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Architecture and Impermanence: The Re-Thinking of Territories

by

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the notion of ‘deterritorialization’ of which the focus is a house. This house is understood as a frame that is juxtaposed against systems that move through and overlap with the said house-frame. For the purpose of this study, the systems that interact with the house-frame have been limited to: light, wind, temperature, water, and sound.

As these systems engage with the house-frame, one’s previously perceived perception of the house is momentarily shifted and re-directed to another: space is seen as a process of intensities, difference, and durations. Such space allows for the spontaneity of discovery, forgetting, continuity, discontinuity, definition, and re-definition.
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My apologies to anyone whom I may inadvertently have omitted.

Oversights and errors in the book are, of course, entirely my own.
1.0 Introduction
This thesis seeks to identify an approach to understanding ‘open’ systems of which the focus of this investigation is a house. The house is understood as a frame that is juxtaposed to systems that move through this said house-frame. The problematic is the following: how does a house-frame as a structure reveal and extend itself, rather than constrain itself to a self-defined frame. In other words, the concern of this project is that of the relationship of figure to ground. Rather than creating a fixed and stable figure-ground relationship, this thesis encourages another mode of perception. That is, to perceive space as a conceptual-phenomenal construct that is temporal and heterogeneous. Figure and ground relationships are placed into question and improvise themselves into new relationships.

The house-frame - as a figure - is placed into a relationship with the ground – systems move through and reconstitute this temporal figure. For the purpose of this study, the systems investigated have been limited to: light, water, temperature, wind, and sound. These systems
are viewed as catalysts that move through and overlap with the house to create temporal, phenomenal, and spatial re-perceptions of the house and thereby extend the weave of the house – the house-frame is opened.

These intervening systems create spontaneous situations, which occur within the everyday. This thesis is also a study in how the concrete manifestations of the everyday may become a site of intervention and a potential for rethinking static and sedentary space. The notion of the drift, an activity within the everyday, is key to understanding such a potential slip. That is, to perceive and conceive of space as manifold and as condition that reveals itself continuously within time. Space is not confined to a single logic and viewed as a final reveal. But the drift is a way of understanding the house-frame as a temporal event that reveals situations that allow for the spontaneity of discovery, forgetting, discontinuity, definition, and re-definition.
2.0 The Imaginary
2.1 The Index

Language territorializes space. In so doing, language indexes its fears and desires. In so doing, territory is created through modes of representation. A concept – an intellectual Will – creates a structure and a claim on a space. The concept – “an act of the head” – is an overall structure and a leitmotif of a design project. Nonetheless, the understanding of the concept as a purely intellectual Will is problematical. On the premise that territorialization is a conceptualization of space negotiated through representation, two forms of conceptualization are considered: the soft and the hard concept.

The strong concept is defined as territorialization through a heavy-handed rationalization. For example, the site of a project nor the design process is much considered. Rather what is of primary concern is the execution of a predetermined concept.

In contrast the weak concept territorialized, however, it forefronts the site and process in the design and execution of the project. The aim of this thesis is to question the role of territorialization.
2.2 Indexing Space

Representation cannot be escaped and transcended to some 'true' and 'objective' unfettered point of view, but rather it is constantly mediated and manipulated. Consequently, the representation of space can take various forms. Nevertheless, what this project investigates is how a particular notion of space, may be applied to architecture, and how this concept develops alternative notions of figure and ground relationships. The three notions to be considered are: territorialization, unterritorialization, and deterritorialization.

Of the above mentioned indexes of space, deterritorialization is further investigated through the notion of the drift. Deterritorialization, rather than positioning itself on one side or the other - respectively, territorialization or unterritorialization - deterritorialization negotiates between this binary construct. Deterritorialization is moreso concerned with the heterogeneity of space and the shifting from one index of space to the other. This process of shifting is what is further investigated and developed.
2.2.1 Territorialization

The architect designs, plans, and projects space. Through this representation, space is territorialized. Distinctions are created to define figures. These figures solidify in the process of territorialization and bring about qualities of permanence.

Territorialization is a structure that intervenes on a space. A structure is necessary and viable for the architect. Indeed, the work of the architect is indexical and it defines and structures a strategy of space, coordinating programs and infrastructures.

The belief that space may be permanently or naturally territorialized is a conceit at worst, a claim at best. This attitude is a heavy-handed conceptualization of space, an arborescent top-down force, rather than a tactical engagement with space. Space is replete with hyper-heterotopias. Territorialization homogenizes space, closing down rhyzomatic potential and growth.
2.2.2 Unterritorialization

The binary opposite of the territorialized space is unterritorialized space. Unterritorialized space may also be understood as pure and autonomous space. The unterritorialized space is neutral and sterile. This space, an Ur-space – a prelinguistic space of no territorialization – is no longer tenable. To be human is to index, and so implicit with it a mode of representation.

The belief that space may be unterritorialized is naive, however principled. The desire for unterritorialization is to cease indexing space and to see space as a ‘thing-in-itself’. This desire to see a ‘thing-in-itself’, as object alone, is to desire a condition that does not take into consideration the frustration and complexity of space. A subtle turn is to accept neither this condition of unterritorialization nor the previous condition of territorialization but to understand a trajectory that may also be a projected desire, self-critical, and responsive.
2.2.3 Deterritorialization

Deterritorialized space is neither completely saturated nor void of either territorialization or unterritorialization. Rather, deterritorialized space is a process that acknowledges and oscillates between the above mentioned territorialization and unterritorialization.

Deterritorialized space is a dynamic trajectory; consequently, a process of change and impermanence. This understanding of space is not a purist position. A mix of territorialization - a structure and a claim of space - and of unterritorialization - a principled position - is evident in the deterritorialized space; deterritorialized space is neither a single logical strategy nor a relativized, unfettered position. However, deterritorialized space distinguishes itself from the previous two positions by way of three but not exhaustive ideas. These stress the temporal, heterospatial, and phenomena-conceptual. These tendencies invite other values to be considered. These values suggest different methods and measurements of understanding space. These different modes are that of speed and duration, intensity, and difference.
Space is temporal. Space is not static but is in a process of transformation. Events mark these moments. The ‘now’ generates these situations that encourage improvisation and a particular relationship to space. These situations are not limited to one particular occurrence, but may be a multiplicity of situations. They are loci of situations that release or disrupt continuities, the presumed stability, and rather draw a line promoting interconnections and a richness. Such deterritorialized space can be understood in terms of its various speeds. Space may be slow; it may be a pause, a fleeting moment, a redefinition, or a potential discovery.

Space is difference. It is heterospacial; a folding terrain riddled with difference. This thesis promotes an architecture that understands itself as intervening on a system of contingent relations. That is, space is manifold and rich with a landscape of complex, folding, and intertwining surfaces (i.e. territories). Space is anything but in stasis.
There is no longer one single territory.

Space is not a quality in itself, nor is there a pre-determined system of relations - a genius loci - but rather it is defined and shaped by a multiplicity of subjects; these subjects are also temporal and not static, so the qualities of space change accordingly. Space is fluid and so are the systems of relations.

Space is an intensity. Space is a complexity of a projection of concepts and of receptions of phenomena. This particular notion of space incorporates the empirical, the phenomenal, and the imaginary. Moreover, the intensity generates a concentration of an event that challenges the way space is conceived. The intensity of a space challenges the perceiving and corporeal subject to reconfigure and to reorder their figments of territories.

This particular index of space is a mix of these various values and
understandings of space. To conceive of space in this regard is not to conceive of space as solely functional nor absurd, but as space that is becoming.

Deterritorialization is a mix of territorialization and unterritorialization. They are all an index: a figment of the imagination. Nonetheless, the poetic sensibility is vital. It proposes a life-style, a way of seeing space. For this reason, the poetic - the imaginary - is of utmost importance. That is, to see space as a manifold reveal of various speeds and intensities and to cultivate space as an extension of the given.
3.0 The Empirical
3.1 The House-Frame

Architecture is a mode of perceiving and intervening on a space. This intervention is in the form of a system that gives definition and qualities to a terrain. In turn, territories are formed. The house is a framing of this terrain. Therefore, the house – as it is understood in this thesis – is that of a house-frame, a frame that gives structure to a space.

The house-frame, as it is being rendered in this thesis, may be considered as a frame akin to a technological device. This investigation questions the concept of technology and a type of technological thinking. The prevailing understanding of technology and technological thinking is that it is a will to power – a mastery – of a domain, a will to clearly delineate and manage territories.

In contrast, what this thesis proposes is a structure - a frame – that is attentive to potential drifts and turns. This is important not only imperative for a critical understanding of technology, but also vital for understanding the complexity of becoming. In this sense, the
focus of this thesis is a house-frame. This house-frame is a concept that is understood as a loose categorical term that aims to contain a plethora of innumerable complexities under one succinct concept.
3.2 Light

The design of the house is such that the sun's southern light maximizes various shades and penetrating patterns of light within the house-frame. The concern for southern light in particular is due to the sun's trajectory. That is, southern light guarantees the least consistent light. This light creates the most shadows, unlike the northern light. This move offers a chiarroscuro of light throughout the house, throughout the days, throughout the seasons.

The following figures are a study of how this light would behave during particular moments throughout the year; long shadows in the winter and spring, shorter shadows in the summer and fall. Moreover, during the design process, decisions were made regarding the roof and walls as to how they should be positioned to allow for different degrees of light into the house. The concept that shade could become a haven for some, and a deterrent for others, played into the conceptualization of different types of spaces that could emerge.
3.3 Wind

The house is sensitive to the prevailing south-easterly winds. The main concern for the wind was to have a house-frame that would be porous enough to allow for the wind to move through the house from various directions. This could also be determined in part by the inhabitants of the house, in so far that they would be able to determine where an aperature would be open or not.

The house has also been designed to allow for the maximum circulation of the wind through the house by creating areas of suction and of positive wind currents (fig. 55). This preoccupation with wind is primarily to investigate the manifold spaces and their qualities that may be attributed to them.
3.4 Temperature

The temperature of the site varies with the season. However, fields of warmth and coolness register themselves throughout the house. This is indicative of the following diagrams. The cool and warm zones are fields of heat and shadow that various parts of the house receive during various times of the year (March 21, June 21, September 23, December 21) at select moments during the day.

This particular register of space suggests a mode of thinking about the space in question in terms of intensities and durations. Moreover, the spaces are differentiated and defined according to the subjects' tendencies and personal preferences.
Fig. 63
Cool Zone 15:00
Fig. 64
Cool Zone 18:00
Water is lacking on this site. Nonetheless, when it rains it pours. The rain is so intense that on very short notice the water floods through the plain. For this reason, the house runs parallel with the flooding water and creates the least resistance against the torrential floods.

The roof of the house has been designed in such a way as to allow for rain water to collect on the roof. This also allows for evaporative cooling. Moreover, during a rainy season the roof may become increasingly saturated with water (fig. 71 - 75). At a particular point, the roof is so saturated that it consequently sheds that excessive water (fig. 76). This shedding of the water brings about the discovery of another particular space of the house (fig. 77).
3.6 Sound

Sound is very pervasive; especially in this particular site. A train runs no less than 300 yards by the house. For this reason, vegetation and thick sound insulated walls are used for various parts of the house. Nonetheless, sound is not limited to the train alone. What is also considered is the wind and the water.

The roof of the house is so designed to pour a concentration of water down into the pool generating a fountain like sound. At other moments the saturated roof splashes onto the patio, generating sound. These are moments of intensities that make one aware of one's surrounding and the 'now'.
4.0 Empirical Imagination

The everyday is a site for intervention. That is, the empirical everyday. The everyday elements of light, wind, water, temperature, and sound attest to their still untapped potential. They are all in various degrees, chaotic and indeterminate. A house that is designed for these everyday elements is transformed. This heightens the awareness of the everyday and the situations spark the imagination to unfold and extend itself.

The notion of the deterritorialization is a combination of these two notions - the empirical and the imaginary. Respectively, one concerns itself with perception and reception, whereas the other with an act of the head. In combination, the empirical imagination indexes an understanding of space that is a process of definition in various speeds, durations, intensities, of sameness and difference. A sensibility that understands architecture's impermanence and with that understanding a rich palette of possibilities.
5.0 Bibliography


DeCerteau, Michel. The Practice of the Everyday.


