

Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary

Transitory Objects

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Contents

Francesca von Habsburg Preface	7
Daniela Zyman / Johannes Porsch Introduction	10
Denis Hollier The Hegelian Edifice	17
Mark Wigley Constructive Abuse	27
Rosalind Krauss The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum	44
Sabeth Buchmann Title of text	58
Sebastian Egenhofer Title of text	74
Helmut Draxler Title of text	86
Manuel DeLanda Deleuze and the Use of the Genetic Algorithm in Architecture	89
ImpleMENTAL Art & Science, excerpt from a conversation	96

Transitory Objects

Alisa Andrasek / BIOTHING, <i>Mesonic Emission/Seroussi Pavilion Paris</i> , 2007	131
John Bock, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	135
Monica Bonvicini, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	139
Hernan Diaz Alonso / Xefirotarch, <i>T-B A21 Patagonia</i> , 2008	143
Ksenia Ender, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	147
Dan Flavin, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	151
Rodney Graham, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	155
Florian Hecker, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	159
Nikolaus Hirsch & Michel Müller in Collaboration with the Cybermohalla Ensemble, <i>Cybermohalla Hub</i> , 2008	163
Greg Lynn FORM, <i>Toy Furniture</i> , 2008	167
David Maljković, <i>Retired Form</i> , 2008	171
Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	175
Olaf Nicolai, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	179
Neri Oxman / MATERIALECOLOGY, <i>Raycounting</i> , 2008	183
Manfred Pernice, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	187
Matthew Richtie with ArandaLasch and Arup AGU, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	191
R&Sie(n) / François Roche & Stéphanie Lavaux "I've heard about...", <i>a flat, fat, growing urban experiment</i> , 2005–2010	195
Fred Sandback, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	199
Bojan Šarčević, <i>The breath-taker is the breath-giver (Film B)</i> , 2009	203
Francesca Woodmann, <i>Untitled, Providence, Rhode Island</i> , 1976	207
Cerith Wyn Evans, <i>Title of work</i> , Year	211

Preface

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Francesca von Habsburg

Introduction

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Daniela Zyman / Johannes Porsch

The Hegelian Edifice

“Death, if that is what we wish to call this unreality, is the most terrible thing of all and sustaining death’s work is what demands the greatest strength. Impotent beauty detests conceptualization, because it requires beauty to do this thing it is incapable of doing. Now, the life of the spirit is not life that cringes at death and saves itself from destruction, but life that can bear death and is preserved in it.”

Hegel, Preface to *Phenomenology*

A Simple Beginning

“Only that which is simple constitutes a beginning,”

Hegel, *Science of Logic*, Book I

“The simple beginning is something so insignificant in itself, so far as its content goes, that for philosophical thinking it must appear as entirely accidental.”

Hegel, *Aesthetics*

We shall begin with architecture. “Architecture confronts us as the beginning of art, a beginning grounded in the essential nature of art itself.”¹

Not that we have any intention of building a system like Hegel, constructing an aesthetic, or classifying the fine arts. There is nothing constructively edifying about our project. It is, instead, an attempt to bring closer whatever wrecks projects as well as edifices. Rather than outline a structure, we hope to follow and bring into play a crack that frustrates plans and shatters monuments.

We shall begin with architecture: beginning with the beginning – *archè*. But this beginning will not inevitably control the consequences it opens up. No value is to be accorded *archè* simply because of its inaugural value. *Archè* has no advance control over some *telos* that in retrospect will make any trace of the arbitrary, of contingency, or of accident disappear from itself.

We shall, therefore, begin as Hegel begins his *Aesthetics*, with symbolic art and its privileged form – architecture. Beginning, then, like Hegel, but at the same time, simply because we begin *like* him, not beginning as Hegel did. Beginning like him, but for other reasons. No longer in order to rediscover in architecture the *archè* of

1. G. W. F. Hegel, “Architecture,” in *Aesthetics, Lectures on Fine Art*, translated by T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2:624. [Translator’s note: Whenever possible I have used this translation for quotations from Hegel. The French edition of *La Prise de la Concorde* takes its quotation from the translation of Hegel into French by S. Jankelevitch (Paris: Aubier, 1944). Occasionally the wording of the French version is important to Denis Hollier’s text and in those instances I have translated the Hegel quotations from Jankelevitch’s translation, and so noted.]

the arts that follow or accompany it, the *archè* of artistic activity, of aesthetic activity in general present to itself under the mode of immediacy and simplicity; but to loosen this *archè* from its resolution, dismantling this beginning by turning it into a mere beginning, which is never more than the semblance of an inauguration. Like Hegel, but metaphorically.

The Hegelian Edifice

Between 1818 and 1829 Hegel developed the aesthetics course edited and published by his students after his death in 1835. The course does not exactly begin with architecture: the first part is a general introduction to aesthetics, the second is devoted to the idea of beauty. But it attributes the beginning of art – which is the object of aesthetics – to architecture. It does this twice: when it lists the three aesthetic moments (symbolic, classical, and romantic), then when it lists the five particular arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, music, and poetry). Each art form passes through each of the three moments (architecture, painting, etc. are each by turn and each in its own way symbolic first, then classical, before becoming romantic), with the result that properly speaking, the beginning of art is constituted by symbolic architecture, which is architecture in its purest form and in its most appropriate moment; for Hegel has defined it as the symbolic art par excellence. “If therefore in the series of particular arts architecture is treated first, this must not merely mean that it is presented as the art offering itself for treatment first on the strength of its being so determined by the nature of art; on the contrary, it must equally clearly be seen to be the art coming first in the existence of art in the world.”²

History and concept, chronology and logic, fact and law all thus concur, if Hegel is to be believed, in acknowledging architecture's inaugural value for aesthetics as a whole. However, in the pages devoted to this, it is striking that, instead of a serenely confident description of his object, we find the anxiety of someone attempting to grasp an object that is elusive. This anxiety is even more legible when, because it is a posthumous text reconstructed by course notes taken at different times, possible vaguenesses of articulation between one sentence and another, between one paragraph and another, have not been reworked. Hegel's discourse on the beginnings of art is awkward therefore, and the difficulty experienced in

2. Ibid., p. 630.

its development is nowhere more apparent than in the first pages of the section devoted to architecture, those dealing with “Independent Architecture.” This is the title of the chapter in which architecture is described at the purest moment of its status as symbolic art, giving it the right to an inaugural position.

Hegel has some difficulty reconciling the requirements of law and the factual evidence. Simple beginnings do not have the simplicity that would permit them to be made into origins. The origin is still lacking at the beginning. And Hegel will apply himself more to the correction of this lack than to the description of architecture. In fact, as a result of the logic of *Aufhebung* (in which each moment supersedes – that is, simultaneously does away with and preserves its antecedents), his entire construction, the entire edifice of his *Aesthetics* depends on it. This logic rules in particular the succession of the arts, each one confirming in turn a victory over the materiality of the preceding art. From sculpture to the last art, poetry, which will in turn also be superseded, supersession permits an exit from the realm of art and will constitute aesthetics itself (discourse on art) as a moment of philosophical reflection. Thus poetry and art are superseded by “the prose of thought,” in which the spirit, says Hegel, is immediately in touch with itself with no need for a detour into the exteriority of signifying materiality: the concept does not really need words and letters to make itself known. The best example of this prose is, in fact, Hegelian discourse itself. The *Aesthetics*, a part of this system, constitutes a superseding of art, setting art up by this very fact as something dead, something from the past. “Art transcends itself and becomes prose.”³ As the first moment of absolute spirit (see the third section of the third part of the *Encyclopedia*), art gives way first to revealed religion and then to philosophy. “In the hierarchy of means serving to express the absolute, religion and culture stemming from reason occupy the highest level, far superior to that of art.”⁴

Art is dead. With his *Aesthetics*, Hegel constructs its tomb. Art, which began with the construction of tombs, also ends with a tomb. The pages on architecture, thus, would be a sort of redoubling of aesthetics as a whole and, by extension, of the entire system in which this aesthetics lies. In both cases a certain relationship to death is translated into constructive practices. Architecture is something appearing in the place of death, to point out its presence and to cover it up: the victory of death and the victory over death. This allows it to be simultaneously the first of the arts – in its empirical, limited form as a stone edifice – and their tomb – in this major and sublimated form: the Hegelian edifice. The *Aufhebung* insures the return of the

3. Ibid., 1:89 (“Introduction”).

4. Ibid., 1:13.

archè and its liberation in the *telos*. But this final fusion is only possible if the *archè* indeed has the simplicity allowing it to reappear completely in each succession of its supersessions. To accomplish this there must be something to *support* the identity that Hegel's discourse requires between origins and beginnings, law and fact. But – to say the least – one must admit that this identity is not immediately apparent.

The Tower of Babel

In fact, the beginnings of architecture – or at least what we know of these beginnings as passed on to us through tradition – are far from corresponding to what the concept of art would have them be. The beginnings: “turning to the earliest beginnings of architecture, the first things that can be accepted as its commencement are a hut as a human dwelling and a temple as an enclosure for the god and his community. Impossible to go any further.”⁵ Impossible to go back in time any further than the hut and the temple. And also futile to go any further, because with the hut and the temple we are, in any case, *not yet* in the area of art; we are still short of its origins. Beginnings come before origins. At least for anyone who sticks to the traditional facts. Hegel will not do this, but will himself produce the origin of architecture, going to great lengths through a critique of this tradition to fix a beginning that would be, literally, original; that is, a beginning whose attributes are the simplicity and immediacy implied by any inaugural or first position. Whereas, on the contrary, both house and temple are constituted according to a complex structure of mediation. In fact: “In the case of a house and a temple and other buildings the essential feature which interests us here is that such erections are mere *means*, presupposing a purpose external to them. A hut and the house of god presuppose inhabitants, men, images of the gods, etc. and have been constructed for them.”⁶

Two themes overlap in this critique of the beginnings of architecture: first, the hut and the temple are means; second, they are the means to ends external to art, to nonaesthetic ends to which whatever beauty they may possess will always remain subservient. The apparently simple distinction between these two themes will, however, be constantly put in question throughout Hegel's exposition.

Art is a pertinent concept only for whatever has as its end the manifestation of the idea of beauty; and the fact that house or temple presuppose other ends,

5. Hegel, *Ibid.*, 2:631 (“Architecture”).

6. *Ibid.*

that they are first of all the products of a nonartistic purpose, condemns them to remain external to art as well. For the moment the possible difference between the requirements of material existence (such as building oneself a shelter against cold, rain, etc.) to which house construction is subjected, and the requirements of the religion manifesting itself through its temples, is unimportant. Hegel fixes on the externality of the end, in order to exclude from art any construction subjected as a means to such an end.

But the second reproach made to the traditional version of the beginnings of art, going back to the first, throws the economy of his argument off balance, because he no longer brings in the positioning of the end (extra- or intra-aesthetic) but takes into consideration only the status as means. Any means, in fact, is means to an end from which it is separate, which is external to it not simply for accidental reasons varying according to the nature of the end, but by virtue of a necessity intrinsically bound up with the status of means. In other words, externality here is no longer a function of a topography of ends; it is thus no longer merely externality to art, but rather unspecified externality itself, which slips in between means and end, and as a result is precluded from any originating position. On the one hand, therefore, insofar as they are subjected to extra-aesthetic purposes, hut and temple are extraneous to art; on the other hand, as means, they are excluded from any moment of origin. Mediacy can only and must always be derivative: “We cannot go back to this division for origins, for in its nature the origin is something immediate and simple, not a relativity and essential connection like this. Instead we must look for some point beyond this division.”⁷

Descriptive serenity gives way to a normative tension marked by the decision of law to subject fact to itself, but which marks, just as easily, the inadequacy of law and fact. This inadequacy can be perceived, for example, in the notion of “falling short” inherent in the division between means and ends brought to light by the analysis of hut and temple. One wonders how this “falling short” goes with the already stated impossibility of “going beyond” – going back further than the cave and the temple. “Falling short” has a logical value. It designates a moment logically anterior to this division, whereas chronologically this regression is first of all impossible, but above all useless, because with the hut and the temple we are *not yet* in the area of art. This indecision must be read as the symptom of a decision: one to place architecture at the origin of art, a decision that by its very abruptness will perhaps tell us as much about architecture as anything Hegel says.

7. *Ibid.*, 632 [Translator's note: This passage, however, is my translation from the French as quoted by Hollier. Where the French reads *origins*, the English of Knox's translation reads *beginning*; other differences are slight.]

Architecture must be the origin of art, even if everything would tend to exclude it from the domain of art. For it is hard to conceive of a building exempt from utilitarian space, one whose only purpose is aesthetic. In these pages there are other signs of this decision, underlining to what extent it is bound up with an almost fetishistic attachment to the values connoted by the term “architecture.”

Hence, unable to find in architectural production any building corresponding both to the concept of the work of art and to that of an original moment, Hegel is obliged to borrow a model from sculpture: “we will have to look around for buildings which stand there independently in themselves, as it were like works of *sculpture*, and which carry their meaning in themselves and not in some external aim and need.”⁸

Let us be content to note that the problematic of meaning has taken the place here of that of mediacy. At the very least it is remarkable to see that all the properties Hegel demands of architecture (with no success in discovering them there) are presented to him without difficulty by sculpture – from which he does not demand them. What is more: sculpture will serve as the controlling model in the search for a building true to the concept of art. This paradoxical situation will soon lead Hegel to define, contrary to any proper hierarchy, architecture, the first of the arts, as a type of the second, sculpture: independent architecture can be called, he says, “an inorganic sculpture.”⁹

The house and temple are hollow. It is *inside* their walls that come to dwell inhabitants, men or images of gods, constituting the intended purpose of the construction – the purpose Hegel judges to be external, *outside* them. Into this hollow, into this emptiness inside the first constructions, therefore, some exteriority penetrates that forbids them access to architecture; this lack of simplicity rules them out as the origins of art. The true beginnings sought by Hegel will have to be faultlessly exempt from this original lack; they will have to stop up this hole and fill this void. They will have to be full – which, we note in passing, excludes caves and cavities, etc., just as well as houses or temples – they will have to be unoccupied by this flaw: this dehiscence inside which the exteriority of purpose could dwell; this innermost cleavage constituted by the exteriority of end and means. Not only must their aim be in themselves, but their purpose must not break their homogeneity, the immediacy of their self-presence. This, according to Hegel, is what independent architecture as inorganic sculpture must do.

In order for the origin to regain its threatened simplicity and for architecture to regain its value as *archè*, as fundamental, Hegel sets out in search of edifices that

8. Ibid., 632.

9. Ibid., 633.

are neither houses nor temples, that have no purpose outside of art and are not undermined by the negativity of mediation. He finds them in Mesopotamia:

“What is the sacred?” asks Goethe. And he immediately replies: “What links souls together.” Starting from this definition, one may say that the sacred as the aim of this union, and this union itself, constitute the first content of independent architecture. The most familiar example of this is in the legend of the Tower of Babel. In the distant valleys of the Euphrates, people constructed an enormous architectural work; all mankind worked on it in common, and this community was at the same time both the aim and the content of the work.¹⁰

We would have to know more than we do about the composition of the text of the *Aesthetics* to draw any certain conclusions from this, but it is not beside the point to note that in “The Symbolic Form of Art” there was no mention of the Tower of Babel or any similar sort of building. On the other hand, in the chapter “Symbolism Proper” there is a discussion of Egyptian pyramids, whose exemplary status this tower will replace in “Architecture.” The tower appears at the beginning of the chapter “Independent or Symbolic Architecture” where it precedes (we shall see later what gives it the right to do so) the pyramids, which now are no longer anything more than one form of the “Transition from Independent to Classical Architecture.” Undeniably, the pyramid has become less exemplary from one part of the *Aesthetics* to another. The example of the symbol that, in accordance with symbolic structure, must be the symbol of the symbol as well, is no longer the pyramid but the Tower of Babel. This tower would be, therefore, the work of the symbolic art par excellence; independent architecture or architecture proper; the moment that will be followed by “Architectural Works Wavering between Architecture and Sculpture,” such as phallic columns, obelisks, etc., then by the “Transition from Independent Architecture to Classical Architecture,” with Indian and Egyptian subterranean buildings, housing for the dead such as pyramids, utilitarian architecture, etc. The origin of architecture, its original status as symbol, is found with the Tower of Babel.

The Symbol

“The symbol is *prima facie* a sign.” But it is not just any sign. An ordinary sign has a “sensuous form” that does not represent itself but represents on the contrary something other than the sensuous form it is: its “content.” This *content* is thus,

10. Ibid., 638 [Translator’s note: Translated here from the French.]

by virtue of the very structure of the sign, *exterior* to the sensuous form expressing it: it has no “proper affinity whatever” with it; “the connection which meaning and its expression have with one another is only a purely arbitrary linkage.”¹¹

No doubt the symbol, for Hegel, is first and foremost a sign, but a very specific sign since it is defined by the absence of the property that has just been used to characterize the sign. The externality of the sensuous form and the ideal content expressed by it, the arbitrary connection between meaning and its expression, are not to be found there. The sensuous form of the symbol, its materiality, as such, is already charged with a meaning that is truly *its own* meaning since it is one for which it has a natural inclination, not one that is decided. Its meaning is (this time literally) *contained* in its form and warranted by it. The symbol is a sensuous form that represents itself. There is no discontinuity or externality separating form from content. Meaningful form in itself; meaning itself. “Taken in this wider sense, the symbol is no purely arbitrary sign, but a sign which in its externality comprises in itself at the same time the content of the idea which it brings into appearance.”¹²

The exteriority of form and content in the sign is described by Hegel in terms he will return to for describing nonaesthetic architecture (that which remains subordinated to the external purpose of habitation). It is, therefore, not by chance that in both cases this exteriority is transcended by a symbolic status. Such a way of transcending them situates both the problematic of sign to thing and of means to end, of meaning and of teleology, in the same perspective. Just as the symbol represents itself and has its meaning in itself, symbolic architecture would refer only to itself, would express only itself, would say only what it is.

In reality, all is not so neat in Hegel’s text. And traces of the decision bound up with the requirements of the system are to be found here also. The title of the chapter containing the Tower of Babel can be translated as “Architectural Works Intended to Be Used as a Meeting Place for Peoples,” a title that, at this point in the Hegelian development, poses several problems. These problems can be reduced to two categories:

1. What connection is there between the fact that the tower is “intended to be used as a meeting place” for the peoples who built it and its being – according to Hegel – the very example of independent architecture, thus functioning symbolically? How is this intention immediately present? How is it immediately represented in the materiality of the tower? In what sense does such an intention derive from the aesthetic realm and consequently authorize architecture to be counted among the arts?

11. Ibid., 1:304.

12. Ibid., 305.

This question arises especially because in the chapter in which Hegel describes what corresponds, as it were, to the superlative state of symbolness, the most symbolic – that is, the purest, the least contaminated – form of symbolic art itself, it is not symbolism but rather human community that comes up. The word “symbolic” is scarcely used. It does not figure in the title, and in the text itself it only appears three times: twice apropos the symbolism of the “number seven” found in the architecture of the temple of Baal and of the city of Ecbatana, and another time, *in extremis*, apropos the Tower of Babel. Here it is to justify the tower’s connection to the realm of symbolism – that is, to explain an articulation that is at first sight very surprising between the fact that the Tower is intended to be used as a meeting place and the conclusion concerning its symbolic nature deduced from this fact. And in this cursory mention the symbol is to lose the difference that served to define it, distinguishing it from the sign: “Such a building is symbolic at the same time since the bond, which it is, it can only hint at; this is because in its form and shape it is only in an external way that it can express the sacred, the absolute unifier of men.”¹³

The symbol, thus, is now defined by the externality of form in relation to what it expresses. Whereas Hegel had just described this externality as the distinguishing characteristic of the nonsymbolic sign. The distinction between symbol and sign is shown in these pages to be as fundamental as it is shaky. Virtually absent from the place where one would most expect its effects, the place where it seems such a distinction should be fully operative, when it does put in a brief appearance the purpose is to erase the difference that had allowed one to produce this very distinction. The concept of the symbol was supposed to lessen the externality of the signifier and signified, and at the very spot where this reduction carries the most urgency, Hegel reintroduces externality and does so by means of the symbol itself.

2. This same wavering concerning externality exists not between content and the form expressing it, but between the end and its means. The Tower of Babel is intended to be used as a meeting place; its intention, its final cause is to be what “links souls together,” in other words, according to Goethe, the “sacred.” Now we recall that the temple was excluded from independent architecture and stripped of any pretension to set itself up as the origin of architecture precisely for the reason that, being dependent on a religious purpose, it did not belong in the realm of art. Hegel now, however, attributes religious purpose especially to buildings of the same sort as the Tower of Babel without even bringing up the slightest

13. Ibid., 2:638 [Translator’s note: For consistency I have replaced the word “holy” with the word “sacred”.]

consideration of the idea of beauty: "The primary purpose behind such explicitly independent buildings is only the erection of something which is a unifying point for a nation or nations, a place where they assemble. Yet along with this there is the subordinate aim of making obvious, by the mode of configuration, what does in general unify men: the religious ideas of peoples."¹⁴

Hegel's newly discovered origin, which he substitutes for the temple (guilty of subordination to a religious purpose) follows no less, however, the dictates of this same religious purpose. That the main factor in the definition of the tower is not this religious purpose, which it was for the temple, but the fact that it is used as a meeting place, in no way changes the indecisiveness about what is accomplished by this retreat, since Hegel had already defined the temple itself as "an enclosure for the god and his community,"¹⁵ that is, as a meeting place for peoples.

Just as, shortly before, the sign and the symbol were sometimes distinct and sometimes identical, religion and what unites peoples are now, depending on the context, compared or contrasted as being external or internal to the realm of art. In both instances it is unclear what is gained. It was supposed to allow a (re)uniting with the *archè* that continues to be elusive. What we can read in this system of self-denying contradictory gestures that merely succeed in baring the arbitrariness of a desire, and in this determination *not to place the pyramid at the origins of art*, is something like the presence of a fantasy that would come, literally, to fulfill the origins. The pyramids were still hollow, like the house or the temple; they were inhabited by a dead being or by Death. Towers, on the other hand, are full: "In the middle of this sanctuary, we are told by Herodotus who had seen this colossal structure, there was a tower of solid masonry (not hollow inside but solid, a *πυρλος στερεος*)." ¹⁶ The Tower of Babel has come to fill up the hole in the pyramid, a flaw that would have risked ruining this tomb of death that the Hegelian structure in its entirety is meant to be.

Denis Hollier, "The Hegelian Edifice," in *Against Architecture: The Writings of Georges Bataille*, translated by Betsy Wing (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1990), 3-13.

14. Ibid., 637.

15. Ibid., 631.

16. Ibid., 639.

Constructive Abuse

The question of translation most conspicuously surfaces in deconstructive discourse when Derrida's "Des Tours des Babel," following Walter Benjamin's 1923 essay "The Task of the Translator," argues that translation is not the transmission, reproduction, or image of an original meaning that preceded it.¹ On the contrary, the very sense of something original is but an effect of translation, the translation actually producing what it appears to simply reproduce.

A text, as Benjamin puts it, "calls for" a translation that establishes a nostalgia for the purity, plenitude, and life it never had. In answering this call, the translation necessarily abuses the text, transforming rather than transmitting it.² There is some kind of gap in the structure of the text that the translation is called in to cover, to cover precisely by forcing it open even further to liberate what is hidden within that structure. A text is never an organic, unified whole. It is already corrupted, already fissured, inhabited by something "alien." A translation is not simply a departure from the original that is either violent or faithful, as the original is already internally divided, exiled from itself. Not only is no text ever written in a single language, but each language is itself fractured. Languages and texts are necessarily impure. Always divided, they remain irreducibly foreign to themselves. It is the translation that produces the myth of purity and, in so doing, subordinates itself as impure. In constructing the original as original, it constructs itself as secondary, putting itself into exile from the very space that it produces. The supplementary translation that appears to be a violation of the purity of the work is actually the possibility of that very sense of purity. Its violence to the text is therefore a kind of violent fidelity, a violence called for by the text precisely to construct itself as pure. The abuse of the text is called for because of an abuse already going on within that text. The translation actually exploits this internal conflict in order to present the original as unified; the conflict becomes the basis of its own effacement.

Furthermore, as Benjamin argues, this faithfully abusive transformation also involves a certain violence to the language of the translation. Just as the translator must break open the language of the text to "liberate" what is "imprisoned" within it, the translation must equally "break through the decayed barriers" of its own language³. What is liberated from the text is not some fixed meaning, but a "state of flux" as "alien" to the language of the translation that releases it as to the text

1. Jacques Derrida, "Des Tours de Babel," trans. Joseph F. Graham in Joseph F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

2. "[A]nd for the notions of translation, we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another. We never will have, and in fact never have had, to do with some "transport" of pure signifieds from one language to another, or within one and the same language, that the signifying instrument would leave virgin and untouched." Jacques Derrida, "Semiology and Grammatology," trans. Alan Bass, in *Positions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 20.

that concealed it. Both languages normally attempt to conceal this unstable movement. Indeed, the concealment constitutes the basic “kinship” that exists between languages that otherwise appear foreign to each other, the “central reciprocal relationship between languages” by which, in the end, they “are not strangers to one another.”⁴ They only appear foreign to each other inasmuch as they each repress this instability to produce the effect of languages with discrete, delimited identities. In the end, it is actually the translation itself that becomes “overpowering and alien”⁵ as it releases that which is normally imprisoned and distorts the apparently secure identity of each language. Consequently, a text neither lives nor dies in translation. It does not have some original life-giving intention invested in it by an author, whose presence is either simply revived or substituted by a dead sign. Rather, it “lives on,” it “survives” in a kind of spectral “afterlife” at a different level than it had before because something buried within has been released.

In elaborating Benjamin’s argument about the basic kinship between languages that seem foreign to each other, Derrida argues that this “survival” [*Überleben* or *Fortleben*] of a text in its translation is organized by an unusual kind of contract that ensures that translation is never completed nor completely frustrated.⁶ The contract sustains the necessarily unfulfilled promise of translation, defining a scene of incomplete translation, an incompleteness that binds the languages of the original and translation in a strange knot, a double bind. Such a convoluted but constitutional bond is not like the negotiable social contracts that appear to organize each language, nor is it the fixed pre-social contract that transcends and coordinates each language dreamed of by so much of the philosophical tradition. Neither cultural nor acultural, such contracts exceed cultural transactions without simply being outside them. Each visible negotiable contract that organizes a particular language presupposes such a hidden contract that makes discourse possible, establishing the overt differences between languages while making certain covert exchanges between them not only possible but inevitable.

Such a translation contract is not independent of the different languages whose economy it organizes. It is always inscribed within them, albeit obliquely. The visible gap between languages actually passes through each one. And not only is each “original” already divided, but translation is occurring across those divisions. It is only inasmuch as each is always divided, inhabited by the other and constantly negotiating with it, that translation is possible.⁷ In fact, it is the less visible translation going on within a language that makes any visible translation between it and a lan-

3. Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” trans. Harry Zohn, in Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 69–82, 80.

4. *Ibid.*, 72.

5. *Ibid.*, 75.

6. “A text lives only if it lives on [*sur-vit*], and it lives on only if it is *at once* translatable *and* untranslatable ... Totally translatable, it disappears as a text, as writing, as a body of language [*langue*]. Totally untranslatable, even within what is believed to be one language, it dies

guage outside it possible, which is to say that one language is never simply outside the other. Translation occurs across a gap folded within rather than simply between each language. The fissures that divide any text are actually folds that bind them to that which appears to be outside them, and it is precisely these folds that constitute the texts as such, producing the very sense of an inside and an outside that they subvert. In the end, the contract is no more than the strange geometry of these folds, the convoluted organization of the cracks that structure a discourse.

In these terms, any translation between deconstruction and architecture does not simply occur between the texts of philosophical discourse and those of architectural discourse. Rather, it occupies and organizes both discourses. Within each there is at least an ongoing architectural translation of philosophy and a philosophical translation of architecture. To translate deconstruction in architectural discourse is not, therefore, to faithfully recover some original undivided sense of deconstruction.⁸ Rather, it must be one of the abuses of Derrida’s texts that constitutes them as originals. To translate deconstruction in architectural discourse is to examine the gaps in deconstructive discourse that demand an architectural translation in order to constitute those texts as deconstructive in the first place. The architectural translation of deconstruction, which appears to be the last-minute, last-gasp application, turns out to be part of the very production of deconstructive discourse from the beginning, an ongoing event organized by the terms of an ancient contract between architecture and philosophy that is inscribed within the structure of both discourses. And to think of such a contract here will not only be to think of architecture as the possibility of deconstruction, but likewise to think of deconstruction as the possibility of architecture.

In the end, to translate deconstruction here will be to unearth what it is of architecture that both philosophical and architectural discourse attempt to bury and yet depend on: the irreducible strangeness of architecture that must be concealed by a range of institutional practices central to both discourses and yet also protected by them because its survival is actually their very possibility – no matter how much they disavow its existence. Indeed, it is precisely the intensity and repetition of the disavowals that marks its structural role. To exhume these repressed qualities of architecture will necessarily render the very familiarity of these discourses forever strange. This will turn out to be at once a question of the strange architecture that haunts the discourses that work so hard to entomb it and of the strange architecture of the tomb they construct for it.

immediately. Thus triumphant translation is neither the life nor the death of the text, only or already its living *on*, its life after life, its life after death.” Jacques Derrida, “Living On: Border Lines,” trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), 75–176, 102.

7. See Jacques Derrida, “Me–Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to *The Shell and the Kernel* by Nicolas Abraham,” trans. Richard Klein, *Diacritics*, vol. 9, no. 1, Spring 1979, 4–12.

8. “For if the difficulties of translation can be anticipated ... one should not begin by naively believing that the word ‘deconstruction’ cor-

The Edifice Complex Revisited

A preliminary sketch of this haunting scene of translation can be drawn here by developing Martin Heidegger's account of the idiosyncratic relationship between architecture and philosophy. A certain thinking of architecture is central to Heidegger's work. It is not that he simply theorizes architecture as such, but that theorizing is itself understood in architectural terms. As is well known, one of the most famous of his later essays, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking,"⁹ literally identifies thinking with building. In fact, this identification is already written into his earliest work and, even then, he argues there that it is not so much his identification as that of the ancient and ongoing tradition of philosophy he is interrogating.

Heidegger often directly and indirectly addresses the way in which philosophy repeatedly and insistently describes itself as a kind of architecture. He points, for example, to the way Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* describes metaphysics as an "edifice" erected on secure "foundations" laid on the most stable "ground." Kant criticizes previous philosophers for their tendency to "complete its speculative structures as speedily as may be, and only afterwards to enquire whether these foundations are reliable."¹⁰ The edifice of metaphysics has fallen apart and is "in ruins" because it has been erected on "groundless assertions" unquestioningly inherited from the philosophical tradition. To restore a secure foundation, the *Critique* starts the "thorough preparation of the ground"¹¹ with the "clearing, as it were, and levelling of what has hitherto been wasteground."¹² The edifice of metaphysics is understood as a grounded structure.

For Heidegger, the tradition of metaphysics has always understood itself as a kind of building, even before it started explicitly describing itself in these terms when René Descartes depicted philosophy as the construction of an edifice, a sound structure erected on stable, well-grounded foundations, a description that would then be institutionalized, most conspicuously by the writings of Kant. Heidegger argues that Kant's explicit attempt to lay the foundations for a building is the necessary task of all metaphysics. The question of metaphysics has always been that of the ground on which things stand, even though it has only been explicitly formulated in these terms in the modern period inaugurated by Descartes. Metaphysics is no more than the attempt to locate the ground. Its history is that of a succession of different names (*logos*, *ratio*, *archè*, and so on) for the ground.

responds in French to some clear and univocal signification. There is already in 'my' language a serious (*sombre*) problem of translation between what here or there can be envisaged for the word, and the usage itself, the reserves of the word." Jacques Derrida, "Letter to a Japanese Friend," trans. David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *Derrida and Difference* (Coventry: Parousia Press, 1985), 1–5, 1.

9. Martin Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1971), 143–161

Furthermore, Heidegger argues that philosophy's original but increasingly forgotten object, "Being" [*Sein*], is also a kind of construction, a "presencing" [*Anwesenheit*] through "standing" [*stehen*]. Each of philosophy's successive terms for "ground" [Grund] designates "Being," understood as "presence." Metaphysics is the identification of the ground as "supporting presence" for whatever stands like an edifice. It searches for "that upon which everything rests, what is always there for every being as its support."¹³ Indeed, for Heidegger, metaphysics is no more than the definition of ground as "support."

In the terms of Heidegger's argument, it would seem that there is some kind of symptomatic transference between philosophy, as an institution that constructs arguments like a building is constructed, and the object it analyzes. At the very least, philosophy identifies with its object, seeing itself as a construction that reveals the construction of Being, not by simply representing that construction but by presenting its essential condition. The rules that organize the institutional practices of philosophy supposedly are provided by its object rather than by any sociopolitical system, which is to say that philosophy's rules are not institutional. Philosophy, in the strictest sense, does not even think of itself as an institution. The figure of architecture is therefore not simply one figure among the others that it chooses to employ. More than just philosophy's figure of itself, it is the figure by which that institution effaces its own institutional condition, an effacement that paradoxically defines philosophy's particular institutional location and sociopolitical function. It is philosophy's claim on that which precedes or exceeds the social that gives it unique social authority – the authority, precisely, to define and regulate the social. From the beginning, philosophy has represented itself as a source, storehouse, and arbitrator of order. This representation would not be possible without the architectural figure, which is to say a very particular figure of architecture, one that always has to be protected from damage even, if not especially, when it is not being explicitly invoked. Maintained in working order even when it is being held in reserve, the figure is always operative in the discourse and actually exerts the greatest force when in reserve. Philosophical discourse is more indebted to this architectural figure than it could ever say, even when it does become explicit. Indeed, the real force of the figure lies in those of its operations that philosophy cannot address.

When the figure does surface, it is that of presentation. Philosophy's structure supposedly emerges from and thereby presents the ground. The figure of the edifice, the grounded structure, is that of a standing up that presents. On the one

10. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan and Co., 1929), 47.

11. *Ibid.*, 608.

12. *Ibid.*, 14.

13. Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 127. "[T]hat upon which something rests, namely what lies present before us, supportive ... the basis, the footing, that is, the ground." *Ibid.*, 104. "In measuring itself up to that about which it thinks, true thinking seeks in the being itself that on which it supports and grounds itself. All true thinking finds grounds and has definite possibilities of grounding." Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 20.

hand, philosophy is the construction of propositions that stand up, and the ability of its constructs to stand is determined by the condition of the ground, its supporting presence. On the other hand, philosophy is the question of what the ground will withstand, of what can stand on the ground. For Heidegger, the “fundamental” question of metaphysics (why there are beings rather than nothing) asks of a being “on what does it stand?”¹⁴ In both cases – philosophy and its object – standing up through construction makes visible the condition of the ground. An edifice is that which manifests grounding, that which exhibits the ground to an eye.

Consequently, philosophy’s successive relayings of the foundations do not preserve a single, defined edifice on evermore stable footings. Rather, it is a matter of dismantling the foundations of a traditional edifice until it “begins to totter”¹⁵ and its structure cracks open, establishing the possibility of a different building. The form of the edifice changes as the ground changes. Having cleared the ground, for example, Kant must reassess its load-bearing capacity and, as he puts it, “lay down the complete architectonic plan” of a new philosophy to “build upon this foundation.”¹⁶ The edifice must be redesigned. Re-laying the foundations establishes the possibility of a different edifice. For Heidegger, who begins his most extended reading of Kant’s *Critique* by arguing that philosophy’s central activity is “best illustrated if we consider the building trade,” the laying of the foundation is the “architectonic circumscription and delineation of the inner possibility of metaphysics” through an interrogation of the condition of the ground. This interrogation involves the “projection” of a “building plan,” the tracing of an outline, the drawing, the designing of an edifice, the drawing of the design out of the ground.¹⁷ Interrogating the condition of the ground defines certain architectonic limits, structural constraints within which the philosopher must work as a designer. The philosopher is first and foremost an architect, endlessly attempting to produce a grounded structure.

The history of philosophy is therefore that of a series of substitutions for structure. Every reference to structure, no matter how oblique, is a reference to an edifice erected on, and marked by, the ground, an edifice from which the ground cannot be removed. As Derrida observes, when beginning a reading of Lévi-Strauss:

It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word “structure” itself are as old as the *epistēmē* – that is to say as old as Western science and Western philosophy – and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the *epistēmē* plunges in order to gather them up and to make them part of

14. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2.

15. “[T]he foundation upon which traditional metaphysics is built is shaken and for this reason the proper edifice of *Metaphysica Specialis* begins to totter.” Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 85.

16. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 60.

17. “To this end, the general meaning of the term “laying the ground” [*Grundlegung*] must be clarified. The expression’s meaning is best

itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, ... structure - or rather the structurality of structure – although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure – one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure – but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. ... The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play.¹⁸

The figure of the edifice that philosophical discourse appears to appropriate from “ordinary” language as a metaphor of itself is that of a structure whose play is constrained by the ground, a structure with which the play of representation is constrained by presence. It is not simply a figure of the exclusion of representation in favor of presence. Rather, it represents the ongoing control of representation. The tradition of philosophy is the sustained attempt to get control by recovering something that precedes representation, restraining representation by establishing the architectonic limits provided by the ground. It searches for the most stable ground in order to exercise the greatest control.

The architectural figure is therefore never simply that of the well-constructed building. It is also the decorated building, one whose structural system controls the ornament attached to it. In the end, the edifice is as much a model of representation as of presentation. It figures a continuous hierarchy from the supposedly infinite depth, solidity, and reliability of the unmediated presence of the ground to the thin, ephemeral, dissimulating representations of ornamental layers that need to be controlled to maintain order. Order is exemplified in the control of ornament. The traditional logic of ground and structure with which philosophy organizes itself is equally the logic of structure and ornament. In the end, philosophy is no more than a theory of ornament.

In these terms, philosophy is dependent on an architectural logic of support. Architecture is the figure of the addition, the structural layer, one element supported by another. It is not just the addition of the building to the ground, but a series of assembled layers. Metaphysics’ determination of the ground as support presupposes a vertical hierarchy from ground through structure to ornament. The idea of support is dependent on a particular view of architecture that defines a range of relationships from fundamental (foundational) to supplementary (ornamental). With

illustrated if we consider the building trade. It is true that metaphysics is not a building or structure [*Gebäude*] that is at hand, but is really in all human beings ‘as a natural construction or arrangement.’ As a consequence, laying the ground for metaphysics can mean to lay a foundation [*Fundament*] under this natural metaphysics, or rather to replace one which has already been laid with a new one through a process of substituting. However, it is precisely this representation which we must keep out of the idea of a ground-laying, namely, that it is a matter of the byproduct from the foundation [*Grundlagen*] of an already-constructed building. Ground-laying is rather the projecting of the building plan itself so that it agrees with the direction concerning on what and how the building will be grounded. Laying the ground for

each additional layer, the bond is weaker. The structure is supposedly bonded to the ground more securely than the ornament is bonded to the structure. But as the distance from the ground becomes greater, the threat to the overall structure diminishes. This vertical hierarchy needs to be understood as a mechanism of control that makes available the thought of the ground as support that is metaphysics.

If structure is that which makes present the ground, submitting itself to the authority of presence, ornament either represents this grounding or deviates from the line of support, detaching itself from the ground in order to represent that which is other than structural. Philosophy attempts to tame ornament in the name of the ground, to control representation in the name of presence. In the end, the philosophical economy turns on the status of ornament. In fact, it is the structure/ornament relationship that enables us to think of support, and thereby to think of the ground. The unique authority of the tradition of philosophy, its capacity to define and legitimate order, derives from its implicit theory of ornament, a theory that rarely becomes explicit.

Philosophy's traditional description of itself and its object as building invokes and sustains a particular image of architecture as a mechanism that precedes and controls the decorative images attached to it through its structural bond to the ground. This image, which itself must be controlled, is never presented in any detail, let alone subjected to any kind of philosophical analysis. It is seen as unquestionable, a truth so familiar that it is not even seen as an image – let alone an image with a particular history sustained by a complex system of institutional practices mobilized to particular sociopolitical ends. Indeed, it is not even employed as a representation of architecture as such, but as an appropriation of that dimension of architecture that supposedly precedes representation: a brute, tangible, visible, and inescapable reality of the material world that is, as a result, both immediately accessible to the reader of philosophy and unquestionable by that reader. The figure is employed to credit philosophy itself with the unmediated condition exhibited by a building, putting in place the supposed neutrality and authority of the structural and structuring gaze of philosophical argument.

The figure itself is not examined by the eye it makes possible. It is exempted from interrogation and this exemption, as it were, holds the institution of philosophy together inasmuch as it makes a whole chain of similar exemptions possible. Architecture is invoked as a kind of touchstone to legitimize certain routine practices within the discourse of philosophy, to relieve those practices from examina-

metaphysics as the projecting [*Entwerfen*] of the building plan, however, is again no empty producing of a system and its subdivisions. It is rather the architectonic circumscription and delineation of the inner possibility of metaphysics, that is, the concrete determination of its essence. All determination of essence, however, is first achieved in the setting-free of the essential ground.

Laying the ground as the projection of the inner possibility of metaphysics is thus necessarily a matter of letting the supporting power of the already-laid ground become operative. Whether and how this takes place is the criterion of the originality and scope of a ground-laying." Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 1.

tion, to block them from view, to disavow that they are practices. The figure of architecture that supports the philosophical eye is the agent of a strategic blindness, orchestrating a system of blind spots that enable philosophy to assume and sustain a particular sociopolitical role in our culture.

Although this image of architecture is such a simplistic figure, a cartoon, it is precisely as a cartoon that it plays such an influential role in so many cultural transactions. The concern here is not to simply produce a more nuanced account of architecture. Indeed, we should not so quickly assume that this is even possible. Rather, it is a matter of trying to understand the nuances of how the implausibly simple figure operates – the complex role played by its very simplicity.

The Always Structural Ambivalence about Architecture

The strategic role of the figure can be identified more precisely by looking at the traditional site where philosophical discourse explicitly addresses the question of architecture: the philosophy of art. The already complicated relationship between philosophy's descriptions of itself and its object in architectural terms, whether explicit or implicit, is further complicated by the discourse's encounter with architecture as an art. In aesthetics, the particular image of architecture with which philosophy organizes itself interacts with an ostensibly more detailed image of architecture. These images do not necessarily, if ever, coincide. The strange relationship between them marks the particular investments that are at stake in the traditional image of architecture, an image meant to be without any investment and employed precisely to mark philosophy's absence of investment, its detached quest for the truth. The figure of architecture is used to establish the neutrality of the philosophical gaze at the world, but, when philosophy is obliged to look at architecture itself through its architect's eye, the scene becomes much more complicated and is marked by certain symptomatic displacements, contradictions, evasions, and denials.

Such an overdetermination can be found in Kant's aesthetics. Although he employs architecture to describe metaphysics in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he subordinates architecture in the *The Critique of Judgement* as an inferior art, indeed the most inferior of the arts because it is the most bound to the utilitarian realm the aesthetic supposedly transcends.¹⁹ Architecture cannot be thought outside

18. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 278–294, 278.

19. "In architecture the chief point is a certain *use* of the artistic object to which, as the condition, the aesthetic ideas are limited ... adaption of the product to a particular use is the essential element in a *work of architecture*." Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 186.

utility and so its beauty is merely “appendant.” On the other hand, the decorations of buildings, which can be considered separately from buildings as things in themselves – “ornamental gardens,” “the decoration of rooms,” “wall hangings,” “wall-paper,” “ornamental accessories,” “beautiful furniture” – are elevated into “free” beauty, free precisely from utility. Although buildings are the lowest form of art, the decoration of buildings (“the sole function of which is *to be looked at*”²⁰) is promoted into the highest form of art: painting. But much of the ornamentation of buildings is obliged to represent the function of those buildings and is therefore excluded.²¹ What is promoted in metaphysics – the structural bond to the ground, which can control representation – is apparently demoted in aesthetics. The groundedness of architecture seems to get in the way of the detached aesthetic gaze.

But if we look more closely at the text, this distinction is not simply applied to architecture. Architecture organizes the very argument that subordinates it. The aesthetic eye, like the philosophical eye, is not simply directed at architecture but is framed by it. *The Critique of Judgement* begins with two architectural examples with which it defines the fundamental disposition of aesthetic taste. The first separates the aesthetic eye from the eye of reason by opposing the rational cognition of a building to taking aesthetic delight in it. The aesthetic is detached from the rational knowledge it “accompanies” and placed in a “separate faculty.” The second employs the distinction between a decorated palace and functional buildings like simple huts and eating houses to establish aesthetic disinterest as a disinterest in the existence or an object, its purpose, or its utility. Before we get the concepts, we get – or are presumed to have already gotten in our everyday experience – architecture, one of the arts to which the concepts are later to be applied. And in both cases, that everyday experience of architecture is aesthetic, the very experience that the book will go on to argue is almost impossible in architecture. Architecture is used to exemplify conditions that are then excluded from it in a pathological act of disavowal.

The *Critique* attempts to subordinate architecture precisely because it is so indebted to it. Philosophical discourse is only able to preserve the image of architecture with which it organizes and describes itself by veiling its indebtedness to that image; philosophy can only preserve its self-image by domesticating architecture, confining it, taking it out of view, holding it in reserve in some secure place from which it can be used to organize the very terrain in which it is prohibited from ap-

20. *Ibid.*, 188.

21. “Much might be added to a building that would immediately please the eye, were it not intended for a church.” *Ibid.*, 73.

pearing. Even the necessary appearance of architecture in the carefully delimited domain of aesthetics produces a kind of embarrassment for the discourse, which forces a series of double gestures.

It is not that architecture is simply promoted in metaphysics and demoted in aesthetics. Rather, it is stitched into the operations of philosophy in more complex ways than philosophy can describe. To understand its role, we need to know more than what philosophy can say of architecture. It is actually a question of what it will not say about architecture, the architecture that is excluded from philosophy and whose exclusion makes philosophy possible or, more precisely, the architecture that should be excluded but never can be and so must be buried by a sustained pathology of disavowal, the architecture for which even the classic image of architecture that punctuates the discourse is but a fetishistic substitute that itself must be withdrawn as much as possible. The architecture that is spoken of but always and immediately domesticated, bracketed off as a suspect figure, masks another sense of architecture, one that is unspeakable and frightening to the discourse, which nevertheless cannot avoid harboring it within its very structure, as without it there could be no sense of structure in the first place.

It is the tension between these architectures that would be at stake in any translation between deconstructive discourse like Derrida’s and architectural discourse. If his work displaces the tradition of philosophy, the question here must be whether or not it displaces or reproduces the different images of architecture embedded within that tradition. These images – which are also embedded within heterogeneous cultural institutions in addition to philosophy, and even organize our sense of what an institution is – cannot be as easily detached from the discipline of architecture as it might at first appear. This seemingly all too obvious link between deconstruction and architecture, which surfaces in the very word “deconstruction,” cannot simply be discarded in the interests of a more nuanced reading without effacing a critical dimension of Derrida’s work. I would argue that it is precisely within this very literal association, within its very literalness, the literalness of an architectural metaphor, that Derrida’s writing is mobilized. At the very least, the strategic role of what seems to be but an incidental metaphor would be one of the central issues in any engagement between architecture and deconstruction.

This is not because philosophy, when speaking of architecture, is pointing outside itself to the material condition of buildings with which the discipline of architecture is most directly concerned, offering a theory of that material practice that

is necessarily transformed by Derrida's work in a way that is of interest to that discipline. Philosophy is not simply theorizing something outside itself. The apparent distance between it and a building is at once produced by and is the possibility of its own theoretical discourse. It draws an edifice rather than draws on an edifice, producing an architecture of grounded structure that it then uses for support, leaning on it, resting within it. The edifice is constructed to make theory possible, then subordinated as a metaphor to defer to some higher, nonmaterial truth. Architecture is constructed as a material reality to liberate a supposedly higher domain. As material, it is but metaphor. The most material condition is used to establish the most ideal order, which is then bound to reject the former as merely material. The status of material oscillates. The metaphor of the ground, the bedrock as the fundamental base, inverts to become base in the sense of degraded, material, less than ideal. The vertical hierarchy inverts itself, and in this inversion architecture flips from privileged origin to gratuitous supplement, foundation to ornament.

Philosophy treats its architectural motif as but a metaphor that can and should be discarded as superfluous. The figure of the grounded structure is but an illustration, a useful metaphor that illustrates the nature of metaphysics, but outlives its usefulness and must be abandoned from the final form of metaphysics, a representation to be separated from the fundamental presentation, a kind of scaffolding to be discarded when the project is complete. The scaffolding that originally supports a structure is the part of structure that becomes ornamental. The structure of structure is, in the end, ornament. When philosophy reflects on its own completion, it defines architecture as metaphorical. Metaphysics is arguably no more than the determination of architecture as metaphor. But can architecture be so simply discarded? Not if we follow Derrida's own argument about metaphor, and the architectural metaphor in particular.

Contracting Architecture

It is significant that the earliest of Derrida's lectures to be published – "Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology," which was originally given in 1959 – is an approving reading of the particular sense of "structure" in Edmund Husserl's work, articulated in terms of the rhetoric of "grounds," "foundations," "superstructure," "excavation," and "erection" that Husserl employed, and the first essay Derrida

published – "Force and Signification" of 1963 – is a disapproving reading of the "privileged" role of spatial metaphors, particularly that of "structure," in a text by Jean Rousset. Husserl is supported inasmuch as he explicitly rethinks the condition of structure and the general question of spatial form, whereas Rousset is condemned for employing spatial figures uncritically. The issue is not a small one. Derrida argues that such figures are "only metaphorical, it will be said. Certainly. But metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results. When the spatial model is hit upon, when it functions, critical reflection rests within it."²² The discourse is within the spatial metaphor rather than the metaphor is within the discourse. It is orchestrated by what it thinks it employs. For Derrida, the "aesthetic" mode in which discourse is "fascinated by the spatial image" is far from innocent; it organizes the tradition of metaphysics that can be traced back at least to Plato. To resist that tradition, he calls for a sustained suspicion of the spatial metaphor and the way its metaphoric condition is effaced:

Hence, for as long as the metaphorical sense of the notion of structure is not acknowledged *as such*, that is to say interrogated and even destroyed as concerns its figurative quality so that the nonspatiality or original spatiality designated by it may be revived, one runs the risk, through a kind of sliding as unnoticed as it is *efficacious*, of confusing meaning with its geometric, morphological, or, in the best of cases, cinematic model. One risks being interested in the figure itself to the detriment of the play going on within it metaphorically.²³

This crucial argument does not appear to be about architecture, and yet twice Derrida clarifies the sense of the suspect metaphor in terms of architecture. At the beginning of the essay, what is figured by "structure" is said to be "somewhat like the architecture of an inhabited or deserted city"²⁴ and in the middle of the essay its "literal," and therefore dangerous, sense is architectural: "Now, *stricto sensu*, the notion of structure refers only to space, geometric or morphological space, the order of forms and sites. Structure is first the structure of an organic or artificial work, the internal unity of an assemblage, a *construction*; a work is governed by a unifying principle, the *architecture* that is built and made visible in a location."²⁵ It is inasmuch as the spatial image is literalized as architecture that it is dangerous and its uncritical employment has to be interfered with, if not "destroyed."

Derrida's work would go on to repeatedly demonstrate that metaphysics constitutes itself with the very metaphors it claims to have abandoned as "mere" metaphors. Furthermore, at one point he argues that this very attempt to aban-

22. Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification," trans. Alan Bass, in Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 3–30, 17. The essay goes on to argue that metaphor "is the essential weight which anchors discourse in metaphysics."

23. *Ibid.*, 16.

24. *Ibid.*, 5.

25. *Ibid.*, 15.

don metaphors in favor of something more fundamental involves the architectural metaphor itself. In his most sustained argument about metaphor, he notes that a metaphor is distinguished from the fundamental as a building is distinguished from the ground:

Thus, the criteria for a classification of philosophical metaphors are borrowed from a derivative philosophical discourse. ... They are metaphorical, resisting every meta-metaphorics, the values of concept, foundation, and theory. ... What is fundamental corresponds to the desire for a firm and ultimate ground, a terrain to build on, the earth as the support for an artificial structure.²⁶

Philosophy can only define a part of itself as nonmetaphorical by employing the architectural metaphor. This particular metaphor organizes the general status of metaphor. In so doing, it organizes the tradition of philosophy that claims to be able to discard it. The figure of a building as a grounded structure cannot be discarded to reveal any fundamental ground, as the sense of the “fundamental” is produced by that very figure. Architectural figures cannot simply be detached from philosophical discourse. Architecture is not simply one metaphor among others. More than the metaphor of foundation, it is the foundational metaphor. It is therefore not simply a metaphor.²⁷

The architectural figure is bound to philosophy, and the institutionalized discourses “responsible” for architecture and philosophy each share and maintain this bond. The bond is contractual, not in the sense of an agreement signed by two parties, but in that of a conceptual knot of which the two parties are but an effect, a translation contract in the sense of Derrida’s reading of Benjamin. More than the terms of exchange and translation within and between these discourses, it produces each discourse as a discourse. The translation between architecture and philosophy works both ways. Each has a fatal attraction for the other that manifests itself in many different ways. Each depends on the other. Neither one can think of itself outside the other, and yet each can think of itself only by placing the other outside. Each constructs the other as an origin from which it is, by definition – which is to say, by self-definition – detached. Each identifies the other as other, constructing it as other by invoking it as a privileged origin, only to push it away. Philosophy appeals to architecture to constitute itself, only to immediately subordinate architecture as mere material. Likewise, architectural discourse appeals to philosophy to constitute itself, only to subordinate it as provisional and ephemeral

26. Jacques Derrida, “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” trans. Alan Bass, in Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207–271, 224.

27. Some of the multiple complications this unique status produces can be seen when Derrida invokes the architectural “metaphor” to describe his sustained attempt to undermine the distinction between the conceptual system of philosophy and its metaphors: “I try to deconstruct the opposition between concept and metaphor and to rebuild, to restructure this field.” Jacques Derrida, “Jacques Derrida on Rhetoric and Composition: A Conversation,” interview with Gary A. Olsen, *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 10, 1990, 1–21, 16. Deconstruction

argument that must give way to the fundamental materiality of a building. Both discourses are constantly marked by the traces of these inversions, oscillating between moment of attraction and repulsion that can never simply be separated. The translation contract, as it were, negotiates this complex and restless dynamic.

This unwritten contract, which is neither a contingent cultural artifact nor an atemporal acultural principle, establishes the possibility of the more visible social contracts that appear to organize and separate architecture and philosophy as institutional discourses. The relatively recent status of architecture as a discipline began to be negotiated by the first texts of architectural theory in the Renaissance, which drew on the canonic texts of the philosophical tradition to identify the proper concern of the newly constituted figure of the architect with drawing [*Disegno*], which mediates between the idea and the building, the formal and the material, the soul and the body, the theoretical and the practical. Architecture – architectural drawing – is neither simply a mechanical art bound to the bodily realm of utility nor a liberal art operating in the realm of ideas, but is their reconciliation, the bridge between the two. Architectural theory thus constructs architecture as a bridge between the dominant oppositions of metaphysics and constitutes itself by exploiting the contractual possibility already written into the philosophical tradition wherein it describes itself as architecture.

It is not simply that architecture has some familiar, unambiguous material reality that is drawn upon by philosophy. Rather, philosophy draws an architecture, presents a certain understanding, a theory, of architecture. The terms of the contract are the prohibition of a different description of the architectural object, or rather, the dissimulation of that object. The discipline or architecture participates in this prohibition. Even though it nominates architecture as its subject, its main concern is to maintain the assumptions about architecture that are necessary for the everyday operations of culture outside the ostensible field of architecture: assumptions about materiality, order, spacing, closure, and so on. The discipline is no more than the maintenance or the sense of a field, a defined territory ostensibly worked over by different forms of architectural practice, theory, historiographical strategies, forms of criticism, pedagogical techniques, course structures, building codes, codes of professional ethics, techniques of representation, guild mentalities, modes of publication, exhibitions, journals, galleries, museums, and so on. But this field is not so much explored by these institutional practices as defended by them. It is constituted as such by an ongoing labor of representation, which

redeploys and undermines the image of architecture that, among so many other things, subordinates that very image of architecture.

confirms that architecture has its own limits that can be demarcated and examined, but in the end does so by preventing such an examination. Even this concept of a field as a delimited space presupposes exactly those architectural assumptions that are exempted from examination by such institutionalized defenses.

It is this solid defense through a systematic blinding of discourse that defines the profoundly conservative role of architectural discourse. It is not so much that the discourse assumes a conservative position, but that it conserves certain ideas about space employed by discourses which do not appear to be concerned with space (like the ideas embedded in the very concept of "position," for example). The traditional classification of architecture as an art acts as a cover for this fundamental disciplinary work. Even, if not especially, the current discourse's endless celebration of the new and of unique architectural responses to different spatial, regional, and historical conditions, the romanticizing of creativity, the promotion of the individual architect, the production of canonic histories, the awarding of prizes and commissions, commissions as prizes, and so on, is first and foremost a labor of conservation. The solidity of architecture is in this institutional defense rather than in the structure of buildings. The resistance of architecture does not lie in its ostensible materials but in the strength of institutional resistance to their interrogation. It is not that architecture, as it were, stands up to sustained interrogation. Rather, the institution of architecture is not read as such by the many discourses it makes possible, including, but not especially, those of "architecture" and "philosophy."

The concern here must therefore be to locate certain discursive practices repressed within the pathological mechanisms of the traditional economy that bind these discourses together by tracing the impact of another account of architecture hidden within them. It must be remembered that deconstructive discourse is not outside this economy. On the contrary, it attains its force precisely by inhabiting the tradition, obeying its principles so rigorously that their internal complications and contradictions become evident. In so doing, it necessarily engages at some level with the contract between architecture and philosophy. The question is, exactly what kind of relationship does deconstructive discourse assume with the account of architecture that the traditional economy resists but cannot avoid, the always threatening architecture repressed by the tradition? Can deconstructive discourse speak about this unspeakable architecture? Or even, can a discourse be deconstructive without doing so? To what extent is deconstructive discourse no more

than a certain kind of interference with the institutional mechanisms that conceal, if not incarcerate, a certain forbidden, improper, and, above all, illegitimate architecture?

Mark Wigley, „Constructive Abuse,“ „*The Edifice Complex Revisited*,“ „*The Always Structural Ambivalence About Architecture*,“ „*Contracting Architecture*,“ (excerpt from chapter 1 „The Translation of Deconstruction“), in *The Architecture of Deconstruction. Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge,MA/London: MIT Press, 1995), 3-22.

The Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalist Museum*

May 1, 1983: I remember the drizzle and cold of that spring morning, as the feminist section of the May Day parade formed up at République. Once we started moving out, carrying our banners for the march towards the Place de la Bastille, we began our chant. “Qui paie ses dettes s’enrichit,” it went, “qui paie ses dettes s’enrichit,” in a reminder to Mitterand’s newly appointed Minister of Women’s Affairs that the Socialists’ campaign promises were still deeply in arrears. Looking back at that cry now, from a perspective firmly situated at the end of the ‘80s, sometimes referred to as “the roaring ‘80s,” the idea that paying your debts makes you rich seems pathetically naive. What makes you rich, we have been taught by a decade of casino capitalism, is precisely the opposite. What makes you rich, fabulously rich, beyond your wildest dreams, is leveraging.

July 17, 1990: Coolly insulated from the heat wave outside, Suzanne Pagé and I are walking through her exhibition of works from the Panza Collection, an installation that, except for three or four small galleries, entirely fills the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. At first I am extremely happy to encounter these objects – many of them old friends I have not seen since their early days of exhibition in the 1960s – as they triumphantly fill vast suites of galleries, having muscled everything else off the walls to create that experience of articulated spatial presence specific to Minimalism. The importance of this space as a vehicle for the works is something Suzanne Pagé is conscious of as she describes the desperate effort of remodeling vast tracts of the museum to give it the burnished neutrality necessary to function as background to these Flavins and Andres and Morrises. Indeed, it is her focus on the space – as a kind of reified and abstracted entity – that I finally find most arresting. This climaxes at the point when she positions me at the spot within the exhibition that she describes as being, for her, somehow the most riveting. It is in one of the newly stripped and smoothed and neutralized galleries, made whitely luminous by the serial progression of a recent work by Flavin. But we are not actually looking at the Flavin. At her direction we are scanning the two ends of the gallery through the large doorways of which we can see the disembodied glow produced by two other Flavins, each in an adjoining room: one of these an intense

* This text, written as a lecture for the September 10, 1990 meeting of the International Association of Museums of Modern Art (CIMAM) in Los Angeles, is being published here considerably before I have been able to deliver, as fully as I would have liked, on the promise of its title. The timeliness of the issues, however, suggested that it was more important to open them to immediate discussion than to wait to refine either the theoretical level of the argument or the rhetoric within which it is framed.

apple green light; the other an unearthly, chalky blue radiance. Both announce a kind of space-beyond which we are not yet in, but for which the light functions as the intelligible sign. And from our point of view both these aureoles can be seen to frame – like strangely industrialized haloes – the way the gallery’s own starkly cylindrical, International Style columns enter our point of view. We are having this experience, then, not in front of what could be called the art, but in the midst of an oddly emptied yet grandiloquent space of which the museum itself – as a building – is somehow the object.

Within this experience, it is the museum that emerges as powerful presence and yet as properly empty, the museum as a space from which the collection has withdrawn. For indeed, the effect of this experience is to render it impossible to look at the paintings hanging in those few galleries still displaying the permanent collection. Compared to the scale of the Minimalist works, the earlier paintings and sculpture look impossibly tiny and inconsequential, like postcards, and the galleries take on a fussy, crowded, culturally irrelevant look, like so many curio shops.

*

These are two scenes that nag at me as I think about the “cultural logic of the late capitalist museum,” because somehow it seems to me that if I can close the gap between their seeming disparateness, I can demonstrate the logic of what we see happening, now, in museums of modern art.¹ Here are two possible bridges, flimsy perhaps, because fortuitous, but nonetheless suggestive.

1. In the July 1990 *Art in America* there occurs the unanalyzed but telling juxtaposition of two articles. One is the essay called “Selling the Collection,” which describes the massive change in attitude now in place according to which the objects in a museum’s keeping can now be coolly referred to, by its director as well as its trustees, as “assets.”² This bizarre Gestalt-switch from regarding the collection as a form of cultural patrimony or as specific and irreplaceable embodiments of cultural knowledge to one of eying the collection’s contents as so much capital – as stocks or assets whose value is one of pure exchange and thus only truly realized when they are put in circulation – seems to be the invention not merely of dire financial necessity: a result, that is, of the American tax law of 1986 eliminating the deductibility of the market value of donated art objects. Rather, it appears the function of a more profound shift in the very context in which the museum operates – a context whose corporate nature is made specific not only by the major

1. Throughout, my debt to Fredric Jameson’s “Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” (*New Left Review*, no. 146 [July-August 1984], pp. 53-93) will be obvious.

2. Philip Weiss, “Selling the Collection,” *Art in America*, vol. 78 (July 1990), pp. 124-131.