wants his position, or lack of it, to be pronounced by people who count. And everyone knows, for example, that Louis Kahn would never have had the position at Yale without…

DS: Without Vincent Scully.

YS: And some people did both, like Philip Johnson.

DS: Tafuri comes into this discussion in many ways. Tafuri said you could have an architectural discourse that is neither mere apologetics nor militancy nor operative criticism, you could have one that engages a dialectic between critical participation and historical detachment. So, as a historian you could have

fold

some sort of detachment from the work, without ever achieving complete objectivity, and as a critic you could be closer to fighting for the work. You could be both operative in one sense and scholarly in another. And this is what is so often forgotten nowadays; that you could only be like Luther's whore of reason in the service of an instrumentality or there's nothing else. But actually Tafuri thought there were different levels.

YS: Pierre Hadot said that thinking is never without motivation. The quality of a man's thought is determined by his motivation, not by the technicalities of his abilities. There are many people who do not really think or their thinking is a disaster, like the young Norberg-Schulz. Also the people who became Nazis or Fascists— some of them were perfectly capable of thinking.

DS: Heidegger is a good example.

YS: Except that Heidegger restricted his thought to his own inner dialogue. He thought that everything was given to him directly by the god. Being itself spoke to him.

DS: A good Catholic.

YS: No surprise that sometimes he reached a completely false conclusion. But my point is that it is very important to appreciate that thinking, like architecture, is not just a technicality; it is not just that you can think, that you can design…

DS: It's your motivations.

YS: Right. What drives you sometimes determines the quality more than the ability to execute this or that.

DS: Architecture is certainly a form of thought. But it is a different form of thought than literature, a different form of thought than music. For instance, for Beethoven, you don't read his letters or theoretical writings because there are no theoretical writings, you *listen* to Beethoven. Or play it. His thought is in his music. A work of art is its own justification.

DS: Right. I think what you said about motivation is profoundly correct and convincing. Look at Foucault, all of his work, all that multifarious critical and theoretical and historical work, but for what? For political purpose. It was always militantly political at some level to expose the capillary workings of power at every level. And it is not engagement in the existentialist sense, he was certainly not complicit with that tendency in any way. In fact, he was opposed to Sartre. It was critical resistance through the mobilization of subjugated forms of knowledge. By the way, LEFT architects see themselves as partly coming out of the Foucauldian motivation. They use architecture in an ironic way, sometimes a serious way, to expose relations of power. In some sense they are a left version of Rem Koolhaas. Rem himself, by the way, was interested in Foucault and Tafuri

and turned their theories into apologetics for the existing world, neutralizing them. He actually met Foucault at Cornell in the 1970s.

YS: Took drugs with him.

DS: And look at the result! This idea is very clear, while you need an intention, you can't reduce architecture or any art form or any discourse to intention, but it's there. We need intention and motivation, we need to know the direction that you're going, even if it is unconscious that comes to light in the process of making a project. Don't you think?

YS: Yea, though I think there are cases where it is important not to. Someone like Luis Barragan in Mexico City. It was politically, humanly…

DS: A horror…

YS: It must have been, I never met him…

DS: Reactionary…

YS: But I knew from people who did, he was a reactionary…

DS: Misogynist.

YS: Misogynist…

DS: Hierarchical.

YS: Terrible man but he made wonderful beautiful architecture.

DS: There are a lot of people who could be seen as terrible human beings but make marvelous architecture. I am not saying Frank Lloyd Wright was a terrible human being, but he was a complex human being. He ran off with a client's wife, causing a lot of troubles. I don't advise you as an architect to do that.

YS: But, listen, the point isn't about…

DS: Anecdotes.

YS: The point is that, in the case of Frank Lloyd Wright, he was very much affected by certain writings…

DS: John Ruskin?

YS: Ruskin early on, but through one of his wives Wright became interested in feminism and German Romanticism. Yes, Frank Lloyd Wright probably got it from her! So the benefit from writing was multiple. And the next one, Olga, was a follower of the mystic Gurdjief. So, again you have language.

Your subject is actually…

DS: Immense.

YS: Very large.

DS: Also I think Frank Lloyd Wright may have had contact with the ideas of Gottfried Semper through the office of…

YS: Dankmar Adler. Semper is very good example of what we're discussing because his architecture is really unfortunate: the Dresden Oper, ETH's Hauptgebäude in Zurich. He was very much a historicist…

DS: A neo-historicist.

YS: But as a theoretician…

DS: Surely pivotal.

YS: He was absolutely amazing.

DS: One of the most important ever! He had a huge impact indirectly on Frank Lloyd Wright.

YS: So you could say those with the most developed theoretical insight in architecture were not the best architects.

DS: Those who built nothing have a huge impact on architecture. Like Piranesi, who built one renovation, Santa Maria del Priorato on the Aventine Hill in Rome, has a huge impact, albeit delayed, on the French, and then on the Russians avant-gardists in the 20th century.

YS: Even Eisenstein's technique of the montage is from Piranesi.

DS: He was trained as an architect, his father was an architect.

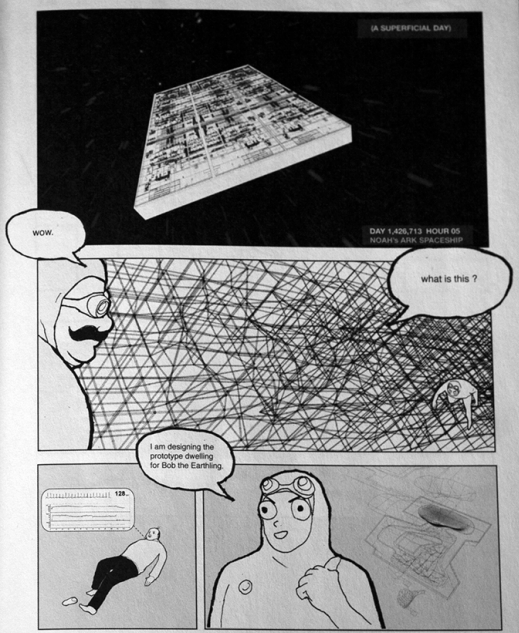
YS: And then you have the enormous topic of architecture and cinema.

DS: But that is another story, to be dealt with on another occasion.

YS: The effect of cinema on architecture is vast, and I would say it's another form of writing if you like.

On Subjectivity

Architecture is a practice that should not be evaluated with proof, but rather on the articulation of one's preferences. Parameters, logic, systems, indices, or any gauge that is quantifiable is a type of tyranny that reduces passion or will to a checklist. On the contrary, the value of architecture appears when architects can exercise qualitative choices. "I did it because I like it" should be encouraged, and more importantly, "I like it because..."



wander in possible wonders

Jimenez Lai in response to G. Exhcanged October 15th, 2013

G: For your writing technique, you have chosen the architecture parable as the method for the dissemination of your ideas on architecture rather than the traditional model of the essay/ treatise. This idea of conveying the architectural morals of the author into the short story is part of a rich history dating back to Laugier and into the twentieth century with the parables of Loos. What advantages have you found in the use of narrative as a construct into which architectural ideas and commentary are embedded?

JL: The significance of theory is extremely important in the production of discourse. However, theory is not fact – it is a very well articulated expert opinion on a subject matter. The word I would like to emphasize here is opinion – not dogmatic, not factual – but a very thoughtful opinion. In other words, the material of language that theory operates around is a subjective voice. The representation of the subjective voice can take many forms, but in my earlier years I took on storytelling because I saw it as the skeletal work that an amateur as myself (at the time) could begin to build my thoughts upon.

G: As an architect whose reputation has been built just as much upon the intersection between narrative and illustration as on built work, how does an idea develop? What is the relationship between narrative and the physical artifact during the creative

process? Which comes first? Similarly, at a more focused scale, do the words come before the images or vice versa?

JL: I am a believer of spirit of the times, and I am not a subscriber of intuition. In other words, it is my opinion that ideas do not come from thin air – it is an accumulative archive that informs a reflexive action towards the construction of cultural affairs. Now, this work is very difficult, as it requires an ongoing diligence in the practice of remaining inquisitive as well as digesting the consumed matters. In a round about way, I am trying to express that this thought process is very fluid (built work, drawings, text, so forth), but the core of its embankments always circles around the range of thoughts that exist in the universe of the intelligence that this world seem to evidence.

G: In Citizens of No Place, the stories appear to take place in a hypothetical future with a degree of independence from the real world. What is your work's relationship with reality? In what ways are the time, settings, and characters of these stories grounded in reality?

JL: My relationship with reality is an affinity towards plurality. In some ways, I do not think my work is futuristic — I think my work attempts to construct the alternate realities that allow myself the freedom and space to reflect upon our current realities. Perhaps a revisit to the etymology of the word utopia is very useful here. I am (and have always been) talking about utopia— but not the misconceived meaning of ideal place, but rather its Greek root no place— an alternate reality that alleviates pressures of obligatory assignments, and frees our minds to wander into possible wonders that our current reality can find joy and satisfaction in.

G: I have always been impressed with graphic novel artist's ability and freedom to construct the full environment around the events, moods, and atmospheres of a specific narrative. This is a freedom granted by the medium that architects typically do not have. As someone who works in between these two mediums, how do you control the creation of your own site? What are the limits you placed upon yourself in the creation of these worlds? As an architect is there an obligation to maintain a degree of reality? As a graphic novelist is there a certain disconnect necessary to uphold the format?

JL: To engage this thought, I would first proclaim that I am first and foremost interested in buildings, and this is why I signed up for this profession. The byproduct of the graphic novel was a relationship I wanted to form with my predecessors I looked up to, as the practice of paper architecture (often in the form of drawing) frequently took an earlier arrival than that actual built works. While I very much appreciate the observation of the environments I was trying to construct, I feel a lack of satisfaction in the reality that paper space offers.

It is also interesting you referred to this medium as a site – I resonate with this thought. If No Place is a site, it is a city that one might find the lingering warmth a fire that philosophy and sociology once roared rampant. It is a place where a qualitative act always is valued more than quantitative proliferation.

G: In the Citizens of No Place universe, the characters exist in a subjective relationship to the protagonism of the architecture that surrounds them. In this universe, architecture's ability to affect the occupants that interact with it is magnified and made explicit. Is this done as a hypothesis that architecture is indeed fully capable of these effects in our actual world, or as a device that promotes the conversations between the characters within the stories that always appear to be hyper-aware of their spatial surroundings?

JL: The Citizens of No Place universe featured a few recurring characters that had distinct personalities – varying degrees of angst, foolishness, zeal – and perhaps this was a personal work I was working through. I don't know that if the architecture of Citizens of No Place offered a space to stage such players, and perhaps in the next installment of this work I might be more attuned to the inner-workings of it.

G: An important part in the construction of fiction is the role of the narrator. How do you use the tool of narration and omniscient voices within your stories? Where do you put your own voice in relationship to these contexts and characters? Specific for the medium where there are three main ways to deliver text, what goes into the decision of process of when to use a caption box, speech, or thought bubble? Who is speaking in each?

JL: I suppose I am the one speaking in all these stories – but I am also speaking through my journalisms of my peers. In addition to that, as a fan of movies and manga, I do try to find a way to produce rhythm, tone and mood. There were times I wanted to construct a sense of absurdity, and other times I went over-the-top with darkness. But it would have been more of a reflection of my life then – I am a much more optimistic person today.

G: In the preface to the book, you discuss the composition of the page as the actual object you are designing. What lessons have you learned from the using of the page as site that have become manifest in your later, physical work?

JL: As a fan of the Rolex Learning Center, Toledo Glass Museum, and Moriyama House, I see the loose-fit-plan as a very strong urge that I want to satisfy. The values I learned from composing comic book pages have been instrumental in better understanding proportions, directionality, and pace. The superfurniture series is a direct result of all of this exploration, in plan. My upcoming endeavors for the Taiwan Pavilion at the

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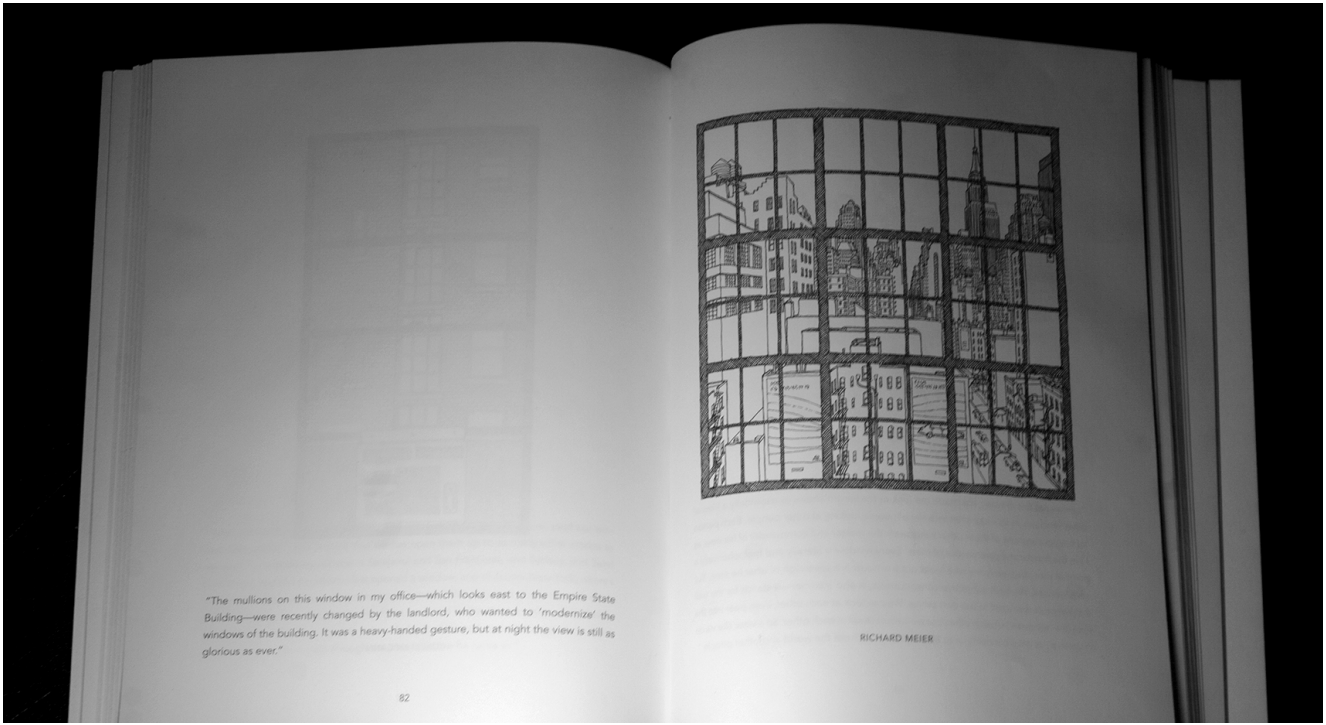
14th Venice Architecture Biennale would be an extension of this thought.


"The mullions on this window in my office—which looks east to the Empire State Building—were recently changed by the landlord, who wanted to 'modernize' the windows of the building. It was a heavy-handed gesture, but at night the view is still as glorious as ever."
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RICHARD MEIER

wordless literary devices

Matteo Pericoli G-Chatting with LV.
Exchanged October 10th, 2013 – October 17th, 2013

LV: In the Laboratory of Literary Architecture your motto was "literary, not literal." What does it mean and why? Could you explain what the major obstacles writing students had to overcome while designing space out of words were?

MP: It's probably more like a mantra than a motto. When writing students begin thinking about a literary text in terms of space and structure, there is an obvious initial instinct to translate more literally the portions of the text in which locations, buildings, and settings are described. For example, the students who worked on novels such as To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf or on essays such as A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again by David Foster Wallace naturally started by thinking of structures that directly address lighthouses, ships, etc. Trying to be literary rather than literal means that we slowly move away from what the words describe to what the words hide, to how the text is structured. That's the hard part at first. Whenever we discuss any of the students' initial architectural ideas, we ask ourselves: "Are we being literal or literary?" And they instantaneously understand what I am talking about. We try to go even deeper by leaving the words behind and isolating those literary aspects of the text that each student feels are essential to conveying their interpretation and thinking of them in architectural and spatial terms. It could

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be, for example, the way a character faces the events that are presented to him, the pacing in the text or the relationship between the reader and the protagonist. How can all of this be conveyed with architecture? How can space, materials, light, volume, etc. be turned into wordless literary devices? How can tension, or pacing, or a mood, be expressed with architecture?

LV: Would you define the architecture that your students have produced as literary architecture? Does literary architecture exist first of all? And where would this term be situated in the relationship between writing and architecture?

MP: I'll start with your last question, but unfortunately have to say that I have no idea where this term would be situated. The most magical and essential element of a piece of architecture is space. And yet space is the hardest thing to teach, and perhaps to learn. How does one teach that what truly matters in architecture isn't there? I have always been amazed by the fact that when I read a great novel or a great essay, I often have the feeling at some point that I am actually inhabiting a structure that has been constructed by someone else. A wordless structure, that is. So, I use Literary Architecture simply to clarify what the students' goal is: to construct a piece of architecture whose inner compositional mechanisms originate from a piece of literature. Back to your first question, yes, I think the students have produced what I would call "literary architecture" because hypothetical visitors of their designs should experience them as architectural mirror of the students' structural literary interpretations. Does this make sense?

LV: Yes, it does, Matteo.. You have talked about a "wordless structure" and also wrote in an article that "for a writer, thinking wordlessly, may turn out to be a positive experience."[1] Do you think the reverse is possible? Would an architect benefit from thinking spacelessly? And with this I mean if thinking less like an architect and more like a writer would be beneficial to design processes?

MP: I'd like to answer your last question by reversing your reasoning one step further: I don't think that the writing students in my course think "less like writers" when they "act as architects." On the contrary, I think—actually, I hope, as this is another implicit goal of the course— that because they are writers they can think wordlessly like architects in order to address design issues. I have a reverential respect for writers, as I believe that writing is one of the hardest and probably cruelest disciplines. Anybody can try his hand at it, really. But to write something that is "constructed" in such a way that it can stand on its own is another matter altogether. I think that architects could benefit from thinking narratively about architecture, which doesn't necessarily mean that they'd have to know how to write, just as writers don't need to know all aspects of architecture. Perhaps simply reading a lot and studying all kinds of literature, e.g. novels, essays, science-fiction, poetry,

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etc., and trying to determine what makes or doesn't make them "work" structurally, could be a positive and fun experience for an architect. In fact, knowing why the architecture of this or that novel is interesting, well-paced, precarious, unsettling, or structurally daring, and so forth, might help an architect in creating a structure that will successfully lead the visitor from one space to the next by working on volumetric relationships, proportions, materials, light, etc. in literary terms (e.g. tension, pacing, mood, etc.)

LV: In your last answer you used the word "construct" to explain the act of composing written words. Ergo, you believe that words can be built, sentences can even become promenades and series of words structures. To me this is an overlapping, or even better, a language's appropriation of a territory that it wouldn't traditionally belong to. If Ludwig Wittgenstein was right in claiming that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world,"[2] what would this type of appropriation mean to architecture? And to other disciplines? Is this a possibility of a discipline's expansion/blurring of its own limits?: not to be sought inward, but out of its own territory?

MP: Actually, I didn't use the word "construct" to explain the act of composing written words. Rather, I was referring to writing a text in general. And I used "construct" because, like most disciplines in which you have a project that needs to be addressed both on a very small scale (a detail, a word, a note, etc.) and on a much larger scale (the whole building, text, composition, etc.), there is a component of an almost physical effort needed to assemble it. You have to constantly take care of the details while never losing sight of the whole. Sometimes you get lost and have to scratch everything and start all over again. I wouldn't want to go as far as to talk about a language's appropriation, because I always insist in class that this is a game, and it has to be fun. But it's a game with very precise rules, which requires rigor to be played. There is no wrong interpretation of a text, but there are too-literal ways to transform ideas and intuitions into architecture, which we try to uncover and move away from. The idea for the course came to me when, after teaching a drawing class, a creative writing school asked me in 2010 to come up with a new course that had something to do with my other passion, architecture. (I am an architect by training and worked as one for some time, maybe I should have said that at the beginning.) Since I had noticed how writers and literary critics often use architectural metaphors to explain aspects of novels, essay, etc., I said: "Why don't we try to take the writing students one step further? Let's ask them to explain their most beloved books' structures and then build them!" That's all. As for your choice of Wittgenstein's quote, I agree, language can indeed limit one's ideas. Imagination, the possibility of forming new ideas of any kind may benefit from even momentarily stepping out of your routines and ordinary mental state; it needs to be expansive and inclusive rather then narrow and exclusive. When you step aside to look at something

anew, and step into another "territory," sometimes you end up on fertile ground (as it seems we were lucky to have done in this class) and sometimes you don't, and that's okay too.

LV: I'd like to go back to when you said that "architects could benefit from thinking narratively" and that "they [the architects] don't necessarily need to know how to write." In the article "When Writers become Architects," Architizer suggests "perhaps architecture schools should reintroduce writing classes where possible, in order to teach architects how to think in narrative, in metaphor, and ultimately, to translate these concepts into imaginative spatial structures."[3] Do you agree? And how much of a role does writing play in the current education of a young architect?

MP: I really can't say what kind of role writing plays in the current education of a young architect. I don't have enough experience to answer. I studied in Italy a long time ago, when the system was quite different. There was no undergraduate/graduate program like now, just a single five-year program plus thesis. What I can honestly say though is that, as an architecture student, writing played unfortunately no role whatsoever in my educational experience. We were just asked to read some essays about architecture, of course, and read many books on the history of architecture, and that's basically it. Our papers were mostly technical, therefore narrative, especially literary narrative, was a foreign entity. I recently had a small taste of the role writing plays at an architecture school in Italy, when I was invited to present the Laboratory of Literary Architecture at a design course at the Polytechnic of Turin's School of Architecture. A young professor had come up with an interesting reverse exercise: he'd asked his students, as part of a larger exercise, to write a text based on an existing building. They had to choose a building from any period and come up with a piece of writing of any kind (fictional, essay-like, etc.) that was inspired by, or that somehow was a literary translation of, that building. It was interesting to notice how almost all the students got kind of trapped inside the building itself. The variety of texts they produced ranged from a fictional story that took place inside the building to a fictional essay that described a made-up historical reconstruction of the building. I could not help but notice how their instinctive approach was limited and restrained by them being architecture students.

LV: I had a similar experience in my second year at the Politecnico of Milan. During that semester's studio project, my professor, Oliviero Godi, asked us to write a poem about the site project as an alternative way of doing site analysis and, I feel that both your writing students and myself went through a similar process of finding, extracting and reducing in order to reach the conceptual structure that lies beyond the form of written words in their case and of a natural landscape in my case. Having said that, do you think it's possible to claim the existence of a sub-language that becomes universal and

common to all artists (writers, poets, painters, composers, architects etc.) once stripped away from the form through which it is manifested (novels, poems, drawings, music, space etc.)?

MP: Of course. I think that this is exactly the point and the bottom line of our conversation: there is a core, a common thread that obviously runs through and links many of the creative disciplines you listed— and many more, of course. The challenges are finding it, as it's not always that obvious or easy to see through the outer layer of form, and knowing that in order to find it you need curiosity and humility to place yourself in some kind of unfamiliar territory. Professor Godi evidently wasn't concerned about this or, for that matter, about appropriation or "contamination." In fact, I believe that teaching and learning rely on the very same idea of a "sub-language", i.e. that common ground or point of contact between the teacher and the student. My educational experience at the Polytechnic of Milan in the early 90s was instead one of total detachment: I sat, together with hundreds of other students, far away from a professor who stayed firmly positioned behind a large desk and tried to convey his knowledge to us. It was definitely not an ideal educational experience, but it helped me realize that certainties and erudition tend to hinder imagination and the discovery of that common ground. Or maybe I am completely wrong...

1 AJ Artemel. "When Writers Become Architects: An Experiment In Space And The Written Word." Architizer. 28 Oct. 2013. http://architizer.com/blog/when-writers-become-architects/

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico Philosophicus, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1972), 56Routledge, 1972), 56

3 AJ Artemel. "When Writers Become Architects: An Experiment In Space And The Written Word." Architizer. 28 Oct. 2013. http://architizer.com/blog/when-writers-become-architects/

times, from Jorn Utzon's Sydney Opera House to Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, is a product of engineers as much as of architects; without firmness, there will be no delight. All three elements of architecture are essential.

So architecture is art and it is not art; it is art and it is something more, or less, as the case may be. This is its paradox and its glory, and always has been: art and not art, at once. Architecture is not like a painting or a novel or a poem; its role is to provide shelter, and its reality in the physical world makes it unlike anything else that we commonly place in the realm of art. Unlike a symphony, a building must fulfill a certain practical function—giving us a place to work, or to live, or to shop or to worship or to be entertained—and it must stand up. But a building is not at all like other things that we place in the realm of the practical but that may have aesthetic aspirations, such as an airplane, an automobile, or a cooking pot. For we expect a work of architecture, when it succeeds in its aesthetic aims, to be capable of creating a more profound set of feelings than a well-designed toaster.

Sir John Soane's Museum, the architect's extraordinary townhouse in London—and one of the greatest works by an architect who was one of the most brilliant and original design forces to have come out of Georgian London—contains a room that can make this clear. It was Soane's breakfast room, and it is fairly small, with a round table set under a low dome that is not a real dome but a canopy, supported by narrow columns at four corners. Where the canopy meets the corners, Soane placed small, round mirrors, so that the occupants of the breakfast table can see one another without looking directly at each other. The

yellowish walls are lined with bookcases and paintings, and natural light tumbles in softly beside the canopy, indirectly, from above. Soane liked to create rooms within rooms and spaces that connect in unusual ways with other spaces, and in the breakfast room you can see that he is doing it not just as the early-nineteenth-century's version of razzle-dazzle but to provide a kind of psychic comfort. The dome is protecting, but it is not quite enclosing, a reminder that while we may feel uncommunicative and vulnerable early in the morning, we need to move out of that stage into the world. The breakfast room functions as a kind of halfway house, cozy in a way that other, more formal spaces tend not to be, and soft in the way it introduces us to the day. It is a room of great beauty and serenity, perfectly balanced between openness and enclosure, between public and private. The British architecture critic Ian Nairn was exaggerating only somewhat when he called the breakfast room "probably the deepest penetration of space and of man's position in space, and hence in the world, that any architect has ever created."

In the breakfast room, Soane used architecture to fulfill a routine function and create a powerful, almost transcendent experience at the same time. For me there are other buildings, too, that achieve the extraordinary as they fulfill a function that, in and of itself, is perfectly ordinary. In 1929, when Mies van der Rohe was asked to create a small pavilion to represent Germany at the world exposition in Barcelona, he produced a sublime composition of glass, marble, steel, and concrete, arranged to appear almost as if the elements were flat planes floating in space. The white, flat roof and the walls of green marble with stainless

formal consequences in the built world

Paul Goldberger interviewed by Lily Wong.
Recorded on September 4th, 2013

LW: There are obviously different modes of writing in architecture, with diverse, sometimes conflicting, goals and approaches intended for different audiences. What prompted you to become an architectural critic, writing for a larger audience rather than doing architectural research, writing about architecture in an academic setting?

PG: I have always been very interested in journalism. In fact I spent a small amount of my career as a general journalist. I sometimes say that being an architectural critic was a way for me to avoid making a decision between journalism and architecture. I am interested in having an impact on the world. Speaking to the public and trying to connect the often very disconnected worlds, the profession and the public, is a goal that interests me very much. I am interested in reality, I might say, not to the exclusion of theory. I spent a lot of my life as an academic also, but I do not like a life spent entirely in the academy. It's too self-referential in a way.

LW: Do you think an education in architecture is necessary for one to become a good architectural critic?

PG: Well, I'd say it is certainly not necessary to be an architect. I think you need some education about architecture however,

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and mine was architectural history. There are other ways to study architecture without actually getting a professional degree. In some ways it is almost better not to be an architect because if you are an architect, especially if you are a good architect, you feel a kind of internal, innate passion to do things in one particular way. That's important in architecture, but is dangerous for a critic to feel -- a critic needs to be open to a certain range of different possibilities and to be able to evaluate and analyze things on their own terms. If a critic rejected all work that did not resemble one particular direction, I think he or she would not be a good critic. Whereas an architect has a right to, and sometimes even a responsibility to, have a narrower view. It is part of being an artist in a way, having a way you want to do it.

LW: In the beginning of your career in the seventies and eighties at the New York Times you wrote some articles that exhibit an enthusiasm for postmodern architecture; articles such as "A Postmodern Stage Set" and "Now the Religion is Anti-modernism."[1] You contributed to the discourse and brought it to the attention of the general public. How would you describe the climate in architecture around that period? Did you feel the need to use the platform you had at the New York Times to support this new development?

PG: I felt that there was an enormous amount of change going on in architectural thought. Modernism did feel as if it was running out of energy and architecture was looking for other ways to express form. In the end postmodernism was a very mixed bag at best, and we might now say, a very fraud digression, which was not apparent at the time. In retrospect, I might have been more tolerant of some of its aspects than I am today. But, you know, one never fully understands a time when one is in the middle of it. I did nevertheless think that it was important and that the attempt to reuse and reinterpret history and to, in effect, reject the rejection of history that had been part of the modernism canon was a valid pursuit. The problem is that it led to an awful lot of terrible buildings that did not stand the test of time, that were polemical rather than seriously good.

LW: So, do you see writing criticism as having formal, material consequences in the built world?

PG: I believe writing criticism does have formal consequences in the built world and should. It is naïve to believe that those consequences are always enormous, direct and absolute. I think very often they are subtle and gradual, but nevertheless they do exist.

LW: In the introduction to your book *On the Rise*, you wrote that the role of the critic is "to argue for a set of values or standards without trying to shape a city or profession in one's own image."[2] What are some of the values that you hold? How

have they changed since then?

PG: Things evolve. I very much agree that the challenge of being a critic is to have a set of established principles, but not to interpret them in any particular single aesthetic direction. For me, the set of values that we tend to group under the word urbanism is certainly a key principle and key value; that buildings have a responsibility to the whole and not just to their integrity as single objects. Social responsibility is another principle. I believe not only architects as professionals, but also society as a whole, have a responsibility to build well, not only well aesthetically but what is needed. It's not to say that we always do that. If we were always building what is needed, we would be building more housing, more parks, more schools, instead of more McMansions, office buildings and shopping centers.

LW: Yes, of course.

PG: Another principle that has guided my criticism is that, while accepting creativity is often an individual thing and there is such a thing as individual genius, I believe profoundly that architecture is a collaborative art. Nobody makes a building on his or her own. It is important, as often as it is feasible, to give credits to all who play key roles in a project. That architecture is a profession that should be open to all and that the role of women and minorities in architecture should be supported to the greatest extent possible. These are not radical ideas, if anything it would seem strange to say the opposite today. Architecture has a civic and social duty as well as an aesthetic responsibility. I think my criticism emerges out of that set of values which is deliberately non-specific.

LW: Alessandra Lange once wrote that your writing style is more historical in comparison to what she identifies as emotional and activist criticism…

PG: Yea, I like Alessandra very much and admire her work, but I don't entirely agree with that distinction. I think the activist, emotional and historical categories, while they have some validity, are not mutually exclusive, they are not absolute.

LW: Right.

PG: I think a good critic should have elements of all three in his or her work. I hope I do, I certainly want to. Perhaps my work has been a little bit more historical, might be a little less activist, but not entirely. I've written a lot in the last couple of years on the issue of modernist preservation, which has been very actively engaged in fact, and I have written strong advocacy pieces. Those, in part, emerged out of emotional feelings as well as historical knowledge.

LW: Right, in my mind there are also some articles, when

compared to other critics' assessments, that perhaps appear more historical in some sense, such as the Bilbao piece, "The Politics of Building"[3], in which you discuss the Basque and the political context in which the museum was built; that an iconic museum is being used to establish a certain image for the political agenda.

PG: Right, for the Bilbao article there are a couple things that have to be said. First, it is not only about the Basque history, even though it began with that. Certainly it deals with the physical form of the building, but I wrote the article that way for another reason too: I needed to find another way into the building because it had already been written about a fair amount. That building is still remembered, deservedly so, in relation to the very important and extraordinary piece of criticism, Herbert Muschamp's famous article in the New York Times[4], often referred to as the Marilyn Monroe essay that appeared before the building's completion. It was such a powerful, emotional response to the building that there was not a tremendous amount left for a critic to say in that regard. The last thing in the world I would have ever wanted to have written is a more moderate version of the same piece, which would have served no purpose at all. So I wanted a somewhat different way into the building and there was an interesting aspect of the building: its relation, or lack thereof, to Basque culture that Muschamp had not dealt with at all, and no one else either.

LW: What do you think are the problems, if any, when a critic becomes too sentimental or emotionally involved with the building?

PG: Well, it is perhaps dangerous to become too emotionally involved. But a critic who does not display some emotional connection to a building is probably not doing his or her job very well. I think it's possible to become too emotionally engaged and in that case all you get is a bunch of gushing or a bunch of vitriol without any real, critical argument being put forth. It becomes unconvincing and becomes just about the critic.

LW: What about the assessment itself? Do you think a piece of criticism has to be either positive or negative or…?

PG: No, in fact many things are not simply good or bad. They are in between. Nothing is worse than equivocal criticism, nothing is worse than an article that says, on the one hand this and on the other hand that; this is sort of good, this is not so good. It all feels very wishy-washy and without any conviction. So, how do you write a piece that appears strong and processing a conviction that nevertheless takes a position and is not at one extreme or another: absolute good and absolute bad? That's one of the challenges of writing, that's all I can say. I think the ability to do that separates out good writers from bad writers.

LW: I have in mind a recent piece that you wrote about the Bush Library in Dallas by Robert A.M. Stern[5]. You seem to be saying something like, it is not the best but it's okay, it fulfills its duty…

PG: Yes, this is how I felt. There are things about that building that I like better than I expected to. Generally Stern's work is done with intelligence, even though you feel it is the wrong thing done well. And making a convincing argument that something is the wrong thing done well is difficult to write, but sometimes it is the thing to say. Of course, no building can be fully separated from its program. In the case of the Bush Library it has a particular connection to a program that, you know, many of us understandably are not entirely thrilled about. The Bush presidency was not something most of us admire unequivocally. So any building that takes that on as its program is inevitably going to be under a certain shadow of the program. Part of the challenge of criticism is to acknowledge that, to incorporate that into the overall thinking, but not to let it drive everything you say. If it drove everything that was said in the article, then you would be simply saying nothing more than Bush was a terrible president and therefore it is a terrible building. That is a way decaying the responsibility of an architectural critic. One must still engage the building as a work of architecture and critically examine it, even if you also acknowledge that the program causes some critical examination.

LW: Do you think a critic has to belong to a certain institution, such as a newspaper or a magazine?

PG: Until recently the answer was yes, a critic needed to because one has no other ways to disseminate ideas. But in architecture now, as in every other field, anybody who has a computer has a printing press today. There is a level playing field in a way that it didn't use to be with a lot of exciting activities, but will there be a well-played game? Not necessarily. So how do we keep the world open for a multiplicity of voices and yet have some credit, authority, knowledge and experience in a certain way because they still count for something.

LW: Then, how could a critic build his or her authority now?

PG: Until recently old media was still establishing authority, and it still does to a certain extent, not as completely as before. We'll see over the next generation how much authority emerges out of new media and whether there are new voices that establish serious authority without having a connection to traditional media.

LW: You once mentioned that people often asked you how you feel to have the power of being the New York Times critic.[6] Do you still get similar questions nowadays? Do people still think that you have a certain power?

PG: People tended to exaggerate the power of the New York

Times years ago, maybe they still do. I don't think critics have power in the raw sense of power. I do think they have authority. Power and authority are related but they are not identical…

LW: How would you characterize the difference?

PG: The difference is, I think, authority is the ability to be listened to, command, be respected and often be followed. Power is the ability to force. I once read that, at least in politics, power is what rushes in to fill the vacuum when authority fails. I think it's a good way to look at that.

LW: Yes, fair enough.

PG: In criticism it is not so simple as that, but nevertheless conceptually it is still somewhat valid. Generally critics don't have quite that amount of power but they do have authority. I think they still do. In my own career, my authority came initially through the New York Times and the New Yorker, but over time it builds into your name. I hate the word brand that everyone uses today; nevertheless there is a certain kind of brand equity that has developed in one's name that doesn't need an established institution to maintain authority. But whether people would create authority from scratch without institutions remains to be seen. It's too early to tell.

LW: What about the critic's role in promoting or hindering an architect's career?

PG: Yes, I definitely think that a critic can definitely help or hinter an architect's career but cannot single-handedly make or break a career.

LW: How, then, do you choose the architects that you write about?

PG: I usually think in terms of buildings and projects but not individual architects. Now I am spending a lot of my time writing books and I am not writing criticism all the time, a lot of it is just what strikes me, what interests me.

LW: You have written a lot of books that arguably belong to different genres: an architectural guide to New York, a journalistic report on the rebuilding of Ground Zero…

PG: Yes, yes, with criticism woven into it but fundamentally a reporting book. That's correct.

LW: …and you wrote a book called *Why Architecture Matters*, which could be said to be of the same category as *The Architecture of Happiness*…

PG: Yes, very much so, it is a similar book to that. We have slightly different ways of approaching it. I like Alain de Botton's book and I think *Why Architecture Matters* and it are

two different writers attempting to do similar things, obviously I prefer mine, but obviously he is very good.

LW: And now you are writing Frank Gehry's biography…

PG: Yes, another genre entirely. I think it's very exciting as a writer to push yourself to new directions and different genres allow that to happen without leaving architecture, which I don't want to do.

LW: What are the differences in writing all these books of different genres?

PG: Well, for biography I am still learning as I go. It is very difficult because of the overwhelming amount of information and the challenge of turning it into an interesting, readable narrative. Also, the challenge of making sure that the life story does not squeeze out architectural interpretations and ideas. While it is a book about Gehry's life, it also has to be about his work. Connecting these two things is a challenge. I like books that have a personal component. *Why Architecture Matters* is very much about how my eyes work, how my value system works, what means the most to me and why I see things the way I do. I loved doing that book— a labor of love, a testament to what I care about.

1 See Goldberger, Paul. *On the Rise : Architecture and Design in a Postmodern Age.* New York: Times Books, 1983.

2 Ibid. pp.7

3 Golderberger, Paul. "The Politics of Building" in *Building Up and Tearing Down : Reflections on the Age of Architecture*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2009.

4 Muschamp, Herbert. "The Miracle In Bilbao," *New York Times*. September 7, 1997.

5 Goldberger., Paul "On Not Hating the New George W. Bush Library," *Vanity Fair.* May 24, 2013.

6 See Goldberger's Introduction to *On the Rise.*

Mead and Royal Cortissoz in the office as young men.

Robert Cortissoz went to work as soon as he was able, becoming an office boy at McKim, Mead & White. The partners noticed that he spent his lunch hour in their library and seemed to love music. One afternoon White asked him if he had ever heard an opera, and the boy answered that he had not. White produced an extra ticket and brought Cortissoz to the performance, no doubt remembering that he had begun his career at one small notch above office boy. Eventually, Cortissoz studied enough music and art to seek a newspaper position writing about culture. When he asked for an introduction, White did him one better. Saying that he knew a newspaper editor who was landing in the harbor that afternoon from a trip abroad, he grabbed Cortissoz, hurried to the docks, waited to greet his friend—probably Whitelaw Reid of the *Tribune*—and thrust Cortissoz at him.

Robert Cortissoz rose as a cultural commentator in New York and had a long and productive career, often writing about the artists he had met with McKim, Mead & White. Cortissoz lived until 1948, and in the 1920s he and Mead formed a sort of survivor band. They greatly admired Joe Wells and tried to get a memorial alcove for him set up at the American Academy in Rome; this seems never to have been done. Both wrote often about his importance in creating the climate for Renaissance forms in American architecture and his role at McKim, Mead & White.

Before the mid-1880s Wells had worked equally with McKim and White, but thereafter he seems to have moved to White's projects. William Mitchell Kendall, who came to the office in October 1882, increasingly took his place with McKim, and by the time McKim returned to New York from Boston, Kendall had become his right-hand man. Kendall seems to have been a silent and loyal assistant when McKim was present, but Cortissoz, Partridge, and others regarded him as mean. He was fiercely jealous of Wells, who commanded more respect in the office than he ever would, and did as much as possible to destroy Wells's reputation later on.

Kendall had been born in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, in 1856, the only child of a teacher. He graduated from Harvard in 1876, then spent two years at MIT before going to Italy and France. On his return he joined McKim, Mead & White. Kendall married Grace Eliot Endicott of Detroit in 1897 in Switzerland, but the marriage was odd and doomed. Mrs. Kendall spent most of her life in a private sanitarium. Kendall, the architect of the current portico at Plymouth Rock, was a dull sort whose design skills never rose above the mundane; he was content to be known as McKim's right-hand man until 1906, when he became the first new partner in the firm.

With Kendall helping McKim, White and Wells grew even closer. The relationship was a rocky one, with White alternately trying to bring Wells into his "sassiety," on outings and at clubs, then rejecting Wells as being not adequate for a leadership role at the firm.

The relationship between White and Wells went through several stages. There was a close intimacy while Wells was in Europe in 1880–81. During that period Wells wrote frequently to White; his later letters from Italy were destroyed, as we know, by Lawrence Grant White in the early 1930s. The relationship at this stage may have been more than friendship; there is a possibility that an intimate relationship existed. Then White got married. Wells noticed the change in his personality in 1884, and may have been jealous of White's success. Later, in 1887 or 1888, White's relationship with Saint-Gaudens changed when the latter took on his Swedish mistress, Davida. This may have pushed White back toward Wells.

In November 1888, White, Wells, and the painter Thomas Wilmer Dewing began paying for rooms in the Benedick, which they shared for some pursuits not related to the profession. Here they formed a private club, the Sewer Club, whose membership included Wells, White, Dewing, Gus Saint-Gaudens and his brother Louis, and Frank Lathrop. The club lasted for two years, until Wells's death, and was then carried on as

a history of personalities

Mosette Broderick in conversation with C. Recorded August 28th, 2013

C: I guess we're here to talk about writing architectural history…

MB: Right.

C: And I'll start by proposing that there are many types of architectural history…

MB: Certainly.

C: A history of theory, history of building techniques, history of politics and culture, and also a history of personalities.

MB: Yes. There's one more I would say. Visual sources: what I call old architectural history, where you would look at a set of windows and their influence. It was all about repetitive sources.

C: A history of aesthetics?

MB: You could almost say prototypes. The mantra was that you would analyze a building in features and you would give them all capital letters. So it would be A-window, B-door, "A-A-B-A." That's what the classes used to sound like, and I remember being exceedingly bored by it.

fold

C: I don't think the history of personalities gets admitted much in the insular academic or historical circle for reasons I'm not quite sure… but I think it's probably one of the strongest shapers of history, whether we like to admit it or not. In *Triumvirate: McKim, Mead & White: Art, Architecture, Scandal, and Class in America's Gilded Age* you focus on the image making of architects, and propose that it was their personalities that allowed them to become the greatest firm in the country for decades.[1] What can we learn from a history of personalities?

MB: We can learn a lot. When I was a young graduate student at Columbia there was a wonderful professor named Eugene Santomasso. He began his architectural history class with a picture of the architect. I thought that was interesting to see what they look like and what they do. You know, do people really look like their dogs? My interest, in a way, was the social conjunction between the architect and their architecture, more than the cult of the architect. One of the ways we used to describe the cult of the architect was to push someone up. For a period, the monograph was what architecture publication in the second half of the 20th Century was all about. You did one on Aalto and you did one on someone else in order to promote them. My gut reaction is always to pull them down. I am less interested in the cult of the architect than how a bunch of guys, who really shouldn't have made it, succeeded. Triumvirate is really about their problems. How the young guys in the office did all the work, you were really lucky that you got Henry Bacon when he was young and Joseph Wells. We can imagine Cass Gilbert in the last twenty years of his life, sitting on a golf course with a cocktail in his hand, meeting and greeting people. Architects were and are often the meeters and greeters. Take someone like Frank Lloyd Wright, he built up an entire cult around himself, which sold him to many people and also horrified many others. If you asked the average person in the United States in the 1940's and 50's what they thought of architects, they all conjured up the problems Wright had. They didn't like architects, they liked builders. So sometimes it backfired.

C: But at the moment we like architects very much.

MB: We like architects and we have star architects, but we didn't for a long period of time. In a way I think it is partially because of this rejection of the Wrightian persona. Builders were practical men, while architects ran off with other people's wives and spent money. I think we've come back to star architects because we had a 30-year hiatus that produced banality. The average building was built as cheaply as possible, to take in as many paying tenants as possible, or to sell as many houses in the subdivision as possible. We didn't want the frills of it looking good or the thoughtfulness that an architect could add. But I think we've gone beyond that. Now we have competitions in cities between star architects the world over.

C: It almost seems that the iconicism that many schools aspire to is to nurture the next Zaha or to tease out the next Libeskind in a visual studies class – so if the objective is to train "successful" architects, perhaps there should be an acting class or one on public speaking. It's quite apparent that the reason Norman Foster is arguably the most successful architect in the world is that he is Norman Foster.

MB: So how did he become that famous?

C: We like to attribute success to…

MB: Talent?

C: Yes, and also more "hard working" attributes.

MB: Yes, well, those attributes belong to the guys in the office who really carry the work through. If Foster doesn't have good people in the office, as was true of McKim, Mead and White, it would have gone down the tube in about twelve minutes. There are two issues here: In the old days you might have actually had a partner who did the schmoozing brilliantly. They say McKim could "talk the birds out of the trees," that he was extremely persuasive. I've always felt he wasn't much of a designer, but he was very good with people, and he would hire talented people to do the drawings. There was a tree guy, a watercolor guy and a clouds guy. The next issue is the cult of the architect that arguably came from Wright, who taught it to Philip Johnson, who taught it to Bob Stern. You become really, really good at PR, but that doesn't necessarily mean you end up doing good buildings. I think being able to persuade a client is part of the architect's capability. You can't be a great architect if you can't get jobs. You have to be able to persuade clients to do buildings that will, at least partially, come out the way the architect wants, then you go to PR. But there are a lot of people who go to PR first. In the end, I think it is good buildings that make you a success.

C: But like you mentioned, it's hard to make good buildings if you don't have the personality to get them built.

MB: That's correct, or a credible client. When you think about what clients put up with in the old days, they dealt with very difficult architects. There are wonderful stories about Wright and Edgar Kaufmann Senior, the patron of Falling Water. Wright would try to do something and have the bricks taken away. Then Kaufmann would bring in his engineer. They tried to out-smart and one-up each other, but the design got better because of that.

C: And I guess that's what I am arguing, that the personality is as strong as the design.

MB: The personality really matters, but the financial guys

seem to have the last say in everything. There are still some fine houses for well-to-do clients who understand design, but when you get to big buildings, it's beyond that stage - you are in money that is run by a corporation. It worries me. I don't know if we're going to get great buildings that way.

C: You mentioned the ability of McKim, Mead and White to attract great designers to their office and also the people that they associated with…

MB: Produced sons who went into those offices! Like Barney and Chapman, etcetera.

C: They collaborated with the sculptor Augustus St-Gaudens as well as Frederick Law Olmstead, and created this whole social network. We could perhaps say they designed this social network, which reminds me of Andy Warhol's Factory. There was Warhol and then the greater group of people he surrounded himself with who supported him, and vice-versa. But perhaps it takes a Warhol to create it or pull everyone together.

MB: I think the McKim, Mead and White story is slightly different. In the early 1870s they were unknown with no money, but they believed in the shared idealism of the synthesis of the arts. That was what the École was supposed to be teaching you anyway. They had an unofficial version of an atelier, that's what brought them together. Years ago there were attempts here in New York to get architects and artists to collaborate, but usually the egos got in the way. St-Gaudens and White fought, but they both believed in the same visual background. Maitland Armstrong and John LaFarge, fought, too, but they still had the same goals. The problem with the cult of the architect today, is that the ego is on such a banner. When the architects came together for the New York state theatre at Lincoln Center, they fought with each other to the detriment of the building! It was all about moi. Can architects really collaborate if their ego has become so enlarged to the point that they can't work with another star architect? One of the other problems that we've encountered with the profession of architecture is that in the United States architecture never really mattered. It has always had this problem of being a profession perhaps of the elite, or perhaps of the affected, but it hasn't caught on with the general population. We don't even have criticism in many of the papers.

C: I just skimmed your book…

MB: By the way, I should say the architectural history for this is in the footnotes because the editor wouldn't let me put it in! You have to go to the back of the book, if you want my opinion on the shingle style or the country house,.

C: So we have a book with two histories: a book of personalities and a book of architecture styles.

MB: That is correct. It's very depressing to me. The most significant things I think McKim, Mead, and White did was the shingle style house, but it is all in the back there.

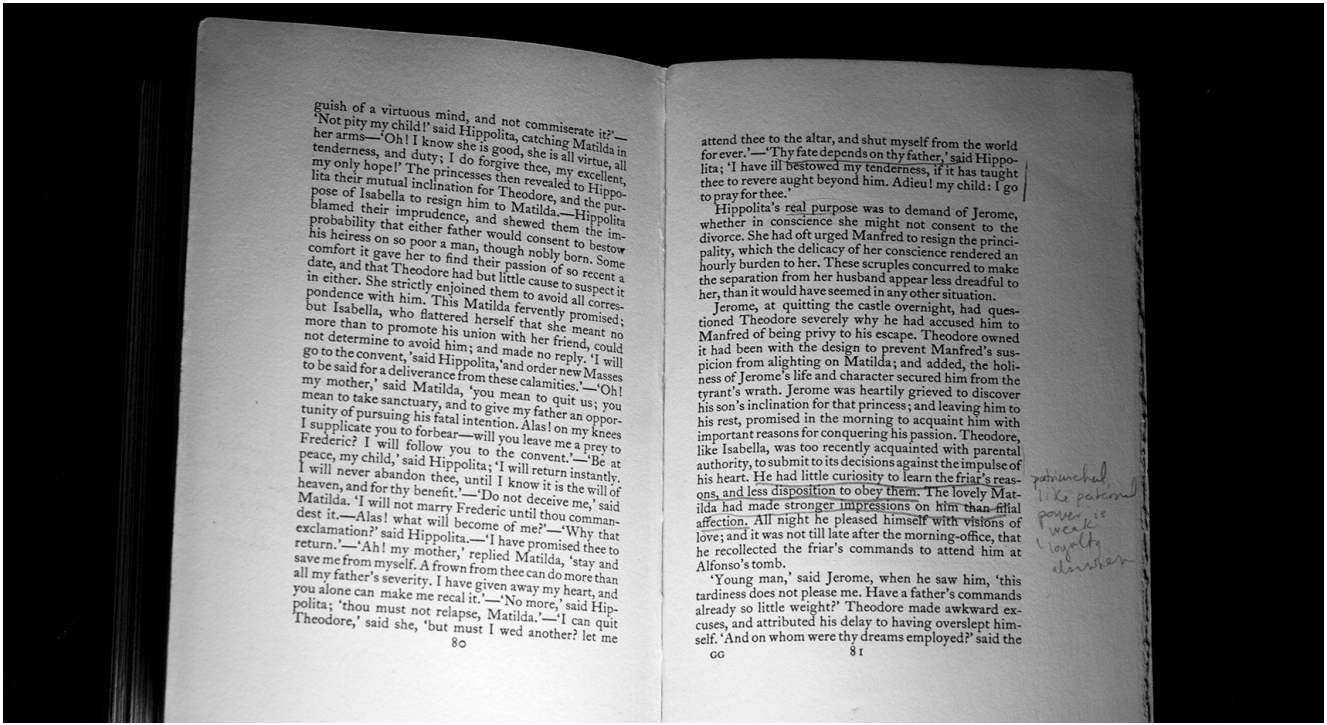
C: But there is also all of this stuff in the front, too. There are parts when you quote diaries, and it reminded me of In Cold Blood which I was reading this summer. Maybe it was the mindset, but there seemed to be a lot of parallels in how the events unfolded as a direct result of specific character traits, almost to the extent that the history was inevitable after putting the personalities in those circumstances.

MB: Kind of like amateur psychology.

C: All of these letters that you mention had already been redacted and edited by later generations with an eye for history. There is still this desire to write one's own history as can be seen from the continuous stream of architect biographies and films. The persona of an architect shapes events and produces architecture, yet this view is considered a populist or almost tabloid way of viewing architectural history. But the effect is undeniable and this low-brow and high-brow distinction is fundamentally misleading. In academia we like to believe that a building is assessed on its own merits when in reality I believe it is the criticism, presentation, publicity, and personalities that greater define our history.

MB: It's difficult. But in a way, unlike books that are pumping up Wright or Aalto, this book was meant to pull them down, to show that they were also very flawed characters and once they got successful basically went away from architecture. Mead never was in architecture, McKim became a spokesman of the profession and White became a dealer and, in a way, a personal maniac. We could say that McKim, Mead and White were hardly designers after the first decade of their careers.

1 **Broderick, Mosette.** *Triumvirate: McKim, Mead & White: Art, Architecture, Scandal, and Class in America's Gilded Age.* **New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 2011**



guish of a virtuous mind, and not commiserate it?'—'Not pity my child!' said Hippolita, catching Matilda in her arms—'Oh! I know she is good, she is all virtue, all tenderness, and duty; I do forgive thee, my excellent, my only hope!' The princesses then revealed to Hippolita their mutual inclination for Theodore, and the purpose of Isabella to resign him to Matilda.—Hippolita blamed their imprudence, and shewed them the improbability that either father would consent to bestow his heiress on so poor a man, though nobly born. Some comfort it gave her to find their passion of so recent a date, and that Theodore had but little cause to suspect it in either. She strictly enjoined them to avoid all correspondence with him. This Matilda fervently promised; but Isabella, who flattered herself that she meant no more than to promote his union with her friend, could not determine to avoid him; and made no reply. 'I will go to the convent,' said Hippolita, 'and order new Masses to be said for a deliverance from these calamities.'—'Oh! my mother,' said Matilda, 'you mean to quit us; you mean to take sanctuary, and to give my father an opportunity of pursuing his fatal intention. Alas! on my knees I supplicate you to forbear—will you leave me a prey to Frederic? I will follow you to the convent.'—'Be at peace, my child,' said Hippolita; 'I will return instantly. I will never abandon thee, until I know it is the will of heaven, and for thy benefit.'—'Do not deceive me,' said Matilda. 'I will not marry Frederic until thou commandest it.—Alas! what will become of me?'—'Why that exclamation?' said Hippolita.—'I have promised thee to return.'—'Ah! my mother,' replied Matilda, 'stay and save me from myself. A frown from thee can do more than all my father's severity. I have given away my heart, and you alone can make me recal it.'—'No more,' said Hippolita; 'thou must not relapse, Matilda.'—'I can quit Theodore,' said she, 'but must I wed another? let me

attend thee to the altar, and shut myself from the world for ever.'—'Thy fate depends on thy father,' said Hippolita; 'I have ill bestowed my tenderness, if it has taught thee to revere aught beyond him. Adieu! my child: I go to pray for thee.'

Hippolita's real purpose was to demand of Jerome, whether in conscience she might not consent to the divorce. She had oft urged Manfred to resign the principality, which the delicacy of her conscience rendered an hourly burden to her. These scruples concurred to make the separation from her husband appear less dreadful to her, than it would have seemed in any other situation.

Jerome, at quitting the castle overnight, had questioned Theodore severely why he had accused him to Manfred of being privy to his escape. Theodore owned it had been with the design to prevent Manfred's suspicion from alighting on Matilda; and added, the holiness of Jerome's life and character secured him from the tyrant's wrath. Jerome was heartily grieved to discover his son's inclination for that princess; and leaving him to his rest, promised in the morning to acquaint him with important reasons for conquering his passion. Theodore, like Isabella, was too recently acquainted with parental authority, to submit to its decisions against the impulse of his heart. He had little curiosity to learn the friar's reasons, and less disposition to obey them. The lovely Matilda had made stronger impressions on him than filial affection. All night he pleased himself with visions of love; and it was not till late after the morning-office, that he recollected the friar's commands to attend him at Alfonso's tomb.

'Young man,' said Jerome, when he saw him, 'this tardiness does not please me. Have a father's commands already so little weight?' Theodore made awkward excuses, and attributed his delay to having overslept himself. 'And on whom were thy dreams employed?' said the

patriarchal like paternal power weak is loyalty elsewhere

yoked together from the start

Mark Morris and Christoph a. Kumpusch in response to W, C and IKL. Exchanged October 12th, 2013

W: In your article 'Two Hundred and Eighty-Eight Lines' in Log 27, you make the case that drawing is both a product and an action - it is both a thing in and of itself and a mode of exploration. In reference to architectural ideas, how does writing operate in a similar manner?

MM: Yes, I think so. Architectural writing should inspire, provoke and produce ideas. One of the rites of passage of any new student of architecture is collecting books; starting a personal library of monographs, histories and how-to books. Then there are (what it is left of) the architectural magazines and newspaper columns devoted to criticism. We draw on this well of writing throughout our careers.

As a mode of exploration – putting pen to paper or hands to keyboard – architectural writing takes on many forms: notes in a sketchbook, academic essays, portfolio statements and websites. Some feel more comfortable with writing than others, but we all do it. Some architectural ideas are awkward to express in writing and you have recourse to sketch or diagram your way through it. But a written manifesto or design methodology can function as a design jetpack. Sometimes writing is the most expedient way to advance an argument or announce your intentions.

W: Some would argue that architecture deals only with building. Others contend that it is a way of seeing the world. Can writing function as architecture? How might one participate in the production of architecture outside built form?

MM: I view these positions inclusively. Architecture is about building and ways of seeing the world and about writing. Architecture, as a concept and a practice, originates with written treatises. So these things – building, seeing, writing – have been yoked together from the start. My first reaction to "can writing function as architecture" is to say no, why would we want it to, and, vice versa, architecture doesn't function like writing. Having said that, some of the most intriguing projects have come from mining relationships between architecture and writing. Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida made this juxtaposition seem like the most fertile ground for creativity. Jane Rendell at the Bartlett School of Architecture in London has been looking at this question anew in her book Site-Writing.

I encourage architecture students to embrace writing not to make architecture redundant in any way, but to provide a helpmate to the architectural task by clarifying goals, expanding ideas and communicating precisely. Interestingly, some of the best architectural texts don't feature in manifestoes, treatises or conventional architectural writing, but in novels. From Horace Walpole's Castle of Otrantro to Paul Scheerbart's The Gray Cloth to Philip Kerr's Gridiron, there are some marvelous moments in fiction where architecture impacts the plot or looms as large as a character.

We're all participating in the production of architecture outside built form in one way or another. A practicing architect authoring a built work is technically removed from the direct manifestation of that work as "built form." This is what makes architecture and its visual representation so vexing and fascinating at the same time, this distance from the thing itself or the requirement of so many others in the realization of the built form.

IKL: New typologies, forms, and movements require new language or rhetoric in order to be understood, described, and discussed. How does the development architectural language dovetail the development of projects and ideas?

MM: I am not an advocate for developing jargon or enriching "architect-speak." I think that sort of thing ultimately hurts architectural history, theory and criticism – and, indeed, architecture. Accessible language with which to describe design ideas and the built environment is key; something I argued for in the "Architecture on Air" podcasts. Language is nimble enough already to accommodate new types, forms and movements. Using esoteric terms or neologisms when humbler language would suffice just cuts others out of the conversation.

rotate + flip

Why distance ourselves from each other and broader audiences by not speaking or writing plainly? This isn't to dumb anything down or staunch new possibilities, but to be mindful of the power and elegance of more direct forms of communication in the tradition of Strunk and White's Elements of Style. Occasionally you need to define work with an "ism" and new words or modes of critique are required and someone like Charles Jencks usually comes to the rescue.

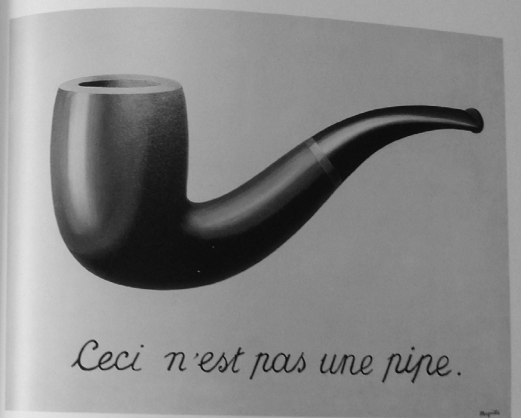
C: Academic writing seems to be in a state of stagnation: while blogs and E-books exist to proliferate text to previously unimaginable audiences, a hierarchy still exists within academic circles and institutions. Within this hierarchy, books and journals are placed in the arena of legitimacy, while the blog is relegated to a position outside of the accepted discourse. How might this be changing? How do you see the influence of universal platforms and access altering the discourse surrounding scholarly text?

MM: A dissertation is only ever typically read by five people and it takes five years to write! Likewise, an academic book gets a print run of a few thousand copies. A second edition is cause for real celebration, champagne for all the professors. But a successful blog article or podcast can get 50,000-100,000 hits. A MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) can reach even more. Which all goes to undermine the way the academy still values professionally published books so highly.

Peer-reviewed work in any field remains important and will remain so regardless of whether the journal is hardcopy or electronic. I imagine issues like peer-review and editorial review are why many blogs are, perhaps, undervalued. But there is also value in access, readership numbers and overall impact.

I think if you come of age at a time when people point to a physical book as the golden tool for learning and communication, the idea persists. When my daughter saw an essay of mine online formatted for her iPad, she thought it was cool; so much cooler than if it were on a bookshelf. Paradigms shift, tools upgrade, but good writing, interesting ideas, should be portable across lots of media.

C.a.K: Writing captions for images is the architectural writer's nightmare! As visual people, we tend to write to images in the body of our main text. Coming up with intriguing things to say about images you've already spoken about just for the sake of captions is always challenging. You cannot state the obvious, you cannot repeat yourself, so you end up fashioning a whole micro essay around the images and this inevitably comes last in the process. This last gasp effort is ironically your best work, because you've internalized all the arguments in having already written the real text. The sad truth is that one could, on most occasions, dispense with even reading the article or chapter or book and just scan the captions. But what would be the point of writing the real story? The only solution is to farm out caption writing to someone else to guarantee the captions won't trump the thing they mean to illustrate. And don't get me started about image permissions…



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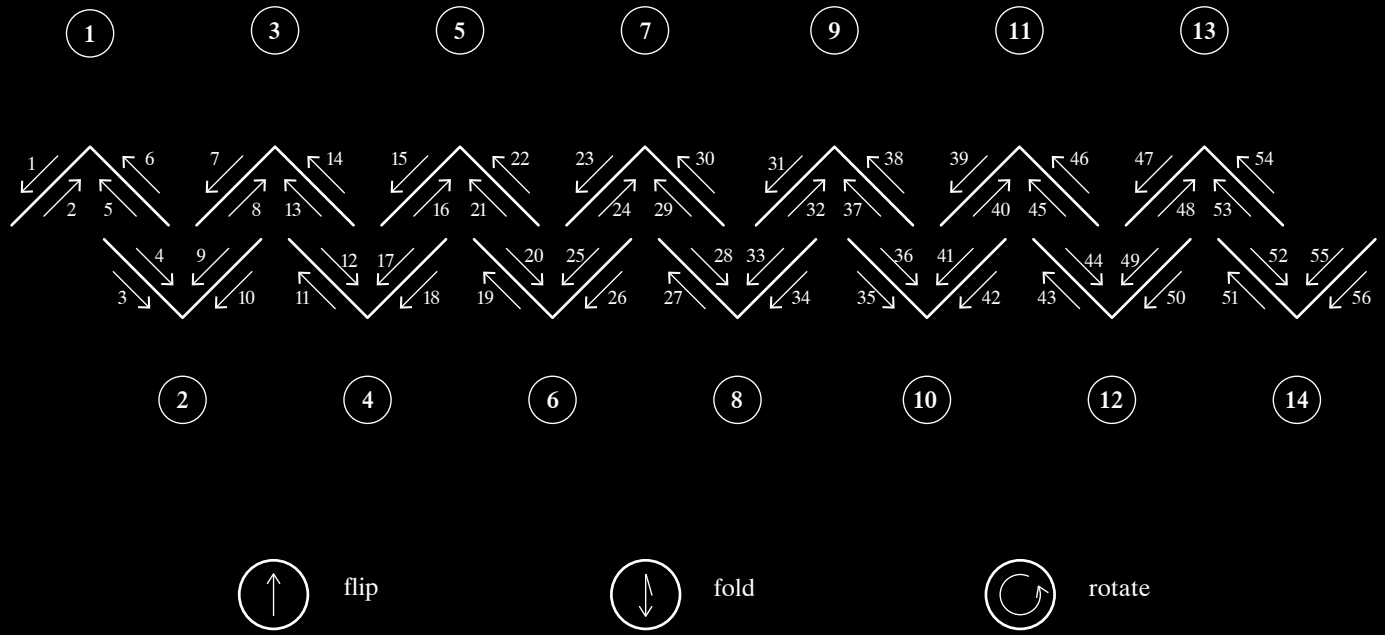

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