

“Else-where”

“Else-where”:
Essays in Art, Architecture,
and Cultural Production 2002-2011

By

Gavin Keeney

**CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

“Else-where”: Essays in Art, Architecture, and Cultural Production 2002-2011,
by Gavin Keeney

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To Robin . . .

The dead don't stay where they are buried.
—John Berger

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PREFACE

The 23 essays collected here survey art, architecture, and cultural production primarily through a discursive, “archaeological” investigation of the premises of *the event* of art and architecture, plus the critical or textual analogues given to the same. The primary presence in these readings is a path out of late-modern nihilism; or, a possible way out of the world of broken signifiers and mere materialist agency that constitutes the instrumentalized orders of art and architecture under the spell of capitalist orders. In this way, it is the critical apparatus or apparitional nature of texts that informs this archaeology of the affective regimes given to late-modern cultural production. The essays are intended to signal the arrival, coincidental to the exit from post-structuralism, of an elective engagement with the very idea of the limit inscribed in worlds *as limits*; a figure that suggests that what lies outside of such worlds is the true address of the work of art and architecture.

Arguably, as limit, the work of art and architecture draws a type of circle that either delimits the presence of signifying agency itself or its negation. It is the latter that is invoked in the trajectory of the essays as they unveil the operative agency of formalist endeavors as an approach to the edge of the world as limit and the expectation that such forms of reduction lead to the ability to embody and “say” the contemporary form of the unsayable (for example, the anti-capitalist sublime). This encounter with spectrality, the principal gesture of post-structuralism (plus the subsequent turn into compromised forms of materialist reification, or re-engagements with deterministic elements of cultural production, pro- or anti-capitalist in spirit), nonetheless brackets the expectation of exiting the same, effectively perpetuating the dislocations and short circuits endemic to socio-economic theories of art and architecture (art and architecture as socially and/or economically determined and grounded forms of accommodation with ideological production itself). This problem has been present all along the path of modernity, and it is, as such, the very source of the dismissal of art and architecture by figures as diverse as Guy Debord, Manfredo Tafuri, and Gilles Deleuze.

The idea of a limit automatically suggests “closure,” while in the more speculative practices given to art and architecture the avowed negation of

negation arrives with the notion of the event; this late-modern version of the event most commonly traced to Edmund Husserl's phenomenological project, while its presence in post-structuralism and post-phenomenology remains primarily a spectral (and repressed) form of ideality. In the negative dialectics of the apophatic path to the One (one world), the erasure of compromises with mere worlds (instrumentalized orders) leads to the proverbial way out, here configured as the anti-capitalist sublime or Benjaminian cosmogonic parousia, an antithetical modality for art and architecture that also accesses the abstract and reductive speculative agency (representational "poverty") that arrived with modernism, but which was – over the course of the twentieth century – abandoned en route to the post-modern impasse and the substitution of *speculative capital* for speculative thought. In this sense, and as gestures toward an elective, non-statist "communism," art and architecture might be described as forms of intellectual capital en route "else-where."

The essays assembled here cross the shifting terrain of the last half of the twentieth century, insofar as they also track various movements out of structuralism and post-structuralism into the implied exit from modernist and post-modernist nihilism. While operating at the limit of a set of discursive readings of this exit en route to something or somewhere else, the primary concern is to re-inscribe in art and architecture the futural terms of the event as such (the One), not so much as new, deferred utopian premises but, instead, as timeless or untimely terms of engagement with the world (and worlds) that re-introduce and privilege the Real, versus the lost causes of art and architecture in service to capital. Such an agenda erases the unnecessary and the compromised limits of art and architecture to draw a new limit that paradoxically limits the very nature of the limit in such a way that it opens all worlds to another world (one *virtuous* world). In a sense, then, this book is an update of Aldous Huxley's *The Perennial Philosophy*, first published in 1945. For Huxley modern nihilism originates in the production of meaninglessness (forms of empiricism and psychologism), and by midcentury this complex, within and without, was all but triumphant. Anti-capitalism is, therefore, reducible to its preliminary, ahistorical form as a productive, non-reactionary evocation of pure communism, something that is essentially capitalism's Other and an evocation of the One (a world and a form of subjectivity at once beyond dualism and beyond all forms of ideology). The origins of capitalism and statism, for Huxley, reside in the Reformation and the subsequent secularization of that revolt. It remains for the reader to decide if, since 1945, anything has changed in any substantial manner and whether renascent forms of the Good (the One) are truly sustainable.

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INTRODUCTION

THE “HISTORY” OF ART HISTORY

I.

In Book IV of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche confers two figures of speech with a simultaneity that is striking. The figures are Midnight and Noontide, and this book (suppressed until 1892) is rightly the penultimate statement of what passes in *Zarathustra* as an affirmation of life proper.

Book IV was printed privately (in 40 copies) and circulated secretly by Nietzsche. It discloses what he considered the essence of *Zarathustra* insofar as the higher men who come to visit Zarathustra in his cave seem to represent the phases required to reach the negation of negation and the subsequent double affirmation that is, arguably, the operative intention of the entire apparatus of this hyper-parabolic tale.

The figure of the Eternal Return of the Same has been considered the central motif of *Zarathustra* since the book was properly assimilated (well after it was written). The long and tortured reception, including outright distortions, has only been more troubling in its appropriation over the entire course of the twentieth century, albeit by figures on both the left and the right. If *Zarathustra* is the denunciation of the outmoded and the traumatic announcement of the nihilist moment par excellence (the negative critique of culture that leads to the affirmation of a “Dionysian monism”), what it announced *then* is also what it announces *now*. What it affirms, however, is contained in the non-dialectical, poetical confrontation of Midnight and Noon. One finds in the last book a form of closure to dialectical thought proper and the conflation of two ways of affirming life – that is, an exit from a type of structural anomie or a chiasmus given to Western rationality as such.

Here life is also history, yet not the history that is usually constructed as self-edifying discourse or justification by power for power as forms of cultural and political hegemony. If anything, Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* exacts punishment on all such forms of history in service to power. What type of history is then inferred and ennobled, in what many also see as a

deconstruction of Western subjectivity, is the paramount concern of the work.

Zarathustra announces the arrival and end of pessimism (nihilism), while affirming its ultimate limit in the image of the Eternal Return. What Nietzsche also affirms in the very last passages of Book IV is “work” (*his work*), and the necessity of the subject to quite simply transcend itself. In this scenario, life, history, and work are effectively elided or conflated, and the idea of work also becomes the idea of the work of art.

What, then, is the “history” that confers upon art an “art history”? And what is art history? If art history is different from the history of art, a view of the prospects *Zarathustra* announced for knowledge comes into view. Art is a form of history in this regard (as world-historical event), and “wanting nothing for oneself” is the mark of the arrival of that event in the life-work of the artist. Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Nostalghia* (1983) is in this manner “Nietzschean,” as – in the film – the Russian poet Andrei announces this very same sentiment in the opening scenes, as he refuses to enter a convent to see a famous painting by Piero della Francesca, preferring instead to remain in his state of “exiting” the aimless wandering that characterizes his actions throughout the entire film. Here is Nietzschean alienation personified and hypostatized.

The history of art, then, is not art history. And the “history” that is *in* art overflows its mere productive or cultural agency, an explicit surplus that denotes what moves through it (as history moves through the subject). This larger “canvas,” then, is life. The history of art is the gestural power of Midnight conjoined or fused to Noon. Within the former is the Dionysian spirit of creative power itself, and within the latter is the Apollinian will to power so badly misunderstood ever since Nietzsche formulated this figure of speech as the foremost means to overcome power (and alienation).

This other power moves in images, and if the Eternal Return is the primary image of *Zarathustra*, it also marks the categorical nature of the inquisition undertaken by Nietzsche of how worlds are formed, deformed, taken apart, and reconstructed out of thin air. The Eternal Return’s main feature is its affirmation of the apparatus of life (hence the significance of the word *joy* in Book IV). In all subsequent appropriations of this immense figure of power (of creative repetition as power, as Gilles Deleuze has theorized) the so-called structural logic of worlds collapses. The architecture of worlds is no longer to be found in vaporous forms of ideology but, instead, in concrete terms given to the production of life as art. Life as history also returns the power taken by power. In the case of deconstructing power, the return of power becomes, paradoxically,

intensely personal before it negates the subject and once again invokes history.

II.

Nietzsche has often been called a forerunner of modernism. If the enemy of most totalizing modernist projects has also been the bourgeois subject, it is axiomatic that this very subject is the problem both for and against power. The elusive, if not slippery contours of subjective power are, therefore, tantamount to the boundaries of the inquest. To re-define and restrict subjectivity has, as a result, been the principal project of totalizing political and cultural projects.

Yet the bourgeois subject is not the abject subject (the alienated individual given to resentment and traversing worlds constructed by power). In fact, the abject subject is the debased bourgeois subject. As such, the Dionysian monism of Nietzsche's immense inverse vision of power (embodied in the Eternal Return as overwhelming repetition) resides as possibility within the bourgeois subject. In raising this subject beyond his/her normative role as "slave," yet through abjectivity, Nietzsche also invokes an inordinate "rights of man" as rite of passage. For this reason, the bourgeois subject in art is a telltale presence throughout art history, and in the films of Ingmar Bergman, Alain Resnais, Chris Marker, Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean-Luc Godard, and Andrei Tarkovsky, for example, it is this very subjective condition that is presented as conundrum. In art proper, or in the work of art traversed by life and history, the very nature of the subject returns to an apparent hiatus as subject – a type of *détournement* given to the work of art that engages in the liberation of subjects from the Spirit of Gravity (totalizing systems left, center, and/or right). The Dionysian vision is the vision of spontaneous creation (not of personal utopias, but of absolute freedom through creative expression). It is this negation of captive subject that is the outcome of the work of art. Life is not culture. And history as formative force operating within art is, after all, the enemy of culture per se. If power acknowledges and confers status upon culture, power in its originary sense liberates art from culture.

The subject of art is not the bourgeois subject, nor the subject in any sense of the word as it has come to be embedded in psychological or cultural terms. The subject of art is the so-called impersonal agency of history and life. The misadventures of modernism (both *avant-garde* and *reactionary* misadventures) have more or less proven that the misappropriation of this idea is related to the misadventures of idealism

(Nietzsche's other *bête noire*). In Nietzsche's case, however, it was German Idealism *as ideology* that was the target of Dionysian monism. The spirit of Hegel and the spirit of Kant, while ghostly presences in the latter half of the nineteenth century, yet remain the main hurdles in the re-assimilation of idealism today (the prime "missing" ingredient in the passage out of nihilism and the necessary redefinition of the subject/citizen).

As subject *of* certain forms of art, the bourgeois subject is a figural reference to the processes of art as it moves toward the idealization of those very processes that negate the subject in favor of that which surmounts the subject – that is, ideality itself. This process of surmounting the subject is the true address of all idealizations, and, as such, abject apparatuses of culture are also the prison-houses of this spirit. If history, life, and Spirit are to remain in a state of non-ideological, non-statist expression, the means of passage beyond calcified worlds as prison-houses requires the liberation of the bourgeois subject and the liberation of the forces given to art that are the very means to that liberation.

Gavin Keeney
June 26, 2011

PART I:

2002-2005

On arriving at a location, my first work is an unconscious act of seeing: a walk. Then, slowly, after having decided on a focus and framing my concern, I begin to experience the conscious act of seeing. This is a magic moment in my work, which I compare to a walk in the forest looking for mushrooms. Vision is now completely focused. It sees and looks for only one thing. It is driven to capture one thing again and again with an almost unfulfillable desire. It is then that I begin to wonder whether the building is concealing something I may never be able to capture in its entirety. Can it be that the building has a soul?

—Hélène Binet

ESSAY ONE

A REFRACTED HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The page contains a single sentence: “Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn’t any.” The sentence is repeated over and over for the whole length of the page, giving the impression of a wall, of an impediment. There are no periods or commas or margins, a wall, in fact, of words that illustrate the meaning of the sentence, the collision with a wall behind which there is nothing. But towards the bottom and on the right, in one of the sentences the word *any* is missing. A sensitive eye can discover the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through.¹

—Julio Cortázar

Historiography, Formalism(s), and Critical History

In early structuralism (Roman Jakobson) there exists the theory of the dominant – for example, the visual arts in the Renaissance, music in Romanticism – to which other forms conform/strive to merge. In modernism the dominant is/was science – and linguistics, architecture, sociology, psychology, etc. attempted to produce a synthetical system outside of/in contradistinction to the humanities. This is the either/or implicit to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*, which, of course, he abandoned after the Russellian project collapsed.

In Russian Formalism we see the first moves toward a system of signs freed from semantic content. This is also why Russian Formalism appealed to the neo-rationalist architects of the 1960s and 1970s. The end game however (Manfredo Tafuri’s idea of hegemony returning) of formalism was futurism, suprematism, constructivism, and functionalism – all more or less new forms of architectural nihilism (see Massimo Cacciari) at first

¹ Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Pantheon, 1987), p. 370. First published in Spanish in 1963 and English, by Pantheon, in 1966. Cortázar is invoking through Franco Morelli’s theory of the novel an “else-where” or “beyond” that exists here-and-now in the very act of creative writing.

and, then, new forms of architectural dogma. Nicolas Berdyaev's suggestion (via Fyodor Dostoevsky) that communism failed because it was not spiritual enough contains a suggestion that the humanities and science are essentially irreconcilable until systems are truly "open" – hence Umberto Eco's anti-ideological concept of the "open work." The mechanistic worldview and the organic worldview are two mutually antagonistic and insufficient themes that plague philosophy and architecture. (See José Ortega y Gasset.²)

Russian landscape – the silent and primordial figures and gestures lurking in the literature and art of the (lost) Silver Age (1890-1920) – gave way to the slashing, machinic universe of agit-prop avant-gardism. Socialist Realism killed even that latter, mechanistic worldview in favor of heroic images of an always-deferred material and technological utopia. Tafuri's utopic realm of the sphere – versus the fallen world of the labyrinth – was idealism pictorialized. In the rarified realm of "structure," politics (and ideology) was momentarily bracketed (or pre-prepared) before redeployment. Hence, Tafuri favored – even against his own better judgment – the meta-logical games of formalism as acts of resistance and criticality (and often, Antonin Artaud-like aesthetic cruelty).

Lyricism returned in the 1950s thaw in Russian literature, and it is that spirit, plus an intense inner working of the subject/object dialectic, that animates the cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky. Landscape, in Tarkovsky's world, is *mise-en-scène*, and it reflects, always, an inner condition, as do the supporting apparatuses of architecture (often ruined architecture) and the things of everyday life. Tarkovsky connects the latter-day Russian aesthetic of the tragic to the pre-Revolution mysticism of Russian lyric poetry and literature.

It might be said that landscape returns *in waves* (in movements through things), versus as an object or set of objects. An ecology of signifying forms is the meta-ecological model underlying signifying chains. New topographies and the renovation of the architectonic aspect of design almost always prefigure a redeployment (*re-surfacing*) of repressed content (other possible futures, or always already deferred alternative models). The ideological aspect of the aesthetic (Terry Eagleton) consists of the mask that Tafuri considered the chief characteristic of Gramscian hegemony. In theory, this mask must be removed and the underlying content exposed and transformed to liberate consciousness (Demetri

² José Ortega y Gasset, *Toward a Philosophy of History*, trans. Helene Weyl (New York: W.W. Norton, 1941). Re-published as a second edition under the title *History as System, and Other Essays Toward a Philosophy of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961).

Porphyrrios). Thus, radical formalism comes and goes – it's here, and then *not here* – as the diachronic history of architecture reveals the diachronic nature of signifying systems. Synchronic applications, on the other hand, are typically applied to the critical-historical operations of philosophy, history (art and architectural), and aesthetics.

Curiously, avant-garde modernist and late-modernist art and architecture share an innate anima toward the return of the outmoded (Hal Foster). Paradoxically, late-modern (or neo-modern) art and architectures also permit a selective return of certain forms of avant-garde formalism – the primary example in neo-modernist architecture is the persistence of varieties of purism and architectures of liminalism (the Whites, or the New York Five) and minimalism. Blame Kenneth Frampton for the New York Five, if you will, but their collective position was an act of recovery and renovation of principles buried in the avalanche of generic modernism after Le Corbusier. The so-called corporate modernism of the post-World-War-II period led directly to the crisis of the 1960s. Tafuri may have denounced historiography as mythography, but critical history also contains its own mythicizing subject (for example, the architecture of deferred utopias reaching back to the Renaissance), this other subject perhaps present most powerfully in Jacques Derrida's concept of the Other (*l'autre*). (See Tafuri on Leon Battista Alberti.³)

The problem well may be that architecture is implicitly hegemonic in itself – as it almost always denies ground. Its own version of hegemony is built into its reliance on materialization and the technological spirit. It is this latter thing that emanates from within hegemony as a form of positivism that takes no prisoners. This primary urge within architecture is the place where architecture is overwhelmed and appropriated by conventional/instrumentalized forms of everyday hegemony. The age-old architectonic of metaphysics underwrites this doubling of hegemony. Deconstruction is but one way “through the mirror,” though not quite a “way out.”

Machine-age romanticism pervades modern architecture. This is the “machine-ate-the-garden” syndrome. It is prefigured in William Blake and Henry David Thoreau and problematized by Leo Marx and proponents of the industrial sublime. The hegemonic aspects of architecture crush landscape, its most obvious other, whenever its own precious autonomy is threatened (and thus, too, Derrida's meditation on the implicit violence in

³ See Manfredo Tafuri, “Discordant Harmony from Alberti to Zuccari,” *Architectural Design* 49, no. 5-6 (1979): pp. 36-44. See also Carla Keyvanian, “Manfredo Tafuri: From the Critique of Ideology to Microhistories,” *Design Issues* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2000): pp. 3-15.

the construction of ipseity versus alterity, self at the expense of not-self, and hence Raimund Abraham's admission that the first act of architecture is to make a mark, inscribing a violent rupture into things). This is most evident in urban environments. This aggressive autonomy issues forth from architecture in defense of its hegemonic status – utopian or otherwise. The avant-garde is complicit in this handing over of architecture to everyday hegemony insofar as it abdicates its responsibility to prevent the collapse of free consciousness into new empty forms (new masks). Clement Greenberg's "Towards a New Laocoön" (1940) preceded the hegemony of abstract expressionism and set the stage for the 1960s revolt of conceptualism and minimalism. G.E. Lessing's *Laokoon* (1766) simply countered the late-Baroque concentration of the arts in dematerialized spiritual form by placing limits on literary and plastic art forms. Heinrich Wölfflin produced an art history without names that essentially took the synchronic approach to reading form to a new level of systemization by way of psychological precepts. His gift was absorbed into Russian Formalism by way of symbolism and then futurism. This abstract approach to mining history came to an apotheosis in structuralism (by way of Ferdinand de Saussure), and was undone, in turn, by post-structuralism, in which case the diachronic political critique of post-Marxism extracted maximum revenge on the tyranny of the signifier.

Today, we see the advent of a deterministic virtuality (an almost-new vitalism) that impregnates everything with the shimmering sign of nothingness. This nothingness – the ultra-depleted surface of things – is, paradoxically, valorized as the most prescient of conditions, as the late-modern subject is primarily presented as a void (a virtual and virtuous nothingness). This nascent nihilism suggests that architecture has grown weary of its complicity in hegemonic orders and has elected, instead, to play, versus resist. Such a strategy also suggests that the flotsam or debris field of architectural deconstruction has opened up the discipline to purely instrumental and ad hoc games played from "inside" architectural production – that is, within the folds of information and data that produce/impress the architectural image as well as the architectural object. As the shimmering architectures of the dematerialized subject are increasingly realized as *actual* cultural fabric, the anti-ideological ideology of "total flow" might be expected to reveal itself. That this pluralistic, negative ideology has arrived out of a deconstruction of previous ideologies is fully consistent with the nature of the production of architectures. What is curious is the maelstrom of incorporations that occur in the intertextual apparatus of architectural virtuality and dematerialization. As the architectural object moves closer to a field

condition in and of itself, a wide array of previously repressed material is folded into the matrix. This new “ecology” is, in fact, a form of psycho-social reconditioning – and the incorporation of the idea of “landscape,” as figure or fold, suggests a possible way out of the deterministic circle inscribed in the generation of purely synthetical environments. This way out is *through* the proverbial hole in the wall of the architectural image – the “cracked” and “broken” surface that only appears smooth. A possible re-inscription of depth is in and of itself predisposed to return “landscape + architecture” to its place in the creative construction of consciousness. This concept of depth approaches Martin Heidegger’s “running ahead to meet the past,” and, as a cipher for the production of timeliness, such an approach precludes complete immersion in the detritus of over-determined, collapsing systems and/or the seductive, dematerialized field of flows and vectors. Despite the scintillating presence of surface, at some point the issue of architecture’s ontological ground must be formally re-addressed. Hence architecture’s indexicality and its implicit role as cultural and post-cultural “archive.”

For Derrida, the future itself has a future . . . Thus the wheel rolls on and on, turning over and over, crushing incomplete school after incomplete school. The provisional nature of form-making is revealed in the process – and the essentialist worldview within such processes escapes unscathed to return another day as another attempt to reach the ontological ground beneath our feet and some form of synthesis, or, as Walter Benjamin proclaimed, “The Coming Philosophy.”

Architectural Horizons: Time Not-Itself

The possibility of access to history is grounded in the possibility according to which any specific present understands how to be futural. This is the first principle of all hermeneutics.⁴

—Martin Heidegger

Upon disposing of (setting aside) the achingly beautiful photographs of so-called natural landscapes (the Sierra Club idiom) and the glossy, romanticized vernacular images of working landscapes (the National Geographic idiom) – or first and second nature – and circling this same window on the world (photography) in search of something more *timely* (third or “fourth” nature), the image of the subject/object dialectic reappears

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 20. Lecture delivered to the Marburg Theological Society in July 1924.

through the agency of the putative autonomy of the photographic work of art. (See Aleksandr Rodchenko, Edward Steichen/Alfred Stieglitz, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Hilla and Bernd Becher, Josef Koudelka.)

The sense of time not-itself provided in Heidegger's 1924 lecture "The Concept of Time" pushes toward the foreground in the various worldviews contained in photography – whether the socio-politically charged works of Magnum or the extreme, aesthetic ambient landscapes of Karl Blossfeldt, Michael Kenna, Geoffrey James, Balthazar Korab, plus architectural and fashion photography in general. Closer to the origins of modern photography, the work of Steichen, Walker Evans, Rodchenko, Man Ray, Josef Sudek et al. picture the *élan vital* (Roger Caillois' inertia of the *élan vital*) – the inner history – of photographic subjectivity through an apparent objective apparatus; an apparatus that proves in the end to be mythic, versus empirical. These early progenitors of the photographic aesthetic meld the expressionist, constructivist, and cubist affects of an inquiry into form and the interplay of object and field, the latter most often portrayed as shadow or tenebrous void out of which emerge the forms of life (often as vestige, phantom, and/or fragment) imbued with momentary auratic, if not symbolic, verisimilitude, only to fade into the fixity of the frozen image. Hence two forms of darkness are suggested . . .

In architectural photography (Sudek, Ezra Stoller, Julius Shulman, Marc Llimargas, or Hélène Binet) and fashion photography (Helmut Newton, Richard Avedon, Steven Meisel, Juergen Teller, Nick Knight), the concept of trace and vestige moves to a new level of significance, productivity, and seductivity in the suggestive, yet aborted, narrative content, landscape (urban and otherwise) often providing a telltale (palpable) intonation or adumbrative depth suggesting a deferred grounding of abstract (dematerialized) desire in consumption, appropriation, expropriation, and photogenic simulation; that is, various forms of reappropriation. That such aesthetic precepts have further burrowed their way forth in the present-day image of architecture through computer-generated simulations is, therefore, no surprise.

In the photographic expropriation of landscape, in and of itself, the image of constructed ground (space) – whether gardens, cities, parks, cemeteries, airports, etc. – supports subtle but persistent themes consistent with the production of an elective, versus enforced, hegemony. This surplus hegemony is elective insofar as such circumstances are either avoidable or generally out of reach. The nature of time, as relative to environments and variable milieux, and as depicted in an imagery that selectively edits/represents cultural values (currents) and implicit historicity (timeliness), or that which asks "how," frames and enhances the

authorized and unauthorized perceptions of cultural conditioning; that is to say, the emptiness of the typical modern architectural image is an elective minimalism, as are the polished products of the sensuous and seductive editorial pages of glossy fashion magazines that often appropriate and “restyle” classic, Baroque, and modern landscape gardens as *mise-en-scène* supporting the dream-state of haute-couture fashion and design (for example, the editorial pages of *Vogue*). Indeed, such fashion statements operate within the world of photography as an excess (a type of hallucination) glorifying the scenographic and privileged places and attitudes (*modus vivendi*) identified as *de luxe* and or elite in the rarified upper reaches of society, a class-conscious production of cultural identity. In turn, a titillating noirish under-/over-world is suggested in the extreme and phantasmatic imagery that is folded into such normative fashion pages (for example, Newton and Teller) as an image of extravagance, decadence, and an excess of “success” (freedom through mock bondage). This latter imagery substantiates the ineluctable charisma of the urban chic and is present in diverse forms, including the presentation graphics of present-day architects and landscape architects (per the Surrealists, a colonizing of the unconscious mechanisms of desire).

The ageless, immortal landscape that stands just outside this frame (process) of forceful or frivolous “acculturation,” as a “timelessness” within timeliness, in turn, supports the indeterminate nature of the authorized/unauthorized activities of the elite, the voyeur, the flaneur, the aesthete, the connoisseur, and the so-called cognoscenti (*fashionistas*) – an explicit confrontation/clash of the microcosmic, iconoclastic architectures of the heterogeneous with those of the everyday world of the *hoi polloi*. The macrocosmic image – the wide world – often is deployed as a spectral other and supports a synoptic, panoptic return to preternatural and natural vectors of consciousness ostensibly outside historical time and its proscribed, constructed ground. Landscapes of the primordial ground condition and re-insinuate the elemental dialectic of self and ground through a social and aesthetic reductionism to primitive or unalloyed terms consistent with the concept of wilderness and primitivity. (Hence Derrida’s and deconstruction’s attempt to forestall the re-naturalization of blind metaphysical assumptions and precepts.)⁵ The structural and operational terms of such groundings are built upon the innate aesthetic allure of things archaic and/or of a radically contingent “nature.”

⁵ Re-naturalization here is configured as the sense or restoration of the One in the Many and the One as/in the Good, insofar as the Good is temporal and the One is transcendent and immanent, at once, or, essentially atemporality within temporality.

“Landscape + architecture” appears, then, as ever, suspended in the void between Blaise Pascal’s two infinities, suggesting, in turn, the primary somatic substance within all architectures.

The production of time (timeliness) – as time has no abstract reality, as such, other than the neutral concept of timelessness – is as often a surplus as an intentional affect of design. The promenade (*architecturale* and *cinématique*), the cemetery or park as heterotopia (see Michel Foucault), the cacophonous urban bazaar and street, the implied orthodoxy of certain styles and modes of structural landscape – historical (diachronic) and trans-historical (synchronic), or “isms” of various orders – all effectively produce fictionalized forms of time bound up within a system of inferences and discursive structures that are both concealed and masked (see Tafuri, Fredric Jameson, and Mike Davis), as all hegemonic systems construct a surface to which things are projected. In the latter case – for example, in the synchronic plenitude of avant-garde formalisms – much modernist landscape is complicit in the spurious conflating of the timeless and the timely, primarily through an extension of seriality and cinematic aesthetic strategies inconsistent with unmasking conventions and undermining the everyday (default) mode of the production of time and space. It is the putative production of authenticity that motivates the avant-garde (“every new age requires new forms”), through the agency of *Zeitgeist* or episteme, while almost always the operative forms are re-absorbed into a new conformity. The bricolage of post-modern landscape and architecture, or the pop and minimalist landscapes of the 1980s avant-garde, is, thereby, directly implicated in the demotion of landscape architecture to a type of brinksmanship, versus an authentic rewriting of the codes of everydayness. This denial takes both the form of ahistorical games and faux avant-garde agitation (art-house provocations, installation art, etc.). It is the polar opposite of the utilitarian and pragmatic (often conservative and reactionary) modes utilized by the status quo. In most cases the faux avant-garde and the pragmatic are both facile and instrumentalized representations of landscape as surface, intentionally glossing or bracketing cultural and intellectual depth, troublesome and pernicious forms of ideology, and introducing a type of determinism by way of formalizing contingent systems. In other words, the “how” is endlessly supplanted by the “what.”

The legendary fixity of images (see Vítězslav Nezval and William Butler Yeats, both nominally Symbolists) is a relatively ancient problem in aesthetics, while the structural and contingent gestures of design and representation betray or conceal this concept, insofar as they produce a product or condition, versus a continuum. In the case of the production of

a continuum, time is portrayed through a dynamic, yet temporal, synthesis (syrrhesis) of structural and ambient forces – an avant-ecology of signifying factors (images, signs, forms, functions) that imply, as well as access, a vast otherness within, beyond, above, or below the constructed ground of image/place and image/time. Rote fixity collapses under such immense pressures and time opens up to other times; to other horizons, the nature of time itself (implied historicity) forced to the foreground or gesturing wildly in the background. In-between, almost always, remains the subject (the proverbial, metaphysical, irreducible middle ground) situated at the crossroads of vertical and horizontal axes, *x*, *y*, and *z* (the conventional coordinates of constructed space) replaced by “fourth” nature – “fourth” nature being the very image of being, a sublime portent for the cipher of time not-itself, or time as the provisional field for the non-ideological unity of things. Here the specter of the time-crucified subject looms large against the primordial darkness of the archaic imaginary (an apparently archaic otherworldliness and/or nothingness as *ur-ground*).

The Fusion Thing: “Total Flow” or Nothingness?

There exist *mute* edifices – constructions and lodgings; and there exist edifices that speak; but there are others still – and they are the most rare – which *sing*.⁶

—Massimo Cacciari

The historical, diachronic interplay of “landscape + architecture” in modern architectural production is/was at times a visionary *pas de deux*, while at other times an anti-visionary *danse macabre* (*danse mécanique*). In the latter case, landscape (*milieu*, *ambiance*, and *ground*) is eclipsed and/or flattened in the strenuous and sometimes idealistic (utopian) siege represented by high-borne modernist formalisms (technocratic, positivist, pragmatic, and programmatic). In such scenarios, landscape became an almost nothing, not by design, but by proscription, elimination, and/or abstraction. In this essentialist project, landscape became denatured space, returning only later as “ground.”

⁶ Massimo Cacciari, “Eupalinos or Architecture” (1980), in K. Michael Hays, ed., *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), p. 399. First published in English in *Oppositions* 21 (Summer 1980). Also published in Massimo Cacciari, *Architecture and Nihilism: On the Philosophy of Modern Architecture*, trans. Stephen Sartarelli (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).

In the somewhat delicate, often lyrical, case of the *pas de deux*, landscape is situated at the elective nexus of interpenetrating systems (architectonic and environmental fields), as intermediate condition, or simply noted, in passing, as a surplus value incorporated into the development of the architectural object by juxtaposition. The extension of architectural elements into the near landscape in the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, or Carlo Scarpa, and the penetration of the building by so-called free-flowing or layered space suggests the classical disposition of positive and negative, solid and void (that is, topology), and the articulation (if not transformation) of architectural forms to fully synthetic forms in the rare instances when landscape and site impregnate architecture with a prescient, auratic “interiority” and/or formal radiance that plays out in an explicit synthesis of verticality and horizontality – as in early modernist villas – thereby picturing the contingent, material conditions for architecture’s emergence. The most immaterial aspects of ambient environmental factors – the play of light and shadow – often provide architecture with an archaic uncanniness (an elemental timeliness) that is purely ephemeral and, most usually, unintended (purely incidental). Tadao Ando and Steven Holl are masters of this poetic/phenomenological genre, while others (Frank Gehry) simply accept the inevitable “patina” of building marked by time. The mutable materiality of architecture supported this embrace of the ambient, as glass curtain walls and metal cladding became ever more common and dematerializations occurred in the genre, noted explicitly by the Museum of Modern Art’s 1995-1996 exhibition “Light Construction.” Dan Graham’s mirrored pavilions play wonderfully with this omniscient quality of glass, doubling the field of vision such that the very field of representation breaks down into a prismatic and often kaleidoscopic universe of shards, filters, and superimpositions – the effect entirely dependent on the setting of the object in the landscape. This latter dematerialization invokes the concept of “total flow” and the tendency toward objectifying surface at the expense of depth.

Outside of this cyclic, accidental, and discontinuous emergence of sublimated aspects of architecture’s implicit ground, a third order of symbolization and abstraction is to be found that represents a preliminary and provisional synthesis of subject/object relations – that is, most often a figurative symbiosis built *into form* and described as the gestural or sublime fusion of “form” and “content” in sculpture and the hybridized field of land art, most especially, where discursive orders are stripped away and an elemental, generative, and formal essence presses forward. In the case of art, and its near-automatic assumption of conceptual autonomy, the works of Isamu Noguchi and Robert Smithson, plus the avalanche of

land-art inspired landscape architecture after the 1960s, re-present the archaic and liminal nature of almost-first nature (perhaps “fourth” nature) through hyper-sensual manipulations of form and a presentiment, if not an acclamation, of pre-linguistic forms and seminal structural operations, versus aspects of full-blown discourse or discursivity (the full-fledged signifying agency given to language games proper). Here, timeliness is reduced to an iconic presence tipping inexorably toward absence (timelessness). These liminal measures most often take the form of excavations or insertions (interventions) that at the least pretend to rewrite the codes of occupying or mapping presence. This type of “deep-sea diving” comes in many forms and is not limited to the delineation of art-in-the-landscape, or art-as-landscape. The concise, inward-driven nature of such expression is primarily poetic and is found in all of the arts. This archaistic *jouissance* deliberately invokes the ontological ground as a place “before” – *preexistent to* – the emergence of the imaginary (the phantasmatic world of doubled and/or tripled irrealities) and the symbolic (the so-called fallen world of the abject signifier). These figures play in the dust of the Self, seemingly before the emergence of the ego (and superego). Such fictive gestures also act as analogues for the extreme interiority of works of art and architecture prior to their deployment as cultural signs and tropes (figures of speech and thought). In the process of stripping away the detritus of signifying chains (ossified and/or fossilized modes of expression and discourse), such maneuvers circle the same ground repeatedly. The eventual collapse of the operative figures of near-speech simply occurs as the work vanishes into the annals of art or architectural history. The dissolution of many of Michael Heizer’s and Smithson’s remote works matters hardly at all given that they were intentionally situated in a mythicized “wilderness” as a strategic critique of the production of modern art and the machinations of the art world. Thus, to thoroughly work through fragments, after Derrida, is often a more profound recovery of the spirit of a work (a time) than to dive into the entire output of an author. Perhaps here is Walter Benjamin’s fascination with ruins, as well as his desire to construct a text entirely from quotations (as in the case of the unfinished *Passagenwerk*).

From 1930 to 1960, the time of the emergence of high-modern architecture (and the International Style), landscape was effectively subjugated by the ordeal/onslaught of hyper-structural and technocratic instrumentalities – cultural, political, economic, and otherwise. The image of techno-utopian architecture and the architect as glossy man accompanied the last hurrah for pseudo-messianic modernism. The high-architectonic was at best complemented by neutral ground/landscape (often tawdry

“ground”), though *most often* ground/landscape was “locked away” in the spatial assault of low-formalist and high-functionalist orthogonal systems – or, super-functionalism. The amalgam that came to be known as corporate modernism, and which was typified by Mies van der Rohe’s transcendent glass office towers (set upon pristine podiums), is/was, according to Cacciari and Josep Quetglas, the pure reification and *secularization* of the certain abstracted aspects of sacral architectures past. This “classicism” (or classic modernism) masked the origins of the modernist experiment in socially self-conscious experiments in form-making – for example, Mies’ problematical Berlin period – and became hypostatized in the omniscient and omnivorous over-production of sterile corporate architectures. Most midcentury modern landscape architecture, following suit, adopted the dominant visual code of geometricism and the architectonic logic of *plan libre* as the spirit of the age, overthrowing the last vestiges of Romanticism, post-Romanticism, and the late-Olmstedian picturesque. The latter continued well into the mid-twentieth century transposed into the form of national parks and interstate transportation systems. In the case of the exemplars of modern landscape architecture (for example, Dan Kiley, Garrett Eckbo, Christopher Tunnard, Hideo Sasaki, and Peter Walker), an attendant minimalism (expressed in rampant seriality and typological reduction) secured the accommodation of landscape to architecture, albeit through subjugation and abstraction. Antoni Gaudí, Roberto Burle Marx, and Luis Barragán, on the other hand, appear to represent unique expressions of critical regionalism before it was characterized as such by Frampton.⁷

After the 1960s, as the hegemony of abstract planning and object-oriented modern architecture increasingly fell into disarray (and disrespect), various alternative visions emerged alongside post-modernism (after 1968) both reviving and re-negotiating the language of generic historical form and the geometric and material expressions of late modernity – modernity being measured, to paraphrase Jacques Lacan, “from the Renaissance to the so-called zenith of the twentieth century.” In

⁷ Bracketed, herein, is the entire section of faux-populist, pop, and vernacular architectures from theorists such as Reyner Banham, Robert Venturi, Bernard Rudofsky, J.B. Jackson, and Christopher Alexander, to the late-modern syncretism of “everyday” and new-urbanist fantasies. In the case of Banham, machine-age romanticism had its Second Coming. In the case of New Urbanism, typologically driven post-modernism returned in the form of an elective code. The “classicizing” aspects of New Urbanism, however reductive, remained open enough to absorb the experimental, alienated architecture of Aldo Rossi, as well as certain aspects of the critique of urbanism associated with the Tendenza and European neo-rationalism.