

The Primacy of Perplexion

Working Architecture through a Distracted Order of Experience

PART II – FICTIONAL SELVES IN SEARCH OF REALITY

by Katja Grillner

IN THE LIGHT OF Virginia Woolf's literary world and a general hope for the power of poetic making to pierce through the dense "web of reality", I would like to present some works and writings of Steven Holl and Lebbeus Woods; two New York based architects who consciously addresses these conditions while at the same time keeping a strong belief in the architect's possibility, and responsibility, to play an important role as "makers" of a built reality. Steven Holl's projects stand out from the general architectural practice of today in their remarkable and strong individuality. Each of them has a distinct character of their own and, even though they are not completely divorced from their author, they are independent enough to stand for themselves. There is no style, in the classical meaning, to be found here, rather an approach that seems to be consistent. It is from this approach, the rules that seem to guide his making, and its correspondence to the issues addressed above, that I wish to present Steven Holl's projects.

The Thickness of the Limit – The Architecture of Steven Holl

Writing's relation to architecture affords only an uncertain mirror to be held up to evidence; it is rather in a wordless silence that we have the best chance to stumble into that zone comprised of space, light, and matter that is architecture. Although they fall short of architectural evidence, words present a premise. The work is forced to carry over when words themselves cannot. Words are arrows pointing in the right directions; taken together they form a map of architectural intentions.¹

Writing is an important part of Steven Holl's practice, serving as a complimentary tool in the process of making. In his own comment on it, as quoted above, this role of the word is evident, even

The first part of this article was published in *NA* 1995:1 and discusses the notion of "distracted perception" as an adequate way of describing the present condition of architectural experience. The argument is drawn from a reading of texts by Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger and Gianni Vattimo, in which the work of art, and in this text architecture, is given the specific role of penetrating this "veil of distraction" to make meaningful communication possible. An analysis of the fictional space in Virginia Woolf's novel *Jacob's Room* indicates the role of the imagination in understanding and interpreting the physical traces of an absent subject. In this second part the focal point is shifted to the creation of architectural space today, keeping in mind the established interdependence and difference between selves and realities, imagined inhabitants and architectural spaces.



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though it is questionable if language could ever withdraw its presence fully into a silent architectural experience. In the texts he has written during the last years he formulates a phenomenological approach to the experience and creation of architecture, supporting himself mainly on readings of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I will consciously avoid looking at them from a strict philosophical view-point, even though there are some weaknesses to be found if doing that². Since the written works are thought in relation to architectural projects I will try to keep them together when possible. The most central issue in the written work is the question of a “zero-ground”. This question I find, as will be seen, the most problematic in its theoretical implications, but when it comes to the actual application it is shown to be very interesting and most fruitful. After dealing with this in depth I will move the focus over, through the question of permanence and flux, to Lebbeus Woods’ practice in order to connect back to the ethical concern that was the origin of this paper.

Anchoring and Indeterminacy

Anchoring, the title of Steven Holl’s publication of his own projects, suggests the importance he puts on reaching a firm ground, outside the self-referential universe of the individual, either as building or as experiencing architecture. The possibility of this ground has been seriously questioned for a long time and it is not through a simple reinstitution that Holl tackles this problem. In his text *Anchoring*³ he sets out to define the bondage as being that of situation. It is in the specificity of each project that a foundation is to be found, in the “intertwining of a construction with the experience of a place”. Architecture serves to explain the landscape even though it does not necessarily mean a strict contextual revealing of the site; “Hence the habitual ways of seeing may well be interrupted”. The link, metaphysical and poetic, cannot anymore be found in myths and history but must be sought in other qualities that comes from the specific, realative space. Holl suggests what he calls “a beautiful potential: proto-elements of architecture”: These elements “float about in zero-ground of form without gravity but are precursors of a concrete architectonic form” and are simply the euclidian geometrical elements, lines, plans and volumes, but are traced back to their origins in organic forms. They are the ultimate limitation of the instrument we play on and applied to a specific situation a trans-cultural universality might arise.

In the adoption of a limited concept, the “zero-ground” together with the limitations specific to the situation, Holl sees a possibility of going between the ideological theories claim of universality and the relativistic abdication of responsibility. A project based on a limited concept begins with dissimilarity and variation,

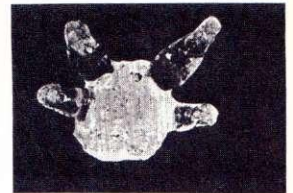
“illuminates the singularity of a specific situation” and the result can speak of the universal as well as the specific. The classical direction of artistic creation going from the universal idea to the specific object of art is now reversed.

(Even though not intending it to be an ideology ... if read as such ...) This would be an ideology denying the homogeneity of the accepted by celebrating the extraordinary, parallel to nature’s diversity. If it is a theory, it is a theory that allows for an architecture of mysterious beginnings, with the hope of original and unique meaning in each place. Its aim is variation, precision and a celebration of the as-yet-unknown. (Anch, p. 12.)

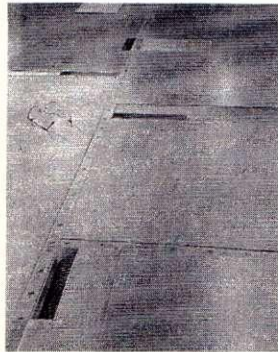
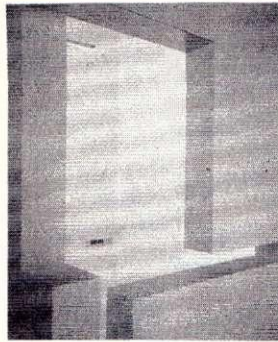
In this position I think there is a certain weakness. Standing for itself it does describe very well a possible way of approaching a specific project of today, but in having euclidian geometry as its “natural” and theoretical foundation, it avoids dealing with the changes in perception that undoubtedly has followed the “discovery” of other geometries, the development of modern physics and the speed of modern communication systems. It also avoids the whole problematics of actually communicating a meaning through an image- and media-dominated culture. It seems to assume that the same subject, man, is there as firmly as she has ever been, always at the center the same. Reading other, more recent, texts and studying other projects by Steven Holl reveals a more complex perception of the problem.

... slipping into a world below...

Steven Holl shows in his two most recent texts; “Locus Soulless”⁴ and “Pre-theoretical ground”⁵ more clearly that the ground he is seeking addresses – and is conscious of – the problems arisen in the media society of today. The “soulless” space of technological expansion can be countered through fusing it with the coexistent tendency of contraction, the uprising of local cultures. Two opposite concepts of time held together in a non-dialectical relationship, time as flow and time as difference, points of specificity; “The poetic illumination of unique qualities, individual cultures, and individual spirits makes reciprocal connections in the transcultural, transhistorical present.” (EoA, p. 37). In the latter text he approaches the question from the experiencing side, which in a way is more promising since that is the location of the receiver around whom the web of information is constantly more and more tightly woven and demands to be pierced through. The experience of “phenomena” – as distinguished from that of objects – is what let us slip below into a pre-theoretical and pre-logical world. To open architecture to this underworld is a question of letting exploration and curiosity take over, to think through the matter that makes the



Protoelements;
lines and volumes.



De Shaw and Company, reception area. Experiments with reflected colour and denial of the limit.

form. Types of perception emerges in this “zero-ground” as “phenomenal zones” which are the experimental territories; “zones of intensely charged silence ... beyond words”. (SH, p. 21.)

Silence from Perplexion?

Making architecture involves a thought that forms itself through the material in which it is made. The thinking-making couple of architecture occurs in silence. Afterward, these thoughts are communicated in the silence of phenomenal experience. We hear the “music” of architecture as we move through spaces while arcs of sunlight beam white light and shadow.

In opposition to those who insist on speech, on language, on signs and referents, we strive to escape language-time bondage. To evolve theoretically in active silence encourages experimentation. Silent phenomenal probes haunt the polluted sea of language like submarines gliding along the sandy bottom, below the oil-slick of rhetoric ... (SH, p. 21.)

The reaction against language-based architecture is in the context of post-modern and deconstructivist architecture understandable, but not in itself entirely justified. Instead of treating language as the only available source of meaning, being a self-referential container from which we can only assemble collages⁶; it might be regarded as the medium or tool for putting an image, an architectural experience into motion, without holding the position of meaning in itself. Paul Ricoeur puts forward this position and argues that the only way to come to an understanding of the self, the other and the world is through language, which makes perceptions and images “productive”, makes it possible to go from an experience to actual action.⁷ Language is here almost like a wall towards which we throw a ball and receive it back, going in another direction, being different and in one sense still the same. The theoretical position of Steven Holl, as put forward in his texts, seems sometimes to be blind for this latter interpretation of the role of language. The quest for silence as quoted above, levels reality on a hierarchical scale, putting a primacy to a silent perception independent from words and linguistic structures. I do not believe that that level can neither be distinguishable nor independent, and Steven Holl shows in his practice a much more complex and rich understanding of the problem.

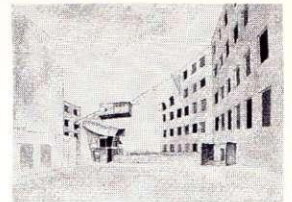
Another interpretation that might be made of Holl’s quest for silence and the slipping below to an underworld of phenomenal sensation is to see it as an effect of a “blow” of architecture, the *Dasein* existing for a short moment in a state of perplexion, an un-founding of the system of significations in order to found a new world. The effect of the materiality and tactility of his works could

indeed evoke this “wonder” which is necessary in order to reach the “object of communication”, the subject of today. But to be meaningful as a work of interpretation, providing us a glimpse of the earth, we have to step up again and with our achieved reanchored language constitute our experience as a field of action. Architecture must work further beyond that first blow of disorientation and be conscious of the multiplicity of meanings that can thus be created. On this level the structure of language can be worked through as a carrier of meaning, a medium for interpretation and a precondition for the dialogue that is hoped for with an architecture of interaction.

Programmatic Imagination

Rethinking the architectonic program is the most basic beginning of any more substantial attempt to step out from the dilemma created by the reduction of architecture into either instrumental technology or “quasi sublime art”. The hidden structure that a program creates has dangerous potentials if not consciously considered. There is a program beneath all buildings which goes far deeper than the mere assignment of fulfilling the client’s requirements regarding spatial disposition and aesthetical preferences. It is the architect who is responsible for making possible the ways of living realised by individuals in a physical reality. Without implying that certain actions could ever be securely assured to never happen, (almost anything can occur in any space), one still has to be aware of that a meaningful space has the power to offer inspiration for action and above all for discussion. Steven Holl is actively experimenting with programmatic fluctuation as a response to the rapid changes in needs that is a result of the general contemporary life-style. He is taking the problem beyond mere technical flexibility in his suggestion of “Hybrid buildings”, where different uses are overlapping and interluding, never letting one specific take over and form a type. The hybrid building forms an anti-type as much as an anti-object, an anti-typology which admits a defense against the idealisation of architectonic form which has made possible a complete removal from situation and context.

Makuhari Newtown, a city block in Chiba, was planned in 1992 by Steven Holl Architects and holds within it a variety of programs and experiences⁸. It consists of two interrelating structures engaging with their different characters in a form of dialogue; one stout and softly mumbling living/sleeping facility, the other twittering numerous melodies in high-pitched tones, providing various “miniature programs”. Here, in the little pavillions, phenomenal experiences are offered in the connections between natural interventions (sun, wind, reflections, sky and water) and material tactility. The multiplicity of relations created in this way allows



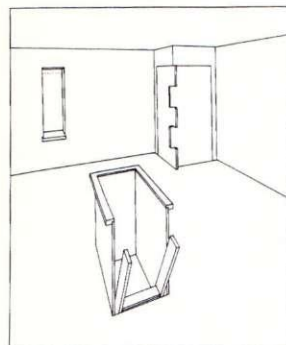
House of teleological suspension attaching to a solid wall folding out to reach over, always stretching the limit condition.

for infinite interpretations from the inhabitants, hopefully stupored with wonder often enough to create a spirit of constant un-founding and refounding in a never-ending discourse.

Of these specific ideas, several might be realized, yet the overall strategy and intention depends on none of them. They serve only as examples for the figure in the landscape of this city for which the unknown is a source of optimism. To affirm the joy of the present, to find lines of escape, **to subvert an overall urban plan from within** – via architecture – is part of projecting an open future as a source of freedom.⁹

These words accompanies a town planning project in Porta Vittoria, Milan, which was commissioned for an exhibition on imagined cities in 1987. They stand very well by themselves for a general concern of Steven Holl, the possibility of acting and making use of a situation of indeterminacy to provide a hope for a future, while avoiding the utopian closure of predetermination and limitation of ideas. Through working simultaneously with perspectival sketches, fragmentary imaginations of possible inhabitable spaces; and “poetic naming” of programmatic points, such as “The See-Saw”, “The Octopus”, “Monument to Toil”, “Hotel for Unhappy Lovers”, “The Garden of Sounds” etc., this open yet defined situation is created. An overall program and plan is derived from this fragmented sketching and naming, going from the margin towards an empty central space, left undefined to allow for a continuous playing of a game with transforming rules. This is one of Holl’s many projects that promises a multitude of meanings, embracing the condition of a segmented body of knowledge, only possible to reach through active engagement in the lived experience. To allow this depth to occur in a human artefact requires a decentering of the poetic imagination, from the coherent self of the subject towards an active engagement of the individual imagination in the world of contradictions. Other projects of interest in this context are for example the American Memorial Library in Berlin, the Chiasma, (see below) and the Makuhari city block (above).

Another method, connected to the “poetic naming” in Porta Vittoria, that Steven Holl uses to create programs for a specificity within an open and general context, is that of imagining fictive characters as future inhabitants of the building. Working with the poetic imagination lets the project live as already built while drawing, and at the same time avoids the objective reality as putting limiting constraints to the project’s potential. A leap into fiction serves as a model for the spatial experience where memory, dreams and anticipations are included. Characters used are for example in the Bridge of Houses (79–82) on Manhattan, “The decider”, “The doubter”, “The man without opinions” but again poe-



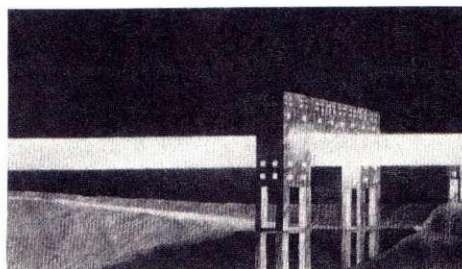
The stair of the tragic poet.

tic concepts are also used, nouns such as; “The riddle”, “The dream-house”, “matter and memory”¹⁰. In *Hybrid Building, Florida* (85–88), there is one side reserved for early rising Melancholic types; “a tragic poet”, a “mathematician” and a “musician”¹¹. In Zürich¹² a group of apartments are organised in three types, the Apollonian, Dionysian and the suspended type for Daidalos.

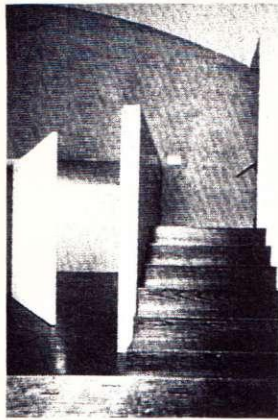
The aim with this method is never to create fictions in themselves but to provide an individuation of anonymous spaces, thus confronting the alienation of functionalist architecture, where the norm followed was decided from a statistically determined average man, most probably not represented among the “real” inhabitants. Further down, in the presentation of the “Fukuoka” housing project, the role of hinged space will be explained in its role of programmatic individuation.

Beyond drawing-board geometry the actual spatial definitions of the city are interlocked in a web of relationships with movement, parallax and light. (WCR, p. 7.)

Connected to programmatic imagination is the process of sketching imaginary environments trying to catch the experiential richness of individual perception. Simultaneously we can recognise the face of a person we know, notice a dropped coin on the street and ponder the beauty of the houses on the street we have chosen to walk on. The more fragmented our urban experience has become the more present is this capacity of us. The task of representing this reality has to involve overlapping imagination where the clear focus of the dirty sidewalk merges with the background perception of our surroundings.¹³ The intentionality in our experience seek understanding of the situation we perceive, anticipation is always a part of our movement in space as well as the memory of what just passed. When drawing has become a mere tool for production, the building already exists in ideal space, even before being constructed. Nothing changes as the building arise from the “real” earth, since only ideal time, that is no-time, is accounted for. In the process of constructing architecture today, this dimension has to be recaptured, in a form corresponding to our foundational disorientation. This is a field for continuous experimentation, trying to put the reality in motion while capturing the architectural object floating in ideal space.



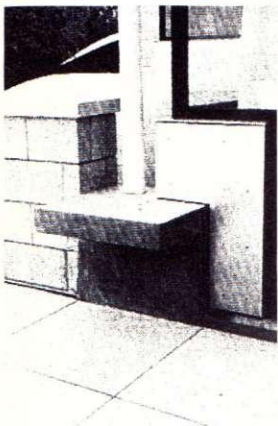
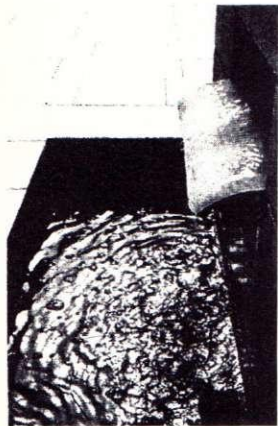
Gymnasium bridge,
the presence of the limit.



“The Intertwining – The Chiasm”¹⁴

Fusing the objective with the subjective, architecture can stitch our daily lives together by a single thread of intensity. (SH, p. 23.)

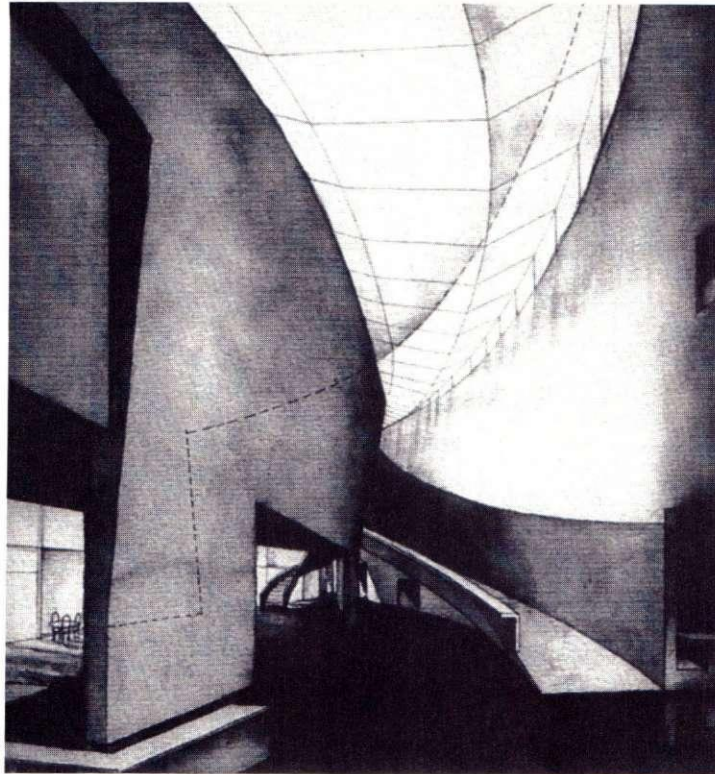
Looking at Steven Holl’s projects from the point of view of the condition of the boundary and the thickness of the limit, strengthens the power of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh as being an invisible resistant non-matter, fusing and differentiating the subject and the object. This concern with transitory stages as permanent has been present from the beginning of Holl’s career. Located in South Bronx, the Gymnasium bridge from 1977 can illustrate an early example where a vision of a new and more just society can be realised within this limit condition, suspended in between the real and the unreal, “the visible and the invisible”. The building/bridge is intended to serve as both a communication and a communal meeting space. The development of hinged space, adding a transformative and thickening quality to the “line” of the wall, connects the programmatic concept with a physical, spatial realisation. Later projects such as The “American Memorial Library in Berlin”, “Fukuoka Housing”, “Stretto house”, “Chiasma” (Art museum in Helsinki) and the projects on “the Edge of a City” are all focused on the inhabitation of the boundary itself. Formally this concern is present from the smallest scale detail, (the light coming in through a thick piece of bent glass in the Pace Gallery), to large overall planning strategies. In making the boundary present as “flesh” Steven Holl undermines the simplistic dualism as well as the homogenization of spatial experience. He discloses on an experiential level the ambiguous condition of contemporary life where contradictions are inevitably held together, but intellectually discarded.



Holl’s Stretto house, based on a musical score by Bela Bartok, is a spatial exercise in interlocking and overlapping which appears as much more rich and complex than Holl’s own mathematical equation between sound/time and light/space.

Chiasm, instead of For the Other: that means that there is not only a me-other rivalry, but a co-functioning. We function as one unique body (...) an exchange between me and the world, between the phenomenal body and the “objective” body, between the perceiving and the perceived: what begins as a thing ends as consciousness of the thing, what begins as a “state of consciousness” ends as a thing.¹⁵

This desire for “meshing” is also expressed in the written works on a theoretical level where Steven Holl is concerned with the “intertwining of intellect and feeling” that occurs in the interplay between architectural experience and the idea or concept that the building is organised around. The barriers needed to be questioned, subject/object, public/private, time as ideal or as lived all take part in this overriding intention of Steven Holl’s works. Sometimes he seems himself intellectually caught in simple dualisms, such as for example the relation between music and architecture as expressed



in the equation presented in the text on the Stretto house (see illustration), but in the projects these simplifications are never present. He himself expresses his way of dealing with the question as being an embracing of the dual conditions and not a simple rejection.¹⁶ He refers to the dialogical principle of Mikhail Bakhtin as a source for this idea where oppositions are held together in order to create a third. Like a true dialogical discourse, this “oppositioning” never intends to result in compromises, weak blends of lost potentials.

The winning entry to the 1993 competition for a new Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, Finland, is entirely focused on the intertwining and has as its motto, “Chiasma”¹⁷. In itself this project contains all different scales on which this chiasmic movement can take place. On a large scale three different directions are identified to connect the specificity of this building with the urban reality surrounding it. Present in these “arrows” are nature (the sea reaching into the city), culture (the relation to Finlandia Hall by Alvar Aalto) and the history of the city as spatially present in the meeting of two grid-patterns. There is a flow of water running through and under the exterior of the building. The interior is organised around ramps and stairs allowing for alternative routes and ways of experiencing the art and the building. The spaces, sketched in watercolours are serene and mysterious, the daylight is carried by the materiality of the walls, horizontally curved so as to catch and keep the nordic light, shining through long summer-nights.



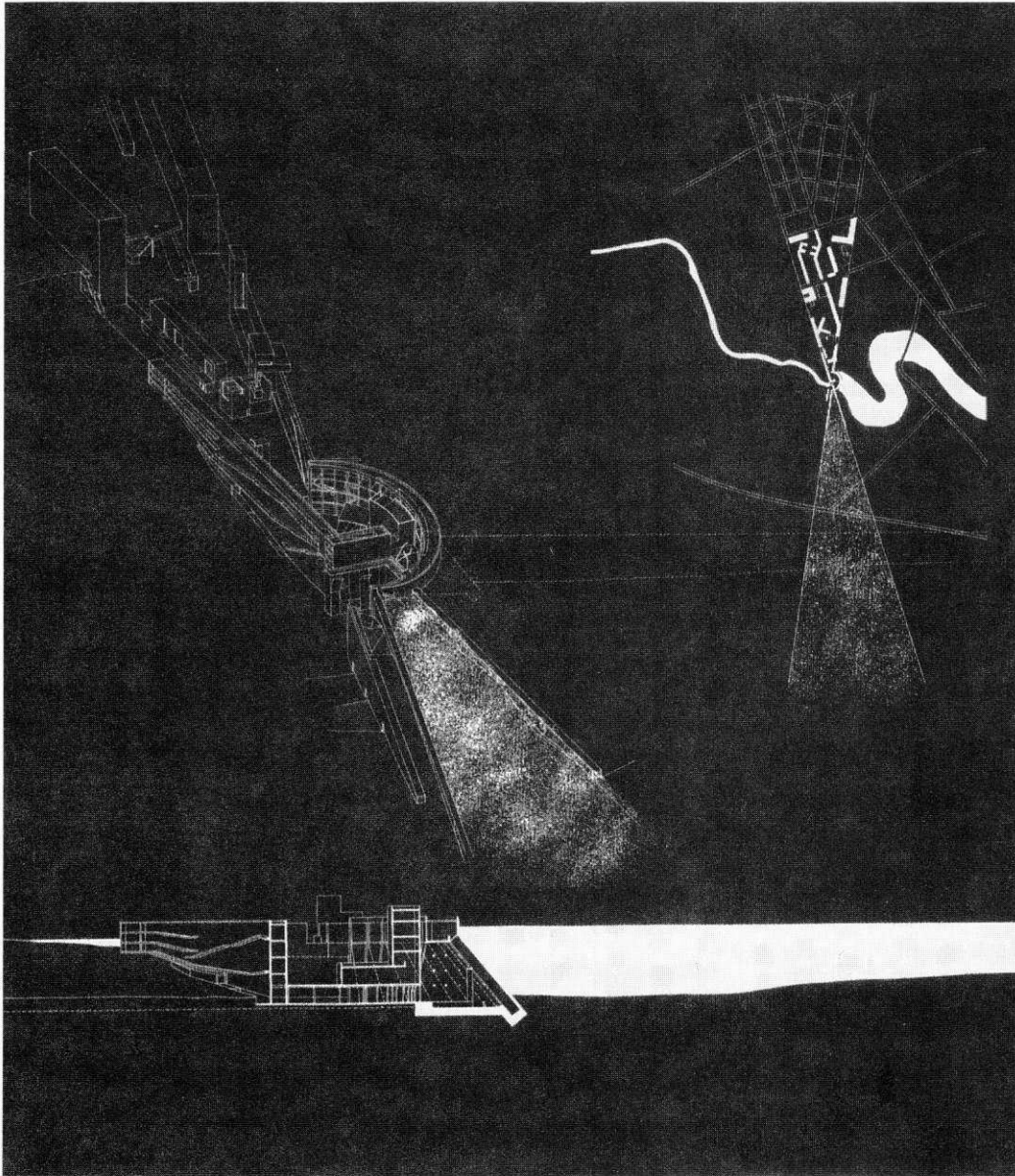
Fukuoka housing and New York Storefront gallery.

With Chiasma, there is a hope to confirm that architecture, art, and culture are not separate disciplines but an integral part of the city and the landscape. (...) The geometry has an interior mystery and an exterior horizon which, like two hands clasping each other, form the architectonic equivalent of a public invitation.¹⁸

“Chiasma”, stands as an interesting example of an attempt to assign to architecture the responsibility of being a critical and discursive democratic space. A concentrated point in a large urban fabric can radiate and penetrate throughout infinite space. It is the very boundness of the specific situation that makes it so powerful that it in some contexts stands for all, a momentary universal, turning up from behind. The Fukuoka housing project¹⁹ in Japan has similar intentions but interiorises the space to the individual inhabitant who gets the responsibility of being the carrier of his architectural experience out into the city. The hinged spaces, consisting of walls that pivot around vertical axes, allow for easy variation depending on day, season, family condition or other individual reasons for changing the organisation of the apartment. The volumes contain, in their exterior, “active” and “silent” voids interlocking, offering experiences in the interaction between the void and the dweller. Again, the physical reality of nature; sunlight, water, wind, reflections, concentrated in its reaction with the built construction, a “phenomenal lense”.

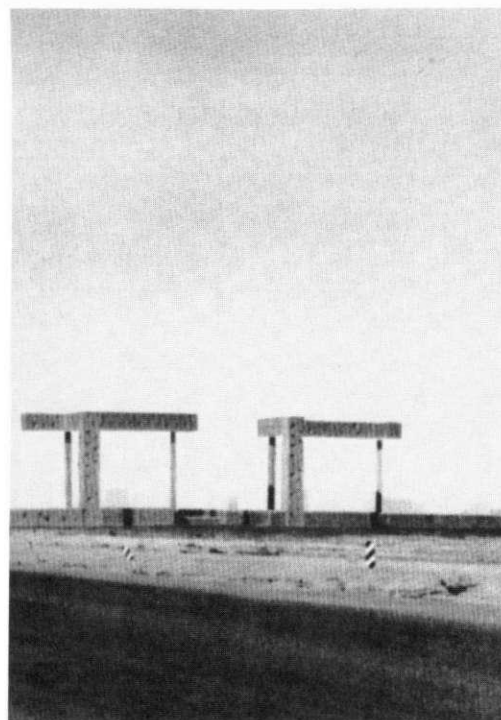
The hinged spaces in the Fukuoka project and the “StoreFront Gallery for Art and Architecture” facade in New York, a project in collaboration with Vito Acconci, where use of hinged openings radically questions the façade as a the sharp borderline between public and private, street and gallery, artist and art-visitor.²⁰

As a last example from Steven Holl’s prolific practice I want to present his Edge of a City projects, as a general strategy and illustrated with two specific plans; the Cleveland Stitchplan and the Spatial Retaining Bars in Phoenix.²¹ The “Edge of a City” was exhibi-



ted at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, 1991. The projects suggest utopian incisions at the boundaries between the urban and the rural, between city and nature. It is a response to the American formless cityscape that goes far beyond the Post-modern strategy of reworking the city-centres into European dimensions, imitating piazzas and constructing 19th century cityblocks. It is a subversion taking place from the margins that Steven Holl suggests, penetrating from within the outer limit to the heart of the modern city. Through providing new programs to abandoned sites he hopes to create an intensified urban realm, a new way of living decentred but at the same time at the very centre of your

The Cleveland stitchplan forms five Xs containing mixed use programs. In the points of intersection the paradox of the limit is enhanced since the point only is a point because of the crossing over of connecting lines. On the urban side of the X new living areas are suggested and on the rural side recreational activities can take place. One cross-over is developed into a dam, and the water meeting the X form a new boundary along the edge.



In Phoenix, Arizona, "Spatial Retaining Bars" are constructed in the beginning of the desert. They offer a program for full living and frames views of the mountains at a far distance. They are as much perceptual tools as inhabitable spaces. The structures form a double horizon with their cantilevered lofts. Underneath this second horizon the sun will be reflected at sunset, a reversal of the surface of the sea.

own life. The nature of the projects moves between being both unreal and real. The scale is often enormous, but details are considered and spaces realistically presented. The use of photo-montage strengthen this impression of utopia becoming real. The edge is as much a limit, with two sides, as a horizon onto which we project fears and hopes for the future. The "horizon" is as much as "to-morrow" a paradoxical concept, it is unreal since it per definition can never be reached, and every day is a new day, today. At the same time we are bound to these concepts, without them we are lost in a continuous flow, heading nowhere, leaving nothing behind. By suggesting these edge-constructions, Steven Holl provides a new horizon, "countering urban sprawl", offering a point of meaning.

Architecture is Now – Lebbeus Woods and the Struggle in Time

At this point, at the end of this paper, I wish to counter or make more real some of the propositions discussed above. Lebbeus Woods is a visionary and revolutionary architect whose practice in itself would need and deserve the space of a full paper to be analysed in depth. While Steven Holl's practice in general aims at a built reality for a specific client, Lebbeus Woods' projects are more often self-initiated and critical searches that refuse to play

within the rules of the game. To generalise, Steven Holl acts as if he believes in a possibility of changing society from within the architectural profession while Lebbeus Woods performs a sort of active nihilism, believing in his power as an individual to subvert society through making, without having to depend on its structure of power. His aim with the revolution he invokes is a transformative society based on responsible free individuals, who interact and understand each other, not through ideological consensus, but through a continuous self-assertion in individual actions. The tools he uses are the architect's traditional; precise drawings and models but he also makes powerful images and writes persuasive texts. They are not utopian and not Science-fictional, they are made and intended for being constructed in a present condition, but with a personal responsible projection into the future. Lately he has engaged in projects for cities of war; Zagreb and just recently Sarajevo. For having the courage to take a stand and act in this complex reality he deserves admiration and respect, and in doing so he puts himself in a vulnerable position, open for severe criticism.

A new architecture cannot be created by one person, nor can a new city, yet their coming into being relies almost entirely on individuals who are willing to act as though they were personally responsible for them. Only in this way can a shattered community without credible institutions reform itself on radically new terms. The architect who proposes to build the new with the old formulas and solutions (...), who enacts the old professionalisms (...), who mouths the old platitudes and optimisms (...) only perpetrates a depressing cynicism. The only way the new can be created is from deep within precise conditions existing in the present. The architect must become, more than ever before, a creature of the present, fusing all that is remembered and all that is dreamt within it as though existence itself were hanging in the balance.²²

War, Architecture and Life

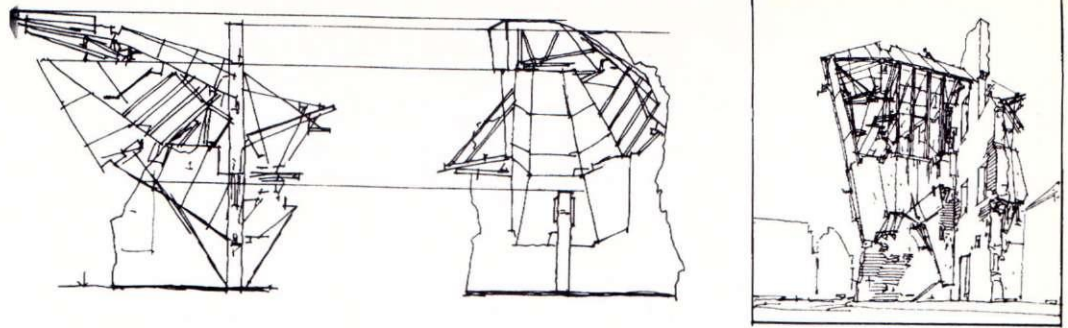
In a time where knowledge can never be objective, where stable structures fall apart and ideologies serve as promoters for war and violence, it is evident that there is a call for change. Life itself, is what Lebbeus Woods proposes as being what we have left to live for today. The classical distinction between Art and Life depends on a positioning of authority, knowledge and truth outside the individual, to tear down those structures Lebbeus Woods suggests a working with the human experience on the fluidity of life. The knowledge thus embodied in a work of architecture is in its essence

existential and has all its value positioned in life, not in art.²³ Since life is a constant flux, values positioned there can never be stable in themselves, only as temporarily fixed in matter outside the individual, can values be interpreted and used for dialogues. In this way the nihilism that Lebbeus Woods expresses does not at all proclaim the death of architecture, as built constructions for possible inhabitation, but rather the death of the profession as a static, serving tool of power. From the initiation of projects through the process of building and the struggle to inhabit them runs the architecture of becoming. The architect is an architect because he takes part in this process, not because of professional titles or education.

Program as Vehicle for Authority or Criticism ?

Questioning the authority of any power structure, no *requested* program should be carried through. In fact, Lebbeus Woods questions the whole idea of having a program at all for the structure to be built. In itself the space should be meaningless, only with an inhabitant could meaning be created.²⁴ This questioning of the idea of program makes sense with respect to the traditional understanding of the term as a tool for deciding the future use of the building. In this meaning program only serves to fulfil a certain need that the future inhabitant has and the architecture following this can only become a slick use-response, involving no engagement at all. But if program is redefined as being not a tool for prediction but the power of the individual imagination to project possible meanings into the work, I am not sure that his criticism would be as hard. Thinking in program is not a way of prescribing what can be done and what cannot be done in this or that space. It is rather a disclosing of hidden programmatic structures and a source for a free play around multiple meanings. Constructed space is always assigning some actions; that, it cannot escape. Avoiding to think of space in terms of bodily engagement in manifold ways, seems to be as dangerous an escape from responsibility, as the uncritical acceptance of a program, requested from society, and I do not think that that would be the right way to read Lebbeus Woods' criticism. As discussed above on Steven Holl; "programmatic imagination" gives a possibility for engaging actively in an open future.

There is nothing to express, anymore. There is only the paradoxical bringing into being of that which has not been asked for, nor is required. The future of my architecture, at least, lies only in its perpetual becoming.²⁵



Freespace Structure – Scar against Forgetfulness

The Freespace structures of Lebbeus Woods demands a struggle from its inhabitant. Only then can meaning form itself and embodied existential knowledge appear within the structure. From a completely different direction, but with similar aims, I would claim, demands the architecture of Steven Holl also an active response, in the resistance given from tactile experience: “If the imagist practices an architecture of “concealment”, resistance takes form in an architecture of “revealing”. Architecture of matter and tactility aims for a “poetics of revealing...””²⁶ The Freespaces drawn for Berlin and Zagreb have the role of subverting the power structure of an old society in need of change. As parasites, and worms, do they merge with the old pattern and eat the structure from within. In “War and Architecture I” Lebbeus Woods discusses the importance of never letting a war or destructive event be erased by either reconstructions of older city-patterns or a total renewal of complete forgetfulness. In his understanding of the decisive role of memory and dream (past and future), Lebbeus Woods’ visions are decisively different from both modernist future-oriented utopias, and romanticising dreams of a mythical return to the past.

The new spaces of habitation constructed on the existential remnants of war do not celebrate the destruction of an established order, nor do they symbolize or commemorate it. Rather they accept with a certain pride what has been suffered and lost, but also what has been gained. They build upon the shattered form of the old order a new category of order inherent in the present conditions, within which existence feels its strengths, acknowledges its vulnerabilities and failures, and faces up to the need to invent itself as though for the first time, thus seizing the means to continuously refresh and revitalize itself. There is an ethical and moral commitment in such an existence, and therefore a basis for community. (WaAI, p. 84.)

The double awareness, of the dangers of nostalgia and forgetting, puts Lebbeus Woods right into the now of the present. He appears as a Nietzschean nihilist, living through a transformative culture where values are continuously replaced and logic has ceased to rule.²⁷ The risk that underlies this nihilistic value-fluctuation, is that, in the long run, the present becomes an eternal now, that the past cannot be perceived because of the flux of all experience. If life would be a continuous transformation we would live in a never-ending present, indifferent to all meanings and ethical positions. A transformative “living-life-as-art” needs the constant ungrounding-regrounding of disorientation that the “blow” of art provides (see above, “The Primacy...”). The struggle for finding a meaning in the inhabitation of “freospace”, and the invention of reality in constructing it, might provide the temporary foundations necessary for us to perceive a thickness or a difference where values can be grounded.

The concepts of past and future are valuable only to the degree that they become or remain of the vivid present, the actual becoming of a moment. Past and future are to be considered, but only in order to be forgotten in the presence of experience.²⁸

Heterarchy – a Multitude of Meanings

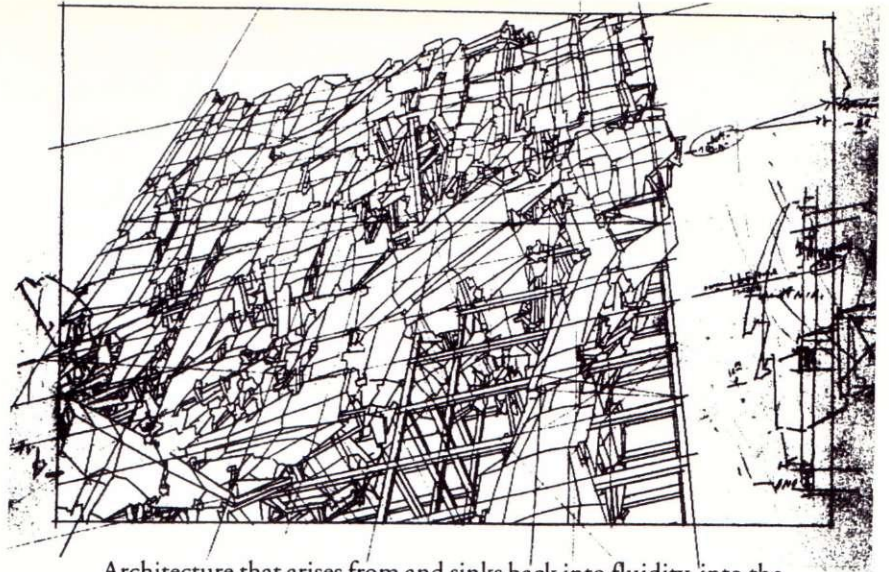
The challenge for architects today is to invent a whole greater than the sum of its parts, without resorting to totalitarian means. I am at present attempting to meet this challenge by what I believe to be an architecture of precision, in phenomenological terms, within a context of free choice and indeterminacy, in epistemological terms. (EM p. 69.)

Being asked more specifically about the meaning-content of his drawings²⁹, Lebbeus Woods answered with six interpretations, the fifth based on the four first asking for an acceptance of these co-existing meanings. The sixth interpretation, based on all others, asks simply for founding such a way of living where “such contradictions and multiple – or compound – interpretations are continually increased.”

With this last interpretation, the tectonics of the world landscape I have drawn comes directly into play – it is a tectonics of knowledge, in the modern sense of the word, which means a balancing of opposites, a dynamic form of synthesis, within the flux of highly personal experience. (EM p. 65.)

The creation of a multiplicity of meanings, or the possibilities of different interpretations, are preconditions for the projection of a weak future-orientation, or weak utopias, as the base of our actions. The realization that the “end” of modernity has come to “stay”, that “truth” has faded away, is an experience that could be dangerous if it turns back on itself either as a demand for new ideologies or as an indifferent nihilism of no possibility of any action. To step out of this dilemma we have to leave the concepts of stability and absolute truth and instead embrace paradoxes and contradictions as part of our interpretative existence and of the way knowledge and meaning is disclosed. Lebbeus Woods attacks the traditional logics as defined by Aristotle and the Euclidian stable geometry for being sources of hierarchical knowledge, founding the self-preserving stable society. The language of “the excluded middle” cannot deal with change and fluctuation, it does not inhabit the epistemological changes brought about in the 20th century and serves therefore only to confusion and paralysis. To realise mutually contradictory ideas can lead to a disclosure of a higher level of understanding; “paradox is revealed as a more developed, more complex form of order” where indeterminacy has a proper role. (WaAII p. 10.)

The urban patterns Woods suggests are heterarchical, that is to say, they have not one, but many centers, and cannot be spatially manifested as the hierarchical, monumental city. The life within heterarchy consists of autonomous individuals and groups, being self-inventing and cooperative. There will be a structure to it but one that is constantly changing. Communication systems should be available for anyone, creating the network for initiation of change and interaction. Dialogue is what constitutes the heterarchical way of life as opposed to the monologue of authority in a hierarchical structure. In an heterarchical structure the individual has to take part in a perpetual becoming while in an hierarchical one is possible to live an existence as simply being, physically, in space.³⁰ In “Centricity”, a project from 1987, Woods proposes an urban fabric consisting of many centers and of numerous plans, having a cyclical form. At the intersections of these cycles disturbances occur which put in motion the accumulated symmetry. In this way Woods seems here to recognise a larger but unfixable and invisible order, and in the focus of the many centers a presence of place discloses a quality of things. Steven Holl expresses a similar concern in his text “Locus Soulless” (EoAp 35–45) for the simultaneous existence of a trans-cultural flow of information and the contraction of meaning in points of specificity.



Architecture that arises from and sinks back into fluidity, into the turbulence of a continually changing matrix of conditions, into an eternal ceaseless flux – ... – architecture whose forms and spaces are the causes of rebellion, against them, against the world that brought them into being – ...

Conclusive Remarks

In bringing in Lebbeus Woods into the context of Steven Holl's architecture, and bringing their work into this paper, I hope to have contributed to an understanding of how ethical positions, and very different modes of action, are possible and necessary in our post-modern society. The criticism that Lebbeus Woods gives to the architectural profession is severe and quite just. Architects work uncritically and make possible realisations of programs serving to solidify a society that does not correspond to any belief but in some cases the apparent necessity for a continuous growth of economy and the abstract notion of well-being for "everyone". The convenience of stable naming leaves things to be what they are, or rather to be appropriated to the structure of hierarchical power. It is true that the modern citizen in western democratic societies are muted by a laid-back laziness and a numbing trust in the anonymous society's power of organising the life of the individual. The "perplexion" that is suggested in the beginning of this paper, is what would wake up the sleepy "mass" and make possible an individual responsibility and ethical standpoint. First when the personal features of each individual becomes clearer the possibility of dialogue is born.

To allow for change, indeterminacy and flux is the concern that in some sense connects these two architects. They both ask for the embracing of the paradox, understanding that a paradox in the

language we are bound to use, only mirrors the heritage of ideal time, where stability is the sole ruler. To understand the reality of such indeterminacy I found the reading of *Jacob's Room* very helpful, and I would argue that the power of fiction to provide insights to the "invisible" side of reality is an important tool for further work on this problem. The choice of presenting this material; works of Virginia Woolf, Steven Holl and Lebbeus Woods, in order to investigate some major concerns of mine, has been guided by their respective depth and radical questioning but also by their differences which make them complement each other. The subtlety in Virginia Woolf's search after Jacob, the quiet seriousness of the architecture of Steven Holl and the political action in the manifestos and works of Lebbeus Woods, are all features I think are crucial in attempts to work ethically with this world.

Type two words, two inches apart on blank paper. Wait for the vibrations to commence between them. Study the standing wave pattern. Type in the new word where it appears.

Notes

1. Steven Holl, *Anchoring*, p. 9. (Anch).
2. There are ambiguities that should need to be resolved in the claim of a zero-ground, the desire to avoid language-domination and the possibility of a geometrical base in for example the Golden Section.
3. Steven Holl, *Anchoring*, p. 9–12.
4. In *The End of Architecture*, Ed. P. Noever. (EoA).
5. *Steven Holl*, Catalogue from exhibition in "arc en rêve centre d'architecture" in Bordeaux, August 1993. (SH).
6. In *The Wake of Imagination* Richard Kearney describes this condition through the metaphor of the Post-man, formulated by Jaques Derrida in his essay, *La Carte Postak*: The post-man only delivers letters that he himself has not written.
7. In the lecture "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality" this position is discussed in the context of the relation between image, fiction and poetic imagination.
8. Published in *Steven Holl*, pp. 72–75.
9. *Steven Holl* p. 100, *Design Quarterly* 139–88 or *Lotus* 59–87. (My bold.)
10. *Anchoring*, p. 37–43, *Lotus Int.* 44–84/4.
11. *Anchoring*, pp. 80–89.
12. Zolikersberg, 1993, published in *Steven Holl*, p. 76.
13. Steven Holl discusses this in "Within the City Phenomena of relations", pp. 4–9, and in *Steven Holl* pp. 21–28.
14. Title of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay where the notion of "flesh" is introduced and discussed as being what makes poss-

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ible the recognition of world, other and my own visible body. In the collection *The Visible and the Invisible*.

15. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, "Working Notes", p. 215. (Val).
16. In interview, March 22nd, 1994.
17. In the competition entry Chiasma is defined as "1. a decussation of intersection. 2. a fusion and exchange of segments ... the source of genetic crossovers."
18. Steven Holl, "Chiasma – Notes on design", *Arkkitehti*, 4/5 1993, p. 31, the competition entry is well represented here as well as in *Steven Holl*, pp. 96–97.
19. *Anchoring*, pp. 140–149; *Domus* no 731, October 1991, pp. 43–50.
20. The project was performed as an installation, "exhibited" in December 1993. Published together with it is a booklet with description and an interview of Steven Holl and Vita Acconci.
21. These projects are well presented in *Pamphlet Architecture* no 13–91, *Quaderns* no 197–92, pp. 78–88, *Design Quarterly* no 152–91, pp. 41–48.
22. Lebbeus Woods, "War and Architecture II", *A+U*, feb. 1994, pp. 8, 10 (WaAII)
23. "War and Architecture I", *A+U*, no 277, October 1993, p. 83. (WaAI).
24. *Freespace Architecture*, Vol. 162, 1992, p. 41; see also discussion between Woods and Holl, among others, on the issue of program in *The End of Architecture?*, Ed. P. Noever, pp. 110–21.
25. *Skala*, Nr 27, 1992, "Efter Metropolis", Interview by Anders Michelsen, p. 69. (EM).
26. Steven Holl, "Within the City Phenomena of Relations", p. 16.
27. Gianni Vattimo makes this interpretation of Nietzsche in *The End of Modernity*, p. 21.
28. Lebbeus Woods, *Anarchitecture – Architecture is a Political Act*, p. 46.
29. *Skala*, No 27. "Efter Metropolis", p. 65.
30. *Skala*, "Efter Metropolis", p. 67.
30. Christopher Dewdney, *Radiant Inventory*, McClelland and Stewart, Toronto 1988.

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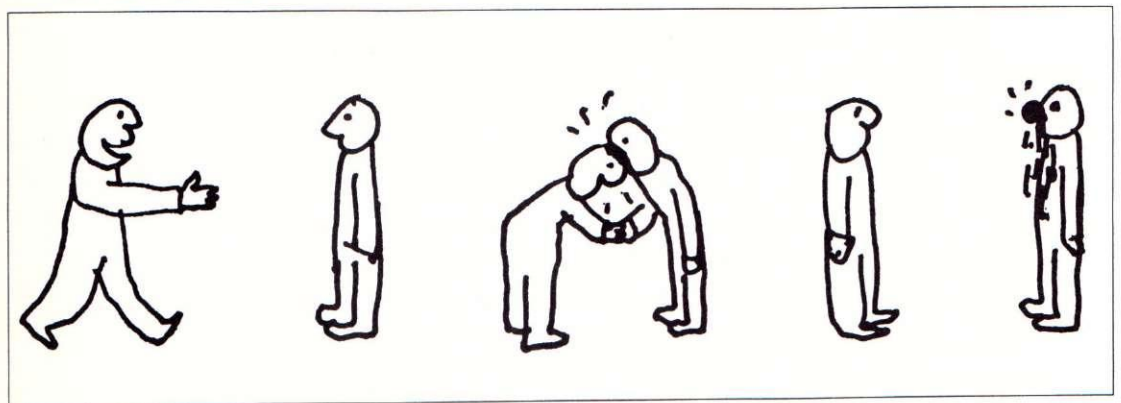
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