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Abstract: With this paper I want to broach three main concerns in addressing the notion of conservatism and conservation within the disciplinary boundaries of architecture. Firstly I want to outline something of the legacy we have to negotiate in this very agenda. This requires some examination of the grounds of modernity as it has set Eurocentrically derived cultures the task of inventing the new. Secondly, we need to develop some understanding of what I am tentatively calling "conserving the present," that is concerned with examining the uncanniness or unhomliness of our sense of dwelling, which is to say, any sense of identity or being-at-home. Projects of conservation tend to be constituted as prosthetics of forgetting this condition of not-being-at-home. The third part of the paper addresses a question of ethics and architecture, as a problem of constituting practices for a future-to-come. Here there is an attempt to think the question of ethics otherwise than as a legacy of modernity's Enlightenment thinking, and therefore pose a question of the new in terms other than those of modernity's notion of progress.

Key words: architecture, ethics, modernity, Agamben, Jameson, Foster

Radical Gestures: Time's Matter for Architecture

Legacy and Conservation

Confronting the conservative in architecture is a timely and necessary agenda, a confrontation that aims to explore and expose the complex of forces that constitute the discipline, profession and teaching agencies of architecture. With this paper I want to broach three main concerns in addressing the notion of conservatism and conservation within the disciplinary boundaries of architecture. Firstly I want to outline something of the legacy we have to negotiate in this very agenda. This requires some examination of the grounds of modernity as it has set Eurocentrically derived cultures the task of inventing the new. Secondly, we need to develop some understanding of what I am tentatively calling "conserving the present," that is concerned with examining the uncanniness or unhomliness of our sense of dwelling, which is to say, any sense of identity or being-at-home. Projects of conservation tend to be constituted as prosthetics of forgetting this condition of not-being-at-home. The third part of the paper addresses a question of ethics and architecture, as a problem of constituting practices for a future-to-come. Here there is an attempt to think the question of ethics otherwise than as a legacy of modernity's Enlightenment thinking, and therefore pose a question of the new in terms other than those of modernity's notion of progress.

We are familiar with the debates between the ancients and the moderns over the permanence and transience of things. Classical mimesis held beauty to be the copy of a nature perfected and hence the distillation of the eternal in those things made by human beings, the overcoming of the becoming of materiality in the existence of the perfection of the Ideal. Modernity's own overcoming of mimesis constituted the task of making in fundamentally different terms, those of the originality of form, the profanity of the freedom of worldly transactions, the emergence of "spirit" as a substance relating to self-consciousness rather than to the ideal of Classicism. All of this is already in place in GWF Hegel's *Aesthetics* (1998). A significant marker of modernity's investment in the expression of freedom localized in the profanity of worldly things is the figure of Charles Baudelaire. Remember Baudelaire's famous definition of modernity from "The Painter of Modern Life": "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 12). For Baudelaire the artist (in his case one Monsieur G—Constantine Guys) extracts from fashion, from the contingent appearances of everyday life, from the crowd, whatever element it might have of poetry, of beauty, of the ideal, to distil the eternal from the transitory.

Hence modernity is at once fugitive and the eternal, the essential spirit that makes the particularity of fashion perfected to its moment of appearance. We may easily see how a fundamental condition of modernity has been the acknowledgement of the ephemeral nature of things, of fashion in avant-gardism, in practices of inventing the new, while yet proceeding in a project of conservation and restitution of identity in the new. In this way we may be able to make sense of Baudelaire when he suggests: "Everything that is 'material,' an emanation of the 'spiritual,' mirrors, and will always mirror, the spiritual reality from which it derives" (Baudelaire, 1995, p. 2). That is to say, it is the lived moment of expression of the artist's ability that produces the work in its moment of production. The transitory nature of the moment and its appearance as fashion has to be observed, moment-to-moment, to distil their essence: the spirit that produces them in its freedom.

The discipline of architecture is embedded in this legacy of a dialectical relation between identity and difference, or in the language of Walter Benjamin, the new as the ever same (Benjamin, 1973). In as much as the discipline has an agency in literally renewing the everyday fabric of our lived relations as the *habitus* of our sense of dwelling, it is faced with a continual confrontation of identity and difference. At a certain level of abstraction the very notion of "architecture" itself becomes a zone of indecision or contestation as the totality of artifactual things construed within a loose disciplinary boundary is scrutinized for some repetition of the same, for the distilling of identity or the eternal in the fleeting of the ephemeral. This task is one of locating some identity that may nominate this or that particular as architectural. However, we need to realize that the very discourse of modernity, its ground, rests on an uneasy alliance between identity and difference. This presents the extremes of shoring up in the face of an uncertainty of the new, the future as repetition, or an iconoclastic destruction of any previous model in the name of a delirious and unnamable future. Perhaps this scission was nowhere more pronounced than in the writings of Georges Bataille on architecture, derived particularly from his reading of Hegel (Hollier, 1989). Bataille's rally against architecture may be understood precisely in terms of the emphasis he gave to these extremities of the construal of identity as a search for permanence and fixity within a dialectical relation to difference understood as identity differing from itself.

How, then, do we confront the conservative without invoking this legacy and at the same time without refusing this legacy, which is to say, without invoking the negative theology that grounds modernity's slide between identity and difference? To proceed I want to take a small detour via some of the writings of John Rajchman, in particular his "What's New in Architecture," where a question of the "new" is broached in a manner that cuts across the dialectical thinking of identity and difference (Rajchman, 1990). Three contemporary philosophical discourses are discussed by Rajchman, those of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze. Each of these thinkers has had an impact on the discipline of architecture, in as much as we can call the critical theorizing of architecture a practicing of architecture. What is significant here is the manner whereby the question of the new necessarily interrogates our thinking of the notions of identity, self, historicity and inventing such that the question of the new does not resuscitate a repetition of the problem of identity or the consolidation of the past.

From Foucault, Rajchman takes the genealogical enquiry of "other times and other places," which amounts to a radical displacement of the question of identity or conservation. Rajchman suggests that with his notion of 'heterotopia', Foucault poses the problem that "how we are housed is tied up with the great question of which kinds of classifications are available at a time and a place for us to characterize ourselves" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 34). This 'problematisation' of ourselves in relation to our spaces of habitation requires an interruption to the self-evident contexts, both historical and conceptual, by which we understand our own self-constructions and that of the spaces we take to be the simple consequence of the logic of historical process. Foucault's own work on the spatial distributions of modernity focused on spaces of confinement and control, as constitutive of relations of power that constructed marginalization and dispossession. With Derrida, Rajchman focuses on the notion of 'event' and its relation to 'invent.' Three key issues emerge: (i) There are events in our history that open up altogether new possibilities for understanding the history in which we find ourselves: "an event is the unforeseen chance or possibility in a history of another history" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 34). (ii) Such an unforeseen event is the questioning of the value of habitation, or the constitution of a proper and appropriate place in which we feel at home. Derrida invokes the 'uninhabitable' or the *unheimlich*, as that which exposes our received ways of inhabiting: "the problem of 'inhabiting the uninhabitable' is the problem of how to construct ourselves and live in a world, when we accept that at bottom there is no essence, no plan, no program of our being-together in the spaces we inhabit" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 35). (iii) Such events are an inventing of ourselves. It is we who are 'surprised' by the event. This poses for Derrida the most radical question related to identity and habitation as an open question of what it is to be human.

And from Deleuze, Rajchman derives a thematic gaining increased currency in contemporary architectural theory, that of the relation between the virtual and the actual as what allows for relations between what is possible and what is real. Deleuze makes a categorical critique of the pair of terms "possibility/reality" in the sense of one "realizing possibilities" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 36). Both terms are equally conditioned by the 'concept' in that the idea of possibility is taken from that of reality. For Deleuze the virtual is a reality for which we do not as yet have a concept, and virtualities are not realized but actualized. Actualizing happens by "inventing something which, by the lights of our concepts, is impossible" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 36). In discussing the notion of actualizing, Deleuze has recourse to invoke Foucault's notion of the "history of the present:" "the actual is not what we are but

rather what we become, what we are in the course of becoming, that is, the Other, our becoming-other" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 36). Or as Rajchman suggests: "Foucault would ask us how to 'inhabit' those moments of 'actuality' in which we are becoming something else than what our history has constructed for us to be, those heterotopic moments of our current historical 'impossibility,' the moments of invention" (Rajchman, 1990, p. 36).

Conserving the Present

An instance of this thinking otherwise as a 'history of the present' comes from a presentation by the theorist Hal Foster at an architectural conference titled "Thinking the Present." Foster's own paper was titled "Architecture, Development, Memory" (Foster, 1990, pp. 110-122). Foster presents a scenario whereby the discipline of architecture engages in a confrontation with the conservative in terms of two possible modalities of thinking, one that works within that discipline's history, logic and modes of classification, and one that ruptures via an event in thinking, an inventing of the new. The scenario pertains to the issue of homelessness and the response by the discipline of architecture to its recognized presence. Foster suggests that a responsiveness by practitioners to the recognition of homelessness, an engaged agency of responsibility, would be to use the disciplinary know-how of building in order to address the issue of homelessness. This would take the form of architectural practitioners devising economically viable high quality shelters to provide habitable spaces for the homeless, which is to say, to conserve the disciplinary boundary and prerogative of architecture as that which delivers shelter. Foster points out, however, that such a response, as caring as it may appear, does not begin to address the crucial nexus of the issues of homelessness. These issues are not simply the housing of those on the streets, but working directly on the mechanisms, at once economic and political, that primarily bring about homelessness. Foster stresses that architects, given their pivotal role in mediating between developers, civic administrators and the building industry, are in a key position to develop acute understanding of the cycles of property development that bring about conditions of homelessness, as well as the agency of local and state government administrators that encourages speculative development.

To mobilize such expertise brings the discipline of architecture to invent new territories in which to work, and indeed engage with a host of new agencies and responsibilities. Yet its effectiveness in addressing homelessness would be greatly enhanced by such new modes of classification of spacings. Foster suggests:

> Exactly how the developer-architect and the academic-architect were produced, I cannot say. I can say, however, that one way to respond to these twin figures is to produce another dialectical pair: as opposed to the developer-architect, the political architect; and as opposed to the academic-architect, the counter-disciplinary architect. … What happens then to architecture? (Foster, 1990, pp. 112-113)

Foster goes on to suggest that the political architect, in an anti-foundationalist critique of architecture as shelter or home, might make the homeless as subject, taking 'practice' in terms of what currently exists as the limits of 'architecture'. The counter-disciplinary architect works critically on the disciplinary confines and constructs of how architecture produces its authorial subjects and trains its practitioners: "In short, the point is not so much to contrive (say) anti-panoptical projects, but to consider whether or not architecture can be thought outside a

system of surveyed space, outside a regime of disciplinary gaze, outside an order of regimented bodies, outside a time-space of compelled circulation" (Foster, 1990, p. 114).

It is not without coincidence that Foster has his focus on homelessness and the uncanny when discussing the disciplinary borders of the discipline of architecture and the inertia perceived in shifting those borders. Architecture as a discipline in fact takes up something of a reflexive if not paradoxical position with respect to the conservation of its disciplinary integrity or identity. As the discipline that specializes in the proper or appropriate spacing or housing of identity, whether that spacing be familial, corporate or commercial, one could imagine that this is the discipline that is most acutely aware of its own habitation as construction. And hence, the discipline would also be acutely aware of its own primordial homelessness, particularly in the light of its long history of colonization by other disciplinary fields, whether they are medico-juridical discourses, the disciplines of sociology and psychology or structuralism and poststructuralist philosophy. Foster himself emphasizes at the beginning of his paper, categorically, that he is not an architectural historian, that he is speaking from outside the field and is therefore invoking a challenge to professional or disciplinary identity. Any question of confronting the conservative in architecture thus commences with recognition of location and placement with respect to a being-at-home in the discipline.

Ethics of a Future-to-Come

In his book *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, Karsten Harries introduces his project of an ethics by reiterating a pronouncement made some fifty years earlier by Siegfried Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture* (1967): "a certain confusion exists in contemporary architecture, as in painting, a kind of pause, even a kind of exhaustion" (Harries, 1997, p. 2). Harries is here, ironically, conserving a crisis of architecture, a crisis of architecture going astray, of losing its way, of losing its ethos, as an "interpretation of a way of life valid for our period" (Harries, 1997, p. 2). The ironic register doubles when we recognize Harries' appeal to Martin Heidegger on dwelling in order to locate some semblance of identity or being-at-home for the errancy of architecture's path, forgetting that Heidegger is the great philosopher of primordial homelessness and identity's ensnarement in the uncanny. Harries' search for a new foundation to architectural thinking relays between his classification of architecture in terms of "aesthetic" and "ethical" functioning. The former constitutes the predominant practice of architecture in the twentieth century, and is, in essence, an amalgam of instrumentalism with respect to function and formalism with respect to architectural style. Harries' confrontation with this, in a concern with ethos, is a restitution of a questioning of habitation and life initially erased with the advent of modernity. Here Harries parallels Alberto Perez-Gomez in his thesis on architecture and the crisis of modern science (Perez-Gomez, 1983). Hence, Harries concludes his book with an invocation to the *polis*, to community, to architecture as an expression of "our" way of life: "Consider once more the suggestion that works of architecture be understood as public figures on the ground of comparatively private buildings, where temple and church provide paradigms that have lost their authority. How are we to reoccupy the place once held by sacred architecture?" (Harries, 1997, p. 365). This project of restitution as a confrontation with the conservative sets the stakes for invigorating a grander project of conservation, as if the correlates 'private' and 'public' still have any sense of resonance with pre-modern modes of social cohesion.

Three fundamental problems exist with Harries' project of renewal. The first is its lack of criticality with respect to the notion of 'our ethos,' which is to say, our identity, our being-at-home, as if the genuine problem, the unhinging problem is something other than what may decide whose 'our' is at stake. The second problem circulates around a certain a-temporality given to fundamental precepts such as 'the sacred' or the 'private' as if their essential being is something unchanged from the time of the Greeks. The third is a notion of the ethical grounded in Enlightenment humanism, as if the Enlightenment project itself is something forever renewable. In short, the new becomes something forged on transcendental conditions, on some moment of repetition of the same as constitutive of identity, meaning, the designation of belonging. Opposed to Harries' project of restitution would be something like Rajchman's "new pragmatism," invoking some key philosophical speculations by Deleuze and Foucault (Rajchman, 1998, pp. 212-217). As Rajchman suggests, the critical question becomes how to see and to conceive of new forces that exceed and problematise assumptions that normally function as "transcendental:" "It becomes a question of how, in the absence of a priori or transcendental conditions, prior to what "determines" us as subjects, objects, members of communities, we may yet "invent ourselves" and our worlds" (Rajchman, 1998, pp. 213). Two key notions that emerge are those of "diagram" and "diagnosis." Diagrams map strategies of power, as with Foucault's 'Panopticon' as a diagram of power that maps disciplinary societies. Diagnosis refers to the function of archives: "[Foucault] declares that the archive is not concerned to 'sketch in advance what we will look like' but, on the contrary, with breaking with such continuities, to confront us with the fact that we are in the process of becoming something other, we know not yet what" (Rajchman, 1998, pp. 214).

Thus Rajchman suggests that the diagrammatic and diagnostic are not concerned with a future that is futuristic, but rather with a present with a multiplicity of unknown futures, unknown precisely because the images of those futures have yet to be invented. This invokes an approach to the new that is fundamentally different to that of the traditional avant-gardes or progressive social-democratic planners in as much as for the latter there is a future we are able to know and master. And it is in the context of a Deleuzian 'diagrammatics' that I want to introduce the extraordinary pronouncements of Giorgio Agamben on a thinking of the present, and the crisis this presents for any critical thinking on a confrontation with the conservative in architecture (Agamben, 1998). Agamben does not share Harries' humanist appeal to ethics. As a political philosopher he has taken up and extended Foucault's project of archiving the bio-political dimension of modernity, which means providing a diagnosis of the fundamental ground for being human in such a way as to displace the transcendental conditions of humanism. The diagram of power he draws for late modernity transforms Foucault's panopticism, as the strategy for a disciplinary society, into a new model, that of the totalitarian camp. Where for Foucault the modern prison becomes the privileged heterotopic spacing for the incitement of juridical power-knowledge relations and the social is cohered in a micro-politics of such relations, Agamben suggests that with the refinements of biopower, the camp becomes the privileged heterotopic spacing. The camp is not a further intensifying of juridical strategies but precisely the space of the suspension of law, where bare life is recognized as that substance that is neither inside nor outside the political stability of law, and is hence exposed to an arbitrary and apolitical jurisdiction. Hence Agamben suggests that the camp, which is now securely lodged within the city's interior, is the new biopolitical *nomos* of the planet:

> Today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West. ... [This] throws a sinister light on the models by which social sciences, sociology, urban studies, and architecture today are trying to conceive and organize public space of the world's cities without any clear awareness that at their very centre lie the same bare life (even if it has been transformed and rendered apparently more human) that defined the biopolitics of the great totalitarian states of the twentieth century. (Agamben, 1998, pp. 181-182)

Fredric Jameson, in *The Seeds of Time* (1994), also registers this spacing of the suspension of law as a crucial moment in critically assaying current conditions of architectural practices. In his emphasis on a current reconfiguring of the very conditions that constitute the public and the private, Jameson emphasizes that the end of civil society marks our current politico-cultural matrix. Indeed, the architect Rem Koolhaus presents Jameson with a new exemplar that makes sense of crucial aspects of postmodern culture, particularly the absence of any ground that may set up the binary public and private, which Jameson here terms "the end of civil society:"

> Unlike the modern project, these public ventures must underscore the exclusion of private life, and they necessarily reincorporate the paradoxes of private property after the end of civil society (in the one, by way of the dialectic of the property of information; in the other, by way of the more classic antinomy of a public space that is privately owned). (Jameson, 1994, pp. 134-135)

This thematic of the end of civil society becomes a crucial register for Jameson's broader discussion of contemporary architecture. He engages with it via the term "Dirty Realism" which he borrows (and sharpens a little) from Liane Lefaivre. By dirty realism Jameson is invoking the emergence of some new political space of contemporary culture. But, he stresses, "we do not have the terms or categories to describe what succeeds civil society as such" (Jameson, 1994, p. 158). However, in this work on contemporary architectural practices he manages to provide some indicators of its modes of appearance:

> What now takes the place of the opposition between private and public? Is there some intermediate zone between the two that survives, and how today to theorize the everyday or daily life, or the street, as one candidate for such an intermediary position? I think that it is useful to think of the new space along the lines of a no-man's land, not merely of warfare as such but of all previous traditional forms of boundaries (the paradox being that the category of boundary has in this situation disappeared). Spatially, this can be imagined as something in which neither private property nor public law exists. (Jameson, 1994, p. 158)

This "no-man's land" roughly sketched by Jameson resonates closely with the core issue of Agamben's analysis. Within bio-political exposure of life itself as the fundamental political substance, techno-instrumentalist procedures for the conservation of life become our fundamental ethical ground. Where, for example, we see ecology and eco-sustainable design practices as inherently good from the viewpoint of sustaining life, this ethos itself is only sustainable with the globalization of bio-political technologies of power with their fundamental redistribution of the

question of right, their unhinging of known forms of political sovereignty, and their inventing of new classifications of being human. Broadly, we may oppose the two radicalities of confronting the conservative in terms of the works of Harries and Rajchman. With Harries, the new will take its model from an already known, will rely on transcendental categories, and will fulfill the conditions suggested by Deleuze in moving from possibilities to realities, where the concept inherent in possibilities is itself modeled on, or is a restitution of a former reality. With Rajchman, our task is to critically engage with our present in order to dislocate ourselves from what we take to be the inevitable or natural condition by which we inhabit our world, in order to pose a project of inventing that for which we do not as yet have a concept. This fulfils Deleuze's conditions for construing relations between virtualites and actualities, where virtualities are complications in or multiplicities of what is actual.

The significance of Agamben is that he poses a diagram and diagnosis of our everyday practices of habitation that radically questions the classifications by which we understand our present, what Foster would perhaps see as the agencies of the political-architect and the critical-architect in their affective capacities, or what Jameson would consider as the traversal of the 'no-man's land' of our contemporary dirty realism. In the radicality of his questioning, Agamben dislocates us from our ethos and at the same time offers no concept by which we may renew our ethics. Indeed, his work incites us, perhaps as a first task, to radically invent a new notion of ethics in relation to habitation, an architectural ethics that would come before the name or law or identity of 'architecture', an ethics that does not commence with the question of rights, or social contacts, or the very possibility of saying 'our.' If I may conclude with Agamben, this would be an ethics that:

> has no room for repentance; that is why the only ethical experience (which, as such, cannot be a task or a subjective decision) is the experience of being (one's own) potentiality, of being (one's own) possibility—exposing, that is, in every form one's own amorphousness and in every act one's own inactuality. The only evil consists instead in the decision to remain in a deficit of existence, to appropriate the power to not-be as a substance and a foundation beyond existence; or rather (and this is the destiny of morality), to regard potentiality itself, which is the most proper mode of human existence, as a fault that must always be repressed. (Agamben, 1993, p. 24)

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