



Session 3
Modernism and Research
Moderator: Professor Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Thomas Herzog, Ecological Architect: the European Charter for Solar Energy in Architecture and Urban Planning and the Principles of Modern Architecture

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Introduction

In 1993, the German Society of Architects awarded their highest honor—the Gold Medal—to Thomas Herzog in recognition of his work as a “solar architect”¹. He is a teacher, researcher and practitioner. His work is innovative yet humane and highly expressive of structure, materials, and the interactions between the building and the natural systems and processes of the site. Throughout his career he has developed new materials and technologies that make possible the creation of increasingly energy and resource-efficient buildings. In promoting the development of ecological architecture, Thomas Herzog is a leader in Europe and is increasingly recognized internationally for his work in this arena. This paper examines the work of Thomas Herzog, and by extension the realm of ecological architecture in the context of the modern architectural tradition.

In 1996 the book *Solar Energy in Architecture and Urban Planning*, edited by Thomas Herzog, was published. Written for an international audience, the central theme is developed around the “European Charter for Solar Energy in Architecture and Urban Planning”, a statement of the principles of solar architecture drafted by Herzog² and signed by a thirty leading European architects including practitioners such as Erskine, Foster, Hertzberger and Piano. Directed at planners and architects, the Charter states:

The aim of our work in the future must, therefore, be to design buildings and urban spaces in such a way that natural resources will be conserved and renewable forms of energy - especially solar energy - will be used as extensively as possible, thus avoiding many of these undesirable developments [the side-effects of rapid depletion of non-renewable resources].³

The directives to architects and planners outlined in the charter and elaborated upon in the text of the book are summarized as follows:

- To design projects based on a holistic understanding of the complexities of materials and energy flows throughout the city, building and building components. This task makes clear the importance of understanding the increasing body of information on new systems and technologies and the need to rethink the way architects and engineers are educated.
- To assess the resources available at each project site, particularly the potential for using solar, wind and geothermal heat sources. This information should be reflected in siting, organization and building form and should not exclude existing conventions and cultural patterns.
- To achieve a design that uses the minimal amount of energy required to construct and operate the building, considering the importance of balancing energy flows and life cycle costs.
- To develop buildings that optimize the use of sustainable energy sources and are permanent systems that are flexible over a long period of time.
- To establish a symbiotic relationship between the city and nature, maximizing the use of appropriate energy sources and transportation systems as well as the natural systems of waterways, wind and sun and integrating these within the building fabric.⁴

Not unlike the manifestos developed by early modernists to promote their ideals, Herzog seeks to provide a leadership role in setting the theoretical direction for the

work of the next generation of architects. It is interesting to compare both the theoretical aspects and built projects of this new ecological architecture with that of the early modernists. For the purposes of this paper, the broad view of the modern movement provided by William J.R. Curtis in *Modern Architecture Since 1900* serves as a point of departure. Key to Curtis' point-of-view is that there has been a wide variety of architecture developed in the Twentieth Century that embodies modern principles, although architects who are seeking to define specific agendas and generate appropriate formal solutions have frequently developed the work. Curtis acknowledges the wide variety of approaches⁵ but places them in the context of a set of visions and aspirations that are commonly held among these modern practitioners. He describes this modern vision as an architecture that is:

- based on new means of construction
- disciplined by function
- free of the paraphernalia of historical references
- evocative of meanings that are consistent with the modern experience
- expressive of a morality that is supportive of human betterment
- composed of elements that both work together as a machine and are capable of being broadly applied⁶

Modernism and Climate Responsive Architecture

Concerns with energy efficiency and the ecology of building systems were not explicitly addressed in the writings of modern theorists. One can read between the lines of the principles in view of contemporary concerns about energy and environmental quality and imagine that a solar agenda would clearly fit within the vision. In fact, a strand of thought that might be identified as "solar" or "climate-responsive" design is intertwined with some of the work of the early modernists. Among those well-known "Modernists" identified as having an interest in issues of climate-based design are Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto and Walter Gropius.⁷

Thermal Control

In *Towards A New Architecture*, Le Corbusier describes the machine age architectural solution that would allow the same house to be built anywhere⁸. He believed that the 'respiration exacte' system of glazing - a double-skin

for heating and ventilation - would make this possible. He learned, however, that the system did not work as anticipated.⁹ In the Cite de Refuge in Paris (1929-33), a building that exemplified his formal solutions, including the use strip windows, created interior spaces that were nearly uninhabitable due to overheating. In recognition of this problem he began to explore the patterns generated by the sun, the vernacular forms of hot climates and the earlier work of Stamos Papadaki¹⁰ to develop the brise-soleil. This sun tempering device was interpreted based on his evolving set of modernist principles and was later architecturally integrated with his work at Unite de Habitation, in India and Africa. It was also used as a retrofit solution at the Cite de Refuge.

Daylighting

Alvar Aalto, clearly pioneered the use of daylighting in his libraries and also dealt with the restorative benefits of sunlight and daylighting at the Paimio Sanatorium in Finland (1929-33). His careful attention to issues of site design is also indicative of his concern for what we might refer to today as an "environmentally friendly" site response. The sanatorium was narrow in profile allowing sunlight to penetrate deep into the spaces, included an innovative window design that would heat the fresh air as it entered the living spaces (this was not particularly effective and the windows have since been removed), there are balconies for patients and employees and furniture is organized to optimize the access of patients to fresh air and sunlight.

City Planning

Walter Gropius explored solar issues in the context of large housing projects. At the Siemenstadt apartment complex of 1929 (near Berlin), each unit was only two rooms deep with an east facing bedroom and west facing living space/balcony allowing morning and evening light to penetrate the spaces. The linear, four-story north-south oriented buildings were also sited so that they did not block solar access to other buildings. Known as the Zeilenbau plan, it was enthusiastically received by critics such as Lewis Mumford¹¹, yet it was later recognized that a south orientation would have been more effective for taking advantage of the thermal potential of the sun.

Organic Architecture

Throughout his career Frank Lloyd Wright espoused the principles of organic architecture; however, according to Scully, this tended to be metaphorical rather than

biological¹² interpretation of the idea. It was not until the Second Jacobs House (1947) that he designed an earth-sheltered house with a specifically solar agenda. Described as a solar hemisphere, the form and site orientation were derived from the path of the sun, south-facing glazing and the use of mass to collect and store solar energy, and the use of earth to shelter and insulate the structure were key in developing the design concept.

Thomas Herzog

It is within the context of the principles and projects described above that we need to examine the built work of Thomas Herzog. Herzog was born in 1941 and has lived much of his life in Munich. He describes a childhood passion for biology and a long-time interest in and facility with metalwork (as an art). These, he claims, are essential attributes to the work he has developed during his years of research and practice.

From that time [childhood] I have always enjoyed working with my hands and I have always been fascinated with the inner functional logic of nature. All natural organisms have this logic, but it has to be discovered. The limitation of early Modern design styles like Art Nouveau and Jugendstil is that they only copied the forms of nature; they never explored its function.¹³

He received his Diploma in Architecture in 1965 from the Technical University of Munich and it can be assumed that his education included a careful examination of the work of the modernists as well as a strong technical base. He completed his doctorate at the University of Rome where his dissertation, later edited as a book, involved the architectural applications of Pneumatic Structures. He also co-authored with Julius Natterer a text on wood frame construction during that period.

At the time Herzog was a student, the oil crisis of the early 1970s provided the incentive to pull together the strands of previous work in the area of solar architecture, and redouble efforts to develop new solar architectural solutions. The architecture of this period was experimental and driven solely by energy performance criteria. The early buildings were considered by many architectural critics to be without merit. Criticism ranged from addressing the ugliness or ungainliness of form to the difficulty of fitting these buildings into an urban architectural context. In fact, many of the early buildings did not perform well either.

Not coincidentally, it was at this time that Thomas Herzog began his professional career. His work breaks the early stereotype, fitting within the framework of early Modernist principles, yet responsive to the directives of the Solar Energy Charter. Herzog eschews labels; however in a 1993 interview, he reluctantly agreed upon the name "ecological architect".¹⁴ In this conversation he made it clear that he did not wish to be called a "solar architect" in view of the negative image associated with that term and the early experimental work of the 1970s. In fact he stated, "the problem with solar architecture is solar architects"¹⁵

Herzog and Modernism

Herzog believes in a multi-disciplinary approach to design, teaching, and research. Since completing his formal education he has established an exemplary practice, collaborated on the development of several new materials for construction and served as an advisor to numerous doctoral students. In this, his path has not been unlike that of the well-known German modernist architects who established the Werkbund and later the Bauhaus. In a 1993 interview, Herzog stated that

We have to accept that we need help. Since 1981 I have worked hand in hand with the Freiburg Institute of Energy Research because no architect can ever master all the forces at work on solar buildings. The architect is in many respects an amateur, but he is not alone. The expert on temperature effects will not understand the biological implications of his results . . . The right side will behave differently to the left and so on. Ecological architecture, if that is what we call it, is a vast and complicated collaborative scientific and creative endeavor. We have not begun to master it yet.¹⁶

Like the modernists, Herzog is concerned with developing a strong architectural vocabulary based on the premise that the construction materials and elements be efficient in form and production method. Herzog is known for working with representatives of academia and industry to develop new "high tech" construction materials and systems, as well as re-engineering older systems.

An early demonstration project done by Herzog in collaboration with the Fraunhofer Energy Institute in Freiburg and SET of Luxembourg provides an example of a highly efficient house and studio, and utilizes

technologies pioneered by Herzog. In this project, Herzog and his collaborators developed, over a period of time, a translucent, insulating panel. The aerogel panel system provides insulation while admitting light through the wall. This highly energy efficient cladding system resulted in a rationally designed house that was solar without looking solar.

Another of the cladding systems developed by Herzog is a lightweight, ventilated tile wall panel system that works well in both warm and cold climates. The air plenum behind the mass-produced cladding system provides a rainshield, and the tiles can be manufactured in various colors and finishes. The size and range of color and texture make for a potentially highly articulated system that could work well in the urban context of many cities.

Herzog also continues to explore the possibilities of working with highly efficient steel structural systems in combination with wood, which is a renewable resource. We see this in the development of his larger scale work in Hannover, from the Production Halls and Central Energy Plant for Wilkahn, to Hall 26 and the Deutsche Messe AG Administration Building.

At the Wilkahn Furniture Factory, the laminated timber and tension-braced steel structural system suspends three wide manufacturing bays between four narrow bays that house administrative functions. The simple and efficient structure is clad with clear glazing, translucent panels and wood cladding in a composition expressive of structure and function and at the same time classical in composition. Daylighting of all spaces is emphasized and the organization of the bays provides for natural cross-ventilation. An amorphous silicon photovoltaic system is integrated with the sloping glass roof at the structural towers.

As a part of the redevelopment on the Trade Fair site at Hannover, Herzog extended these ideas in the design of a long-span exposition hall, and a 20-story high rise. Both projects have very efficient structural systems, take advantage of passive strategies for improving the performance of heating, cooling and lighting, and make strong modern architectural statements.

The premise that the building works as an ecosystem is a reinterpretation of the idea of the building as machine for living. In most of his projects, the machine becomes an expressive element as well as providing the underlying order of the building. Herzog is also concerned about the human occupants of his buildings. Unlike many of

his predecessors, the answer is not in creating a strictly technological response, but also to address the wider range of site, social and cultural issues. In this way, he shares some characteristics with Aalto.

What we are working on is a new material culture that must be fitted into an old material culture. We love new technology and new materials but we also love our old towns and cities. In no way am I prepared to abandon our whole cultural heritage just to pick up a few watts of free energy from the outside world.¹⁷

At the Windberg Youth Training Center, Herzog is skillful in fitting the new structure with the existing monastery. His choice of form, colors, and materials complement existing buildings, and the choice of site creates an outdoor space in keeping with the existing scale and organization. Although this goes against the maxim that modern architecture should be free of historical and cultural references, it is clear in the work of modernists such as Aalto and the later work of Le Corbusier that these historical ideas have some validity in developing a new architectural vocabulary.

In addition, the building is designed to educate the users in solar technologies and energy conservation through their experience of living there. The building is a clearly organized residence hall, but at the same time is expressive of passive and active mechanical systems. The massing of the building is also expressive of the structure, and the organization makes visible the function of the passive systems related to structure, enclosure and interiors.

Herzog's buildings reportedly provide spaces that work well for the client and others who experience the building. It is interesting, though not unexpected, that the periodicals and publications that document his buildings provide few photographs of interior spaces and do not discuss the user response to and experience of the building. Based on Herzog's own statements regarding the importance of creating humane spaces, this would be an important factor to evaluate; however, the shortage of references makes this impossible to address within the context of this paper.

Finally, the idea that the built ecosystem may be expressed in the building form and methods of construction might also be construed as expressing a higher moral purpose. In his book, *Solar Energy in Architecture and Urban Planning*, he also provides a

catalog of projects of his own and others that exemplify ecological architecture and provide examples of solutions that address the concerns stated in the Charter. Again, like the modernists, particularly as the movement evolved, it is evident that there are a range of possible formal solutions to a common set of design goals and objectives.

Conclusions

Herzog's earliest buildings looked 'solar'. The long, angled south-facing glazed walls in the carefully designed and crafted structures also relied on strong geometric forms and efficient structural systems. As his work developed the building form seems to have become more expressive of the materials and techniques of construction. This is a strategy that may help make solar buildings much more acceptable to the mass consumer - typically someone who does not want to be too different than his or her neighbor.

Herzog's body of built work to date is somewhat small in comparison with many better-known architects currently in practice (including signatories of the Charter), but this has not kept him from being recognized for his innovative and exemplary practice. Whereas the work of many creative architectural theorists has not lived up to the power of their words and ideas, Thomas Herzog brings a strong design sense to his work. Schooled in the work of the early modernists, his buildings are expressive of structure and function (ecological as well as typological) with close attention to formal organization of plan and facade.

The projects, research and writings of Thomas Herzog clearly are modernist in origin and inspiration. Like the early proponents of the movement, he, too is compelled to stretch the limits of tradition (even the modernist tradition) and to take a leadership role in "opening the eyes" of the practitioners of today and tomorrow.

Notes:

- 1 Thomas Herzog. "Pioneer of the Sun" (Interview), *World Architecture, No. 27*. (1993): 22.
- 2 The text of the Charter was developed by Thomas Herzog in 1994-94 as a part of the Renewable Energies in Architecture and Design (READ) project and supported by the European Commission DG XII.
- 3 Thomas Herzog, ed. *Solar Energy in Architecture and Urban Planning*, (Munich/ New York: Prestel, 1996): 3.
- 4 Ibid. pp 4-6.
- 5 Architects have explored these principles under the self-described names of Purism, Rationalism, Constructivism, Expressionism, de Stijl, and Bauhaus. Critics and historians have added labels such as The International Style, Modern Regionalism, New Brutalism, Romantic Modernism, and High Tech to describe work that has emerged later this Century.
- 6 William J.R. Curtis. *Modern Architecture Since 1900, 3rd Edition*. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1996): 11-12.
- 7 Donald Watson for Society of Building Science Educators Jury (Ralph Knowles, Jeff Cook and John Reynolds), documented via e-mail correspondence related to contest to identify the first modern solar architect to practice after 1910. May-July, 1997.
- 8 William J.R. Curtis. *Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms*. (London: Phaidon Press 1986): 116.
- 9 Ibid. p. 116.
- 10 Donald Watson for Society of Building Science Educators, e-mail June 17, 1997.
- 11 Ken Butti and John Perlin, *A Golden Thread*. Cheshire Books, producer. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1980): 168
- 12 Donald Watson for Society of Building Science Educators, e-mail June 17, 1997.
- 13 Thomas Herzog. "Pioneer of the Sun" (Interview) *World Architecture, No.27*. (1993): 23.
- 14 Ibid. p. 23.
- 15 Ibid. p. 23.
- 16 Ibid. p. 23.
- 17 Ibid. p. 23.

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Ironic Blur: Towards a Modernism of Distortion

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Weak Blur

In the software Photoshop, in the toolbar under filter you will find blur. As you scroll down, more variations of blur occur, including Gaussian Blur, Motion Blur, Radial Blur, and even Smart Blur. Blur has become part of our common visual vocabulary and this has been extended more recently into the form of a building at the 2002 Swiss EXPO, namely the Blur Pavilion found on Lake Neuchatel. The architects responsible for this work are the New York studio of Diller+Scofidio. They will form the focus of my inquiry into the notions of irony, blurring and distortion with diversions into the work of the Marcel Duchamp and the contemporary German artist Gerhard Richter. As philosophical backup, the writings of Heidegger, Benjamin and Vattimo will illuminate my meanderings into Diller+Scofidio's modernist underpinnings, however weak they turn out to be. The blur filter, in the context of this paper, can be seen as a subversive tool—an antidote to question and dismantle our image driven culture with its high-definition, high-resolution, high-speed capabilities and its pre-occupations with transparency and positivistic tendencies.

Through a Distortive Lens – 1936

As a point of departure for establishing a theoretical modernist perspective, 1936 seems to be an important year. At that time two articles of seminal importance for the modern era were published. Martin Heidegger's "*The Origin of a Work of Art*" and Walter Benjamin's "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*" set the ground for our notions of what it means to be modern in their recognition of mass media's ability to modify the essence of art and by extension—its perception. Heidegger's *stoss* highlighted anxiety—a particularly modern emotion triggered by the modern human being's confrontation with his insignificance in the contemporary world. Heidegger's notion of *stoss* suspended the familiar

in favour of a stimulated 'preoccupied wonder' that revealed the 'real' world as a fable. Traditional notions of aesthetic experience founded on the eternal ideas of proportion and stability gave way to indeterminate ones. The purpose of art was redefined as a constant founding and un-founding of the world. In this state of oscillation/disorientation the true work of art was realized as an inexhaustible unfolding.

Benjamin's experience of shock was more pedestrian and familiar. As well, compared to Heidegger, his view of technology was more positive. It focused on the rapid succession of the image—analogue to a driver in traffic or a pedestrian in the midst of the metropolis. The modern man is confronted with a constant onslaught of stimuli that demands reaction. In Benjamin's eyes, film is the art that is in keeping with the increased threat to life. Art in Benjamin's sense is essentially precarious, demanding the metropolitan's man nervous and intellectual hypersensitivity. Art and by extension architecture was no longer a work to be observed but an experience that demanded engagement.

Heidegger and Benjamin's ideas continue to influence our philosophical and artistic milieus through such present day theoreticians as Gianni Vattimo, who was born in 1936. He is one of Italy's foremost contemporary philosophers who teaches at the University of Turin. He



Diller + Scofidio, Blur Pavilion, Swiss EXPO, 2002

work re-examines the roots of modernism and post-modernism in Nietzsche, Benjamin and Heidegger. His position rejects the possibility of stable foundations for knowledge – arriving at the concept of weak or postfoundationalist thought. As Vattimo states:

“The advent of the mass media enhances the inconstancy and superficiality of experience. In so doing, it runs counter to the generalization of domination...it allows a kind of ‘weakening’ of the very notion of reality...it presents itself as softer and more fluid, and in which experience can again acquire the characteristics of oscillation, disorientation and play.”¹

From Vattimo’s stance the rationalization of the world turns against reason the more it is perfectly accomplished. Reason has gone astray because it has chosen scientific, objectifying, metrical reason as its model. He replaces a sense of positivistic progress with a post-apocalyptic, counter-utopian world:

“...in the idea that the whole is false precisely to the extent that it is realized there lies a new philosophy of history in embryonic form. This would be characterized by the replacement of the linear and the cyclic models with one that could only be defined as ironic and distortive...(that is) ironic-hermeneutico-distortive.”²

With these shaky modernist and post-modern foundations firmly in place, the work of Diller+Scofidio provides a means of illuminating these ironic and distortive tendencies. The philosophical voices of Heidegger, Benjamin and Vattimo reverberating like a distant echo in the abyss of a truly modern world.

Parasites, Indigestion and Jetlag: A Modernist Perspective

Diller+Scofidio is a collaborative studio that blurs the boundaries of a typical architectural practice. Their cross-disciplinary projects incorporate architecture, theatre, art installation and exhibition design. Their works frame the familiar world that surrounds us in a different way. Various modes of distortion are at work in their projects, which include: the MOMA installation *Para-Sites* (1989), the snail like *Slow House* (1992), the CCA exhibition *The American Lawn: The Surface of the Everyday* (1998), the theatre piece, *Jet Lag* (2001), their Seagram Building

intervention, *The Brasserie* (2001), the afore-mentioned artificial cloud in Switzerland entitled *Blur Pavilion* (2002) and a recently won competition to build a digital museum/laboratory for *Eyebeam* in New York.

Literary Flesh: A Mooning D+S

As a primary point of departure Diller+Scofidio’s work starts from the notion of flesh. In their eyes, flesh is a primary interface. It is the outermost surface of the body ‘bordering all relations to space’.³ Their anti-monograph entitled *Flesh, Architectural Probes*, published in 1994, is bounded by an image of the(ir) buttocks embossed with the word ‘flesh’. The gender of the model appears to change from the front to the back cover. In this light, the spine of the book is analogous to a fold in the flesh, on axis with the anus, the dividing line. This hinge is both male and female - an hermaphroditic offspring of Hermes and Aphrodite. A closer inspection of the cover’s ‘pornographic’ close-up exposes the authors of this deviate offspring—the mooning and cheeky Diller+Scofidio.⁴ The table of contents reveal their distracted audience. They include: deviants, neurotics, neighbours, sinners, custodians, tourists, homebodies, and insomniacs. In short, the whole world is watching.

Diller+Scofidio attempt through their work to challenge the Cartesian dualism of mind and body, the notion of perspectival space and positivistic technology for a re-instatement of the subject. Their installations, architectonic interfaces, and buildings are meant to engage the contemporary ‘distracted’ body and, in an age of mechanical reproduction, create new zones of meaning through irony, subversion and disorientation.

Diller+Scofidio take seemingly benign elements—fog, screens, tables, chairs, food, snails, our BODIES and through the potency of symbol, metaphor and narrative create a ‘critical’ architecture of ‘delayed’ space, oscillating screens and sexualized prosthetics.

Their architecture is an apparatus that interrupts the seamless quality of our mediated environments. They make us see, in a full sense, and awaken us from our positivistic dreaming through an oscillation of fiction and fact to produce, as Nietzsche would say, a world that has become a fable.

Slow House

The close-up (of the buttocks), is complemented, as a device in the age of mechanical reproduction, by the slow motion (of the house). This is echoed in Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*:

*"With close-ups the world expands, with slow motion, movement is extended. The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear; it reveals entirely new structural formulations of the subject. So, too, slow motion not only presents familiar qualities of movement but reveals in them entirely unknown ones..."*⁵

Hermaphroditic Snails

The Slow House, although never completed, was intended as a second house for city dwellers. It uses both the narrative of the drive from the city to the ocean and the metaphor of a snail as a way of de-signing a home. D+S uncover, through hyper-description, the latent symbolic qualities of the elements that make up the domestic environment that include: the car, the front door, the fireplace, the TV, the VCR, and the 'picture' window. Each part becomes an interface that is scripted into the play of the house. Slow House is given a dynamic vector through the de-signing process—as common signage and conventions are replaced by a radical re-invention of the 'getaway' house. The hermaphroditic snail is a metaphor for the androgynous nature of architecture. The 'de-abstraction' of the snail is realized by the curved form of the house's shell complete with two exterior projections—one 'stack' is a chimney, the other is a mount for a closed-circuit video camera—a live 'feed' for a TV—the new electronic hearth.

The house is part of a narrative that begins with the car drive from the city to the ocean front property. The arrival, to a slower pace of living, is part of the getaway from the city. The car windshield, as a screen, is analogous to the 'picture' window of the house. The car's rear-view mirror that reflects the passing landscape, is analogous to the house's closed-circuit camera, which can record the view of the ocean—the missed and past sunsets to be replayed for the house's occupants.

Upon arrival, the house is in essence, a distorted cone of vision, beginning with a red door and culminating with a TV monitor hung in front of a 'picture' window. The house deforms classical perspective. The visual axis, is bent, offering only a constantly changing view along the curved sidewalls of the house. As Diller+Scofidio indicate: "...the unified subject in control of his world is teased off centre, off balance. The house is a mechanism of arousal, eliciting an optical desire and feeding it, slowly."⁶

Delay Cuts and The Large Glass

The house is designed as a series of nine section cuts. The section can be thought of as a cut through time, a delay.⁷ The delay slows time down, so that each frame can be contemplated and de-signed. Delay is a play on glass; it is a slow liquid. The section cuts terminate with Slow House's large glass—the 'picture' window that 'enframes' the view of nature—the commodified ocean view⁸. A TV monitor hovers in front of the glass. The TV becomes another type of window superimposed against the 'picture' window. The TV can receive a live feed from a video camera mounted on the exterior of the house. As well, through a VCR, a recorded view can be played back. This enables the occupants of the house; with a remote control in hand, the option, especially in the darkness of night, to view a playback of early morning. Will they see the morning more clearly?

Fast Food

From the Slow House we move on to the fast pace of dining out in New York City. Notwithstanding Diller+Scofidio's snail obsession they have in store more gastronomic delights. This stop features Mies van der Rohe's sober creation—the brooding, black and transparent Seagram's Building. Within the bowels of the building, like a parasite nestled within its host, lies one of D+S's first major architectural commissions, The Brasserie (completed in 2000). Struck with the irony of designing a windowless interior in the glass-clad Seagram Building, Diller+Scofidio used the project to experiment with notions of vision and transparency. Restrained by the historic protection guidelines set for Mies' masterwork, the D+S operate, within the walls of this modernist icon, as discrete interior renovators. The only exterior intervention being a small 'peephole' for a video camera, cut into the protected Miesian exterior. D+S's parasitic creation is respectful of its host's limited hospitality.

In the midst of Mies, Diller+Scofidio are seriously at play, carrying on with an ironic sensibility, notions of theatre, surveillance, and indigestion.⁹ As the critic Aaron Betsky has commented, "The Brasserie exaggerates the exhibitionist act of seeing and being seen, heightening our awareness of both the absurdity and beauty of social rituals." Working within this theme, the restaurant features a grand, slow, staircase, not unlike a fashion catwalk, that brings patrons into the middle of the room. Each person who enters the restaurant is captured by a video camera located just

outside the revolving doors. After a slight delay they are featured on a series of flat video monitors that float above the bar. The whole scripted scenario proves that surveillance matched with the voyeuristic gaze can be sexy and intoxicating.

There is also a play with translucency. Liquor bottles are displayed behind translucent glass and the barstools feature moulded resin seats that are a perfect fit for any buttocks. Resin is also used in the tabletops that reveal the ghosted image of the legs beneath it, and the bathroom features an amber-coloured resin sink shared by both sexes.

The Brasserie is an intelligent intervention and an appetizer for Diller+Scofidio's masterwork, the Blur Building, that is much more serious and sublime in its commentary on our immediate environments, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the psychological spaces we create.

S(low) Cloud

The notion is that blurring is a result of a fault, a deviation, a malfunction. As Diller says, "The Blur Pavilion for the Swiss EXPO 2002 is an experiment in de-emphasis and the immersive potential of blur on an environmental scale...Blur uses the inherent ambiguity of the fog to foil the conventions of heroic EXPO or world's fair architecture, to engage substance without form, and to stage a slow event"¹⁰

As a building, Blur Pavilion appears to be almost nothing at all. But as Ricardo Scofidio states, "It's incredible, the structure that's required to make this nothing."¹¹ In short, the Blur pavilion has proven to be

quite a feat of engineering. It is composed of a large platform of open grating, about the size of a football field that hovers 24 feet above a lake in Yverdon-les-Bains in Switzerland. A system of ramps, elevators, and stairs make the platform accessible. Then there is a computerized set of 29,000 high-pressure fog nozzles that spray filtered lake water across an area that is 300 feet wide, 200 feet deep and 65 feet high. The amount of water sprayed is tempered by a computer system programmed to respond to air temperature, humidity and the direction and speed of the wind. Therefore, the form of Blur is constantly changing like the weather. The modern paradigm of form or space is weakened to the point that all that remains is a white cloud of vapour. A humorous tinge of irony in the air.¹²

Unlike previous EXPO architecture this is not about spectacle. On the contrary the visual is suppressed in favour of the visceral. The structure of Blur Pavilion, shrouded in fog, is de-emphasized in favour of a sublime experience of this immersive environment. As Diller states, reiterating a blunted version of Heidegger's *stoss* and Benjamin's shock: "Unlike entering a building, entering Blur will be like walking into a habitable medium—one that is featureless, depthless, scales, massless, surfaceless and contextless. Disorientation is structured into the experience...Blur exploits low definition and impaired vision, and exchanges visual immersion for an immersive acoustical encounter."¹³

Braincoat Babble

In the original design for Blur pavilion, the interactive component between the visitor and the building was very



Diller + Scofidio, Blur Pavilion, Swiss EXPO, 2002

ambitious. The pavilion in essence a kind of misty auditory website entitled 'Babble'. The interface between the body and building being a smart raincoat—a 'braincoat'. Each coat is equipped with a portable CPU that integrates tracking and sound technologies. At the base of the access ramp each visitor would log in to the system from this point onward the building would know the location of its 400 visitors. Because of the mist, the navigation would depend on hearing more than sight, as Diller explains, "The electronics embedded in the skin of the coat electronically extend the body's natural system of navigation. Rather than rectifying the loss of vision, the coat acts as an acoustical prosthesis to supersensitize the sense of hearing." The large football sized platform is mapped out with text tracks that lead the visitor on various directions to new content. The visitor scans the surface of the platform not unlike a computer cursor. As D+S have declared, if fully realized, "Blur/Babble would be an epic, interactive, and serialized weather opera."¹⁴

Although the 'braincoat' component of the pavilion was not implemented due to budgetary constraints, Blur, nicknamed the 'Cloud' in Switzerland was completed with a simplified auditory component. In the end, Blur exists as a kind of mirco-climate, a weather station that is a signal of global warming and the limits of technological intervention given the various ecological disasters of the past 200 years. Blur exists as a technological sublime creation. Like Frankenstein it is a monster. An amalgam of the scientific and the transcendental brooding on Lake Neuchatel. It lacks the positivistic outlook of Buckmaster Fuller's Dome at EXPO '67. Instead uncertainty of the future, epitomized in the weather, is a central pre-occupation. The disorientation and dislocation of the visitor is only an initial indication of what is occurring on a planetary scale.

Given The Waterfall, the Illuminating Gas¹⁵

As a modernist work of architecture, Blur pavilion is as revolutionary and fresh as Joseph Paxton's Crystal Pavilion built for the 1851 Great Exhibition. Paxton's glass and iron pavilion was deemed by the critics of the day not to be architecture because of its transparency. As homage to Marcel Duchamp, D+S have created a gas architecture, a seemingly weightless architecture that blurs the world, dissolves its edges, and through a sense of dislocation provides an opportunity to see the world new again. Blur Pavilion resuscitates the modern spirit through creating a 'disabled' architecture, an architecture

of almost nothing, an architecture perfect for the distracted body, moving seemingly undirected through a mediated landscape. An aimless yet pointed architecture. As Ned Cramer, executive editor of Architecture Magazine, in a recent article on the Blur pavilion explains:

"So the Blur Building, in a sense, brings modernism full circle...Somewhere along the way, 'modern' came to mean 'immutable' and progress came to be thought as infallible. And under the influence of Mies, CIAM and the Harvard GSD, and other authorities, the mission of architecture slowly changed from revolution to regulation. Diller+Scofidio have dedicated their careers to setting the record straight."

Accomplished Nihilism

A progressive view of history, exemplified in Montreal's 1967 EXPO architecture, is replaced by a perception of a world that is riddled with anxiety, doubt and disorientation. There is a correspondence to Vattimo's words:

"...aesthetic experience appears to be an experience of estrangement, which then requires recomposition and readjustment. However, the aim of this is not to reach a final recomposed state. Instead, aesthetic experience is directed towards keeping the disorientation alive."¹⁶

This notion of estrangement finds a sympathetic soul in the work of Gerhard Richter. Like Diller+Scofidio his whole career has been a re-invention of a truly modernist spirit, treading thin line between painting and photography, representation and abstraction. Richter has just had a major exhibition in February 2002 at MOMA in New York. It consisted of 188 paintings, from every



Gerhard Richter, Detail, Moritz (863-1) 2000, Oil on canvas 51 x 46cm.

phase of his career that demonstrated his stylistic plurality. Description of the works can be difficult. Like architecture, there is a limitation with a linguistic translation of any work. Language can express only what language enables it to express.

Richter, like D+S, uses the blur tool as a subversive device to make us look closer at project of modernism—they both slow the world down so that we are able to see it, prompting our critical alertness. Richter had given various explanations for the streaking and blurring effects that characterize the Photo Painting. The blur effect is evidence of the handmade a trace of the slow deliberateness of the labour of painting and gives the image both body and time. As a direct effect it makes our bodies slow down to take the time to look closer. Rolald Nasgaard comments in a [Canadian Art](#) article:

“Unlike photorealism, which with its positivistic optimism pretended to a descriptive clarity of the visual world, Richter undermines and problematizes the truth value of the photograph, increasingly dissolving the details and contours of the subject matter the harder and closer one looks. Our usual behaviour gets upset, satisfaction is deferred, perception held in suspension, closure between visual field and its reduction is endlessly deferred. Richter has taught us to take pleasure in the antithesis.”¹⁷

Possible Viscous Worlds

Richter in his deadpan works of colour charts and blurred painted of newspaper photographs seems to echo a favoured John Cage quotation: “I have nothing to say, and I am saying it”. Like Cage, Richter and D+S are uncovering the beauty of the raw phenomena of our immediate and mediated worlds through blurring our thick and viscous world.



Diller+Scofidio, Blur Pavilion, Swiss, EXPO 2002

From this strange vantage point, Modernism refuses to die because modernism (of the rational, functional, and regulated variety) has been re-invented and indeed renewed with the original modernist notions of shock, distortion and disorientation, articulated by Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin in the mid 1930's. Diller+Scofidio and Richter are true modernists as subversives that have created a twisted modernism. In terms of architecture, modern pre-occupations of structural correspondence, utility and function have been replaced by an ambiguous, disabled and weakened modernism that reveals the indeterminate, fragile and neurotic nature of our fragile and resilient modern world.

Notes:

- 1 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992) pg. 59.
- 2 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, pg. 87-88. This quote is a contracted version of the original text.
- 3 Definition given by Diller+Scofidio, *Flesh, Architectural Probes* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1994), pg.1.
- 4 A clear nod to Marcel Duchamp's foam rubber 'breast' cover for *Priere de Toucher* published in 1947.
- 5 Walter Benjamin, *Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, pg. 236.
- 6 Diller+Scofidio, *Flesh*, pg.225.
- 7 Duchamp conceived of the three-dimensional world as composed of an infinite number of two-dimensional cuts put together. The inframince is an infrathin slice, like a cat scan. (explanation by Elizabeth Diller at the AA transcribed (precisely) in *Flesh*, pp. 103-134.
- 8 In the 1950's the view became an object of desire, a possessive artefact, a trophy for the living room. The picture window domesticates nature. It assigns value to whatever it frames. Diller+Scofidio in an excerpt from [Parachute](#) interview, April 1997, pg.10.
- 9 'Indigestion' is an artwork created by Diller+Scofidio, involving the projection of a dinner conversation on the top of a dining table.
- 10 Elizabeth Diller, *BLUR/BABBLE, Anything* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001) pg. 133-135.
- 11 Ned Cramer, *All Natural, Architecture*, July 2002, pg. 53.
- 12 Irony is a kind of antidote that counteracts any element that is too serious. Octovio Paz, Marcel Duchamp (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1978), pg. 74.
- 13 Diller, *Anything*, pg. 137.
- 14 Diller, *Anything*, pg. 139.
- 15 Marcel Duchamp, *Etant donne*, 1946-1966
- 16 Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), pg. 51.
- 17 Roald Nasgaard, "Spoon in the Hand Mirror in the Face", [Canadian Art](#), Spring 2002, pg.60.

(Liminal) Domains: The Language of Modernism, *Phenomenal Transparency*, Le Corbusier's *Villa Stein* and T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

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Abstract

If one sees two or more figures overlapping one another, and each of them claims for itself the common overlapped part, then one is confronted with a contradiction of spatial dimensions. . . [O]ne must assume the presence of a new optical quality. The figures are endowed with transparency. . . they are able to interpenetrate without an optical destruction of each other. . . Space not only recedes but fluctuates in a continuous activity.

—Gyorgy Kepes, *Language of Vision*

In drawing a distinction between a literal and phenomenal transparency, Rowe and Slutzky challenged Giedion's materialistic interpretation of architectural space with a psychological *cum* physiological one. Phenomenal transparency. . . reveals an architecture of subtlety, meaning, complexity, and enormous promise. . . [S]pace is conceived as a (nearly) physical entity: defined, stratified, shaped and contained. Walls, floors, surfaces, and space itself are equivalent. It is a figure-ground relationship in continual reciprocity, "an environment imposing a common relationship on all that happens."

—Alexander Caragonne, *The Texas Rangers*

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .

I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.

—T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky's classic essay "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal", first published in 1963, offers an insightful—and unparalleled—discussion of a specific formal and spatial attribute of Le Corbusier's *Villa Stein at Garches* known as *phenomenal transparency*. The essay begins with a remarkable definition of transparency (from Kepes) and a description of the distinction between real ("literal") and seeming ("phenomenal") transparency. The authors amplify the distinction between the two kinds of transparency via a discussion of Cubist painting. The last of the major sections of the essay compares Gropius' *Bauhaus* ("literal transparency") and the *Villa Stein* ("phenomenal transparency"). The arrangement of multiple layers of space parallel to the primary facades of the *Villa Stein* results in "a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations."

If the *Villa Stein* (1927) is arguably a paradigm of Modern Architecture as well as the best-known example of phenomenal transparency in architecture, then a discussion of *Phenomenal Transparency* as a critical attribute of another paradigm of Modernism, T. S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1917), may prove beneficial. 'Prufrock' holds the potential for an illustrative comparison not only because of Eliot's use of what critics have termed multi-perspectivism (a term that seems tied to discussions of 'Modern Space') but because the structure and language of 'Prufrock' seems to exhibit what Kepes describes as ". . . a new optical quality. The figures are endowed with transparency: that is, they are able to interpenetrate without . . . destruction of each other."

This paper uses the critical framework provided by Rowe and Slutzky as the means for comparing and contrasting the *Villa Stein* and Eliot's 'Prufrock' and, ultimately, the discussion seeks to enlarge our general understanding of the language of modernism as well as our specific understanding of the domains of Modern Architecture and Modern Literature.

Neologism, Translation, Evocation and Equivalence: Searching for Authenticity Through the Modern

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Creative work can actualize an involving experience with an idea, beyond signifying or representing that idea. While creative work often begins in ideas (as well as in intuitions, accidents and inspirations), creative work can frame an encounter, if the author is mindful and the audience is receptive. The character and content of these encounters can be thought of as comprising and, in fact, actualizing the work. The sculptor Christopher Wilmarth, the photographer Minor White, the poet Paul Celan, and the architect Tadao Ando have all made modern work (and Ando continues to do so as the only living maker in the group) that I believe can be approached and understood in this way. I equate this quality in their work with authenticity, in its rooting of the work's substance in a living, present encounter. In this they have engaged the persistent pursuit of the authentic within modernism, an impulse often associated with the origins of this movement.

The process of forming meaning in the reading of a poem (or "physical poem" ¹ as the case may be) is, of course, a creative process involving a developing response and, perhaps, the formation of meaning. The works of these creators that I discuss below don't 'read' readily in anything like a narrative mode. These works work require an active process of engagement, sometimes involving struggle in the formation of meaning, which, in the case of these four, is crucial to their intentions.

Each of these makers works in a way that results in a blurring, dislocating or undoing of easy meaning. In so doing they each carefully work in a way that both mines and undermines legibility and, in so doing, creates an open ground for the viewer's creative engagement. If the meaning is too clear the encounter is closed. If the meaning is too obscure the work becomes hermetic. In this way they all walk what Minor White called the

"spring-tight line" between "abstractions" and "the world of appearances." ²

Christopher Wilmarth

Light gains character as it touches the world; from what is lighted and who is there to see. I associate the significant moments of my life with the character of the light at the time. The universal implications of my original experience have located in and become signified by kinds of light. My sculptures are places to generate this experience compressed into light and shadow and return them to the world as a physical poem. ³

Wilmarth began this passage by referring to a phenomenon, light, the originary phenomenon for much of his work. He then established the participation of the viewer as equivalent to the light's physical interaction with matter, "what is lighted," in defining light's character. The "light gains character" not only from physical interaction with matter, the ostensibly defining phenomenon with quantifiable characteristics, but from the viewer and her personal qualities as they qualify and characterize the perception of what is physically present. Wilmarth then indicates he was writing about his work in its relationship to "the significant moments of" his "life." In saying this, he narrowed the focus to "the significant moments." These are in some sense celebratory pieces, inspired by unusual significance.

Wilmarth further stated that his "original experience" had "universal implications." These implications and their universality are not discussed or defined, but his language implies to me a conviction that there is a potential for the many to connect with what is "located" for him "in" work of this kind, engendered by light. To say they are "located in" (and "signified by") "kinds of

light" is itself worth noting. What is "located in" the light is in some sense, in some part, the originary experience remade (not only referred to, though Wilmarth acknowledges as well that signifying is part of the function of the work). This seems a compelling reading of Wilmarth's intention, especially considering the sentence following. There he says that the sculptures "are place to generate this experience." A second passage may make more tangible aspects of the first:

I was always on the lookout for a place with the light just so and the colors right (red and yellow almost never seemed right) and if I was quiet, or hummed a long time just one or two notes, I would become transparent and be part of the place I was in.⁴

The sculptures could generate this kind of experience, for a viewer. The language Wilmarth used is ethereal and transcendental, speaking of a place of reverie where one could be lost in place in much the same way as one could become lost in thought.

Returning to the end of the first passage, "experience" is "compressed into light and shadow," perhaps implying that the language of drawing is embodied (and given bodily dimension) in his sculpture, through which he can "return them to the world as a physical poem." It is an almost synæsthetic equation of medium and effect in which steel and glass sculptures locate reverie through the means of drawn poems. To say that a work is meant to be a physical poem does not define it in a constraining way because we do not know what a physical poem is, at least not in the sense that there is a shared, familiar definition for it. But the phrase is evocative. It deserves consideration as well in terms of the sculptor's relationship to the writings of the poet Stephen Mallarme. Wilmarth created a series of painted, drawn and sculpted works inspired, and perhaps instructed, by Mallarme's poetry, following in the steps of Matisse, who had made illustrations for Mallarme that he referred to as "equivalents."⁵ Dore Ashton, in an essay that speaks to parallels between these two visual translators of Mallarme, wrote:

Matisse's habit of suppressing images through lengthy trials in order that they may be sensed rather than finally described is identical with Mallarme's procedures. The poet who said that

destruction was his Beatrice, as well as the painter who spoke of his "condensations" and who often stated "I don't paint things, I only paint differences between things" were perfectly coupled in this timeless collaboration.⁶

For Wilmarth it was important not to represent things but, perhaps, to allude to them and, in the end, to evoke their possibility. So while the work enfolds lines of thought in content and in name and includes elements (like Roebling wire rope cable) with strong, and even named associations (he called one piece "Second Roebling,") ultimately the meanings are not explained. They are material neologisms. To try to name them all would preclude too many possibilities in the encounter with the work. The content within the pieces does matter, critically, but:

For those without an interior life or without an access to it, my work, at best, remains on the level of "beautiful" and can give no more. The rest, with is the most, is not released. For those with an "inside" it can go deeper, for my work does not spell out, nor does it illustrate, meaning. It is an instrument of evocation and requires as catalyst the soul of a sensitive person to engage its process of release, its story, its use.⁷

It is an "instrument of evocation," not a guided path. Out of respect for the authentic experience of the work Wilmarth said:

Words are easy to make and often carelessly used. Poems take longer. The mind in my art is yours to explore. The mind in me is mine.⁸

Minor White

A horizontal black and white photograph, predominantly dark in its tonal range, depicts a landscape of striated rock and blackness. There is no apparent reference for the scale of the image. Curving and twisted rock forms dominate the foreground and sides of the image, rendered in rich grey tones, shading off into the left-middle, framing an inky black region dotted with small star-like white points. These points make a glittering constellation that seems to glow in blackness, framed by a tumultuous yet velvety geology.⁹

This image was published in Minor White's book *Mirrors, Messages, Manifestations*. White conceived the

presentation of images and captions as separate in this book.¹⁰ The image's impact begins, for me, in dark reverie and sensuousness. The eye moves from right to left along the curves of the almost storm-roiled, ocean-like rock, which feels monumental in size, and into the blackness punctuated by its stars.

The title, initially withheld, then given, is "Bullet Holes, Capitol Reef, Utah." The shock of the marriage of stars and bullet holes proceeds from what is really a narrative theatrical device. A surreal, unscalable image snaps into focus and shifts sharply in character. An image and a title, the most commonplace of format elements, have been rearranged to force re-reading, to replace reverie with shock.

How is one to regard the beauty apprehended only a moment ago? Now there is a struggle to come to terms with something at once terrible and beautiful. Or is it? What is the origin behind these bullet holes? All this is experienced in the moments of the viewing as it might be in a play with two acts. The image has functioned as an equivalent, but perhaps not in quite the way that Matisse meant in applying this term to his accompaniments for Mallarmé's poems. An equivalent of what?

Minor White explored Equivalence in his work. Alfred Stieglitz named the concept in photography in the 1920's and called a number of his photographs by that name.¹¹ It became a mode of work and conceptualizing for a number of photographers after him, including White. Stieglitz's own explanations of Equivalence seem to me to be open-ended and vague: "I have a vision of life and I try to find equivalents for it in the form of photographs."¹² Some of the photographers that followed him, including Minor White, reflected further on the nature of equivalence. White wrote:

Equivalence is a function, an experience, not a thing. Any photograph, regardless of source, might function as an Equivalent to something, sometime, someplace. If the individual viewer realized that for him what he sees in a picture corresponds to something within himself – that is, the photograph mirrors something in himself – then his experience is some degree of Equivalence . . . when a photograph functions as an Equivalent, the photograph is at once a record of something in front of the camera and simultaneously a spontaneous symbol. (A

'spontaneous symbol' is one which develops automatically to fill the need of the moment . . .)¹³

White once said, when looking at an image of the ocean, "that he was 'appalled by the image of [his] inner landscape.' "¹⁴ Equivalence could yield an appalling experience. Equivalence, for White, depends on the way we as viewers interact with what the photographer has made. Equivalence is individual based on the unique combination of viewer and viewed. It is unique to each of us, or unique in the combinatorial relationship of the work and what each one of us brings to the work. In this he seems to be a cousin to Wilmarth and, as well, an inheritor of Walt Whitman's world-view:

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it,
(Did you think it was in the white or gray stone?
Or the lines of the arches and cornices?)

All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments,
It is not the violins and the cornets, it is not the oboe nor the beating drums, nor the score of the baritone singer singing his sweet romanza, nor that of the men's chorus, nor that of the women's chorus,
It is nearer and farther than they.¹⁵

This begins to ground the case for Equivalence in photography as a medium for rooting work authentically in contemporary life through rooting it in the moment, perceptually, emotionally and cognitively. The logic respects a limit definition of the contemporary—the very moment of the present. It implies as well respect for the authenticity of the spontaneous response. Although Equivalence could also be an experience engendered by living with an image for a while. Studying with Minor White meant spending a lot of time:

"reading" photographs, an activity that involved sitting in front of a photograph long enough for something to happen, to possibly break through to "what else the photograph is."¹⁶

Because the idea was, "to photograph not for what the subject is, but for what else it is."¹⁷

There is a crucial dimension to White's explorations of Equivalence that needs to be stated. It requires, at

times, a testing of the relationship photography has to representation. It has to do with subverting but not completely undoing the ability to recognize (as in the bullets / stars image), leading towards a critical experience of Equivalence.¹⁸ It has to do with being unknowing and knowing, at once and by turn. "The spring-tight line between reality and photograph has been stretched relentlessly, but it has not been broken."¹⁹

Paul Celan

Knowing something of the history of Paul Celan's life is crucial to understanding his poetry. He was born Paul Ancel in 1920 and grew up in a small town in Romania called Cernovitz that had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Thus Ancel's first language was German. He grew up with a love for and a scholarly appreciation of poetry, reading Rilke and other poets with his high school friends. World War II changed his world radically and tragically. Because he was a Jew he was forced to work in a Romanian labor camp during part of the war. He suffered violent personal loss through the war as well: that of his parents and some of his friends. He saw the society and culture of his youth destroyed. He witnessed the Holocaust. My parents, Pearl and Yehudi Fichman, were high school friends of Paul Ancel and introduced me to his life and his work as the poet Paul Celan while I was growing up.

Writing after the war and for the rest of his life engaged him in a struggle to come to terms with "that which happened."²⁰ At the end of the war he felt that all that was left to him was his mother tongue, the language of German, the language of the instigators and perpetrators of the murder of his world. His struggle to come to terms needed to be enacted through the language of "deathbringing speech."²¹

Reachable, near and not lost, there remained amid the losses this one thing: language. It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave no words for that which happened; yet it passes through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, "enriched" by all this.²²

In "*Todesfuge*" (Death Fugue), written around 1945 not long after Ancel learned of his parents' deaths, he wrote for the first time as Celan, writing darkly, metaphorically and factually, speaking through poetry of the death camps of World War II.²³ His work changed in approach and character over the years of his writing career. It moved from the mode of "*Todesfuge*" to a more abstract sort of quarrying and fusing of chunks of language in his last works. Here the need for neologism was found in a struggle to find how to speak. The resultant poems are joined and shaped in ways perhaps closer to the form of struggle in human thought. The language that "gave no words for that which happened" needed to be forced, blasted and annealed into neologisms if an authentic coming to terms was to be achieved.

Celan closed the 1958 Bremen speech by calling himself one who "goes toward language with his very being, stricken by and seeking reality." Though my last phrase does not quite catch the German's ultimate stresses – *wirklichkeitwund und Wirklichkeit suchend*, "reality-wounded and Reality-seeking"²⁴

Celan became a writer stammering through the unspeakable via the unutterable language; "calling himself 'whitegravel stutterer'; someone speaking through his 'true- / stammered mouth' about 'eternity / blood-black embabled'." Whether as poet, speaker or translator (he engaged translation of others' poetry throughout his career) he was often "opting for neologism."²⁵

Though his work seemed to become more closed, when he was challenged about this Celan said that his poetry was "absolutely not hermetic."²⁶ "In a poem, what's real *happens*," he (Celan) told a German high-school class.²⁷ In this language he speaks to the problem of authentically making actual through his poems. In his later works Celan described less and evoked more but the work became commensurately more difficult to access. In later work he strived more to make actual an encounter through language with "that which happened." Yet, like the other makers in this study, he sought, quoting Martin Buber, " 'an addressable thou': the poet himself, his mother, wife or sons, a loved one or friend, the Jewish dead, their God.' "²⁸

Like the others in this study, "Celan's work demands an 'encounter' like that in his writing of poems, where 'I went with my very being toward language.' "²⁹ And like

the next maker, "Celan's writing may baffle the reader unready to give it that 'attentiveness' he considered 'the natural prayer of the soul.'" ³⁰

Tadao Ando:

Ando is a boxer that became an architect. He is an architect who went to high school, worked as a carpenter and then traveled to educate himself. He never went to architecture school. He never worked for anybody else. ³¹ He builds stark, concrete buildings in traditional Japanese neighborhoods. His stance is aggressive, perhaps befitting a pugilist:

The architect has no other way to endorse his own independence than by driving in one wedge after another into the circumstances in which he finds himself. ³²

Ando is a traditionalist that became an architect. He champions the values behind the Sukiya tradition of teahouse architecture, a delicate, even fragile wood and paper architecture that sought oneness with nature, simplicity, and rusticity through the use of humble materials employed in a refined way. The purpose: if it can be summarized, it was made to create a place to shelter the spirit and foster its growth. To this end, Ando believes that it is necessary "To resuscitate the aesthetic of the sukiya style today, it is necessary to employ its spirit, not necessarily its forms." ³³

Ando was asked in a recent interview about how to respond to the events of 9/11 and how one might mark the World Trade Center site. He said, "To console and quiet the souls of the thousands of people lost, and above all, to raise the hopes of the coming generation, isn't a 'blank' open space what is needed now?" ³⁴

At some peril we might look at Ando as a contemporary warrior poet in the samurai tradition. Clichés carry risks. For the samurai, warfare and tea ceremony were related Zen Buddhist paths, or ways, to enlightenment (the way of the warrior and the way of tea). Like the samurai, Ando integrates a martial arts ethos and the practice of a fine art.

His concrete surfaces have textures as smooth and delicate as fine craftwork. His compositions are spare and clean. By these means, Tadao Ando produces spaces symbolizing the relation between human beings and physical objects. His interpretation of this relation is imbued with

distinctively Japanese emotions derived from the Japanese cultural tradition. This may best be illustrated by a comparison of his work with that of Sen no Rikyu (1522-91), one of the greatest of all tea ceremony masters, and an important architect of tea ceremony pavilions. ³⁵

Ando has worked in a way comparable to the tea ceremony masters of a previous era. They developed a new type and form based on a desire to cultivate spiritual growth. They made a place apart from the everyday world, reached by a circuitous path, the roji. They crawled through a constricted entry, the nijiriguchi, to reach a space apart, with their experience focused on a contemplative interior and the ritual acts within it. The teahouse, or sukiya, was constructed of humble materials used in a refined and attentive way. All this was done to foster spiritual growth through an encounter, the tea ceremony, tempered by a Zen influenced sensibility cultivating attentiveness to people and things. ³⁶

Ando's contribution has been to create equivalents to buildings of the sukiya tradition by redeploing their underlying principles given the circumstances he finds himself in. These buildings do not refer to or signify their originary sources. They enact the principles again, neologically, which is the only way these principles could be actualized in contemporary settings.

Conclusion

These are four makers of modern works. Wilmarth was a maker of physical poems of reverie; Celan was a poet of struggle, enacting that struggle in language. Minor White was a poet in images. Ando is a poet-warrior in the samurai / sukiya traditions. Wilmarth worked to preserve the creative relationship between viewer, work and author, seeking viewer who would be a catalyst. White too made space for the perceiving viewer, basing the work on creating a relationship between viewer and work that reached an emotional stage. For Celan the art happened in the poem, through an encounter with the poem, never hermetically, speaking with/to an addressable thou. Ando's works are effectively performance pieces where the audience is led onto a stage to perform rites and rituals of spiritual growth in a sanctified realm.

These four makers have made the substance of their thought, and their work in form, available, if transformed and abstracted, to an encounter. Whether in language or form language, that encounter requires active engagement. The work can realize its authenticity only in the crucible of the encounter.

Notes:

- 1 Christopher Wilmarth, 1974, as quoted in the Wadsworth Atheneum exhibition catalog *Nine Clearings for a Standing Man* (Meriden: Meriden Gravure Company, 1974), 21st unnumbered page.
- 2 Minor White, as quoted in Robert Adams, "The Spring-tight Line," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 46-47.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Christopher Wilmarth, 1977, as quoted in Hirschl & Adler Modern exhibition catalog *Christopher Wilmarth Drawings 1963-1987* (New York: Meridian Printing, 1989), 5.
- 5 Stephen Mallarme as quoted in Dore Ashton, "Mallarme, Friend of Artists," 1981, in *Christopher Wilmarth: Breath* (Meriden: Meriden Gravure Company, 1982), 15.
- 6 Dore Ashton, "Mallarme, Friend of Artists," 1981, in *Christopher Wilmarth: Breath* (Meriden: Meriden Gravure Company, 1982), 16.
- 7 Christopher Wilmarth, 1980, as quoted in Hirschl & Adler Modern exhibition catalog *Christopher Wilmarth Drawings 1963-1987* (New York: Meridian Printing, 1989), 5.
- 8 Christopher Wilmarth, 1978, as quoted in Hirschl & Adler Modern exhibition catalog *Christopher Wilmarth Drawings 1963-1987* (New York: Meridian Printing, 1989), 5.
- 9 Minor White image in Robert Adams, "The Spring-tight Line," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 47.
- 10 Robert Adams, "The Spring-tight Line," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 48.
- 11 Minor White, "Equivalence: The Perennial Trend," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 12.
- 12 Alfred Stieglitz as quoted in Sarah Boxer, "The Evolution of Alfred Stieglitz, Ever the Perfectionist," *New York Times*, 2 August 2002, NE edition, B31.
- 13 White, 12.
- 14 Adams, 46.
- 15 Walt Whitman, "A Song for Occupations," in *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose* (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 173.
- 16 Paul Camponigro, "A Multiple Legacy," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 57.
- 17 Camponigro, 56.
- 18 Adams, 46-49.
- 19 Minor White as quoted in Robert Adams, "The Spring-tight Line," in *Minor White, A Living Remembrance* (Meriden: Aperture, 1984), 46-47.
- 20 Paul Celan as quoted in John Felstiner, Preface to Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), xxi.
- 21 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann And Stefan Reichert, with Rolf Bucher (Frankfurt, 1983), vol.3, 186; quoted in and translated by John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xv.
- 22 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann And Stefan Reichert, with Rolf Bucher (Frankfurt, 1983), vol.3, 185; quoted in and translated by John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 114-115.
- 23 John Felstiner, Preface to Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), xxi.
- 24 John Felstiner, Preface to Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), xxvi.
- 25 John Felstiner, Preface to Paul Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), xxxiii.
- 26 Paul Celan as translated and quoted in Ian Fairley, "When and Where," in Paul Celan, *Fathomsuns and Benighted*, translated by Ian Fairley (Riverdale-on-Hudson: Sheep Meadow Press, 2001), 4.
- 27 John Felstiner, "Translating Paul Celan," *Midstream* (April 2002), 31.
- 28 John Felstiner quoting and interpreting Paul Celan, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xvi.
- 29 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann And Stefan Reichert, with Rolf Bucher (Frankfurt, 1983), vol.3, 186; quoted in, interpreted and translated by John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xvi.
- 30 Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Beda Allemann And Stefan Reichert, with Rolf Bucher (Frankfurt, 1983), vol.3, 198; quoted in, interpreted and translated by John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), xvii.
- 31 Kenneth Frampton, in Museum of Modern Art catalog *Tadao Ando* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), 10.
- 32 Tadao Ando, *Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects and Writings* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1984), 135.
- 33 Tadao Ando, *Tadao Ando: Buildings, Projects and Writings* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1984), 141.
- 34 Tadao Ando, "The Grand Tour with Ando: New York," interview by Mika Yoshida and David Imber, *Casa Brutus* (September 2002), 84.
- 35 Kiyoshi Takeyama, "Tadao Ando: Heir to a Tradition," *Perspecta 20* (1983), 164.
- 36 Takeyama, 164-169.

Descriptive Programming in Contemporary Modernism

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Nelson Goodman poses the following question:

The literature of aesthetics is littered with desperate attempts to answer the question “What is art?” This question, often hopelessly confused with the question “What is good art?”, is acute in the case of found art – the stone picked out of the driveway and exhibited in a museum – and is further aggravated by the promotion of so-called environmental and conceptual art. — part of the trouble lies in asking the wrong question – in failing to recognize that a thing may function as a work of art at some times and not others. In crucial cases, the real question is not “What objects are (permanently) works of art?” but “When is an object a work of art? – or more briefly, —, “When is art?”¹

We could easily paraphrase “What is architecture?” into “When is architecture?” or “When is a building or other architectural productions architecture?” While this provokes a rather fundamental discussion about the existential issues of architectural culture, this paper proposes to apply this point of view to the ideas of architectural programming, as developed through Modernism and later ideological development.

“What is —?” is a question fundamentally seeking definition. And this seems to be the core of the discussion of architectural programming, for which, essentially, there are three components: Typology, Diagram, and Metaphor:

Typology directly asks a question, such as “What is a library?”

Diagram operates on articulating the components, such as “public/private” or “living room/bedroom”, which of course requires the definition of articulated components via “What is living room?/What is public?”,

etc. In that sense, Diagram relies on the relative definition of articulated components.

Metaphor is a method used to manipulate the definition itself, as in the case of “House is a machine for living.”

In all three of these cases, the prevalent condition of definition is the *explanation* that follows those definitions. However, as Goodman points out, it may be possible that we are thinking of the ideas of programming from the wrong point of view by relying on definition. In the case of writers of the fiction, what happens in the story, or how the story is told, can be conceived as a program. It involves the protagonists, situations, plots, ending, etc. Everything the writer writes in the fiction is a result of work imagined from his/her intention of telling the story; therefore, all the lines are essentially fictional, such as when Tolstoy writes; “Anna trembled with joy.” In regard to this, John Searle observes a distinction between *fictional statements* and *genuine assertion* in literature:

To make a famous example, Tolstoy begins Anna Karenina with the sentence “Happy families are all happy in the same way, unhappy families unhappy in their separate, various ways”. That, I take it, is not a fictional, but a serious utterance. It is a genuine assertion. 2

“Fictional statement” is what actually constitutes the work of fiction, word by word, sentence by sentence, whose architectural counterpart is the actual building/place as a result of the programming. If we apply the idea of the programming to the writing of fiction, then it is to this “fictional statement” and not to “genuine assertion”.

The question is; did Tolstoy write the entire “Anna Karenina” to *explain* his definition of “happy” or “family”

as in his “genuine assertion”? Or did he write his series of “fictional statement” in the book as a *description* of the imagined world? In other words, is the entire volume of “Anna Karenina” a representation of the definition of “happy” and “unhappy” or “family” by Tolstoy? Or is it the imagined and presented world by Tolstoy that make the reading experience worthwhile?

In the parallel question of architectural programming, this alternative approach presumes the ability to imagine the series of described situations rather than to explain the resulting situations based on “genuine assertion”. In architectural programming, it seems that it is this “genuine assertion” that drives the discussion of the three programmatic ideas, i.e. Typology, Metaphor, and Diagram. In other words, architects are usually exclusively concerned with genuine assertion as the resolution of the programmatic issues; discussion of which usually leads to “justification” rather than the application of the mechanism of fictional statement as a means of imagining the world as an outcome.

This paper proposes a critique on this definition-explanation-oriented programming, and proposes an alternative point of view, which I have termed “descriptive programming”.

First problem – Typology

We come across the newspaper titles as the following:

“Sony Builds a Mall. But Don’t Call It That.” (New York Times, July 25, 1999)

“Where the Shoppers Also Catch a Plane” (New York Times, April 25, 1999)

In the first example, “Mall” is a building type as presumably understood by the readers, though in this particular case, it is obviously referring to a building that does not categorize itself into that type. In order to understand the situation, we have to know two things; one is the definition of mall as a type, the other is why this particular building does not fit into that definition. The reason it does not fit can only be described through specific situations and conditions, and not by a generalizing idea such as “cross between culture and consumerism”, or something to that effect. Does this mean that all we need is a new word that categorizes a kind of building that Sony built?

The second title, on the other hand, informs us differently. It describes a certain situation. It is apparently an abbreviation of “there is a place (or building), where

the shoppers can also catch a plane.” It is an article about airports incorporating the shopping (not the usual luxury items associated with tax-free, but more familiar daily life shops like GAP, etc.), in places like Heathrow, Schipol, or Pittsburgh airports. It is a specific description of who they are and what they do in a specific situation.

These titles represent the problem of Typology. In both cases, what seem to matter is the descriptions of these places as conceived and observed, and not the degree of appropriateness for the definition of the type. Typology, as quintessentially epitomized in Nikolaus Pevsner’s book, is essentially a way of categorization. Each category has an origin, and the effort of establishing the definition for that category traces the historical development of that category, as the definition changes through history. However, the consequence of this definition-making only leads to criticism of the kind Pevsner wrote for Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum:

Sensational it surely is, but it is also about everything a museum should not be. It is a monument, after all, and the spiral ramp which one is forced to descend makes any cross moves impossible, and cross moves are the spice of museum visits. What else needs saying by way of criticism of new museums? 3

Bernard Tschumi proposes a different point of view for this problem:

Architecture has always been as much about the event that takes place in a space as about the space itself. The Columbia University Rotunda has been a library, it has been used as a banquet hall, it is often the site of university lectures; someday it could fulfill the needs for an athletic facility at the University. What a wonderful swimming pool the Rotunda would be! You may think I’m being facetious, but in today’s world where railway stations become museums and churches become nightclubs, a point is being made: the complete interchangeability of form and function, the loss of traditional, canonic cause-and-effect relationships as sanctified by modernism. Function does not follow form, form does not follow function — or fiction for that matter — however, they certainly interact. Diving into this great blue Rotunda pool — a part of the *shock*. 4

“Railway station” “museum” “church” “nightclub”: they are all types, and Tschumi points out the irrelevance of that categorization. In this sense, “Diving into this great blue Rotunda pool” works as a description of a situation that may shock conceptually but not necessarily as an actual experience.

The event, as referred here, is a substance that exists largely in the temporal dimension with a specific duration, as well as the spatial dimension. Therefore these programmatic components are meant to happen at different time frames. When the religious ceremony is taking place, the nightclub is not. And when a religious ceremony and a nightclub take place at different times span in a same space, then that space will start being defined as “multi-functional” or “flexible”; another generalization of terminology based on the limits of definition.

Second problem – Metaphor

This problem of definition is what leads to the application of metaphor in architectural programming. It seems that the origin of that idea all stem from the famous statement by Le Corbusier, “House is a machine for living.” Let’s say that there is a question “What is a house?” then there can be an answer such as “A house is a machine for living.” “A house is a city” “A house is a womb”, etc. These answers all work in a metaphorical manner. It seems that any metaphorical application to the given type of the building (of course, it has to be a known and established type as opposed to the unknown, yet to be established type, such as the one that Sony built in the previous paragraph) is possible, which is exemplified by Hans Hollein’s famous statement “Everything is Architecture” with an image of an aircraft carrier in the deserted barren landscape against the sun-set (1964).

There are many arguments over the nature of metaphor, though I would like only to refer to Nelson Goodman’s summary here for my purpose. He uses an example of “The lake is a sapphire.”

The oddity vanishes upon recognition that a metaphorical application of a term is normally quite different from the literal application. Applied literally, the noun “sapphire” sorts out various things including a certain gem but no lake; applied metaphorically, it sorts out various things including a certain lake but no gem. 5

In other words, the mechanism of the metaphor essentially relies on the categorization of the given element with no specificity but the most generically acceptable conditions of the elements. “House is a machine for living” can be understood as an answer to the question “what is a house?” although this necessarily involves the series of definition of “what machine is” and “what living is”, in addition to the argument of the mechanism of how metaphor works.

However, let’s apply the initial Goodman question here. If we are to paraphrase the question to “When is a house a machine for living?” Then the answer to this question can be provided with more specific descriptions, with specific time frame:

1. When the partition opens or closes to change the size of the space; it may be twice a day, once a week, or whatever the frequency and duration may be.
 2. When the air conditioning adjusts the temperature automatically; it will be specifically during the cold or hot seasons, or while it really is in operation.
 3. When the louver adjusts the sunlight; it will be again at particular time with particular sun angle on a sunny day during the daytime.
- Etc.

The machines are conceived for the precise, fundamentally simple (or series of simple, therefore complex) *describable* process of operation.

Can we apply the same mechanism to other examples, such as “house is a womb”? The paraphrasing to “When is a house a womb?” does not even begin the descriptive process.

Third problem – Diagram

In order for the diagram to exist, there has to be more than two components involved. In architectural terminology, they are from the dialectically related components such as “inside/outside” “public/private” “service/serviced”, etc. to more articulated components such as “entrance” “living room” “waiting area” “lounge”, etc. Therefore, a diagram relies entirely on the definition of each articulated component, which are usually attributed to the spatial conditioning. These spatial terminologies are used to categorize the *relative* characterization of the articulated spaces. They are relative, because the articulation occurs in different

degrees of clarity, as we have other terminologies such as “semi-public” or “living/dining room”, etc. The greater the degree of the articulation, the more impossible it becomes to define, as in the case of “breakfast counter (what about other meals taken at the same place)” or “relaxing area”, etc. In fact, these articulations become somewhat a combination of objects or intended activities and the ambiguous identification of space, such as “bed” “daybed” “reception” “work”, etc. plus “area” “corner” “space” “room”, etc. thus the convoluted invention of “daybed corner”, “reception space”, etc.

Living room, for example, has an inherent definition problem, especially in relationship to “family room” in the same context. “What is a living room?” creates layers of problems in the minds of our daily life. In fact, the accompanying book of “Un-private House” exhibition at Museum of Modern Art in New York, curated by Terence Riley in 1999, uses the word “living area” as well as “bedroom” and “work space”, as the standard index for the showcased different houses.⁶ We are also witnessing the symptom these days that the real estate new terminology for the living room is “great room”. Now what is that supposed to mean?

There is an additional way in which programmatic articulation works, and that is to characterize the activities involved, such as “sleeping” “eating” “working”, etc. However, these categorizations are inherently crude, since they require instantly more conditioning to become legitimate for articulation, such as “sleeping for half an hour after the lunch (napping)” or “eating breakfast by oneself”, etc. At the same time, they also involve a particular temporal dimension: “eating breakfast” for either 10 minutes or 2 hours are totally different situations to be articulated separately. That format continues until all the articulated components become quantifiably overwhelming, and there will be another dimension of generalization/categorization all over again. Even in the case of one of the most obvious diagrammatic components, “public”, Glenn Lowry, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, remarks the shortfall of the definition:

“Ten Years ago, for instance, the average visitor to the Museum of Modern Art was female, white and 55 years old, with a household income in excess of \$70,000 a year. Today that visitor is 35, with a household income of less than \$50,000 a year. Males and females are almost evenly represented, and while still predominantly white,

the ethnic makeup of the museum’s visitors has grown significantly more diverse.”⁷

This description is analogous to the description of the protagonists in fictions in its specificity. The specificity of the description of the protagonist in museum setting also means that the activity of visiting the museum will need the same kind of descriptions, such as meeting friends after work in a museum cafe, or shopping in the museum store, etc. beyond the generic diagram of what one is supposed to do at the museum.

Description as information

Thomas Pavel’s discussion of “Salient Worlds” provides an alternative point of view for the programming. By referring to Aristotle’s Poetics, Pavel remarks “the poet must put forward either propositions true in every alternative of the real world (things possible according to necessity) or propositions true at least in one alternative of the actual world (things possible according to probability).”⁸ The critical point here is that this probable world has to be described rather than explained. As obvious in the science fiction, let’s say, that if the writer conceives a planet with three sexes in its society, the resulting situations have to be described in detail in order to make that world exist in the story’s context, rather than to explain why such a planet should exist. The operating mechanism is: “what if a planet has three sexes in its society, then what happens in their daily life?” and how that life is described, which is of course a result of how it is imagined.

We can summarize the shift of the problem of definition in architectural programming to the description of the situation as follows:

from: “What is? (definition)”
and “Why is?(explanation)”
to: “What if? (hypothesis)”
and “Then what (description)”

For this purpose, it is important to understand the programmatic components as a set of information rather than pieces of logic. Roman Jakobson summarizes this idea of information related to the idea of “Realism”.

A pupil is asked to solve a problem: “A bird flew out of its cage; how soon will it reach the forest, if it flies at such and such a speed per minute, and the distance between the cage and the forest

is such and such?" "What color is the cage?" asks the child. 9

In the imagined worlds described in literature, all the information given by the description is *real*, although as we can see in Jakobson's example, certain information relies on a logical coherence (such as the logically correct answer to that bird question) and other information provides simply more description (in order to create the sense of reality).

The description in the fictions also works in two ways; let's say that the *scrooge's* wicked physique has everything to do with his personality and conduct in the case of Charles Dickens' "Christmas Story". The visual description of *scrooge* is used as an explanation device for the plot development (he does wicked things). On the other hand, Pavel discusses the description employed by Gustave Flaubert in *Madame Bovary*. 'Her hands, however, were not pretty – not pale enough, perhaps a little rough at the knuckles; and they were too long, without softness of line.' (*Madame Bovary*) This particular description is definitely not designed to explain why she does what she does, and Pavel calls this kind of mechanism of description *realist detour*.¹⁰ It is purely a piece of information in the sense of Jakobson's "realism", which is the way in which the mechanism of descriptive programming needs to be understood.

Exercise 1 – explanation/description

Then how does this descriptive programming work conceptually? Let's use the example of a poem, titled *Breakfast (Déjeuner du matin)* by Jacques Prévert to examine the mechanism of descriptive programming.

He put the coffee	Il a mis le café
In the cup	Dans la tasse
He put the milk	Il a mis le lait
In the cup of coffee	Dans la tasse de café
He put the sugar	Il a mis le sucre
In the café au lait	Dans le café au lait
With the coffee spoon	Avec la petite cuiller
He stirred	Il a tourné
He drank the café au lait	Il a bu le café au lait
And he set down the cup	Et il a reposé la tasse
Without a word to me	Sans me parler
He lit	Il a allumé
A cigarette	Une cigarette
He made smoke rings	Il a fait des ronds
With the smoke	Avec la fumée

He put the ashes	Il a mis les cendres
In the ash-tray	Dans le cendrier
Without a word to me	Sans me parler
Without a look at me	Sans me regarder
He got up	Il s'est levé
He put	Il a mis
His hat upon his head	Son chapeau sur sa tête
He put	Il a mis
his raincoat on	Son manteau de pluie
Because it was raining	Parce qu'il pleuvait
And he left	Et il est parti
In the rain	Sous la pluie
Without a word	Sans une parole
Without a look at me	Sans me regarder
And I took	Et moi j'ai pris
My head in my hand	Ma tête dans ma main
And I cried.	Et j'ai pleuré.

Let's say that the last line "And I cried" is obscured from us. Until the next to last line, we can understand it as a description of a situation. It is a chronological depiction of what seems to have been taking place, observed by "I". If we are to exercise the didactic process of deciphering the situation without knowing the last line, then we can assume the situation to be one of the following:

1. "I" and "he" have some kind of relationship, and this scene represents that relationship.
2. "I" and "he" have no relationship, and this is a totally neutral observation by "I" of the scene.
3. "I" and "he" have some kind of relationship, but this scene does not represent that relationship, since this is a totally neutral observation by "I" of the scene.

In the case in which we have to come to the ending of this description, just because it has to end in the last line as an ending (because this is a poem), then it is agreeable to apply the coherence of logic as a strategy. It can be suggested that the repetition of "Without a word to me / Without a look at me" is a way of indicating the grief on the narrator's mind, in which case, "I cried (out of grief)" is the resolution of that logical process. This is how the entire text up to the last line works as an explanation of the last line (1). It represents the idea of the grief by "I".

On the other hand, if we are to take the description completely as a neutral set of information, without the

effort to deduce the logical sequence (because we don't have to), then the nature of the description becomes entirely different. If we are to put a sentence such as "I laughed" or "I yawned", then what happens is that it simply unfolds to the next set of information to be provided. There will have to be series of the next descriptions that follow. In other words, we do not have to understand the poem/description/information as something that comes to a logical conclusion at all. Rather, the description continues on and on until a substantial enough description of different situations becomes revealed. In the case of the previously mentioned examples such as "shoppers catching a plane" or "diving into the great blue Rotunda pool", conceiving of the programmatic conditioning seems to require this approach of elaborating on the imagined situation.

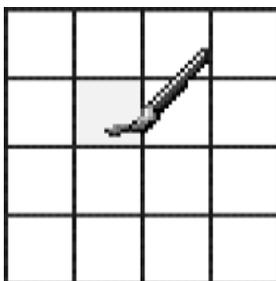
Exercise 2 - temporal/spatial

The description of a situation is inherently tied to the temporal dimension. One situation occurs before or after another situation, and each situation has a specific duration of time. In the case of the Japanese traditional living, the room that is used as a living room during the day would become the bedroom at night with the use of the futon that will be stored away in the morning. Diagrammatically speaking, this can be summarized as "flexible", though that is not what our interest is here. It is the nature of distinction between temporal and spatial point of view in the mechanism of description. In order to incorporate this point of view, let's examine the mechanism of two kinds of games we play. One is a puzzle and the other is a maze, as they are generally categorized.

The solution to a puzzle is not based on a temporal dimension. There is no chronological order to the process

of the solution. It can be solved in an un-definable length of time, in fact the examination of the solution can happen in a split second. If there is a length of time involved for the solution, then that length carries no conceptual importance. On the other hand, the solution to a maze does require a conceptual length of time, since the solution can only be traced in the chronological sequence of time. Every point of the solution is not interchangeable. In this regard, we can characterize solving the puzzle as a spatial process and solving the maze a temporal process.

In "Harry Potter" by J. K. Rowling, a new game called "Quidditch" is invented and described. The interesting thing about it is that the author had to describe the game in two different formats; one is the description of the rules of the game as Harry Potter himself had to learn as a beginner, the other is the description of the actual game played by two teams staging the exciting situations evolving from the interactions of the rules and the performance itself. "Quidditch" and other sports have a set of rules; one part of the rules is a spatial conditioning, such as the size of the court, the number of the players, the height of the basket, etc. and the other part is an operational conditioning including how long the game will take place, etc. It is a combination of the spatial and temporal conditioning. If we are to invent a new game, we have to conceive these two sets of information, i.e. the rules and the actual game. And that process is grounded on the difference between puzzle and maze; rule (spatial conditioning) through spatial process (solving the puzzle), and performance (temporal conditioning) through temporal process (solving the maze). We can argue that the nature of the descriptive programming parallels this idea of inventing rules and following through with the description of the performance.

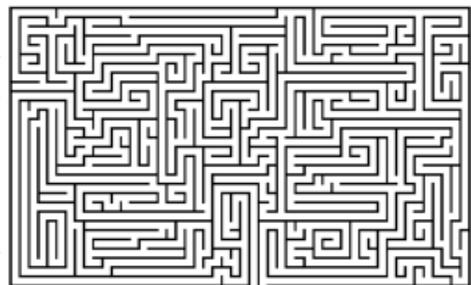


Colored Grid

Consider a grid of size 4 x 4 (i.e. sixteen squares), where all squares should get a color.

The colored grid should meet the following conditions:

- 4 squares should be colored blue,
- 3 squares should be colored red,
- 3 squares should be colored white,
- 3 squares should be colored green,
- 3 squares should be colored yellow, and
- no color appears more than once in any horizontal, vertical, or diagonal line.



Therefore, it involves not only the spatial conditioning as typified in the conventional programmatic ideas but also the temporal dimension which brings out the specific situations more closely related to our perception of reality. And that reality does not always require the definition to be relevant.

Conclusion as Beginning

The preceding discussion does not attempt to deduce a conceptual conclusion. The objective is to propose an alternative point of view to three prevalent ideas of programming; Typology, Diagram, and Metaphor, as developed through Modernism. Academically speaking, this alternative point of view may mean that architectural education, especially in the design studio situations, might employ the writing of descriptive text as a viable method of the programming of projects. This may also clarify the difficulties we are witnessing in the discussion of architectural programs as mentioned in the example of shoppers in airports and socializing in museums, etc. In a seminar I teach, that is exactly what the students attempt to do; i.e. programming as a creative writing. This technique also involves a series of exercises, a few of which have been mentioned previously. However, it should be also noted that the discussions in the seminar are necessarily influenced by the study of language and literature, and revolve around many of the same issues that are being discussed in those discourses.

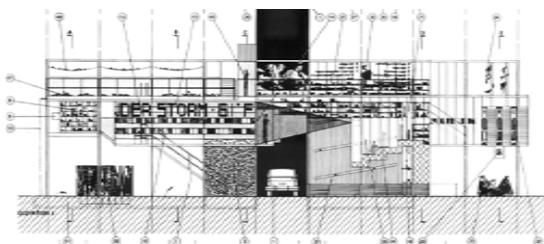
I have worked on a series of theoretical project, titled "House of PLOT(s) - #1, #2, #3", which employ directly the idea of descriptive text as a programmatic device to conceive a living situation (house). I will not elaborate on these projects in this paper. However, imagining the specific situations without being concerned about the logical coherence is what became the most interesting

aspect in the process of developing these projects, and not the conceptual explanation of ideas in each project, per se. It is the process of programmatic conditioning and description of the resulting situations.

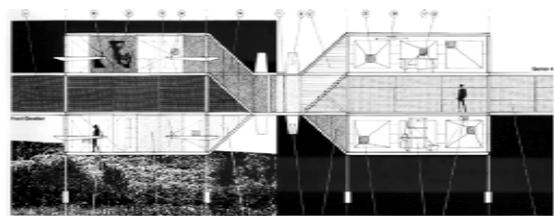
This mechanism of descriptive programming broaches the possibility of accommodating the immediate symptoms of our culture, without the delay of coherent explanation.

Notes:

- 1 Nelson Goodman, "When is Art?", *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett Publishing, 1978)
- 2 John Searle, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse", *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge University Press, 1979)
- 3 Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types* (Princeton University Press, 1979)
- 4 Bernard Tschumi, *Architecture ad Disjunction* (MIT Press, 1996)
- 5 Nelson Goodman "Metaphor as Moonlighting", *Of Mind and Other Matters* (Harvard University Press, 1984)
- 6 Terence Riley, *The Un-private House* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999)
- 7 Glenn Lowry, *The State of the Art Museum, Ever Changing* (New York Times January 10, 1999)
- 8 Thomas Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Harvard University Press, 1986)
- 9 Roman Jakobson "Realism", *Language in Literature* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987)
- 10 Thomas Pavel, "On Conventionalism in Poetics", *The Feud of Language* (Basil Blackwell, 1989)
- 11 Taeg Nishimoto, *PLOT House* (GA Houses no.37, 1993)
- 12 Taeg Nishimoto, *PLOT House(s)* (GA Houses no.45, 1995)



11



12

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