

Emphasize the Gap!
Towards a Žižekian Definition of
Critical-Emancipatory Architecture

by
Uros Novakovic

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Confronted with issues, whose (socioeconomic) causes cannot be resolved through the modification of the built environment, architectural interventions may often inadvertently aid the reproduction of the problems they seek to resolve. In eliminating symptoms of social inequality, alienation and marginalization, architecture can legitimize the social order out of which they arise. In such situations, architects' attempts to concern themselves with narrowly practical concerns are insufficient even to their own aims, and in order to properly address the issues facing it, architecture must simultaneously operate as a vehicle for social critique and political emancipation.

In the work of philosopher Slavoj Žižek, a critical-emancipatory intervention corresponds to an emphasis of a constitutive tension and discord ("the gap") within what is commonly perceived as a stable, neutral background. Critique strives not to explicitly reveal existing problems. Instead, it reveals an inherent inconsistency within an implicit, ideological fantasy of order and harmony that allows us to naturalize these problems. Consequently, the critical-emancipatory potential of architecture resides not in its programmatic content nor in its representational image, but in its capacity to disrupt the reassuring affective texture of ideology. Critique resides in a formally subtle (concerning architecture in its narrowest definition as an affective structure), yet politically radical shift in how problems of everyday life are interpreted and processed; re-introducing a minimal sense of disquietude that is both critical and emancipatory. The disquietude, that marks an absence of a fantasy of order and harmony, can, paradoxically, only be sustained as a product of a formally (representationally) ordered and harmonious appearance. The critical-emancipatory disquietude is not a compromise of the order and harmony, but rather a reflection of its uncompromisingly egalitarian nature.

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Foreword

At the beginning of his essay, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”, Oscar Wilde describes the paradox of progressive-minded, well-intentioned interventions whose consequences ensure the reproduction of the problems they seek to remedy:

[People] find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man’s intelligence; and... it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable, though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease. They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor. But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim. Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it. ... Charity creates a multitude of sins.¹

Confronted with social problems (and all problems of architecture are ultimately social) architects’ interventions are often akin to those of Oscar Wilde’s philanthropists. Through their genuine, otherwise admirable attempts to alleviate particular issues, the philanthropist-architects

1. Quoted by Slavoj Žižek in *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2008): 118.

simultaneously legitimize (and sustain) the political or economic order out of which these issues arose. Rendering its appearance more beautiful and pleasant seems to hide, rather than banish, the ugly and unpleasant features of our social reality. Consequently, progressively-minded architects often experience themselves as if trapped in a blackmail; torn between legitimizing the social order through ameliorative interventions of its symptoms, or withdrawing into a self-consciously 'critical' position - transgressing architecture's normative social role and proposing to illustrate rather than ameliorate the issues at hand.

Philosopher Slavoj Žižek, proposes a possible escape route out of this deadlock. In opposing critique to transgression, he suggests a manner of critique independent of a withdrawal from the social demands placed upon us.

Namely, since the social order is (as Marx already noted) inherently inconsistent to itself (at its core there is always a gap), its self-perpetuation depends upon a phantasmatic, ideologic-libidinal supplement, which obscures its inconsistency (or, fills in the gap at its core). This phantasmatic background allows us to derive minimal enjoyment from our interaction with social authority (or, conversely, feel guilty for not enjoying). A properly critical act, therefore, does not reside in explicitly opposing social demands, but in disrupting the background fantasy of the social order's inherent stability on its perpetuation depends.

Wilde's critique of charity should, consequently, not be read as a (naïve) advocacy of pseudo-revolutionary individualism - effective indifference to others' suffering masked as a higher virtue, nor as blatant (liberalist) defense of virtues of self-interest. Charity, Wilde's example,

designates not only the act of giving - helping those in need, and, but also, more importantly, the accompanying 'charitable' attitude/sensitivity; the sentimental self-celebration which a philanthropic endeavour often allows for, even solicits - offering it in exchange for our monetary contribution. The need for social transformation - which ought to be insisted upon - is not obscured by the aid itself, but by its sentimental supplement; in Žižek's words, by "the feeling good for having participated in the struggle."² While charity may truly help those in need, the sensitivity embodied in its affective texture - the obscene self-celebratory sentimentality that accompanies otherwise noble gesture - allows the structural causes of the problems to be reproduced. Namely, it creates a "multitude of sin."

The possibility of criticality thus resides within the narrow, but properly autonomous, dimension of architecture; in its capacity to structure the affective background of everyday life. The emancipatory character of an architectural intervention is not embedded in its functional or symbolic content (both of which are regulated by social demands), rather it is determined through the affect which provides it with "a density of meaning" - relating it to the background of social fantasy. The critical task of architecture, which in its narrowest definition concerns itself precisely with determining the sensitive dimension of an architectural object, lies in substituting the charitable sensitivity permeating contemporary practice with a critical-emancipatory one.

The aim of the thesis, as its subtitle suggest, concerns a delineation of critical architectural practice arising out of Slavoj Žižek's notion of the gap; a pre-transcendental non-all that opens the space for an emancipatory act. The introductory chapter defines the gap, and reveals

2. Slavoj Žižek in *Living in the End Times*, 117.

the inadequacy of Žižek's own explicit interventions in architecture theory to his underlying theoretical premises. The main body of the work, illustrates (using as its point of departure Adolf Loos' story of the Poor Little Rich Man) the potentially oppressive character of architecture, and proposes a fourfold categorization of aesthetic-architectural tendencies in order to define an emancipatory architectural practice. Finally, the conclusion, through an adoption of Žižek's categorization of violence, opposes the notion of critical-emancipatory practice to the premise of non-geometrical form-making prevalent in contemporary architectural practice.

Introduction: Thinking the Gap



In contrast to his extensive commentary on film, literature and music, observations on the built environment are largely absent from Slavoj Žižek's work. With the notable exception of a single essay explicitly devoted to the subject, the Architectural Parallax, Žižek's contributions to architectural theory are confined to brief, tangential digressions, and stand-alone, unsupported assertions. In addition to an overarching, emphatically stated assertion of architecture's significance as a site of ideological obfuscation (In Žižek's words, architecture "is the place where they screw us, they construct the very space where we spend all our time."¹), and a material embodiment of human fantasies (articulated in Žižek's gratuitous warning to architects: "when making your plans tread softly because you tread on the dreams of people who will live within ... your buildings."²), Žižek's intervention in architecture may largely be summarized in three distinct practical recommendations: (1) a proposal to re-appropriate non-functional excess spaces within a building envelope, specifically, a gap between skin and structure, for alternate uses (the main thesis of Architectural Parallax); (2) an insistence on the possibility of re-appropriating monumental, formally structured works commonly associated with authoritarian regimes for emancipatory politics (evidenced in his "admiration for baroque Stalinist 'wedding cake' *kitch*"³, as well as in his defence of seemingly fascist tendencies within the works of Jože Plečnik⁴); (3) and, finally, a definition of emancipatory architecture as a practice devoted to generating a sense of disengagement, an "effect of the suspension of everyday functioning"⁵ (a proposition found in a single footnote in, Žižek's self-proclaimed magnum opus, *Less Than Nothing*).

In addition to Žižek's explicit architectural propositions, we should posit another notion of emancipatory architecture implicit within his work,

Opposite: Fig. 1. Mass gymnastics in Prague, 1907.

1. Slavoj Žižek. "Notes Towards a Definition of Communist Culture: Utopias." Backdoor Broadcasting Company Academic Podcasts. (16 June 2009.) <http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2009/06/slavoj-zizek-masterclass-day-2-notes-towards-a-definition-of-communist-culture/>
2. Slavoj Žižek. *Living in the End Times* (London and New York: Verso, 2010): 278.
3. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 244.
4. Slavoj Žižek, "Everything Provokes Fascism." Interview with Andrew Herscher. *Assemblage* 33 (1997): 62.
5. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (London and New York: Verso, 2012): 622.

6. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 6.

in reference to which his explicit propositions operate; namely, a conviction in architecture's capacity to emphasize a "pre-transcendental gap"⁶, an inherent non-identity or inconsistency that, for Žižek, constitutes all phenomena. Each particular proposition reflects a distinct mode in which the gap appears. (1) The non-functional excess space, Žižek advises us to re-appropriate, is a gap (a non-identity) between architecture's representational appearance and utilitarian function. (2) Žižek's insistence on the possibility of re-appropriating "authoritarian" forms, similarly, reflects his belief in the inconsistency of normative liberal democratic politics (and consequently its insufficiency for emancipatory practice); namely, the gap between apparent liberal permissivity and powerful prohibitions regulating everyday life that characterize liberal society. (3) Finally, the sense of disengagement from the everyday that architecture, according to Žižek, ought to embody corresponds to a sense of the gap; a sense of uncertainty or disquietude within the peaceful certainty of the everyday.

The Gap

In its most immediately familiar mode, the gap can be understood as an irreducible discrepancy between lived experience and symbolic representation. As Žižek illustrates through his standard reflexive retort to laudatory introductions he usually receives as a guest lecturer, one invariably perceives oneself as either inadequate to, or not-fully accounted by, one's social-symbolic appearance.

7. Slavoj Žižek. "Architecture and Aesthetics." Lecture at Arquitectura y Sociedad (Foundation for Architecture and Society), Pamplona, (10 June 2010). <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/videos/architecture-and-aesthetics/>

The description that was given of me, all those titles, books, professorships, in my miserable existence, I found it difficult to recognize myself in that figure of me. I held a gap between that complex symbolic identity, professor and so on, and simply me.⁷

The gap between symbolic appearance and lived experience does not, for Žižek, imply a misrepresentation, or a lack of knowledge. Were he introduced as a miserable human being, or as a miserable professor, Žižek would be equally justified (albeit less gracious) to protest; to insist upon a distance separating him from the given identity. Regardless of the particular content of a description, one is inherently inadequate to, or not fully accounted for in, one's social-symbolic appearance. A description one were to give of oneself would be no less false. The gap, which initially appears to separate different symbolic identities, a famous professor and a miserable human, thus describes an irreducible, constitutive excess of being that resists symbolization as such.

The overarching theoretical proposition at the heart of Žižek's work - the injunction to emphasize the gap - consists of a secondary, "purely formal shift" (a dialectical reversal) "of transposing the tragic gap that separates the reflecting subject from the pre-reflexive Being into this Being itself."⁸

8. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*: 15.

[T]he most elementary figure of dialectical reversal resides in transposing an epistemological obstacle into the thing itself, as its ontological failure (what appears to us as our inability to know the thing indicates a crack in the thing itself, so that our very failure to reach the full truth is the indicator of truth).⁹

9. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*: 17.

For Žižek, we are not merely unable to fully identify ourselves in our social-symbolic identity - and thereby condemned to futile, Sisyphean task of reattempting impossible symbolization - but, the very alienation of our search comprises the authentic heart of our being. The gap - the sense of never fully belonging, never fitting a description of oneself, the unaccountable excess of our being - lies at the core of human subjectivity. In Žižek's

10. Slavoj Žižek, *Parallax View* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008): 8.

words, our “cogito is not a substantial entity, but a pure structural function, an empty place”¹⁰; namely, the gap.

All particular symbolic identities (distinct positions) - which at first glance appear to delineate the gap - emerge purely as (ultimately insufficient) attempts to cover up our pre-existing lack; the emptiness of the gap. Žižek’s dialectical transposition of the gap “into the thing itself” thereby corresponds to an ethical principle; a call to endure the immanent struggle confronting us.

In our everyday lives, we constantly fall prey to imaginary lures which promise the healing of the original/constitutive wound of symbolization, from Woman with whom full sexual relationship will be possible, to the totalitarian political ideal of a fully realized community. In contrast, the fundamental maxim of the ethics of desire is simply desire as such: one has to maintain desire in its dissatisfaction. What we have here is a kind of heroism of the lack: the aim ... is to induce the subject to assume his constitutive lack heroically; to endure the splitting which propels desire.¹¹

11. Slavoj Žižek, *Interrogating the Real* (London: Continuum, 2005): 194.

Emphasis of the gap is a call to both renounce any imagined transcendental wholeness or balance that would allow us to reconcile with immanent tensions (such as our struggle for symbolization) we face, and, moreover, to fully identify these immanent tensions as the only (pre-) transcendental truth. In a place where we expect to find higher order, harmony, or transcendental meaning, we should assume the immanent tensions of the gap itself. Žižek thereby opposes the gap to a notion of peace of transcendental emptiness.

[T]his nothing is not the Oriental or mystical Void

of eternal peace, but the nothingness of a pure gap (antagonism, tension, “contradiction”), the pure form of dislocation ontologically preceding any dislocated content.¹²

12. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* : 38.

The gap thereby designates a purely formal, structural splitting; an internal imbalance that lies at the core of all phenomena. Since the gap precedes all particular content (which subsequently appears to delineate it), various modes of our encounter with the gap are homologous to each other. A personal struggle for authentic identity - as a gap separating distinct social-symbolic identities (a professor, a miserable human etc.) - directly corresponds with a political struggle for authentic social order - a gap separating different irreconcilable positions engaged in a political struggle (liberals, conservatives etc.). In all cases, particular positions that (appear to) delineate the gap consist of ultimately futile attempts to obscure its constitutive character by externalizing the cause of the tension. Each assumed symbolic identity, such as, a particular ethnic or professional identity, comprises an attempt to externalize the cause of our alienation onto an other who seems to prevent our full identification; an intruder who disrupts our ethnic community, a competitor who obstruct our professional success etc. Positions engaged in a political struggle, similarly, consist of particular identification of an agent as the cause of experienced social problems (bankers whose greed caused economic crises, immigrants responsible for crime, ignorant masses holding onto xenophobic prejudices, terrorists disrupting our peace and safety etc.). Personal attempts to remove the obstacles preventing us from attaining a fantasized, desired symbolic identification, are correlative with political attempts to remove the guilty other disrupting a fantasized, desired social harmony. In both cases, the particular positions engaged in a struggle

(symbolic identities, or political beliefs) are comprised of different interpretations of the struggle itself - of its causes and goals - hence, rendering impossible any reconciliation.

In its political mode, Žižek's shift, the assumption of a political position that emphasizes the constitutive nature of the gap, consists in identifying the cause of social problems within purely formal, structural contradiction inherent to a social order. Since, in as far as each particular position engaged in a political struggle consisting of an attempt to avoid the struggle and restore imagined social harmony is, simultaneously, grounded in an identification of an other who causes the struggle, the only position that allows us to escape the futile reproduction of constant social marginalization and exclusion, is the insistence on the inherent constitutive nature of social conflict. The position of assuming the constitutive nature of the struggle is directly opposed to normative calls to overcome political differences that are invariably sustained by their obscene opposite: an implicit identification of an other as a cause of the political difference. It is only by emphasizing the formal and constitutive nature of the gap - emphasizing the inevitability of the struggle as such - that we can avoid false, and ultimately repressive, reliance on particular ("ethnic") agents as its cause.

The emphasis of the gap is thereby simultaneously a critical and an emancipatory act. As a critical act, the positing of the gap as a pre-transcendental truth precludes any transcendental justification of immanent injustice, forcing us to soberly confront problems around us as devoid of any higher, redemptive meaning. As an emancipatory act, insistence on the gap both opens up a space for sociopolitical transformation and enables the only possibility of social solidarity.

The solution of the tension is ... not to be found in

multicultural tolerance and understanding but in a shared struggle on behalf of a universality which cuts diagonally across both communities, dividing each of them against itself, but uniting the marginalized in both camps.¹³

13. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 138.

Solidarity with an other - whom we can never fully understand and with whom we share no particular identity or aims - is possible only through a “resonance of struggles”. The only thing we share is that we are both struggling. (The immediate effect of Žižek’s self-deprecating reflexive undermining of his own symbolic identity is precisely a solidarity with his audience.) The emphasis of the gap thereby opens up a space of the “commons” - a space unregulated by external authority (a space devoid of a transcendental guarantor) - within which an emancipatory collective becomes possible.

In “Architectural Parallax” (his sole sustained engagement with architectural theory) Žižek, adopting Alejandro Zera-Polo’s identification of envelope as the core concern of architectural practice (the quintessential embodiment of architecture’s “iconographic” and “organizational” domains¹⁴) identifies the gap with non-functional interstitial space: “a gap between the skin and structure,”¹⁵ clearly observable in many contemporary performance arts venues. The excess of non-functional space reflects architecture’s dual, representational and utilitarian, role. Contemporary performance arts venues (for Žižek, “the paragon of contemporary architecture”¹⁶) need to represent democratic, openness in their appearance, while simultaneously providing security from undesired social groups and enforcing social separation. The non-functional excess is thereby a reflection of a constitutive social tension; a split between explicit social

The Spatial Gap

14. Alejandro Zera-Polo, “The Politics of the Envelope: A Political Critique of Materialism,” *Volume 17* (2008): 78.

15. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*: 261.

16. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*: 257.

norms and effective social constraints.

In bourgeois societies, we are split between formal-legal equality sustained by the institutions of a democratic state, and class distinctions enforced by the economic system. We live the tension between, on the one hand, politically correct respect for human rights, and so forth, and growing inequalities, gated communities, and exclusions on the other. ... The effective message of the “political unconscious” of these buildings [performance arts venues] is democratic exclusivity: they create a multi-functional egalitarian open space, but the very access to this space is invisibly filtered and privately controlled. In more political terms, performance-arts venues try to enact civic normality in a state of emergency (exception): they construct an “open” space which is cooned, protected and filtered.¹⁷

17. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*: 254.

The constitutive non-functional by-product of social contradictions comprises, for Žižek, “the proper place for utopian dreaming”¹⁸; the space wherein these contradictions may be properly addressed. Consequently, a critical-emancipatory intervention consists in re-appropriating the constitute excess for uses “for which they were not selected in the first place.”¹⁹

18. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*: 278.

19. *ibid*

20. “Exaptation”, a term Žižek borrows from biologists Stephen J. Gould and Richard Lewontin, refers either to the evolutionary process of adopting features that arose as “side-effects of adoptive processes” for another biological (or in case of Žižek’s application of the term to architecture, programmatic) function, as opposed to adaptation. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 277

Are, then, the “interstitial spaces” opened up by the “disconnection between skin and structure” in performance-arts venues not ... functionally empty spaces open for exaptation²⁰? The struggle is up for grabs here – the struggle for who will appropriate them.²¹

21. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 278.

While Žižek’s conclusion is consistent with his identification of the gap as the site allowing for the

possibility of critical intervention, the notion of spatial re-appropriation fails to transpose the gap into the domain of autonomous architectural practice. Rather than in-itself revealing the constitutive nature of the gap, the critical-emancipatory capacity of spatial re-appropriation depends solely upon the critical-emancipatory character of the functional content with which the spatial excess is re-appropriated. The use facilitated by the space, rather than its architecture, provides the critique. Devoid of an emancipatory functional content, the re-appropriation of the non-functional merely prescribes already normative practice. Finding novel uses for hitherto unused (or underused) spaces characterizes the ceaseless drive towards increasing utilitarian efficiency and productivity.

Instead of emphasizing the gap, Žižek's proposition fills it, in the hope that its content may provide the critique which the architectural intervention failed to. Already in a review of Žižek's initial presentation of Architectural Parallax²², Adrian Lahoud suggests a re-interpretation of Žižek's proposition, advancing a secondary, implicit, reading.

The most obvious [reading of Žižek's suggestion] is that the interstitial is a site for the fermentation of emancipatory possibilities; this reading has long precedents in architectural history, specifically to do with question of spatial marginality. There is a second and more interesting reading, however... might we instead imagine a sort of ontological *poché* [the gap] that would inhere as an excess within the very register of design decision-making itself so that decisions might begin to be understood as having autonomy from each other?²³

The gap separating the two readings, namely, the gap separating Lahoud's suggestion of an excess within the

22. First presented as 'Parallax' at the 2009 Australian Institute of Architects National Conference.

23. Adrian Lahoud, "Architecture, Contingency, Crisis: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek." *Architectural Design* (2010): 115.

24. As has been noted by critics of the work of OMA, its innovative programming (such as the institution of 'field-like' conditions striving to allow for contingent and diverse social encounters) can always be (and usually are) used to legitimize the power of institutional structures they accommodate. While architecture can more or less efficiently facilitate social demands (the quality of OMA's work lies, despite the emancipatory rhetoric, in its efficiency, which nevertheless shouldn't be discarded), to paraphrase Michel Foucault, freedom cannot be designed for. It can only be enacted. (Fortunately, architecture can also act.) See Dixon, Scott and Kim Dovey. "Architecture and Freedom? Programmatic Innovation in the Work of Koolhaas/OMA." *Journal of Architectural Education*. (2002): 5-13.

practice of design decision-making, and Žižek's notion of a spatial, non-functional excess, may itself be read as a reflection of the initial gap between architecture's representational appearance and utilitarian function. Whereas design decisions can transform appearances (it can modify the manner in which space registers in human experience), they cannot directly transform the social order whose demands, ultimately, determine the use of space. (As a functional object architecture can merely accommodate social demands with greater or lesser efficiency.)²⁴

The gap separates a dimension of the built environment regulated (even if not fully autonomously) by architecture, in its narrow definition as a practice concerned with appearance, and a dimension regulated by an external social order within which it operates, namely, its functional reality. Performance arts venues can only represent openness and democracy in their appearance, because they cannot embody open, democratic social relations in their function. The gap between appearance and function thereby separates architecture's capacity to solve social problems confronting it, and political measures required for their resolution. Architecture can modify the manner in which our social order appears to us, but it cannot impose an alternate social order transforming the manner in which space is inhabited.

The Affective Gap

Whereas Žižek's proposition transposes the gap separating appearance and function within the functional dimension of the built work - identifying a constitutive non-functional excess open for re-appropriation, the act of emphasizing the gap, suggested by Lahoud, consists in (mirroring Žižek's initial proposition) re-doubling the gap, as an excess within architectural appearance. The second proposition is already implicit in Žižek's

own work. Since, as Žižek otherwise emphasizes, the constitutive gap is purely formal. It cannot be reduced to a particular property of functional reality. No modification of functional content embodies the gap. (Consequently, spatial re-appropriation does not constitute critical practice, as there is ultimately no directly emancipatory content for which space may be appropriated. An emancipatory act remains equally possible regardless of the use a space is designed for.) The gap within reality can only be registered as an excess within representative appearance. As Žižek himself notes in an interview with Glen Daly, a critical-emancipatory act (an emphasis of the gap) corresponds to the marking of the very need for appearance, within appearance itself.

[T]he true problem is not, how do we get from appearances to reality, but rather how can something like appearance emerge within reality? ... reality itself needs appearance, reality itself is not all. Appearance is precisely not an epiphenomenon. Appearance is inherent to reality. In other words, the Real persists as that failure or inconsistency of reality which has to be filled in with appearance. Appearance is not secondary; rather, it emerges through the space of that which is missing from reality.²⁵

Pseudo-critical, 'functionalist', revelation of architecture's functional reality, ostensibly obscured by its appearance, usually manifesting itself as a disregard of social demands for 'proper' appearance, is no more critical than 'formalist' disavowal of contradictions within functional reality. Both approaches miss the need for appearance that arises out of (and corresponds to) a lack in reality. Paradoxically, for Žižek, functional reality does not precede appearance, rather, on the contrary, it is the addition of appearance that renders reality consistent. "The moment we subtract

25. Slavoj Žižek and Glen Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2004): 95.

26. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 88.

27. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 692.

28. “[W]e call affect any mode of thought which doesn’t represent anything. So what does that mean? Take at random what anybody would call affect or feeling, a hope for example, a pain, a love, this is not representational. There is an idea of the loved thing, to be sure, there is an idea of something hoped for, but hope as such or love as such represents nothing, strictly nothing. Every mode of thought insofar as it is non-representational will be termed affect.” Gilles Deleuze. “Spinoza’s Concept of ‘Affect’.” <http://english.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/deleuze-gilles-1978-spinoza-s-concept-of-affect.original.pdf>

29. Zaera-Polo. “The Politics of the Envelope: A Political Critique of Materialism.”

fictions [embodied in representational appearance] from reality; reality itself loses its discursive-logical consistency.”²⁶ Architecture devoted purely to functional efficiency, disregarding the “fiction” of appearance, often produces the most dis-functional spaces; having lost the fiction that structured its very functional reality.

The gap can thereby only be revealed as an excess within appearance (itself an excess over functional reality); as the pure striving to appear, preceding any representational content of appearance, within appearance itself. The gap is reflected (re-doubled) in appearance as a gap between the representational dimension of appearance (its capacity to stand for particular concepts) and non-representational “appearance qua appearance;”²⁷ the domain of the “suprasensible” within appearance. The non-representational excess dimension of appearance should be equated with Deleuze’s notion of affect.²⁸ The affect appears to us as a distortion (a gap) within representational space; a transfixing, captivating effect of appearance which cannot be accounted for by its representational dimension.

The dialectical reversal whereby Žižek’s initial architectural proposition (to re-appropriate non-functional excess) is transposed within architectural practice (as a gap within appearance: an affective, non-representational excess of appearance) can be illustrated by moving from the notion of architecture advocated by Alejandro Zaera-Polo (and endorsed by Žižek), to one proposed by Peter Zumthor. Whereas for Zaera-Polo, the proper site of architecture is the envelope - the quintessential embodiment of both representational and utilitarian concerns²⁹, for Zumthor, architecture constitutes the affective background of our everyday existence.

Architecture has its own realm. It has a special physi-

cal relationship with life. I do not think of it primarily as either message or a symbol, but as an envelope and background for life which goes on in and around it, a sensitive container for rhythms and footsteps on the floor, for the concentration of work, for the silence of sleep.³⁰

30. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture* (Basel: Birkhauser, 1998): 13.

The autonomous realm of architectural practice, the sole aspect of a work that retains minimal autonomy from social (or clients') demands, corresponds to the overarching affect embodied within a work. (Affect cannot be prescribed simply because it cannot be represented.) Within a collective endeavor of building-making, the seemingly narrow, yet irreducible, role of an architect consists in determining the particular sensitivity (an affect) permeating throughout the multitude of distinct, often technical, decisions. (The ultimate aim of an architect's coordination of various consultants' work is the sustenance of an affect within the final product.)

The affective property of an architectural object (the sensitivity embodied therein) cannot be reduced to a secondary by-product of its functional or representational content. Already, at the level of our immediate, everyday experience, we initially encounter the built environment purely as an affective appearance. Our notion of an object's functional and representational value arises through a retroactive, inherently insufficient, attempt to account for its immediate affective presence. Although an architectural object, through our interpretation, invariably acquires particular functional and representational value (it seems to address particular functional and representation needs), function and representation are not its constitutive properties, both are developed, and constantly re-developed, re-interpreted and re-appropriated, through the interaction of the work (as an affective presence) with

31. In more precise (Žižekian) terms, the “substantial” functional/representational reality of a work (its density of meaning) is itself constituted (“stitched together”) through the addition of an “in-substantial” pure affective capacity.

32. Gilles Deleuze. “On Spinoza’s concept of ‘Affect’.” http://english.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/deleuze-gilles-1978-spinoza-s-concept-of-affect.original.pdf

33. Slavoj Žižek. *Organs Without Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 188.

the social context within which it is situated. The gap between functional and representational interpretation of a building (the seemingly commonsensical distinction between its appearance as a signifier and its use) may thus be re-interpreted, as separating two different, equally inadequate, attempts to account for architecture’s irreducible, unaccountable, power to affect us.³¹ In practice, the interpretative reduction of architecture to a functional/representational object invariably serves to mystify its immediate affective presence; obscuring affective oppression (and stifling critique thereof) beneath purported functional, or representational value, or conversely asserting architecture’s liberating affect as a product of its particular functional/representational content.

The ideological dimension of an architectural object lies, precisely, in its affective property. As Žižek insists, ideological fantasies (that distort our understanding of reality, and thereby, in Deleuze’s words, diminish our “power of acting”³²) are not embodied in an explicit doctrine or practice (their “represented and constituted reality”³³), but in an undergrowth of their implicit, affective texture, through which the explicit doctrine is sustained. The ideological dimension of an explicit text or practice is, Žižek maintains, always supported through an (obscene) affective supplement.

Deleuze’s account of fascism [which Žižek agrees with and expands onto ideology in general] is that, although subjects as individuals can rationally perceive that fascism [or any ideology] is against their interests to follow it, it seizes them precisely at the impersonal level of pure intensities: ‘abstract’ bodily motions, libidinally invested collective rhythmic movements, affects of hatred and passion that cannot be attributed to any determinate individual. It is thus

the impersonal level of pure affects that sustains fascism, not the level of represented and constituted reality... The struggle against fascism should be fought at this impersonal level of intensities not (only) at the level of rational critique - by undermining the fascist libidinal economy with a more radical one.³⁴

The dependence of ideological doctrine's power over its subjects on its affective, libidinal economy (providing an intensity of enjoyment) is illustrated in Žižek's paradigmatic example of an ideological agent; a military doctor (from Žižek's own army experience) whose power over his patients (his ability to humiliate one of them by ordering him to publicly masturbate) is sustained through ironic disavowal of the seriousness of his orders (smiling, laughing with other assembled soldiers waiting for their examination), ensuring that his exercise of power (the spectacle of public humiliation) is accompanied by an obscene sense of solidarity with the humiliated subjects. As Žižek recalls, even "the unfortunate soldier himself soon joined us with an embarrassed giggle, exchanging looks of solidarity with us while continuing to masturbate..."³⁵ The capacity of ideology to humiliate its subjects, depriving them of a power to act, directly corresponds to its ability to also impose obscene enjoyment onto them.

[T]he agency of Power ... shouts severe orders, but simultaneously shares with us, [its] subordinates, obscene laughter bearing witness to a deep solidarity. ... [A]ttitudes which are officially opposed and mutually exclusive reveal their uncanny complicity, where the solemn agent of Power suddenly starts to wink at us across the table in a gesture of obscene solidarity, letting us know that the thing (i.e. his orders) is not to be taken too seriously and thereby consolidating his power.³⁶

34. Žižek is here paraphrasing Deleuze whose position, in this instance, he shares. Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies*, 188.

35. Slavoj Žižek, "From Joyce-the-Symptom to the Symptom of Power." *lacanian ink* 11 (1996). <http://www.plexus.org/lacink/lacink11/zizek.html>

36. *ibid*

37. *ibid*

38. Deleuze, "On Spinoza's Concept of 'Affect'."

39. In case of contemporary (post-modern) permissive ideology, this solicitation to enjoy, is, of course, made increasingly explicit, but nevertheless accompanied by a series of prohibitions. In either case, ideology consists both of guilt and enjoyment.

40. Slavoj Žižek, "Liberation Hurts: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek." Interview with Eric Dean Rasmussen. *electronic book review* (2003). <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/desublimation>

A critical emancipatory act, subverting the mechanism of power, consists in transforming of the undergrowth of obscene injunctions "which the official, public ideological text simultaneously disavows and requires for its undisturbed functioning."³⁷ Although an ideology may at the official, explicit level prohibit enjoyment (as Deleuze notes, priests and despots "need the sadness [or more precisely, the guilt] of their subjects"³⁸), for Žižek, explicit prohibitions are always accompanied with, and sustained through, implicit, obscene solicitations.³⁹ The obscene, transgressive enjoyment at the affective, libidinal level is a necessary supplement to official, explicit prohibitions.

The lesson of totalitarian subordination is not "renounce, suffer," but this subordination offers you a kind of perverted excess of enjoyment and pleasure. To get rid of that enjoyment is painful. Liberation hurts.... [H]ow does a totalitarian power keep you in check? Precisely by offering you some perverse enjoyment, and you have to renounce that, and it hurts. So, I don't mean physical violence, or a kind of fetishization of violence. I just mean simply that liberation hurts.⁴⁰

The affect denied by ideology is, thereby, not enjoyment or pleasure, but a 'painful' renunciation of transcendental (ideological) re-assurance, and the ensuing sense of an irreducible anxiety and uncertainty. Suspension of our everyday ideological identification, our disengagement from a reassuring ideological fantasy, is always minimally anxious.

Anxiety and Enthusiasm

The liberating 'pain' of anxiety stands opposed to the 'pain' of guilt. Whereas, guilt reflects our attempts

to fulfill impossible demands placed upon us by an external, transcendental authority (namely, within an ideological structure with solicits our enjoyment, guilt is a reflection of our inability to enjoy), anxiety correlates to our confrontation with our absolute responsibility; the absence of any external authority on which we can rely.

[A]ccepting guilt is a maneuver which delivers us of anxiety... we withdraw from the dizziness of freedom ... into the constraints of the externally imposed prohibitory Law, so that the freedom which then arises is the freedom to violate the Law, freedom caught in the vicious cycle of Law and its transgression... When we obey the Law, we do it as part of a desperate strategy to fight our desire to transgress it.⁴¹

41. Žižek, *Parallax View*, 89-90.

The emancipatory dimension of anxiety releases us from a cycle, wherein “the more we obey ... the more we feel guilty.”⁴² Anxiety, thereby, both renders possible an authentic ethical act - an act reducible neither to obedience nor to transgression, and, as the affect “co-extensive with the human condition”⁴³, opens a possibility of a community unconstrained by the Law of prohibitory authority - a community not grounded in an exclusion of an other, an intruder, who does not share its particular identity.

42. Žižek, *Parallax View*, 90.

43. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 622.

The critical-emancipatory anxiety must also be opposed to cynical, pessimistic resignation. Cynicism designates, precisely, a return to the ideological position wherein a disavowal of an explicit doctrine is grounded in an implicit, affective sustenance of the same. Cynical disavowal of emancipatory possibility ultimately serves to dissipate our sense of anxiety, providing us minimal reassurance of transcendental consistency (even if, it is only a consistency of hopelessness). Consequently, in order to

maintain an authentic sense of critical anxiety, it must be, paradoxically, supplemented with, equally authentic, optimistic enthusiasm of committed engagement (a position Žižek ascribes to Alain Badiou).

44. Žižek is here paraphrasing Sigmund Freud. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 622.

[Insistence on anxiety as “the only affect which does not cheat”⁴⁴] unavoidably ends up in some kind of cynical pessimism (which can be also masked as a tragic grandeur): all collective enthusiastic engagement ends in fiasco, the truth can only be experienced momentarily, in self-blinding acts of tragic authenticity in which we ‘traverse the fantasy.’ These moments cannot be sustained permanently, so the only thing we can do is to ‘play the (social) game;’ aware that it is ultimately a mere game of illusions. Badiou enables us to break out of this ennobled tragic cynicism: enthusiasm is no less “authentic” than anxiety, a collective political engagement does not eo ipso involve imaginary misrecognition. This difference is absolutely crucial today - it is the difference between political death and life, between endorsing the reigning post-political cynicism and gathering the courage for a radical emancipatory engagement.⁴⁵

45. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 622-623.

The simultaneous sense of anxiety and enthusiasm comprises the affect of confronting the gap. The addition of the latter (enthusiasm, courage...) is a necessary supplement preventing the return of transcendental assurance masked beneath cynical resignation. Ideological disengagement (our withdrawal from reassuring ideological certainties) does not correspond to a paralyzing fear of the unknown, but to a naive, passionate, optimistic engagement in a struggle for the future. The coexistence of anxiety and enthusiasm marks an authenticity of each.

Only through an enthusiastic engagement with the freedom opened up by anxiety, can the authentic sense

of anxiety - of an irreducible sense of an openness within reality - be maintained.

[A]nxiety is the necessary background of enthusiasm: there is no enthusiasm without anxiety, enthusiasm does not begin in itself, it is formally the result of the conversion of anxiety.⁴⁶

46. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 838.

Enthusiasm of our political engagement, our belief in the possibility of change, marks the authenticity of our ideological disengagement, our inability to draw comfort from transcendental certainty. In its narrowest definition, a revolutionary moment is an instance, where an anxiety-inducing openness of future possibilities (a realization that no power is in control and no outcome is guaranteed) is engaged through an enthusiastic struggle over the definition of the future.

Žižek's own, seemingly contradictory, political position, an enthusiastic commitment to revolutionary communism combined with rigorous, anxious questioning of any communist practice, reflects the paradoxical nature of his critical-emancipatory position. The authenticity of a commitment to a communist ideal, insistence on the need for social equality and liberty, is correlative with a ceaseless interrogation of its particular programme. Anxious, critical questioning is not the opposite of a commitment to practice (Žižek openly endorses real-life political options⁴⁷), but the cornerstone of emancipatory political practice. Anxiety reflects an unwillingness to compromise radical emancipatory ideals, an unwillingness to exchange them for reassuringly attainable goals. Conversely, a possibility of rational, critical interrogation avoiding everyday ideological mystification, is only opened up through an enthusiastic commitment to a revolutionary ideal. Only a commitment to the possibility of

47. Most notably, current Greek opposition leader, Alexis Tsipras.

48. This is best illustrated by the gradual disappearance of 'practical' social-democratic welfare state (in Europe) and liberal civil rights (in United States), following the demise of revolutionary spirit in the post-1968 Western world.

49. Slavoj Žižek, "Learning To Love Leni Riefenstahl." *In These Times*, (10 September 2003). <http://www.lacan.com/zizekleni.htm>

50. Alan Johnson. "Is Slavoj Zizek a Left-Fascist?" *The Telegraph*, (1 January 2013). <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/alanjohnson/100195901/is-slavoj-zizek-a-left-fascist/>

revolutionary transformation (only a dream of revolution haunting our everyday political practice) prevents an obscene acceptance of immanent social tragedy, injustice, and oppression as inevitable or unavoidable - as if a part of greater natural harmony.⁴⁸

Žižek's insistence on the necessity of re-appropriating "totalitarian" forms and practices, such as his affirmation of the necessity of revolutionary terror (albeit, not necessarily bloody), insistence on an emancipatory dimension within public spectacles of mass gymnastics (including his reappraisal of the work of Leni Riefenstahl)⁴⁹, assertion of the necessity of organizational discipline among the left (earning him accusations of left-fascism⁵⁰), as well as, his professed love for formally rigorous "totalitarian", "Stalinist" architecture should be read as reflecting the necessity of an optimistic, "utopian", aesthetic sensitivity as a precondition for critical-emancipatory anxiety. The affirmation of a formal order and rigorous structure of representational appearance, is, for Žižek, necessary, in order to avoid cynical/ironic distance from 'ideological' commitment.

The hero of Žižek's emancipatory practice is the eponymous protagonist of Jaroslav Hašek's anti-authoritarian novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*. Josef Švejk is a working-class conscript in Austro-Hungarian army who ends up sabotaging the war effort, not through disobedience, but by obeying orders too literally, carrying them out to their absurd conclusion. It is never clear whether the consequences of Švejk's actions are intentional or not; whether his apparent idiocy is real or faked. His over-enthusiastic proclamations "Long live the Emperor!" and "We shall win this war!" appear ironic and incendiary in the context of widespread, matter-of-fact, anti war sentiment of the public. (The Czech public largely sympathized with their fellow Slavs whom they

were supposed to fight.) When charged with sedition, Švejk cooperates with childlike innocence, trying to assist his captors, encouraging their strictness etc. While following the explicit rules (all too literally), Švejk violates the implicit meta-rules; the habits and customs, that comprise the unspoken affective framework necessary for maintaining normal power relations. For Švejk, formal loyalty to the Emperor coincides with a naive, matter-of-fact, yet uncompromising egalitarianism. He treats everyone he interacts with the same dignity and respect, regardless of their widely diverging social status. When at the battlefront he sees soldiers shooting, he shouts: “Stop shooting, there are people on the other side!”⁵¹

Švejk appears to lack a ‘sense of reality’; an implicit, unspoken understanding of “informal rules which tells us how we are to relate to explicit norms: how we are to apply them; to what extent we are to take them literally; and how and when we are allowed, even solicited, to disregard them;”⁵² an understanding of proper measure.⁵³ Cynics (virtually all the other characters in Hašek’s novel) who maintain “critical” distance towards the Law (discreetly mocking it, breaking it in private) end up perpetuating it in practice. They pose no threat to the authoritarian order. Far from undermining authority, cynicism functions as its necessary affective supplement. Power tries to control our enjoyment, not by forbidding it with explicit rules, but by pressuring us to enjoy our discreet transgressions. (An emblematic figure of power is an undercover police agent who attempts to prove Švejk’s anti-Austrian sentiment by inducing him, while happily inebriated to sign popular anti-war songs.) Švejk undermines the injunction to enjoy not by not enjoying himself, but by enjoying too much - enjoying ideology too directly - without the expected transgressive cynical-ironic distance.

The basic paradox of the relationship between public

51. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 1.

52. Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*. (New York: Picador, 2008): 158.

53. Švejk successfully operates in the same, seemingly absurd, grotesque universe, where one constantly needs to read between the lines, that poses great difficulty for Kafka’s Josef K. (Coincidentally, Kafka and Hašek were contemporaries; both writing in 1920s Prague.) Švejk can be read as a comedic counterpoint to tragic Josef K; succeeding through apparent idiocy where the other one failed. See for example Hans Kragh-Jacobsen, “Prague: Kafka and Hašek.” < http://www.zeitzug.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1110&Itemid=390>

power and its inherent transgression is that the subject is actually 'in' (caught in the web of) power only and precisely in so far as he does not fully identify with it, but maintains a kind of distance toward it; on the other hand, the system (of public Law) is actually undermined by unreserved identification with it.⁵⁴

54. Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, 148.

Critique must appear as its opposite. Practices, that formally draw "the line of separation between 'real problems' and 'ideological chimeras'" comprise "the very founding gesture of ideology: ideology is by definition self-referential - that is, it always establishes itself by assuming a distance towards (what it denounces as) 'mere ideology'."⁵⁵ Affective reassurance (closure of anxiety) is always a product of reflexive, ironic distancing; opposed not to the representational form of order, but to the naive optimistic dimension within it.

55. An idea Žižek ascribes to Jacques Rancière. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies*. (London and New York: Verso, 2008): 211n.

The target of critique is thus not the falseness of representation: the illusory, limited character of any consistent representation order which does not allow for real-life multiplicity and complexity. The gap (the excess of inconsistency) corresponds not to any substantial multiplicity of reality (that invariably escapes any representational order) but to a non-substantial (purely formal) excess within the order itself. The gap can only be revealed as an inherent inconsistency within an otherwise consistent order.

In its minimal definition, a critical-emancipatory gesture designates merely an avoidance of cynical/ironic shortcuts enticing us to bypass the full affective consequences, of an inherent sense of anxiety within a represented order. The affect of the gap both cannot be represented and does not precede representation (does not exist without representation). It corresponds, precisely, to the constitutive 'excessive' effect of representational

appearance.

A simultaneous sense of anxious uncertainty and enthusiastic optimism lies at the core of every architectural project. An architectural intervention is invariably both accompanied by an optimistic enthusiasm - embodying our hopes for a tangible better future, and, as Mark Wigley observes, arises out of an irreducible doubt - an uncertainty that the intervention is meant to alleviate.

Whenever a society is unsure of something, it puts a building on top of this uncertainty. The most obvious example would be when somebody you love dies, you put a gravestone on top this impossible doubt, this gap, this horror. If you don't know what the meaning of a political system is,... you put a building right there. So always surrounding us are these images of certainty, stability, authority, but they are actually always located in points of maximum insecurity and doubt.⁵⁶

The constitutive sense of uncertainty on top of which architecture is situated reflects the constitutive anxiety of ideological disengagement. Our horror, or confusion, is not merely a product of external intrusion, but of an inability (or unwillingness) to reconcile this intrusion into a greater meaning provided by an ideological fantasy. The task of emancipatory critical architecture consists in re-inscribing this constitutive sense of uncertainty - a sense of suspension within everyday certainty - within an architectural intervention, while maintaining both its representational role as an image of certainty (as Wigley notes) and its utilitarian role as an efficient, functional object (as Žižek points out).⁵⁷

Anxiety and Enthusiasm of Architecture

56. Mark Wigley. "AD Interviews: Mark Wigley." Interviewed by David Basulto. ArchDaily. (18 Mar. 2009) <http://www.archdaily.com/17252>

57. Žižek and Wigley were co-panelists on "Architecture and Pleasure" panel at the "1st Architecture and Society International Congress, Architecture: More for Less" hosted by Arquitectura y Sociedad in Pamplona on 10 June 2010.

58. Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 602.

Architecture (together with design) is here unique: it has to generate [an] affect of suspension of everyday functioning, of disengagement, while simultaneously constructing buildings which still meet the material needs of the people using it and thus function as part of everyday functional reality.⁵⁸

The crucial Žižekian insight (the dialectical shift), which is, in the case of architecture, missed by Žižek himself, lies in transposing the sense of critical anxiety as a paradoxical product of an over-commitment to its representational and utilitarian constraints. The representational and functional constraints of architecture do not limit its critical capacity. The constitutive nature of the gap, as a purely formal inconsistency rather than a particular, substantial, identifiable feature, can only be revealed as an unavoidable excess within the contingent, normative, socially imposed order. Architecture's everyday functional and representational constraints merely provide it with the necessary formal order within which constitutive gap can be registered. The sense of critical anxiety can only be opened up through an over-representation of order, and an over-efficiency of utilitarian organization.

The criticality of a work corresponds to its apparent, representational naivete; its over-emphasis, over-ascription of importance (missing the "proper" ironic or cynical distance) to its contingent, socially imposed constraints; enthusiastically, rigorously transposing these constraints into formal organizational principles. Opposed to critical-emancipatory architecture stands both ironic, uncommitted playfulness, and cynical, gloom of pseudo-critique, which while transgressively undermining particular, representational and functional constraints, affectively re-produce a sense of transcendental order.

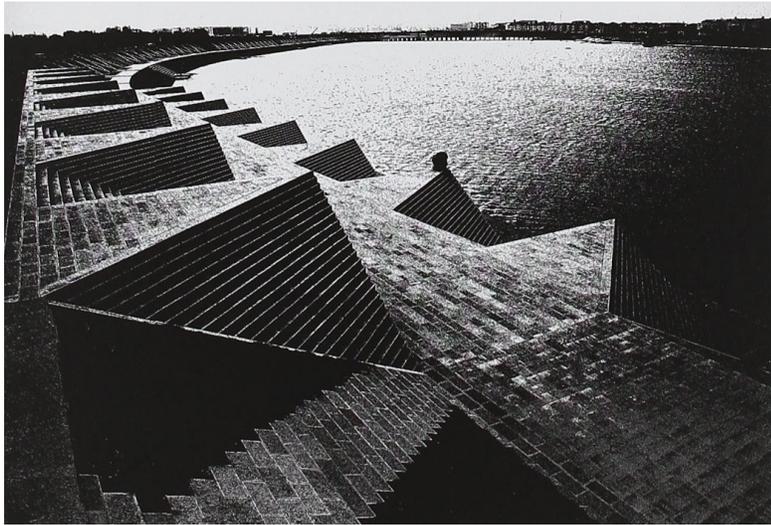
The universal (pre-transcendental) dimension of the gap, for Žižek, corresponds to (and can only be revealed as) an inherent immanent gap within a contingent, particular content. (In Žižek's words, "[t]he truth of transcendence is a radical gap in immanence."⁵⁹) Consequently, critical practice is both independent of its particular functional or representational content (critique is possible everywhere, ordinary, generic architecture, constrained primarily by demands for efficiency, possesses no less critical potential, than prestigious, representative structures), yet only achievable through an over-identification with its contingent particularities (the contingent demands imposed upon it). A sense of simultaneous anxiety and enthusiasm emerges merely through (a negative, but nonetheless difficult, gesture) of avoiding compromises; whether pseudo-critical ironic disinvestment, or pseudo-enthusiastic self-celebration. Žižek's injunction to emphasize the gap should thus be read as affirmation of architecture's inherent critical capacity. Critique corresponds to a commitment to an architectural impulse as such; the core of simultaneous anxiety and enthusiasm propelling any architectural project.

The limited, fragmentary, and somewhat inconsistent, nature of Žižek's engagement with architecture does not indicate an incompatibility of architectural and theoretical concerns. The difficulty in emphasizing the gap within architecture reflects architecture's open admission of it. Perhaps, more so than any other discipline architecture is already aware of, and defined by, its inherent contradiction: form and function, appearance and use, limitation of architects' power and the scope of problems confronting them, as well as, architecture's constitute anxiety and its equally constitutive enthusiasm. If architecture is understood as the quintessential affective practice, a physical, material embodiment of affective intensities, it

59. Žižek's response to a question from Giorgio Agamben quoted in "Mind the Gap. Žižek, Hegel and the Metaphysics of Contingency". *Ernst Blog: Ernst Bloch on the Web*. (25 January 2012) <http://ernstbloch.wordpress.com/2012/01/25/mind-the-gap-zizek-hegel-and-the-metaphysics-of-contingency/>

comprises the very mechanism of Žižek's emancipatory critique. Žižek's intervention in film, literature or music, may be read not only as an interventions in their affective architecture, but also as calls to adopt quintessentially architectural affect within them.

Towards a Žižekian Definition of
Critical-Emancipatory Architecture



The need for critique in architecture, both as critique of architecture, and as architecture as social critique, arises out of a recognition that seemingly desirable interventions often aggravate problems they aim to resolve. Well intentioned attempts to render the built environment more beautiful and pleasant often destroy what, with hindsight, seem to be its most beautiful and pleasant features. Our former solutions become our new problems.

The seemingly paradoxical counterproductive dimension of architectural interventions is illustrated in Adolf Loos' parable of The Poor Little Rich Man. Despite possessing seemingly all that one can desire - "[h]e had money and possessions, a faithful wife ... and a brood of children"¹ - Loos' eponymous protagonist, nevertheless finds himself precluded from true happiness; unable to enjoy his fortune. Perceiving himself as alienated from his authentic identity, and envious of others whose worries seem to be "charmed away by a great sorceress - Art!"², the Poor Little Rich Man instructs a famous architect to transform his home, hoping that his true self would thereby be realized.

Every room formed a symphony of colours, complete in itself. Walls, wall coverings, furniture, and materials were made to harmonize in the most artful ways. Each household item had its own specific place and was integrated with the others in the most wonderful combinations. The architect had forgotten nothing, absolutely nothing. Cigar ashtrays, cutlery, light switches - everything, everything was made by him. But these were no ordinary architect's arts; no, the individuality of the owner was expressed in every ornament, every form, every nail. (It was a psychological piece of work whose difficulty will be evident to

Opposite: Fig. 2.1 Ai Wei Wei - Fake
Design: *Yiwu South Riverbank*

Precluded from Living

1. Adolf Loos, "The Poor Little Rich Man" in *Adolf Loos, Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays 1897-1900* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1982): 125.
2. *ibid*

3. *ibid*

anybody.)³

At first, the Poor Little Rich Man felt pleased. He enthusiastically devoted himself to studying the Art of his home. But, soon a transformation took place in him. An environment where every ornament expressed various particularities of his personality increasingly burdened his mind. As if his entire existence were circumscribed by the details of his home, he found himself unable to act; trapped in a prison of his own making.

The happy man felt suddenly deeply, deeply unhappy. He imagined his future life... He was precluded from all future living and striving, developing and desiring. He thought, this is what it means to learn to go about life with one's own corpse. Yes Indeed. He is finished. *He is complete!*⁴

4. Loos, "The Poor Little Rich Man," 127.

A negligible, yet irreducible, sense of oppression, similar to the one experienced by the Poor Little Rich Man, commonly accompanies our encounter with otherwise beautiful and inspiring works of architecture. Pristine new buildings often seem to dull our experience of the world, depriving it of what in retrospect appears as vibrant complexity and unconstrained potential.⁵ The ability of architecture to engender a sense of oppression is often ignored: dismissed as personal pathology, an understandable, but irrational nostalgia for the old, a small price to pay for the greater good of progress; or reduced to a problem of architecture's functional performance or alleged symbolic meaning. The disregard of the experienced sense of oppression merely accentuates it. Like the Poor Little Rich Man, we learn to walk with our own corpses. Tolerating our oppression, we become our own oppressor; precluding ourselves from future living and striving, developing and desiring.

5. The development of the Olympic Park in London's Lower Lea Valley provoked lament of "the violent trampling of this vibrant edgeland, home to abattoirs and breakers' yards, newspaper printing plants and cooking-fat recycling plants, as well as both the largest church congregation and biggest pile of fridges in Europe. All this was to be swept beneath a pristine carpet of tarmac and undulating Teletubby mounds, a piece of golf-course urbanism dotted with sporting white elephants." Oliver Wainwright. "The best architecture of 2012," *The Guardian*, (5 Dec. 2012). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2012/dec/05/best-architecture-of-2012?INTCMP=SRCH>

The task of critique resides in transforming our sense of apprehension and discontent into a ground for an emancipatory architectural practice. From critical-emancipatory position, the oppressive character of architecture resides not in a disregard of the old, or of its context, but in the lack of real novelty it offers. Misperceived as nostalgia is not the longing for the past, but a longing for a radically different future. Our sense of oppression is a mourning of a future that might have been. Not novelty, but a lack of ambition disappoints us. The sensitive failure of formally exuberant and often genuinely technologically daring projects is not grounded in their non-functionality or symbolic inadequacy, but in an absence of real (political) dreams. Their apparent confidence, a heroic disregard of the old, disguises cowardice; a failure to confront the world as it is, permeated by oppression and desire to transform it. Works acclaimed for formal and technological daring must be critiqued for their insufficient daring in transforming social relations.

The failure of a work, its tendency to reproduce problems, must not be opposed with pseudo-wisdom of modesty that cautions us against excessive ambition and prescribes return to tradition. Rather than questioning aims, a critique must always be formulated as a condemnation of the manner in which our aims have been compromised, of self-imposed limitations, and our acts' insufficiency to their own terms.

The story of the Poor Little Rich Man, as well as Loos' famous equation of ornament with crime, is usually read as a critique of excess. The figurative crime of ornament (of which Loos implicitly accuses the Poor Little Rich Man's architect) is equated either with superfluity - the non-functional excess of symbolic art-value interfering with the Poor Little Rich Man's home's utilitarian use-value, or with inflexibility - the excess of

6. See Hal Foster, *Design and Crime*. (New York and London: Verso, 2002): 14-17.
7. This reading of Loos is certainly supported by some of his writing. As has been noted Loos failed to develop a systematic analysis of the phenomena he critiqued. He offered a profusion of examples of the works he ridiculed without identifying (at least explicitly) their common feature. See Miriam Gusevich, "Decoration and Decorum, Adolf Loos's Critique of Kitsch," *New German Critique* 43. (Winter, 1988), 97-123.
8. See Daniel Willis, *Emerald City*. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 130-132.

over-design⁶ that restricts adaptation or personalization. Loos seems to alternate between advocating functionalist architecture devoted to satisfying purely utilitarian demands (abandoning its symbolic role as an embodiment of identity),⁷ or architecture which would allow its inhabitants to participate in (or even direct) the transformation of their environment⁸ (enabling them to fluidly assume and transform their symbolic identity). In both cases, equating ornament with excess misses the core of its oppressive dimension, and the removal of the excess feature that seems to be prevent Poor Little Rich Man's enjoyment reproduces the obstacle it sought to avoid.

The functionalist proposition - a home comprised of objects whose forms directly reflected their intended use, thereby smoothly accommodating 'practical' needs, would seem to be no less oppressive than a home filled with superfluous ornaments; nor more conducive to living and striving, developing and desiring. It would equally deprive the Poor Little Rich Man of space for authentic action, reducing him to a bare animal-like life. Similarly, the (more sophisticated) participatory notion of a versatile, transformable home that allows for registration of personal memory and identity, at best returns the Poor Little Rich Man to his original state, failing to ameliorate his perceived alienation - the inauthenticity, which propelled his initial quest for Art. Diminishing the oppressive authority of the architect (or more relevantly, the developer), does not redress the oppressive dimension of architecture itself, and transposing the cause of oppression onto an external figure, also obscures the subject's own complicity in it. (Leaving aside particular changes to the home itself, participatory design would merely be oppressive more efficiently. It would be a more symbolically efficient version of the home designed by the famous architecture.) Since, our built environment is always inherently incomplete, and ultimately malleable,

advocating adaptability and versatility merely acclaims the already existing - defending it from an incursion of 'design'. It does not address (or even represses) a desire for design.

The identification of the cause of Poor Little Rich Man's unhappiness with his excessive desire for Art, or of excessive striving for symbolic identity, that characterizes participatory and functionalist readings of Loos' story invariably prescribes practices whereby human desires for more than bare or transient being are themselves compromised and oppressed. In contrast to the condemnations of excess, an emancipatory critique must always identify the oppressive capacity of an object in its betrayal of its own purported aim. The most critical reading must also be the most naive. The failure of ornament, therefore, lies not in its non-functionality nor non-adaptability, but in its failure to express the subject's sense of the self; namely, his only genuinely authentic identity.

The Poor Little Rich Man's story should be read as narrating a shift in perspective wherein what formerly appeared as an external gap; a distance separating the protagonist's idea of himself and the outward appearance of his home (namely, his personal and social dimensions), is recognized as internal to the subject; a gap separating the subject and his perceived identity - a minimal, yet irreducible, distance between the Poor Little Rich Man's own experience of himself and all the particularities of his identity which he now finds expressed in his home. With all his particularities embodied in his home, the Poor Little Rich Man suddenly experiences himself as pure (but actually existing) abstraction relating to all his particular features as something contingent.⁹ Whereas formerly the cause of his unhappiness was traced to his non-identity with his home (his social identity), once that discrepancy

9. He becomes, in Žižek's terms, proletarian. To be proletarian is to be devoid of all particular features. Loos' story could thereby interpreted (in Marxist terms) as an allegory of political struggle, with the Poor Little Rich Man as a potential revolutionary agent arriving at 'class consciousness'.

was eliminated, he suddenly confronts his own non-identity with himself; the internal inconsistency, the inner splitting (the gap) at the core of human identity. The oppressive nature of ornament (as well as the oppression of functionalist and participatory architecture) lies in its inability to express the gap that constitutes the subject.

The failure of ornament lies in its compromise. The Poor Little Rich Man's particular features expressed in it comprise an attempt to avoid the sense of the gap, to fill in, his internal non-identity with contingent particularities. Both the functionalist exclusion of the non-functional, and its pragmatic utilization as an identity marker or a transient sensory stimulant, are equally insufficient as a program for emancipatory architecture. They avoid the sense of the gap at the core of human existence.

The Poor Little Rich Man's melancholy anxiety should be read not as a problem to be avoided (a gap to be filled), but as an indication of his newfound awareness of a previously existing (and universal) condition. Loos' fable would be far more tragic were the Poor Little Rich Man, albeit still precluded from living, striving, desiring, to accept this fate with cynical resignation; supplanting the lack of true living with ironic distance towards reality. The shift of perspective marked by his unhappiness is a painful, but necessary step. Anxiety should not be eliminated, but transformed into a ground for action. It is a first sign of possibility; a necessary ground for liberation. The critical task lies in re-inscribing the gap that separates our symbolic identity (the appearance of our home) from our self-experience, into our identity itself. (Loos' apt naming of his protagonist as a man simultaneously rich and poor, by designating properties opposed to each other reflects the very non-symbolizable gap at the core of his self-identity). As Žižek notes, "the only 'success' the subject can gain is the reflexive shift of perspective which recognizes success in failure itself."¹⁰ The only authentic

10. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (London: Verso, 2012), 520.

enjoyment, living, striving and desiring, lies in learning to enjoy the gap!¹¹

The oppressive dimension of ornament corresponds to its function as a fetish.¹² For Žižek, fetish designates an object or a feature to which one clings and which allows us “to endure all the dirty compromises of [our] life.”¹³ Fetish is a mark of a compromise. In *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Žižek provides a series of anecdotal and literary examples of fetish objects: a pet hamster, which embodies a loving husband’s disavowal of the death of his wife, allowing him “to talk coolly about his traumatic last moments with her,”¹⁴ until the hamster (formerly his wife’s pet) dies and the man suffers acute depression; a button, in a short story by Patricia Highsmith, that reminds a middle-class New Yorker living with an intellectually impaired son of a time when he had been able to strike back against his miserable destiny (by inexplicably assaulting a beggar from whom he would steal the button) and allows him to serenely endure his everyday “family nightmare”; a cheap, commemorative plate stolen by a disenchanted Stasi¹⁵ agent from his office - “his act of ‘small private revenge’ for all the compromises and humiliations of his life - stealing this plate was the only thing for which he could summon enough courage.”¹⁶ For Žižek, the fetish operates as a de-sensitizing screen that allows us to separate our factual knowledge from our belief. It allows us to cognitively accept traumatic reality, while simultaneously neutralizing its full affective impact.

Far from obfuscating “realistic” knowledge of how things are, the fetish is, on the contrary, the means that enables the subject to accept this knowledge without paying the full [that is, affective] price for it: ‘I know very well [how things really stand], and I am

11. “I want us to enjoy our wounds!” Slavoj Žižek, “From Hegel to Marx...and back to Hegel! The Dialectical Tradition in Times of Crisis.” Conference, São Paulo. (March 2013) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRjF1YuGzrM>

Precluded from Politics

12. The fetishistic dimension of ornament is already latent in Loos’ own writing. In his terms: fetish transforms ornament into kitsch. See Miriam Gusevich, “Decoration and Decorum, Adolf Loos’s Critique of Kitsch.”

13. Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2008), 298.

14. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 299.

15. The secret police of former East Germany.

16. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 297.

able to endure this bitter truth because of a fetish (a hamster, a button . . .) in which the illusion to which I stick is embodied.’¹⁷

17. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 300.

While fetishes, especially from a perspective of our narrow private concerns, often seem to “play a very constructive role by allowing us to cope with harsh reality”¹⁸, they invariably aggravate the very problems they seem to be ameliorating. By allowing us to avoid necessary critical examination, fetishes (much like Marx’ famous opiates) obscure the necessity of transformative action.

18. Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 296.

A fetishist experiences a button or a hamster as an earthly trace of a greater, transcendental harmony, a counterbalance to the disorder of everyday reality, redeeming the discords and suffering of daily life (personal, social, as well as political struggles) in an fantasy of a higher (transcendental) unity. The fetish appears as an embodiment of imaginary resistance against oppression and injustice that we do not resist in our everyday social reality. It stands for a part of us which exceeds (transgresses) our daily conformity. The fetish seems to resist so that we do not have to: enabling us to bypass necessary (political) action that could fundamentally transform things.

Confronted with apparent disharmony, a sense of higher, transcendent harmony can only be sustained through notional, fetishist transgression of explicit social rules, as if the subsequent survival of the social order we (in our fetish) pretend to rebel against re-assures us of its higher, transcendent virtue.

19. This was certainly not Loos’ intended meaning. Loos did indeed associate tattoos with lawbreaking. He grounded his position in since discredited 19th century criminal anthropology. See Jimena Canales and Andrew Hershel, “Criminal Skins: Tattoos and Modern Architecture in the Work of Adolf Loos,” *Architectural History* 48 (2005), 235-256.

Loos’ equation of ornament and crime mistakes the crime being committed. A fetish is not a crime against law (an obscene superfluous excess, as Loos implies), but a crime of perpetuating an unjust, oppressive law.¹⁹ (Fetishist ornament wastes a commodity more precious than energy and material. It wastes human dreams.) It

operates by re-appropriating our dreams and desires into a dream of order, and a desire for an authority (that would maintain a semblance of a harmonious universe in which we believe). Tattooed savages and degenerate aristocrats, criminals and ‘famous architects’, whom Loos collectively charges of ornament-crime, are guilty, not of transgressing restrictive social norms (such as Loos’ own norm of functionality), but of investing their daily activity into maintaining existing norms, into desperately attempting to keep things as they are.

Tattoos, as well as other pseudo-transgressive, deliberately non-conformist identity markers (recreational drugs, extreme sports, meditative spirituality, fondness for exotic music...) proliferating among social classes least inclined toward overt political engagement (namely, apolitical yuppies and capital-wielding elites) allow them to maintain a sense of positive self-identity when confronted with tragic consequences of their political complicity. The representation of transgression (the appearance of being more than what we do in our social reality) embodied in a tattoo provides a necessary affective distance allowing one to fully enjoy her/his conformity. The ornamentation of the Poor Little Rich Man’s home, similarly, reflects his need for a proper fetish; his desire to fully enjoy his own wealth and fortune. Ornaments (in which he attempted to capture all his particular features) can be read as an attempt to integrate his (otherwise unaccounted-for) social privilege within a greater ‘meaning’ (a product of his particular qualities), thereby allowing him to enjoy it without a sense of guilt.

The failure of a fetish, the price we pay for our enjoyment of social complicity, is, paradoxically, the denial of the authenticity that a fetish claims to embody. By grounding our identity in particularity (directly linking our particular features with a fantasy of universal order), it deprives us of our universal human dimension

as struggling individuals, and consequently of the sense of solidarity with others. A fetish deprives us of politics. To be human is, as Aristotle suggested, to act politically. Devoid of political struggle for social transformation we lose our properly human dimension; reducing ourselves to mere pleasure-seeking automata. The lack of living, striving, and desiring experienced by the Poor Little Rich Man, reflects his lack of engagement in politics. The inability to act is the inability to act politically. To be deprived of political engagement is to be deprived of properly human life.

Precluded from Sense

Fetishes, as Žižek notes, obscure not our immediate awareness of conflicts and struggles (of which we are always aware), but the constitutive nature thereof. A fetish shields our deeply held beliefs in universal order and harmony from empirical knowledge of dissonant, conflicted everyday reality. Fetishization serves to reduce the dissonant everyday reality to an aberration of a universal harmony. In its most concise definition, a fetish is “an object that conceals the void.”²⁰ It does not conceal positive knowledge. It conceals a void in a place where we expect to find reassuring order: divine justice, an organic social body, self-organizing efficient markets etc. Fetishes deny not the existence of concrete conflicts, but the conflicted core, the gap, of the totality of the social order itself.

20. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing* (London and New York: Verso, 2012): 46.

In “The Beauty of a Social Problem”, Walter Benn Michaels invokes Bertolt Brecht’s comments on the “Song of Great Capitulation” from *Mother Courage*. The scene, Brecht, notes...

...will be ‘disastrous’ ‘if the actress playing Mother Courage invites the audience to identify with her’ because the ‘spectator’ will be deprived of the oppor-

tunity 'to feel the beauty and attraction of a social problem.'²¹

21. Walter Benn Michaels , "The Beauty of a Social Problem," *The Brooklyn Rail*, (October 2011)

Fetishistic identification with the heroine, fixation on her concrete particular features, obscures the sense of confronting an abstract problem causing her immediate suffering. "[To]feel the beauty of the problem," Benn Michaels explains, "is precisely not to feel the pathos of the suffering produced by the problem; it's instead to feel the structure that makes the problem."²² The fetishist denial of a capacity to act (politically) corresponds to a denial of particular aesthetic sensitivity. We are deprived of particular aesthetic experience: a sense of facing a structural problem, a sense of irreducible freedom as well as the anxiety of confronting conflict where solidity of order and stability is to be expected.

22. *ibid*

Both the functionalist and participatory architectural approaches are insufficient to liberating the Poor Little Rich Man, since they misidentify architecture's oppressive dimension as a property of either its functional or representational content. A feature or a gesture can be fetishized, appropriated for the benefit of reproducing an existing social order, regardless of the function it serves, or the ideas it represents. Architecture accommodating a socially transformative program or transgressing formal aesthetic criteria may nevertheless engender faith in the stability and universality of the social order within which it is constructed; reassuring us that all necessary social changes can be accommodated within it. Similarly, explicitly subversive messages, images of suffering, disfigured shapes, and disturbing gestures can themselves serve as fetishes; reassuring us that the struggles and conflicts they openly display are nevertheless redeemed within a higher, transcendental order.

Opposite: Fig 2.2. Viktoria Binschtok, *Wand#1*.

According to Benn Michaels, Binschtok's photographs of traces on a wall of an unemployment centre, embody the sense of a social problem by "de-personifying" it. "[W]e can't see whether they [whose traces Binschtok photographs] are lazy or hardworking, we also can't see whether they are men or women or what their race is; in fact, we can't even see (what Brecht wanted the audience to see in *Mother Courage*) their class. What the photograph shows instead is not a class but a mechanism—the "pivot"—that helps make the class system work."

Walter Benn Michaels, "The Beauty of a Social Problem," *The Brooklyn Rail*, (October 2011) <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2011/10/art/the-beauty-of-a-social-problem>

In order to account for the emergence of fetish, Loos' seemingly commonsensical distinction between an object's utilitarian function (its use-value), and its representational appearance (art-value) must be supplanted with a division (in the opposite direction) within appearance itself; a distinction between the representational and the affective dimension of architectural appearance. Architecture both represents particular ideas and embodies particular sensitivities. It can both be read, through formal, socially defined rules of representation, and sensed, through immediate, bodily engagement. The fetish is constituted as an affect: a sense of universal harmony (which can also appear within a representation of an explicit disavowal thereof); a reassuring sense of an ordered universe, of a higher meaning that redeems quotidian suffering, of transcendental stability and fatalistic certainty.

The distinction between the representational (explicit) and the affective (implicit) dimension of a work, parallels John Ruskin's distinction between "external forms" and "internal elements" that together define an architectural style (in this case, the Gothic).

Now observe: the chemist defines his mineral by two separate kinds of character; one external, its crystalline form, hardness, lustre, etc.; the other internal, the proportions and nature of its constituent atoms. Exactly in the same manner, we shall find that Gothic architecture has external forms, and internal elements. Its elements are certain mental tendencies of the builders, legibly expressed in it; as fancifulness, love of variety, love of richness, and such others. Its external forms are pointed arches, vaulted roofs, etc. And unless both the elements and the forms are there, we have no right to call the style Gothic. It is not enough that it has the Form, if it has not also the



23. John Ruskin, *Stones of Venice* (London: Farber and Farber, 1981), 119.

power and life. It is not enough that it has Power, if it have not the form.²³

Both external forms and internal elements are simultaneously present within a work, yet they are independently registered in human experience. Whereas external, or representational forms are cognitively analyzed - read in reference to socially learned concepts -, internal elements, “the power and life” of a work, are felt - affecting us in our immediate bodily experience.

In contrast to Ruskin’s chemical analogy, the relationship between forms and elements cannot be reduced to simple causality. Unlike the direct determination of a mineral’s material quality by its “constituent atoms,” external forms and internal elements of an architectural style are independent of each other. A building, Ruskin emphasizes, may possess particular external forms without corresponding internal elements, or vice versa, we may imply, it may possess particular internal elements devoid of corresponding external forms. The affect (internally) embodied in a work is not determined by the idea (externally) represented by it. As Ruskin implies, an affect is shared between situations of everyday life and art. It provides us with the background of, what he refers to as the builders’ “mental tendencies” or “moral characteristics.” The deepest, unspoken dreams and beliefs are embodied in affects.

24. In Deleuzian terms’ an affect is a “variation of intensity” that arises out of proximity or distance between distinct particular concepts, but is irreducible (non-representable) to a concept itself. See Gilles Deleuze. “On Spinoza’s concept of ‘Affect.’” http://english.duke.edu/uploads/media_items/deleuze-gilles-1978-spinoza-s-concept-of-affect.original.pdf

The affect of a work (the sensibility embodied in it) is registered in the domain of tones, intensities, relative degrees, gradations, proportions, colours and amplitudes. (It is grounded not in particular features, but in a relationship between the particulars.²⁴) Yet although, the affect may be composed of relative qualities, it is no less solid and undeniable. A work possesses an affect, no less than it possesses form or function.

The non-representational nature of fetish, reflected in our inability to define particular fetishistic form or function, is often fatalistically interpreted to deny the possibility of, critical, non-fetishist, architecture. Since the fetishistic character of a work is not grounded in the categories through which architecture is usually interpreted, it may appear as if anything can be fetishized and appropriated. Fatalistic rejection of a possibility of critique or emancipatory practice within architecture is grounded in a misperception of affect as a secondary, ephemeral product of its representational and functional properties, and the personal qualities and memories of those engaged with it. Opposing the identification of affect as a property extrinsic to the work, Gilles Deleuze places it at its very core.

[Art] is no less independent of the viewer or hearer, who only experience it after, if they have the strength for it. What about the creator? It is independent of the creator through the self-positing of the created, which is preserved in itself. What is preserved - the thing or the work of art - is *a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*.²⁵

Percepts and affects in a work owe nothing to those experiencing them. Moreover, whereas function of a buildings can be re-adapted for new uses, and its representational value is invariably re-interpreted within a changing social context, only the affect defines the building as a work of architecture. If, however, the affect is transformed, we may properly speak of a new work.

The nature of affect, as both embedded in the work (separate from the personal memory of those who experience it), and separate from its representational dimension thereof, far from rendering critical practice impossible, or futile, opens up an irreducible space for

25. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* (London and New York: Verso, 1994): 164.

critique within architecture. Since fetish is neither a functional, nor a representational feature, architecture may be critical and emancipatory (non-fetishist) regardless of its function and representational meaning. Although architects are ordinarily expected to fetishize their work, to celebrate its particular functional or representational content (the use it is meant to serve), they nevertheless retain an irreducible freedom to critique: to misinterpret or distort the implicit, affective dimension of this demand. Affective dimensions of a work always remain within architects' autonomous decision making.

Aesthetic Tendencies

The non-coincidence of the explicit, representational dimension of appearance and its implicit affective dimension enables us to draw a distinction between order and disorder (or harmony and disharmony) both in the representational and the affective dimension. The semiotic square (see diagram) produced through a doubling of the order-disorder dichotomy, defines four distinct aesthetic tendencies of architectural practice: (1) First, architecture can both representationally and affectively express a belief in an ordered, harmonious universe. (2) It can representationally disavow higher order while nonetheless maintaining it affectively. (3) It can wholly disavow order and harmony. (4) And, finally, it can formally represent a belief in an ordered, harmonious universe, but disavow it affectively. The four aesthetic tendencies (or modes of appearing) can be designated as (1) naive-ideological (or corporatist: embodying a belief in a world structured as a body), (2) cynical-ideological (or fetishist), (3) cynical-critical (or transgressive), and (4) naive-critical (or emancipatory);²⁶ where naiveté and cynicism are properties of representation, and critique and ideology are properties of an affect.

The fourfold categorization of aesthetic practice is already implied in Žižek's reading of four German Idealists: poets Friedrich Schlegel, Schiller, and Hölderlin, and philosopher Hegel. Each figure, in Žižek's reading, stands for particular proposition negotiating the gap between subjective freedom and social order; a particular attempt to redress the Poor Little Rich Man's homelessness, reuniting him (a reflexive subject) with his authentic being.

For Schiller, free human life within nature and culture is possible if it achieves that kind of internal organization, determination from within, or harmony

26. In their political manifestation they correspond to conservatism, liberalism, anarchy, and finally, emancipatory politics (Žižek's communism).

Opposite: Fig. 2.3. Four Aesthetic Tendencies

A similar categorization of contemporary aesthetics is offered by Fredric Jameson in *The Seeds of Time*. Jameson proposes to systematize “the rich plurality of styles [of] postmodernism” (pg. 131) into a semiotic square, producing categories of ‘high modernism’, ‘dirty realism’, ‘deconstruction’, ‘critical regionalism’ on axis ‘innovation-replication’ and ‘totality-part’ (pg. 133). Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): 131-133.

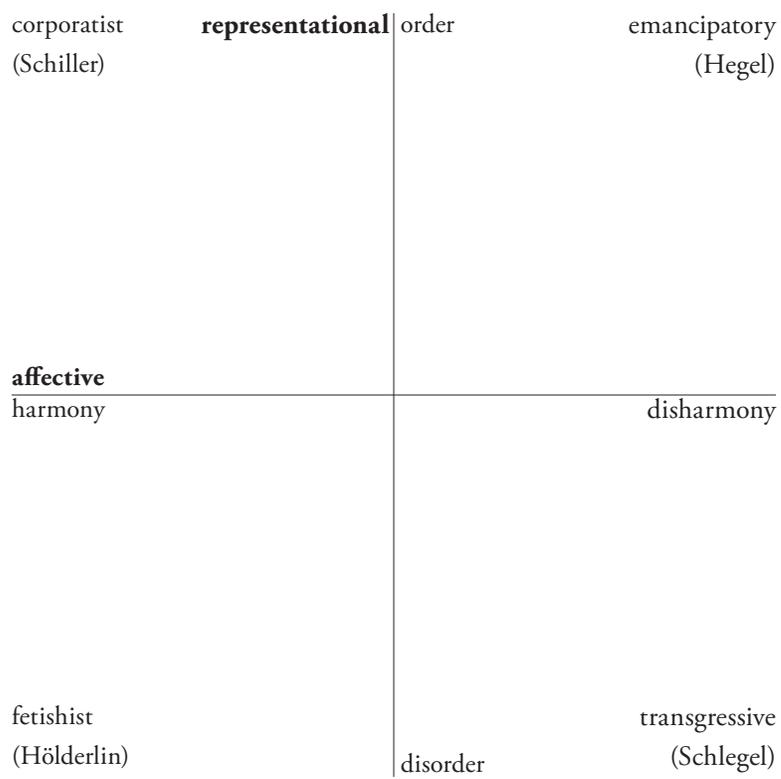
27. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 15.

of parts that is characteristic of both natural and artistic beauty. In a beautiful natural object, we find, as it were, “the person of the thing”; we have a sense of “the free consent of the thing to its technique” and of “a rule which is at once given and obeyed by the thing;” and this is a model for the free consent of an individual to the worth of a social repertoire or way of life. Friedrich Schlegel, on the contrary, seeks to enact a kind of imperfect yet always energetic freedom in continuous, ironic, witty, self-revising activity that characterizes romantic poetry—a kind of commitment to eternal restlessness. ... Schiller believes in the subject’s integration into the organic substantial order - free selfhood can wholly appear in beautiful nature and art; Schlegel asserts the force of subjectivity as the constant unsettling of any substantial harmony.²⁷

Schiller and Schlegel thus occupy the naive-ideological (or corporatist) and cynical-critical (or transgressive) positions on our square. The two are diametrically opposed. Whereas, for Schiller, authenticity corresponds to a complete expression of universal order and harmony, for Schlegel, it resides in a complete disavowal thereof.

Hölderlin occupies the intermediate, cynical-ideological (fetishist) position: explicit, representational disavowal of universal unity combined with implicit, affective re-assertion thereof. For Hölderlin, it is only through a representation (explicit, narrative) of disorder (of a subject’s alienation from authenticity) that a sense of higher order can be achieved. The only way we can cope with (or overcome) our separation from our authentic being (the only way we can be intuitively re-united with it) is by explicitly representing this separation as the content of the narrative we are telling.

[Hölderlin’s] answer is what he calls the “eccentric



path” : the split between substance and subjectivity, Being and reflection, is insurmountable, and the only reconciliation possible is a narrative one, that of the subject telling the story of his endless oscillation between the two poles. While the content remains non-reconciled, reconciliation occurs in the narrative form itself..²⁸

28. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 14.

29. Intuition (a term used in the tradition of German Idealism) refers to an immediate knowledge (a sense) of an object that does not require a concept to mediate it. See Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 298.

The reconciliation, a sense of order and harmony, cannot be read in the narrative, but it can be intuited²⁹ in the form of the non-reconciled narrative. Whereas for Hölderlin, a transcendental order (a sense of harmony) remains, albeit unrepresentable - accessible only through intuition, Hegel, who stands for the fourth, naive-critical (or emancipatory) position abandons the presupposition of an order beyond immediate disorder. For Hegel, disorder, the gap of separation, is inherent to the transcendental order itself.

Hegel occupies here a fourth position - what he adds to Hölderlin is a purely formal shift of transposing the tragic gap that separates the reflecting subject from pre-reflexive Being into this Being itself. Once we do this, the problem becomes its own solution: it is our very division from absolute Being which unites us with it, since this division is immanent to Being. ... Being as the inaccessible pre-reflexive Ground disappears; more precisely, it reveals itself as the ultimate reflexive category, as the result of the self-relating division.³⁰

30. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 15.

Žižek (at least in his immediate analysis) seems to interpret Hegelian reversal as an inversion of preeminence Hölderlin affords intuition over representation - abandoning intuition as the site of authenticity, and returning to representation as the only site of truth. The reversal could, however,

equally be read as an inversion of their respective relation to order. The properly emancipatory position would thus consist (diametrically inverting Hölderlin) in positing the authentic sense of transcendental disorder as a product of representational order. The sense of disorder, the gap of separation, is inherent to the represented order itself. The systematic nature of Hegel's philosophy (notably, its claim to represent the totality and the Absolute) can be read as both an ontological and aesthetic precondition for conceiving radical incompleteness.

The four positions are, of course, not equal. They are, as Žižek notes, "three plus one." All position, other than Hegel's, "remain ... metaphysical, clinging to the notion of a pre-reflexive Ground", retaining the "presupposition of a substantial being beyond the process of (self-) differentiation."³¹ Only with Hegel, where our "very division from absolute Being" immediately unites us with it, do we cease relying upon a transcendental authority for redemption of our everyday alienation, and fully confront the gap.

31. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 16.

In the first aesthetic approach, a work is conceived as an embodiment of a complete and consistent transcendent order. Corporatist architecture strives to transcribe abstract universal principles onto concrete, material particularities of a site; transforming the disorder, complexity, and transience of the latter, into the stability, permanence, balance and harmony of the former. It is characterized by platonic forms, cardinal axis, grids, and by irreverent erasure of particular features of the site in order to incorporate it within a universal order. Corporatist architecture conceives of itself as a struggle, comparable to warfare or medicine. A designer is perceived as a hero...

Corporatist
formal order +
affective harmony

Opposite: Fig. 2.4 Fra Carnevale, *The Ideal City*.

A place where imperfections are not permitted.

32. Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre, "The Question of Autonomy in Architecture." <http://tzonis.com/dks/dks/publications/online%20publications/1984-HAR-The%20Question%20of%20Autonomy.htm>

33. Although, to some extent, the designation of corporatist practice as archaic merely reflects contemporary disapproval thereof, its provenance in pre-modern society is undisputed. See Paul Wheatley, *The Pivot of the Four Quarters: A Preliminary Enquiry into the Origins of the Character of the Ancient Chinese City*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1971)

34. Tzonis and Lefaivre, "The Question of Autonomy in Architecture."

...who after a struggle succeeds in arresting disorder and monstrosity on the site and constructs the perfect palace or the perfect city in the same way that he overcomes the enemy on the battlefield.³²

Much like a classical physician whose aim is to restore the proper balance of humours in a body, corporatist architect's work consists of restoring proper proportion and symmetry to the environment.

Corporatist practice may be seen as characteristic of pre-modern cultures. Early urban centres were often planned as replicas of the universe, centered around a sacred, forbidden place.³³ Architecture of temples and palaces strived to represent the cosmic or moral nature of a social order in which it was constructed.

The practice of architecture was interwoven with ritual while the theory was bound up with conceptual systems of divination... formal perfection was believed to be the outcome of moral perfection-which is, in the end, a version of the doctrine of purity and harmony.³⁴

Corporatism is the aesthetic of Renaissance paintings of Ideal Cities, Albert Speer's design for Nuremberg Nazi rally grounds, the Pyramids (as they were originally meant to be), and the Villa Rotonda. Ancient aristocrats found corporatism re-assuring. The nouveaux riche found it aspirational. Modern state bureaucracies and corporate headquarters derived from it tradition which they otherwise lacked.

Corporatist architecture attempts to connect everyday lived experience within a particular social order with a universal order of nature or of gods. It aims at a symmetry between human, architectural, social, and



35. Contemporary corporatists attempt to ground their notion of a natural order in complex scientific models. See Nikos Salingros, *A Theory of Architecture*, or Christopher Alexander's aptly titled *The Nature of Order: An Essay on the Art of Building and the Nature of the Universe*.
36. Lefaivre and Tzonis, "The Question of Autonomy in Architecture."

cosmological bodies. Those who wish to return the world to an imagined golden age of purity, harmony, balance, of clearly delineated boundaries, of a social order of smoothly operating hierarchies are the architects of corporatism. Wishing to appear as conforming to divine or natural order³⁵, their forms are "dictated by the directives of 'purity' or 'harmony' and taboos of pollution."³⁶ Tragedies and suffering, pollution and imperfection are interpreted as an outcome of earthly violation of transcendent harmony. Corporatists claim that the solution to human problems lies in assuming our ostensibly natural, or divinely-ordained place in a hierarchic order that is at once social and spiritual.

Ultimately, corporatist attempts to eradicate impurities, end up reproducing them. Attempts to maintain an image of tranquil social hierarchy, requires violent exclusion of those who do not fit in it. The appearance of peace and harmony is paid for by hidden everyday social violence, often worse than the one corporatist aestheticians sought to eradicate. As the Poor Little Rich Man learned, attempts to keep the world pure require impurity of exclusion and oppression at its core.

Fetishist
formal disorder +
affective harmony

37. "Decline in the belief in the norms of purity and in the divine order coincided with the emergence of utilitarian norms and... of norms that refer to form itself." Lefaivre and Tzonis, "The Question of Autonomy in Architecture"

Recurring failure of naively ideological, corporatist norms to produce the harmonious world they promise, a realization that impurities and imperfections are caused not only by outside disruption, but by one's attempts to maintain the order itself, ultimately leads to the abandonment of the aim of conformity to a universal order, and the substitution of architecture's transcendental purpose with a variety of profane goals. Instead of embodying universal harmony, in the fetishist aesthetic tendency (perhaps the most common today), architecture professes pleasure or utility³⁷, or, most often,

a combination thereof as its ultimate goal. It explicitly disavows beliefs in transcendental truths, and expresses, cynical or ironic, distance towards traditional norms of harmony and purity.

The expressive, twisted, shattered, cantilevering, asymmetrical, forms that predominate in contemporary architectural practice, as if embarrassed by or afraid of, the naïveté of their corporatist predecessors posit themselves as reflecting an awareness of the complexity of the world, disavowing stifling hierarchies in favour of openness, rational provision of practical needs, or sensual excitement. Both sensual and utilitarian formal norms are fetishistic. Both the utilization of form purely as a sensual stimulant or an iconic image, and, its apparent opposite, the self-professed denouncement of formalism in favour of ostensibly functional needs, stand opposed to the corporatist aim of utilizing form as an explicit manifestation of the transcendental order. Both claim to be devoted to satisfying merely our more or less practical, profane quotidian needs and desires.

For Žižek, this cynical/pragmatic attitude, that disregards “pathetic ideological phrases, and follows only utilitarian and/or hedonistic motivations”³⁸ invariably coincides with fetishization that allows the same disavowed, “ideological” beliefs to flourish.

Cynical distance is just one way - one of many ways - to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironic distance, we are still doing them.³⁹

Explicit disavowal of a belief in transcendent order (the cynical distance) is, often, crucial in order for them to remain operative. In abandoning a claim to embody

38. Slavoj Žižek, “The Spectre of Ideology” in *Mapping Ideology*. (London: Verso 2012): 15.

39. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989): 30.

transcendental order, architecture simultaneously allows itself to serve as a fetishistic support for our belief in the order it claims to have abandoned. Fetishization corresponds to a transposition of a belief and its accompanying norms from representation (where they were explicitly acknowledged) into affective texture. Prohibitions that are explicitly abandoned return as prohibitions of affects.

In Baroque (the official style of the Counter-Reformation) formal, representational displacement, transformation, oblique projection, even transgression of the pictorial frame served to maintain faith in a hierarchically ordered universe; and its earthly representative, the Catholic Church. Oblique, elliptical, sensuous forms illustrated (as novel research in optics, central to the development of the Baroque suggested⁴⁰), that the apparent complexity of everyday life is, in fact, a product of transcendental perfection, much like shapes of increasing complexity were discovered to be projections of perfect Platonic forms onto curved, or twisted surfaces. Twisting, deformed geometry, even the transgression of the frame is no less perceived as a product of perfect, consistent divinity. The Baroque permitted transgressive form in order to communicate, all the more powerfully, an oppressive affect; a sense of higher power unconstrained by laws mere humans can perceive.

Similarly, in post-Fordist labour practices, explicit, formal freedom, an injunction to pursue our dreams, to realize our potential, coincided with increasingly stronger affective prohibition, a prohibition on melancholy or disapproving attitude, an injunction to enjoy. The shift from labour as “a matter of producing things” to labour as a dissemination of sentiments⁴¹ (namely, the profusion of affective labour, of “supplying [one’s] energies physical and emotional in the service of others”⁴²) paralleled an

40. See Angela Ndalianis. “Architectures of Vision: Neo-Baroque Optical Regimes and Contemporary Entertainment Media.” *MIT Communications Forum*. <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/ndalianis.html>

41. Employees at the international food chain Pret a Manger, their manager notes, are expected to be “smiling, reacting to each other, happy, engaged.” Paul Myerscough, “Short Cuts.” *London Review of Books*, Vol. 35 No. 1:3 (January 2013) 25. <<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n01/paul-myerscough/short-cuts>>

42. Paul Myerscough, “Short Cuts.”

official, cultural commitment to individual liberty; allowing relaxation, or open transgression, of traditional dress codes (and all representational codes), and emphasis on displaying one's individuality.

Fetishist tendency is, above all, defined by a need to project a certain sensitivity; namely, a (self-)celebratory affirmation of functional performance, and a (self-)confidence in its capacity to remedy (social) issues confronting us. Fetishist architecture must imply that problems are indeed solvable within the coordinates of the present social order, which is, thereby, rendered as equivalent to a divine or a natural one. While at the formal, representational level, everything seems possible and all appearances are permitted; forms and functions may be unconventional, uncanny, flexible, open, non-hierarchical, disordered an affect other than self-cebratory self-confidence (a sense of being free of problems, as opposed to Brecht's sense of the problem) is prohibited. Despite its representational freedom, fetishist architecture affectively legitimizes the institutions it houses and the social order within which it operates.

The symbiotic relationship of prominent contemporary architects with authoritarian politics⁴³, is not only indicative of architects' indiscriminate willingness to accept commissions, but also, more importantly, of their authoritarian clients' (far more discriminating) taste (even need) for fetishist works. Although architects' engagement with politically repressive regimes could be justified as a strategy to encourage sociopolitical changes⁴⁴ (the strategic choice between engagement and detachment must always be grounded in the particularities of a situation), the authoritarian character of their architecture resides not in architects' acceptance of authoritarian commissions, but in its compatibility with authoritarian clients' fantasies.⁴⁵ Fetishistic architecture is politically

43. While designing Heydar Aliyev Cultural Centre in Baku ("at the request of Ilham Aliyev, Heydar's son and current Azeri dictator"), "Hadid stopped by Baku and was televised laying flowers at the grave of Aliyev, a former kgb chief and the ruler of Azerbaijan until his death in 2003." See Hrag Vartanian, "Is Contemporary Architecture a PR Panacea for Autocrats? Western Architectural Ethics & Undemocratic Nations." *Brooklyn Rail* (September 2008) <<http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/09/artseen/is-contemporary-architecture-a-pr-panacea-for-autocrats>>

44. Apologia for engagement as a means of transforming authoritarian society is exemplified in Jacques Herzog's statement: "It's very cheap and easy for architects and artists and film-makers to pull out or to make this kind of criticism ... Everybody knows what happens in China. All work conditions in China are not what you'd desire. But you wear a pullover made in China. It's easy to criticise, being far away. I'm tempted almost to say the opposite...How great it was to work in China and how much I believe that doing the stadium [and] the process of opening will change radically, transform the society. Engagement is the best way of moving in the right direction". Excerpts from a conversation between Herzog & de Meuron and Tom Dyckhoff in *The Guardian*, March 14th, 2008, cited in Alejandro Zaera-Polo, "The Politics of the Envelope: A Political Critique of Materialism," *Volume 17* (Archis, 2008): 79.

45. Which are, of course, implicit fantasies of transcendent order and harmony, such as the idea of self-organizing efficient markets etc.

Opposite: Fig. 2.5. CCTV on CCTV.
Fetishist architecture demanded by
ideology.

oppressive, irrespective of its clients' particular politics or its particular programmatic content. Even if architecture efficiently resolves practical issues, its affective cynicism (and injunction to celebrate and enjoy) hinders its practical successes; constraining them to the space allowed by authoritarian imagination. Its oppressive quality lies in its exclusion of (or incompatibility with) dreams of political emancipation.

Fetishistic tendencies of contemporary architecture are epitomized in OMA's CCTV headquarters in Beijing. In Beijing Manifesto, Rem Koolhaas describes the building as a "bent" skyscraper; a traditional high-rise tower "broken" into segments and subsequently rearranged into a giant loop. The result is a work of remarkable technological audacity and awe-inspiring formal extravagance; a structure that, in Koolhaas' own words, "violates some of the most sincerely held convictions about logic and beauty."⁴⁶ The transgression of representational notions extends not only to their traditional forms, but also to any formal principles it itself claims to derive from.

The fetishistic character of a work is reflected in the non-coincidence of representational appearance to any formal principles it may claim to derive from (namely, its informality). While CCTV's shape is conceptually a "skyscraper loop"⁴⁷, its final shape (see figure) explicitly violates the purity of its notion by adding additional asymmetrical sloping to its roof and walls. Although the asymmetry may (claim to) be grounded in practical constraints (a structural need for inward sloping columns, or a programmatic need for a sloping roofline etc.), it is crucial to the project's fetishist efficacy. Devoid of additional asymmetry, the building would, for a fetishist taste, appear excessive; too serious, too committed to an "ideological" position, devoid of ironic or cynical distance

46. Rem Koolhaas "Beijing Manifesto" in
WIRED 08 (2004): 126-127.

47. *ibid*



Opposite: Fig. 2.6. OMA's 'skyscraper loop' and, immediately, its distortion.

48. Hence one of the main accusations leveled by malicious critics on OMA's design, and one most vigorously opposed by Koolhaas, was to assert an (obscene) symbolic meaning to the building. "[A] Chinese critic published an article saying that the building's contorted form, which frames an enormous void at its center, was modeled on a pornographic image of a naked woman on her hands and knees. ... forcing Mr. Koolhaas to issue a denial." Nicolai Ouroussoff. "Koolhaas, Delirious in Beijing." *The New York Times*. (11 July 2011) <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/13/arts/design/koolhaas-cctv-building-fits-beijing-as-city-of-the-future.html?pagewanted=all>

upon which fetishism depends. Fetish-ornament is not grounded in a claim of particular meaning. In its most precise, efficient mode, fetish functions, on the contrary, as an explicit disavowal of meaning; claiming to address purely practical, profane concerns, reflecting functional needs or purely sensual desires. A fetish is thus an object which explicitly insists on its own meaninglessness (representational emptiness), yet as such, as an empty signifier, it serves as an anchor for our explicitly disavowed belief. The bent, broken appearance of the CCTV, its explicit disavowal of any order and harmony, allows it to anchor the transcendental nature of the existing social order; namely to support the belief in a higher harmony of a politically authoritarian and economically liberal Chinese state.⁴⁸

Political failure of the CCTV is unrelated to its inefficient use of resources, hidden symbolic meanings, or even the authoritarian nature of its client (namely, the propaganda organ of the Chinese state). Although these accusations may be valid (and, in themselves, important), they do not constitute a political critique of architecture. The oppressive nature of a project, its suitability for fetishization, is, as always, purely a product of a compromise in its own ambition; of an inability to fully, affectively, assume its formal audacity. Koolhaas is right to argue that both the inefficiency of his design, and the authoritarianism of his client, are justified in as much as they allow for, an otherwise impossible, "Promethean" architecture. The oppressive limitation of CCTV corresponds purely to its betrayal (a compromise) of its self-professed "Promethean" character. The heroism and audacity of its formal expression is absent in the manner in which it engages us in its sensual reality as a material object. The representational transgression coincides with affective normativity; an inability to transgress sycophantic, self-celebratory timidity. While

FIG. 1

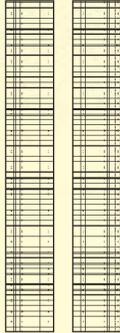


FIG. 2

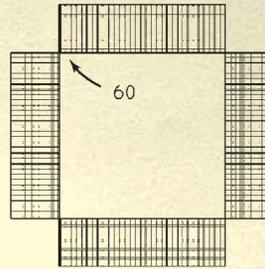
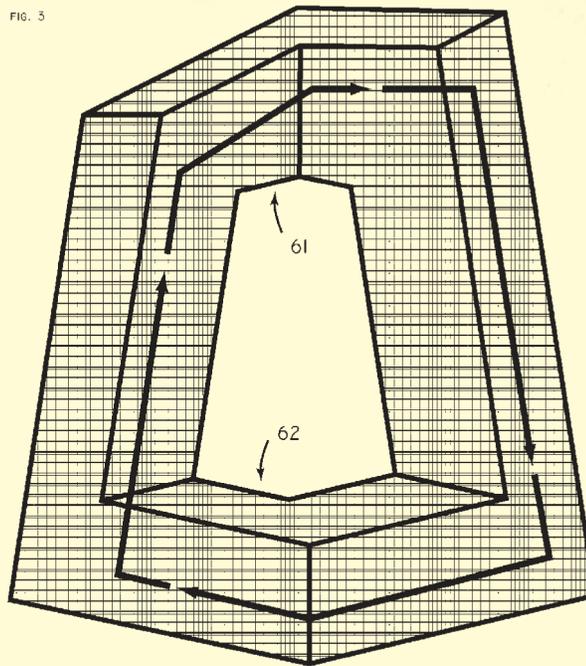


FIG. 3



the structure is openly displayed on the facade, allowing us to cognitively read the powerful forces of tension and compression at work, the bodily sense of the same, an affect of powerful imbalance, is constrained. The transgression operates only at the level of representation. Instead of distorting our sense of an office building, CCTV remains merely a formally distorted office building.

The compromise of a fetishistic project is thereby twofold. First, it avoids the full formal consequences of its own concept; signaling distance from any explicit principles, by bending and breaking them. Second, it avoids the full affective consequences of its own formal distortion; re-assuring us that distortions are merely representational. The withdrawal, the compromise of ambition, is necessary in order to allow for a sense of confident, self-celebration. The achievement of CCTV (the measure of its greatness among fetishist buildings) lies precisely in its successful taming of its own powerful forces, beneath the normality of its curtain wall envelope and the functionality of its spaces. Fetishism, ultimately, relies upon and celebrates obscene self-control. The ability to perform a daring gesture, but step back before its disquieting consequence.

Apparent, formally explicit disavowal of order and harmony grounds fetishism only in so far as it avoids its own affective consequences. The possibility of technological audacity and formal extravagance (openly offered, even demanded, by authoritarian politics) comes at the price of obscuring critical affectivity; an inability to embody a sense of a constitutive contradiction, of “the beauty of the social problem”. The remarkable and awe-inspiring formal extravagance, admirable efficiency, or programmatic innovation, is all too often, a desperate attempt to maintain everyday affective prohibitions.

The transgressive aesthetic tendency, denouncing the contradictions of fetishism, attempts to extend (to accelerate, or intensify) the representational transgression of the former into the affective dimension. Much like fetishism, transgression is not bound by any seemingly 'natural' laws of structure, or economy-of-means, but, unlike fetishism, it is also free of affective necessity or self-celebratory enjoyment that renders formal transgressions acceptable to an existing social order. Liberated from all external conventions, and resolutely avoiding any social instrumentalization of its aims, transgressive works replace all norms (even the most profane utilitarian and sensual ones) with the norm of liberating transgression.

Transgressive opposition to normativity is grounded in a speculative identification of shock with emancipation. Acceleration and intensification of "the loss of certainty, of centre, of history". increasing "change and superficiality" "through clash and disjunction," Bernard Tschumi claims corresponds to "a weakening of architecture as a form of domination, power, and authority."⁴⁹ The transgressive gesture thus claims to be both critical, awakening us to our alienated condition, and liberating, allowing for hitherto obstructed enjoyment. In its narrowest definition, transgression is an inversion of the norm of pleasure and displeasure. Authentic pleasure (or enjoyment), the living, striving, and developing sought by the Poor Little Rich Man, transgressors claim, coincides with critical displeasure (or shock), an amplification of everyday alienation.

The norm broken by transgressive practice is often interpreted as separating architecture from art. Whereas art appears unconstrained in its critical capacity (explicit opposition to social norms has been a recurrent motif of 20th century art), architecture appears to be constrained

Transgressive

formal disorder +
affective disharmony

49. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, 237.

Opposite: Fig. 2.7. Constant, *New Babylon - Group of Sectors Photomontage*. Disorder and disquietude.

50. Constant and Guy Debord, "Amsterdam Declaration." <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/amsterdam.html>

51. Constant and Guy Debord, "Amsterdam Declaration."

52. Constant, "New Babylon: The World of Homo Ludens." 1970. <http://www.notbored.org/homo-ludens.html>

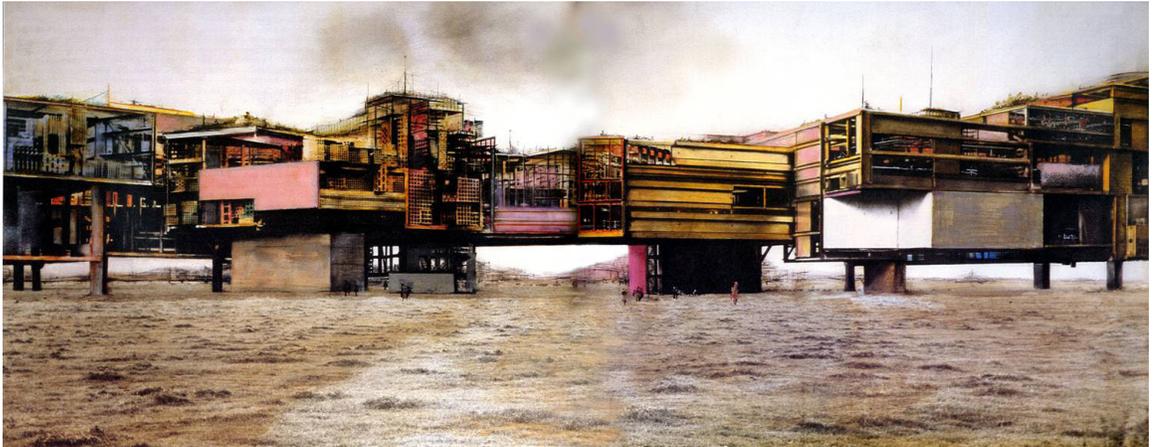
53. Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 152-153.

by functional and representational limitations. Attempts to traverse the division between art and architecture (different "individual arts") are exemplified by Situationist "unitary urbanism."⁵⁰ In contrast to architectural practice grounded in functional, or representational demands, Constant Nieuwenhuis and Guy Debord explicitly posit its aim (namely, the aim of unitary urbanism) as construction of affective ambience.

Unitary urbanism, independently of all aesthetic considerations, is the fruit of a new type of collective creativity; the development of this spirit of creation is the prior condition of unitary urbanism. ... The creation of ambiances favorable to this development is the immediate task of today's creators. ... The construction of a situation is the edification of a transient micro-ambiance and of the play of events for a unique moment in the lives of several persons. Within unitary urbanism, it is inseparable from the construction of a general, relatively more lasting ambience.⁵¹

Constant's project for New Babylon, the most comprehensive attempt to create unitary urbanism - an ambience of creation, strives simultaneously to convey the desirability of future society - the playful world of Homo Ludens - and provide a "condemnation of a morality that still regards labor that can be performed by a machine as the fulfillment of man's life."⁵²

New Babylon is a simulation of a situation of total liberation—of an abolition of all norms, conventions, traditions, and habits. The project radicalizes and idealizes the transitory aspects of the experience of modernity. It imagines a world in which all that is fleeting and transient has acquired the force of a law.⁵³



Opposite: Fig. 2.8. Constant,
Ladderlabyrinth.

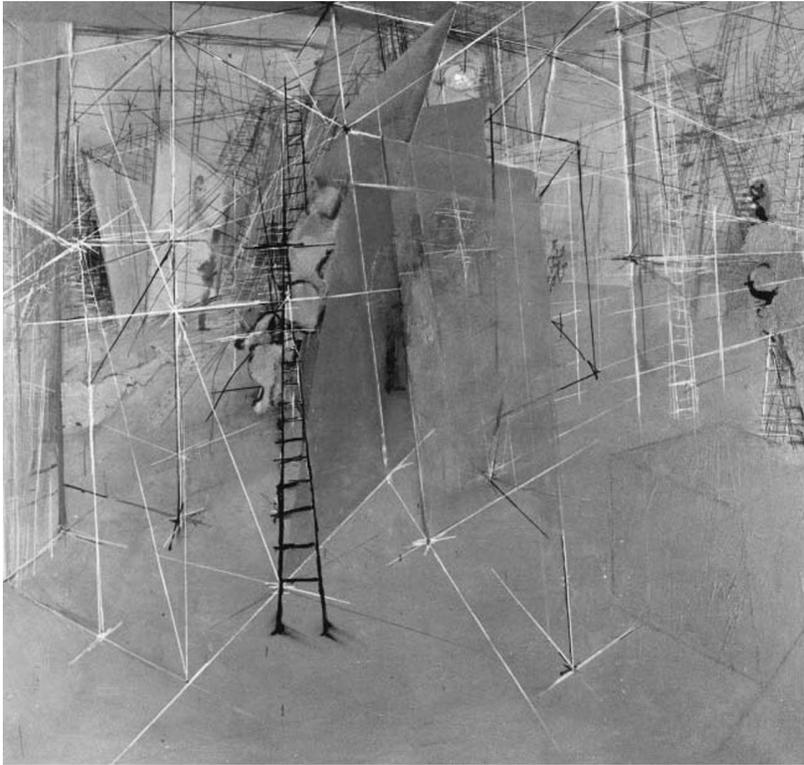
“As a utopian vision of the future, New Babylon therefore arouses feelings of dread rather than of desire: dwelling in a situation of pure indeterminacy apparently does not respond to our deepest wishes and desires.” Hilde Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 172.

Sense of liberation is coincident with an acceleration of existing urban transience; abandoning any recourse to organic pre-modern social order. As Hilde Heynen notes, the product of this transgressive equation is a sense of tension and anxiety permeating through Contant’s drawings.

[F]ragile shapes are opposed to compact ones, dark is opposed to light, dynamic lines are contrasted with static volumes. Sometimes tension is produced by the rhythm of the walls that give structure to the space depicted, or it issues from the movement of the human figures or from the distortions of perspective. This tension can be seen as indicative of the continual oscillation between the liberating and disturbing impressions that the viewer is subjected to. On the one hand, New Babylon fulfills one’s expectations of an absolutely free space, where the individual can construct his own environment as he pleases, exploiting to the full its creative possibilities. Movable walls, ladders, elevators, and stairways suggest a possibility of endless journeys and constant new encounters. The individual can project himself onto his environment within a general structure that harnesses the poetic potential of technology to the full. On the other hand, these drawings also betray a feeling of unease. The indifference with which the earth’s surface has been stripped, the huge scale of the structures supporting the sectors, the endlessness of the interior spaces that never seem to permit any contact with the outside world.⁵⁴

54. Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 168.

Obsessive transformability of New Babylon reflects an identification of formal order with the suppression of creative differences in the face of the vibrant multiplicity of everyday existence. The repetitive monotony of order,



55. While nominally striving to generate or sustain differences, both fetishistic and transgressive practices obscure, in Deleuzian terms, the 'difference in itself'; namely, "the difference that is freed from identities seen as metaphysically primary." (note 1) In Žižek's reading of Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*, "the radically New [radical difference] emerges only through pure repetition." (note 2)

note 1: Daniel Smith and John Protevi, "Gilles Deleuze", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/deleuze/>

note 2: Žižek is here using Deleuze to illustrate the limitation of Hegel. Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 455.

transgressors claim, attempts to eliminate the complexity of disordered reality. The transgressive opposition of order (at its most basic, repetition) and difference reflects an inability to think radical difference; difference not as something imposed onto a neutral, undifferentiated field (through our assumption of particular transgressive identities), but difference as intrinsic, constitutive characteristic of the field itself.⁵⁵

The nightmare of monotonous, self-perpetuating, undifferentiated non-places, which haunts transgressive architecture, reflects its deep insensitivity towards lived reality. Formally formulaic North American suburbs, repetitive Soviet apartment blocks, or undifferentiated junkspace are never sterile or monotonous in their experienced reality. They are permeated with differences, emerging through everyday use, passage of time etc. Difference does not emerge, as a by-product of comparing distinct pre-existing identities. For Žižek, (as well as Deleuze) radical difference (the gap) is the universal preceding the particularity of various identities. The transgressive opposition to order, and insistence on the multiplicity of particularities, does not preserve difference, but, on the contrary, serves to obscure the radical difference as such. Far from revealing constitutive difference the transgressive insistence on formal, representational distinction is an attempt to mask it. Ultimately, transgressors do not fear order, but a more radical disorder permeating through it.

Similarly, transgressive separation from the normative everyday; identifying itself as an exception to a constricting social order - an other place, a heterotopia, which as Heynen points out, permits no (or little) contact with the outside. To be engaged in politics, transgressors suggest, is to step outside; to separate oneself from everyday "economic" needs that define our daily

lives. (“Politics”, from a transgressive standpoint, stands opposed to normative, “apolitical” market demands.) The insistence upon the need for separation ultimately precludes the very possibility of critique in whose name it justifies itself; mitigating the critical impact the works may otherwise possess. The need to signal separateness elevates the order it opposes to a fully-consistent, self-sufficient transcendental truth; again, avoiding the radical gap within the order. The transgressive desire to shock, to break the norms of a social order, fails to recognize that the order is always already broken, internally unstable and inconsistent, desperate for an outside intervention to stabilize it. The separateness from the ordinary⁵⁶ opens the transgressive for appropriation by it; the transgressive object is thus often reduced to a ‘freak show’ that sustains the normative fantasy of a consistent social order.

While, in her reading, Heynen interprets the tension within Constant’s drawings as an unintended revelation of an internal limitation of “utopian world free of inequality and oppression,” ultimately suggesting the “impossibility of giving utopia a concrete form,”⁵⁷ the emancipatory insufficiency of transgressive architecture does not reside in its excessive utopianism. The suggestion of an impossibility of utopia, which Heynen uncovers in Constant’s drawings, marks, instead, their utopian insufficiency. Rather than excessive, transgression is not radical enough. The inherent limitation of transgression can, yet again, be interpreted, as a failure to fully follow through its own premises. If, as Tschumi rightly insists, there is an inherent disjunction in architecture (already inherent in the confrontation of space and event) and consequently, “architecture is constantly unstable, constantly on the verge of change”⁵⁸, this formal instability need not be formally represented.

In spite of the authenticity of its affective confrontation

56. The need for separation is also the critical limitation of Pier Vittorio Aureli’s insistence on the plinth. See Pier Vittorio Aureli, *The Possibility of Absolute Architecture*. (Cambridge Ma.: MIT Press, 2011)

57. Heynen, *Architecture and Modernity*, 173-174.

58. Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, 19.

with tensions and struggles that characterize social problems, transgressive works fail to disturb corporatist social fantasy. Although they may convey the sense of disorder, they fail to locate it within the transcendental order itself. In its desperate attempt to escape the logic of fetishism, transgressive practice ultimately reproduces it. The ultimate (political) effect of Tschumi's works, such as the follies in Parc La Villette, and Constant's drawings of New Babylon, is invariably a return to fetishism; either as a product of inability to achieve critical affectivity, or as the inability of the latter to appear desirable. Despite his transgressive writing, Tschumi's built works are effectively fetishist. His works, much like Koolhaas' reassure us that the ostensible affective novelty embodied therein is already possible within an existing social order. In Constant's case, the undesirable character of his proposals, similarly, reassuring us in the inevitability, or even desirability, of the existing.

Formal insistence on disorder and separation is ultimately itself oppressive. It represses our desire for a positive order other than the existing.

Emancipatory

formal order +
affective disharmony

In its critical-emancipatory mode, architecture is explicitly conceived, much as in its corporatist tradition, as an embodiment of divine order and harmony, yet the order it represents (whereas corporatist order is hierarchical, emancipatory order is egalitarian) coincides not with a sense of transcendental stability, but with struggle and conflict. The commitment to order serves to reveal inherent disorder (the gap) within it. To be critical-emancipatory, architecture must be formally enthusiastic, committed to a social ideal.⁵⁹

The coincidence, and mutual necessity, of formal order and affective disorder is reflected in Immanuel

59. Insistence on a formal order is paralleled in Badiou's notion of 'affirmation', or in Pier Vittorio Aureli's 'absolute'. See Alain Badiou, "The Manifesto of Affirmationism." and Aureli, *The Possibility of Absolute Architecture*.

Kant's critical injunction. In contrast with transgressive ethos, Kant did not oppose thoughtless obedience, with thoughtful disobedience. Instead, he commands us to "obey, but think!"⁶⁰ Only by remaining explicitly, representationally obedient (maintaining an image of order) can we be affectively (and effectively) critical.

Similarly, to use another example, when confronted with traumatic, conflicted social reality, attempts to formally maintain an appearance of order can be more disruptive to our belief in universal, transcendental justice than the direct representation of conflict itself. It is much more traumatic to witness a suffering other's desperate attempt to maintain impossible dignity (to maintain a representation of order), than to witness the most brutal aspects of their hardship. The former strips us of our ability to maintain mere sympathy (along with an unspoken charitable infantilization), and forces us to confront the necessity of political solidarity.

Only the representational claim to embody universal order can disrupt our reassuring (affective) belief in an ordered universe. In order to emphasize the radical nature of the gap, it is insufficient to show disharmony. Instead, it is necessary to show discord within harmony itself. Constitutive tension, as opposed to represented (constituted) tension, is revealed only when things are seemingly in their proper place.

The relationship of explicit, representational stability with implicit, affective disquietude is, in architectural practice, often conflated to a dichotomy between the exterior and the interior of an architectural object. In buildings, such as, Peter Zumthor's Bruder Klaus chapel, solid, formal simplicity and stability of the exterior encloses a burnt, bent interior. Inside the chapel (the place one may expect to find order and harmony) a visitor is, instead,

60. "Immanuel Kant countered the conservative motto "Don't think, obey!" not with the injunction "Don't obey, think!" but rather "Obey, but think!" ... [W]e must resist the populist temptation to act out our anger and thus wound ourselves. Instead of such impotent acting-out, we should control our fury and transform it into an icy determination to think things through in a really radical way..." Slavoj Žižek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*. (London and New York: Verso, 2008): 17.

Opposite Left: Fig. 2.9 Bruder Klaus
Chapel Exterior

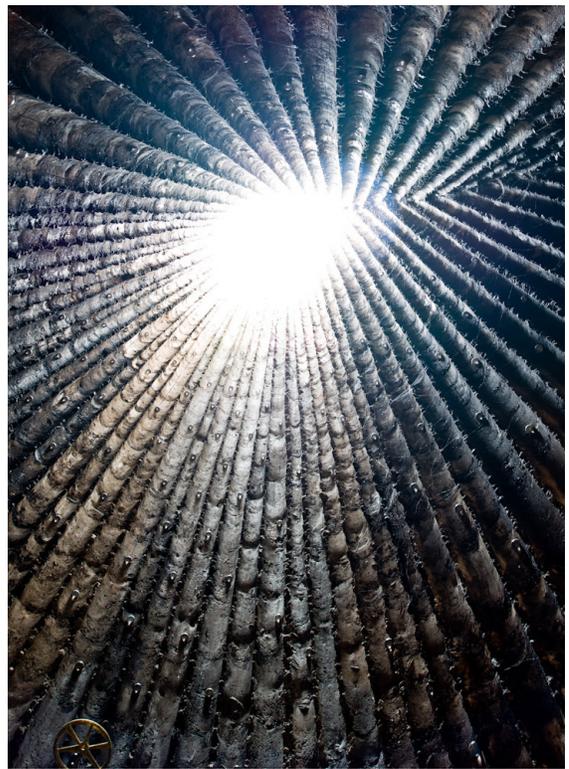
Opposite Right: Figure 2.10 Bruder Klaus
Chapel Interior

confronted with contorted traces of inferno. While in Zumthor's chapel, the sense of disorder is embedded in material and form, in Mies' Crown Hall, the explicitly classicist premise of its exterior, its symmetry, proportion and stability, is betrayed by the functional reality of its interior; an open space facilitating a multitude of profane, conflicting uses. Instead of divine certitude foreshadowed by its temple-like exterior, we are instead confronted with chaos of profane activity. (Crown Hall houses IIT's school of architecture.)

The dichotomy between exterior and interior may be read as a last attempt to reduce (or avoid) architecture's critical-emancipatory potential. While this distinction (admittedly less sharp in Mies' building) undeniably sustains an emancipatory experience, displaying inconsistency at the core of representational order, its effectiveness is reduced to a particular sequence of experience. The particularization of architecture as object (a sharply delineated space with a clear distinction between interior/exterior boundary) opens it to fetishization, such as the reduction of Bruder Klaus chapel to a pilgrimage site. The pilgrimage itself, or at its most minimal the ritual of entering the building, can itself serve as a fetish.

In its radical dimension, critique must be possible everywhere. Critical-emancipatory practice must convey the two (representational order and affective disorder) at the same time.

A critical-emancipatory attempt to reveal constitutive disorder within tension within order is illustrated in Agnes Martin's paintings of grids and John Ruskin's notion of Gothic style. While explicitly depicting a neutral stable network of lines (a quintessential representation of order) Martin's grids serve to record minor imperfections: minute moments where lines fade or meander due to an imperfection of the material or the unsteadiness of



Opposite: Fig. 2.11 Agnes Martin, *Wood I*

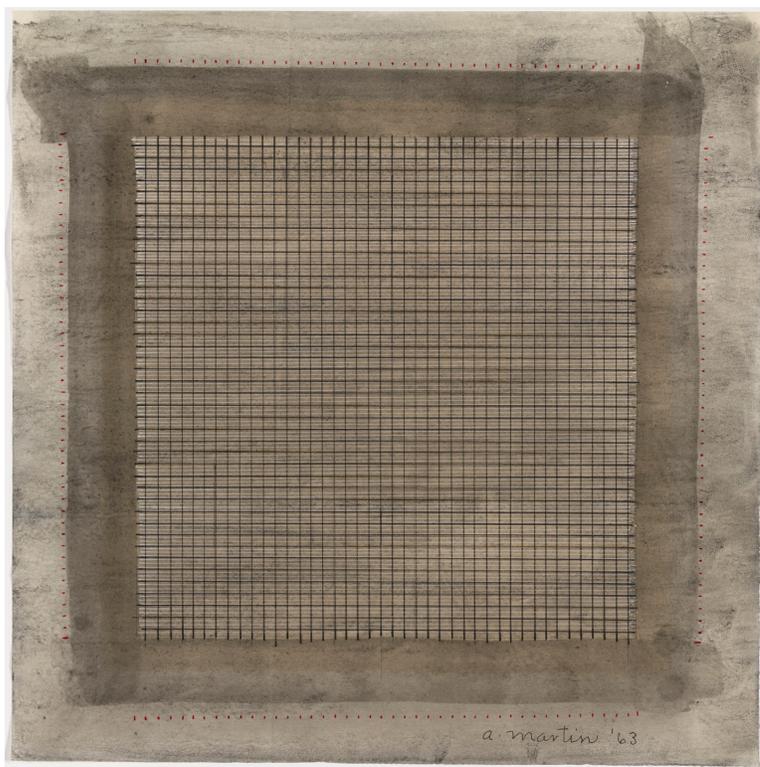
the artists' hand. At the level of our experience of an artwork, Martin's paintings do not depict perfection and universality - they depict precisely a failure to depict it. The universality of Martin's grids is not a universality of perfection, but a universality of failure. The sense of beauty derived from seemingly endless repetition lies in a hope to uncover a sense of openness and anxiety beneath a veneer of stable harmony. Similarly, for Ruskin, the liberating character of Gothic architecture resides precisely in its disclosure and tolerance of imperfections that arise through an attempt to reach perfection. Much like the faults in Martin's hand-drawn lines, Gothic imperfection is not an outcome of a compromise; of doing less than possible, or striving for less than perfect. On the contrary, for Ruskin, imperfection is the only possible outcome of an authentic, uncompromised striving for perfection. Any explicit 'perfectness' would inevitably be a remnant of compromised ambition; of our preference for "the perfectness of the lower nature to the imperfection of the higher."⁶¹

61. Ruskin, John. "The Nature of Gothic." in *The Genius of John Ruskin; Selections From His Writings*. Edited by John. D. Rosenberg. (New York: G. Braziller, 1963): 177.

While in all things that we see, or do, we are to desire perfection, and strive for it, we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress; not to esteem smooth minuteness above shattered majesty; not to prefer mean victory to honorable defeat; not to lower the level of our aim, that we may the more surely enjoy the complacency of success.⁶²

62. *ibid*

Ruskin's position should not be reduced to advocacy of primitive technology, a fetishization of the hand of which he is often accused, rather, it proposes a particular approach toward technology as such; an irreverent pursuit of possibilities offered by a technology to the point of revealing their intrinsic failure; their "shattered majesty."



Implicit in Ruskin's argument, is a belief that enthusiastic striving for the highest perfection invariably uncovers the inherent imperfection of things themselves.

Ruskin's and Martin's emphasis on the hand as the instrument of revealing imperfection is ultimately contingent. The imperfection - or disturbance - may equally mark the time left by the weather or usage, the vibration of a string in perfect tension, the passage of a shadow, or a movement of a curtain caught in a breeze. In all cases, the disturbance would be lost (or, more precisely, could be co-opted as a fetish) if the object's form were not explicitly ordered; striving towards perfect stillness. The constitutive texture of a material revealed through a representationally, non-compromised irreverent intervention.

The emphasis on constitutive imperfection suggested in Ruskin's and Martin's work stands opposed to (today increasingly common) fetishization of the stain as an index of particularity (identity or memory), and thereby reintroducing the presence of universal harmony. As Georges Didi-Huberman notes "the effacement of all figuration in [a]trace" can itself serve as "the guarantee of a link... [I]f there is no figuration it is because contact [with transcendental truth] has [or seems to have] taken place. The noniconic, nonmimetic nature of this stain guarantees its indexical value. ... The absence of figuration therefore serves [or can serve] as proof of existence."⁶³ Stain (in Didi-Huberman's example, a stain on the Shroud of Turin) can thereby serve as a support for a reassuring fantasy (the truth of Christ's resurrection). "Indexicality of the visible sign" can make it "shine forth as a beacon of symbolic law."⁶⁴ The stain is thereby deprived of its immediate disquieting affective presence (the affective character of the stain), and reduced to a (all the more efficient) fetishistic support of its opposite: a sense of harmony.

63. Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Index of an Absent Wound (A Monograph on the Stain)." *October* Volume 29. (Summer 1984): 67-68.

64. Georges Didi-Huberman, "The Index of an Absent Wound," 69.

In order to avoid fetishization, in order not to compromise its radically non-representational character (precisely the character of a stain, as opposed to an image), the stain must be registered within a formal order. The representation of order prevents the stain from indexically reintroducing the sense of order. Its inscription within an order deprives the stain of its particularity. If a stain is merely rhythmically repeated - namely, representationally ordered, in the most minimal sense of the term - it can no longer stand for a particular. The shift whereby a stain ceases to operate indexically can be illustrated in Rotor's Grindbakken installation. The project consists of intentionally registering existing stains - framing them by painting their surroundings white - (openly proposing to fetishize them) on the walls of concrete bunkers in Ghent, Belgium.⁶⁵ It is precisely only at the point when stains are registered within a representational order, such as within a perfect square centered between two symmetrical openings, that they begin to lose their indexicality (the notion that they stand for anything particular) and start to be minimally perceived as affective. (The overly formal framing is, paradoxically, de-fetishizing. Drawing attention to the frame, rather than the thing being framed.)

Even at its best, Rotor's project remains fetishistic. Rather than developing an order of staining (an ordered mechanism for registering stains), it merely registers the already existing; explicitly preventing the new. Stains appearing on white painted surfaces as a result of use remain anthithetical to the project. (In another precise definition, a fetishist stain is a stain that cannot itself be further stained, as is the case both for the Shroud of Turin and for Rotor's Grindbakken installation. Each subsequent staining appears therein as a transgression, and can only be accepted through further fetishization.)

65. Andrew Mead. "White Out: Rotor installation in Ghent, Belgium." *The Architectural Review* (17 December 2012) <http://www.architectural-review.com/white-out-rotor-installation-in-ghent-belgium/8639844.article>

Opposite Above: Fig. 2.12 Rotor's
Grindbakken - Indexical Stains

Opposite Below: Fig. 2.13 Rotor's
Gridbakken - Ordered Stain

The distinction between the egalitarian order (of emancipatory practice) and the hierarchical order (of corporatist practice) corresponds precisely to its ability to allow for the registration of the affect of the stain. Whereas within a hierarchical order, the stain subverts the notional perfection of its 'utopian' ideal (it appears as a reintroduction of the complexity of real-life imperfection), and can subsequently either be eliminated or fetishized, for an egalitarian order the stain is not a trace evidencing its limitation; but a direct evidence (an embodiment) of a refusal to compromise the emancipatory ideal of *egaliberté*. In their emancipatory dimension, stains function not as pseudo-critical obstacles preventing the realization of utopian content; undermining the consistency of represented reality, revealing its flaws, rather, they bear witness to the non-synthetic core of radical utopia itself. They embody a refusal to reduce the content of the formally represented political ideal to a mere organic, hierarchic social order. Whereas an organic, corporatist order is undermined by the stain, and hence all its effort must be invested in eliminating stains, the emancipatory, egalitarian order is directly constituted by it. The stain stands for the utopian content itself.⁶⁶ Whereas, in the former case, the stain was an obstacle to be removed, in the latter, the emergence, or registration thereof is its goal.

66. "[S]tains are not obstacles that prevent our direct access to represented reality, they are, on the contrary, 'more real than reality,' something that undermines from within the ontological consistency of [what we perceive as] reality..."
Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank. *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* (Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press, 2009): 95.

67. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 21.

68. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 31.

69. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 33.

70. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 31.

The coincidence of the explicit norm of order, formal harmony with an immediate, sense of disorder, and tension, may be traced in Peter Zumthor's notion of 'real things.' For Zumthor, a striving for order and harmony of a work, a commitment to "rational and objective criteria,"⁶⁷ "inherent laws of concrete things,"⁶⁸ and "the obvious solution so rarely tried,"⁶⁹ coincides with a sense of "vagueness, openness, and indeterminacy."⁷⁰ Zumthor's notion of the real, the uncovering of which he asserts as the aim of his architecture, consequently



does not merely designate the object's apparent material (as opposed to symbolic) properties, nor a metaphysical reality accessible through matter. Both the notion of the real, as the self-sufficiency of material reality, and the notion of the real, as a transcendental order ultimately suggest an ontological closure. Both the transcendental order, and the mechanistic, material order provide a sense of certainty. They do not allow for living, striving, developing and desiring.

While invariably grounded in the material nature of objects, the real does not correspond to matter itself, but to a property of reality which can be revealed through the objects' material appearance; in Zumthor's words, an inner life of a "tension inside the body."⁷¹ The notion of the real, as an inherent tension in matter, is reflected in Žižek's notion of materialism.

71. Peter Zumthor, *Thinking Architecture*, 18.

The statement "material reality is all there is" can be negated in two ways: in the form of "material reality isn't all there is" and "material reality is non-all." The first negation (of a predicate) leads to the standard metaphysics: material reality isn't everything, there is another, higher, spiritual reality . . . If, however, we assert a non-predicate and say "material reality is non-all," this merely asserts the non-All of reality without implying any exception – paradoxically, one should thus claim that "material reality is non-all," not "material reality is all there is," is the true formula of materialism.⁷²

72. Žižek and Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*, 94.

The apparent opposition of crude materialist insistence on the self-sufficiency of material reality to the metaphysical notion of "another, higher, spiritual reality" betrays their dependence on each other. In order to engage the world, as a purely material mechanism - to perceive it as self-sufficient, fully constituted - it must already be

supplemented with a notion of a higher, spiritual realm. Our implicit, officially disavowed, metaphysical belief fills the immediate inconsistency of material reality, its apparent meaninglessness, allowing it to appear as consistent. (Only a spiritual notion of a higher authority allows hedonists to devote their lives purely to maximizing their pleasure.)

Architectural appearance (the fact of architecture's material presence) must neither be reduced to a reflection of an object's functional truth (as crudely, mechanistic materialism would suggest), nor, to a functional element in itself⁷² (a reflection of some transcendental essence). The real is not a dimension hidden behind appearance, rather, it corresponds to the ability of appearance to inscribe within itself the gap between (material) appearance and (transcendental) essence; namely, the affective dimension of appearance (or the immaterial dimension of material) through which appearance sustains and structures (affects) ostensibly functional processes themselves. Emancipatory architectural practice does not consist in a renunciation of false appearance in favour of supposedly real function, but in re-marking the gap within the appearance itself; revealing the real as the non-all within material reality itself.

In Zumthor's work, an example of an ordered stain is found in an often overlooked (rarely photographed) entry corridor in Zumthor's baths in Vals. The passageway leading the visitor from the reception area to the baths proper is along the length of the mountain-side wall embedded with five regularly spaced brass pipes discharging spring water (hence, Zumthor refers to it as the "Fountain Hall"⁷³); producing large ochre and rust colored stains on the concrete wall and stone floor. At the representational level, the water, seemingly springing from the earth, reflects the baths' origin and foreshadows

73. Sigrid Hauser and Peter Zumthor.
Peter Zumthor Therme Vals. (Zurich:
Scheidegger & Spiess, 2007)

Opposite: Fig. 2.14 Baths in Vals - The Fountain Hall

their function. At the affective level, the causal, irreverent acceptance of the stain, sets up our relationship to the baths, allowing us to engage them, as analogous to wilderness itself; akin to an urban exploration of a post-industrial ruin. (The Baths can also, to the detriment of their emancipatory potential, be read as representative of a post-industrial wilderness; as a post-industrial, megalithic ruin with a partially collapsed roof and flooded floor.) Our enjoyment of the Baths, consequently lies not only in their pleasantness, namely an amalgam of their particular pleasant features, but also in our affective liberation.

More so than in Zumthor's own work, the ambition of critical-emancipatory architecture to reveal the inner tension of order and stillness is clearly embodied in Ai Wei Wei's Grey Brick Galleries in Beijing. The utmost formal simplicity, monolithic (or monomaterial) stillness and almost militaristic rigour of Ai Wei Wei's buildings is both a naive embodiment of utopian egalitarianism, and simultaneously permeated with a sense of disquietude. Much like Martin's paintings, Ai Wei Wei's architecture operates as a structure for recording the weathering of brick, the display of discarded sculptures, the registration of the daily movement of shadows and the seasonal falling of the leaves. The emancipatory-critical dream (or ethos) suggested by Ai Wei Wei's work, is one of ordered, proportioned and harmonious structure for recording the traces of transcendent disorder and chaos. The sense of disquietude embodied therein arises not from an implied presence of higher organizing authority, but from an absence thereof; a sense of an openness and vagueness inherent to things; a sense of the gap.

However faint, the emancipatory dimension of both Zumthor's baths and Ai Wei Wei's galleries, and our genuine enjoyment of them, their ability to accept (or reveal) the stain as constitutive, corresponds to our



Opposite: Fig. 2.15 Ai Wei Wei - Grey
Brick Galleries

minimal, but undeniable, experience of them as common spaces; spaces belonging neither to private nor public, spaces unguarded by higher authority where both freedom and solidarity is possible. Although both spaces are, in their functional reality, not common (the Baths, in particular, are privately owned) and, as all visitors are aware, the access is restricted, the sense of liberation is nevertheless authentic. Namely, rather than obscuring their functional reality, the immediate affect offers a point of critique. Momentary, affective emancipation, rather than allowing us to endure our everyday oppression, reveals its, otherwise ignored, oppressive dimension. The sense of the common serves as evidence for the possibility of the common itself (or more bluntly, the possibility of communism).

In a world where we no longer share common culture or common experience that characterized pre-modern society, the common, the only space not defined through exclusion, offers the only possibility of social solidarity. The ultimate failure of the Poor Little Rich Man's home as well as our sense of disappointment in architecture corresponds not only to its inability to functionally act as common space, but, worse yet, to its inability to embody the sense of the common and thereby seeming to forbid the possibility of the common per se.

Critical Universalism

The critical, non-fetishistic, dimension of Martin's, Ai Wei Wei's and Zumthor's works is best evidenced by their critics' symptomatic attempts to reduce the undeniable affective presence of their work to its regional or ethnic context. Martin's paintings of grids have, despite her persistent denial, been interpreted as reflecting the landscape of New Mexico where they were produced. Zumthor's work has been insistently mystified by positing a semi-mystical connection to the geographic locale of



the Swiss Alps where he began his practice; caricaturing him as a 'swiss clockmaker', such that even his projects outside of Switzerland are seen as importing a unique 'swiss quality'. Ai Wei Wei has been popularized (and marketed in the West) as a critic of the Chinese regime, and reference to Chinese culture and tradition are eagerly sought in his work. (Ruskin, has of course been reduced to an advocate of Gothic forms, and ignored as an advocate of Gothic spirit.) In all cases, the emphasis placed on cultural or regional context (their cultural or regional particularization) is not shared by the artists themselves. Martin has adamantly refused to read her paintings as landscapes.⁷⁴ Similarly, both Zumthor and Ai Wei Wei have revealed that they perceive their cultural context as a contingent rather than essential to their work.⁷⁵

The popular fetishization of authors as figures defined by their ethnic substance parallels the discomfort (from the perspective of ideology) aroused by the non-fetishistic character of their work. Whereas the architecture of Koolhaas or Zaha Hadid can be portrayed as genuinely global, and celebrated as the vision of a future (that is, of course, a continuation of the present), the works of Zumthor and Ai Wei Wei can only be appropriated by ideology (rendered consumable for established tastes) through insistence on their particular ethnic identity, as remnants of a disappearing world. (One subversive gesture would be to treat Koolhaas and Hadid as ethnic figures; to persistently interpret their work through particularities of late 20th century Rotterdam and London.) The culturalist-regionalist particularization is necessary in order to incorporate their work within an uncritical ideological framework, avoiding their affective quality that resists easy fetishization. Attempts to interpret critical works as grounded in their particular context, serve to avoid the (explosive) universal dimension within them.

74. Agnes Martin herself considers the aim of her art to be depiction of "desire" as such, rather than a desire for anything in particular. Not passion for things, but passion per se. See Arne Glimcher ed. *Agnes Martin: Paintings, Writings, Remembrances*. (Berlin: Phaidon Press, 2012)

75. In an interview for the Guardian, Zumthor accounts for his location in Swiss Alps as 'accidental' and not essential to his work. Similarly, Ai Wei Wei explains references to Chinese culture made in his work as a particular strategy available to him by the contingent condition of working in China, rather than the aim of the work. See Peter Zumthor. "Serpentine pavillion 2011: 'I hope people relax here.'" *The Guardian*. (30 June 2011) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/video/2011/jun/30/serpentine-pavillion-2011-peter-zumthor> and Ai Wei Wei. Interview. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-xLsza10xE>

The culturalist-regionalist interpretation of critical works operates in a manner analogous to the ornamentation of the Poor Little Rich Man's home. Much like the Poor Little Rich Man's transformation of his home into a work of Art served to avoid the constitutive gap at the heart of his self-identity, the fetishization of artists' contingent features serve to obscure the real sense of the gap conveyed by their work. A critical-emancipatory gesture, emphasizing the universal dimension, must thereby be repeated. The liberating capacity of the generic (non-identifiable), which Koolhaas rightly identifies,⁷⁶ resides purely in its inability to be fetishized as a context for the critical. The sense of the gap, unobscured by a particular, is possible only within the generic; within the non-identifiable, non-places (junkspaces) of the global metropolis, in the no-man's land in-between of ethnic imagination; Zumthor or Ai Wei Wei deprived of their Swiss-ness, or Chinese-ness. At its most radical, the emancipatory shift which opens up the sense of the common (and thereby the possibility of the common), can only proliferate beyond its particular constraints in the space of the common itself.

Interpretation of architecture as a (reflection of a) particular (concern); whether, a particular idea that it needs to represent, a particular function it needs to embody, a particular context it needs to address, or even its particularization as an stand-alone object⁷⁷, is always accompanied by its obverse: a universalization of a particular - implicit positing of a particular social order as universal. Regionalist particularization of Zumthor and Ai Wei Wei parallels an implicit universalization of Koolhaas and Hadid; and the social order defended through their works. Similarly, functionalist particularization (treating architecture 'pragmatically' as an object serving a particular function) universalizes the social framework

76. Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau. *SMLXL*. (New York: Monacelli Press, 1995): 1248.

77. The notion of particularity as a limitation to architecture's emancipatory capacity was first pointed out to me by Maria Alexandrescu in personal communication.

out of which particular functional needs arise.

In each case, emancipatory-critique is a critique of particularization. It asserts that although, each project is grounded in contingent particularities (it does possess, particular context, function etc.), there is within a desire that is universal; a desire, in Loos' words for living, striving, and developing. The challenge is to not betray it.

Conclusion: Emancipatory Violence of Geometry



Architecture always posits itself as an intervention against violence. We build homes that shelter us from the violence of weather; hospitals sheltering us from the violence of disease; and, most literally, we build prisons that shelter us from the violence of crime. Architecture strives to eliminate eyesores, discomfort and inefficient space. At the same time, as Bernard Tschumi notes, architecture, in “the intensity of relationship” that it establishes “between individuals and ... space,”¹ is itself inherently violent. Its spaces are disrupted by the presence of our bodies, and in turn, they, in their unavoidable physical presence, constrain our movements and suppress the freedom of our imagination.

Any relationship between a building and its users is one of violence, for any use means the intrusion of human body into a given space, the intrusion of one order into another... The argument is not a matter of style: modern architecture is neither more or less violent than classical architecture, or than fascist, socialist, or vernacular versions. Architecture’s violence is fundamental and unavoidable, for architecture is linked to events in the same way that the guard is linked to the prisoner, the police to the criminal, order to chaos.²

Tschumi’s notion of architecture’s inherent violence can be read through Slavoj Žižek’s categorization of violence. In his book, *Violence*, Žižek proposes four overarching types of violence: subjective, systemic, symbolic, and, finally, emancipatory. While architecture cannot be non-violent, it can utilize its constitutive violence in order to operate in an emancipatory manner.

(1) As subjective violence, Žižek designates any violence performed by a particular, identifiable subject. It can range from vast humanitarian catastrophes, wars,

Opposite: Fig. 3 Alison and Peter Smithson - Hunstanton Secondary Modern School (now known as Smithdon High School). Brutalism before the abandonment of geometry.

1. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994): 122.

2. *ibid*

and crimes against which we feel obliged to act, to minor discomforts and mundane tribulations. In all cases, subjective violence appears as a disruption, an obstacle to the smooth functioning of everyday personal ordeals. With regard to architecture, subjective violence would correspond to the immediate violence of disfunctionality, discomfort and ugliness against which architecture intervenes, as well as any such discomforts caused by architecture's physical presence.

(2) Systemic violence, for Žižek, refers to everyday, matter-of-fact struggles and humiliation experienced by the impoverished and the marginalized.

[T]he “ultra-objective” or systemic violence ... is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism, which involve the “automatic” creation of excluded and dispensable individuals from the homeless to the unemployed.³

3. Žižek referencing Etienne Balibar in Slavoj Žižek, *Violence*, 14.

Unlike subjective violence, systemic violence, as its name suggests, does not have an identifiable perpetrator, but appears as a product of a seemingly neutral, systemic framework. Systemic violence always generates (is supplemented with) subjective violence. It is the violence of a social order out of which architecture arises, whose demands it is required to address, and whose institutions it ultimately houses.

(3) Embedded in our ostensibly ‘non-violent’ response toward subjective violence, Žižek claims, lies symbolic violence. Symbolic violence designates the violence of our attempt to naturalize systemic violence. Ultimately, symbolic violence is grounded in the separation between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ that is inherent to language, hence, its name refers to the violence of symbolization. In its architectural manifestation, symbolic violence is reflected in a striving towards perfectly functional,

inoffensive space. Namely, it is embedded in attempts to maintain an illusion of systemic non-violence. In, Tschumi's terms, symbolic violence entails a 'ritualization' of violence.

A ritual implies near frozen relationship between action and space. ... When it becomes necessary to mediate tension and fix it by custom, then no single fragment must escape attention. Nothing strange and unexpected must happen. Control must be absolute.⁴

4. Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994): 126.

More broadly, symbolic violence designates the violence of any architectural gesture which offers re-assurance in the inherent, permanent nature of a (systemically violent) social order. The price we pay for symbolic violence is the normalization of systemic violence. Its non-violent (or an anti-violent) facade, serves to legitimize the violence of everyday social reality,

(4) Finally, advising us to abandon the false distinction between 'violence' and 'non-violence' since the latter is always a (symbolically violent) attempt to disguise (systemic) violence, Žižek advocates emancipatory violence; the violence of a disruption of the 'normal' functioning of the systemic violence. It is the violence of our refusal to accept systemic violence; a stubborn insistence on non-compromised, universal application of a belief in human equality. Whether or not violent in their immediate presence, an emancipatory gesture cannot but appear as violence from the perspective of social authority. Emancipatory violence thus stands directly opposed to symbolic violence. It is the violence of a gesture which (unlike symbolic violence) cannot be appropriated for symbolic violence; a gesture which cannot serve to normalize systemic violence.

A potential for emancipatory violence within

5. Owen Hatherley quoted in Will Self's review of his work. Will Self, "It hits in the gut." *London Review of Books* (8 March 2012). <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n05/will-self/it-hits-in-the-gut>
6. *ibid*
7. In case of Hatherley's critique, the erosion of democracy sustain by pseudomodernism is exemplified by Tony Blair's administration in United Kingdom; "the most illiberal administration in the history of British democracy." (*ibid*)

8. Will Self. "It hits in the gut." *London Review of Books*. (8 March 2012): 22-24 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v34/n05/will-self/it-hits-in-the-gut>

architecture can be traced in Owen Hatherley's reading of Brutalist architecture; the style, as its name suggests, devoted to affirming architecture's violent nature. Brutalist raw material presence and its alleged utopian aspiration serve, for Hatherley, as a condemnation of (or a counterpoint to), what he terms "pseudomodernism," namely, architecture adopting "modernist formal language," but replacing its emancipatory politics with "vacuous aspirationalism."⁵ Unlike pseudomodernism, whose eagerness to please - to mitigate the violent effect of its own architectural physicality - "provides a calm, ostentatiously friendly face for"⁶ contemporary erosion of democracy,⁷ Brutalism is, much like Žižek's emancipatory violence, characterized by an unyielding resoluteness, which to those confronting it, cannot but appear as rudeness.

As Will Self noted in his review of Hatherley's *Militant Modernism* and *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain*, "[t]he problem for Hatherley" - and the problem with equating Brutalism with emancipatory violence - is that, despite his (and other brutalists') egalitarian rhetoric...

...he cannot quite cope with the deep-seated – and philoprogenitive – nature of the masses' bad taste, any more than he can with their unwillingness passively to consume [unabashedly Brutalist] Liverpool tower blocks.⁸

The popular dislike of Brutalist heritage should be read as evidence of its betrayal of its emancipatory potential. (In practice, its brutality serves as a negative proof of the need for symbolic violence.) Rather than obstructing the normalization of systemic violence - and consequently emancipating those affected by it -, the violence of Brutalism, while unabashed, appears

gratuitous (subjective) - violence for its own sake.

In order to account for its emancipatory failure, Žižek's and Hatherley's distinction between emancipatory Brutalism and pseudomodernist architecture of symbolic violence should thus be transposed within Brutalism itself. Already, in his seminal essay, "The New Brutalism," Rayner Banham distinguishes formally geometrical Brutalism of Smithsons' Huntstanton Secondary School and Louis Kahn's Yale Art Center from non-geometrical Brutalism exemplified by Smithson's competition entry for Sheffield University extension: "the only building-design which," according to the Banham, "fully matches up to the threat and promise of Parallel of Life and Art."⁹ Smithsons' Sheffield University design strives to create a "coherent visual image" not by relying "on Plato and the Absolute," but by "non-formal means, emphasizing circulation, identifiable units of habitation, and fully validating the presence of human beings as part of the total image."¹⁰ "Beauty and geometry - hitherto regarded as ultimate properties of the cosmos", are replaced, in shaping architectural form, with "image and topology - which, though essentially primitive, have been reached only through immense sophistication."¹¹

The "modernist formal language" of Hatherley's pseudomodernism itself derives from the Brutalist abandonment of geometry.¹² In pseudomodernist terms, the shift away from geometry is, often characterized as a move away from 'ideas' to 'facts'; from abstract to concrete concerns, or from a 'top-down' Absoluteness to a 'terrain' of 'bottom-up phenomena'.¹³

Field conditions [Stan Allen's particular variant of pseudomodernism] offer a tentative opening in architecture to address the dynamics of use, behavior of

9. the title of the 1953 exhibition where, according to Banham, Peter Smithson's opening line - "We are not going to talk about proportion and symmetry"- served as "declaration of war on inherent academicism." Rayner Banham, "The New Brutalism." *The Architectural Review*. 27 July 2010. <<http://www.architectural-review.com/archive/1955-december-the-new-brutalism-by-reyner-banham/8603840.article>>

10. *ibid*

11. Rayner Banham, *A Critic Writes: Essays by Reyner Banham*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996): 15n.

12. Geometry is to be read as an imposition of external notions grounded in an Absolute, rather than being derived from the given.

13. Terminology borrowed from Stan Allen "From Object to Field." in *AD Profile 127 (Architecture after Geometry)*.

14. Stan Allen "From Object to Field." in *AD Profile 127 (Architecture After Geometry)*: 30.

crowds and the complex geometries of masses in motion. ... Logistics of context suggests the need to recognize the limits of architecture's ability to order the city, and at the same time to learn from the complex self-regulating orders already present in the city.¹⁴

The abandonment of formal geometry should thus be read as a shift to the notion of the self-sufficiency of the existing. The "bottom-up phenomena", or "the dynamics of use" are seen as self-organizing (generating flows), thereby allowing them to serve as a formal principle. (Without its self-organization the terrain would be overly chaotic. The 'bottom-up phenomena' would be nonsensical.) Existing 'facts' are sufficient as formal principles (and geometrical order is not needed) because they themselves constitute a highly complex order (whose intricacies architecture can only aspire to). Imposing abstract, 'top-down', geometric ideas onto the terrain of facts is undesirable, since it would disrupt its inherent self-organization.

15. The title of Curtis' TV series is derived from a poem by Richard Brautigan envisioning a world where technology has, reassuringly, restored the balance of nature.

"I like to think
(it has to be!)
of a cybernetic ecology
where we are free of our labors
and joined back to nature,
returned to our mammal
brothers and sisters,
and all watched over
by machines of loving grace."

Richard Brautigan, "All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace" (an excerpt).
http://allpoetry.com/poem/8508991-All_Watched_Over_By_Machines_Of_Loving_Grace-by-Richard_Brautigan

The notion of bottom-up self-organization is not limited to (pseudomodernist) architectural imagination. In *All Watched Over By Machines of Loving Grace*,¹⁵ Adam Curtis locates it at the heart of post-1960s popular imagination, linking broadly contemporaneous conceptual notions across divergent fields (and seemingly divergent political positions): the neo-liberal fantasy of self-stabilizing markets (the resurgence of the notion of the invisible hand), a techno-utopian belief in technological determinism, the notion of ecosystems as stable of natural systems sustained through feedback loops (paradoxically, threatened by the incursion of a 'self-stabilizing' market economy), as well as genetic determinism of human behaviour advocated by selfish gene theorists (popularized today by Richard Dawkins). The notion of self-organization, Curtis claims, is reflected in an Ayn

Rand-inspired heroization of an apolitical individual, whose pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others (virtuous fidelity to one's selfish gene) was imagined as stabilizing the order.

In none of its manifestations, Curtis emphasizes, was the notion of self-regulation empirically supported. Financial crises illustrated the need for government regulation and intervention in stabilizing an inherently unstable economy. Scientific models purporting stability of natural systems were contradicted by historical data showing wild population swings. Nor could selfish-gene account for seemingly random, altruistic human behaviour.

The supplanting of abstraction, geometry and the Absolute, in favour of the terrain of everyday, practical, and site specific concerns misses the dependent relationship of the latter on the former. To be human is to inhabit the world (to move in it) always with respect to a fantasized Absolute. Everyday reality does not exist independently of the phantasmatic, rather, the former is always structured (held together) with the addition of the latter.

Consequently, the abandonment of formal geometry merely reinforced, and was in turn reinforced by, a fantasy of a geometrically ordered universe; a universe of self-regulating mechanisms and self-sustaining flows. The non-geometrical architecture - pursuing, like a Randian hero, merely its own 'dynamics of use' - far from avoiding an Absolute, posited the given, contingent, systemic violence of the existing social order as the Absolute.

Architectural form should prioritize beauty and geometry, not because its abstract concerns are inherently more important than the practical issues architecture is meant to address (they are not), but, on the contrary, because a geometric image (as a formally ordered

representation) allows the existing issues to be registered in their full (systemic) violence. Geometry can enable us to resist (and register our resistance in an architectural object) not only against the subjective violence, but also against the systemic violence of the everyday. Far from validating human presence, as its proponents groundlessly claim, non-geometrical appearance reflecting merely given conditions, obscures universal human concerns. It obscures our intrinsic sense of incompleteness; our irreducible desire that is always more than a desire for something - a desire for more than the existing.

The value of formal beauty and harmony (as well as the necessity of Plato and the formal Absolute) lies in their ability to act as background against which not only reality (the rawness of material, the traces of everyday activity) is recorded, but also, more importantly, the incompleteness thereof. Geometry allows us to register real life including its chaotic inconsistency and irreducibility, namely, life that is in excess of any notion of self-organization. It is only against the formal order than the existing itself can be set free.

The failure of Brutalist architecture (evidenced by its unpopularity among those whose interest it is meant to serve) lies not in the immediate (subjective) violence of its material presence, but in a lack of emancipatory violence; its inability to stand against (to resist) the “flow” of everyday systemic violence. The capacity of architecture to resist, to “make life visible (even possible) by offering obstacles to unbounded and unstructured motion and flow.”¹⁶ is unavoidably linked to its formal Absoluteness. Motions and flows can be resisted only by the incontrovertible, Absolute nature of architecture’s material and form.

In historical terms, the abandonment of geometry inevitably led to the abandonment of Brutalism itself.

16. David Leatherbarrow’s remarks in relation to Peter Zumthor’s use of the word “resistance.” David Leatherbarrow, *Architecture Oriented Otherwise*, 84.

Devoid of a geometrically ordered frame - devoid of beauty and harmony - brutality of raw material presence (no longer resisting anything) appeared gratuitous (subjective); merely an obstacle to the smooth functioning of everyday reality. Consequently, Brutalism was substituted by an architecture far more efficient in its symbolic violence - allowing us to better digest the violence of the system; namely, pseudomodernism. (To architecture devoid of emancipatory dreams, non-geometrical form is sufficient.) The subsequent failure of Brutalism (and more broadly of utopian modernism) lies in its aversion to assuming its raw material quality as a property of geometric order; an unwillingness to directly (with enthusiastic naïveté) posit the non-all (the gap) that causes our disquietude as the Absolute. Without geometry Brutalism ceases to be brutal enough. It becomes merely a nuisance. Far from being its most radical step, the shift to form constituted as a product of 'real', existing conditions corresponds to an abandonment of its utopian dreams.¹⁷

17. In Lacanian terms this corresponds to the difference between the real and the Real.

Conversely, the persistent popularity of traditional academicist aesthetics shouldn't be dismissed as only a reactionary desire for a return to reassuring tradition. Academic formalism is not purely a reflection of social conservatism. Its geometry carries an irreducible critical potential. The striving for symmetry and harmony also suggests a utopian notion against which the present life is judged; against which everyday suffering can be registered, a radical desire for a qualitatively different future, a critical demand that everyday struggle and suffering be registered against a "higher" standard. Desire for geometry is not (necessarily) a desire from a sense of harmony, but for deep disquietude that lies within it.

For Slavoj Žižek, "the duty of philosophy [its social role] is not to solve problems, but to define problems."¹⁸

18. Slavoj Žižek. *Zizek!* Directed by Astra Taylor. (New York: Zeitgeist, 2005).

Architectural form (its geometry) operates in a similar manner. It does not provide answers to social problems. It does not suggest (let alone prescribe) particular forms of living. Form, primarily, poses a question. It defines a problem.

The failure of historicist neoclassicism - the genre of buildings which explicitly posited themselves as a reflection of popular taste for formal order - resides (simply) in providing the wrong answer to the right question. While it registers the radical multiplicity of life (the given appears in contrast against it), it seeks to integrate it within its hierarchy, or to eliminate it. It misappropriates a radical desire embedded in formal order in order to reassure us in the inherent nature of social hierarchy.

Yet, instead of providing better answers, pseudomodernism has been merely posing worse questions. It reduces its task to facilitating the smooth, unobstructed functioning of the social order, devoting itself to a problem of maximizing functional efficiency, or sensual excitement, namely, attempting to render the existing desirable. It is, for this reason, all the more oppressive. Pseudomodern abandonment of striving towards the Absolute constitutes, to misappropriate Banham's words, an "abdication of architectural responsibility."¹⁹ It comprises a retreat from a dream of emancipation to a dream of efficient symbolic violence.

19. Banham, "The New Brutalism."

The apolitical cynicism permeating contemporary architectural practice is neither wise nor critical. On the contrary, it reflects architects' contribution to everyday, systemic oppression. While architecture cannot avoid its own violence, it can certainly cease contributing to the systemic violence of the social order. Architecture can resist, but it can only do so through assuming itself as an Absolute, through explicitly devoting itself to a utopian vision. There is nothing more dangerous and delusional

than believing a radically better world is not possible.

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