TEN SHORT THESES ON ARCHITECTURE AS ART

GK/AGENCE ‘X’

2011
TEN THESES

I. DROPS DRIPPED
II. WKCD
III. WHAT DOES IT DO?
IV. TECHNE
V. FAUX YEAR ZERO
VI. COMMERCIMUM AS ETHICS
VII. FICTITIOUS SPACE
VIII. THE MODULE
IX. THE IMAGE
X. ART, LOVE, REVOLUTION
I. DROPS DRIPPED

Perhaps the most stunning portion of Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is the singular sentence composed of two words, “Drops dripped”. The sense of this and other passages in this monumental novel describing the world as such, the world as given that survives despite our best intentions to control it and subject to our will, is that there is always one world just beyond all other possible worlds.

The same is true of art and architecture, especially when considered from the point of view of so-called cultural capital. There is a sense, always, that singular works of art and architecture act as limits (as Tolstoy’s “Drops dripped” acts as limit), proscribing an abundance that exceeds all intentions given to works of art and architecture.

There is a critique at large at the moment regarding “cognitive capitalism”. The intention of this dissection of disciplines and institutions is to question the appropriation of intellectual capital by the apparatuses of capitalism. Foremost in this regard is the encroachment of capital into the academies and schools that apparently produce what capital always requires – speculative intellect itself.

Enough has been said and written over the last century regarding how capital appropriates art and how it assimilates architecture within its all-embracing pursuit of power. Manfredo Tafuri’s inordinate pessimism was an outcome of this diabolical reading. Yet, this apparently unending game is more critically arrayed today toward the apprehension of thought in its most non-instrumental forms and its analogues as disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. Current neo-liberal valorization of “the creative class”, while not intended in the pejorative sense, is a symptom nonetheless of something highly pernicious underway in the advance of capital to the frontiers of thought proper. Art and architecture are, therefore, exposed once again as highly speculative regimes within cultural production given to appropriation at their most incipient stages. This is also the basis for the bio-political agendas of late-capitalism.

The critique of the apparatus, traceable to Michel Foucault and renewed by Giorgio Agamben, plus the critique of disciplines often undertaken within disciplines is, in many ways an “auto-portrait” of the formal and performative nature of speculative capital en route to its proper place in culture. Yet, this subjective condition or state given to or conferred upon disciplines is always moving and, therefore, given to a blurred auto-portrait. This blurring is also the reason for the affective disposition of much present-day art and architecture, including its formalization in the theory of relational aesthetics, while (when given a positive charge by its purveyors and by its place in art and architectural media) it also becomes productive of highly misleading forms of neo-expressionism and pseudo-specular, avant-garde propositions. The late-modern critique of cultural production, since Pierre Bourdieu, has an explicit historical dimension that when denied or suppressed becomes a type of ghost in the machine (an operative function that has no real content yet becomes more powerful as it becomes increasing invisible). This “ghost” is the origin and end of affectivity in architecture – and it has become the signature event of deconstructivist and poststructuralist tirades “against the machine” while also productive of the determinist-materialist bias of advanced critical theory. This ghost operates as a thoroughly disembodied version of Hegelian Spirit – the precise opposite of Hegel’s project and a bizarre capitulation to specious forms of reification given to capital. An early example of this process in the annals of apparent anti-capitalist agitation is the role played by pop art in the late 1950s, an event con-temporaneous with the emergence of the Situationist International. That pop could pretend to be a form of avant-garde agitation, in opposition to the modernist project, underscores how it also became a type of capitulation to postwar consumerist desire. Coined by Lawrence Alloway, the term connoted more than it could ever encompass. That Guy Debord had his eye on it, plus emergent forms of pop in Italy, is telltale insofar as pop perhaps at first was a form of détournement capitalist desire until it was détourned in turn by capital (by the emergent “artworld” as defined by Arthur Danto in his infamous 1964 essay “The Artworld”).

The unconscious of history, father of sociology Émile Durkheim’s term, is also – paradoxically – the means toward evading disciplinary paralysis. This unconscious can be détourned … To operate from that unconscious is to also operate as an artist. Overt historical means to ends are already caught in the net of instrumentalized orders and complicit with ideological sleight of hand. In many ways this has been the “cause célèbre” for the unremitting

---

TEN THESES

historical failure of the avant-garde and, especially, the neo-avantgarde, the latter of which fails intentionally through pseudo-avantgarde posturing.

Architecture operates in this torsional field (not as a rarified aesthetic field but as a twilight of sorts that regards neither one nor the other address, conscious or unconscious intentions, as the privileged disciplinary ground of its activities). All of this is to say that Architecture proper is not an art and not a discipline insofar as it straddles these two worlds. In addressing that world beyond its fence-sitting nature, the world where “drops drip” so to speak, a far more severe and austere architecture is possible and an architecture that is no longer beholden to the double-edged inquisition of capital, which permits its excess and then throttles and/or appropriates it. All evocations of an “outside” are essentially co-opted. Emmanuel Levinas’ appropriately configured “il y a …” (embodied in the wonderful statement “It is raining …”) is lost … It has been lost repeatedly to architecture as it fails to register and defend one world, versus its own historically problematic autonomy.

How Architecture might operate as Art (as pure speculative agency), and evade the maneuvers of late-capitalism is the question, then. In doing so it will also have to outmaneuver its disciplinary status as architecture. A more timeless approach is to approach Architecture as pure aesthetic thing (an approach underway anyway in all times and all senses). What becomes the principal problem in this regard is to also elude the normative definition of Art as “useless” (as being utterly devoid of historical necessity). In circumventing this strangely “historical” definition of Art’s a-historical merit, Architecture might also secretly re-load its historical merit. But to do this it must do so as absolutely pure aesthetic thing (or all that arrives as limit and singular thing that secretly remains ultra-timely or ultra-historical). It is in this paradoxical state that Architecture is also Art.

Perhaps the best example of architecture capitulating to a machinic ordonnance within architectural production as cultural production has been the attempt over decades to assimilate the impersonal agencies defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and yet wholly misappropriated due to the simple fact that architectural theory embraced the non-signifying power of these forces without also embracing the political and historical point of such (something that Deleuze and Guattari might be said to have pretended to bracket in their attempts to escape all forms of the prison-house of ideology). It is this well-meaning appropriation of an intensely anarchic drive in cultural production that has produced some of the most pernicious forms of spectral architecture since the enemy of impersonal forces in cultural production (meaning “humanism”) fell before the twin assaults of structuralism and post-structuralism. Yet, to critique “total flow” or “data-scapes” today is to indulge the unnecessary return to arguing over how to evade the subject of what actually produced this neo-liberal, post-theoretical juggernaut – the most obvious answer being the rarified games of the impersonal and anti-humanistic forces of Capital itself. Additionally, to indulge in attacking parametricism is also pointless, as it too is already perceived for what it is and suffers the same structural aporia that “total flow” and “emergent” architectures suffered in the 1990s and 2000s – that is to say, the affectivity of such is the classical smokescreen for the actual coordinates of its production, and the fact that this smokescreen is self-inflicted says much more than any possible critique might as to the origins of apparent avant-garde insurrections within the academies and within the discipline of architecture today. To say that they are permitted (and funded) such that they might be appropriated and/or neutered is to state the obvious. It is far more interesting, then, to discuss the problem of architectural complicity with capital by centering the discussion on the double nature of the architectural object and how it performs its own version of the singularity that either produces the purely aesthetic work of art or the mere object/commodity of architecture in service to capital.

One possible approach to the purely aesthetic object of architecture might then be to ask: What is function, what is program, what is scale, and what is affect? Once such has been answered, it would then be necessary to ask the reverse: What is produced when there is no function, no program, no scale, and no affect? Such questions would approach the limit sought in the purely aesthetic object of architecture while also beginning to re-define Architecture in relation to Art.
II. WKCD

Perhaps one of the best places to start in examining the hidden premises of cultural production today is to look at the production of a cultural district and the role played by architecture. In the case of the West Kowloon Cultural District, a mammoth project for the lower West Kowloon Peninsula, exactly opposite Hong Kong, arguably the better of the three plans was by OMA, whereas Norman Foster’s plan won the competition in early 2011. OMA’s plan in many ways plays out both the conscious and unconscious desires of such a plan through Rem Koolhaas’ well-known dancing at the edge of nihilist cynicism. The plan (regardless of which of the three one looks at) is a massive real-estate development scheme on Victoria Bay disguised as a cultural district. It is also an obvious means of diverting both cultural and architectural capital from Hong Kong proper, part and parcel of “re-integrating” Hong Kong with the Mainland.

Within the OMA ensemble it is instructive to ask what the architectural elements do and how they do what they propose to do. It is also important to reflect on how Victoria Bay is utilized within what is in many senses an act of architectural “suture”, connecting Hong Kong to Shenzhen with the bay remaining nonetheless a very real and very physical barrier. Waterfront development always plays this same game with actually existing water, and the WKCD project by OMA plays it in a most masterful way within a disastrous context. The resources arrayed across the tip of the peninsula all speak to the implicit dualities of the site; the inward (inland) view and the outer (Hong Kong) view. Hong Kong is notoriously China’s current “gateway” to the West. One flies or trains to HK to exit China, while one flies or trains to Shenzhen to travel inland. The WKCD project sits astride this dynamic and the very idea of a cultural district for this site is an official, governmental attempt to condition this dynamic through the production of facilities that will favor the inland while looking “West”.

OMA’s plan includes a number of telltale signature or what is called today “iconic” buildings. It is also knit together by what has come to be the foremost expression of architectural hubris – infrastructural apparatuses. The site is not so much overwhelmed by the architectural ensemble as utterly conditioned by that agglomeration of programmatic legerdemain masquerading as cultural facilities. All such agglomerations do this – for example, in New York, Rockefeller Center, Lincoln Center, the United Nations, Battery Park City, and the old and new World Trade Center. In these First World instances the first sign of programmatic legerdemain is the presence of a podium (beneath which to hide the supporting causes, as Disneyland is famously constructed above an underground service network supporting the above-ground amusements). Additionally, the post-industrial re-development of waterfront sites in the US throughout the 1980s and stretching well into the 1990s advanced the cause of re-exploiting abandoned brownfields worldwide. It is critical to note that “post-industrial” means in this case, quite literally, the shift to a post-industrial, neo-liberal service economy. The WKCD plan does all of this, plus. The plus is the Chinese government’s additional attempt to condition capital flows in the form of architectural projects while also maintaining the communist command and control structure required. The WKCD is a gigantic shell game wherein one will never know what is actually taking place within these architectural “vessels”, most especially since many of them are essentially “empty” shells and could easily serve as army barracks in a pinch. The picturesque gestures of the typical renderings connote a vague renunciation against specificity, as is always the case anyway with master planning and especially the case with vision planning. Add the programmatic promiscuity of a cultural district to the mix and the potential becomes truly volatile.

The so-called Middle Village is symptomatic. This stretch of the project stretches credulity as it is the most obvious tilt toward stitching the new cultural facilities to the existing and proposed West Kowloon CBD. One easily recalls the shambles of West Kowloon before the re-patriation of HK by the British to China; and one hears from HK historians a memorable bemoaning of the loss of authentic fabric in Shenzhen as the re-development of Guangdong Province proceeds, initially by SAR (Special Administrative Region).
TEN THESES

What, then, is the true program? There is the Middle Village and the area denoted M+ in the OMA scheme, plus the Theater Village at waterside. Within this mélange of structure exists a somewhat generic landscape and the aforementioned tilt toward infrastructure. It is the “transparency” of these architectural assemblages that suggests an apparent openness to the site and to the structural relations of the elements of the site. Movement becomes program … The volumetric concerns are highly nuanced as a result. What is evident is that many of the facilities are essentially “conveyances” – and the Chinese have made this aspect of development an art, from the airports to the malls to the high-speed train depots. Here is the evocation of the modernist dream of “speed”, prompting the question, “How does form embody or facilitate speed?” Yet, within the generic whiteness of the model there are strange gestures. These include the waterside pavilion cantilevered out over the water’s edge and the fan-shaped “amphitheater”. These two buildings suggest the great conundrum of architectural formmaking today in association with the elective evisceration of program famously underway in OMA’s work as early as the Très Grande Bibliothèque project for Paris (1989). These objects act as singularities within the overall scheme and also evoke a certain conviviality based on Chinese conventions. They are, as such, the most interesting moments in the plan, but not for their picturesque nature. It is, instead, the internal operative “function” that is curious (a negative function that is clearly a nuanced “nihilist” function as well). This internal function is a limit imposed and the formal gesture concerns that limit. The limit as function (extirpating all need to perform prescribed functions) is a necessary rite of passage toward the purely aesthetic architectural object as work of art.

To speak of the dissembling act of architecture as mask is usually to invoke Adolf Loos, or more recently John Hejduk and Raimund Abraham. Yet, such classic maneuvers also invoke the fictitious space of Mannerism and the Baroque. In the apparent attempt to exceed limits one automatically invokes other limits. For this reason scaleless, programless, and so-called timeless acts of architecture collide with one another in the figurative and affective register that signals an architectural limit to all such exercises. These two buildings in the OMA plan are vessels for that decidedly anti-modernist agenda, albeit, ones that also could be masquerading as such. Post-modern near formlessness (Ignasi de Solà-Morales’ “weak architecture”) is not the point however. The double nature of the proposed forms is that they are not timeless at all but highly conscious, highly timely measures against the overwhelming programmatic amplitude of the project as defined by its overlords. Chinese capital is a curious phenomenon; half-capitalistic, it is also half-cannibalistic. The WKCD is a blatant symptom of this swerve between conscious and unconscious drives in architecture, while it is those unconscious drives that need to be addressed directly and privileged above and beyond the conscious drives. In these two buildings by OMA for the WKCD resides the subversive spirit of the purely aesthetic architectural object, yet as a secret surplus to all of the overwhelming and overly programmatic ventures given to the plan proper. Manfredo Tafuri’s “ideology of the plan” is intact, but just as he decamped for the Mannerist extravagances of Giulio Romano, OMA has decamped for secreting within their plan for the WKCD the architectural equivalent of the universal signifier devoid of overt expressive power and invested with pure speculative intelligence (bizarre a-temporal formal means to no particular end).
III. WHAT DOES IT DO?

“The ideogram needs to be deformed. The artist-innovator must impose a new form upon our perception, if we are to detect in a given thing those traits which went unnoticed the day before. He may present the object in an unusual perspective; he may violate the rules of composition canonized by his predecessors.... The motivation behind this ‘disorder’ was the desire for a closer approximation of reality. The urge to deform an ideogram usually underlies the Sturm und Drang stage of new artistic currents.” – Roman Jakobson

There is a curious moment in Russian Formalism when the early question “How is it made?” (focused then on poetics and literary form) morphed into the question “What does it do?” (focused instead on pure linguistic form). This shift occurred around 1935, but is present much earlier in its incipient stages, and is associated with Prague School Structuralism and Roman Jakobson. This move introduces the issue of the “what” that operates within the functional reserve of languages (architectural and otherwise).

If architectural objects can be formless, scaleless, and programless, what does this offer to the principal intention of architecture – that is, to formalize space-time? The architectural object is effectively – as a type of imposed limit – a means of tying a knot. And the architectural image is the means toward this end, which, in turn, engenders a whole range of operational strategies for and against that singular object/goal. As image, and as knot, architecture might or might not embody purely non-utilitarian and – more critically – non-discursive aesthetic privileges …

The “ideogram” is the established order of seeing given to art and architecture. To deform the ideogram is to re-engage the origin of the object of art and architecture, or the real. The first act of this re-engagement with the real in the perceptive act of architecture is to invoke its ground. The architectural object must reside somewhere, versus in the ether of disconnected and reified orders given to instrumentalized worlds. Whether it resides in relation to those constructed worlds or in relation to the given world (the real) becomes the question. How it does what it does is then not the main issue, whereas what it does is the premier mark of pure function.

Architecture as a work of art typically negates programmatic function, which is not to say it has no function whatsoever. Instead, architecture as artwork accesses and formalizes a more fundamental function – the universal function that famously has no specific content. In doing so it also re-fashions the image of architecture, becoming, in the process, temporarily talismanic (the scaleless, programless thing as knot). This is too often, however, the excuse for iconic works of architecture that are hardly ever purely aesthetic and never what they seem. Most often the iconic architectural object is also fetish (or semi-secret idol for de-materialized capital). Bracketing program and/or instrumental agency in favor of “no specific content” is a paradox that inhabits all forms of art that act as limits. Such works of art also shut down discursive operations en route to re-situating or co-opting the work as architecture in service to/for something other than itself. Formal autonomy is a Janus-faced subject; it faces the world and it turns away from the world. In the latter case it faces the void (the universal function of art as prescriptive object/thing, versus prescriptive subject/non-thing).

What does Peter Eisenman’s City of Culture at Santiago de Compostela do? First of all it demolishes a hillside and supplants that hillside by burrowing into it. The real of this project is the displaced hillside. This imposition is, however, not the founding crime but the first cause of the project. The hillside as real becomes the real of the project. The immense knot tied by the cultural center is not antithetical to the hillside but a “new” hillside.


3 See Kasimir Malevich’s architektons …
Eisenman’s explorations of the semiotic (signifying) power of architectural language and his subsequent deconstruction of all such premises are buried with these buildings in the manner that the complex remains singular despite its multiple parts. The negation of the hill is also the subsequent affirmation of the troubled will to form (Kunstwollen) given to architecture. The early studies are all still present, including the “tartan grid” that has been subsequently deformed into three-dimensional forms that are, strangely, highly structural (versus post-structural). The very real nature imposed by this project exposes the irreal imprint of architecture and the topological distortions of the grid and its three-dimensionality are preeminently knotlike. The purported and/or alleged categorical imperative of architectural formmaking is here envisioned and implanted as a real in excess of the real it emphatically supplants. This discordant harmony is what marks the project for instant canon, even as it heads for the “exit” of all such distinctions.

The cultural capital inherent to the form is architectural heritage and Eisenman’s vision of the same. The cultural capital to come will be any manner of the arts that privilege the Galician and Spanish vision of the arts. Politically the new cultural center operates off-center, in association with the other centers of Spanish culture, with a nod toward Bilbao in particular. The Medieval pilgrimage town of Santiago remains at arm’s length, out of harm’s way, while the City of Culture establishes itself nonetheless in relation to that historical purpose. The envelopes of this complex will enfold, then, a political and cultural agenda that is also leveraging an historical agenda. The monumental operative critique, if that is what it is, is to invoke a very different historical condition – that is, the present moment and its ability to condition and influence what comes afterward. What this project does is formulate an inwardly disposed historical sensibility – a vessel for the future – without naming that functional abstraction called history. As work of art, the City of Culture at Santiago de Compostela hovers on the horizon, despite its immense weight/burden, and in taking flight circles that site hawklike, ravenous in its own disregard for history and architectural history as authorized forms of culture. Cultural production is tantamount to cultural heresy in this case. The limit imposed also opens on to an unlimited preternatural excess within architecture as art – this latter condition negotiating into oblivion the hillside and the ideogram of cultural centers.

The relationship to the real here is troublesome. As Jakobson states, deforming the conventional ideogram is part and parcel of the Sturm und Drang phase of insurrectional artistic agendas (for example, to claim to be more of a realist than all other realists). In Russian literary formalism this was often undertaken by quite simply “making strange” what was already “known”. Yet Santiago is a mature Eisenman project and weighs heavily as alternative ideogram for cultural centers by its explicit, a-historical speculative coordinates. It will additionally suffer by comparisons to Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim and Richard Meier’s Getty Center in Los Angeles. Both of these comparisons will bring clashing, renascent forms of ideological criticism to bear on the project, obliterating the work of art. The massive singularity of Santiago is both its privileged “address” and its probable critical downfall. Scaleless here will no doubt be misread as monumental hubris, and programless will be misconstrued as “more” post-structuralist indeterminacy. There is nothing incommensurate about Santiago; it inhabits its ground with absolute clarity. It is its relationship to the real, however, that is its greatest strength and weakness at once. It is only a weakness because of the unresolved issues of architectural representation in relation to the universal function that inhabits works of art. This function must be totally liberated for the work of architecture to become the work of art. The work of art in its relation to the real must also pre-condition and preempt its critics; in essence, it must re-educate them.
IV. TECHNE

The manner in which the architectural object is produced is tantamount to its particular and peculiar origin as a work of art. Modeling is foremost in this regard, whereas the plan, section, and elevation is the functional equivalent of the incipient “ideological” purchase of the mere work of architecture in service to its reception (for example, architecture in service to capital). Tafuri’s “ideology of the plan” is intimately foretold in architectural planometrics – and less so in section or elevation, but nonetheless discernable as “circulation” and “articulation”. The first cause (self-causing cause) of Architecture as work of art is in its facing away from the instrumental regimes that always follow. How to preempt the looking back in the direction of contingency and its instrumental regimes is the question for Architecture as Art.

This problem of the Janus-faced nature of architectural representation has a long lineage, most acutely in the development of its forms of delineation as object. Axonometric drawing (originating in the Renaissance with the surveys of Roman ruins) is of particular interest for this reason. Perspective drawing is a bizarre torsional field given to optics and has been troubled as utterly unreal since its inception as hyper-real. Modeling is perhaps paramount in the production of the architectural project for the simple reason that it engages the image of architecture at the threshold of its gaining ground in reality. How the architectural object displaces reality is more clearly situated in modeling, versus the various forms of sleight of hand given to drawing. As liminal register, modeling faces the origin while bracketing the reception. If form is always en route to appropriation by one type or another of rote contingency, the model more readily permits the architectural object to remain in the eidetic realm where architecture originates. Axonometric drawing, while closely resembling modeling, is of the next (forward) register – the beginning of reception and the conditioning of the object by forces external to, and after the fact of, Architecture proper.

*Techne* becomes the critical point in this process of “modeling” the subject of the architectural object. As image, Architecture inhabits the visual and aesthetic field as an at first aesthetic object and, later, as utilitarian something else. To withstand the negative force of the something else (to negate it) requires making that originary or first cause strenuous enough to survive this second-level incorporation.

If *techne* is neutral (and this is a highly problematic position to sustain), then the architectural work of art will engage a neutral form of *techne* and avoid those forms already contaminated by ideological and contingent means to ends. *Techne* in this sense is the spectral apparatus (apparatiuses) of architecture or its “historical” means of grounding itself in relation to the real (becoming perceptible). There is a recognizable quality to architectural drawing that is effectively materialistic and deterministic before the fact (as in the mere fact that drawings often draw drawings). This almost “automatic writing” given to architecture is due to the embedded histories of the discipline (the “ghost” of architectures past), foremost the conventions of representation. Beaux-Arts means to architectural ends were famously prescriptive; and their wholesale denunciation by modernism was a convenient excuse to impose new conventions. Yet the elevation and the highly shadowed drawings of the Enlightenment and 19th-century historicism concealed as much as they revealed. The unconscious of architecture in these cases was also a case of astute repressions that were actually conscious repressions (or sublimations). The deployment of the concept of *entourage* and the practice of *poché* (both in figure/ground studies and in the deeply evocative, high-contrast elevations of Beaux-Arts drawings) could be seen as a means of figuratively expressing the dynamic and erotic excess present at the moment of the architectural act (first cause/causa sui) – a gesture, however restrained, toward the universal function that precedes all other functions attributable to architecture.
V. A FAUX YEAR ZERO

Modernism tied a knot and canceled its own history. As a result, and with all good intentions, it also indulged a faux revolutionary year zero, imposing a false limit. In doing so it knowingly engendered all of its current ghosts, foremost what has come to be known as anti-modernism (and post-modernism). That forms of anti-modernism dogged its path throughout the 20th century is in many ways just desserts for its blithe disregard for anything other than itself.

Architectural modernism arrived relatively late in the game, perhaps only by the 1930s. Its great progenitors can be tracked by the perceptive observer all the way back to the Renaissance and the purported dawn of modernity. Other origins for modernity include the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Yet it is the elective erasure of history that truly haunts modernism and causes almost all of its nightmares. If by midcentury it was all but exhausted, it was also more or less its own fault.

The alliance of modernist architecture with capitalism (large- and small-bore capitalism, great capital and petit-bourgeois capital) is an easy target for Marxian criticism. What is more difficult is to isolate the formal operations that gave birth to its outsized penchant for grandiosity and its revered and loathed claims to objectivity. As a structuralized assault on pre-modernism (and the attendant knot tied to eviscerate this history), with modern architecture, as with most forms of modern art, History as such died by a thousand cuts.

Mies van der Rohe is the usual culprit in the inquisition of anti-modernist diatribes, yet his amoral approach to architecture and his chameleonesque status – as he moved from Germany to the US – is legendary. As primary technique for imposing gravitas, he favored depicting architectural space-time by way of one-point perspective, while his various attempts to re-sacralize architecture are rife with distortions of its true address (the real) or its authentic aesthetic purpose (to sacralize life, versus merely itself and/or its master). Such means of critique offer a corrective to what is often a badly distorted picture of Mies; that is, a great anamorphic distortion that produces a monstrous affective stain in the continuum of modernist architectural history and its elisions and diremptions up through its total collapse. “Mies” functions as a twisted signifier that can be turned toward or away from the origin of architecture (toward or away from the ontological conundrum of its event) insofar as his work is a “classicizing” assemblage of affects, from the Barcelona Pavilion forward to the New National Gallery, Berlin. Along the way, all of the domestic gestures are fair play for the inquisition, as Villa Tugendhat was fair play for Karel Teige around 1930. Unlike Louis Kahn, for example, the domestic work is a piece with the corporate work. There is no shift toward the subject, which underscores the vulgar inhumanity of the architecture.

The patently obvious fact that the International Style was the death of modern architecture is not without its ironies. If this death occurred due to the success of the so-called style, and the ubiquity instilled obloquy in its wake, the resultant disgrace and universal anathema accompanying its fall from grace is the signature moment of its avowed style. It reveals capital’s betrayal of its own premises, always in search of the “new”, and always in search of new intellectual and speculative capital to exploit and/or run to ground. The greatest irony of all, as Karl Marx predicted, is that capital will run to ground and effectively destroy itself. Ground here is effectively “communism”.

Architecture in service to capital both mirrors and facilitates this disaster – this perhaps necessary but ugly end game. What runs to ground is the machinery of the capitalist juggernaut, exhausting itself through its own structuralization (a process perfectly in keeping with architecture’s own bias or cut, and perfectly aligned with the greatest weakness in recent architectural history – architecture’s very high regard for itself).
VI. COMMERCIUM AS ETHICS

The provisional answer being developed across the path of these ten theses regarding the question as to how architecture might return to its propositional origin or advance to its possible future as artwork given to a pure function that escapes the commercium of capital (or its reduction to merely servicing capitalism) is intimately related to a re-conceptualization of the commercium of capitalism and what it suppresses. Alain Badiou speaks of levels of incorporation, or of how singular objects and concepts come to be embedded in transcendental or ideological fields. The greatest problems occur with the incorporation of incorporations (the very process of reified orders nesting within reified orders). Such a de-naturing of the world is also often the construction of the prison-house of the world, not the transformation of the real toward a virtuous “one world”. This notion of a constellation of singular objects or subjects caught in a prescriptive net or knot (for better or worse) entails the reciprocal event or act of expropriating the same through creative acts of re-appropriation. Giorgio Agamben has done this in terms of the idea of the law and its violation, insofar as expropriating universal or pure functions from within political and theological nets also serves to liberate subjects. It is perhaps Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s theory of the Social Contract that best illustrates what is at stake after all – that is, subjects and their relationship to the commercium denoted as society.

Slavoj Žižek has addressed architecture directly in this sense by identifying an approach within architecture to this very process of expropriation of singular concepts and forms from the constellation of discursive and operative practices that produce and/or constitute the discipline of architecture. Foremost this takes the form of “exapted” forms (an analogy to evolution where certain elements of a larger organizational complex, an organism, lose their original function and become nominally “useless”). This evocation of a process within architecture that produces so-called useless forms – an example being the staircase – also suggests that the hidden hand of the market in its manipulation of architecture operates unconsciously (through so-called competition) or hyper-consciously (through endless reification). To present this system of evolved-devolved forms as a given within architecture is to also demote architecture to an evolutionary continuum devoid of conscious impulses (to push it toward mechanistic and material-impersonal agency). Whereas both Badiou and Žižek extract concepts and singularities from the continuum of philosophy and cultural production (an example being Žižek’s raids on Lenin, for purely polemical purposes), architecture in its higher modalities is a purely conscious and purely artistic ideational endeavor and the “exapted” forms he refers to are quite often intentionally expropriated forms torn from the pattern-book of architecture toward re-situating the conceptual knot of the architectural object in an altered transcendental, aesthetic, and/or ethical field.

This all suggests that what is truly at work in the work of architecture as artwork is a renovation or re-calibration of the commercium of architecture in a manner wholly consistent with the commercium of art. In art (and in the so-called artworld) the higher-level incorporations reveal the astonishing resilience of art as part and parcel of a perhaps primordial ethical commercium – arguably, a constellation of forces that also reveals art to be, in its most potent presentation, pure speculative capital (a form of currency or “money” as means of pure symbolic “exchange” between worlds). As Donald Preziosi has recently shown, the common ground here is the thematic denoted
“religiosity” (an expropriated and possibly *exapted* formal reserve within art and religion). Architecture, as it approaches Art, contains the same reserve (a wilderness of formal operations). Le Corbusier’s La Tourette is one such example of a building that is also part of a larger *commercio* yet retains its relationship to the paradigmatic, immaterial/ideational axis of cultural production without losing or compromising its place in the horizontal register of the real. Its agonistic form (its brutalist austerities/aesthetic) and its agonistic arrival (the process of building it) are legendary. The *commercio* addressed by its formal precision (an example of what Le Corbusier called “unspeakable space”, wherein every particular of its construction is in perfect harmony with a larger purpose) is illustrative of a higher-level incorporation that preserves the most salient features of that process as event. That the building is a monastery is not without interest, for it also brings to bear the issue addressed by Preziosi that religiosity is the common ground between art and theology and that a non-reactionary de-secularization of art would not be such a bad thing after all, since modern art also neutralized much of the power of art and turned it into a spectral game of cultural production in service to capital.

---

VII. FICTITIOUS SPACE

The limit or knot imposed by the architectural object is notably its possibility as work of art. This process is the very process of negotiating terms by which we inhabit and/or traverse worlds. If architecture is Janus-faced and looks two ways at once, the looking back to its purported origins is also looking back toward the first knot tied (toward ontological origins and all of the problems associated with such inquiries, including the suppression and or repression of the true nature of those origins). This critique of “ontological” inquests is legion – especially since Martin Heidegger’s attempts to re-situate the inquest in the spatial metaphors of Being and Becoming. Yet the “coin” of the realm of architecture is the limit imposed by the object of architecture, a limit that invokes in its highest instantiation the pure function of its symbolic exchange value between worlds.

The classic and classical ideal image of architecture (as idealization) is its virtual image; albeit, a process now exhausted due to the image of architecture connoting far too much that has nothing to do with this pure function as a form of “speculative capital”. The recourse to the image has also facilitated a premature evacuation of the theoretical coordinates of the construction of the constellation of environments (the actual situations in which architectural objects are grounded). The real of environments, if and when they are not hideously deformed environments, stands in, almost always, as the means of re-naturalizing the ideal image (the strenuous ideational knot of the architectural object). The production of imagery in the commercium of architecture in service to capital has been a spectacular failure throughout the modernist period as a result of its discontinuity with the real of environments or its late-modern reification as media. Yet, the very idea of the necessary limit imposed by the architectural project as art confers an older and more stable ideational value on the architectural object – that is, that sense of “coinage” that also provides a powerful means of wresting architecture from the more grotesque incorporations it has been subjected to more or less since its beginning.

The limits of art are a fabulous, almost baroque commercium that also delimits not so much an unavoidable threshold that may not be crossed but, instead, an internalizing and universalizing dangerous essentialism that is evident in the Renaissance as incipient fictitious space (masquerading as objective space), and something taken to new levels of incorporation within a reborn religiosity in the Baroque and Mannerist insurrections (against Renaissance humanism and its troublesome grandiosity and all-encompassing hubris).

In pushing architecture back toward art, and in pushing art back toward religiosity (the formal “x” within all theories of the Sublime, or the majestic “awe” entailed as first knot when the subject stands face to face with the Other), what occurs in that supposed interior of the artwork (as it also occurs within the subjective condition of the artist) is the liberalization and liberation of the formal and – strangely – purely aesthetic aspects of works that propose one world while straddling two. Late-modern investigations of the ontological fictions given to architectural discourse, and investigations of the vacated premises of onto-theological fictions given to attempts to sacralize or re-sacralize the world (after the nihilist dis-enchantment of the world associated with modernity), all fall over and – as compensation – present the alternative image of Romantic ruins, in effect the liberation of the ghostly affective register buried within, and a “collapse” because the discursive operations of the structuralist and post-structuralist projects are caught yet within the net of the modernist project and, as such, are not sustainable. Escaping that project means exiting the de-natured and secularized visions for and against the production of a machinic universe beholden to capitalism and the freeing of the speculative toward the construction of one world (versus toward preserving its absolute negativity as caesura or pure function guarded by negative dialectics and pictured only in terms of its faux avant-garde defiance of the world proper).

Apropos of all of this, the possible knot or limit of Architecture as Art will shut down the noisy commercium of architecture in service to capitalism, and in doing so produce a new limit that also coincides with one world – a limit that is productive of not yet another lie or founding myth but, instead, that which underlies architecture and art.
VIII. THE MODULE

The “measure” of the module in architecture is the first cause given to modernist space, and it is invested with the geometrical and proportional values of architectural production that also signal the limit imposed. The nature of the model perhaps supplanted the iconographic bias of the earliest architectures that serviced power while if it was brought over into Renaissance architecture by way of classical architecture it has been subsequently defined downward by modern architecture. “Downward” in this case means toward the production of an orchestrated whole that is the functional equivalent of the incorporation of incorporations. In the case of La Tourette it is Xenakis’ rigorous and rationalist deployment of the module and its iterations across the face of the project that also suggests that in a non-literal way the first module in this project is the cell of the monk (as expressed on the exterior of the building). This orchestration or musicality imparted to the limit imposed by both the module and the overall project is intimately related to the idea that architecture is frozen music (an analogy perpetrated by Goethe, and an analogy that worked in reference to Gothic architecture but falls apart upon closer inspection in modern architecture). The rationalist bias or cut of the modernist module speaks a very different language than music; it is, effectively, the very different language spoken by modern music and its relationship to itself, versus to the natural world (which is, arguably, the origin of music).

The module, then, is the articulation of the linguistic abstractions of modernist architecture in pursuit of the limit to be imposed through the architectural object. When it rises to the level of art, this orchestration of architectural space-time denounces simple mimesis and errs on the side of poiesis. How it errs is the true measure of its impact (or the true expression of why it errs). As organizational apparatus toward the structuralization of space and time as complex (and as embedded in the architectural object), the module is best understood in relation to non-scalar or scaleless measures that are present as ghostly other aesthetic gestures, as in the Wittgenstein House the aberrations say much more than the rationally disposed, discreet and discrete particulars. Not a built form of the Tractatus, the Wittgenstein House is an ode to rationality itself in relation to the world (irrationality) as such.

Scaleless measures in architecture are means to inscribing a limitless limit – a paradox that is required in any architecture that might assume the status of art. This scaleless image is a provisional means of erasing the performative and conventional ideational “types” embedded in the historical continuum of architecture and typically contaminated by ideology. “Scaleless” then means “of another scale” (as “programless” means “of another program”); and if this other scale is at first indiscernible, or of a significance that dwarfs other aspects of the work (including any reference to the real), secretly the work is headed back to “ground” anyway, and secretly the scaleless image is an evocation of the sublimity hidden within architecture as work of art. All such limits (in image and in built form) have, as a result, a “theological” imprint (veiled by the exterior face of that image or form). As Preziosi has begun to show, this imprint on the “obverse side” of the architectural “coin” (thing) is religiosity itself.

If works of architecture that employ a rigorous rationalist grid or module are considered as works of art, and often they are at the least considered extraordinary exemplars of imposed or elective “orders” within the architectural canon, the severity is overturned and the repressive regime of the mathematical and geometrical part, elevation, and volumetric image collapses in the mind’s eye. Again, the image of ruins resides in the image of order. It is more or less an axiom of architecture to say it foresees its own end (as ruin). But, in the case of discussing the limit in relation to an architecture that is also a work of art, this collapse is of a different order. Modularity as limit (and as limits within limits) is a mimetic function after all (and very Baroque or very Medieval as well), and its auto-poietic expressions are willfully temporal in terms of eidetic architectural-representational values. To transpose, erase, deform, or transvalue such in the architectural project is also to deliver an emphatic declaration of a certain rite of passage within architecture (a “Rite of Spring”, even, to expropriate a particularly useful modernist musical metaphor).
IX. THE IMAGE

The most catastrophic reading of the impossibility of closing the gap between the world as such and the world of the subject (here analogized as the architectural object) remains Arthur Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation*. If the image is a knot, and that limit or knot is a necessary function of architecture as work of art (to productively silence the noise that resides on the other side of the image), what the image, in turn, locks into place becomes the primary concern of Architecture as Art. To lock into place through the image something productive (and/or generative) is to also privilege the universal function of architecture as image. What becomes exceptional in this scenario is what forces are held in tension within the image (and almost always *behind* the image, or *beyond* the surface and structure of the image). In architectures in service to capital this is the well-known field of intentional and/or unintentional repressions and half-conscious incorporations of incorporations (negative versus compensatory processes of reification).

The pessimism of Schopenhauer’s position regarding this irresolvable schism between worlds famously led to his “vanishing” (at the end of *The World as Will and Representation*) into silence or a type of mysticism. The attempt to formulate a conceptual aesthetic unity that has no origin (no actual ontology other than the myth of that typically archaic source, such as “architecture’s primitive hut”) is the pure function of the work of art. The famous double blind spot given to or bracketing systems of representation (the so-called objective world looking back at the so-called subjective world) and its stalemate in the privileging of the space between worlds is, out of necessity, needing to be closed – or, at least, this is one possible path out of modern architectural nihilism (a negativity that is to be maintained as long as there is no positive or virtuous transvaluation in sight). How this positive transvaluation is to be accomplished is the fundamental mystery of the image of Architecture as Art, and whether it is possible at all is the open question (a question to be worked out *through* works of Architecture as Art historically).

For these reasons, and as if to test the convergence of worlds in an art that is also highly physical, versus simply allied with the production of the image of this convergence, Anselm Kiefer’s installations in both galleries and at Barjac (his compound in the South of France) represent an incorporation of aspects of two worlds toward the envisioning of one world – the apparent apocalyptic imagery is telling for this very reason. These incorporations also are grave approximations of a knot *in the process of being tied* (as his leaden books, unreadable and inoperable, are similar emblems of a self-imposed limit in all theories and images of knowledge as knot).

“Art cannot exclude reality, whether it is night or day; both have nothing to do with participation, nostalgia and apology; beneath the ‘divine’ opposites meet each other and are preserved. This is why Kiefer centres his work on the dialogue between *Himmel* and *Erde*, between heaven and earth, because only in the embrace between these opposite poles is art ‘real’, drawing its power from the fact that it is able to hold extreme opposites together, from the celestial to the terrestrial. Art, in fact, is an omnipresent force, it cannot accept unilateralness, it works simultaneously on good and bad, positive and negative, corporeal and spiritual, historical and present.”5

Architecture as Art would present this same stalemate as synthesis, yet in a highly generative and productive form of architectural limit as virtuous “economy” (*commercium* of universal functions as ethics). The illustrious gap between world and representation (two wills facing off against one another and, arguably, the first cause of all theories of the sublime) is, in the work of art, momentarily canceled, whereas the possibility with Architecture as Art is that this temporal closure might also become a virtuous means toward constructing one world, minus the totalizing apparatuses of architecture as ideology given to architectural modernism and architecture in service to capital.

---

X. ART, LOVE, REVOLUTION

Why have most all attempts to *détourner* the *commercium* of architecture in service to capital failed? And, if the most recent attempts (by Debord, for example, and by late-modern evocations of “total flow” and “emergence”) have been determinist in their own right, what is the pure function of Architecture as Art that might succeed?

Debord spoke of the “irreversibility” of time (of time’s arrow), and in this sense he invoked the necessity of *détourning* this very function within the Society of the Spectacle. This sense of time is the revolutionary impulse itself. Theories of emergence in architecture valorized a type of consilience that was nonetheless totally contaminated by neo-liberal, socio-economic ideology – that is, specious confusions of evolutionary theory and economics that were simply reified versions of Social Darwinism. Its evocations of “ecology” were laughable at best and frightening at worst. Primarily deployed in urban settings, these forms of “ecology” were bizarre artificial amalgams of forces mapped through imagery (for example, de-natured nature) – the well-known image boards of these projects serving as a poor version or copy of the storyboard used to “map” narrative and visual flows within cinema.

Debord’s intuition that “time is of the essence” (almost a tautological aspect of the very process of *détournement*) is, in the possibility of Architecture as Art, a strategic place-holding gesture for the work of architecture that might effectively shut down the noisy *commercium* of capitalism and *détourne* that spectacle toward wholly new purposes. Such purposes would have to be free of ideology and its other (avant-garde acts of resistance, such as new Situationist pranks). For this reason, and perhaps as second-level, place-holding gesture toward Architecture as Art, the architectural image must be re-worked and re-structured accordingly. Photography has in many respects facilitated this re-working, and many of the most stunning photographic works produced in the latter half of the 20th century have been pseudo-documentary works (for example, the chromogenic wonders of Thomas Ruff, Thomas Struth, Candida Höfer, et alia). The instrumental agency of these works is what needs to be appropriated for Architecture as Art. Strangely, photography exhibits the same penchant for tying the knot and silencing the *commercium* of capitalism (both for and against it); and art photography does this most brilliantly. The most precise statements of this function (also present in cinema) also come from the great critics of capitalism – foremost Chris Marker. Marker’s film-essays are legendary, as his recent still photography resides at the same turning point in the representational field of art as transcendental field.

It is the figure, then, of dispossessed “humanity” that is always trying to return in forms of overturning the *commercium* of rampant capitalist appropriation of the very idea of one world. This figure is the “lost cause” of the collective, High Romantic World-Soul. It is what, after all, the universal function of art and architecture seeks to identify and safeguard.

Architecture as Art opens on to one world freed of the myths of the past (as in the first cause of the avant-garde modernist assault on the same, but positioned, instead, in relation to the subject, versus the de-materialized or “apostrophized” subject of ideology and revolutionary praxis). Marker has documented the failure of revolutionary praxis around the world; and that failure is always for the same reason, whether Paris in 1968 or Athens and London in 2011 (when so-called structure or the abstraction known as “humanity” took to the streets). In all cases “humanity” is an abstraction (as it is today with Antonio Negri’s “multitude”). This abstraction is the result of the structuralization of forces that are instead requiring re-naturalization in a *commercium* as ethics (arrayed not toward *power* but its opposite, *fragility*). “The kingdom, the power, and the glory” (the Good) necessary to art and architecture to invoke and preserve fragility is the power to envision one world that is not the privileged realm of the few against the many (or vice versa). This is also a powerful, versus weak, image; its authority is the authority of the given or the real, versus the imaginary. Yet, in the fallen world of the capitalist *commercium* it requires the imaginary forces of cultural production to reach this non-place, insofar as it has been roped off by power through these same forces since time immemorial. Thus the penultimate knot – the trinitarian and perpetual event of Art (the Kingdom), Love (the Power), and Revolution (the Glory) as one thing in pursuit of one *virtuous* world, and, arguably, the only origin or first cause worth chasing.

---

6 The trinitarian conceptual knot “the kingdom, the power, and the glory” is utilized here categorically, versus theologically, retaining nonetheless its universalizing approach to one world. All higher levels of theology and philosophy contain a type of austere formal ontology of the word as image (limit) that might be borrowed to empower Architecture and Art, an austerity that is no doubt also the origin of Le Corbusier’s statement regarding “unspeakable space” in reference to La Tourette.