

# Ecologies of Architecture

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Reinventing architecture can no longer signify the relaunching of a style, a school, a theory with a hegemonic vocation, but the recomposition of *architectural enunciation*, and, in a sense, the trade of the architect, under today's conditions.

Once it is no longer the goal of the architect to be the artist of built forms but to offer his services in revealing the virtual desire of spaces, places, trajectories and territories, he will have to undertake the analysis of the relations of individual and collective corporeality by constantly singularizing his approach. Moreover, he will have to become an intercessor between these desires, brought to light, and the interests that they thwart. In other words, he will have to become an artist and an artisan of sensible and relational lived experience (Guattari 2013: 232).

## *Introduction*

In a desperate attempt to catch up with forms of contemporary media culture, architects tend to perpetuate earlier notions of culture as representation rather than culture as forms of life (Lash 2001: 107). Architecture has yet to break with culture as reflection still firmly embedded in its concepts of Utopia, Type, History, City, Geometry, Landscape and Ornament. To speak of the *ecologies of architecture* is to break with judgement for experience, to break with the propositional knowing-that for the impredicative knowing-how (Ryle 2009: 25-61). As the self-declared empiricist (i.e. pluralist) Gilles Deleuze put it in his book on Nietzsche, it is not about justification, "but a different way of feeling: another sensibility (Deleuze 1983: 94)." If to think differently we have to feel differently then the design of built environment has no other purpose but to transform us (Kwinter 2014: 313). While engineering focuses on solutions, architecture dramatises the problem so that we may stumble upon a new emancipatory potential (Kipnis 2013). After all, problems always have the solution that they deserve (Smith 2012: 307).

## *Pedagogy of the Senses*

Posthuman architecture ought to focus on the encounter between thought and that which forces it into action. While accepting multiple nested scales of reality, the ecologies of architecture challenge the alleged primacy of the 'physical' world. What we engage with is the world considered as an environment and not an aggregate of objects. The emphasis is on the encounter, where experience is seen as an emergence which returns the body to a process field of exteriority (Colebrook 2004). Sensibility introduces an aleatory moment into thought's development thus turning contingency into the very condition for thinking. Not only does this upset logical identity and opposition, it also places the limit of thinking beyond any dialectical system. Thought cannot activate itself by thinking but has to be provoked. It must suffer violence. Art and architecture may inflict such violence. They harbour the potential for breaking up the faculties' common function by placing them before their own limits: "thought before the unthinkable, memory before the immemorial, sensibility before the imperceptible, etc (Deleuze 1994: 227)." The eco-logical 'perspectivist' assault on the ego-logical representational thinking inevitably impinges upon the identity of the subject. Where Kant founded the representational unity of space and time upon the formal unity of consciousness, difference fractures consciousness into multiple states not predicable of a single subject. In other words, difference breaks with the differentiation of an undifferentiated world in favour of the homogenisation of a milieu or *umwelt* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 62). To speak of Whiteheadian super-ject is to break with earlier notions of sub-ject as a foundation (Whitehead 1978: 29). 'Desiring-machines' connect, disconnect, and reconnect with one another without meaning or intention (Deleuze and Guattari 2008: 288). Paradoxically, actions are primary in relation to the intentions that animate them the same way that desiring is primary to volition. Individuality is not characteristic of a self or an ego, but a perpetually individualising differential. It is not the subject that has a point of view, rather it is the point of view that has its larval subject (Deleuze 1980). Deleuze explains: "[e]ach faculty, including thought, has only involuntary adventures," and "involuntary operation remains embedded in the empirical (Deleuze 1994: 145)." This constitutes his famous 'pedagogy of the senses'.

### *Asignifying Semiotics*

The ecologies of architecture rely on cartography to overturn the theatre of representation into the order of desiring-production (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 12). The ultimate ambition is to debunk *hylomorphism* – where form is imposed upon inert matter from without and where the architect is seen as a god-given, inspired creator and genius – and to promote the alternative immanent morphogenetic approach that is at once more humble and ambitious (DeLanda 2002: 28). There lies a (r)evolutionary potential in creating the ‘new’, defined as the circulation of de-coded and de-territorialized flows that resist the facile co-option by re-coding or capturing (Deleuze and Guattari 2008: 379). To speak of univocity of expression is to break with equivocity of the hegemonic linguistic sign. Action and perception are inseparable, as are forms of life and their environments. If the objects of knowledge were separated from the objects of existence, we would end up with a duality of mental and physical objects – bifurcation of nature – that leads to an ontologically indirect perception. By contrast, the premise of the ecologies of architecture is that perceptual systems *resonate* to information, where information is defined as a difference that makes a difference (Gibson 1986: 249; Bateson 1972). This ‘direct realism’ is grounded on the premise that, from the outset, real experience is a relation of potential structure rather than a formless chaotic swirl onto which structure must be imposed by cognitive process (sapience). The world is seen as an ongoing open process of mattering, where meaning and form are acquired in the actualisation of different agential virtualities (Barad 2007). Following Deleuze’s argument, it is possible to assert that the genetic principles of sensation (sentience) are thus at the same time the principles of composition of art(efact) (Deleuze 2003).

### *Niche Constructionism*

Architecture ought to reclaim its vanguard position within the Epigenetic Turn which embraces *tekhne* as constitutive of posthumanity, and not just the other way around (Stiegler 1998: 12). Experience is not an event 'in' the mind. Rather, the mind emerges from interaction with the environment. The predominant homeostatic notion of structure in architectural thinking has to give way to the event-centred ontology of relations. The metastability of existence (formerly known as sustainability) is to be mapped in the very act of becoming. The Affective Turn in architecture concentrates on perception which occurs not on the level at which actions are decided but on the level at which the very capacity for action forms, the virtual (Massumi 2002: 79). If representation is a means to an end (to classify), schizoanalytic cartography is a means to a means (to intervene) (Guattari 2013). Teleology cannot be used as the sole design criterion because the freedom of action is never a de facto established condition, it is always a virtuality (Evans 2003: 16-17). This proto-epistemological level of potentialisation (priming) is already ontological (Massumi 2015: 71). It concerns change in the degree to which a life-form is enabled vis-à-vis its (built) environment. Their reciprocal determination commits contemporary architecture to ecology in general and ethico-aesthetics in particular (Guattari 1995). The psychotropic cry that "we shape our cities; thereafter they shape us" is to be taken literally. Only recently have biologists conceded the effect that 'niche construction' has on the inheritance system (Jablonka and Lamb 2005; Odling-Smee, Laland, and Feldman 2003). They confirmed that a life-form does not only *passively* submit to the pressures of a pre-existing environment (evo), but also *actively* constructs its existential niche (devo), that being the city in the anthropocene. The implications for the discipline of architecture, considering its quasi-causal role in the neo-Lamarckian *Baldwian Evolution* (evo-devo), remain significant and binding (Wexler 2010: 143).

## *Futurity*

The New Materialisms in general, and the Affective Turn in particular, seem to be gaining momentum to such an extent that even some of the scholars of this affiliation have been urging caution (Colebrook 2010: 168-69). However, as far as the discipline of architecture is concerned, this otherwise healthy dose of scepticism is not only premature but also counterproductive. In its history, architecture has undergone a gradual disassociation from the material realm and become an ultimate white-collar profession. The consequent withdrawal from reality (thesis of autonomy) has been variously seen as 'bad' escapism or a 'good' strategy of resistance (Hays 1981). The urge to ward off the givens and to continue to contemplate (possible) alternatives is praiseworthy. But idealist bracketing and messianic ambition come at a price. Architects might end up painting themselves into a corner of impotence by depriving themselves of the (virtual) means to intervene. After all, intervention has always been the main trait of (any) materialism. The best strategy of resistance seems to lie not in opposition but in (strategic) affirmation (Braidotti 2012). The recognition of the present-future relation provides a point of departure for an ecological account of anticipation and/or creation akin to Isabelle Stengers' thinking *par le milieu* (Stengers 2005: 187). What defines the concept of futurity is the inseparability of the event and its environment. Futurity is a condition of the present; it is the anti-utopianism of the ecologies of architecture *par excellence*.

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