# AoD Interviews|

## Architecture of Deconstruction
The Specter of Jacques Derrida

Edited by: Vladan Djokić & Petar Bojanić

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International Scientific Conference
University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
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*Architecture of Deconstruction / The Specter of Jacques Derrida* was a three-day, international scientific conference organized by the University of Belgrade, the Faculty of Architecture and the Center for Ethics, Law and Applied Philosophy (CELAP). The aim of the conference was to draw attention to the question of borders between the disciplines of architecture and philosophy. Taking a look at the relation between architectural theory and practice from the perspective which at one time aspired to the term *deconstructivist* and came from the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, the conference was directed toward defining whether a new kind of unease has emerged in contemporary relations between the two disciplines.

With these questions in mind, we hoped to re-establish the connections which influenced so strongly both architecture and philosophy in the last decades of the 20th century; and in doing so, open a possibility of their re-evaluation in the circumstances which define our present times.

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# The Architectural Philosophy |

## Petar Bojanić
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This text is the result of our joint contribution to the October 2012 conference *Architecture of Deconstruction / The Specter of Jacques Derrida*, held in Belgrade. Participating in two further conferences, in Turin in December 2012 (Architecture and Realism), and in Salerno in February 2013 (Architecture and Philosophy), has enabled us to refine our argument regarding the always complicated relationship between theory (philosophy) and architecture.

This introduction is the result of collaborative work and joint construction (Vladan Djokić is an architect and the dean of the Faculty of Architecture, while Petar Bojanić is a philosopher and the director of the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory). Our intention is to explain the utterly uncertain and always debatable connection between architecture and philosophy. Namely, this is an elucidation of the reconstruction of the connection between philosophy or theory on the one hand, and architecture on the other, by making reference and explaining the title of this text ("The Architectural Philosophy"[1]), thereby introducing a few premises that would regulate the status and form of the copula "and" between these respective fields. The first premise could regard the various kinds of inspiration that philosophy or theory has produced in the field of architecture, or even the results of various encounters and dialogues between philosophers and architects. Indeed, today the philosopher is awakened in the architect. The architect is a thinker and is capable of thematizing her own enterprise. She no longer needs the philosopher. In that sense, the theme of this symposium, *Architecture of Deconstruction*, has essentially been surpassed.

On the other hand, it seems to us, and this is our second premise, that it is indeed possible to explain the uncertainty of the encounter between an architect and philosopher through the example of collaboration or exchange between an architect and philosopher.[2] By this we mean, between two big figures who could be the emblem and paradigm of any future relation or

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1    The phrase "The Architectural Philosophy" is used by Peter Eisenman in a fragment used to explain his "Wexner Center." Cf. "Philosophy and Architecture", *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts*, ed. Andrew Benjamin, Academy Editions & St. Martin's Press, London, New York, 96. Many years ago, Eisenman announced the end of the relationship between architecture and the philosophy, and imagines a brand new philosophy translated into, and completely adopted by architecture.

2    The connection between an architect and philosopher can be expressed in another way: "Derrida, when asked if we had had a collaboration, replied that it was not a collaboration or an exchange, but rather a double, parasitic laziness; separate tricks." P. Eisenman, "Separate Tricks", Written into the *Void, Selected Writings 1990-2004*, introduction J. Kipnis, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 78.

connection between philosophy and architecture (today we are certainly not dealing with the importance of the "architectonic element" for philosophy): Peter Eisenman and Jacques Derrida. We therefore think, quite to the contrary, that this conference, as well as a conference we are organizing in Belgrade in November of 2013 entitled "Issues. Discussions with Peter Eisenman," can indeed show how philosophy has been transplanted into architecture, or even the various transformations of philosophy in architecture. If we follow the genesis and changes of the "philosophical moment" in Eisenman, and if we reconstruct his reading of Derrida and certain other philosophers, whom he uses to resist Derrida's influence and temper it, and despite all the oscillations and doubts, it is possible to find several important phases that end with the breaking away and breaking apart of the philosopher Jacques Derrida. At the end of his text, the motto of which was taken from Edgar Allan Poe,[3] read at the conference in Belgrade, on October 24th, 2012, Eisenman writes:

> Ultimately the problem for architecture is that there is a Derridean double: a good Derrida and a bad Derrida. The good Derrida opens architecture's presence to a question; opens architecture's signifies to a free play of signifiers; and places architecture's ontological belief in origins of place (i.e., site) into ritualistic nostalgia. The bad Derrida surfaces when he demands that it is necessary for architecture to display, to look like, or to represent its textuality – its non-presence – in its being. This demand for representation is nothing but pure narrative, a narrative that all but erases textuality. As Jeff Kipnis no doubt will say, Derrida did not understand deconstruction in other disciplines, particularly in architecture. I say, that's alright Jacques, not many of us do either.[4]

In the earliest phase, upon initially meeting Derrida, at the time of the Museum of Modern Art exhibition, over 30 years ago, Eisenman considers Deconstruction (Jencks capitalizes it at the time) or any philosophy an ideology, and not a style.[5] At the outset, Eisenman defends deconstruction, only to show

3  "The ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly imaginative never otherwise than analytic" (1841), E. A. Poe.

4  Manuscript, 4. In the introduction to the collected texts of Peter Eisenman, Kipnis is even more precise: "Eisenman does not seek to derive authority or force from his representation of Derrida's position; like any speculation in dialogue form, the reports are but rhetorical devices to help the architect clarify his own position." J. Kipnis, "Introduction", P. Eisenman, *Written into the Void, Selected Writings 1990-2004*, XXVIII.

5  "My sense is this: I believe that Deconstruction is not ultimately visible. It is about building unbuildable ideas. I do not think any multi-national corporation is going to build Deconstruction just as they do not build any other ideology." "Peter Eisenman. An *Architectural Design* Interview by Charles Jencks", London, n. 270, 60.

reservations towards it not a year or two later;[6] and then after a letter of Derrida and the first disagreements with him, he writes possibly one of the best critiques of deconstruction and philosophy in general. Replying to Derrida's letter in 1990,[7] which could be used to mark the end of the collaboration of the two thinkers and the moment when the architect is finally emancipated by finding the philosopher within, Eisenman writes several important fragments that not only question some pillars of Derrida's philosophy, but are entirely original and still very fresh. Here are a few passages from that letter:

> Yes, I am preoccupied by absence, but not in terms of this simple presence/absence dialectic, as you might think. For me as an architect, each concept, as well as each object, has all that is *not* inscribed within it as traces. I am preoccupied with absence, not voids or glass, because architecture, unlike language, is dominated by presence, by the real existence of the signified. (…) In my view, your deconstruction of the presence/absence dialectic is inadequate for architecture precisely because architecture is not a two term, but a three-term system. In architecture, there is another condition, which I call *presentness*, that is neither absence nor presence, form nor function, neither the particular use of sign nor the crude existence of reality, but rather an excessive condition between sign and the Heideggerian notion of being: the formation and ordering of the discursive event that is architecture. (…) Now, it is one thing to speak theoretically about these matters and it is another thing to act on them. (…) In the end, my architecture cannot be what it should be, but only what it can be. Only when you add one more reading of my work alongside your reading of it in pictures and texts – that is, a reading in the event of a building – only there will you see the play between presence and presentness, only then will you know whether I have been faithful.[8]

6   In his letter to Eisenman, (12.10.1989.), Derrida quotes this passage in which Eisenman distances himself from deconstruction: "I never talk about Deconstruction. Other people use that word because they are not architects. It is very difficult to talk about architecture in terms of Deconstructions, because we are not talking about ruins or fragments. (…) Deconstruction is dealing with architecture as a metaphor, and we are dealing with architecture as a reality..." J. Derrida, "Lettre à un architecte américain", *Rue Descartes*, n. 10, Albin Michel, 1990, 43.

7   It is unfortunate that Francesco Vitale did not publish this letter in the annex of *Adesso l'architettura*. Eisenman recently personally confirmed something interesting. Namely, Derrida never responded to, nor mentioned this letter to Eisenman. After this letter, Eisenman and Derrida participated at three conferences together, and met privately in Paris a few times. The aforementioned book contains a transcription of a conversation between Derrida and Eisenman from 1993 about "writing architecture." Both Derrida and Eisenman make an interesting distinction between the narrativity of Jean Nouvel and the writing of architecture in Eisenman and Libeskind. J. Derrida, *Adesso l'architettura*, Milano, Libri Scheiwiller, 2008, 224-225.

8    P. Eisenman, "A Reply to Jacques Derrida," Written into the Void, Selected Writings 1990-2004, 1-4.

Forms of this critique of Derrida and philosophy in general are present in Eisenman's later texts and interviews. However, the philosopher is now fully incorporated into the architect Eisenman, in a similar way to the philosopher taking over the architect's position in Ludwig Wittgenstein. Namely, Eisenman is now, in his later career, reading the classics (Palladius, these last few years, Alberti this semester), or else deconstructs key aspects of architecture, such as villa, angle, symmetry, proportion, etc.

The third premise, which we will single out, regards the autonomy of architecture to act socially and produce "social acts," or, more specifically, "social gestures" (although we are not going to dwell on the difference between act and gesture [*actus, gestus*]). Here are, right away, two pre-conditions of autonomy and social engagement that generally speaking, imply one another: first, that to be an architect is really a social act, or that the "existence or identity" of architect constitutes a social act (leaving aside for now the distinction between social acts and social facts). And second, that architecture (or the architect) is a product of certain constellations or connotations that, until recently, fell under the heading of philosophy. Therefore, the moment when the architect accepts that she is no more than a consequence, that "some philosophy" is behind it all – she becomes a social actor, and can change reality and nullify any theory of which she is not the author.[9] It seems to us that it is relatively easy to show today that Eisenman's first projects and proposals ("Harlem Plan," the "Rationale" proposal from his period at the "Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies"),[10] as well as his latest appearances (the speech before the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland), are in complete harmony with this premise.

In a grant proposal entitled "Rationale," submitted in 1971 to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation we can find the sentences that so perfectly describe the tension we are talking about today. Eisenman writes:

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9   In an unpublished discussion between Jacques Derrida and Coop Himmelblau (Wolf D. Prix, Helmut Swiczinsky, Regina Haslinger) from 1988, which can be found in Derrida's archive in Irvine, entitled "Un entretien impossible" (we would like to thank Marguerite Derrida for allowing us to quote it here now), Derrida has considerable difficulty to show that philosophy is "behind it all" or at the basis of everything around us. Here are a couple of passages:
Himmelblau: You mean to say here that philosophy and architecture share a foundation, the same root. But if I look out the window, I see many a building inspired by reasons, origins, circumstances other than philosophy.
Derrida: Are you sure there is no philosophy here? I think it is filled with philosophy (...) Would you like me to tell you how philosophy is incarnated here, in Paris? (...) You respect philosophy too much.

10   Not long ago Lucia Allais published a text "The Real and the Theoretical, 1968" in the journal *The Real Perspecta* (n. 42, 2010, 27-41); all our references are taken from this text.

> "First, I am an architect, not a theoretician or a historian. I believe in the inseparability of ideas and form.
> First, as an architect and a theoretician, I believe in the inseparability of ideas and form."

The real or the social that Eisenman recognizes in 1968 is what actually initiates his project and his architectural commentary. He writes:

> "Black America is in essence urban America. Whether by default or by design the cities have been left to the urban blacks. Today they represent the only true urban culture that exists in this country. (...) The modern city, the utopia on the earth, has been the dream if not the reality of much contemporary thought and work in the areas of city planning. For various reasons the climate for any realistic movement toward this goal was not right. However... there is an opportunity now."

Despite the project never being realized (as you know), the problem remains, and that is the always complicated status of the "real" and the various protocols of social within architecture. Namely, only a few years later, in 1973, Eisenman organized a conference "Architecture Education USA," where, along with his colleagues, he defended intellectual speculation against a multivalent call for a return to a "sociological real" (which is his term). Eisenman and company found solidarity in rejecting any architectural framework where "theory and form are seen as unreal while practice and function are considered to be super-real." Eisenman himself goes farther still in considering that "the value of reality" needed to be "neutralized," that is, it was not education that needed to be reformed, but reality that needed to be educated.[11]

Over three decades later, it appears that Eisenman uses "real" and "social" interchangeably:

> People are always going on about how formalism is the project of autonomists in architecture. For me, it is precisely this autonomy that holds architecture back from engaging with society. If it is the work of architecture and its own discourse which impact society in a real way, then to be an architect constitutes a social act. Nor should the social here be understood to mean making people be happy or feel better: building housing for the poor, commercial centers for the wealthy, or garages for Mercedes. I am speaking of understanding architectural conditions of autonomy, ones which produce an engagement with

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11    P. Eisenman, "Education of Reality", in L. Allais, "The Real and the Theoretical, 1968", 41.

society and labor against hegemonic social and political structures of our time. Which is what architecture always was.[12]

We suggest this critique of the architect's or architecture's engagement be called the social gesture, or more precisely, that a key characteristic of architecture as a gesture or the gesture as the key to architecture, is resistance towards structures and hierarchies of our time.[13] The gesture has social value and importance, if characterized by resistance (the architect is certainly one of the key actors in society who produces such gestures). And this could be the key addition to Wittgenstein's explanations of gestures.

Let me say again that Wittgenstein defines architecture as a gesture (*die Geste*), a quite particular gesture, while mentioning that neither an intentional movement of the human body, nor every edifice constructed with the appropriate intention is a gesture.[14] However, what belongs to the gesture (regarding a type of movement), and how can we better determine, within Wittgenstein's statements about the gesture, his basic intention?

Five characteristics of the gesture, or what makes a gesture a gesture:

First, the gesture is miraculous, a miracle, something that above all interrupts a sequence and routine. The divine gesture, according to Wittgenstein, is properly called a miracle. The architectural gesture, if it is a gesture, whether in the form of text or expression in space, ought to have a miraculous and spellbinding characteristic.

Second, the gesture is an event. For something to happen, it must of necessity be sudden, either pleasant or quite unpleasant. (It assumes that we are stopped, caught, that we must respond to what has befallen us, at the same time determining what we have happened upon.) For something to be a gesture, or for an event to be an event, it is necessary to excite and provoke a self-thematization on the part of those who perceive it and accept it.

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12  P. Eisenman, „Discours devant la Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland", *Marnes*, n. 1, Paris, Edition de la Villette, 2011, 410.

13  "*Sozialer Gestus*" (*gestus* as standpoint, holding, *als Haltung*) is one of the more important categories in Brecht, which he uses for the first time in 1929. Cf. B. Brecht, *Gespräch über Klassiker*, in W. Hecht (ed.), *Schriften zum Theater*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1964, 156.

14  "*Architektur ist eine Geste. Nicht jede zweckmäßige Bewegung des menschlichen Körpers ist eine Geste. Sowenig, wie jedes zweckmäßige Gebäude Architektur.*" L. Wittgenstein, *Vermischte Bemerkungen*, Paris, 1990, T. E. R., 59. Daniele Pisani wrote one of the best book on Wittgenstein and architecture. Cf. D. Pisani, *L'architettura è un gesto*, Macerata, Quodlibet Studio, 2011.

Third, the gesture is neither sudden, nor originary, nor self-moving (automatic) production. "You draw a door, you look at what you have drawn, and you say: "a little higher... a little more to the left... a little more... oh, yes, like that, perfect!" (Gesture)." Wittgenstein, then, names a set of operations or work that harmonizes and conjoins the visible and the invisible, the scale with the measure, that which arouses pleasure or satisfaction – the gesture. For the "gesture" to happen, it is necessary to correct and adjust.

Fourth, for a gesture to be architectural and thus the mark of good architecture, it is understood that the architect successfully expressed one thought or one emotion. ("In some people, for example myself, to express a single emotion, let us say, using music, is some kind of gesture.") The gesture is found in between or in the span of thought and expression, and furthermore, the expression is adequate if and only if the gesture is right and commensurate.

The fifth characteristic of the gesture is that it cannot be recognized through rules. If we are free of rules and constraints while gleaning or anticipating an expression filled with spirituality (*seelenvolle Ausdruck*) – we are before a gesture.

It seems necessary to us to add one more to these characteristics of the gesture on which Wittgenstein relies. Deleuze and Barthes in their lectures on film and when analyzing the gesture in Brecht, respectively, call this the "the pregnant instant" (*l'instant prégnant*) or "the privileged moment" (*le moment privilégié*). The gesture, if it is to be a gesture, reveals the true present (*vrai présent*) and decisive emergence of meaning (*l'émergence du sens*). Sense or meaning, begin with resistance, with the social gesture, says Deleuze (*Le sens commence au gestus social*).[15]

We will end this short paper with a long unpublished quote from the discussion between Jacques Derrida and Coop Himmelblau. The interview was conducted

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15   The social gesture, it needs to be said along with Eisenman and Derrida, is necessarily a thing of the written (writing, architectural writing), and not speech. In "Epreuves d'écritures", written for the exhibit "Les Immatériaux" in 1985, Derrida cites two key characteristics of the gesture (*geste*): that it begins in writing (*pardon ne fait aucun geste, ne devrait même pas dire: nous allons effacer le mal*) and that it relates to the behavior of the subject, singular, authentic, unrepeatable, coded (*Le geste est codé, mais c'est ce que personne pourtant ne peut faire à votre place*). J. Derrida "Epreuves d'écritures", Revue philosophique, n. 2, Paris, 1990, 275.

in English, but this is a translated version of the French copy, found in the archive. It is ready to go to print, but quite a few fragments are crossed out in pencil by Derrida. The front page, for reasons unknown, bears a note, in Derrida's handwriting, forbidding its publication. The interview spells out clearly what Derrida is trying to tell Eisenman in a letter from October 12th 1989, speaking of Benjamin, poverty and homelessness:
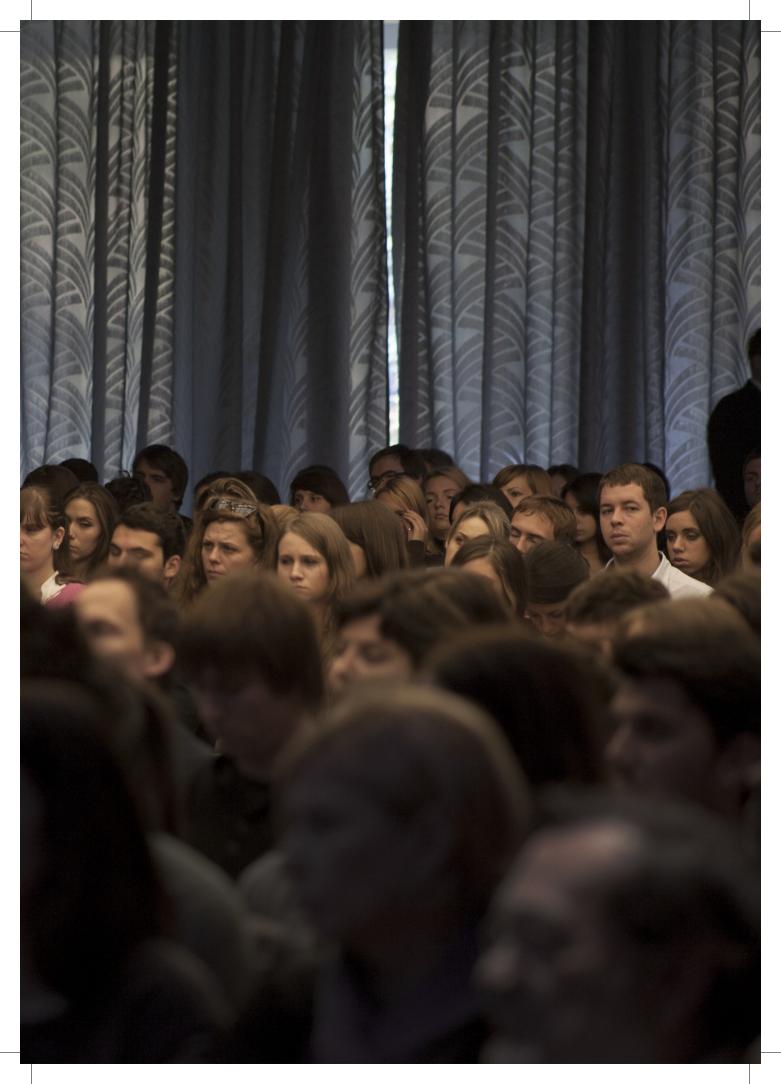
*You know, I do not know if this is a criticism or not, but I would say that I am very attuned to the fact that architectural discourse, or architectural publications, are very rich. Which means that, in its current state, architecture is tied to great economic powers of the cultures of Western civilization. This is not something I criticize, but we should pay attention to this, to the political aspect. This fact, that architectural reviews are beautiful, which is a good thing, could still lead us to asking the question: why is that? Why are they more expensive than books on philosophy, for example? Why should it be that architecture is more seductive, more useful? Why would it be that the financial and political powers that be more readily support the university teaching of architecture than philosophy, or the humanities, or even the other arts, such as painting? Why is it thus?*

*During the lectures I gave in Japan, I insisted that the best contemporary architects – the most audacious, the most inventive – no longer place importance on social and political problems, such as questions of housing, and they are right to do so. What they are doing is more formal, more formalist. Sometimes even the architects associated with Deconstruction, very well, and I understand why you sometimes do not wish to follow, for example, political regulations, housing commissions which say things like "Well, you should design low income housing, something for the homeless, socially useful". Alright, because that implies the use of old architectural schemes, and you are right, you should not have to do it.*

*However, you should attempt to become more political; to become more political in a new way. You should pay attention to investment sources, in the ways in which your investments are used, or exploited, so to speak. How come it is possible to design Deconstruction architecture in Japan, in Los Angeles, and maybe in Berlin, and not in Central Africa? What are the new ties with capitalism? I think that we need a new analysis, and not one based on old patterns, of this new architecture.*

Translated by Edward Djordjević

# Interview with Mark Cousins|

Renata Jadrešin-Milić

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

M a r k   C o u s i n s | when the interview took place |
Director of History and Theory at the Architectural Association. Guest Professor
at Southeastern University Nanjing. Founding Member of the London
Consortium Graduate School. Other posts held: Arts Council of England,
Architecture Panel and Visual Arts Panel. Visiting Professor at Graduate School
of Architecture Planning and Preservation, Columbia University.

M a r k  C o u s i n s

Lecture:
T e a c h i n g  A r c h i t e c t u r a l  H i s t o r y  i n  a n
A r c h i t e c t u r a l  S c h o o l
25/10/2012

Abstract:
Students around the world resist the courses on architectural history which are offered in their schools. This lecture tries to explain why this should be the case and to propose a radical alternative which I have tried to introduce at the Architectural Association in the last few years. It focuses on the category of the architectural Past which is quite different from history in its normal and academic sense.

P l a y i n g  o n  W o r d s
27/10/2012

Abstract:
The lecture examines the effect of reading Derrida upon art and architecture students. Rather than locate this at the level of arguments I suggest that we consider it from the point of view of the pleasure of reading Derrida and particularly in respect to his play upon words. His puns play a particular role in his writings- that of lifting certain repressions. But the paper tries to show that this play is based on a linguistic field of largely Roman and Greek signs. The paper asks what the consequences of this are for the claims that the writing is subversive or deconstructs such structures as the classical tradition.

# Teaching Architectural History

**R. J. M.:** We all face the fact that architecture students devote a significant number of hours to the study of architecture history. We often wonder if this expenditure of time and effort will ultimately benefit the students? Will these young architects design better buildings for having spent time during their academic training in studying history of architecture? In that sense, what is your opinion: Is knowledge of history a help and prerequisite to the effective practice of modern architecture?

**M. C.:** I think the answer is "no", because the evidence for that is that most architects practicing now don't have knowledge of architectural history. It's problematic because often they are the people who say that everybody ought to. But in reality even if they know a little, and it's something that stops at the door of their office. So they don't bring it into the office with them. Perhaps, though, your question has another aspect. Would it be better if they did? And here, I think, it's difficult to give an answer. After all, there is nothing worse than the architecture done by those who feel they are on some kind of historical or historicizing mission. We have in England a number of people, architects, who would like to just design in a kind of "neoclassical spirit" and it seems quite ridiculous.

**R. J. M.:** Even though, we still do teach architectural history. You mentioned that in a certain architectural history class you gave, only five out of seventy students had any idea what the classical orders were. Do you have a solution to that problem? Should the lecturer assume that students already have a basic knowledge, understanding and recognition of famous buildings from different periods in the history of architecture? How to relieve the instructor of communicating basic descriptive facts so that he could concentrate on providing interpretation, indicate personal reactions, set up challenging cross comparison and provoke discussion?

**M. C.:** Well, I think the example of the fact that only a few students in a large class knew what the classical orders were is simply an exposure of how little the question of the classical orders is important. Even fifty years ago, frequently courses would start by teaching the students the classical orders, but perhaps as the course went on they weren't really very important anyway. So, perhaps a certain knowledge of the orders was simply a kind of façade which has now fallen away, revealing the fact that in truth the students don't feel a need to know it. And, in any case, the question of "knowing the orders" is more

complex than I have suggested because it's not just the question of knowing what the Ionic, or the Doric, or the Corinthian is. It's a question of knowing what consequences that had in the design of buildings. I don't think you could turn the clock back and simply start compelling students to learn it because I don't think you could compel students to learn where they don't see the point. Students will learn something where they experience and trust that there is an immediate purpose to doing something.

R. J. M.: We are aware that the preparation for the teaching of architectural history is usually based on the lecturer's own opinions and judgments, and very often the "lecture" becomes a mere parade of slides accompanied by lots of facts. Have you ever thought of establishing some institution where teachers of architectural history can make contact with the latest developments in the field of teaching?

M. C.: Well, for the last part of your question, I don't know, I am just a teacher; I have no wish to run anything. I think the first thing is to question the way the knowledge is presented, because that immediately shows that actually, when we teach, as you say, with slides, we are actually teaching on the basis of an archive or a corpus of photographs. And ultimately, the photographs are quite a small number of apparently exemplary buildings, and that needs to be itself taken into account. We are not studying what people think when they use the term history. We are studying the architectural historians' canon of buildings which were particularly significant to them in particular epochs of historical time. In that sense, most of what you might call "ordinary architecture" is never studied by architecture at all, whether historically or in design studios.

R. J. M.: Are you talking about vernacular architecture?

M. C.: It includes that, yes. But I am really talking about, for example in Belgrade, an ordinary bank in say 1955, we don't attempt to appreciate it. And we may be right, not to see the value in the kind of generalization, still less in a kind of statistical survey.

R. J. M.: What is that "ordinary building"? What does an "ordinary building" look like?

M. C.: Well, perhaps we could start by defining it negatively: it's something which no one from architectural culture would think worth photographing, talking about, pointing out to students. It's what everybody, including architecture, passes by in the street.

**R. J. M.:** But they also have their architects, do they not?

**M. C.:** Yes, it can have an architect. It's not described. And therefore, it becomes, the word we would use in English is, "non-descript". "Non-descript" would just mean: it isn't "re-represented" for academic purposes.

**R. J. M.:** Do you think, then, that when Modernism reached its highest point, nobody ever mentioned any building that had some classical orders for example, although those too were built at that time and are still present? Don't you think that, in that period, those buildings were some of "non-descript", that you have just mentioned?

**M. C.:** Yes, the problem here is a certain contradiction in the definition of architecture. On the one hand, it is assigned a function of providing buildings in a culture. On the other hand, the term architecture always implies a kind of ideality, a kind of idealism, implying "the best". From a social point of view, there is plenty of good enough architecture, if by that we mean "fulfills its functions in an adequate way". And can even be for somebody or some people an object of affection.

**R. J. M.:** I would also like to know whether, when you teach architectural history, you ever show any slides of any building to the students, or not? How do you teach?

**M. C.:** I've never shown a slide.

**R. J. M.:** That's what I was thinking you were going to say...

**M. C.:** I don't wish to appear to be a dogmatic iconoclast. But let me say, there are a plenty of people showing slides. Over the five years the students will all see plenty of slides. In a strange way I think that the people at the Architectural Association, I don't know why this is, but people don't even notice that I don't show slides.

**R. J. M.:** Nor did we at the Conference. It was very interesting and nobody noticed that there were no pictures behind you. Could you tell us why and how you started teaching architecture?

**M. C.:** I had always been interested in questions of space and questions of the history of spatial organization. That for me was the door. But I was very

fortunate in that this door was opened by Alvin Boyarsky at the AA, who asked me to come and to start what would become the Friday lectures at the AA. The subsequent director persuaded me to come full time, so there I stayed. And I enjoy it very much. Everyone always complains about work, but I have to say, I can't conceal the fact that I enjoy it.

**R. J. M.:** In your opinion, what is architectural history for?

**M. C.:** Well, I think one has to prepare to answer that question. Obviously, it seems to me we are in general in favor of people "knowing things" as far as possible. I find it strange that the students don't enjoy architecture of the past as much as they used to. One can tell that this is the case: in the past, architects used to make trips on vacation to see both old buildings and contemporary buildings. But, I think now it would be surprised to hear that they made a trip to see a new building, because you can see it on the web anyway.

## Architecture and Philosophy

**R. J. M.:** What do you think and do you believe in categories such as "honest" and "dishonest", or "true" and "false" in architecture? Do you believe in something like that?

**M. C.:** Well, I am always surprised in conferences that quite often it is as if the topic that is supposed to be discussed is hijacked by questions of "truth" or "methods of the production of truths". I'm happy to operate with the very simplest kind of conceptions of evidence. I am sure one needs those. But I'm afraid I'm not very interested in questions of "truth" in general, except in terms of their effects on other people. I think I am more interested in the distinction you don't really include in that, though I think is an important one for academic stuff, which is the difference between being interesting and being boring.

**R. J. M.:** What is "architecture of our times" for you?

**M. C.:** I think that it's very important to be very, very careful regarding those kinds of questions. Someone at the Conference already mentioned the paper by Giorgio Agamben on the "contemporary". And, if someone wants a serious answer to this question, they should read the Agamben article. What is clear, as Agamben argues, and I think he's completely right, is that what will turn out to be central or crucial to the period is not something which will be obvious at the moment. In a sense, what is most obviously prominent is really unlikely to

be significant. And what will be significant is something which isn't comfortable or happy in its period. It is something "out of joint". And anyone who has lived with architectural discussions knows how rapidly cycles go of what is thought to be good, indeed of what topics need to be discussed by architectural culture, and one becomes rather skeptical of accepting any easy answer to the question.

R. J. M.: My follow up question is: Do you believe in *Zeitgeist*? Do you believe in that phenomenon that there is a "spirit of an age" whether we talk about architecture or anything else? Or are there some certain things that are universal, that have nothing to do with "in what time we are"?

M. C.: I need to trace different aspects of your question. I do not believe in *Zeitgeist*, if by that is meant that you can take a cross-section of time and that any one moment, everything which is visible in that cross section is related to everything else in that cross section. It's what the philosopher Louis Althusser used to call "expressive causality" and I'm strongly opposed to it. At a philosophical level I don't see any compelling reason to think that there is a kind of homogeneity of different temporalities. I don't see why everything needs to hang together. Still less do I see why things should hang together in what you are calling like the "spirit of an age". So, putting that a kind of dismissal to one side now, on the other hand there will always be attempts to represent what the *Zeitgeist* is. It's almost as though people require a kind of Hegelian journalist to tell them "when it is", "where we are", so that they can have some critical orientation. A lot of so-called intellectuals try to answer that need, "where we are", "where we are going". In the seventies almost every book that related to society was called "The coming crisis of …" or "after" something. It's very much bound up with the notion of *crisis*. And of course intellectuals always insist that it either is a crisis now, or will very soon be a crisis, because as intellectuals their job is invested in making sure there is a crisis. No one ever sold a book by saying: "Oh, it's just more of the same, nothing is going on".

## A b o u t   t h e   C o n f e r e n c e

R. J. M.: Could you tell me something about the conference? Are you satisfied, did you like it? What do you think about the question of borders or limits between the disciplines of architecture and philosophy?

M. C.: As far as the conference is concerned, like other speakers, I am simply amazed in several different ways. On the one hand, I'm somewhat surprised

that there obviously is such interest in the topic. And I salute the organizers of the conference. I think it was quite a brave step. Also I have to say, I think I've never been to a conference which was not only so efficiently organized, but so humanly organized. So I think everyone who came to talk has been very, very touched personally by the conference and they will remember it for a long time.

## About Belgrade

R. J. M.: Do you like Belgrade? What is your impression of its architecture?

M. C.: The architecture – I like. It's somewhat difficult to say this, because obviously Serbia has enormous economic and financial problems. But nonetheless it seems to me that one of the pleasures of walking around is not seeing everything converted. There was a period after German unification when I think West Germany did a lot to damage the construction industry of ex-GDR. And it committed itself to the populist thing of making sure that within four years you could show two photographs- before and after- in a city center. And somehow these "after", the old neo-baroque with a new coat of paint, get actually rather irritating after a while. I thought Belgrade, which has had less spent on being gentrified and smartened up, it was very easy to have real affection for.

R. J. M.: I noticed that you paid some attention to the "Palace of Albania", the building at the beginning of Knez Mihailova Street. You were quite surprised to hear that it was finished before the Second World War. What was it that surprised you?

M. C.: Yes, I think, it's especially the pre-war, not so much modernist but modernizing, buildings that were particularly interesting. And also some of the post-war buildings. Some of the buildings really did require some study and they are very, very distinctive. But, as I say, it's a real pleasure, at least for an outsider, to see them without this veneer of gentrification which one has got used to everywhere. I can remember Soho in Manhattan before it was gentrified. And indeed I formulated the rule that it's finally becoming possibly gentrified when a shop opens that sells candles. Then it's all finished.

# P e r s o n a l l y

**R. J. M.:** You are well-known for engaging theoretical ideas and challenging norms. Do you have a mission or what do you see as your mission in doing that?

**M. C.:** I'm afraid I can't say that I have a mission. In many ways, I find I share a similar background with people of my generation. In one sense, I think I might be called an ex-leftist without too much political idealism now. I think that, probably, I'm perhaps distinguished because I think it's very important, both in teaching and in writing, to oppose the norms of academic writing. I think it can be very boring and fail to convey to students that, while the topic may be quite complicated, there are various ways, including quite simple ones, of expressing it. I find myself something of an anarchists. I very much dislike the unnecessary rules and regulations of the academic system. I dislike the patronage of academic systems, whether it's openly corrupt or whether it's concealed behind the mask of meritocracy, because these really stunt the critical independence of students.

**R. J. M.:** One more question: your last lecture was about "playing on words", which I found very interesting and inspiring. I am wondering: are we allowed to "play with words"? Because, for example, while instructed how to write scientific theses in science, whether in the humanities or the natural sciences, students are usually taught and instructed that words are defined by the researcher and that the only important and essential thing is the idea that stands behind the words we are using! Do you agree with that?

**M. C.:** No.

**R. J. M.:** So, in that case, words always have the same specific and fixed meanings? Is that what you think?

**M. C.:** No. Oh, no, no. I certainly don't think that words have fixed meanings.

**R. J. M.:** Well, how do we use words if we are not allowed to define the specific meaning that stands behind a given word?

**M. C.:** I think it depends what practice is at stake. Obviously, in a thesis you aim at clarity. But that should never get trapped into a kind of rigidity, which cuts the thesis completely off, let us say, from poetry. And I think in general

it's important to produce in architecture, as well as in argument, something new. Not for the sake of technology, for innovation. Rather, something new animates. Makes words live and vivid. It's on that basis that one can say that – and sometimes people find themselves completely in disagreement with me, or completely not understanding what I am saying – it is the task of art and architecture to destroy meaning. Now, that sounds odd. Meaning is good, why would anyone want to destroy it? But when I say "destroy meaning" it's what's accumulated like rust, it's what makes things immobile. We normally think that the meanings are a good thing but I am not at all sure.

R. J. M.: Thank you.

# Interview with Mark Wigley|

Djordje Stojanović

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

M a r k   W i g l e y   |   when the interview took place |
Mark Wigley, Dean, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, New York. An accomplished scholar  and design teacher, Mark Wigley has written extensively on the theory and practice of architecture and is the author of *Constant's New Babylon:  The Hyper-Architecture of Desire* (1998); *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern  Architecture* (1995); and *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (1993). He co-edited *The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationalist Architectures from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond* (2001). Wigley has served as curator for widely attended exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Drawing Center, New York; Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal; and Witte de With Museum, Rotterdam. He received both his Bachelor of Architecture (1979) and his Ph.D. (1987) from the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

M a r k   W i g l e y

Lecture:
T h e   G e o m e t r y   o f   U n e a s e
26/10/2012

Abstract:
This talk offers some reflections on the legacy of Jacques Derrida in architecture. It explores the intimate yet forever convoluted relationship between architecture and philosophy.

Dj. S.: Were you surprised by the invitation to speak about derrida once again after twenty-five years? Were you surprised by the invitation coming from Belgrade?

M. W.: I wouldn't say I was surprised, in the sense that I think it has been almost twenty five years since the strong beginnings of the discussion about deconstruction in architecture. So it seems to me twenty five years means more or less one generation; it makes sense that one generation later there is a desire to think again about this. And I think it is very nice that the invitation came from Belgrade, and not from any of the classic locations, New York, Paris, London. Not because of neutrality, probably one can never speak of neutrality in Serbia, but it is an unexpected place that forces everybody to think. And of course, to work on this question of deconstruction in architecture means to think again. Not simply to think about what happened, in architecture and deconstruction, but to think what it means to think in architecture. A lot of conversation in the United States is about what it means to think.

Dj. S.: Could we take the view from the present time and look at the effects, importance or influences of deconstruction in architecture?

M. W.: What I would like to argue, as you remember, is that I think that the influence of writings of Derrida is most strong and most productive in operations in which his name is never mentioned. So I think, to have a group of people in architecture who are always referring to the work of Derrida, who are, let's say, Derridians in architecture, to me this is not an interesting outcome. Nor would it be interesting for any philosopher, if there were Deleuzians or Heideggerians, for instance. There are many times that a name of a famous philosopher becomes an important name in an architectural discourse. And I think it is appropriate that this happens, as architects are intelligent and they are looking into the most interesting thinking in philosophy, most interesting writers and most interesting artists, and there is always a reflection of what this means in architecture. But when this becomes a religion of some kind, then it is not so interesting. To answer your question, Derrida played a very important role in destabilising normal relationships to authority. The interaction with his work allowed a loosening up in architectural discourse, a different language, new conversations and new subjects. It has to be said, that children of the generation most interested in deconstruction, so let's say my children and my friends' children, and already maybe we have children of the children, they react very strongly against the strength of this work, because they are looking to create their own identity and so in a very foolish way they took an anti-

intellectual position. I don't have a very clear answer to your question. You can see it two ways: scholarship in architecture opened up and as a result could think about Derrida for a while, or you could say thinking about Derrida in architecture created new kind of opening. I am not sure which.

**Dj. S.:** In 1993 you published the book "Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt", five years earlier you were the curator of the exhibition titled "Deconstructivist Architecture" at MoMA together with Philip Johnson, and one year before the exhibition you completed your doctoral thesis "Jacques Derrida and Architecture: Deconstructivist Possibilities of Architectural Discourse". What do you remember from this period that covers more than one decade including the time you had been working on your PhD?

**M. W.:** Was it 1993? I didn't think about it for a while. I had some very bad advice. I was advised not to publish the PhD. This was not specific advice about this PhD, just from someone who thought that PhD's in general do not make for good books. Eventually I decided I didn't agree with that. In the mean time, my thinking had evolved and of course the book is the refinement of the PhD arguments. Refining an argument is of course more difficult than finding an argument in the first place, because it takes longer. The answer to your question is more that at a certain point I decided to think through all of the same questions again and present the argument in a little more precise way. At the time I was also teaching for the first time and I was suddenly involved in many things. The argument in the book is exactly the argument of the PhD, even if it is a refinement. I don't think there is anything new. I almost want to answer your question by saying that between 1988 and 1993 nothing was happening. Perhaps like with the wine, it is sometimes good to put the wine in a barrel and let it sit there for a while. What was happening in way, these arguments were in a barrel. Of course, I felt of the PhD nothing but embarrassment, which is what most people who do a PhD feel, that, even though it was produced with great care and seriousness, this is something unbearable and alien to you. So you keep the alien in the house or the barrel and you are waiting to see what you think about it. And after a while I though no, I believe these things I was writing so I will put them into a book. When I was doing the PhD, it was seven years from beginning to end, but the work on Derrida was only the last two or three years. Maybe this is more detailed then you need, but a lot of the PhD we was just trying to understand what was my question. Why was I so interested in architecture? Then I realised that Derrida was a way for me to express this. Symmetrically, the time after the dissertation was just like the time before Derrida: a time of the reflection. I started doing my PhD and teaching at the same time, so I was thinking and reading. Then I wrote it, finished it, and then followed a time of thinking, reading and teaching before I returned to it.

Dj. S.: I suppose one may ask the question why Derrida is so precious to architects?

M. W.: I suppose what I was trying to say in the conference is that for some reason that I cannot explain fully, when I was reading "Of Grammatology" for the first time, in translation, I felt right away that this was an architectural argument. The geometry of the argument, or the geometry of the supplement, the argument that that which appears to be outside, external or added, or refused, repressed is in fact structural to the inside. It was immediately clear to me that Derrida was making an architectural argument. That is number one. Number two was that in so doing he was participating in a very clear philosophical tradition of the use of architecture to think. Probably before encountering Derrida I would have said that my work is in the area of history of architectural theory, that I am interested in arguments with which architecture is defended, promoted and disseminated. For me Derrida's argument was immediately a way to understand what it is that makes buildings so strange and so powerful. Having said that, I had no interest in what would mean to import Derrida into architecture. I was much more interested in the fact that that he had imported architecture into his argument. This is my PhD. I would have never imagined that it would have any significance for the field. And still I would not want to say that it had some kind of urgent importance for the field, but it had urgent importance for me.

Dj. S.: With regards to the exhibition, you have mentioned many times, that there was no intention to promote the idea of the new style in architecture, yet you wanted to show that something new was going on between a seemingly diverse group of seven architects.

M. W.: All seven people in the exhibition would reject the label. I have even said this in the essay of the catalogue, that this is not a combination of people and projects that they would agree with. The project here was to make an elicit or illegal association between different architects and to argue that there was something in common in their work that they themselves would not recognize. To me it was very refreshing that they did not like the label "Deconstructivist". But it is important to note that they would not have accepted any other label that would put them all together in the same room. They didn't like the fact that I made it very clear that I thought their work was already historical. And this is very important point. I was always arguing and arguing again in the catalogue, this work was historical. Frank Gehry had made his house ten years before the exhibition and precisely my argument was that this work needed to be exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, to create space for the next generation. My greatest fear was that the assumption would be that this would

be the beginning of some kind style or something like this. This was another reason that they were a little uncomfortable: they didn't like to be told that that are already historical.

Dj. S.: What is Deconstruction, if not a style? Derrida chose to explain this by explaining what Deconstruction is not rather than what it is. In his essay "Letter to a Japanese Friend" he says that Deconstruction is not a method, not a critique, not an analysis. How appropriate is to discuss the idea of Deconstruction in terms of the design methodology, although we know Derrida was very careful not to use the term "method"?

M. W.: I don't believe in method in architectural design. In the early years of my PhD I was interested in design methodology. Now I don't believe that there is a method in architecture. Architects have, let's say, their habits and their psychology and have their techniques. Probably one could analyse architects and identify their method. But even if you could produce the most complete description of the behaviour of the architect, you will never be able to explain a particular project that they have produced. I think that discussion on methods in architecture is not valuable, but why do we have this explanation? Because, since Vitruvius, the figure of the architect has not just been the person who will make a building that is beautiful because it resonates with the geometry of the universe, but the person who can explain this. There are two gestures, one is to say architecture is articulate building, building that talks, that speaks the truth, speaks about the beauty of the cosmos. And secondly, that the architect who makes this building is also articulate and also explains this fact that the building can resonate with the universe. Since the figure of the architect has always been understood as the figure of the explainer, there is this question that we should explain the method. I would say in truth, no architect ever knows how they produce the work they produce and no architect can explain the effect of his work, and I think no architect is deeply concerned with the method or deeply concerned with the effect.

Dj. S.: I suppose the question of the method surfaces only retroactively, when one looks back at what has been done.

M. W.: We can approach the same question slightly differently. In architecture, in a much more radical way than in any other field, there is a distance between the inside and the outside of the discipline. In the inside of the discipline, which means in the architect's head, inside of the architect's studio, inside of the architectural school, having dinner with other architects – if we go to this inside, the architect is enormously open to the mystery of architecture, and

open to the possibility of receiving ideas from any direction, and the production of architecture is enormously collaborative. Even on a very small project, there can be one hundred people involved. So the position of the architect is not about the process or about the method, but a kind of openness to a conversation, a very open ended, almost open source conversation. Society of course does not want to know about this, because society asks of the object that it represents stability and wishes that this object has a unique signature of one architect, and this one architect should have something of genius ability. So if we ask the question of the method, let say, how is it that design is produced, then we have to say that it is a process in which the architect is in control only to the extent that the therapist is in control of therapy or that a chef is responsible for the full effect of the food. Very good architects are very good at helping other people to collaborate, and most architects have no time to design, so that even as a matter of reality designers don't design. Design is done by those who are never named, can never be named. Design is an unnameable procedure, carried out by unnamed figures. All stories about methodology are an attempt to extend the mythology of architecture's certainty into the studio, into the school, into the head of the architect.

**Dj. S.:** Is this relevant to the ways architectural education is set?

**M. W.:** Openness and collaborative sensibility of the architect, this is now regarded in the university as the only way to do advanced research in almost any field: in science, in mathematics, in law, in medicine, etc. The classic procedure of the architecture, the studio system, the open environment – studio means empty room, in which anything is possible – this idea of the empty room in which a group of people, irrespective of age or discipline, could collaborate through open conversation, of which there are multiple scenarios, this is now regarded as the most advanced method of thought. The strange thing is, what we should as architects be very proud of, is this open and mysterious environment of the studio; and what we should be embarrassed about is the stupidity with which we pretend that we know exactly where our objects came from and what their effects will be. For me education is totally about reinforcing this open source condition of architectural thinking and it happens that we live today in a more or less open source age in which this new technological and personal generation believes that what you share is more important then what you keep. Architecture is uniquely positioned now to go through some major advances because our familiar techniques are now the techniques of the network society. I would say that the purpose of the school of the architecture is to celebrate the secret inside life of the architects and to be disrespectful of the overly confident external life of the architect.

**Dj. S.:** I am interested in that very moment of becoming for the architectural project. You have pointed out at the concept of translation, and have referred to Walter Benjamin's essay "Task of the Translator".

**M. W.:** Benjamin's argument is very important. Classical understanding of translation is that it is the secondary recovery of the primary meaning. So the most perfect translation is simply the one that minimizes interference with the original. In the Benjamininan sense, the translation is not just as good as the original, in fact there is no original without translation. The translation is what gives you the sense that there is the original. This is why the argument became so important for Derrida, because the supplement, the translation, which should obey the original, is in fact the carrier and producer of the original. This has so many points of importance in architecture. If the representational surface in architecture should translate and communicate the unseen and primary meaning of the structure, of the function, of the society, of the universe, because it is the secondary translation, then we can say well no, it's not the purpose of the building to represent some pre-existing present truth. The truth and the centre of the truth and the fullness of the truth is produced in the translation, in the decorative surface. Architecture is not, for example, communicating the resonance of the universe; it is a universe-producing machine. This is one application. Anyway when we are speaking of the building, let say a classical building, the columns are understood to be a translation of the wooden temples, that were themselves the translation of the first buildings. Even inside the ecology of architecture, each element is translating another element. All of this suggests and forces us to take the most superficial dimension of architecture and to understand this in the most serious way. Ornament obviously being this very phenomenon. This relates to your earlier question, because if the architect is required to explain the project, which also means to translate the project, to communicate the meaning of the project. And of course from the point of view that I am insisting on, there is no such thing as architecture which waits for the architect. Architecture is an effect of a tradition of theorizing, mainly text, but also speech. Without a continual labour of translation, there would not be architecture. I have never shared Derrida's fascination between speech and writing. My opinion is not important, but nevertheless I have this opinion that classical association of speech with the presence of the speaker versus writing that could, as it were, speak in my absence and therefore be, again, a translation or a delay – I don't find speech to have the qualities that have been ascribed to it. And remember that the figure of the architect, the explainer is also the speechmaker. I regard the architect as the species: architects make lectures, we teach our students

to make lectures, we teach our students to stand, literally to stand between the drawings and the jury, between the image and the word. The body of the architect is, let's say, a part of the performance. Benjamin's argument about translation reverses layer upon layer within architecture.

Dj. S.: To extend this topic further, could you discuss the trajectory from the idea to the material form, from the thought to the representation?

M. W.: This is a very good question. I don't think the answer will be as good as the question. The crudest way to make the argument would be that metaphysics is nothing other than the thought that there could be a domain of ideas separate from the domain of the material world but able to occupy that world, able to be translated into that world. Of course in Plato's view, the world that we know is the secondary xerox (copy), xerox of a xerox. Architecture offers itself as a first xerox (copy).  What is interesting in classical architecture, is that classical architecture says that it is more beautiful than a tree. The tree is a third order of the copy of an idea. This is why the temple sits on the plinth. The temple belongs neither to the world nor to ideas. Another way to say this is that the temple is the first order translation, first layer of the translation. The classical argument that says that ideas can impregnate material such that material can speak, so architecture is articulate building, architecture has ideas, discusses ideas, that it is a form of communication, a form of representation. Of course the translation argument again reverses this to say that material representation, in this case architecture, is not simply translating some world of ideas beyond it, it is giving you the idea that there is such a world. When explaining what is an idea, Plato says, first think of the person who wishes to make the building. First he has the idea that there is a building and then he makes the building. So we have already within Plato that thought: first is the idea and second is the material. But if it is the translation that produces the thought of the original, in this case the thought of ideas which is something that is coming even before thought, then architecture is not simply a way of expressing, communicating, representing, translating, that which philosophers are most interested in. There is no thought of that which comes before thought without the material example of architecture. Philosophy, again and again says, as if by accident, as if casually, let me use the example of architecture. What I was trying to say in this book is that we can ask the question of philosophy, which is: try to say it without architecture, try to make your point. For example, and by this I don't simply mean the most flexible forms of the philosophy, can we ask Derrida to make his argument without architecture? Now, we could get into a big discussion what constitutes architecture, but let's say at least let's

lose all the references to ground foundations, structure and ornament, let's lose such architectural understanding of inside and outside and we will have to lose the concept of spacing. Because even in Derrida's own words there is no spacing without architecture. Even following his own rules, not my rules but his rules, and I remove now all these traces, there will be no text. Architecture is not, and of course this is not a completely Derridian argument, it is not one example amongst many, it is not a simple, material example of a thought that could have had many other examples. It is the one example that allows all the other examples to be thought. Or to but it another way, architecture is the example that allows philosophy to have examples. It is the exemplar of examples. On one hand you could say, this is very much elevates the importance of architecture, that architecture is super important. But I don't think so, I think really what it says is that now you understand the role of the architect. The role of the architect is not to make beautiful buildings, but it is to preserve the idea of the example. This is what I was reading the other day, that we are the caretakers of the concept of the object. Because in philosophy the object is never that which waits for the idea. The word object is already a philosophical word. It is that word. If we take care of the image of the object, and the image of the object is able to receive ideas, it becomes a simple, technical task, like being a plumber or doctor. And we could argue that it is the diminishing of the responsibility of the architect.

Dj. S.: "A strange structural condition", this is how you describe the idea of deconstruction. Also, in "Architecture of Deconstruction Derrida's Haunt", you identify a condition, which has no inside nor outside, and use it to debate the role of the ornament. And you use the very same condition to discuss the idea of network in your later work. How important is that which has no inside nor outside?

M. W.: I am not sure that I have said anything other than that. In a sense everything that I have worked on is this. Which is what I mean when I encounter Derrida, that this is the most beautiful way to understand what I would call a structural condition. This also means condition of structure. If we think, for example, about electronic networks, we are absolutely in the same space as when we think about the classical orders: these are systems of representation. Perhaps it is too clumsy to use the word communication. But let's stay with the ornament. Ornament is that which is neither in nor out, but is also that which connects. This is another way of saying the same thing. Let's not say communication, but connection. If ornament is connectivity, then of course, systems of connectivity, like the internet should be analysed architecturally, following our knowledge of ornament. Of course the word net is already a

weaving, it is already a fabric. The thought of architecture as clothing, clothing as ornament, ornament as connectivity. Ornament also as a confusion of sensuality, of smell and touch, and also pattern. Not simply abstract or material but a blurring of the two, a sort of sensual intelligence. Net of course is the same thing, the same argument. Maybe this is not what you are looking for in the question, but the cosmic resonances of classical architectural theory are not so far way form what people think about networks of information.

Dj. S.: Where do we stand in architecture when it comes to the idea of networks?

M. W.: Cities are the first form of social media. The city is nothing but the network. When we say networks we do not mean, let's say, the world after the Second World War. We mean connectivity itself. If I walk a hundred meters in the country side, I meet three cows and my grandfather. If I walk a hundred meters in the city, I might see fifty people and hear six languages, and be offered ten, twenty different opportunities. Cities maximize connectivity. Cities are exploding in size for this reason. Everybody is looking for more connectivity. And the reverse is also the true, systems of connectivity are urban systems. If you are an architect and you ask where is architecture today, you must look at networks of communication which are the new urban formations. Everybody knows that we live in some kind of digital urbanism, but not really fully analysed. One thing that is sure is that cities, even at the beginning, when you had a combination between a fortress and a marketplace, there are already at any one time fifty different networks, fifty different forms of communication, different ornamental systems. And to continue exactly the same argument, it is still an argument about structure. I am most fascinated with the writers from the ninety sixties, like Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller who show no interest in any distinction between networks of communication, social networks, and the concepts of structure. Fuller has become, more or less now, a permanent obsession. Because with Fuller of course, his architecture is an image of the network. And remember that the classical architect is in theory producing a kind of image of the world without image, without ideas. This is such a key role for the architect, because the architect thinks in a space and his thinking is apparently not possible. Nobody really likes architects. You hire an architect because there is something you simply don't understand. The architect is an expert at synthesising  multiple forms of information. Nobody invites a famous architect to make the library for their city because they think that a beautiful library will somehow uplift everybody's spirit, even if they speak this way. In reality only an architect is able to combine all the forms of the knowledge necessary to produce a successful library. If it could be done by

an engineer, it would be given to an engineer. Architects think in unimaginable spaces. This is why the secret life of architecture is an open source environment. We are used to absorbing and synthesizing different and incompatible forms of information. The architect thinks where thinking is not thought to be possible. The building stands exactly where thought stops. Architecture in a sense starts where thinking stops. And today we find ourselves not yet able to visualize the structure of the space we inhabit, which is electronic. You didn't ask me this question but none of the so-called digital architects of today have in any way helped us to think the electronic space we occupy. They are digital architect in the sense that they use computers, but they are not digital architects in the sense that they communicate to us the architecture of the digital. I think this is just a huge gap in our work. For the same period, the last twenty-five years. And this is why I think the conference is very valuable, because perhaps I do think that we need to circle back to test the assumptions of contemporary architectural discourse. Financial recessions are very positive for thinking in architecture.

Dj. S.: Finally, I would like to show you an image (http://blog.4ofseven com/1112m4/1112-inconsistencies/) and ask for your interpretation. I hope this will not ruin the entire conversation. I have done this with a group of students from the University of Belgrade, last year. The departing points of the study were two essays. One is Allen's "Field Conditions" and the second one is your "Network Fever".

M. W.: It's beautiful, this is very nice work. It is actually more beautiful when you see it close up. I think, what is nice, for me, is that this is of course a network image, a spider web image. But what I like when you show me the close up image is that it appears to be discontinuous. Again, with Fuller, there are two kinds of geodesic structures: one is the typical geodesic dome made of hexagons and triangles and so on, but there is also the discontinuous spheres which are held in tension. There is a little bit of that illusion about this here. I love this kind of spider's web effect, and I think about the work of Saraceno as an artist of the spider's web. Also, I do think about the images of the internet or the attempts at making images of the internet.

I liked that part of the Mark Cousins' presentation where he spoke about the give in systems. There is a lot of give, a lot of resilience in your system. The room in which you have installed this is more or less white. So the room makes the claim that it is empty. It is not empty of course, it has been field with white, but this white says I am nothing. So it appears when you look at the room

that there is nothing, that it is a gallery and in the gallery is your web which is of course the fabric. If I zoom in on your shirt or my sweater, you will see something like this. You have the coat of white paint, which is the coat but it pretends that it is not there, it says I am not here. Actually all that is here is nothing. I am representing nothing. Imagine that in the 1920s, architects would invent the idea that a white wall is empty and this idea would be so successfully advertised that we still believe it to be true. But it is this coat of fabric that says there is nothing here. Then you place the web inside and it says I am here. In fact the white wall says, look, I show you the spider's web. I would become very interested in these points of contact, where one fabric is connected to another fabric. If I would zoom in any of these points where the web meets the wall or the floor and if I would zoom in on the detail and your fabric would actually become then somehow part of the white surface. That's when people start to get worried. I could say, this is very beautiful and I could jump into it, but it still an object, it is still an image. I like this very much, but it still looks like it is separate from me and separate from the room. But if I discover that these points are more ambiguous in their status, then I start to be worried. The argument of the Deconstructivist exhibition was only that: that if I see something that has clearly been added, the more I look at it the more I realize I cannot draw a line between the original thing and what has been added, and I have this uncanny sense. As you know from my text (Network Fever), one of the fascinating things about networks is that they have no outside. It probably relates also to Derrida's text (Architecture of Deconstruction), and text is of course a textile, there is nothing outside of the fabric. The fabric is a world. Of course there are many such worlds, many such networks. I would be fascinated to know where these wires are cut. And of course the story could be different, this wire could disappear into to the wall and reappear somewhere else. I could also use it to make a telephone call.

Dj. S.: One thing that was mentioned today at the conference was Derrida's idea of *limitrophy*, the sense that there is no clear cut between one and the other. Does this relate to the question of the inside and the outside.

M. W.: I do not have a sophisticated thought here, but one of the ways to understand the difference between the boundary and the limit is that the limit has a dimension. The limit was originally a lane between two fields, it had a thickness. It is this thickness that creates the space, the spacing of the limit. Whereas, the boundary is the end. The limit is both end and beginning. When you have two lines like this, you get the inside of the outside, and the outside of the inside. I would say, naively, when it comes to the question of the

limit, and I could start looking at buildings or could start reading a philosopher writing about limits. Now, I think that the two exercises are both valuable, but the philosopher who would read Derrida on limits, and not look at the world of dimension is an idiot. If I am an architect I am called on to think in the space of the unthinkable, and to produce an image of a line, of decision making, of clarity, of edge, shape, form, structure, etc. However, I know that any such line could be different, I know every line to be indeterminate, fragile, partial, indefensible, unexplainable. And yet those lines are going to serve as the very image of clarity, decision, definition and so on. Architects have deep knowledge of the paradoxes of the limits. So they have a lot to offer to this conversation. Perhaps my comments here are not precise because I never say to myself, ok, think it again in terms of limits. I have never thought of architecture in this way. I was just as interested in that comment as you, and this is also why I liked very much that final session. I thought all three presentations, however different, the dance between them was very nice. How this question of limit, raised by Sophie first, reappears with Mark, and even with Bernard. I like that question, and I for sure do not have an answer.

# Interview with Ljiljana Blagojević |

Aleksandar Kušić

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

Lj i lj a n a   B l a g o j e v i ć  **|**  when the interview took place **|**
Associate professor at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade and visiting professor of Theory of Architecture at the Faculty of Arts, University Donja Gorica, Podgorica (Montenegro). Author of the books *Modernism in Serbia: The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture, 1919-1941* (MIT Press in association with the Harvard University Graduate School of Design, 2003), *Novi Beograd: osporeni modernizam* (New Belgrade: Contested Modernism, Belgrade: Zavod za udžbenike, 2007) and *Moderna kuća u Beogradu, 1920-1941* (Modern House in Belgrade, Belgrade: Zadužbina Andrejević, 2000). Her articles were published internationally in *Docomomo Journal*, *StadtBauwelt*, *Perspecta*, *The Journal of Architecture*, *Architektúra & Urbanizmus* etc. She lectured by invitation at Harvard University Graduate School of Design, Yale University School of Architecture, Parsons The New School for Design, *Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien* and in 2009 and 2010 she was a visiting associate professor at Yale University School of Architecture. As an architect she worked with RHWL and Office of Zaha Hadid in London and Institute for Architecture and Urbanism of Serbia in Belgrade. Her projects were exhibited at 9th Prague Quadrennial (1999) and the 2002 Venice Biennale. She co-authored and co-curated national exhibition of Serbia at the 2008 Venice Biennale.

L j i l j a n a   B l a g o j e v i ć

Lecture:
P o s t m o d e r n   T a b l e - T u r n i n g :
A r c h i t e c t u r e   a n d   S p e c t e r s   o f   P h i l o s o p h y
26/10/2012

Abstract:
The issues of interpreting "common ground" at this year's International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice, in words of its director David Chipperfield, aimed to provoke architects to "admit the inspirations and influences" that should define their profession. The response offered in the Pavilion of Serbia is a table, a gigantic slab made of chipboard on steel structure and faced by processed mineral material bound with acrylic, still, a table with four legs. Marx famously used a table, that common, everyday thing (made of wood), wood, to introduce the analysis of "the fetishism of commodities and the secret thereof" in *Das Kapital*, the text so painstakingly read by Derrida in his deconstructive table-turning exercise of *Specters of Marx*. In this lecture, I will be guided by Derrida's *hauntology* in exploring the theoretical table turning between architecture and philosophy in the midst of the postmodern and postsocialist debates in Belgrade (Serbia).

In the context of declining societal modernization of the late socialism in the 1980s, the nascent postmodernism engendered a theoretical turn in Serbian architecture. Theoretical turn, that is, both from practice and production dominated discourse of socialist modernism and from the hitherto dominant critical theory of post-Marxist philosophers. I will trace the sources and frame of reference of this turn and speculate about it against the more recent re-turn of architectural phenomenology. The table, writes Marx, "stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas", yet Derrida lets us into this "phenomenological "conjuring trick"". Thus in the know, we can ask: What inapparent symptoms of socialist architecture has postmodernism made apparent, as from the opening, that is from the raising of the curtain? What can postsocialism gain from making Marx "an illegal alien", against Derrida's warnings, and postsocialist architecture from exorcism of the critical thought? Is there anything for architecture to learn from its ghosts, as *hauntology* would have us believe there was?

**A. K.:** I would like to begin with a sentence by Terry Eagleton, who comments on a peculiarly negative aspect of Jacques Derrida's encounter with Marx and Marxism. For Eagleton, Derrida is right to register all of the appalling sufferings of the day, but is irredeemably wrong to propose an alternative in a "perpetual excited openness to the Messiah who had better not let us down by doing anything as determinate as coming".

**Lj. B.:** If anyone, Eagleton is an author whose precise, sharp and brisk style of writing I admire, especially in his seminal book *The Function of Criticism*.[1] Nevertheless, Eagleton's take on Jacques Derrida, or rather his bitter avalanche in "Marxism without Marxism",[2] the great title notwithstanding, seems to me very different to how I would see the encounter you ask about. Of course, in comparison to a veteran literary critic like Eagleton, a techné-minded architect like myself would read Derrida naively, at face value. Yet, naivety might be just what I needed to take Derrida's writing as a methodological point of departure in posing research questions for a theoretical interpretation of contemporary architecture in the post-socialist context, architecture practices with no apparent relation with deconstruction and its theoretical or philosophical underpinnings. Thus, immediately upon receiving an invitation to speak at the conference *Architecture of Deconstruction / The Spectre of Jacques Derrida*, my reaction was to re-read the *Specters of Marx*[3] and see where it got me in searching for the subject of my lecture. Of course, the book itself is historical material as well as philosophical text, its first, French edition appearing in 1993. It is chronologically linked and directly refers to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the immediate ex-Marxism, or what might be termed an exorcised Marx aftermath. For me that is one of its key points. Without any mystification, the book makes clear that rather than being frightened by it, it is still necessary to keep the exorcised spectre of Marx close by, hearing him bursting into laughter, as Derrida says, in the face of the capital or paternal ghost. That is the very spectre which I thought could guide my lecture and its "hauntology" of architecture in post-socialist Belgrade. Also, for me it was of crucial importance to understand Derrida's arguments outside the closed-circuit of acquaintances or the limited, exclusive group of deconstructivist architecture, and test his thesis beyond the historical, in the very real and actual socio-political contexts and architecture which take place today, on the other side of the fallen wall.

1    Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism*. London: Verso, 1984.

2    Terry Eagleton, "Marxism without Marxism" in: Michael Sprinker, ed., *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx. Jacques Derrida, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Antonio Negri, et al*. (1999) (London, Verso, 2008), pp. 83-87.

3    Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. (1993) Translated by Peggy Kamuf. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.

**A. K.:** In the summary for the *Architecture of Deconstruction / The Specter of Jacques Derrida* conference, you seem to make reference to a connection between the Serbian national pavilion at the 2012 International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice and Marx's criticism of commodity fetishism. Do you believe that in the context of current Serbian social apathy architecture has found a place in the production of slick, almost self-referential commodities, the consumption of which is linked to the very attitude described by Eagleton – the one of empty gestures, infinitely closed within the current social system?

**Lj. B.:** The actual object, that is the 5 tons heavy, 22 m x 5 m large, smooth white table with nothing on it exhibited in the Pavilion of Serbia at 2012 Venice Biennale, presented itself as a perfect subject. Why? I was fascinated that a group of ten graduates of the Faculty of Architecture in Belgrade – "masters of architecture" in title and out of practice in real life – who co-authored the table installation conceived it simply as a beautiful, immense object. In their statements in catalogues and newspaper interviews, one reads nothing but repetitive and obsessive sentences about beauty found in immensity of surface and the banality of a table being uplifted into universality by stretching it to the scale of the whole exhibition room. The curator and exhibition council members remain equally mute on any alternative critical reading, perpetuating in their respective statements the phenomenological enchantment with the table effect. But, as Jeffrey Kipnis commented in the discussion following my lecture at the AoD conference, the table has effects, even political effects, he said.[4] And, that is precisely where I thought my research subject lays, in the political effects implied by the table, even if the authors and curators did not own up to them. So, to answer your question at last, the political in space of the post-socialist city concerns, to be most direct, the commoditisation of hitherto societal, public or common space and its transference into the real-estate market. Derrida's analysis in *Specters of Marx* of the classic section "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret" in Chapter 1 of *Capital* volume I, focuses on Marx's magisterial example of the table, a simple thing made of wood which, as soon as it emerges as a commodity, stands on its head and develops out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas. The effect of the table in the Venice art/architecture installation, for me, is not simply in what is seen in the brightly lit room of the pavilion, but in what hides in the dark underbelly of its perfect surface. There, in the young architects' blind spot, the table harbours the deals and proliferation of millions of Euros worth of stararchitecture with

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4    See AoD video: Ljiljana Blagojević, "Postmodernist Table-Turning: Architecture and Spectre of Philosophy", available on-line, http://www.displacingarchitecture.rs/site/video/ Accessed 21st March 2013.

its cool computer renderings showing buildings floating in mid air, effortlessly spiralling up with no visible support or swooshing past disused socialist giants of industry, all the while appearing as spectres in a media space completely detached from the mucky and contradictory reality of the existing city bellow.

**A. K.:** Recently you have recognized Fredric Jameson's notion of an "enclave", while looking at the positions of late socialist architectural postmodernism. Do you find Jameson's enclaves present today, within the realm of Serbian post-socialist architecture? Is there a place - existing right now - you would refer to as an enclave?

**Lj. B.:** Jameson's "enclave" or what he more recently termed as a utopian form of a break, that is, the "future as disruption", opens a possibility to think and theorize both  historical cases of aesthetic practices – and that is what my research on postmodernism in late socialism did – and in criticism of current practices. Derrida's ghost coming as a seismic event from the future, the spectre *of* the event of which he speaks opens an equally charged space for interpretation. I would not dare touch the present to which I am blind. The table in Venice, however, offered itself as a potentiality to think of its turning, not to reveal an invisible enclave, but the ghost's hiding place. What interests me is to not to search in vain for the ghost which does not let itself be seen, but to look where ghosts reside in order to tease out those seeds of the future about which Jameson always speaks in the Marxian mode of thinking as already existing within the present. And, as he insists, these must be conceptually disengaged from the present, both through analysis – that is what we are doing here in this conference and myriad other conferences and dialogues – but also, Jameson says, being Marxian to the hilt, through political praxis. Architecture is in that sense part of both analysis and political praxis, and it can act to profound political effect both through theory and project.

**A. K.:** In your paper presented at the conference you spoke of exorcisms, not only of Marx, but also of critical thought itself. and in the catalogue introduction to the Belgrade Salon of Architecture you indicated the lack of any socially-oriented forms of criticism in contemporary Serbian architecture.[5] What do you believe is the explanation for a such an absence? Is this a consequence of the integration of the discipline into the framework of late capitalism? And

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5    Ljiljana Blagojević, "Opšti karakter i dalje kruži (A Generality is Still Haunting)", *Katalog 33. Salona arhitekture*. (Beograd: Muzej primenjeni umetnosti, 2011), pp. 17-20 (text in Serbian Cyrillic and English).

could a return to "ruthless criticism", as Marx put it, contribute to a way out of our contemporary architectural impasses?

**Lj. B.:** I will start from the end of your question. It makes a lot of sense to me to stand for the meaning of critique which was put forward in the 1960s by the philosopher Gajo Petrović in the journal *Praxis*, that is, the ruthless criticism of all that exists including the sacred cow that is socialism itself, and turn the tables, so to speak, to ruthless criticism of all that exists, including the untouchable topoi of the moment, be it free market, parliamentary democracy, nation state or the like. That does not mean criticism at all cost but criticism as meticulous research of deeply buried layers and discourses of all that exists. The archive comes to mind and Foucault's incomparable method of analysis. The absence of criticism of architecture and urbanism in present day Serbia, to return to what you are asking, really refers in my texts to the absence of that kind of committed deep research which engenders criticality's praxis. On the surface, quite like on that of the big shiny table in Venice, we see reflections of many a current trend, such as network practices, architectural phenomenology or commitment to sustainability and the like. What lies underneath the surface, where and how the discourse of architecture is grounded, dislocated or buried including, of course, architecture praxis, is where criticism's poking finger is or ought to be.

# Interview with Francesco Vitale|

Ana Nikezić

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

F r a n c e s c o   V i t a l e   **|**   when the interview took place **|**
Francesco Vitale (1971). Permanent Lecturer of Aesthetics at the University of
Salerno (Italy). His academic interests have been focusing on Derrida's work
since the Ph.D. dissertation in Philosophy on his relation to Hegel (University
Federico II of Naples, Italy). He has been working since last year at a research
project on Derrida, "politics of architecture" and has recently published the
first complete collection of the Author's papers and interviews on architecture,
*Adesso l'Architettura* (Milano, 2008). His main publications devoted to Jacques
Derrida are: *Mitografie. Jacques Derrida e la scrittura dello spazio* (Milano,
2012), *L'avvenire della decostruzione*, (Genova, 2011), *Spettrografie. Jacques
Derrida tra singolarità e scrittura* (Genova, 2008).

F r a n c e s c o  V i t a l e

Lecture:
T h e  L a w  o f  *O i k o s*.  D e c o n s t r u c t i n g  t h e  D w e l l i n g
26/10/2012

Abstract:
The paper sketches out the essential lines of a work in progress that aims to follow the path opened up by Derrida onto a deconstruction of dwelling. I intend to show how Derrida's concern for architecture is strictly bound to the urgency of a deconstruction of dwelling that inhabits his work from at least *Plato's Pharmacy* (1966) on. According to Derrida, both philosophy and architecture are subordinated to an archaic conception of dwelling which still haunts our way of thinking and building the dwelling (territory, city, house) and, thus, affects the political dimension of our life.

In order to conjure away this archaic phantasm of dwelling it is necessary to return to the origin of Greek dwelling. In particular, to Athens in the fifth century B.C., which is the very paradigm of Western culture as regard to architecture, philosophy and politics. Through a rereading of *Chora* and, in particular, of the unpublished seminars of 1986 devoted to the Plato's *Timaeus* it will be possible to find in the myth of autochthony, the founding myth of the Athenian polis, the archaic phantasm that imposes its law, the law of the *oikos*, to philosophy as well as to architecture. The phantasm of autochthony is the phantasm of a desire that is as much non-coercible as non-actualizable: the desire of a pure and autarchic identity, stable and permanent, rooted in the soil, founded on the belonging to a place, which is therefore deemed sacred. For Derrida, this phantasmatic desire imposes its law to the fundamental ontological determinations of Platonic philosophy and, thus, of metaphysics, as well as to architecture, which is therefore, called the "last fortress of metaphysics".

Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate the congruity between the deconstruction of dwelling, undertaken by Derrida and never explicitly brought to fulfillment, and the work on dwelling by Eisenman (*Houses*). As I will attempt to show, the specter of Derrida still haunts the *Holocaust Memorial* realized by Eisenman in Berlin.

**A. N.:** Since you are very interested in Derrida, can I ask how your interest in Derrida began?

**F. V.:** Yes, I am. All my work is about Jacques Derrida. I was in Paris in 1993 preparing my graduate thesis on the semiology of cinema with Christian Mets, the founder of this field. But I was looking for someone or something with which I could criticize semiology. I found this book *Of Grammatology*, and I was amazed because I found what I was looking for. It was really incredible when professor Christian Mets told me that this man Jacques Derrida was holding a seminar at the École des hautes études on Wednesdays. It was an incredible experience for me because I heard what I was trying to think of. It was extraordinary. It was a seminar about testimony and my first book on Jacques Derrida was on testimony. I only spoke with Derrida 4-5 years after that. I didn't have the courage to speak with him before because the power of his thinking was impressive, I was only 22 or 23 at the time, so at that moment I decided to only do work about this man. It meant having to go back and study the entire history of philosophy from his point of view. But after 3 years when I began my PhD in Naples, I proposed a thesis on Derrida and Hegel as a source for Derrida. I spoke about this with Jean-Michel Rey, who is a friend of Jacques Derrida, and a very interesting philosopher from France working on Nietzsche. Rey told Derrida that I was doing this thesis and he wrote to me that he would like to meet me because he thought that I was working in the right direction. I was trying to demonstrate against the first reception of Jacques Derrida, received as a Heideggerian epigone, that he was a heterodoxical Hegelian thinker. Derrida was very interested in this. So I met him in Paris, hoping that he would accept me as a student, but he told me "you have to go to Germany and study Hegel in German." So I went to Berlin for a year and a half to study German in the same Preussische library where Jacques Derrida studied Hegel, and  wrote this wonderful book called *Glas*. You have to study this book because Derrida always said that this book is an architectural book. He always said that he had a passion for architecture and that if you want to know what he thinks about architecture, you have to read *Glas*. And I think this is an incredible book, with a very strange composition: one part of the page is on Hegel, and the facing part is on Jean Genet.

**A. N.:** Yes, I can see. It is visual.

**F. V.:** This is how it all began. I have never been able to leave him. I have published a dictionary, now this book. I would like to take the time to do something different, but it is difficult because I always find something that is new about Derrida. I think I only ever stopped studying Derrida for two months.

**A. N.:** What was so challenging in Derrida's writing on philosophy that just gripped you? At the conference there was a lot of talk about feeling, that you just fall in love with it, we have heard this numerous times. I was wondering if you had another perspective because you are a philosopher, not an architect?

**F. V.:** I was looking for deconstruction. I didn't know that at that moment but it was exactly what I needed. I needed a critical position against traditional philosophy because I found that traditional philosophy was the ground of our social system, political system, army system and psychological system. I was really against that. The first thing I found in Derrida's work was another way to think about it all.

**A. N.:** And to question, to be able to question something.

**F. V.:** Yes, to question and to criticize.

**A. N.:** But not to criticize in a negative way, that's why I said to question something.

**F. V.:** It is true that negativity is not a good way to think about it. Many interpreters of Derrida interpret him as a negative theology for example. This is a big topic among Derrida thinkers, how deconstruction is not a destruction, how it is not only negative. I connect this with a beautiful text of Walter Benjamin *Experience and Poverty*. Benjamin said in 1933, just before the Second World War, that we needed a new barbarian, against the Nazi barbarian, we need a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate. And I think that Derrida is that, in a theoretical way. In a way, Derrida has been accepted everywhere but in philosophy – in politics, aesthetics, literature, etc. – because he really destroyed the ontology that is the ground of philosophy. In my paper I tried to show that ontology comes from a political desire, which is very bad, because it is a desire for an identity which is absolutely enclosed in itself, without relation, an identity which always looks upon the other as a possible threat. Derrida claimed that we can't do any more ontology. He says that the other is the condition of the possibility of the self. The relation is nothing, it is not a being, the relation is a relation between something. But if the relation is a condition, there is no more ontology. This is a radical position. And I worked on the early works of Jacques Derrida precisely because of this. Now, in the last 10 years, there is a lot of talk about politics, democracy, and architecture. The early works are very important for this because his interest in architecture, and his later, more political, philosophy is historically connected to the first part of his work, his theoretical philosophy. I tried to show this in my paper. From *Plato's Pharmacy* in 1966, where he

spoke about the question of the law of oracles, through *Politics of Friendship*, to *Voyous*, his last book, he spoke about architecture. In the end I want to demonstrate that this is the way Derrida thinks: to destroy ontology because this ontology is grounded on a bad political desire, and on a violent impulse against the other. It still haunts our life. When, in *Specters of Marx*, Derrida says that the proliferating interethnic wars were grounded in an archaic fantasy that still haunts our conception of the city, of soil, of blood, he was speaking about Yugoslavia in 1993. And I think that it is important to recall this because this archaic fantasy is something that you know since you felt this on your skin.

**A. N.:** Yes, in everyday life. I wanted to ask this next question because there are a lot of interpretations of the idea of politics of architecture. Usually architects understand that as politics in architecture, so we might be misguided slightly, because politics in architecture is one thing, and politics of architecture is something entirely different. What do you think is politics of architecture?

**F. V.:** It is evident that there is an empirical link between politics and architecture. The architect has to work, to have a contract, to have a relation with the power of the market, which is also political. There is another aspect, which is that ground. Political desire grounds architecture as well as philosophy or religion or other aspects of culture. For Derrida architecture is important because it is the most important metonymy of this law. Why? Because architecture gives not simply a presence, but a monumentality, it incorporates this law, and renders it lasting, durable, and then produces lasting symbols of itself. For example, if you take *De Architectura* of Vitruvius, who offered his works to Augustus, the Emperor, and says that the task of the architect is to subjugate time to the power of the Emperor. Emperor Augustus had already destroyed his internal enemies, meaning the democracy, and he destroyed his external enemies, and Vitruvius claims that there is one enemy left to conquer – time. We have to construct something that will remain durable, that will outlast your mortal life. This is the opening of *De Architectura*, and the Caryatid Porch of the Acropolis is very important to Vitruvius, because it is a symbol of power. The Caryatides are women who symbolize the victory of Athens over a little colony that revolted. This is the power and politics inside architecture. And there are a lot of other examples.

**A. N.:** And in the contemporary world, how is it all relevant to the future of architecture? How are we connected to all those ontological problems? Usually, we connect with something that is archaic, basic and we go from there. We sit on the foundations that are not made right. But if you destroy

those foundations, how is it possible to root architecture? And what are the consequences for the future of architecture?

**F. V.:** On the first level, there is a very theoretical question, the question of space. In the history of philosophy, from Plato onwards, space is something that is empirical, sensible, exterior, secondary. It is always something that is contingent. What is important is time, because it is the immaterial element of identity. In time identity can be in relationship only with itself. This is the big illusion of metaphysics. And this illusion only involves consideration of space as empirical and secondary, and not theoretical grounding. We can see this in Plato, Descartes, Kant, Hegel. The first who tried to think something different is Heidegger, but then he went back to an archaic experience of space. This is the important question. With deconstruction we can try to move to another experience of space. An experience of space as a condition of possibility of being. Because if a relationship is the condition of possibility of being, then it requires space, since a relation necessarily involves space. Which makes thinking about space as a condition of possibility of being absolutely different from thinking about it as contingent, secondary, not important, only the sensible element of the signifier. In my work I wanted to arrive at this possibility of thinking of space in a different manner. It is precisely here that architecture is important. Not what architects theorize or say about space, but what they do or have done. The relationship between the inside and the outside is a question of architecture, but when an architect theorizes it, it is less interesting than when he allows you to experience another dimension of this inside/outside. For example for me Mies van der Rohe is very important to try to conceptualize another relation between the inside and the outside. Or we can say the same thing for Frank Lloyd Wright.

**A. N.:** In different ways but it is almost the same thing.

**F. V.:** Yes, for example the Memorial of Holocaust by Peter Eisenman – I think it is possible to describe this work as a manifestation of Derrida's description of *différance* as the condition of possibility of space. This is why architecture is important for philosophy. Philosophy maybe rests on this opposition, I am not sure. But I am quite sure that Derrida is the only one who arrived at questioning space, on a theoretical level. I am working on Deleuze as well, but I am not sure. Because Deleuze is a thinker of immanence, and immanence is without difference, and for me that does not work. Although I am not sure, I am still working on this, preparing for a conference in July. Perhaps at the end I will be able to say something definitive.

A. N.: I am interested in that Holocaust Museum by Eisenman, who talks about "weak" architecture. You feel the Holocaust, the whole time, with your whole body: it is in the air, in the space between those blocks, in the rain, the morphology of the ground and the way you are going through it that you feel the space. It is not visual anymore.

F. V.: No, it's physical.

A. N.: You feel it with your whole body: it smells different, there are different sounds. Here we are entering philosophy through another door. It is no more deconstruction, but another way to construct. It is not a wall, not a ceiling, it is in the water.
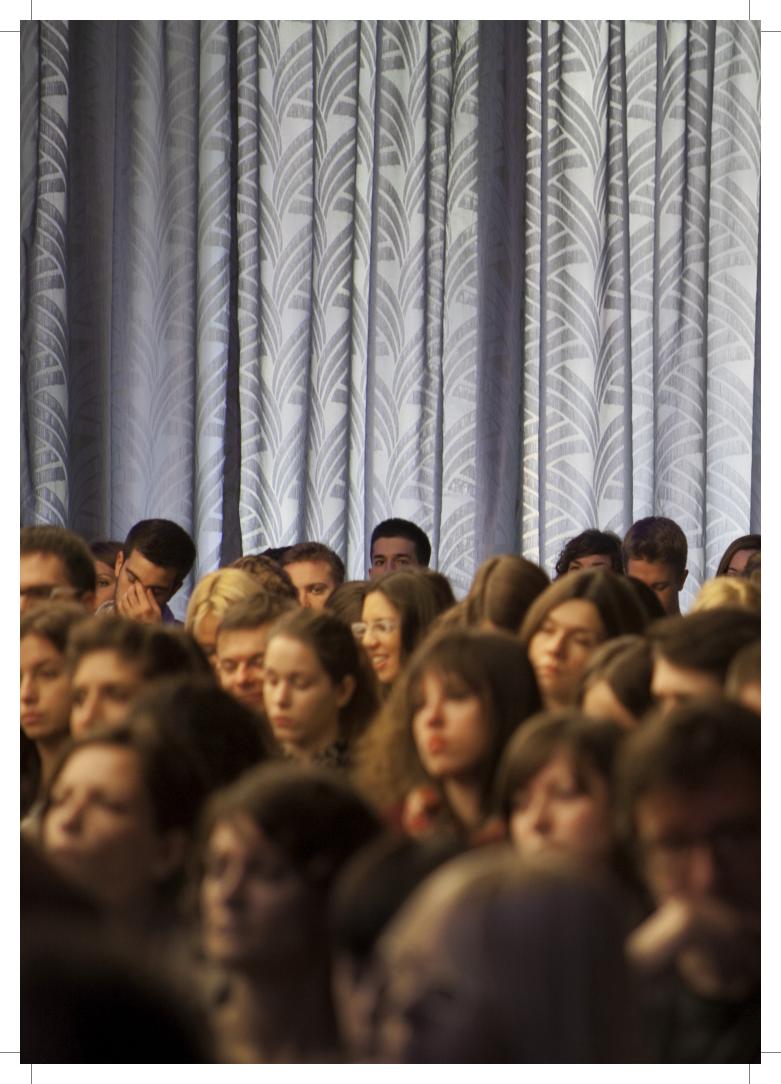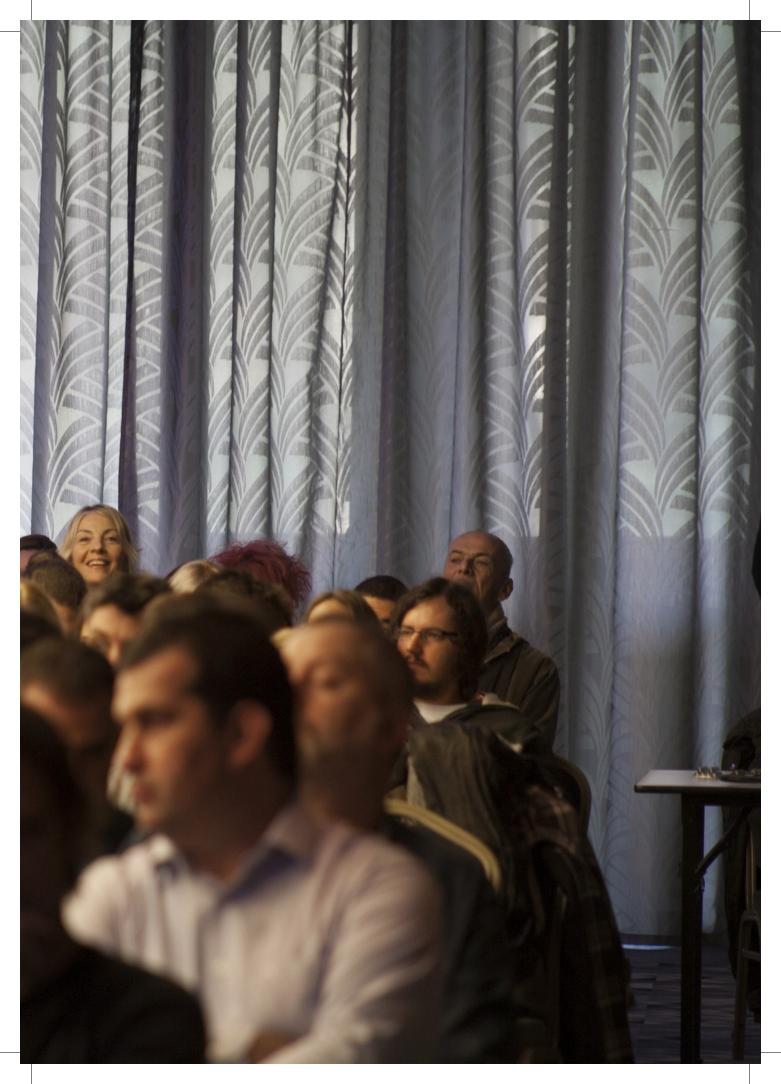
F. V.: Yes, there is no main entrance.

A. N.: Yes, there are no doors, no windows but it is somehow in the topography.

F. V.: There are no boundaries. In history, the sacred has always been linked with space delimited. The origin of sacred is the limited, which you don't have here.

A. N.: And here you don't know if you went inside. If you close your eyes you are not sure when you are in, but I'm sure that you know better without your eyes once you are inside. It changes spiritually. Maybe, then, this contemporary notion, this new way of seeing deconstruction that I've seen today from you and from Renato Rizzi, and the others, not just using it as a tool to deconstruct the building, but actually to use it to understand a political notion of architecture in a different way and to shake the ontological problems that we were raised with. I think that's important, which is why my next question is how to teach this to a new wave of students, where everything is full, everything has to be quick, everything has to be written on a paper, so everything is in a kind of a text? Is it really hard to introduce something like that?

F. V.: Absolutely. This is a very good question because I think that the future of Jacques Derrida depends on this. There are many philosophers or so-called philosophers now who are very easy to understand. Derrida is not easy to understand. And it is not easy to explain that to a student. But the thing that is interesting is that this is not only about philosophy, this problem is always the problem with students, whether of architecture or philosophy, it is the same. I teach both students of philosophy and architecture, and when you begin, at first they don't understand anything.

**A. N.:** How do you begin?

**F. V.:** I try to work like Derrida worked. Mark Cousins spoke today about the play of words, but this is not absolutely true. Derrida worked as a true, traditional philosopher, that means having a text, reading a text. The first thing that I do with my students is to show that a text is an artifact. It is not a transparent expression of fact, it is a rhetorical construction, and this law of rhetoric, I think, can be found in architecture, in philosophy, in medicine, science, etc. For example Leon Battista Alberti's *De Re Aedificatoria* is constructed on the rhetorical look. So I begin by reading a text. And I can speak for an hour or two about one page only. This is difficult, because half of my students leave me after two or three classes. But the ones who remain, at the end, they understand. They understand that they had a true philosophical experience working in this way. Which is very strange, because at my university, I teach deconstruction. But I am the only one who teaches philosophy in the way that it was taught in the last century – reading a text. In the end, this is philosophical practice. If you worked in this manner, in the end you understand.

**A. N.:** I understand. They learn how to experience a text, how to be able to explore it, so actually at the end they have a tool, a skill to read a text.

**F. V.:** Absolutely. The experience of the text. Of course, I could just say this means this, but that would absolutely be just power of the authority.

**A. N.:** It's a long process.

**F. V.:** Yes. Usually I work like Derrida did. I prepare a text for a conference, when I know I have to write a chapter of a book and then I do this in my course. I know it is difficult for students. Last year, for example, I did a whole course only for the first fifteen pages of a book.

**A. N.:** Of course they've learned the whole history through it, I understand.

**F. V.:** But they are happy at the end because they understand that I am writing something and their participation is important, they are involved in the process.

**A. N.:** Once it becomes subjective, it is a completely different story.

**F. V.:** I don't have a very big salary but I'm happy working in this manner.

**A. N.:** So, in that respect, since you teach both, what is the future position and responsibility of philosophical discourse in architectural education?

**F. V.:** I think the first thing is to try to explain to an architect what is the other. To think that the other is our condition of possibility. Because the future is the other, we do not know who will come after us. For me this is not really a problem. I write a book and hope that someone will read it. But for you, this is a true responsibility, because you build something today that is destined to stay there for a long time. This doesn't mean not doing anything because we do not know who will come in the future. But the first responsibility for an architect is to think about this. Who, what comes after me? My work permits that another, and I do not know who that is, could be able to transform it, live in it, that there is hospitality for the other. This is the question of the event for Jacques Derrida. I understand that it is very difficult. For example, Derrida talked a lot about Berlin after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a conference devoted to the future of the city, Derrida spoke about this. Yes, you have to construct, rebuild Berlin, but who has the authority what Berlin has to be for the future. You have to think about the future, you have to create the conditions that something can come, can happen. In very trivial terms, if you exploit all the land in an urban site, you are absolutely negating the possibility that something other can come. In Italy it is a very big problem. Our cities are very full, you can't build anywhere. This is very trivial, but the responsibility for Derrida is this: you have to think that the other comes, as well as that the other is in the past, and that the past has to be considered. Our sons are very helpless, because they have no power. But the other from the past is powerless as well. They can do nothing to resist our memory. We have the responsibility to guard the past, and at the same time not exploit the present, preserving the possibility that something new might happen. I think that Derrida was a thinker of another time. This is the question of the messianic in Derrida.

**A. N.:** This particularly concerns me. The relationship between practice of architecture and an ever growing field of theory. Some say that one loses the freedom of creativity when thinking overcomes intuition. Can you tell us something about the relationship or the balance between philosophical knowledge and creativity, because the more we know, the less we can do, especially in Derrida's work.

**F. V.:** Firstly, this is an opposition. For deconstruction, where there is an opposition, you have to find a relationship as its condition. Because an opposition comes from metaphysics, which forces us to think in oppositional

terms. Where there is an opposition, we have to try to think a relationship that is the condition of possibility of the terms. In these terms, I think that theory is a practice. Every time that there is practice, there is always a theory. What is important is that you are conscious of the theory that you are practicing. I teach aesthetics, but I don't like these terms. Because what is creativity, who creates something? We always elaborate something that is already in our body or mind, but is arrived at through knowledge or through experience, through something that is linked through your life, your parents, personal trauma. What we think is creation, I think, is a result of all the ghosts living in you. You think this is creation, but it is an encounter of all the persons who have influenced you in your life. And freedom, I think when we speak about responsibility we have to be more careful with freedom.

**A. N.:** I think that you've just said something about responsibility which is very important. With more knowledge, you are more responsible. The more you know, the more you accept. So usually people when they are in their twenties or thirties they do something that is extremely extraordinary, they just make a step that is so huge that actually, afterwards, over the next twenty years, they just fill this step that they made when they were twenty. And when they reach their fifties, their knowledge is so big they begin to be more responsible and blocked. You can see it in almost every architect, at the end they go back to the origins. Often among architects you can see that they were doing deconstruction when they were young and later they end up with a pyramid or a circle.

**F. V.:** I think that it is the same situation in theory. Theory is a practice for me. But you have to practice the theory, to experience if this knowledge is correct, is useful. We can have a lot of knowledge that is completely useless, and the only way to know whether our knowledge is useful is to try to practice and find a way. And it's the same for an architect when they begin a project. First you don't know where you are going. To me it happens, in writing a book, I get to a point, in the middle of the night, when I say no, this is not the right path, this is nothing. And you have to delete the file. But this is another thing that Derrida teaches us: to practice our way. He often uses the term *frayer*, which is the French translation of *bahnung* in Freud. *Bahn* is a street, *bahnen* is to open a street. This is the condition of possibility of the psychic construction. We receive something, but our psychic system is open or not to what we receive. This causes a fracture, but is necessary for our psychic system to open a way for something that lacks because of the other. It is a big challenge. You have an idea, but if it is only an idea, it is nothing. You have to try to materialize it. Be it a text or something physical. Although it is easier to write a text.

**A. N.:** No, no, it's not. It depends on the person.

**F. V.:** Yes, but the conditions to build something are more difficult.

**A. N.:** I think between writing and drawing.

**F. V.:** In this book I speak about this. Because for Derrida architectural drawing is a kind of writing that offers us the possibility to write in a non-metaphysical way. That is, not linearly. Our tradition is conditioned by phonetic linear writing, which imposes a way of thinking in which time is linear. This is what mythography is for Derrida. For example, the Manhattan transcripts. Derrida described the Manhattan transcripts by Bernard Tschumi as mythography – the oldest writing of the ancient people who have another, absolutely different organization of the experience and meaning of space. There is part of a conversation with Peter Eisenman, where Derrida desperately tried to explain this. What is arche-writing? A writing that is not linear, not mono-dimensional, not arche-teleological, but multi-dimensional spacial writing, that could provoke a different experience of meaning of space. That is why the work of Bernard Tschumi was important for Derrida.

**A. N.:** Can I ask how you imagine a house? What is your ideal house?

**F. V.:** I don't know. I was thinking about this because I think that I don't have an ideal house. I don't know if this is linked with my deconstruction of dwelling or the deconstruction of dwelling is a result of my lack of ideal house. In the sense that I don't idealize the house. I could speak about the city for example, but not about the house. The house is always a closed space.

**A. N.:** But why is it a closed space? As a shelter?

**F. V.:** Yes, a shelter, why?

**A. N.:** But it's not just a house. A house is a household, a family, something that belongs to you. It's more than just a shelter.

**F. V.:** But I need to think a house in a city.

**A. N.:** Ok, so it's in a city.

F. V.: An ideal house in, I don't know, in Bergamo, which is a very typical city of northern Italy where people work, and work, and work, and work, earn money, earn money, buy cars or something – I can't, if I have an ideal house in Bergamo, I would kill myself. My ideal house is a very normal house, like a box, where I can put all my books, with cooking, and a bed, but it would have to be in an ideal city. For example, I like a lot Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House. It is beautiful, and I went to see it, but it is almost a weekend house, because it is in the middle of nowhere. I prefer a flat, a little flat in the center of New York, not in the country. But it is beautiful – the play of the transparent glass, the possibility to move the wall to cover something, to play with the natural light, it's extraordinary.

A. N.: Maybe this is a house for you, you know, you're saying know, it's transparent, possibility to change, so this is the house.

F. V.: Yes, absolutely, but it is in an isolated place. I prefer to think about the city because the question of space in a theoretical and political sense is that we have reappropriate public space. I spend a lot of time indoors because I have to read and write. But when I stop working, I prefer to stay outside. I don't know if it is the theory that influenced the experience or the other way around. Maybe the experience, because I have always been a very good traveler and I like to visit cities a lot.

A. N.: I'm asking you this question because of this ontological problem of destroying the foundation on which we stand. Do we then have no house, all we have is a *tabula rasa*?

F. V.: Yes, it is a real theoretical problem. I'm working on Walter Benjamin, on this problem because I think that Benjamin was absolutely aware of the problem of the *oikos*. But his solution was the absolute negation of the *oikos*: complete transparency, glass houses. In *Erfahrung und Armut*, he says, using an expression that is terrible for a Derridian, that we don't have to leave traces anymore. New, modern, glass architecture is one where we no longer feel in a house. This is terrible. The question then is, which you have to do, an architect has to do, to think of another kind of dwelling, one which deconstructs the *oikos*. A different manner to live in a place. I am not only a theorist, but even as a theorist I am not so sure about this. It would be absurd to say we are destroying the house, and not dwelling any more. Or we will live in a phalanstery. Benjamin was taken with the idea of the phalanstery. But I do think that this is the topic of the future for architecture and philosophy. At the moment, on the theoretical level, we can think about dwelling, deconstruct dwelling.

**A. N.:** I think the question of deconstructing the dwelling is very complicated because you have to think about something that is so deeply rooted in you, you have to think it in another way and it is very hard for an architect to even imagine that possibility.

**F. V.:** Yes, but this is the challenge.

**A. N.:** It is a challenge even to enter this zone.

**F. V.:** Speaking of the other and of the dwelling. In my house in Salerno, we did a restoration, with a friend of mine who is an architect. We designed a new entry way. There is a counter, made of concrete and wood with many bottles of liquor. And this bar is what separates the living room and the kitchen. You enter and you find yourself in a room with a bar stools. As if entering a bar. To me, this is a very trivial attempt to design a dwelling place where you don't encounter my identity. I do not show you who I am. I invite you to take a glass of whisky, but the space is a public space. And then I have my study, which you cannot enter.

**A. N.:** I have one more question for you. I want to know your impression of this conference taking place in Belgrade and this post-deconstructivist time with all those people who know each other, and with an audience of students.

**F. V.:** It was beautiful. I was really amazed because I thought that it was impossible to get all these people together, Catherine Ingraham, Mark Wigley, Bernard Tschumi. It is incredible for Belgrade, but it would be incredible for New York, too. This is a beautiful conference, and Petar Bojanić is a very impressive man, I love him a lot. And what is also really beautiful is the audience. In Italy, it would be impossible to get so many students at such a specialist conference, with such a precise topic. You might get twenty people. Here everybody was very enthusiastic, they participated, they are interested. I think that this is a sign that you are alive, that you are hungry for something new, something to learn, to meet people. In Europe, or rather in Italy, or even in Paris, a conference on Jacques Derrida, there would be twenty people, and that would be a success. Here, a thousand, a thousand people.

**A. N.:** There were four hundred.

**F. V.:** Four hundred? It is incredible. I would have to make fifteen conferences to get four hundred people. And it is interesting to open Belgrade, to connect

it with cities like Paris, New York, to show that this city is alive. I think that what I called Europe earlier has a very big responsibility to what happened in Yugoslavia fifteen years ago. I am happy to see that something new is growing and it was a really beautiful conference. Thank you very much.

**A. N.:** Thank you.

# Interview with Jeffrey Kipnis|

Ivan Kucina

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

J e f f r e y   K i p n i s   |   when the interview took place |
Professor of architectural design and theory at the Knowlton School of Architecture of The Ohio State University.  His writings on art and architecture have appeared in such publications as *Log*, *Hunch*, *Harvard Design Magazine*, *Quaderns*, *2G*, *El Croquis*, *Art Forum*, *Assemblage*, and his books include *Choral Works: The Eisenman-Derrida collaboration*, *Perfect Acts of Architecture*, and *The Glass House*.  As architecture/design curator for the Wexner Center for the Arts, he organized the design survey, "Mood River", and "Suite Fantastique," a compilation of four exhibitions: *Perfect Acts of Architecture*, *The Furniture of Scott Burton*, *The Predator – a collaboration between Greg Lynn and Fabian Marcaccio*, and *Imaginary Forces – Motion Graphics*. He curated the retrospective of the work of Coop Himmelblau organized by the MAK in Vienna entitled, *Beyond the Blue*. His film, *A Constructive Madness*, produced in collaboration with Tom Ball and Brian Neff, looks at Frank Gehry's work on the unbuilt but seminal Peter Lewis house project.  His recent study of Stephen Holl's Bloch Addition to the Nelson Atkins Museum appears in his new book, *Stone and Feather*. His design for *A Field of Dreams*, appears in the Piranesi Variations exhibit curated by Peter Eisenman in the 2012 Venice Bienalle.
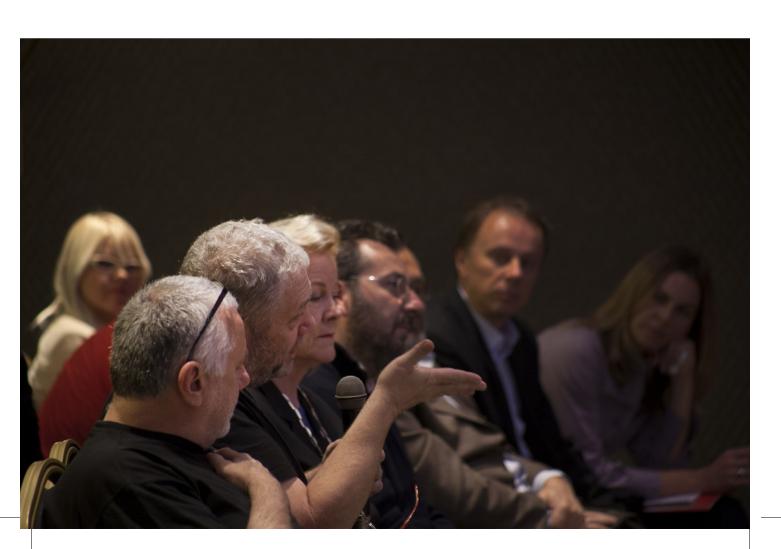
J e f f r e y   K i p n i s

Lecture:
O n   D e r r i d e a n   G r o u n d s
26/10/2012

Abstract:
After a brief reflection on the troubled translation of Derrida's writings in architecture and the consequent initial architectural design response to those writings that sought to mount a critique of the building as thing with an effort to consider the building as text, the talk revisits architecture's historic relation to the ground. Finding in that history evidence that for architecture the operations of a metaphysics of presence is born out the building's relation to the ground, the talk then considers three readings of Piranesi's Camp Marzio plan by three teams, myself, Eisenman and Aurelli, to effect in concert a deconstruction of architecture's ground.

I. K.: I have six questions here. The first one is: Why is it important to talk about Deconstruction today?

J. K.: Deconstruction is not, in my opinion, a philosophy. It's the identification of a fundamental process that had been going on long before Jacques Derrida identified it. It continues to go on, and to be unaware of it today is to be missing an opportunity not just to understand it, but also to use this very powerful instrument capable of challenging authority that's taken itself for granted. It doesn't matter what field you're in- it is a way of thinking that is crucial to know. I believe that. If I were an expert in law, I would probably think that it is even more important in law – where authority is the point – than in architecture. So, I don't agree that architecture is its testing ground; it's one of the places that is most difficult for it to take root, but what it should do in architecture is obvious. And I think it's very important that people understand, it's not an idea about life, a way of living or a way of thinking – it's a process similar to quantum mechanics. It's right where you think there's an edge between possible and impossible, but it turns out there isn't. Every edge is weak….

I. K.: It is more like a critical instrument, then?

J. K.: Yes.

I. K.: What then? Once the authority starts to collapse, what can we create?

J. K.: That's the problem – which is what I was saying yesterday – we might say we've won. But if you keep challenging authority all the time with no maturity, it produces infantilization. And frankly, I think most of the architecture that's come out of it, in the name of deconstruction, is infantile. Even mine.

I. K.: It serves the authority in a way…

J. K.: Yes it does. Architecture always does. Its first effort was to try to get rid of its relationship with authority, and that didn't work. And now we stay within the regime of the authority because we only serve people with power. It's almost impossible not to. Therefore, we had to find a way to serve them reluctantly and always with a slight unease.

I. K.: It is very dual position. And the problem then is how to deconstruct reliable knowledge within the architectural discipline?

J. K.: The one thing that deconstruction never ever said was that there was no truth. It said the truth isn't metaphysical, it's always political, and that's a big difference. Anyone who says it's a nihilist way of thinking misses the point. The "construction" part of deconstruction is as follows: at the very moment you take something apart, you build something else. So, there's no such thing as not working with the regime of decidability, but once you take that regime of decidability for granted, and then you have given it the power it does not deserve. So it's an adolescent fantasy, for people to think that deconstruction is a nihilist way of thinking. That's completely wrong.

I. K.: For me it is nihilist in its ground- even the nihilist ground is the ground.

J. K.: I agree with you. This was Derrida's criticism of Nietzsche. It's why he said for example: "Nietzsche was available for the Nazis", because even if he didn't mean to be, he made it possible to be absorbed by them. For me one of the most – not unfortunate – humorous things, is that Derrida's name has become a metaphysical instrument in a whole conference. And I'm the only guy out there saying "I don't think Derrida was right, maybe he was wrong.". I don't think he thought he was right all the time. I don't know if you have been hearing me: I've been trying to stop people from using his name as a way of authorizing an idea – that is the one thing you should never do.

I. K.: You could see it yesterday, in the first lecture, it was an anti-structural, anti-form...

J. K.: Anti-hierarchy...

I. K.: Anti-hierarchy, anti-methodology even...

J. K.: That lecture, for example, I don't think he is correct. No one can understand the processes that he describes as an authority. They're promiscuous. It's not anti-anything, it's uncomfortable hierarchy.

I. K.: Perhaps questioned?

J. K.: Perhaps, but not anti-. Because it can never form an opposition.

I. K.: What about the phenomenon of the architectural object? Because to me it seems the object survived deconstruction- it stayed. Also – not only the object – the architectural subject, the architect himself. It did not change its role since the modernist times.

J. K.: I don't know why anyone expected it would have? Because the process was already going on in the modernist times. Nothing started with Derrida other than awareness. Everything I am interested in is to put things in relationships. When you put something down and you put something next to it, and they challenge each other. Then you got to put the third thing that challenges them, etc. So as long as there's lots of people arguing, I'm happy. I don't like it when no one is arguing, and I don't like it when two people are arguing. The tendency today is to ask questions about what happens when there are two people arguing. Yesterday I said that we won, but I didn't mean to say that I was happy about that. We should have never won.

I. K.: It is an endless fight maybe. Maybe there are small winnings, but the fight goes on.

J. K.: It should never be stabilized. And I think actually Mark Wigley said that the most valuable relationships are those that are always uneasy.

I. K.: If you have this almost rebellious attitude towards authority, what about the authority of teaching architecture? What about architectural education? How could we challenge it from this point of view?

J. K.: I don't think you should. You could - but I don't think you should – deconstruct the relationship between a parent and a child unless it becomes abusive. You know, just because we have a tool it doesn't mean we use it everywhere in a new form of infantilism.

I. K.: So you want to say that in architecture school it is not necessary for it to be applied as a method? It is necessary as a method of making buildings, but not as a method of education?

J. K.: Freud argued and Plato argued that for teaching to exist, there has to be a lie. It is called the *divine lie*. You have to think that I am authority, and I have to think that I'm an authority. So, when a teacher teaches students, it's actually, as Freud said, a parental relationship, and there's no such thing as parent. Your mother is no one else's mother, she doesn't actually exist, she's a construction.

I. K.: But as a teacher, your knowledge is questioned constantly. This is the point of deconstruction- you're constantly in a kind of negotiation- in an almost political process towards yourself and towards other authorities. Why wouldn't you apply that within your field of work?

**J. K.:** I keep trying to say, you question knowledge and authority, but you don't ever aspire to, or pretend like there will not be knowledge and authority. The goal is not that. The goal is actually to make knowledge more humane, not metaphysical. When I say political, I should say social or human or existential.

**I. K.:** Is it another sort of knowledge?

**J. K.:** I know when I am in a class, that I'm not who they think I am, and I know not to take advantage of that. I teach them that I'm not who I think they think I am, and that they shouldn't let me take advantage of that. But from that point on, they do exactly what I tell them. So, you can be honest and still be in charge.

**I. K.:** This is another dual position, which is uncomfortable, I believe, both for the students and for the teachers.

**J. K.:** Yes. It's a lot of work. If you're asking what the basis of deconstruction was, it's that you're working all the time.

**I. K.:** But, how should Deconstruction, not in the sense of Derrida's Deconstruction, but in a sense of a process – how should it be taught?

**J. K.:** Well, I used to say you taught it by assigning a reading, and explaining the reading. Now I think it's better to actually do the process in the class with the thinking, constantly shifting the context and asking another question. So, let's say I showed a cowboy and Indian movie, and ask who's the good guy and who's the bad guy? And they tell me and I then I say "One of You is an Indian", you know. And so what I do is introduce the process very early, and I introduce the reading later.

**I. K.:** How do you apply it to architecture?

**J. K.:** The same way.

**I. K.:** Students basically start from modernist ideas of a powerful architect. You need to break them somehow.

**J. K.:** Let me ask you a question, and don't get mad at me. What's one plus one?

**I. K.:** Ok, it's a trick question, I know. If I say "two" it is not going to be true.

**J. K.:** You know it's not going to be two, but it's not going to not be two. So, you need to get to two before I teach you otherwise. So you have to be able to say "two" before I can get you to where you need to go.

I. K.: But it is more complex than that.

**J. K.:** Of course. We are in an interview - I had to give you a simple example. I think architecture is one of the first disciplines to understand this deconstruction intuitively. There's never been such a thing as a strong fit between architectural work and its program. Never. The minute the program becomes so strong in its need, they get rid of the architect. So, in the United States architects don't build prisons and they don't build hospitals, because the program is considered technologically too valuable and not open to cultural speculation. So, the relationship between program and form in architecture has always been deconstructing. So that's what I say: "Look, do you always eat in the kitchen? Or do you ever eat in your bed?" So, once you point out that this is going on all the time in architecture, and that this is the problem in architecture, you will acknowledge that it is not a problem, but a benefit. We call that now *loose-fit programming*. So when Cedric Pryce was writing about loose-fit programing he just got through the whole French deconstruction. The *short-term architecture*, the *loose-fit programing,* everything that he was talking about, was to challenge the way architects imagine they have authority through a building - it lasts forever, strong programing, very strong structures. That was the poerty, that was the politics. And the Fun Palace! Even Rem Koolhaas says this is his interest in mechanical circulation. If you were to ask what's the biggest difference betwen Bernard Tschumi and Rem Koolhaas - it is that Bernard is stilli about walking, and Rem is about elevators, escalators, driving trains. You can look at the entire history of those two architects on the basis of that difference and understand what otherwise would be the almost the exact parallel. That makes Rem more interesting to me, because walking is natural, and it seems to deserve more authority than elevators and escalators. Architects have known about walking for four hundred years. They didn't really start thinking about elevators until 1980. So, those are important ideas.

I. K.: I have a very easy question now. What is space for you?

**J. K.:** I don't ever answer that question because I don't believe in it. It would be like asking a doctor what health is. It's a good thing, and it's always great once it happens but it ruins you if you think about it as an architect and a theorist.

I. K.: So what do you think about if you're not thinking about space?

J. K.: You are thinking about relationships.

I. K.: Relationships *are* spatial.

J. K.: That's right, but you don't produce space, you produce relationships. So, anybody who says "I'm going to go make a great space" – you're dead. You can't do it. All you're going to do is use existing techniques and repeat an image of an old great space – long span, reflective lighting, etc.

I. K.: Do you want to say that space appears only as an unplanned, uncontrolled consequence?

J. K.: I think that space inside a closet is fantastic. But I guarantee you no architect would ever say that space inside the closet is a great space. So what I want and need to know is how to make this kind of space, how to make that kind of space. I need to have a complete repertoire of handling relational conditions of the void.

I. K.: But you can unfold the space by just putting two things into a relation. Why do you think that by changing things you are not manipulating space?

J. K.: You are. But what you have to think about is changing the thing. For example, Le Corbusier said that tables are too high, and that the food is too close to you. He said "If you want a more adult relationship at the table, you lower the table". Unfortunately, he understood that that made you spill food. But that's an incredible spatial idea. Very few people talk about that. It's in his notebooks. But the point is, you can't say to yourself "How do I make the space at the dinner table better?" You have to say "What is the effect of the height?" For example, people talk about grids. Seattle is one of the worst cities in the world for walking, it's on a grid. And Savannah is one of the best, because of the scale of the grid is nine times bigger in Seattle. So, grids are themselves useless. You have to know the type of grid, the meter of the grid, the width of the band, and that's what makes you an expert. If all you do is speak in poetic terms like *space* or *Poetics of Space* – by the way, that is a terrible book. It's a wonderful book to read philosophically and I hate it for it. I don't need to know what the effect is; I need to know how to make the effect.

I. K.: So if there is no control over space, how can you represent space?

J. K.: I think there is control over space. For example, when we teach or when we know when to use framed structure versus arcuated structure, we're actually not thinking about structure, we're thinking about space. At that point we understand it is a technical decision. I guarantee you Chopin never once asked: "Is this a beautiful melody, or is this going to make people cry?". He understood if you work in a minor key, and then if you combine chords with chromatic scales and you do them at the same time, it sounds like the wind. So if you listen to "The Ocean" etude, or the "Winter Wind" etude, when it starts off, the scale is a combination of arpeggio and a chromatic scale and it sounds just like the wind. But if you sit down and you say "How do I make this sound like the wind?" – You're dead!

I. K.: You want to say there is a certain kind of pattern in music that enabled the affection of the space in a certain way?

J. K.: Absolutely.

I. K.: What kind of pattern do we have in architecture if we are questioning them all the time?

J. K.: Well, we went through a, maybe necessary, period of naiveté when we decided to jettison all typology. The point of deconstruction for example is you're better off starting with a type and then questioning it – so that there is still a legacy to the type, but the type is set into motion again – than try to start all over.

I. K.: You want to say you are not completely resisting typology?

J. K.: No!

I. K.: You are trying to decentralize it maybe? So it could make it lose its power?

J. K.: Yes, to show how it's already in motion to something else.

I. K.: Are there mixed typologies, or, hybrid items?

J. K.: Yes, exactly. It's funny about those etymologies: do you make a salary? When you earn money, do you call it a salary, what do you call it? Yes, salary. Does anybody hand you a bag of salt?

I. K.: A bag of salt?

**J. K.:** Yes.

I. K.: In a shop?

**J. K.:** No, no, no, when you get paid, you get..?

I. K.: You get money in the bank.

**J. K.:** OK. You don't get a bag of salt. The word *salary* meant, long ago – a bag of salt. So I like the typology of the word – which is what etimology is – I don't pretend that the original meaning is the most important. I think the process is the most important. And that is, when people try to discuss architecture by breaking the term into its etymological roots- arche' and tecton- I just quit listening. It's a cheap ruse.

# Interview with Renato Rizzi|

Aleksandar Kušić & Nataša Janković

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

R e n a t o  R i z z i |  when the interview took place |
Full professor at IUAV, Architectural University-Venice. Since ever he has been interested in the architectural problems through two main aspects: how to re-combine philosophy (logic) and aesthetic (ethic) in Architecture in the nihilistic time. Some of his books: *Mistico nulla*, 1996; *Il Daimon di Architettura*, 2006; *Il Divino del paesaggio*, 2007; *La muraglia ebraica*, 2009; *J.Hejduk: Incarnatio*, 2010; *L'inscalfibile: saggio sull'immagine theologica*, 2011. At the moment he's building a Shakespeare Theatre in Gdansk, Poland.

R e n a t o  R i z z i

Lecture:
P r e - c o n s t r u c t i o n :  t h e  H i d d e n  H i t s
26/10/2012

Abstract:
Where do the plastic forces (or power) of languages (architectural, literary, poetic, scientific, juridical, etc.) we produce come from? Are we conscious about the paradigm of our contemporary and western culture? Which is the "substratum" of our thoughts and knowledge? If we don't have the consciousness of the ontological and epistemic structure of thoughts, how can we understand the character (good or bad) of our time? Our words loose their meanings without this scenario. We believe to see, instead we are blind. For this reason we need to have a point of view very far away from the presence of things if we desire to approach the inner (and untouchable) essence of them. Therefore many categories of thoughts have to be overcome, even broken: chronological, aesthetic, epistemic one! With this cultural lens I try to analyze Eisenman's architectural paradigm, to reveal what is hidden behind the mask of deconstruction, not just for the pleasure of discovery, not at all, but for a real necessity: to understand better the sense of our critical time, of our meaningless languages of Architecture.

**A. K. & N. J.:** We would like to begin with a part of your summary for the *Architecture of Deconstruction / The Specter of Jacques Derrida* conference. In it, you speak of "our meaningless languages of Architecture". Do you believe that the ontological and epistemic vacuity of our times indeed has an ethical dimension?

**R. R.:** An important part of philosophy is fundamental for architecture. Or to express it in another way, we should put knowledge in relation with the presence of things, with the real world. Let me explain that: all our knowledge, I mean all, derives from the observation of the world. It isn't true that thoughts existed prior to the world. Thus, knowledge is derived from the phenomena that occur in the world: our life, trees, storms, the sea, rocks, etc. In the beginning there was a strong relationship between knowledge and the presence of things, and this relationship has gradually become distant, to the point that the presence has become nothing but formalism, and knowledge doesn't have any effect on the presence of the world. Since there is this division, everyone can say whatever they want. Moreover, the word architecture "árche téchne" means exactly this. It is a word that splits in two, that has a double etymology, a double root, and these two roots have become distant. Today we only do "tecture", that is, we only work with technical and scientific knowledge. Universities are the most important institutional places of culture, or at least they should be. The role of the university should be to compare the big paradigms of thought, in which we were educated, with the way the world presents itself, because the presence of things does not depend on us. Yet we continuously create architecture that belongs to that world, to the world of presence. Therefore, if there is no ontological awareness, there can be no epistemic awareness either, because *epistēmē*, means something that stands above, something that is unfaltering. And what is unfaltering if not the presence of things? Architecture is a discipline that produces forms, produces things, if there is no relation whatever, what happens? We lack this awareness. It is difficult to create architecture. For this reason I bring up the question of our primary knowledge, the knowledge given during education, the most basic kind. It is technical knowledge. But technical knowledge is the knowledge of specializations. It isn't the knowledge of unity, it isn't the knowledge of relations. It is the knowledge that brings about the isolation of things. Therefore, this means that the knowledge that we were given is in an ontological contradiction with the presence of the world.

**A. K. & N. J.:** If deconstruction and architecture ever had common ground, one might argue that it was a matter of both equally deflecting a properly political agenda. On the one hand we have the Derridian deconstruction,

which, although always being implicitly political, was marked for a long period of Derrida's life by an absence of the subject of politics. On the other hand, we have architecture, which in the last decades of the 20th century became strongly influenced by the ideas of autonomy, personified by Peter Eisenman. Do you believe that the meeting between deconstruction and architecture could be, or is, a basis for a sort of a *hyper-apolitical s*tance?

R. R.: I wouldn't like to delve too deeply in the matter of deconstruction, because deconstruction has become a style. When a thought becomes a style, it means that it becomes hostile, stiffens, becomes more rigid. But then it also becomes a way of doing things in which you don't think any more. I only want to say that, in my opinion, deconstruction, in particular as it is understood by our American architects, is a matter of intellectual power. The other day Kipnis said: "We won!" during the conference. What does "We won" mean? And what did we apparently win? Architecture is not a problem of power. Architecture is an issue whose basis is something else. From my point of view, it is about grace and decency, but not power. Is deconstruction political? Architecture itself is apolitical. To make it political, one needs to have a strong awareness of aesthetics, the sensibility and capacity of the mind that knows how to work well in the world of aesthetics. That is what makes it really political, and not having a style, or part of a style. Peter Eisenman, Daniel Libeskind, Bernard Tschumi, all participate in a style. It's enough to make crooked things for a given style. If one discussed thoroughly the system of thought of Bernard Tschumi, one would understand the limits of these architects' systems of thought. Furthermore, Eisenman doesn't actually belong to deconstruction, although he likes to be called one. But he is an architect who finds the source of his language in a place that is much more powerful – in Hebrew theology. Jeff Kipnis asked Eisenman the other day, at the conference: "Peter, have you read the Kabala?" And he answered: "Oh, yes, I read the Kabala." But this is a silly question. Because he has written and mentioned in an interview that he was interested in the Kabala. And indeed, his work is proof that he draws inspiration from that which is "theological" in his tradition (and not only his, but of us all). The "theological" is the iconological world, it is iconology. Iconology doesn't mean, as Tschumi was saying today, that all the purchasers want paintings to look like icons. It's not about icons, but about images. Those are images that belong to a very complex history, which is our own personal history, but also to the history of the world, of the cosmos. The word "theological" is a very complex word, and one we should face in a very delicate manner.

A. K. & N. J.: Do you believe that the significance of the cooperation between Derrida and Tschumi, or Derrida and Eisenman, is a true legacy of dissolution

of borders between disciplines, or is this vision far too naïve? Were the borders between architecture and philosophy only seemingly shaken by these meetings?

R. R.: In my opinion, neither Eisenman, nor Bernard Tschumi, nor any of these architects that founded, or maintained deconstruction in a powerful way, haven changed one jot the limits. They set limits that are iconological, and if you don't create such terrific architecture, you are not an architect. If you are not part of this small group, you're nothing. The American school is run by people like Bernard Tschumi, Mark Wigley, Jeff Kipnis, Peter Eisenman, and if you don't belong to that group, you're nothing. But this is just a game that doesn't mean anything. I don't care one bit if they claim that my work is worthless. Architecture will be the real judge for this. Bernard Tschumi's reasoning belongs to the world of contemporary nihilism, considering that he always speaks only about geometry, surface, contents, but never of the real sense of things. He never says what an idea is, where the idea comes from, on what grounds it is based. They don't know how to do analysis, how to do the gnoseological analysis, one of real knowledge, because it is too complicated. Because what matters to them is how to establish a style. The MoMA exhibition was an intuition of Peter Eisenman who invited Mark Wigley as a theoretician (he had just arrived from New Zeland) and gave him this opportunity to curate the exhibition, supported by Philip Johnson (at the time Philip Johnson was an insider at the MoMA). And he organized the exhibition on deconstruction. But they also wanted to invite John Hejduk to take part in the exhibition. John Hejduk is another great name that has dominated architecture in the last thirty years. But John Hejduk refused to participate in this exhibition. Deconstruction is a style, a self-promotion, isn't it?  And one can feel the attempt made by the Americans and the Anglo-Saxon culture to set a new intellectual colonialism through these things. And there is no possibility of discussion with them, since they don't discuss. (This is what I wanted to say and it will probably not turn out well for me.)

A. K. & N. J.: In recent years, architectural history and theory has witnessed the return of the idea of autonomy, in its politically charged, Italian version. By this we mean the rediscovery of Aldo Rossi's version of an autonomous discipline, as done by Pier Vittorio Aureli. As a professor at IUAV – the Venetian architectural university which was once the home of Aldo Rossi himself – what can you tell us about today's reception of Rossi's ideas of an architectural autonomy? Is Rossi's perspective of the entangled relationship between architecture and politics still considered valid today in Venice?

**R. R.:** I am not convinced that it was Pier Vittorio Aureli who did this, since he is a critic who promoted Peter Eisenman. Nor do I see Pier Vittorio Aureli as such an important figure. Instead, in the matter of the autonomy of architecture, it means to put together all the knowledge: philosophy, theology, literature, poetry, cinema, neuroscience, cosmology, physics, all these have to take part in the formation of an architect. The architect finds himself in a very, very particular situation: he is alone. All of us are alone, we live in solitude. But solitude is a life condition that better permits you to understand your identity. Since solitude means that you are always alone (I'm addressing those who work in the field of art, that is, of architecture and art), you feel that around you there is a huge emptiness. And when you start to draw and to put the first sign, who is the one that guides your hand? Bernard Tschumi, Peter Eisenman, Frank Lloyd Wright, or Daniel Libeskind? It's you, unless you are a real monkey, who copies exactly what others do. Since each one of us has his own character, his own psychology, it means that we are always alone. But we need to beware: solitude means that you answer to yourself, not within a group, or within a reassuring style, or because you belong to some group and you make progress as part of the group. No, the architect is always alone. But solitude gives you the possibility to get to know your identity. But what does this mean? It means that when you're alone, thanks to the culture you live in, you become aware of the limits that are around you, limits of your knowledge: philosophy, theology, neuroscience, literature, languages used by other architects- these are all limits. But as you are alone, you can go through all of them. You enter philosophy and then you go back, you enter biology, and then you go back, the same with art, etc. You cross all these limits, but you are inside the biggest limit of all of them, the one of architecture. By doing this, your solitude permits you to develop within the two fundamental values: grace and decency. This is the big question. You are alone. But as a matter of fact you are not alone, because you are embraced by architecture. It is architecture that sustains you. Therefore, architecture has an infinite embrace, but it is the embrace of architecture, not of society, although architecture is always social, architecture is always political, architecture is always economical, architecture is always sustainable. But you need a lot of preparation for this, to stay in the big embrace of architecture, not in one that I or anyone else suggests, as we are all alone. On the other hand being alone is the guarantee of freedom, indeed the guarantee of what Mark Cousins called the promise of happiness, as happiness is actually inside that promise. And it's architecture that offers you that promise. It is really interesting, just like the Chris Younès' discourse on limits. Mark Cousins also treated the topic of a gift, which is also very important. Every project is a gift, it should be a gift and not a dictation, and Nietzsche said something really interesting: "To learn means to

build one's own gifts". What does it mean and when does it happen in life?- try to think about that.

Do you understand what am I saying?

**A. K. & N. J.:** Only partially.

**R. R.:** I would like to repeat. Nietzsche wrote what *learning* means. To learn means to build, to create (but to build) your own gifts. My question is: when do you have the experience that learning means to build your own gifts? When? I think the answer is very easy.

**A. K. & N. J.:** During the process of creation?

**R. R.:** Anytime- it does not matter. In your life, are you able to have this kind of experience or not? To build your gifts?

**A. K. & N. J.:** Something which is pre-given is then…

**R. R.:** No, no, nothing is pre-given. This is related to the notion of limits, and this is related to the notion of happiness. Ok?

**A. K. & N. J.:** Does it then mean to cross your own limits?

**R. R.:** Yes, but to cross your own limits is something very, very strange. If I see a beautiful woman, or if you see a beautiful man, you say: Hah! Look at this! I want to conquer this man! But you do not know who this is. What do you do then? You go back to your house, and then you think: How could I meet this guy or this girl? You prepare yourself, and then you consider: What kind of a gift could I prepare for him or her- to have the possibility of his attention? You do not know what he likes or not. So you try, you go somewhere to find, I don't know, a flower or a perfume, it does not matter, a book, and then you go with this kind of gift and you are able to meet again this guy or this woman.

So, architecture is like this. But the intensity of this – that is fundamental! It means, when you do a project, you don't know what the project means, because you do not yet see this woman going through. But architecture is this beautiful woman, or beautiful man that you want to grasp for yourself, because you want to be happy. Of course, architecture is not a woman or a man, so you need to prepare because architecture will be generous to you. It will give back emotion. After your design you say "now I got it!", you are full of joy and

satisfaction. But to make the right step it means investing all your energy. You have to work day and night, all your attention is 100% focused on that point. Architecture, however, is beyond us, so we are working into architecture, we do not know what it is exactly. We need to develop and to build the gift, to put in our body, in our mind, the best things we can learn, as well as developing our sensibility, our emotion, and then put that into the project. Architecture is this kind of seduction. For this reason to learn means to build one's own gifts. But there is a preamble before this – you need to work very hard. This Cousins did not say – you need to invest all your life into this, because you become you. Since architecture is above us, we are the real objects of architecture. We cannot dominate architecture. We need to prepare to be on the same level as architecture. In all other papers we heard throughout the conference, we dominate architecture. You do not dominate anything! For this reason, architecture is in very difficult but beautiful times, because we have great technique. Truly incredible how our age is full of money, despite the crisis, but there is a lack knowledge. Our mind is completely empty, because we have the computer, we have the technique, we have all the ideology in this field that thinks for us. Here I want to say something that links ontology, epistemology, experience. It would be impossible for us to escape from our own experience when we draw or design our object. So, our body is there, our mind is there, our patience is there, our suffering is there, because it is in us. But what does experience mean? It means *experas*, from the Greek for *limits*. *Aperion* means limitless, infinity. But your experience means to incorporate the most knowledge you can. When your limit is almost on the border of infinity, that is where experience lies.

In the history of the Jewish tradition, the Hebrew people never got the possibility to produce something in architecture. For many reasons they could not build a city. Even if they had the desire, they didn't have land. But if they could not design cities, they could design their minds, their object is their mind. And the Jews they have a great mind, with the iconological references in their mind completely different than others. So if you do not know this history and this tradition, how is it possible to understand the meaning of their language in architecture. Peter Eisenman did this, in a very profound way. For others it is just play.

We need to delve again into this huge knowledge, because it is indispensable for creating the structure of your mind. But in so doing, we are always alone, nobody else can help us when we draw, when we design. The aesthetic is the only term which links everything, and at the same time aesthetics is the worst term in our culture. Because aesthetics today is related to individual taste.

A. K. & N. J.: And in the end – what can You tell us about the Shakespeare's Theater You are currently building in Gdansk?

R. R.: I am designing a building, which is very important to build. I think that a real architect needs to design, to teach, and to write. It is very difficult to do architecture today. It is connected with many different minds, the security people, clients, fire departments. And to build something in this way, within these constraints, is not easy. It is important to build, because you turn experience into matter. There is an important Italian sculptor, from the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century, Medardo Rosso. He only sculpted heads of different people, made from wax. He did these beautiful faces and bodies. He said that in space nothing is material. Our own body is the final stage of something that is spiritual, and the premise of this is that nothing is material in the spirit, nothing is material in architecture. You cannot avoid materials in architecture but the only difference between man and animal is that animals do not have hands. Hands are the only device that allow you to make things. They are linked with the brain, so the brain and the hands are the same thing. Experience, then, is linked with your hands, but ontology is linked to your mind. Today our hands are cut away from our arms, and you only use your mind. Hands are doing something on their own. Your brain is petrified, it does not work anymore, because we have technique which supplies our brain. It is for this reason that architecture is very difficult: we want to maintain the promise of happiness. Happiness is the last stage that comes, before this we have beauty, and before this is the truth. Plato says that to reach truth is difficult, but to reach beauty is even more difficult. To reach happiness is almost impossible. But our goal is to be happy, because we produce good things. It is silly to say beauty is this or that, you cannot qualify it. But beauty is in the process of what we are doing. In architecture, if you are truly engaged in this discipline, the real question is how to get the best things, and to produce something like this you need to have lots of knowledge, so you need to be very close to truth and close to beauty.

Translation from Italian: Milica Golić & Marija Bradaš

# Interview with Catherine Ingraham|

Aleksandra Stupar

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

C a t h e r i n e   I n g r a h a m   |   when the interview took place |
Catherine Ingraham is a prominent theoretician who helped formulate seminal
debates in architecture around poststructuralism and deconstruction. She
received her Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University at a time when these critical
positions were in their ascendency.  Dr. Ingraham was an editor of *Assemblage
Journal* from 1991 – 1998 and has published a number of books and essays on
contemporary architecture and theory.  Her publications include *Architecture*,
*Animal*, *Human: The Asymmetrical Condition* (Routledge, 2006), *Architecture
and the Burdens of Linearity* (Yale University Press, 1998), and *Restructuring
Architectural Theory* (Northwestern University Press, 1989). Her current book
projects are on the relation of architecture to property. Ingraham was Chair of
the Graduate Architecture department at Pratt Institute from 1998-2006 and
has lectured extensively at national and international schools of architecture.
She has taught as a visiting professor at Harvard, Princeton, and Columbia
University.

C a t h e r i n e   I n g r a h a m

Lecture:
A r c h i t e c t u r e   w i t h   a   b i g   *a*
26/10/2012

Abstract:
*Architectonics* – that rich metaphor for the linguistic model that informed debates in and around architecture during its so-called deconstructivist period – relied on discrete structures such as walls, corridors, thresholds, windows, roofs, foundations.  Process studios in the 1990s were elaborate experiments in the complication or dissolution of these structures. I believe it was Rem Koolhaas who announced, at a certain moment, that architecture is a semiotic nightmare, which is to say that architectural metaphors are extremely tricky and always have been. In any case, we are no longer in the business of forming critical theories around architectural metaphors, at least not overtly.

In the foreground of our current thinking about architecture is the search for an intelligence that can be embodied by a variable surface. There are different versions of this: data driven projects, algorithmic explorations, building information management, component systems. In the background of our thinking lie problems of structure; in the far background, problems of program. The vicissitudes of form reside somewhere in the middle-distance.

There also seems to be a desire to move from bio-references to geo-references, in which sites and landscapes are constructed in order to receive, and become themselves, resilient forms. In a geological landscape, synchronic information is illegible without theories of diachronic development, so this shift might mean the recovery of a "harder" historicity. Bio-research in architecture proved to be rather creepy, although some would say there is no geology that is not also biological, and vice versa.

One question might be whether post-structural debates, in their critiques of foundational architectural assumptions, significantly altered architecture's relationship to modernism, our most powerful contemporary progenitor. Jacques Derrida would, very likely, have said "yes and no," because there could be, in his book, no absolute triumph over the past. That was the interesting, and maddening, double-bind he put us in.

Another question might be whether all critical inquiry pursued in the "Derridean manner" eventually becomes a hermeneutical vortex that refers only to itself. It does not seem so to me, although I find it now almost impossible to read much of what was written and said during deconstruction's heyday, not only in architecture but in literary theory and philosophy too. Derrida's writing is, however, still amazingly eloquent.

I think my talk at the conference will be, therefore, about the stresses of visiting an architectural past to which our current practices are deeply indebted and yet towards which we feel a deep ambivalence and even an active hatred.

A. S.: 1. Your transdisciplinary background has strongly influenced your work as an architectural theorist. Could you underline some significant moments of your personal and professional pathway which generated a shift from comparative literature (which was your field of doctoral dissertation) and architecture?

2. The well-known fact that you are one of Frank Lloyd Wright's great-granddaughters has certainly shaped your interests and focused your attention on the field of architecture. Do you perceive this unique family and architectural legacy as an advantage, obstacle, obligation or a challenge? How would you define and position his opus within the framework of architecture-philosophy-theory?

3. In your book "Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity" you presented a different perspective of the history of the city, confronting the principles of bestial urbanism and modern urbanism. However, both 'modes' are the reflections of civilization development, its social, economic and technological features. Contemporary cities and their architecture follow the similar logic but they are exposed to multiplying influences and sensations which create new typologies and topologies.

How do you (fore)see the future of urban world and the (im)balance between "donkey urbanism" and "spaces of flows".  Are they just two sides of the same coin, blurred by a magnified cloud of advanced technology?

4. The recent trends in architecture and urban design, labeled as 'eco', 'green', 'low/no carbon', represent a reaction to climate changes and new environmental awareness. The solutions to current problems are folded into various visions of techno- and eco- utopias but we still lack visible results. Could we find answers to these challenges in animal or human? What is a potential of innovative concepts, such as The TERMES Project? Are we heading toward a new synergy of nature and technology or we just reassess forgotten vernacular knowledge?

5. In 2001 you and architect L. Hawkinson won a competition for the Museum of Women's History in New York. What layers of your multidisciplinary approach were used in the proposed concept and how did you merge theory with practice? What problems might occur when practicing architects collaborate with an architectural theorist, from a completely different background? To what extent is it possible to upgrade architectural theory into a tangible structure? Does theory and practice nowadays coexist, overlap, intervene or even oppose to each other?

**C. I.:** My background is not exactly transdisciplinary. My Ph.D. is in comparative literature, which is where I first encountered Jacques Derrida's work. The field of comparative literature, at Johns Hopkins University in any case, was reinventing itself as critical theory and hermeneutics. Certainly there was an interdisciplinary aspect to my literature studies, but when I completed my doctorate and left that field for architecture, I was not surfing from one discipline to another. I knew very little about architecture when I first began teaching it in the mid-1980s.

Initially I had to trade on the scraps of architectural knowledge I had picked up from my family—from my mother and father, both of whom were architects, and from Frank Lloyd Wright, or, rather, from the aura that Frank Lloyd Wright had cast over my parents and my extended family in general, not to mention the general aura of his famousness. For some time, therefore, I had to fake architectural knowledge while I learned what was actually at stake. What I did have, at that moment, was what a few people in architecture—Stanley Tigerman, Peter Eisenman, Bernard Tschumi—were very interested in: serious scholarly training in poststructural philosophy.

Meeting architecture, with my academic and family background, was a moment of recognition and confrontation. Not only had I come home, in some sense, to the family business, but I also immediately understood that the field of architecture was operating within a fascinating set of structures to which it was almost blind. To put this another way, what I knew about poststructural philosophy became far more precise and exciting to me when I confronted the rich histories, theories, and practices of architecture.

Norbert Weiner remarks at the beginning of his book on cybernetics that the anthropologists, biologists, engineers, and mathematicians—all of whom met together in the 1950s to formulate the rudiments of a computational machine—had to forego something (their pride, the isolation of their disciplinary knowledge, their tendency to "stand on ceremony") in order to gain a working knowledge of each other's field that would enable a collaboration. This remains the gold standard for interdisciplinary work in my view. No one knows the real story of these affiliations; there were, without doubt, academic territorial battles of every kind, as there are in almost any kind of collaborative work. There is no easy transdisciplinarity, no easy passage across the structures that compose one's training and disciplinary languages. I have more than a working knowledge of architecture now but even you are still asking me about my literature background. It is as if my relation to architecture must always be

newly minted from this background. In one sense, you are absolutely right. My take on architecture has been almost entirely formed by my training in philosophy and literature. But, on the other hand, this training itself has been totally re-formed by architecture. I no longer pay that daily round of attention to comparative literature—which is what constitutes a discipline. All of my attention is expended on architecture.

Back to my famous ancestor for another moment. It is a tremendous thing to come from an architectural dynasty of sorts. It is also a mixed bag. I rarely speak about Frank Lloyd Wright but I am interested in (and contentious about) much of what he was interested in: nature and not nature, the United States, America's history (my dissertation was on Thomas Pynchon and Henry James, the technological romance and social complexity of America), architectural relationships to land and ecosystems, and so forth. My father studied at Taliesin and was strongly influenced by Wright's work. My mother studied with Mies, although hers is the Wright lineage. Growing up in this household was like imbibing, without critical distance, the biases of both romantic and modernist architectural traditions. I personally consider Frank Lloyd Wright to be one of the most incredible architects of the past two hundred years. But when I have spoken of him in relation to my own history, I am always taken aback by the response. Perhaps what I mean is that I come face to face with my own expectations about that response.

What I often expect—and this is why I try never to refer to Frank Lloyd Wright as my great-grandfather—is that mention of our relationship will take care of what is otherwise a fairly tricky explanation about why I am in architecture and why I am doing the kind of work I do. Needless to say, this expectation is never fulfilled. In fact the reverse: any personal mention of Frank Lloyd Wright always makes everything more enigmatic.

To shift to a few of your other questions about my books, *Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity* and *Architecture, Animal, Human*—and then to end with a brief mention of the competition that Laurie Hawkinson and I won in 2001:

At one point recently I was working on an essay for an anthology about the "return of nature" in architecture. My argument was the same as Slavoj Žižek's—that the problem is not nature; it is, instead, our belief in the possibility of our omnipotence over nature. There is no nature in the sense we usually mean. There is nothing "out there" that is apart from what is "in here." Žižek's point is that our efforts to be "green" or to pursue sustainable practices has,

so far, changed very little about our blurred and blunt grasping after this thing we call nature. Technology, for its part, pursues its own evolutionary path, bifurcating into sub-technologies as it goes. As Giorgio Agamben has written in *What is an Apparatus?* modern technology, in order to enact its own evolution (which requires a relation to living systems), must create a subject for itself—that would be us, the avid buyers of cell phones.
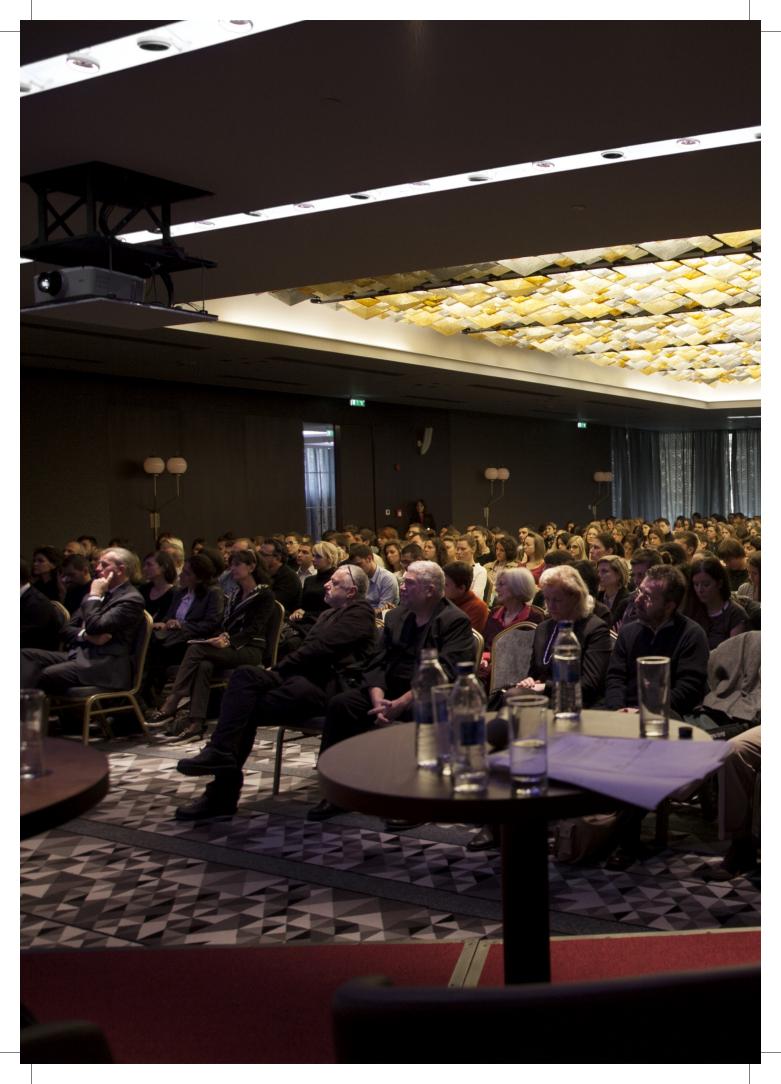
Le Corbusier's complaint about the donkey's way (bestial urbanism) is remarkable for its virulence against the stupidity of humans who act out their animal aspect. It is not about donkeys. One would imagine, actually, that Le Corbusier loved donkeys; he certainly loved drawing them. The founding of cities is obviously, in many ways, a herding or pack idea: better defense, cooperation around resources, technical alliances. Thinking through "animalness"—either in light of Agamben's work on biomodernity ("the open," self-consciousness) or through Derrida's question about why we have given ourselves the right to call millions of diverse species by the same name, *animal*—is a way of de-familiarizing the world in order to suspend automatic assumptions about our omnipotence over it. Will this solve the problems we want to solve? Does it mean we should build bio-mimetic systems? Not necessarily. As always, however, nomenclatures (systems of naming) matter.
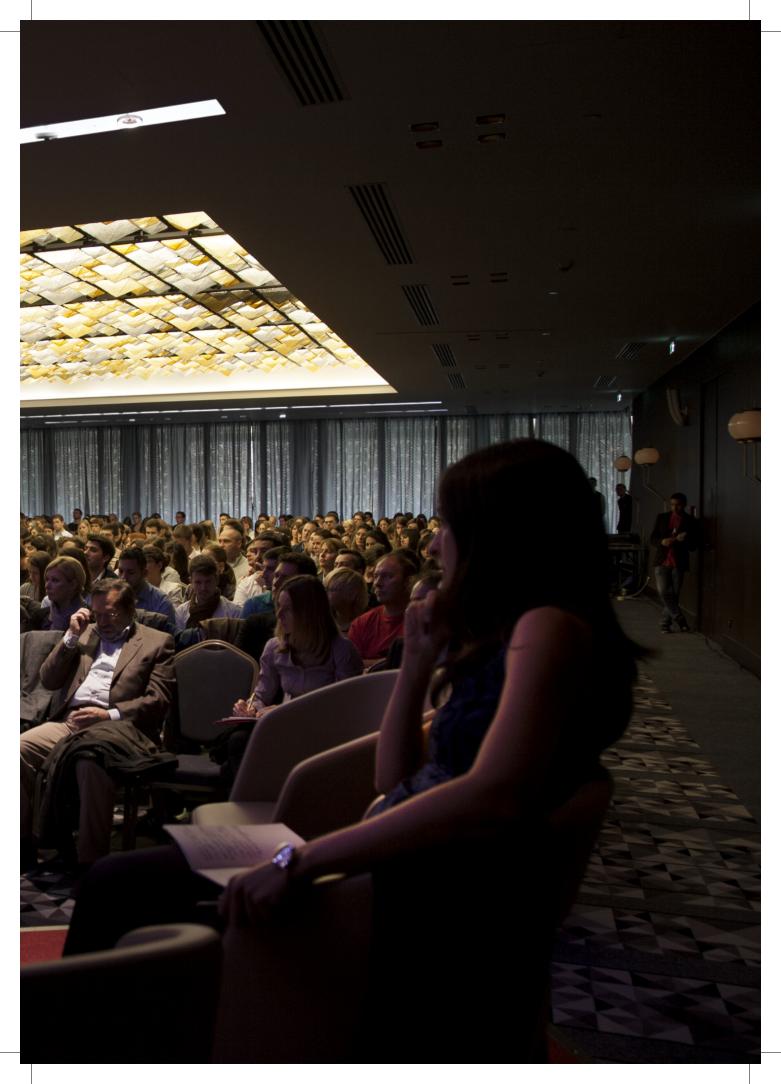
Architecture considers itself to be a benevolent profession. It wants to do everything you ask about: solve urban problems, understand the environment, stabilize the climate, be innovative and constructive, and creatively harness new technologies. In my current work on property it seems clear to me that architecture is uniquely positioned to ask a certain set of questions connected to its simultaneous engagement with complex cultural constructs—such as property and material technologies—and an amazingly diverse array of histories and ideas, including ideas about biological life, flows, computational design, finance and economics, animal motifs (profoundly and poignantly represented throughout architectural history), first order systems theory (cybernetics), second order systems theory (complexity and emergence), and so forth. Our discipline and practice is always already interrogatory, and historically ingenious, along the manifolds and gradients from mineral to human, from space to time, from mind to body. I don't want to flatter architects—many of whom run the risk, I think, of becoming heroic rather than interrogatory. But it's a very very difficult, almost impossible, profession. Better to joke about it; it's so seriously difficult.

Laurie Hawkinson and I could have used more levity in our collaboration around the Museum of Women's History competition. The subject of "women's history," for example, turned out to be a really strange cataloguing of things women used more than men, such as sewing machines, and self-referential works of art by women (Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*), and photos of Susan B. Anthony. It was hard, in other words, to define the meaning of women's history. Laurie and I were quite interested in the project for this reason; it was terrific to have an architectural opportunity to think about how museums organize cultural ideas.

There is no question that we live in a quotidian architectural world that routinely penalizes women (talk about a joke). My completely unscientific calculation of this penalty that women must pay before they are given significant building projects is fifteen years. All other things being equal (also a joke) they must wait a long time before acquiring the absolutely essential experience of building. Laurie and I did not propose a polemical building around these issues—but we were interested in bringing people into the museum through a double skin (which we programmed in different ways) in order to delay them, slightly, around questions of history and gender. It was a significant competition to win and would have been fantastic to build. But the project was politically fraught. Ultimately, the project was not built because New York State elected a new governor, Eliot Spitzer, who did not support the building of the museum and whose own career as governor ended fairly abruptly when he was found to have been seduced into the prostitution ring that he, in his former job as New York State Attorney General, had been trying to dismantle. A tragic-comedic moment in the history of men.

There have been intensely collaborative moments throughout architecture's history between historians, engineers, politicians, kings, practitioners, philosophers, craftspeople, sculptors, physicists, painters, fabric designers, licensed architects, and unlicensed architects. And then there have been periods when architecture isolated itself as a singular, radically autonomous or radically exclusive, discipline and practice. I think the collaborative periods, on the whole, outweigh the isolationist periods. Whether acknowledged or not, it is impossible to do architecture without collaboration. It is also impossible to do architecture without theory: the how-to-build something is far easier than the what-to-design question. Of course techniques and ideas can never be separated in any meaningful way.

# Interview with Zoran Lazović|

Milica Milojević
University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

Z o r a n   L a z o v i ć   |   when the interview took place |
Zoran Lazović, architect, full professor of Architecture at Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade. Realized housing estates, a hotel and several villas in Belgrade, Ivanjica, Sarajevo, Leskovac, Bajina Bašta. Participated in architectural competitions, exhibited in France, Belgium and in all countries of former Yugoslavia. Co-curator of *Serbia: New Efforts*, national presentation of Serbia at the International Exhibition of Architecture in Venice in 2006, co-author of *The New Serbian Architecture* – exhibitions in Paris, Praha and Belgrade (2006-2008). Author of The *Historical Determinants of Belgrade and Sava Amphitheater*, 2003, *Belgrade: Culture and the City* and *Ville d'Espoire*, 2008. Head of Department of Architecture (2004-2009). Professor of Methodology of Design, Faculty of Applied Arts, University of Arts, Belgrade.
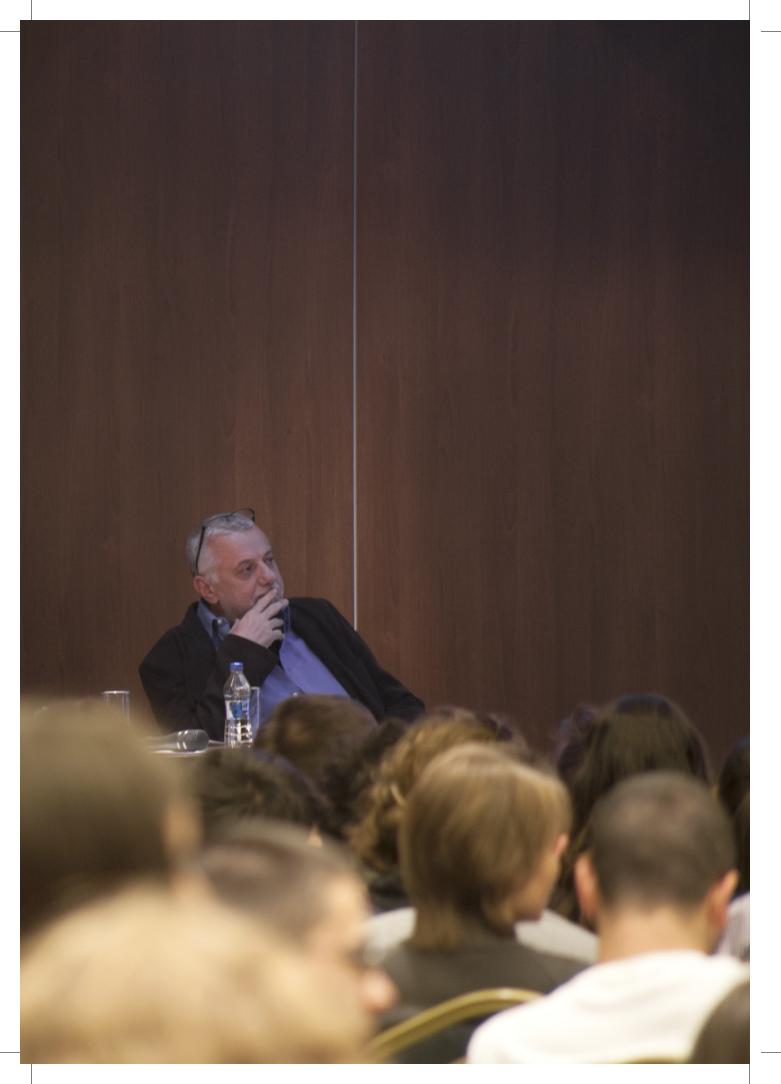
Z o r a n  L a z o v i ć

Lecture:
L a  n a v e  d i  p i e t r a
26/10/2012

Abstract:
The World is permanently constructed and deconstructed. Is there an essential paradox of deconstructionism in creative works of architects? What is architectural design corresponding to? Diary of a story where narrator is his own interpreter: From an uncertain reminiscence and faded copies to multiple new originals. Where was architect's Babylon? *The Group Portrait. Kriegs Insel in Plannen. The Expulsion from the Earthly Paradise. Block 24. The Culture Center of the Third Millennia. The Futuristic Approach to Sava Amphitheatre of the Third Millennia. Urban Utopy: Homage to the City of Vukovar. The City of Hope. Cauchemare. Night work. Imago Mundi. Observatory of the Future?* Wandering and the life at the low frequency. Belgrade Necrosis and the Death of Serbia.The Parallel of introspection, or the death of many worlds in front of us. Those who cannot see that dying will see some other worlds disappearing: their decay, dissolution, disappearance. Look into abyss of the past: for some trace, or for some more traces comparatively. The Architecture. Images. Fragments. Hybrids. Testimony of preserved images, objects, architectural compositions, iconographic fragments, montages, assemblages, art collages, menthol bricolages. The Reflection of major events and ideas: constantly changing and disappearing Context. Context of the big movements. Fashion. Trends. Mainstreams. Wars. Creative priorities and visions. The Anatomy Lesson: confronting your own designs and constructs, bonding, parsing, deconstruction, reminiscence and reconstruction, re-membering. Some trace of already obliterated existence and the inevitable disappearance. Is there anticipation and prediction of events and disintegration, departure and return? What sort of frames have had the images that were invisible at the time? Trace through the Specter of Derrida.

**M. M.:** Your presentation at the AoD conference was conceived as a retrospective. What is the correlation between the method of the retrospective and the method of deconstruction?

**Z. L.:** Although omnipresent and timeless, deconstruction is back in the limelight thanks to Derrida's work in the field of architecture and through the agility of his followers, either philosophers or architects. As far as taking part in AoD conference is concerned, the retrospective was a necessity; it was important for me to recall my first encounter or awareness of deconstruction in the field of architecture or in the context of creativity, and not least as deconstruction in life. I do not see the retrospective as an exposition of all of my work, but as a method of observation and recollection, submersion into the stream of thoughts, ideas and concepts initiated, and completed or uncompleted actions. Retrospection/ introspection is a logical process in seeking the key points of deconstruction, recognition of its origins and important moments, even just thinking about it. And anyway, here, in Serbia, it is normal to go backwards, even to avoid a jinx (Milorad Pavić: Landscape Painted with Tea). It is well-known that the 19ᵗʰ century poet and painter Đura Jakšić sat facing backwards when driven in a carriage through Belgrade, saying- Who has ever looked forward in Serbia? Moving backwards enables re-addressing the past, which is seemingly hidden and invisible, but by no means appeased or quieted, while new events, if they arrive, can only bring unease. In the Balkans, there is a saying: *Let's hope nothing (new) happens*. Thus the past is here ever more interesting than the future. It seems it hurts less. Retrospection is itself a form of deconstruction and demythologization through review; insight into something that is far from consciousness, yet present and buried underneath layers of new attempts. Retrospection as deconstruction, is at the same time 'spection' and construction and can be observed, built and created to mythologize. Just as every construction and creation, in its very origin, can immediately create internally opposing or conflicting processes of deconstruction and dissolution.

**M. M.:** You spoke about the destruction, destroying and creation in those circumstances, about the destruction that is inherent in the process of deconstructing and in the process of retrospection. Could you distinguish deconstruction in architecture from the architecture of deconstruction?

**Z. L.:** Unitl this conference I did not understand things this way. The subject of deconstruction in architecture helped me to deeply and firmly realize the plain idea of deconstruction/destruction and all its tragedy, and at the same time all its recycling and recreating potential.

I recalled, deep in retrospection by now, the year 1993, Dunja Blažević and the action titled *Atelier of construction – deconstruction*, the subject brought upon by the destruction in the Balkans. And us, many of us – still compatriots, acquaintances, colleagues and students, gathered again, this time not at some exhibition in Belgrade, but in some unfamiliar places in Paris. In retrospect I remembered the trend of Balkan's *postmodernization* becoming weary and exhausted, which was abruptly awakened by the emergence of deconstruction in architecture. For me it was very exciting, inspiring, fantastic, creative and creatively intoxicating. The groundbreaking momentum of deconstruction in architecture from the late nineties in the works of Bernard Tschumi, Zaha Hadid, Coop Himmelblau, Koolhas, Frank Gehry, Eisenmann, Libeskind, Hani Rashid, Morphosis and Steven Holl was here unfortunately interrupted by another deconstruction, the deconstruction of ideology and wars that began at the end of the post-socialist era and ended with the destruction of Yugoslavia. I am no Yugonostalgic; it was merely a country- where I grew up. The still living Yugoslavia was falling apart before our very eyes, our whole world was falling apart. It was not exogenous; it was endogenous, internal disintegration, implosion, the release of evil spirits and the ugliest in humans. It was impossible for me to be around the same people with whom I spent many years. The question was how did such shameless nationalism emerge, the homicide and urbicide in previously such ordinary socialist characters? Masks were deconstructed. The LIE was deconstructed. Doctrine was deconstructed as well as ideology, relationships, the sense of community and collegiality, camaraderie, friendship and love, parenting, and false paternalism and fabricated truth. Just like in Prevért's poem: *We, the children of the impasse, the world has rejected us, and slammed us into the mud*. Or dismissed all the warnings: *You cannot run away from something that's there, omnipresent. Peace. Peace, brother, peace! Rimtutituki. Peace is the most beautiful girl, one cannot have her, peace* (Antiwar Rock and Roll Movement: Listen 'ere). It wasn't worth it. The walls of the World collapsed as the Earth trembled underneath our feet. Yet again, for the umpteenth time, the dignity of a man was trampled in the Balkans. *Gone are the innocent summers* (Mika Antić). And a memory emerged, a reminiscence from a stone ship, La Nave di Pietra, a utopia, a place of joy, happiness and dignity brought to Belgrade with good humour and marvellous drawings by Italian architects in 1984. Isola Tiberina, Neverland is Ville d'Espoir – a boat for the people in a life boat.

This created, in me, an unbreakable bond between deconstruction in architecture and deconstruction of the country where I lived. At the same time, not just in architecture, the whole other world of creativity and culture

was being torn apart, stopped, and decomposed. That was a quick death or a slow dying of the art scene, film, theatre and the performing arts, architecture and aesthetics. Overall it represented not just the desertion of the standards of culture, but rather betraying the whole essence of culture and civilization. This was true of all those who remained behind, as well as for many who left. Complete deconstruction. Retrogression and regression unfolded simultaneously, fatally and painfully for all those of us who wanted the opposite yet could only observe the further disintegration that did not even stop in the nineties, but continued to the present day. It all started with the economic crisis in the eighties, the following decade was radicalized by wars, the third one, in the new millennium, was full of false reconstruction and transition – to the present day, with the continuing decay throughout the middle of the fourth decade of horror, suffering and degradation. All of life is a crisis. Eyes wide opened – I did not see a thing.

Looking backwards, I have come to a profound realization, pondering and walking backwards, that deconstruction had already been conceived with the first *Hope of the Youth* and the early expressions of creativity, meaning construction, at the dawn of all other existential choices. After all, in my lecture, young architectural ideas intertwine, as well as ideals and utopia, exodus and homecoming, dissolution of the Earth, the decay of the architecture, life and illusion through the retrospective and the cognition of overall disappearance and deconstruction. Yet nothing in this process has not been re-synthesized or recycled. And for the future, well, it will be bought, we just don't know yet by what means, over the internet I guess. We are not creating it, ourselves. The catharsis is not over yet, and it is in an eternal coma.

**M. M.:** Your retrospective singles out the *Institute IMS*, *Architectural Platform of Yugoslavia* and *The City of Hope.* The retrospective reveals their hidden dimensions. Personal recollections and home libraries of architects contain more documents of those professional activities than archives of our institutes and museums. How can we engage personal experience and private archives today?

**Z. L.:** Everything is covered in large layers of rubbish, rather than layers of lava. I believe that although deeply buried, the truth will undoubtedly emerge, sooner or later. An unthinkable damage was created through the lack of culture and through cultivated primitivism. Everything was dismissed, much more of it good than bad. That is the faith of this theory, which is the faith of ideas, the people, the projects and the opuses. There is no continuity. It is hard

to imagine that every new generation starts as *tabula rasa*, from scratch, not knowing anything about what was before them. It is known to major nations and cultures, thus they prevail. Here, there is no institution that meticulously records and collects, classifies, stores and publishes anything of common value or that should remain after us – with the exception of the police and clandestine services.

The value of the work achieved in the eighties at *Institute IMS* with one of the brightest people I have ever known, Dr Ivo Petrović, was authentic, unique and well ahead of its time, not only within the Yugoslav region. We drank a lot of coffee from his English samovar, which made us twitch, and played beautifully at designing houses, villages and towns. Through these games we created an experimental single family house and three residential estates. This represented a shift in the design and construction of low-rise housing, and at the same time a shift in the IMS system, the only export prefabricated system with which millions of square meters of apartments and offices at home and abroad are constructed. The participation of users, generativity of the system, processes and solutions, batch production of the original, catalog design, prefabrication, raw building, phased construction, algorithms and artificial intelligence in the design and evaluation of solutions.

*Architectural Platform of Yugoslavia* has resulted in excellent and authentic architecture that Europe now wants to protect as their cultural heritage. As part of BINA – Belgrade's Third International Week of Architecture, in 2008, I participated in the exhibition *New Architecture in Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia at the beginning of the 21st century*, as one of the authors who brought the recent work in architecture of now three independent Balkan countries to the same level i.e. to the first joint exhibition after two and a half decades. The differences are not going in our favor any more. Nowadays there is nothing especially authentic in Serbian architecture; today there is hardly any architecture in Serbia. At the moment in Belgrade, incredibly, the subculture of kitsch and provincial, despicable buildings rules supreme. Eyes wide shut. It is like a bad dream.

*The City of Hope* is alive. I have determined that it existed in me for a long time before it was created. That was the name of Nenad Novakov's and CEP publication containing the competition entries of young architects from the early eighties, where we had won numerous awards. *The City of HOPE* is strongly associated with the *Expulsion from the Earthly Paradise* and with *The Homage to the city of (V)ukovar*, the works from those CEP's Yugoslav competition-exhibitions. Today it is all part of a cultural heritage that nobody

knows anything about. *City of HOPE* appeared by itself in different shapes and forms – at exhibitions, lectures, publications, for the first time in Belgium in 1993, then in Paris in 1997, in Belgrade at the Faculty of Architecture in 2001, afterwards at the Salon of Architecture in Belgrade in 2003, and finally as a book written in three languages, in 2008. The projects were activated cosmically, and as for the environment, one should not get over-excited.

**M. M.:** At the institute you explored the objects-prototypes through scientific methods. Following this, independently and intuitively you explored the toys-objects, and at the moment with students you are examining ephemeral structures. What kind of approach and what methods do you suggest nowadays in "searching for the experience about the experience that we do not possess yet?"

**Z. L.:** The first experience is always the best. And it is personal. One learns from someone else's, but one should create one's own. It's thrilling. To discover in yourself your own capabilities and your own experience. Basically we do not possess the experience of our own capabilities; or rather we are not aware of it. We don't know what we are capable of. That magical, hidden, authentic well/fountain/source of creativity should be summoned. It gives meaning to life. And it is always, when honest – original and authentic. In nature or the cosmos, there are never two identical things, even the most similar things are different. That goes for people and ideas too. It is a basic didactic educational postulate, which I apply after gaining my own constructive-deconstructivistic experience.

Consciousness and subconsciousness, the visible and the invisible, desire and destiny are not unrelated. They are endlessly metaphysical. We actually walked down the roads of our desires, as if we were unknowingly following some mysterious river, although it did not always seem to be the case. But surely it was. Yet we wake up right where we had once dreamed to be. The hell of reality and the hell of nightmares are only the temptations of the spirit. One should believe, not only hope. Belief is not as punishable as hope. Dreams should be dreamed to come true. The scientific is intuitive. *Intuition reveals deeply hidden knowledge* (Karl Popper). Science is art, and art is science. *Imagination awakes at the twilight of knowledge* – often I recall that very same phrase which Spasoje Krunić used when mentioning its originator, Nikola Dobrović. There are synchronicities, coincidences, when unrelated people have exactly the same ideas. Those ideas are our eyes, the eyes for vision through the darkness. Noumena, intellectual non-empirical intuition. On the other side is the corporate bluntness: the ruthlessness of the neoliberal who exchanges

the creative for the selective, the selective for the invoice, for simple money counting. In the interim, money became everything. Even if the question of choice is the most important part of the question of integrity and freedom, the choice/selection cannot substitute creativity/the creative approach or view. The creative work through play provides an eternal childhood.

The objects – prototypes of the houses were like a jigsaw puzzle, like Froebel's blocks with which little Frank Lloyd Wright used to play or something like LEGO. Toys- objects, amusements for disrupting the bleak past and gloomy everyday life remind us that play is ever so important. Play was never properly respected - because it was never considered a necessity. Play is surreal, albeit realistic and inherent, it is a need and the essence of creativity and life. Play is freedom, there is no other freedom. *Je danse donc je suis* (Brigitte Bardot). Hence art is rarely accepted as reality. It is primitive not to accept play as reality. Our childhood was filled with toys we created and games we invented. This place is the place of Utopia. It appears to me today that concepts, utopian models, lucidities, intuitions and anticipations of the sketches and drawings, live much longer than developed buildings. Precisely these supposedly evanescent and most fragile things in time and space, and not finished objects, live longer in my memory, keep me interested and create joy.

Ephemera are necessary and real. Ephemerality, that sense of temporariness, transience, fragility and impermanence of objects, houses and being is a challenge for the future in the ever more immaterial way of life and architecture, omnipresent virtuality all the way to the final simulacrum; the way the world is going, from analog to digital, from the real to the intangible. The immateriality in all of that brings joy; it is a concept and thinking of the East, the concept of advantage or eternal dominance of the spirit over the matter. Experience we do not possess is a wonderful phrase, everything that we do not possess is marvellous- freedom, audacity and courage. Experience we do not possess is called freedom. Being fundamentally poor and destitute grants one true and complete freedom.

**M. M.:** Belgrade remains the capital of an abandoned idea of the Yugoslav state. One of your answers on a decade of destruction are sketches of unarticulated thoughts about the city on the open sea (the open North Sea). Is that city still there? How does it survive? For whom? With what hope does one sail towards it?
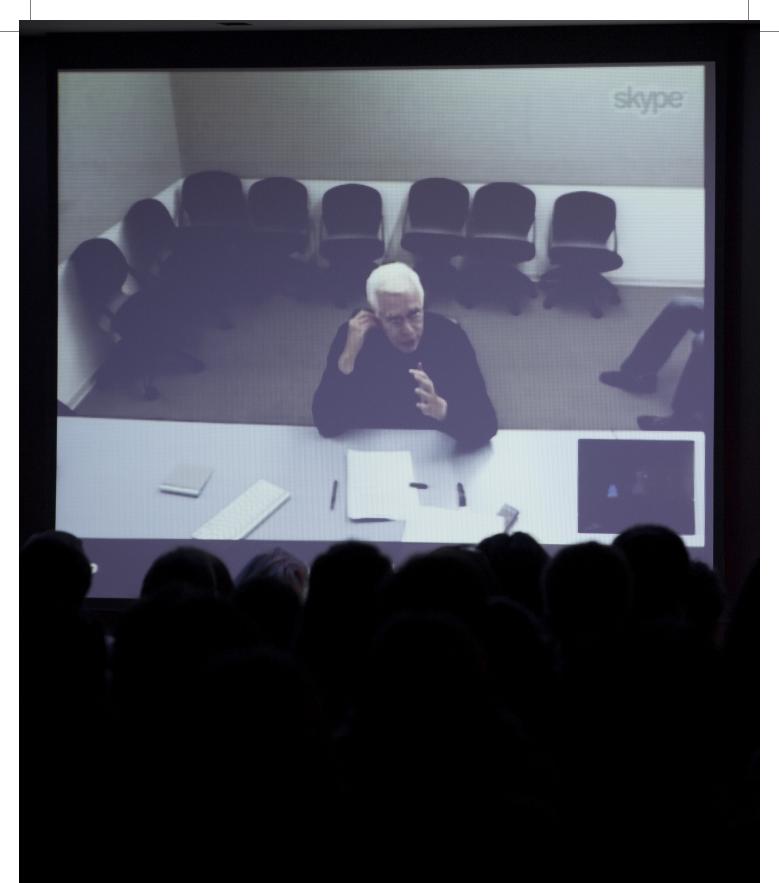
**Z. L.:** Belgrade is a wonderful blend of everything from a small provincial town to the state capital, suburbia and world metropolis. Modern and neglected, loved and abandoned, eclectic and philistine, small and grand. Today it carries the

shadow of the alienated, corporate, neoliberal, bureaucratically technocratic, it is filled with a false elite, penniless jet-set and, as ever, turbo-folk. On the other hand Belgradians are modern, contemporary and fashionable. Belgrade has a soul, a secret, being, and is metaphysical. Belgradians love to denounce their neighbors and colleagues, while ponderously waiting for their food share. Two centuries of Serbian striving for modernism have finished, now we are moving in the opposite direction. The Balkans are Balkanized. Belgrade has remained the capital of Serbia, and still has potential in the dialectical struggle between good and evil. I would say that even if the ex-Yugoslav community has left Belgrade, it is still attracted to the city. Yet this friendly, open city of Belgrade does not offer jobs or opportunities for young people, let alone homes and roofs over heads. At least thirty thousand highly educated young people continue to leave Serbia every year, like boat people, searching elsewhere for themselves and their lives, for a piece of land in the ocean and a little luck in this world. Sometimes I feel like the whole world is in a boat, *La nave di Pietra*. My city on the high (North) Sea is waiting for all of them. Mine, theirs, our house is roaming/floating. *How many of you are still here? Regroup!* (Rimtutituki).

The certainty of existence prevails over the uncertainty of the open sea. Joy lives where dignity exists and it turns out that it is possible to have joy even in the middle of the cold and remote North Sea. The vessels are driven by the wind and waves, by the energy of the sun, they are human powered, with patience and faith, through emotions and reason, in pursuit of the realization of inner ideals for a better experience and dignified living, as they are traveling defiantly through wastelands into uncertainty.

M. M.: Utopian projects are replaced with the projects of self-sustaining houses, buildings, and communities. Your City of Hope resists, persists and holds back. In the light of the sustainability paradigm, the new generation is driven by new ideas: to adapt, to maintain, and to remedy. From your perspective, what is self-sustaining?

Z. L.: In general, worlds fall apart. Naturally, they are unsustainable. *The City of Hope* is just an illusion, a desire for salvation and for redemption. My world is in decay too, and it is untenable as well. Slowly but surely, over time all people and all artifacts of life, hopes as well as illusions quietly disappear. That is quite normal and expected. Much like numerous other buildings, the Duomo di Milano still exists only because the next generations care for it, because they sustain it, leaving it nearly immortal as long as there is a need for it to be there, and there is a human hand to caress it. For a bog or a marsh it is much easier, it is simply self-sustaining, it is not temporary or short-term like sand castles.
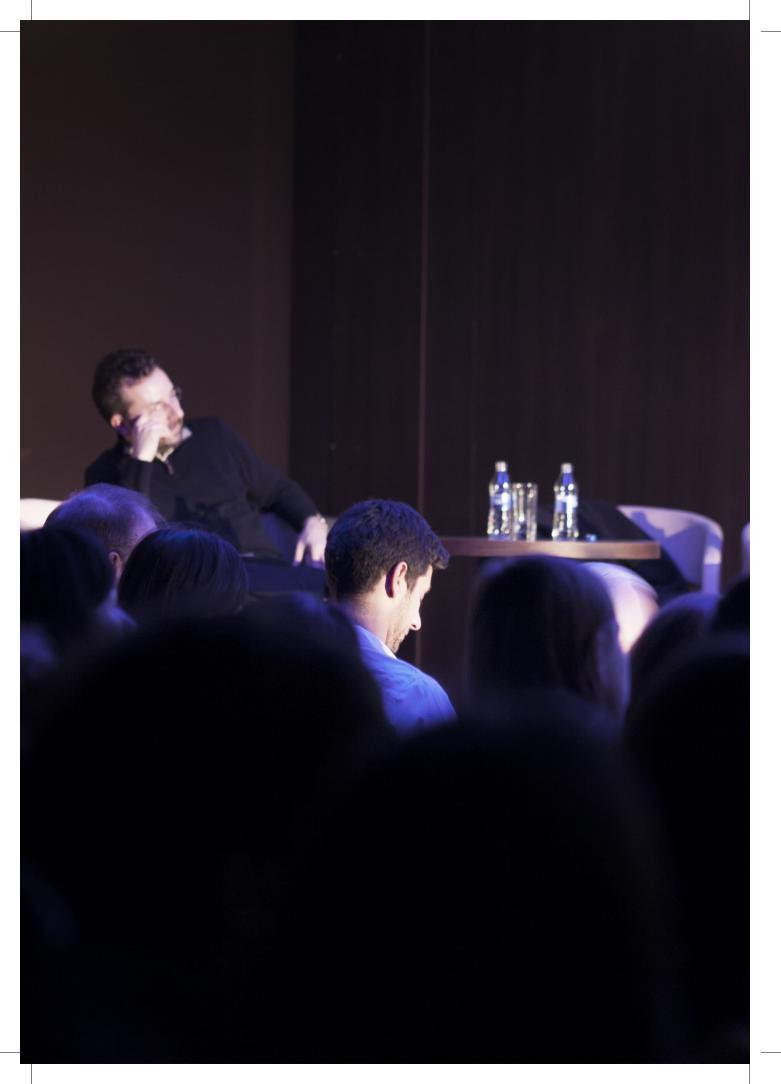
# Interview with Peter Eisenman|

Jeffrey Kipnis

Ohio State University -
Knowlton School of Architecture | USA
October 2012 | Belgrade

P e t e r   E i s e n m a n   | when the interview took place |
Prior to establishing a full-time architectural practice in 1980, Peter Eisenman worked as an independent architect, educator, and theorist. In 1967, he founded the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS), an international think tank for architecture in New York, and served as its director until 1982. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Science and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Among other awards, in 2001 he received the Medal of Honor from the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the Smithsonian Institution's 2001 Cooper-Hewitt National Design Award in Architecture. Currently the Charles Gwathmey Professor in Practice at the Yale School of Architecture, Peter Eisenman's academic career also includes teaching at Cambridge, Princeton, Harvard, and Ohio State universities. Previously he was the Irwin S. Chanin Distinguished Professor of Architecture at The Cooper Union, in New York City. He is also an author, whose most recent books include: *Written Into the Void: Selected Writings, 1990-2004* (Yale University Press, 2007) and *Ten Canonical Buildings, 1950-2000* (Rizzoli, 2008), which examines in depth buildings by ten different architects.

J. K.: I have three questions and then I am going to solicit some from the audience. Question number one is, how did you answer Colin Rowe? What did you see in Palladian villa that was not there?

P. E.: When I first answered Colin Rowe, I said, well, it is two, three stories, heavily rusticated, it has symmetrical openings, etc. He said, no, you can see all of those things. I did not understand how to see what was not there. What I began to see, especially in Palladian villas, was that the outboard windows in their bays were pushed to the edge of the facade. That edge created a void in the center of the space, which was unusual. It was, as it were, charged with non-presence. It was not traditional in villas to have this void in the center. And at the same time, moving the windows to the extreme of the facade, created what one would call instress, which you cannot see, along with non-presence. I began to learn how to see, as an architect, what Palladio was doing that made it, let us say, not only non-narrative, but textual, and things that you could not see.

J. K.: I was thinking the same thing myself. The second question I have for you is going to seem obscure to you, but it is important to us, and that is, have you ever read the Kabbalah?

P. E.: I do not know that I have read it in its full length, but I have read the Kabbalah. I never understood anything, but yes, I have read it.

J. K.: The third question I have for you speaks to something I think quite fortuitous or fortunate, and that is, you speak of the problem that is raised in the Purveyor of Truth, as Derrida's questioning of why the parent letter, which is hidden in full view, is the termination as a signifier. In fact he problematizes the relationship between the facsimile and the original letter as having any sense of what is a copy and what is the original, or which is the signifier and which is the signified. Earlier today, Mark Wigley said that whether it is true for every architect or not, there is a tradition in architecture that has guided the discipline, that, let us say, the house does not represent the family, but it represents the ideality of the family. That we expect architecture to produce the signification, not of the truth of its contents, but the ideality of its contents. Much like clothing should represent the ideality of the person.

P. E.: Assuming that the truth in this context is its housing the family or a happy family. I would disagree that this is its truth. To assume that this is the truth of the house is where you get into trouble.

J. K.: Then that poses two architectural possibilities: one is that architecture gives its pollyanna representation of a deeper ideal of truth; or we follow your suggestion from The Purloined Letter that architecture does not worry about representing truth, non-truth, ideality at all.

I take it you agree with me there. Given that, why is that a positive project for architecture?

P. E.: Just say, why is it a project for architecture.

J. K.: Why is that a project for architecture?

P. E.: Because any work: a house, a church, a building, a school, a mausoleum, has the necessity, if it is to, as it were, put forward its view of the quality of architecture. As literary qualities are important to defeat the narrative, because literary qualities stand outside of the narrative of, for example The Good Soldier, so do architectural qualities stand outside the base functioning of the work. I would argue that anybody interested in doing architecture must at all times consider what are the architectural implications for the discipline, for the culture of architecture, the precedence of architecture, the critique of architecture. Putting architecture into question is more important as a project for architecture than housing the happy family.

J. K.: You said earlier that the conflict between Lacan and Derrida would be easy to translate into architecture. You said that you could tell us the difference between a Lacanian architecture and a Derridian architecture.

P. E.: No, I did not say I would be able to do that. I said I am working on finding the difference between a Lacanian and Derridian view of their discipline, that is, the literary subject, and what its analogous relationship to architecture might be. This is an introduction to that project. I intend to continue to work on it, because I think it is an interesting argument.

J. K.: Do you have an intuition about the direction of your work?

P. E.: I think it will more confirm what I have always felt about the value of the Derridian project in architecture, as opposed to either Deleuzian or Lacanian.

J. K.: I have two questions from the audience. The first is, would you be able to speculate on what it would mean to do the Lacanian idea of objet petit a? Would that be a meaningful question for you in architecture?

P. E.: Could I speculate on how I would do that, in real project? Yes, I think I could.

J. K.: Could you do it right now?

P. E.: I could not do it right now.

J. K.: Get back to us on that. The other question is, in your process drawings there are many, many reverberations and states, and then eventually you pick one and you physicalize it. The question from the audience is how do you imagine the experience of the subject...

P. E.: But Jeff, I never imagine the experience of the subject. I am honestly uninterested, as was, I believe Jacques Derrida, and any other person who is concerned with their own project, how people receive that project.

J. K.: Does that mean, then, that you only have an intellectual sense of the consequence of your work, not an existential one?

P. E.: No, no. I am in a building right now, the DAAP [Design, Architecture, Art and Planning] Building in Cincinnati, which gives me an enormous amount of joy for its spatial feeling. That does not mean that somebody who does not have a similar sensibility to me appreciates it at all. I am absolutely interested in its existential qualities. What I worry about is the project of affect. You know that this is something that disturbs me quite a bit. I look around and I see that the project of affect becoming more and more dominant – which I would call the project of a kind of neo-positivism. That is a neo- interest in presence and phenomena. I would not want to say that my approach is intellectual, but it is conceptual.

J. K.: Would you say that when you are in your buildings, whether the Wexner Center, the DAAP, or even [City of Culture in] Santiago, that the architecture makes a compelling demand on your attention? That, essentially, the architecture is constantly asking whoever is there to pay attention to it, even close attention.

P. E.: Yes, I would agree with that.

J. K.: And do you think, for example, in a museum, where you are hoping to pay attention to works of art, or in a school, where you are hoping to pay attention to the professor, or in the institutions where architecture is expected to recede into the background, there is a justification for your demand on that level of attention.

P. E.: First of all, it is not my level of demand, it is architecture's level of demand. And there is so little architecture around that demands attention, that I would not worry about it as a problem. If you take the number of buildings at Ohio State University where you teach, Yale University where I teach, in Cincinnati, where I am – the number of buildings that demand attention is microscopic compared to all of the other clutter. Which also demands a different kind of attention, that is, visual clutter that is involved in our daily lives. I would not worry about your question. We need more of what we do.

J. K.: Before I say goodbye, let me tell you that in the most admiring and controversial way, your work and the work of Jacques Derrida has been a constant presence in our discussion today, I think it is really fantastic that you were at least able to talk to the audience. Let me say thank you very much for doing that.

P. E.: Thank you all.

# Interview with Chris Younès|

Marija Milinković & Dragana Ćorović

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

C h r i s   Y o u n è s |   when the interview took place |
Chris Younès, Philosopher, professor school of architecture (Paris la Villette and ESA), in charge of a postmaster "Architectures of milieus" and of an international scientific network the "PhilAU" which develops exchanges, researches and experimentations between Philosophy, Architecture and Urban, Head of laboratory Gerphau (Philosophy Architecture Urban)/UMR CNRS 7218 LAVUE. Last publications: *Habiter, le propre de l'humain* (dir. Thierry Paquot, Michel Lussault, Chris Younès), *La Découverte, 2007; Le territoire des philosophes* (dir. Thierry Paquot, Chris Younès), *La Découverte, 2009: Philosophie de l'environnement et milieux urbains* (dir. Thierry Paquot, Chris Younès), *La Découverte, 2010; Architecture des Milieux* (dir. Chris Younès, Benoît Goetz), *Le Portique, 2010; Espace et lieu dans la pensée occidentale. De Platon à Nietzsche* (dir. Thierry Paquot, Chris Younès), La Découverte, 2011.

C h r i s   Y o u n è s

Lecture:
A r c h i t e c t u r e   a n d   P h i l o s o p h y :   P a r a d o x e s   a n d
M e t a m o r p h o s e s   o f   T h e i r   M e e t i n g
27/10/2012

Abstract:
What happens between philosophy and architecture? We know that Jacques Derrida emphasized the idea of a "meeting" as an essential cohabitation. I will address in particular the metamorphoses of this meeting that, from architectonics and principles, becomes multiple and of another nature.
Daniel Payot (*Le philosophe et l'architecte*, 1982) explained how philosophy, from Aristotle to Kant has used architecture as a mirror of itself architectonically (Kant defined it as "the art of systems") in its capacity to refer back to a means of organizing knowledge, each in relation to the others. And architecture is reflected in philosophy, rediscovering the very essence of its foundations as set out by Vitruvius in terms of *firmitas*, *utilitas* and *venustas*. This first meeting can also be considered as a metaphorical game of mirrors in which each presents itself as prevailing over the other forms of knowledge – one as the science of theory, the other as a science of techniques.
This ordered and oriented posturing will collapse at the same time as the disappearance of a finite cosmos. In this dissolution, architecture and philosophy have recomposed themselves to deal with the space and time of inhabited milieus that affect not only the constitution of the gaze, but also a transformation of the world. Their meetings, have become pluralistic and multiple. I'll examine how their interface is a heuristic structure of questioning. The value of the coexistence of cultures among themselves and with nature raises even more questions, so that for the first time in the history of humanity neither architecture, nor the city can refer to an initial foundation. What about human settlements given that the models are in crisis and acutely pose the problem of the impact of ethical and political choices? How to interlace *logos*, *topos*, *aisthesis*, given the spatial-temporal experience implies a concrete manner to be somewhere in an opening and in rhythm? How to assume the double task of representing and giving body to a way of being in the world?

**M. M.:** At the very end of the conference you posed the general question of the relationship between philosophy and architecture. You describe the new nature of this relationship as multiple and pluralistic, and refer to Derrida's idea of meeting as essential cohabitation. Previously you explained the meetings of these two disciplines in terms of prevailing over one another, mirroring and seeking domination. In this new necessity of testing and transcending the limits of disciplinarity, how would you define good conditions for the productive and meaningful cohabitation?

**C. Y.:** We know that Jacques Derrida employed the idea of an essential cohabitation between philosophy and architecture, declaring "The College international de philosophie should provide the place for a meeting of thought between philosophy and architecture. Not in order to finally have them confront each other but to think what has always maintained them together in the most essential of cohabitations". In particular I put forward a hypothesis about the metamorphoses of this meeting that, from unicity of architectonics and principles, become multiple and of another nature. So there is a reevaluation in terms of limits and passages; in other words, in terms of opening up. The new meetings between architecture and philosophy share common ground, exploring resonances and connections between space and thought, space concepts and affects, ethics and aesthetics. Because, to finish with this question of distance, it's about the metaphor that was set by Hannah Arendt. She speaks about the table and explains that if you are too close, you can't speak, but if you are too far, you can't speak neither. You need some space between yourself and the *other*. It is exactly the same for disciplines, you need *in between*, *inter-esse*. A good distance is to be able to have your own language, but also to be able to interact. The difficulty is that you often have separated knowledge. You think it is just in schools of architecture, but it is the same at university in philosophy. The entire time teachers say: oh, the students are not putting knowledge together. That is true to me, that students should connect aspects of knowledge, but, at the same time, to connect that knowledge with colleagues, with disciplines, that is very important, too. So we have to find a *device* to connect things. This kind of conference today and yesterday, it is a way to connect disciplines, too, because everybody is together. There is always something to learn, even if you are teaching design, or history, or philosophy, photography, etc. In a way, everybody, students and teachers, are thought at the same time.

**M. M.:** You use the term *milieu* to explain the complexity and sensitivity of the contemporary environment. It was insightful for me to discover the etymology and multiple meanings of this French word: not only that it can refer to both a physical and social setting, but also the intrinsic logic of its common use. In Serbian it is mostly used in everyday life, meaning a special kind of tablecloth, made of fine white thread, the result of minute women's handwork; it signifies an aesthetic object, charged with very strong social connotations. What is your understanding of this term and how its multiple meanings reflect in your work?

**C. Y.:** The question of milieu wasn't something I was working on at the beginning. I was working on this connection between nature and culture, and we were thinking a lot about the question of context, environment, and so on. In fact, milieu, as used by ethology (Uexcüll), geography (Augustin Berque[1]), philosophy (Deleuze), appeared in my laboratory, and in my teaching, to think re-connections I had to put it in the key, to put the milieu in the milieu. As you have said, we have different layers, because of multiple questions of physical, social, technical conditions, and milieu includes all of them. It means something very strong about this. And I think it is a really big change in point of view when you take very seriously the fact that you are always in a relationship. Life is entirely a question of relationships. In architecture we often separate things and the theory of modernism was about separation. To speak about milieu as an art and as a condition of relationship of things – this is a way to speak about life, and also the possibility to have a good life: *not only to live, but to have a good life*.

I use milieu, the way it was used by Deleuze, to explain that you do not have something that begins, or something that is finished: you are always in the middle. It means you do not know what was before and what will be after, *you are always in the middle*. So it is a question also of time and it is a very ecological point of view. As explained by Canguilhem,[2] take a fish out of water, it will die. Similarly, take a human out of his milieu, it does not mean anything. In fact, we are always determined by our milieu, that is why I work a lot on this question. But we are not only passive, in our milieu, we are also active. I was born in a little village in France and I am very much the product of this milieu, but at the same time, all my life is a way to reinvent my milieu. You see, you have a kind of passivity, it means you have inclination, you cannot do anything about it. Language is an important way of defining a milieu. But, at the same

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1    Augustin Berque (1942), French geographer, philosopher and orientalist.

2    Georges Canguilhem (1904-1995), French philosopher and physician.

time, when you observe any kind of life, it is a way to deal with the milieu. If I was a spy, I would have a very specific milieu, if I was a dog, another milieu, as I am a woman, I have this kind of milieu, and I am a woman who is now not so young, so I have this kind of milieu, and it is not the same as when I was twenty years old. So this question of how we are influenced by the milieu is always present, as well as how we interact, how we build the milieu, how we modify, how we transform it and are transformed by it. It is to avoid having one place: in milieu, you have a lot of places inside, *mille milieus* and more. It means you have a complexity of milieus, you have to put the plurality. It is very important for me to avoid being stuck in only one way of thinking, because all societies, in a way, try to delimit the milieu, and make a chain out of the milieu. But if we take the milieu we have here, milieu at another place, and so on, at the end, we have a very, very big diversity of milieus for the same person. It is a very open concept, so it is also possible to work with. But, most important for me, milieu is a notion about always being in relation with things, about time, about space, about the different kind of technical, natural, physical and social conditions.

M. M.: My next question would be how this idea of complexity and plurality relates to critical discourse? We live in a so called post-critical era. In his lecture today, Bernard Tschumi said that he belongs to the last generation of critical architects. Already in the 1920s Walter Benjamin claimed that those who lament the death of critique are fools. For him, the time for critique was already over. How does this new relationship between thinking and doing, philosophy and architecture, deal with this issue of criticism? What is the role of critique today, is it dissolved in the plural, or it is just looking for new modes?

C. Y.: When I created this graduate course at *L'École Spéciale d'Architecture*, we called it Architecture of Milieu, it had a critical point of view. Not to accept to speak only about the question of scale, of big scale, of small scale, not to speak only about dimension when you speak about architecture, but to speak about relation. It was a critical point of view, because it was the idea that architecture, architecture of milieu, has to go through different milieus. And to have a proposal means, in a way, to have a very critical look at what is disconnected, otherwise it is not possible to have a proposal. For me, a good project is something very critical, because it means to think a situation. To have a proposal, it means to resist, it means a lot of resistance; not saying again I will do the same, but I want to develop a thinking, an idea, a concept, a vision, you could call it *a different way to go about the situation*. We are at the end of the critical. I think that we are human because we are able to say yes or no, to have a critical point of view. It is a part of ourselves, a part of education, otherwise

it would be very conditioned. Education is the way to be able to think and to have a critical point of view. But to be able to do this kind of architecture of milieu, it means to be able to think about the past and future, and also, to be able to understand what I am doing, what was different before, why I propose this, what is different in what I propose? It is not to be different, that is not the question, rather *is it appropriate*? So I think it is very interesting to think critically as a way to be creative. And Deleuze says, when he writes on cinema, you have to resist and to create, at the same time. It is a very critical point of view. To create is a way of being very critical. It is true that today we have a lot of connection with art because it is also a way to have a creative and critical point of view.

It is very important to be critical because we are in a moment of development of humanity and civilisation when we need to resist the very commercial, business obsession to make profit. To be critical means not to want to repeat this kind of development only. Because, what we see today is that we have much more knowledge, many people and countries are rich, we have many techniques, yet, at the same time, we can see a lot of poverty, poverty is going up, a lot of people have difficulty living, getting an education. The critical point of view is a very fundamental critique of a way to make society. So a big, big question today is how it is possible to share things, how it is possible to do better with less, how it is possible to do another way. So it means we have to imagine. To be critical means to have imagination, to work another way, an alternative way, otherwise how is it possible to be critical? With the graduate course Architecture of Milieu, we wanted to develop architecture that is able to connect things, to disconnect and reconnect things another way, which would be more empathetic with life, in a way, *to have more equity*. It is a big question about sustainability, equity is very important today, justice is a crucial question. It is not only a question of aesthetics today: to be critical is a very political, ethical issue. The question of justice is important, the possibility to share things, to have equity in things. So, the question of critical discourse is very crucial, but I would like to take it not only as an expertise about aesthetic, or history, culture, but about what kind of politics to use to make a society with more equity and more justice. The keyword is *justice and political thinking and acting*.

D. Ć.: In one of your essays you advocate searching for possible types of synergies between culture and nature as a new way of understanding our

altered attitude to the environment.[3] In that context you singled out as highly significant a connection between agriculture and the urban environment, in the context of crucial questions of fertile land, water and energy. Could you tell us your opinion on the subject of ecological urgency as a meeting point of architecture and philosophy?

**C. Y.:** Architecture and philosophy have the same problems. Philosophy is asking what is a city, what is a *polis*, what is a human settlement? Not only *what is it*, but also *what we want it to be*? The same question is posed by architects: they try to say what is a city, how it was developed through time and space and what they would like it to become. So, we have the same problem and we do not know now exactly what kind of question to ask for a better city. The synergy of nature and culture is a very essential point. What we know about the Brundtland report[4] is that it was only an analysis of what a certain modernity did, it was an analysis about pollution, destruction of water, destruction of air, destruction of soil. And although done with technology, it was not done because of technology, rather because of a lack of care, from a desire to consume, to dominate. It is very bad, because we know that we are all in danger. It is banal to say this, but it is really very dangerous for us, for our children. So today, we have to invent a new way, to find a kind of harmony. It is not a balance, it is not an equilibrium, it does not mean stopping things, but finding a way to regenerate water, to regenerate air, to regenerate soil, and to avoid destroying all of these. These elements are very important for us, so we have to work with this in architecture. Previously, this was not a prominent issue, and it is very interesting to see that this new generation want to do this. It is a new challenge, this kind of synergy. In a very short time, we destroyed a lot. We took a lot, but we did not give back to the milieu. So, the question is to be able to give back to the milieu what we take and, as Michel Serres[5] says: it is not enough to give back, *we must give back and give back plus*, because we took too much.

When I am in the jury for competitions, when I work on projects with colleagues, I am very much interested to see is if it possible for these projects to regenerate the milieu, do they help or not? The milieu is social, it is physical and it is mental, it is spiritual too. That is why I love this little book from Guattari,

3    Chris Younès (2010), "Perspectives in urban agriculture", website *The Agricultural Urbanism Lab (LUA)*: http://www.lua-paris.com/en/articles/all-articles/item/253-perspectives-dagricultures-urbaines

4    Bruntland Report, 1987.

5    Michel Serres (1930), French philosopher

*Les Trois Ecologies*:[6] it explains that ecology is always in connection with social, environmental and mental or spiritual questions. Eco-aesthetics and eco-ethics are the big issues for both architecture and philosophy. We have to talk, to try to question this together and to propose some possibilities. It is better if we discuss than if we do everything by ourselves, it is not good to be alone. It is very *political* to discuss, to debate: it is a way to be free, to be human. The power of university, since the beginning, was to produce research and discussion. When we work on a PhD, what it is? It is only a discussion about a hypothesis and its exploration in terms of producing knowledge.

D. Ć.: The concept of urban agriculture is re-conceptualised in the 20th century, within the practice and theory of urban planning after WWII, and also several decades later as an aspect of the sustainable development paradigm. You refer to the concept of urban agriculture as one of the solutions to the problem of the loss of agricultural land and food needs. Could you tell us something about this subject in the context of the relationship between culture and nature?

C. Y.: Regarding the question of urban agriculture, we have very different points of view if we are in very developed cities, very rich cities. And often, we must develop urban agriculture because we need *proximity*, we need to avoid pollution, and to have a better way to produce food. And, also, we have big problems today because of the question of poverty. We know we have to find a new way to live, to be healthy, to have a new relationship with food, but also, not to cause too much pollution to have it. If we want these life conditions to be fair and to have a sense of solidarity, we will need to modify the conditions of thought and action; invent new words, new concepts, to advance representations, practices. How can we, in all our different worlds agree? What place should we leave to diverse points of view and values? How can we regenerate and re-enchant our world? How does sustainability require new strategies, new ways of thinking and acting? It is very important to have vegetables, to be able to cultivate them by ourselves. It is not only a hobby, it is a necessity. It is interesting to see that for different reasons, in different cultures, urban agriculture becomes very central and not at all a very strange idea. It is a way to have connections other than health related with vegetables, with plants, with trees within the city. It is interesting to see that urban agriculture is a way to try to invent a new city where urbanity is possible, but at the same time, it is possible to have another way of living with others. It is a way to think, to have another imagination of the possible, to develop the city, not

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6    Félix Guattari (1989), *Les trois écologies, l'espace  critique* (*The three ecologies, the critical space*), Paris: Galilée.

only regarding traffic jams, but with gardens, with this kind of living. It is a big change, the idea that *we have to take care*. It is not the way of domination, it is not the way of progress, but to take care, and to find a good balance between the human and non human. This question of urban agriculture is a way to test if it is possible to take care and not destroy soil, not to consume too much and come up with another contact with products that you are going to eat, for children and for grownups.

**D. Ć.:** You've said that the keyword is justice. Do you think that the concept of urban agriculture could be helpful in achieving social justice in the city?

**C. Y.:** In a way, maybe. It will be a little bit difficult, but to think about urban agriculture, it is a way to think of another city where it is possible to take care of things much more, and also to give the possibility to many people to have access to good quality food, without causing too much pollution. It is very important to have another way of thinking and work in proximity.

**D. Ć.:** Do you think that urban agriculture could maybe destroy the nature of the city?

**C. Y.:** Oh, no. I think that it re-invents the nature of the city because the city is always developing. The city is a marvellous invention of humanity because it is the possibility of people being together. It helps establish people as political.  But today, we have to try to invent another way to make the city, and to avoid the big gaps between the wealthy, who have all the privileges, and the others who are always on the margins of the city. The city is marvellous, but the question is whether it is for everybody? In Paris for example, if your daily commute takes an hour and a half, it is terrible. You do not have time for your children, you do not have time for yourself, you do not have time for the people you love, you are a perpetual slave to transport. So, we have to invent another way to make a city. It does not destroy the city, it regenerates the city. We are looking for a way of regenerating things. It means to have a new birth: not to wipe the slate clean in the form of a *tabula rasa*, but to have an idea to do another way. Agriculture has always been in the city. Only rarely has it disappeared. People wanted to keep gardens when possible, but this vanished. Today, it is interesting to see how it is possible to have gardens in a different way, for anyone who wants one. This is one of the many ways to try to regenerate the city, not as an obligation, but as a possibility. There are possible choices in the quest for appropriate natural-artificial rhythms that constitute an aesthetic *oeuvre* and a critical ethics: establishing a living relationship between nature and culture, life and *tekne* by exploring different paths of regenerating synergies.

D. Ć.: In your texts, in the context of ecological urgency in an inhabited milieu, you mention certain specific forms of urban agriculture, i.e. vertical farms. We understand that you find the role of architects very important, so, what is that role in searching for these new forms in the city?

C. Y.: I do not have enough experience with vertical farms, I have only been involved in one discussion. I was invited by a group of architects from Paris who were working a lot on this issue, and they asked me to take part . That being said, I am a member of the scientific committee of Europan,[7] a competition for young architects, under forty (I guess forty means you are no longer young), and I found it interesting that last year they decided to focus on connection and re-connection. The conversations about agriculture and the urban were sort of re-connections, you see. For the next competition the theme is an adaptable city. It is interesting because it is not a question of functionalism, but it is about change, transformation. Because, to live, you need to constantly transform. The question of farm, for instance, is a hypothesis about transformation, but we have many more possibilities. Also it is a way to involve the broader population in the transformation of the city. I am sure that for this new competition a lot of teams are going to think about how to involve the population at large, there are many possible, inventive, diverse solutions, or diverse proposals. Most significantly for the adaptable city, or adaptable architecture, or adaptable philosophy, is *to cultivate the diversity and the connections*. And it is only by working on a very specific situation, with a given population that we can develop a very specific proposal. It is a way to avoid uniformity, and to be as humans have always been: to have such diversity of languages, such diversity of cities, such diversity of food. We want to live in diversity. It is precisely the question how to allow for diversity and multiplicity of possibilities.

D. Ć.: You talk about creating new cities that are going to be much more human and where sustainability is going to be a very important issue. How often do you have the chance to talk to your colleagues about that and to develop that idea.

C. Y.: Actually French schools of architecture rejected sustainability at first. For them it was something they could not accept, because it looked very technocratic, and like yet another way for companies to make money, so they

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7    Europan is an international NGO established in Paris in 1988 to promote cooperation in the field of architecture and urbanism across Europe through international architecture competitions followed by building projects, intended for the architects under 40 years of age. See http://www. europan-europe.com/e11/en/home/

rejected it. When I read the Bruntland Report, not a single word was about architecture, but it was very interesting to see that all these countries decided to make this statement. Today, however, it is different because the question of sustainability has become a necessity in competitions, a requirement. Architecture is not always sustainable, because we cause incredible pollution and inequity: we are in danger, really, when it comes to water, the atmosphere, everything really. It is not enough to say we were always sustainable. We have to face a very big change: we must examine our way of thinking, our way of dealing with architecture and with philosophy, too. When I began my work on nature, my friends asked me: but what do you do with nature? It is very fashionable today to speak about nature. I do not know how long it will stay that way, but it is very fashionable. My hypothesis is that architecture used to only be interested in what was man made. It also used to disregard other cultures. Today it is different: now we know that nature is precious, too. This big change is very interesting because architects did not want to speak about this and yet because of disasters, they have changed. The question becomes extremely important and a new generation has been very creative in this sense. A lot of people are changing their minds, they want to participate. New ecology, sustainability, we have to invent it and to make it sexy, attractive and creative. As I have said before, to be critical is to be creative.

M. M.: It seems that art has the role of complicating these transfers from concepts to reality. The relationship then is not so immediate, it throws up questions, looks at the possibilities.

C. Y.: Absolutely, exactly. That is why Derrida is so wonderful when he speaks about the question of limits: it is not to simplify the limits, but to complicate them. I liked your question because, to complicate means also to be more complex, more creative, to be able to do something with it, not only to abstract. It is something much more mysterious, in a way. It is like when you meet a friend or you are in love, it is something very mysterious, it is not simple. It is not possible to say I want this, this and this from a person. No, you do not know. This person is wonderful, I do not like this and this, but that is not a problem, because the person is wonderful. It means to complicate things, it is not to make things so easy, so clear, so simple. I am very happy to see that young architects now want to do something else, to be careful, to be empathetic with beings. I hope that this will give us a chance for something, and I do not think that this hope is utopian. Deconstruction is interesting, but in a way, it is something which is becoming. What I regret about this conference is that we did not speak enough about what is becoming.

**M. M.:** Does that mean that deconstructivism, as it appeared in this conference, might be an important contemporary point of reference? Do you see it as something worth re-examining or criticising currently?

**C. Y.:** Absolutely. This movement helped me a lot in my development, because it was very interesting, with many important philosophers. But I would not like to call my graduate course Architecture of Deconstruction, because students wouldn't come if I proposed a course on this. I have called it Architecture of Milieu and some people are interested, because it poses questions. So we have to use deconstruction, but in order to build something else and to face ecological issues.

**M. M.:** Don't you think that there was something strange in speaking about deconstruction here, in Belgrade, thirty years after the exhibition, together with some of its most important proponents? Mark Wigley, for example, said that all this time he did not even mention Derrida. How do you understand the purpose of this being brought up again?

**C. Y.:** Yes, I was surprised when he said that he had *turned the page*. I loved his lecture. For me it was really interesting to see how deconstruction was working inside itself. I think it was a very good message, it was the way to say to students that they have to know this, but also to invent something else. Because we need them to invent, to imagine.

# Interview with Bernard Tschumi|

Vladimir Milenković,
Tatjana Stratimirović & Milan Djurić

University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture
October 2012 | Belgrade

B e r n a r d   T s c h u m i |   when the interview took place |
Bernard Tschumi is an architect based in New York and Paris. First known as a theorist, he exhibited and published *The Manhattan Transcripts* (1981) and wrote *Architecture and Disjunction*, a series of theoretical essays (MIT Press, 1994).  In 1983, he won the prestigious competition to design and build the Parc de la Villette, in Paris.  Since then, he has made a reputation for groundbreaking designs that include the New Acropolis Museum, Le Fresnoy Center for the Contemporary Arts, and the Vacheron-Constantin Corporate Headquarters, among other projects. Tschumi's work has been widely exhibited, with solo exhibitions at The Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Venice Biennale.  He served as Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation at Columbia University in New York from 1988 to 2003. The New Acropolis Museum has been widely acclaimed, receiving awards from the American Institute of Architects, the French Ministry of Culture, and was one of six finalists for the Mies van der Rohe 2011 European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture.

B e r n a r d  T s c h u m i

Lecture:
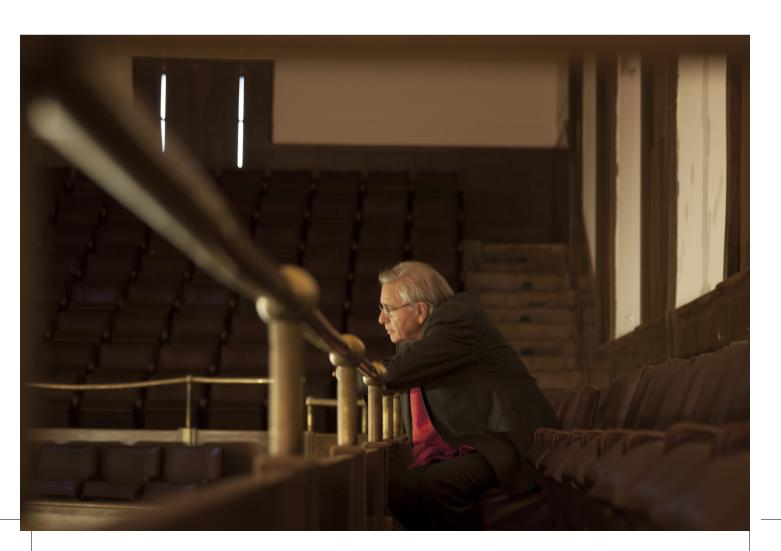D e r r i d a a r c h i t e c t u r e
26/10/2012

Abstract:
"Why are architects interested in deconstruction when deconstruction is anti-form, anti-structure, and anti-hierarchy?" Derrida once asked Bernard Tschumi, who responded: "Precisely for this reason." In his talk, Tschumi discusses the paradoxical and difficult relation between concepts and architecture and asks whether deconstructivism ever had much to do with deconstruction.

Lecture:
C o n c e p t ,  P e r c e p t ,  A f f e c t
27/10/2012

Abstract:
Bernard Tschumi will discuss his latest book, *Architecture Concepts: Red is not a Color*, in relation to selected examples of work done between 1976 and 2012, including the Manhattan Transcripts, the Parc de la Villette in Paris, the two Zénith Concert Halls in Rouen and Limoges, the Acropolis Museum in Athens, and the Alésia MuséoParc that opened this year in Alise-Sainte-Reine, France.

This short, 15 minute interview took place in the car, during the ride to *Nikola Tesla* Airport, after *AoD Conference* in Belgrade. Mr. Tschumi had just given the final lecture entitled *Concept, Percept, Affect* at the main Hall of Ilija M. Kolarac Foundation. The soundtrack to the film *This Must Be the Place* was playing in the car, and it was the end of an intense architectural episode that unfolded, Belgrade style, in the last 48 hours. It was late Saturday afternoon, the highway was unexpectedly desolate, and October rain was hanging in the air.

**V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.:** Did you know that Belgrade is one of the oldest continuously inhabited capitals of Europe, following Athens and Rome? With this in mind, and the distance to the airport, would you say that Athens and the New Museum of Acropolis appear repeatable? Are "genuine" architectural moments actually just a unique set of circumstances?

**B. T.:** There are, sometimes in architecture, some circumstances that may suggest that one building is a prototype for a building somewhere else. But this is certainly not the case with the New Acropolis Museum, which, I believe, was very much born out of a unique set of circumstances and a unique context – namely, the proximity of the Parthenon, the existence of the archeological ruins, and the need to house sculptures that originated from the Parthenon itself. This is what led to the architectural concept of the Museum, this tripartite organization whereby the top glass rectangle addresses the Parthenon, the bottom base addresses the archeological reminiscence, and the middle part addresses the general sculpture collection. However, it is clear that every city has very much a history, and the older the city is, more often, the more interesting this city can be. So, I would not be surprised if Belgrade had comparable circumstances to the ones that were found in Athens, but under no circumstances could that building be repeated.

**V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.:** Back in the '70s and '80s, the way you focused on architectural programs, pointing to the uncertainty of an event, initiated a revolution. Could we call that an ideology of the time, an architectural ideology within architecture? Can you comment on architectural ideology, methodologically, today? Is it the same or is there any difference?

**B. T.:** I want to start with making a very clear distinction between an idea, a position and an ideology. I'm interested in ideas, I'm interested in positions, I'm not interested in ideologies. Let me explain. Ideologies generally take for granted certain preconceived notions that are applicable to any type of circumstance. The history of architecture, the history of modernism, the history

of postmodernism has often been a history of preconceived ideas that were applied without thinking about the political, social or economic circumstances. To me, it is really important that the architect takes every problem afresh and looks at what architecture can do for that particular problem, or for that particular question. In that respect, I would say that the first thing an architect does is to ask a question, or define what a problem is, and than try to invent a concept that responds to that question, to that problem. It's not a preconceived ideology, but it's a response to a given problem.

V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.: There is something that makes the building of the Museum unsuspectingly comprehensible. Your decision to make visible "only" rows of columns, statues and people seems clear. What is sufficient for an architect and what is enough for architecture? When does sufficient become enough? How would you define the lasting of a certain concept?

B. T.: It all depends. I'm interested in taking complex problems, and trying to give them, through architecture, a clarity that addresses both architecture issues, and the very reason why the architect was required in the first place. Namely, if you take the Museum in Athens, it was a complex problem, you had to deal with many variables; they were urban, they were historical, they were political, and they were even technical. To try to give clarity to an answer that does not hide that complexity, but reveals it, is what interests me. However, this was my answer. There are other possible answers, and it is always a matter of reading, of interpretation. Architects have one great chance and force, and I could even say power, to reveal, through the architecture, certain conditions in society today. And it is also our responsibility to do it honestly, but there's never only one answer, one interpretation.

V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.: Another striking architectural situation, on many levels, that you have exposed in your essays, is a position of dissatisfaction, especially when it comes to the relation of a concept and its materialization, the position of the architect. How do you feel about this today?

B. T.: My position has not changed so much over the years, rather it has been informed by the experience of practice. It is clear to me today that I do not use a given material in the same way, if it is concrete, or steel, or wood; each of them enters a dialogue with the architectural concept itself. In the early days, I used fewer materials. La Villette, there were almost only two materials: artificial and natural. But they were used conceptually; they were used as if in constant dialogue with one another. Today, the dialogue continues, but I

became extremely interested in exploring a larger range of architectural materials; that's what explains why the auditorium in Rouen is opposing steel and concrete, while the auditorium in Limoges is opposing polycarbonate and wood.
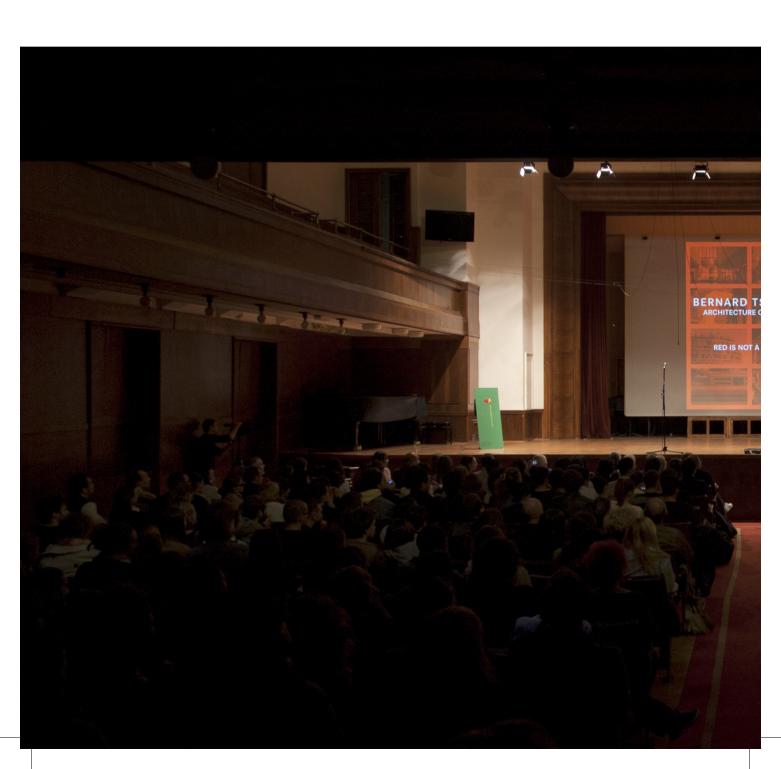
**V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.:** In dusk, in the time of the "magic hour", reflections are overlapping on the glass screen of the hall in which the Parthenon frieze is displayed, enabling the real to merge with the illusive. Are there unexpected phenomena in architecture? Do you allow yourself to be surprised even in your own projects? Do you make a difference between the real and the actual? Where does virtual exist?

**B. T.:** I will quote Mike Davis, a writer, who once made the distinction between the *real fake* and the *fake real*. He said that Santa Fe was fake real, while Las Vegas was real fake.

**V. M., T. S. & M. Dj.:** What would you say, where does meaning in architecture hide?

(A quick glance at the wristwatch.)

**B. T.:** Not enough time.

http://www.displacingarchitecture.rs/ |

all material from the conference
**Architecture of Deconstruction**
The Specter of Jacques Derrida