

ARCHITECTURES THAT MATTER

– events of/in spatial thinking

I, who have not done any 'real work', who is not a practicing architect, do I have the right to talk about Architecture, to speak in the name of Architecture? I do have an university degree and I have studied architecture for almost ten years. But one does not learn to do architecture by studying it, one learns by doing it, by designing concrete buildings that are actually build. The real completion of building is crucial and it has to be build in your name. To be a real Architect one must have a concrete building in one's own name.

But what do I want with architecture? I don't want to do buildings. Not now at least, not under the current conditions for building. But I want to approach architecture. I want to ask about the possibility and limits of achitecture, the conditions of architecture and maybe even about the necessity of architecture and architectural thinking. Is it possible to approach architecture as an architect without designing actual buildings? What kind of an approach could this be? Is it possible to think and write about architecture, about architectural thinking; think architecture?

Architecture is seen as something that exists outsi-

de the written texts about architecture. Written text always refers to architecture that exists in the real world. Architecture is 'out there', present as concrete buildings. Architecture is an interesting field of study because it does not so much claim to produce knowledge about reality; instead it claims to produce reality itself. That is why it regards itself as outside of writing and speech which only represent reality. Architecture precedes reverse to language or signs in general. In the case of signs it is traditionally understood that first there is a reality that the sign then represents. In architecture there is first the sign (a design in drawing) that is then turned into reality. So how is the question of knowledge in and about architecture to be approached in this situation? What is thinking and writing architecture here? And all this after deconstruction of the traditional understanding of signs and reality, of representation.

But isn't this the theory of architecture? Isn't that what writing about architecture is, can and should be about? But am I writing about architecture, thinking that it is something external? Am I doing a theory of

architecture from outside of it?

I was asked to write and describe my research. It is mostly writing. It is writing architecture. I will call it architecture even though it will not result in an actual building. The writing is under its way so we are not able to see yet where it is going. One has to feel one's way about.

My research is about bodies and places that materialise as well as about the acts of creations that are risk taking. And all this meeting with architecture, perhaps, and in writing. I thought to approach these issues through phenomenology. I decided to proceed through three phenomenological points of views, those of art, body and place. I wanted to get near the materiality of architecture. The plan is that with these phenomenological points of views I am able to develop a theoretical and conceptual framework to approach the materiality of architecture.

Through the point of view of the body my aim has been to establish a connection between body's spatiality and architecture's spatiality. Spatiality is seen as a fundamental property of human existence and the body has the central role in this. In the words of Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

...there would be no space at all for me if I had no body.¹

The viewpoint of art examines the possibilities of artistic expression or of creative act. Here I aim to get out of the traditional aesthetic understanding. Through Martin Heidegger's writings the creative act can be posited as risk taking, always an open ended enterprise that cannot be calculated in advance.² It is a meeting with the world, with the other, where the outcome of the meeting is uncertain.

The viewpoint of place aims to study if with the concept of place we are able to get at the materiality of architecture and environment.

The second part is an analysis of the works of architecture. My interest is the city, the materialisation of the city space and architecture in our time. The areas of analysis are Kamppi in Helsinki in Finland and Euralille in Lille in France.

The whole thing seems clear enough: on the other hand the theoretical part and building of the theoret-

tical framework (so I would get a chance to build something after all) and on the other hand an application of it in analysing the contemporary concrete works of architecture, in reality. But there is something that evades me here. Or not something but no thing. And this happens in all the points of views I have taken. This application part is supposed to be the part where I go out there to meet the actual Architecture, the works of Architecture themselves. In a way this is where I should get to the point. But it is just the point that evades me.

I must turn around the theoretical framework and the conception of 'the reality' a bit. I must question the presumptions hidden in this thinking and the outcomes it will lead to. Here I am taking a step towards deconstructing my theoretical framework on my way to deconstructing architecture.

To take just an example let us take the place. I thought that (in) architecture is something that is not expressible in language at all. But that this something could be a something we can perceive. Thus the turn to phenomenology. There are several paths opening from here. The path I thought to take up is the one asking about the presence and the perception of this something in the case of place. So what is meant in phenomenology when the place is said to be concrete? What are the conditions of this concreteness? Because place is not a thing. From space it is said that it is not perceivable³, but how about place? Phenomenologists turn to place because it seems to offer perceivable qualities. The concreteness of place opens it to perception and in doing so offers a secure foothold for existence.⁴

But is the problem of architecture that we are not perceiving the concrete place enough? That we do not see or take into account the whole of the body to sense place appropriately? Have not things that are present and can be perceived, been able to 'take care of themselves' in our Western metaphysical tradition? Even if they are ignored it is quite easy to point this out since they present themselves as present.

So I have begun to wonder if it is not so much the perceived material than the immaterial of/in architecture, that I am after. To be able to trace this immaterial of/in architecture I need to take the deconstructive step. Through deconstruction I am able to ask after the

immaterial, to that which does not present itself but instead leaves and covers up traces. This can lead to open up questions like: if place is the effect of architectural tracing, the architectural trace? Or is it a covering up of a trace? Here might be a path to think about place as an event.

Writing deconstruction also leads to the question of the discursive in architecture. Is it possible to open a discussion between deconstruction and architecture? Is it possible to approach architecture this way? Some writing about the theory of architecture puts architecture and deconstruction against each other, trying to find which is a condition for the other. In this discussion the breaking point of deconstruction (or deconstructive subject position) is architecture and the dialogue ends up in the monologue of the conqueror, that is architecture since deconstruction does not survive it.⁵ I have my doubts about this reading of the possibility of deconstruction in architecture. Deconstruction is not a subject position that wants to survive anything. And neither is architecture a single monolith or single subject position either. I am for multiple architectures that can be approached from different positions, also through deconstruction.

But does architecture need discussion in the first place? Is architecture an academic discipline of which a discussion is a part of praxis at all. As I noted above architecture is not so much concerned about the production of knowledge about the reality, as it is about creating reality. Architecture does not have much to

do with episteme, it operates in the realm of the ontological and the existent, where those who know how to do it know how to do it. And the guarantee of the work is the signature of the creator, the architect. Can there be knowledge or discussion about architecture here?

What would discursiveness bring, what could we ask concerning architecture? What if we did not ask after knowledge and its keepers but instead about ethical, aesthetical and economical⁶ and their inscription in architectural. This might lead, for example, to the traces of place and what was inscribed there, perhaps events. Approaching architecture from here, in writing, would be a risk taking, maybe even a creative act, from one who is not a practising architect, who does not have an identity of the architect but who is still an architect.



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Notes

1. Merleau-Ponty, Maurice: *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge, Great Britain, 1995, p. 102.
2. See e.g. Heidegger, Martin: *The Origin of the Work of Art and the Question Concerning Technology in Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger*, ed. David Farrell Krell, Routledge, London, 1994.
3. E.g. Nerlich, Graham: *The Shape of Space*, Cambridge University Press, Great Britain, 1994, p. 1. "...space seems elusive to the point of eeriness...It is imperceptible by any mode of perception."
4. Casey, Edward S: *Getting Back into Place. Towards a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Indiana University Press, USA, 1993, p. xv. "I shall accord to place a position of renewed respect by specifying its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in the terms of where we are (as well as where we are not)." Casey's emphasis.
5. Wigley, Mark: "The Translation of Architecture, the Production of Babel, (1988)", in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. K Michael Hays, A Columbia Book of Architecture, MIT Press, USA, 2000, p. 673. "Because of architecture's unique relationship to translation, it cannot simply translate deconstruction. There is an implicit identity between the untranslatable remainder located by deconstruction and that part of architecture that causes deconstruction to hesitate – the architecture it resists. Consequently, deconstruction does not simply survive architecture." In this reading both deconstruction and architecture are presented as somehow unitary and single subject positions. Deconstruction is not a subject and architecture is not a unitary and single subject either.
6. Economical in the context of deconstruction is not about money in traditional economic sense. Money in this context is the technology of time.
See http://www.wu-wien.ac.at/wwwu/institute/slawisch/weitlan/kso_redaktion/21_Gernalzick_Derrida.pdf