

The Architect's Vortex (As Described by Heidegger, Foucault, Wittig, and Others)

By

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Accepted 29 April, 2013

Abstract- This essay distinguishes relations of authority and control in the spatial arrangement of buildings. More specifically, it concretely describes interactions between particular spatial settings and their performers – producers, promoters, users, and architectural objects, by means of a concept that explains the role of vision and knowledge in post-industrial society: “the vortex.” According to this concept, the perceived image has been controlled by its promoters through the imposition of a regime of scarcity, with common logistic intentions. Its visual character is revealed through formal aspects such as uniformity, absolute order, and cosmic rhythm. This attitude affirms the role of progress as short term profits in the interest of those in control, in a world where ends are nothing and development is all. In the traditional “vortex,” the works of art carry the cultural prestige of their promoters. When audiences limit their selective possibilities as a result of the promoters’ prestige, “the vortex” takes on a paternalist position. Other emotions such as human affection and expressiveness (commonly related to maternal authority) are excluded from the interpretative process. Therefore, “the vortex” may be considered gender-biased, and if race or class do not exist independently of gender, is it considered race-biased or class-biased as well? In order to gain access to an audience, cultural authority operates through a traditional chain of linear communication. The subjects of this authority generally accept the artifacts and forms of speech traditionally displayed by the communication chain. This cultural chain limits subjects’ selective possibilities. The functioning of this chain depends on subjects’ legitimation, with subjects and promoters of artistic information not considered on the same level. For G. Debord, “the vortex” (known to him as “spectacle”) is the main component of Western philosophy, which reduces reality to a world of mere appearances. Visual knowledge permeates the way audiences think and learn. In other words, particular perceptions become the desired social product. What kind of individuals shall this perceptual process create? Opinions are divided regarding this issue. Many theorists – such as Debord, consider that there is a sense of loss involved, carrying individuals to their own intellectual “death.” For others, the structure of “the vortex” must always be present, in order to find more realistic alternatives. Thus, the question of how “the vortex” operates remains open.

Keywords: Care, Carnal Knowledge, Equipmentality, Spectacle, Vertigo, Vortex.

Introduction

“What was the beginning? they say. They say that in the beginning they are huddled against each other... They move over the smooth shining surface. Their movements are translation, gliding. They are dazed by the reflections over which they pass. Their limbs gain no adhesion anywhere. Vertically and horizontally, it is the same mirror neither hot nor cold, it is the same brilliance, which nowhere holds them fast... They are prisoners of the mirror” (Wittig 1985,30).

Can a corporeal, circumspective architectural vortex trap together the originating components of the architectural domain -work, design, users, and architects, as well as their contention/interaction? As the beginning and end of the architectural experience, the vortex “...contains the undisclosed abundance of the unfamiliar and extraordinary, which means that it also contains strife with the familiar and

ordinary” (Heidegger 1971, 76).

This contention reinforces, rather than dissents with, the kinship of the architectural components, making possible a reciprocal architect-design relationship. The contention becomes manifest as a split or fissure; as a rift. “This rift does not let the opponents break apart; it brings the opposition of measure and boundary into their common outline” (Heidegger 1971, 63). Here, the architect’s thinking opens specific domains or fields, translating multiple design possibilities into architectural works. Inversely, architectural works become products of design possibilities contained by the field, as outcomes from architectural thinking. In order to create dialogue and/or exchange, the architectural vortex aims at perception, existential reconfiguration and general thinking, and engages users/architects into duration/time; that is, an “event” or “work” in which past, present, and future become evident as authentic understanding.

Through its public, institutional, and/or private fields or domains, architecture conveys to others perceptual attributes such as color, texture, volume, and sound. In other words, the nature of the architect as an artist coincides with the nature of his/her designs, and vice versa. Together, architect and design can define a tangible proposition or “work” where tissue and humanity interact as touch and flesh; as the origin of equipmentality, and thus, of the vortex.

A. Dwelling and Genius Loci.

Carnal knowledge entails a skillful use of hands, doing something palpable and material, yet being performed repeatedly and effortlessly such as an attitude or habit. Its habitual, customary quality is etymologically related to the Latin verb *habitare*, to reside, to dwell. Dwelling allows designs, and works of architecture to become things with an existential purpose for users.

By means of a desire to touch/be touched through qualities such as solidity, firmness, openness, and dissolution, dwelling conveys the workly character of a work of architecture. These material qualities disclose states of mind where users can linger, such as deep collective memories. Although they reveal themselves to users/architects as a result of equipmentality, the qualities conceal their thingness, preventing them from being infringed or penetrated. On the other hand, instead of revealing a workly architectural character, unauthentic, abstract techniques unsuccessfully attempt to break apart

these qualities for the sake of progress, showing the role of the promoters' control. For instance, a wall's firmness cannot be trespassed, even if the wall is demolished: this attribute will immediately withdraw into its scattered remnants.

Thus, the circumspect, careful concept of dwelling elicits a familiar spirit of place by means of meaningful aromas, whispers, and shadows.

The spirit of place, or genius, interacts/collides with the presence of corporeality and the concept of dwelling. This genius, along with the location itself and its spatial configuration, creates a visual triangle that functions as follows. In a particular context, a genius shows to the user's intuition how the work contains particular substance, shape, and color (Norberg-Schulz 1980, 6). In a general context, a genius becomes part of a collective experience, "...which, from moment to moment, never ceases to change its content, its form, its face, its identity" (Foucault 1973, 5).

In other words, place is a concrete reality humans face and come to terms with in their daily lives (Norberg-Schulz 1980,5). Users rely on places that are connected to their environment and emotions, places to which they are accustomed to. In this context, places evoke material qualities from the architectural work: reflective and contemplative upbringings permeate our basic appreciation of the work's actual conditions. Architects are incited to generate architectural designs using material and formal attributes. Through its workly character, architecture defines itself as an authentic field or domain.

B. Equipmentality and Use as Fleshness.

Design evokes and conceals the thingness of built structures. By defining itself as a thing, architecture discerns matter (hule) from form (eidos). Form becomes the display and function of the matter. For instance, a quality such as the whiteness of a room can also symbolize the presence of a pure, clean environment. In addition, material and formal qualities are preceded by a discernment that justifies their existence: their use or equipmentality. As a circumspective, material kind of insight, equipmentality reveals the tangible structure of things (such as in the case of a hammer, a soft pair of shoes or a cozy bed), as well as reflections upon which they can rely – e.g., hammering, walking or resting, respectively. "All this comes forth as the work sets itself back into the massiveness and heaviness of stone, into the firmness and pliancy of wood, into the hardness and luster of metal, into the lighting and darkening of color, into the clang of tone, and into the naming power of the word" (Heidegger 1971, 46).

Being a phenomenological attribute, equipmentality invokes the presence of a sense of touch (and thus, of flesh as a carnal, corporeal attribute). Through equipmentality, the work acquires flesh; it is "human," and therefore, "authentic." Thus, the work becomes a convector; a body of knowledge.

Due to its lack of intentionality, depth contends with and allows the fleshness of things to bloom (Merleau-Ponty 1968,219). Because of depth, grades of nearness take place around works/users in distance and space. At first glance, flesh seems violent and crude, but it is also poignant and direct; it never conceals reality, and when the work embodies its openness, flesh flourishes as the foundation of the world. As touching and being touched simultaneously, the user/architect becomes a "touching subject;" that is, part of the things of the world by which he/she is surrounded

(Merleau-Ponty 1968, 133-134). While this occurs, flesh touches the work that takes place in his/her immediate world. This flesh is continuum or means of communication instead of barrier or obstacle. Flesh emerges as the most relevant component between the user/architect and the work. In addition, flesh transforms itself into the surface of the users' body: through its "envelope" or "outer self," the body measures the world that unfolds beyond its limits. It is through their body that users experience touch; the body fluctuates as a carnal pivot between the tension of what is known and what is unknown to it. Carnal knowledge allows users to move inside and outside their world, following their orientation as point of departure. Thus, instead of moving as an automaton, propelled by cause and effect, or paraphrasing Maurice Merleau-Ponty, as fact or sum of facts, the human body projects itself upon primal orientation: carnal knowledge (Merleau-Ponty 1968, 139).

C. Care and Authenticity.

Following Martin Heidegger's definition, care is a temporal and existential openness that involves concern, responsiveness and commitment. Care is circumspective and foresightful. Care "takes care" of the workly character of the work, as well as the reflections of users/architects. In addition, care involves components of the work of architecture, such as authenticity, potentiality, understanding, and falling. In this context, "...care is Being-towards- death" (Heidegger 1962, 378). Through their own flesh, users/architects try to overcome the work's opaqueness, finding at times an "axis mundi" that revolves over and over as if in a vortex; a vortex where the work can rest due. As a call of conscience and resoluteness, care places out of the vortex's context the inauthentic nature of the "they." On the other hand, transparency defines authentic knowledge; what is familiar or unacquainted to users/architects. By "seeing through" a useful tool, conceiving it as an extension of the body, transparency allows tones of flesh to penetrate through the architectural "work." The self-assured, careful character of the work outlines the architectural domain, as well as the thingness of its formal qualities. An alternative to describing the careful, workly character of a work occurs by putting aside all personal and collective preconceptions. After a preliminary "bracketing," architecture can be grasped as a consequence from equipmentality. For instance, if a building as a piece of equipment requires remodeling, its use might also need to be redefined. Yet, usefulness relies on the presence of dependability; i.e., how users perform actions inside/outside an architectural work. This dependability collects particular works in accordance to material and formal attributes. In this context, the work can be manipulated by others as something useful – or equipmental.

When things get deprived of their careful, equipmental character, their authentic context is taken away from them, becoming abstract targets without a genuine connection towards the architectural field. The lack of authenticity points towards the user's lack of satisfaction, causing a serious identity struggle, as well as a loss of the foundation of the world. The eternal, endless lightness or loss, which leads toward the death of meaning and points towards the legacy of modern architecture, evolves into the invisible, taking the form of a reflection; of a "soul" or "ghost." For a bulimic, the loss of flesh becomes his/her silhouette:

"My soul seemed to grow as my body waned; I felt like one of those early Christian saints who starved themselves in the desert sun. I feel invulnerable, clean and hard as the bones etched into my silhouette" (Woods 1981).

D. The Role of Curiosity.

Curiosity prevents users/architects from experiencing care, as well as from digging into material/formal conventions and characteristics of the work. Curiosity is depthless; finite: it allows users/architects to dispassionately change their appreciation from one work of architecture to another. In order to facilitate its functioning, curiosity acts as a metonymy. By eluding contention and criticism, it disregards the inclusion of qualities that give depth to the work, such as expressiveness and privacy. By losing its depth, the work loses poetry (i.e., the capacity to put forth qualities or emotions through the process of making, allowing it to become creative), thereby relying on reason and becoming abstract. The lack of depth allows users/architects to “flush out artifices of presentation and to accept new works” (Lyotard 1984,79). This distractive character of curiosity, defined by Heidegger as the “never dwelling anywhere,” allows personal/collective pleasure by turning away the attention from what burdens or distresses, not showing any concerns on the future; on what comes next (Heidegger 1962, 217). Due to the influence of curiosity in a consumerist, progressive culture such as ours, particular designs become the desired architectural product. Since the user wants the design/work to be his/her own, he/she desires the work’s conceptual framework, even if this option is neither corporeal nor equipmental. This framework defines specific works that the user must accept in order to gain access to cultural prestige. Promoters seek to define users’ expectations by means of ownership: the purchase of a work of architecture confers on them a cultural identity, though it might not be their own. In this consumerist context, architectural field becomes objectified into profitable goods, such as historicist periods, design theories, and architectural products. Thus, “when curiosity has become free... it concerns itself with seeing, not in order to understand what is seen... but just in order to see. It seeks novelty only in order to leap from it anew to another novelty. In this kind of seeing, that which is an issue for care does not lie in grasping something and being knowingly in the truth; it lies rather in its possibilities of abandoning itself to the world” (Heidegger 1962, 216). In other words, a privation or lack of equipmentality translates artifices of presentation into superficial works and designs.

Yet, the climax of this curious operation is not achieved by directly perceiving the hidden treasure; it is rather accomplished when the user’s perception is taken by surprise from behind. When somebody watches me seeing someone else through a keyhole, I suddenly feel arrested, vulnerable, disclosed from behind (i.e. as reflection of my own fears; of my own death). Peekaboo! The event becomes interrupted; through the other’s presence, the user becomes aware of his/her sensual penetration. The user has been hooked by his/her own curiosity and becomes embarrassed; ashamed of this/her own seduction.

For Gordon Matta-Clark, interrupted places evoke the work’s disintegration, decay. They are intermediate and ambiguous, diverging from their original content. Here, the operation projects depth to the user’s existential possibilities, bringing resoluteness and closure to the architectural work. Vertigo allows users to experience a revolutionary authority. The work becomes a prisoner of the mirror; of the vortex.

E. Alienation: Loss of Circumspection.

Looking at the work, does alienation necessarily imply oppression? Can it draw us back to nature? Where does

alienation between work, design, users, and architects start? Where does it end? What can be expected in between: the power of the vortex? How to avoid relinquishing power or surrendering to the forces of the world? How much pressure is needed to make the work collapse? Will the work exist without architects? Will it exist without users?

Listening to Bob Dylan’s “Like a Rolling Stone,” alienation can be described as follows:

“How does it feel

How does it feel

To be without a home

Like a complete unknown

Like a rolling stone?” (Dylan 1967).

Through alienation, users are expected to be stagnant; uncritical of their own condition. Who will dare to re-appropriate, to reinterpret, and to transform the commodities established by the promoters? Besides, an emotion links architects to their repressed work: fear. In this context, architects neglect their own expressiveness, and dispassionately observe the fate and destruction of an architectural realm subject to inauthentically “falling” prey to the world.

For Heidegger, alienation, along, with temptation, tranquilizing, and entanglement, constitutes the kind of being known as “falling” (decline; degradation). “Falling” takes for granted our everyday existence and flushes it into the oppressed flow of the world. In this context, architectural works disregard their sense of place and manifest themselves as foreign objects inside an eyelid. Here, architecture opens a field for its own descent, and works become alienated by each user; a user who does not question his/her daily activities for the sake of cultural prestige.

F. The Unpresentable.

For Jean-François Lyotard, lack of equipmentality can be explained via artifices of presentation:

“Local tone, drawing, the mixing of colors, linear perspective, the nature of the support and that of the instrument, the treatment, the display, the museum: the avant-gardes are perpetually flushing out artifices of presentation which make it possible to subordinate thought to the gaze and to turn it away to the unpresentable” (Lyotard 1984, 79).

The unpresentable “flushes” the user’s/architect’s attention to new representation techniques that eventually evolve into accepted canons. It relies on the users’/architects’ passive acceptance of the new techniques (in Lyotard’s example, the techniques are local tone, the mixing of colors and linear perspective). In addition, “the unpresentable” includes works that result from such techniques: the accumulation of these works is known as avant-gardes (avant-gardes are the nature of “the unpresentable,” including its display, its technique, and its treatment and museum effects). They are presented as

cultural merchandise by those who promote their consumption. In this context, the work of architecture denotes both wealth and cultural value; an ethereal character of endless wisdom and refinement is conferred to those who possess the desired artistic products.

Finally, “the unrepresentable” is metonymic; tautological. Through a superficial repetition of works, matter and form are translated into an act of spectatorship. This tautological nature of “the unrepresentable” has nothing deep or neutral about it; on the contrary, it depends on a paternalist role for its functioning (Illich 1982, 7-8). Here, Lyotard’s quote of Exodus 20:4 becomes relevant: “Thou shall not make unto Thee any graven image...” (Lyotard 1993, 11). By means of hierarchical, paternalist power, cultural authority aims at conferring ineffable artistic knowledge to the work’s users. Its prime motive is economic: the bottom line is profit, no matter the nature of the interaction between architects/users and works/designs. By placing its trust on short-term profits, users/architects must accept the artifacts and forms of speech dispersed by its promoters.

“Since the spectacle’s job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be seen via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of the senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society’s generalized abstraction... The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue...” (Debord 1995, 17).

G. The Authentic “Falling”.

Can “falling” overcome gravity? The mechanics of “falling” can become authentic, having the power to overcome alienation, and “...to undo formal categories, to deny that each thing has its ‘proper’ form, to imagine meaning as gone shapeless, as though it were a spider or an earthworm crushed underfoot” (Krauss and Livingston 1985, 64-65). Since “falling” implies the existential rotation from the vertical to the horizontal axis, it successfully resists the action of gravity. Here, “falling” is akin to photographic mechanisms achieved by surrealist artists (surrealists thought of photography as a “carnal” medium (Krauss and Livingston 1985, 64-65). Thus, by turning verticality 90 degrees into a horizontal orientation, this kind of “falling” evokes seductiveness through the human senses. It also apprehends equipmentality through the sense of touch, and thus, the tactile origins of floors and grounds where users crawl, walk, and lay down to rest daily.

The word “floor” derives from the Greek term *planasthai*, to wander (Merriam-Webster 2001, 446). It refers to the ground surface on which one walks; to the horizontal boundary of a built space or landscape. Floors relate to flesh as a kind of archaeology; as things that, by gathering footsteps, gather world. Yet, flesh is not a conceptual kind of knowledge; its perceptual attributes reveal depth in a spontaneous and expedite manner. In other words, I can anticipate the carnal presence of the mechanics of fall because I can touch the floor; because the floor is tangible (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 15).

Although floors are always already there, revealing, through their thingness, the perception of gravity, depth is the dimension where this exchange becomes tangible; it is in depth where the work emerges as being ready-to-hand. The work’s/design’s shifts between dissipation of strength and

strengthening of gravity make relevant the sense of vertigo. In this context, depth interacts on users/architects as vertigo.

H. Vertigo and Circumspection.

“They say that all these forms denote an outworn language. They say everything must begin over again. They say that a great wind is sweeping the earth. They say that the sun is about to rise” (Wittig 1985, 66).

How/why is vertigo originated? Is it through prohibition, rejection, or anticipation? Does it keep the work outside the vortex? Does it allow the work to penetrate it? Will penetration involve loss of vertigo? Or, will it involve another kind of alienation: an existential alienation learned by previous promoters?

The sense of vertigo brings forward a circumspective architect-user-work interaction into the architectural domain. Being related to the sense of touch, vertigo has several components, among them, the awareness of fear as a repressive emotion –which eventually elicits repulsion. In “Slaughterhouse,” Bataille examines our repulsion towards blood and flesh; a repulsion attributed “...to an unhealthy need for cleanliness, for a bilious small-mindedness and for boredom;” for which people are reduced to being strict vegetarians, and therefore, to eating cheese (Neil 1999, 22). In this context, flesh and blood is seen as rotten meat; that is, as “informe;” as carnage, vomit, and spit. Another component of vertigo is the careful inspection of memories – translated into attraction. Both components interact as follows: first, the awareness of fear, exerted by users’ experiences, is crucial for overcoming alienation –this awareness brings about a post-modern arrangement. Second, a careful inspection of memories allows users to fully experience an existing work of architecture, as well as to disregard those in control.

The vortex’s vertiginous forces reveal the presence of the “axis mundi;” they project the work’s depth and workly character by means of an authentic attraction to their users.

Between architect and work, a fluctuating, diagonal tension prevails, produced by the distance between the work that gets closer to users/architects and the work that avoids their contact. In an invisible, but immediate way, both architect and work are separated by the force of the vortex: the provocative tension that acts upon the mechanisms controlling the production of works, as well as producing and transmitting their own messages.

Thus, the changing authority challenges architects to produce seductive, arresting designs and works; products that can look back at personal memories in an endearing manner. Here, works of architecture require users’ circumspective patterns of thinking that lead to a myriad of interpretations of the same work.

I. The Making of the Architectural Vortex, as described by Foucault.

“A machine situated at the centre of the parade-ground ejects the hoops one after the other at a fast pace. They rise vertically above the heads of the players. They rotate on themselves. At the same time they describe a vast circle which continually increases, due to the momentum imported to them by the machine. The path of their movements would be an immense spiral” (Wittig 1985, 66).

Michel Foucault discloses the rules of the promoters in order to bring forward a better understanding of fear or repression. For Foucault, an awareness of fear allows users/architects to overcome the promoters' control. In this context, the architectural field works as follows: in the production of architectural works, promoters act upon collective or individual memories through the use of intentional indicators. Despite the shallowness of inauthentic works, promoters still control the interaction between personal memories and a desired project.

To show the nature of this control, Foucault uses a vortex which describes the repressive arrangement, "...that full space in the hollow of which language assumes volume and size" (Foucault 1975, xi). He constructs a typical example of what occurs within the vortex: first, Foucault waits for a user/architect to be thrown into the whirl, and as he/she is swallowed by curiosity, Foucault traces the circumspective path. When the user/architect has drowned and becomes invisible, a mark is left. The action of drowning has traced a concave figure: that is, one that is supported and contained by three axes arranged in trihedral position. Each of the three axes has a fixed purpose and involves each of vertigo's characters: the promoters (power), the users (pleasure), and the architect (desire.) Users/architects thrown into the whirl are "YOU". Thus, the vortex of curiosity is presented as a hidden field that traps works of architecture through its participants.

When users/architects fall into the swirl, the concave figure traced by their fall is transformed into a mirror, which overlaps the trihedral vertex formed by promoters, users, and architects. Both the vertex and the center of the mirror express the user'/architect's lack of satisfaction. The promoters' mind strengthens the focus, causing users/architects to become trapped, thereby losing their depth. As they lose their emotions, the mirror reflects to others an acceptance of cultural prestige, and therefore, lack of equipmentality. Yet, awareness of the repressive vertex can also exert cyclical power upon stagnant isolation/alienation, creating emotional bounds between users and architects, and causing an attack on the abstract, rational state of affairs in the architectural field.

Users/architects inside the vortex's "falling" face the unknown and frightening flesh of the world, fighting amputation as a probability. The word "dismemberment" points towards the loss of body parts, of the world's flesh. This relates to the desacralization of personal spatio-temporal dimensions. Possibilities emerge as modes of representation.

The vortex's "falling" is immeasurable: it grants the work the power to sink/degrade into a vertiginous, declining journey towards death and/or oblivion. Through an authentic "falling," time grants architecture an endless, cyclical potential of losing/gaining intensity and weight, and thus, of losing/gaining flesh. By means of fluctuating changes in usefulness, touch can be experienced and meaning can be exchanged.

The authentic architectural "falling" is unending, infinite, without direction. Its speed is indefinite; its structure, boundless. It rejects and/or lacks usefulness; it is entropic. As a dissipating force, entropy brings matter/form into complete disorder; chaos. The architect's vertigo overlaps/makes all its characters dissipate into an unspecified single point; a point that ironically denotes site-specificity. The falling's space is

null; void. Through its attributes (e.g., colorless, invisible, mute, and universally wide/long), this kind of falling allows the overlapping of the original architectural components -work, design, users, and architects- mixing them confusedly and/or randomly into a field or domain; a body of knowledge that ignores regularities.

Architecture becomes redundant; tautological; metonymic. According to Rudolph Arnheim, "(e)ntropy theory is not concerned with the probability of succession in a series of items, but with the overall distribution of kinds of items in a given arrangement. The more remote the arrangement is from random distribution, the lower will be its entropy and the higher its level of order" (Arnheim 2001, 6).

In this context, the work uses and/or recycles non-conventional construction materials that denote disintegration, decay, corrosion. Through organic building materials and methods, work's honesty is brought again into fore.

J. Fetishism and Baseness: Gehry's Biodiversity Museum.

"At some point it became clear that that figure could only be approached through bassesse, through lowering, through going beneath the figure into the terrain of formlessness. And it also became clear that the act of lowering could, itself, only register through the vehicle of a trace or index, through, that is, the stain that would fissure the event from within into act of aggression and mark, or residue, or clue" (Krauss 1994, 284).

Can the vertiginous architectural work be transformed into a fetish? Georges Bataille defines the work's "falling" condition as baseness. Being opposed to surrealism, as well as to scientific, mathematical abstractions, baseness degrades the work into organic secretions and body orifices, evoking a sensual, against the grain, entropy or disorder (Figure 9). This degradation infatuates the presence of waste in the architectural work's authentic perception, bringing forward the relevance of conventionality's dismemberment and/or death (Bataille 1985, 22).

Baseness' glorified repulsiveness rotates vertical design patterns into the horizontal and throws them into the vortex. Thus, although the climax of Bataille's "love of waste" can be inferred as fetishism, he advocated a free and true approach, "...self-conscious and independent of any deception;" an approach that disregards animosity; hatred (Bois and Krauss 1997, 56). He compares the inauthentic, bad fetishism to "slashing a Rembrandt;" that is, to the work's brutal fall to its own mutilation and/or dismemberment (Bois and Krauss 1997, 55). In this context, Bataille refers to the Bastille:

"It is obvious, actually, that monuments inspire socially acceptable behaviour, and often a very real fear. The storming of the Bastille is symbolic of this state of affairs: it is difficult to explain this impulse of the mob other than by the animosity the people hold against the monuments which are their true masters" (Bataille 1929, 117).

What will transform an architectural work into an "authentic" fetish: being the first on a sequence of events? Being equipmental? Can curiosity reinforce the desired functioning of the fetish? For instance, enunciating that "fetishism reigns" would involve a controlling power over others. On the other

hand, expressing that “fetishism rules” would put our desires and anxieties under a single flesh.

With a cost of \$60 million, Panama’s Biodiversity Museum, designed by Frank Gehry, will be the first masterpiece from the renowned architect in Latin America. It is expected to be inaugurated in 2013. Although the building is being promoted/produced by cultural authority’s marketing and representational techniques, Gehry is not foreign to Panama: his wife, Berta, is Panamanian, and mediated for the building’s construction in the Isthmus. The primary goal of this building, known as the “Bridge of Life,” is to provide educational resources, both for Panamanians and visitors, exhibiting Panama’s past and current exuberant flora and fauna. The project encloses an area of 35,000 m²; 4,100 m² of which will be occupied by the building, and the rest will be designated to gardens containing native trees and plants. Due to its strategic location next to the Soberanía National Park, specifically at the Amador Causeway, a path which links a series of islands with rocks dug out during the construction of the Panama Canal, the Biodiversity Museum will be visible from the end of the Pacific entrance to the Canal by cruises traveling through the waterway. It will easily become an “authentic” architectural fetish; a monistic structure that will manifest itself through Gehry’s signature brand. By experiencing its installations, the museum’s users are subject to an emotional and seductive climax of volumes, shades, and colors. Its components (which includes two aquariums, ramps, eight galleries, and a total of fifteen pavilions) are experienced as a pulse or beat, eliciting anxiety; unrest. By means of its protruding, colorful roofs, and asymmetrical shapes, the museum rotates/degenerates Cartesian coordinates into the horizontal. This is sensed by users who experience disorder; disorientation. The fleshness of the work evokes entropy; randomness. Although the museum’s relationship between hule and eidos is imposing, oppressing, and therefore negated, both the Canal and the Gehry building overlap similar origins during the course of time, involving the use of mammoth technologies and logistics for their design, construction, and marketing, as well as a disruptive harmony with their built and natural surroundings.

Through its equipmental, mechanical character, the Gehry building becomes an operative, authentic “fetish.” Push a button (as in a video camera, a TV monitor or a computer), and an image is displayed and/or projected.

“There is a device, then, that produces this image, a device that the camera makes simple: turn the body or the lens; rotate the human figure into the figure of the fall. The camera automates this process, makes it mechanical. A button is pushed, and the fall is the rest” (Krauss and Livingston 1985, 60).

Because of their repetitive nature, these images become a “fetish” in the audience’s mind; they are taken for granted and assimilated in a way similar to dependable things such as a set of cozy pajamas –you just linger on them. Although an authentic “fetish” cannot be perceived and looked at the same time, according to Jean Baudrillard, in post-industrial societies it lacks of a referent (i.e., a genius loci, a referential being, or a substance). They are produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, and can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these; they belong to a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere (i.e., cyberspace) (Baudrillard 1994, 1).

K. Panama’s “Comandancia”.

I take part, I see and hear the whole, The cries, curses, roar, the plaudits for well-aim’d shots, The ambulanza slowly passing trailing its red drip, Workmen searching after damages, making indispensable repairs, The fall of grenades through the rent roof, the fan-shaped explosion, The whizz of limbs, heads, stone, wood, iron, high in the air (Whitman 2003, 63)

An example of lack of truth to its origins is provided by the “Comandancia,” a work by Panamanian architect Rogelio Navarro (1906-1942). Being a modern architect, Navarro makes severe criticism of academicism and obsolete construction systems. As a graduate of the University of Virginia, he becomes a precursor of clean, pure forms that clearly break with the past.

Navarro’s buildings could be considered as “Streamline Moderne.” One of his most relevant structures, the “Comandancia” or national police headquarters (1935-1989), was destroyed by fire during the American invasion to Panama that granted the return to democracy to the Central American nation.

With its rounded edges and flat roof, this “Comandancia” showed modern features such as thin and elegant horizontal canopies in all three floors. It was known by many as “The Boat”. Its forms were pristine. Yet, as mentioned, “The Boat” eventually sank by the world it gathered up: a world filled with corruption and vile.

Regarding the thingness of its buildings, modern architecture was half-blinded. It granted its architects the ability to make powerful statements, prepare pretentious blueprints and structures, and sometimes/eventually bequeath those same structures to corrupt comrades/promoters such as Manuel Noriega and his gang. Thus, according to this example, did modern architecture really break with its past? Or, was it just decadent since its conception?

What makes the “Comandancia” gain transparency among those who still remember its image? Is it desire or will to power? Where does this desire come from? Negation eventually evolves into a sense of absence, and subjects compensate this absence with the desire to obtain the forbidden object. The forbidden image or object becomes attached to the subject’s psyche as a memory of power, and desire prevails over fear as a consequence of an abrupt denial from those in control. In this context, something can be stated: during the humiliation and horror of being destroyed

by a foreign army, the “Comandancia” eventually exudes its own fleshness and/or transparency: its spirit of violence and unrest. Through Marguerite Duras’ *The Lover*, we can explain how an architectural work and/or design become meaningful due to their absence:

“I think it was during this journey that the image became detached, removed from all the rest. It might have existed, a photograph might have been taken just like any other, somewhere else, in other circumstances. But it wasn’t. The subject was too slight. Who could have thought of such a thing? The photograph could only have been taken if someone could have known in advance how important it was to be in my life... Except God. And that’s why –it

couldn't have been otherwise- the image doesn't exist. It was omitted. Forgotten. It never was detached or removed from all the rest. And it's to this, this failure to have been created, that the image owes its virtue: the virtue of representing, of being the creator of, an absolute" (Duras 1985, 10).

Conclusions

In order to bring forward the architect-work interaction into the architectural field, how shall equipmentality and circumspection interact? Shall they rely on human intellect for architectural production, involving hollow, passive processes,—i.e., merely abstract, mathematical deductions? Technical-scientific approaches disrupt and destroy the function of equipmentality, promoting, for the sake of progress, the influence of those in control.

In the field of architecture, an objective mind-set “elides” emotional criticism and facilitates the legitimating of abstraction: it can be understood as a kind of powerlessness where users lose their ability to express opinions, thus lacking authenticity. It relates to the desacralization of the architect's/user's spatio-temporal dimensions. When orientation, as well as the ordinary reference to a known path becomes futile, they need to be redefined – re-centered into a personal “axis mundi.”

In post-industrial society, the “axis mundi” becomes the eye of consciousness, stopping any possible repression. For Mircea Eliade, this is the “foundation of the world;” the center in which baseness or horizontality gathers into a single point of authentic temporality (Eliade 1959, 22). Everybody has an “axis mundi”: a significant vortex or pivotal point that gathers earth, sky, flesh, and blood. Being focused on my daily horizons, I can radiate my body inside and outside my personal wanderings.

For Heidegger, the following behaviors characterize the inauthentic position of users/architects inside/outside the vortex:

“Being for, against, or without one another, passing one another by, not mattering to one another... it is precisely these last-named deficient and indifferent modes that characterize everyday, average Being-with-one-another” (Heidegger 1962, 158).

By disregarding the work's equipmentality, promoters (i.e., those in control) manipulate the architect's thinking from the work or design. Following this kind of alienation, architectural designs or works lose their concrete circumspective attributes, showing the users' estrangement from the architect's hands. Quantity (not quality) is what prevails; design and work are controlled through the imposition of an economy of scarcity by the promoters. In this context, buildings transform their material and formal characteristics into isolated, abstract architectural styles. This alienation, that tears users and architects away from authenticity, can shift into lack of satisfaction. In addition, alienation can throw the work's quality into the “they;” into oppression, as a result of the abuse of the promoters' power (Heidegger 1962, 223). Finally, alienation can eventually deprive users from the work's equipmentality, preventing corporeality from interacting with the work.

Instead, shall corporeality look back at users' needs and concerns? Shall this involve an embracing moment of thinking, capable of drawing together past, present, and future experiences into a single, transparent instant? Is this circumspection capable of projecting Heidegger's modes of being, such as “Being-alongside-the-world” and “Being-with-Others”? Can it also show to others works of architecture that are more empathetic or appealing to their human contexts; i.e., more fleshly or corporeal?

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