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The Deposition of the Body: Architecture and Corporal Limits

by

Juan Kent Fitzsimons

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APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

John Biln, Associate Professor, Chair
School of Architecture

Farès el-Dahdah, Associate Professor
School of Architecture

Lynne Huffer, Professor
Women's Studies, Emory University

HOUStON, TEXAS

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation considers some aspects of architecture’s relationship to the body as living flesh. It focuses on the limits that distinguish bodies that “live” in and for architecture from troubling corporealities: numb, immobile, dying. The body’s vitality would seem to be the logical underpinning for architecture. But other bodily states may insinuate themselves into an architectural work as a disruption of the cultural and social norms it would support. This dissertation explores the reasons for this phenomenon, ways to read its manifestations in architectural form, and its consequences for understanding architecture and the body. An analysis of texts by Louise Pelletier and Alberto Pérez-Gómez, Beatriz Colomina, and Aldo Rossi maps different ways that architectural discourse’s reliance on movement and sensation is disturbed by bodies that are immobile, injured, dying, or dead. A review of Michel Foucault’s notion of bio-power considers how architecture may extend instrumental conceptions of the body to greater areas of human experience. An overview of Michel de Certeau’s investigations addresses this apparent impasse and theorizes the architectural work as a site for questioning the body’s instrumentalization. Special attention to
de Certeau's notion of a scriptural economy organized around the body's ephemerality suggests reading architecture through a “deposition of the body” that seeks indications of corporealities that are not “alive” for architecture. A reading of Herzog and de Meuron’s Stone House considers how architectural qualities may resonate with problems surrounding infantile corporeality, including ambivalence and anal eroticism, and relates these to broader questions about aging and death. The film *Margaret’s Museum* (Mort Ransen, 1995) is examined with attention to two houses that negotiate widowhood when the lost male body paradoxically has dominant status in patriarchal social structures and is instrumentalized in industrial production. Material qualities, construction processes, and formal transformations in these two houses trouble normal distinctions between bodies that are useful and useless, male and female, vital and dead. The dissertation conclusion includes speculations on how the work may engage a more broad investigation into social and poetic aspects of the body in architecture, with a focus on gender and disability studies.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LIFE AT THE FRONTIER

In his novel *Life, A User's Manual*, French author Georges Perec stages the paradox whereby increasingly sophisticated techniques for describing human life ultimately render life impossible.¹ Many characters in the novel lose the ability to tolerate living within an imposed framework. Thus there are suicides, runaways and most prominently a puzzle-maker's revenge plot against his controlling patron. Perhaps more significant, however, is the recurring theme that our inability to represent human life, whether it be in a painting, in an ethnographic study, or indeed in literature, opens something like a black hole in the different media at our disposal. The illusion that our techniques cast shadowless light on what people do and how they do it is shattered by a series of tales where the all-seeing eye faces the horror of its detachment from the life it tries to seize. This is perhaps best illustrated by the painter in Perec's novel. His attempt to paint a scene that represents, room by room, all the lives in his apartment block inspires him with the haunting image of the building as "a grotesque mausoleum raised in the memory of companions petrified in terminal

postures.” In this architectural vision, living flesh becomes dead stone, as though the desire to portray vitality ultimately renders the body still.

*Life, a User’s Manual* is structured in precisely the same way as the painter’s tableau. The novel uses an apartment building’s spatial arrangement to frame the interrelated stories that reiterate the painter’s quandary in different ways. It hangs its apprehension about literature’s relationship to human vitality on a representation of architectural form. It is like a misreading of Victor Hugo’s interpretation of “The one will kill the other”: does the book preclude life itself? And what of architecture?

Perec’s work lays out a dilemma that characterizes architecture’s problematic relation with the human body as a living thing. Architecture is a highly developed means of describing and accommodating the body’s life. An architect could ask the same questions as Perec or the painter: will the elaborate tracery of my project, whose subjects are living beings, turn flesh to stone? Not in a literal sense, but by fixing postures and channeling the imagination towards defined corporealities? Does my work, which turns the body into an idea and then commits it to paper and space, limit its possible states to the life portrayed in an image or described in a user’s manual? The reasonable answer is negative. However, as with literature, architecture’s domain hosts both reason and invention. Textual and visual modes of representation indeed have a scientific

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capacity, and the belief in the objective quality of marks on a page has fostered the development of knowledge about human beings. However, some assertions stemming from that position of authority—regarding for example race and sexuality—have had dubious effects on real individual lives. In Perec's novel, recurring allusions to what escapes the circumscription of life, including the petrified cadavers, may be traces of anxiety about representation's power to form—for better and for worse—what is thinkable about the human body. Perhaps creators who objectify the body and its vitality imbue their works with their misgivings. This is one way to explain the paradox whereby a user's manual for life constantly speaks of death. It may further shed light on cases in architecture where an otherwise life-oriented work is troubled by bodily states that escape its grasp.

Distinct from considerations of authorship, another perspective on these phenomena would inquire into the work and its consequences. Perec's novel is filled with both tales of failed attempts to trace life and an inordinate number of deaths. What are the effects of such a work on its reader? What does it make thinkable? Perhaps it is not conveying its author's unease with the medium's power, but rather is sustaining darker preoccupations. The troubled description of life in this user's manual resonates with fears about the body's mortality—fears that may disturb readers regardless of the author's intentions or qualms. Might an architectural work, which also tries to correspond to a living entity that it can never truly seize, exhibit the same capacity to sustain its occupant's unease?
Architects tend to insist on their works’ relationship to how the body moves and feels. Might those works not also induce visions of corporealities that differ from the body whose motion and sensation normally give form to concrete, glass and steel?

Taken at this moment where they straddle their production and reception, some architectural works may, like Perec’s literary work, host two seemingly opposing capacities: the power to define the body in terms of its vitality, and the potential to resonate with apprehensions about what that definition must exclude. This dissertation considers that cohabitation. It occurs at the limits that distinguish bodies that live in and for architecture from corporal states that are troubling for a society organized around production and consumption: numb, immobile, infantile, dying. In some cases, this limit appears as a violent break in the work, like Perec’s painter’s friends “petrified in terminal postures,” their death a symptom of his work’s ultimate inability to make them live. In others, the relationship between architecture’s ideal body and other corporealities defines a grey area. Both allow critical engagement with social dimensions of such distinctions, especially those related to the body’s activity and productivity. By studying architectural texts and buildings that cover cases of both violent breaks and grey zones, this investigation finds that where the body’s vitality would seem to be the unquestionable and indeed logical underpinning for architecture, other bodily states can insinuate themselves into works as a disruption of the cultural and social norms they would support. This trouble at the frontier between bodily
vitality and its opposite is a privileged moment where social issues overlap with
the individual poetics that confront dark zones of human existence. The
dissertation explores the overlap where confusion over definitions of corporeality
occur in order to engage ideas about the body in architecture and beyond.\textsuperscript{4}

Insisting on the architectural work's mediating position, and therefore on
its relative independence from its producer, is a necessity rather than a choice.
There is no external position from which to speak of the works at hand: my
readings of essays, projects or buildings are structured by my own hopes and
fears about the body, or rather about bodies: my own, and those of close ones.
The reader's body engages other bodies, in particular those commonly assumed
in architectural discourse and those that individual works put forth. This raises
another question: beyond the problem of utility, why do architects imagine bodies
in their work? And why do I find them there? In \textit{Life, A User's Manual}, the

\textsuperscript{4} I will define a few terms used in this investigation. "The architectural
work," "an architectural work," and "architectural works" refer to projects and
buildings; in rare cases this includes texts whose subject is architecture. "Object"
is sometimes used in the place of "work" in order to emphasis its materiality, and
"architectural form" refers more precisely to the qualitative aspects of the object.
"Architectural work" without an article refers to the different kinds of conceptual
and physical labor related to architectural objects: design, interpretation,
analysis, and only rarely construction and use; "work" is sometimes replaced by
"thought" in order to emphasize its conceptual dimension. "Architectural
discourse" refers to the production and circulation of knowledge about
architecture, including architecture's manifestations in other fields and other
realms of experience. "Architecture theory" refers specifically to the formalization
of that knowledge, including but not limited to design methodologies and
analytical methodologies. "The architectural discipline" refers to the formal
organization of architectural work, architectural works, architectural discourse
and architecture theory in professional and academic structures. "Architecture"
on its own refers either to buildings or to all of the above, depending on context.
painter's tableau is a work of love directed at his friends and acquaintances. Love and death are tied together: one need not subscribe unconditionally to psychoanalytic theory to recognize that Eros and Thanatos are an enduring pair. The dissertation's hypothesis incorporates the compulsion to project bodies as the driving force in the interplay between defining vitality and fearing its absence in architectural work.

*Traces of Ephemerae*

Like the painting or novel that describes life in an apartment block, an architectural work makes no sense without assuming that human beings live and feel through their bodies. Projecting and discussing architecture necessarily refer to that assumption. Architectural work may be described simply as a search for correspondence between the built environment and moving, feeling bodies. Architecture's relative permanence should accommodate (and perhaps capture) fleeting bodily presence. Whatever other aspirations or conceits it admits to, architectural work at least imagines stone and flesh in one place, at one time. Perec's credo for novelists, painters and puzzle-makers serves for architects as well: "I search for the eternal and the ephemeral at once."\(^5\)

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\(^5\) Perec, *La Vie*, 574. My translation. An interesting aspect of the original French is lost in translation. "Je cherche en même temps l'éternel et l'éphémère" employs the letter "e" as its only vowel. Perec's novel of 1969, *La Disparition* (Paris: Denoël) was written without using the letter "e", and he followed up in 1972 with the novel *Les Revenentes* (Paris: Julliard), in which that vowel was the only one permitted. The phrase about the eternal and the ephemeral appears first in *Les Revenentes*, 114. By repeating it as the epigraph at the beginning of
Architects, of course, cannot fulfill this quest. What remains of their search is a concrete map of the body's imagined capacities to move and feel. Architectural objects are traces of ideas of mobility and sensation; they are not mobility and sensation themselves. They write something about the body's life. Meanwhile, a scientific disposition convinces itself that various recording media can harness and accommodate the body's vitality: tables and charts, programs of action, the built environment—in short all that is fixed relative to the ephemeral body. This objective stance would accumulate traces of the body in order to better serve it or make use of it when it passes by. These traces—this body writing—can be effective on many levels. As a kind of body writing, architecture keeps me warm and dry, organizes my productive capacities, and houses my recreation.⁶

Body writing, however, is not reducible to objective ends. As though mocking a positivist inability to address certain areas of human experience, writing speaks beyond the body's comfort, utility and leisure. By a strange inversion, the traces of vitality articulate death. "Beaten paths make charming

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⁶ This investigation does not address the urban scale at which a similar phenomenon exists, although I briefly discuss its potential to support such a study in the conclusion.
cadavers” concludes Guillaume Apollinaire; in other words, the lines that record passing bodies also mark the body’s passing. Michel de Certeau associates writing’s apparent transcendence of mortality with this phenomenon:

In a scriptural problematics tied to the ability not to miss any part of time going by, to count it and accumulate it, to profit from what has been acquired so as to make capital substitute for immortality, the body returns as the *instant*, the simultaneity of life and death: both of them in the same place.

The script that captures and collects fleeting ephemerae appears to project its investment into the future, thereby skirting the problem of death and decay. But its own materiality betrays that antiseptic plan. Architectural projects, criticism, history, and narratives—a variety of “beaten paths” whose more or less explicit subject is a body full of life—may also host bodies devoid of vitality. The ultimate inability of architectural work to capture the body’s life raises the specter of life’s absence: the path and the cadaver, the path is a cadaver.

Why, then, would anyone “write” with or about architecture? Why would we read it? Leonard Cohen attributes traces and other markings to the distance between bodies: “True love leaves no traces / If you and I are one / They’re lost in our embraces / Like stars against the sun.”\(^9\) The distance between beings

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initiates trace-making. Writing attempts to close the gap. Architectural work, history books and love letters: none are necessary if there is no other. In the absence of an eternal embrace, we can only write, and therefore always risk the cadaver scarred by our text.

The cadaver’s apparent immobility and numbness disturb a way of thinking that can only conceive of movement and sensation. It is an absolute condition that marks the limits of rational thought. “I speak for those accustomed to finding ... in immobility the most horrible of movements. I place myself exactly where science becomes madness.”\textsuperscript{10} Balzac could be speaking for architects, whose perpetual quest to touch bodies that escape them leaves traces that reiterate the folly of their objectivity. Architecture may be both a medium that objectively grasps the body’s vitality, and a medium that hosts the madness excluded by science: immobility, uselessness, death. Where this ambivalence reigns, neither the necessity of architectural work nor its effects are measurable in terms of the body’s motion and senses alone. But neither are they measurable without reference to the prospect of that body’s absence or passing.

In this dissertation, I explore how architectural form is a site where ideals and fears about the body’s traits and abilities are played out. The insistence on the body’s life in architectural thought establishes a relationship between


\textsuperscript{10} Honoré de Balzac, \textit{Théorie de la démarche} (Paris: E. Didier, 1853), 27. My translation. “Je parle pour les gens habitués à trouver ... le plus horribles des mouvements dans l’immobilité. Je me place au point précis où la science touche à la folie.”
architecture and ideas about what the body could and should be. Its effects register on both social and individual planes, defining broad political stakes at the same time as personal, even existential questions. While many architectural discourses require evoking a relatively limited idea of what the body is and can do, I observe the recurrence in architectural work of paired notions that normally should not meet: mobility and immobility, life and death, vitality and sickness, science and madness, the ephemeral and the eternal. Rather than simply pitting good against bad, these recurring contrasts throw light on the constructed nature of corporal limits in architecture. Those limits function as more or less tentative distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable corporealities: in architecture, life at the frontier is a struggle over the body. By examining the grey area of this borderland, the dissertation attempts to outline how architecture is involved in maintaining expectations about the body, how it holds the potential to modify them, and how this dimension of architecture is a privileged place where social and personal stakes interact.

There are three principal reasons for this investigation. First, I observe that projecting or reading architectural work requires that I assume a certain ideal corporeality. To make sense of the work, I evoke a body that stands up, walks around, sees, feels, hears, and controls its functions like an average adult. It is an implied rather than explicit body, and I suspect it is a function of discourse as much as of my personal experience. This brings me to ask what epistemological
dynamics this instinct-like assumption is part of, and what social consequences stem from reproducing such assumptions ad infinitum.

Second, I notice that some architectural writing contains incongruous references to bodily states and characteristics that seem counter to architectural discourse’s enabling assumption of a normal sentient body. In such cases, the argument or structure is troubled by the reminders of mortality, immobility, incontinence, or other states that do not usually characterize the ideal body in architecture. The work’s coherence is threatened by what appears to be nonsense, like Apollinaire’s “beaten path” as a “charming cadaver.” This may indicate a significance for the text that escapes its explicit intentions and the confines of the discourse that surrounds it. Extended beyond the realm of architectural writing, this suggests that the same phenomenon may occur in other “made things,” in particular architectural objects.

Finally, I am concerned about the evolution of how we think about the human body. The rapid acceleration of our ability to modify the body through prosthetics and genetics is inseparable from social and cultural constructions about bodily normality and quality of life. One can observe how apprehensions about technical evolutions turn literary or cinematic works, for example, into opportunities for reflection on the implications of those evolutions.¹¹ The dissertation responds to my desire to explore how architecture—arguably

¹¹ A few examples: Michel Houellebecq depicts the planned mutation of humanity in a socially degraded and apocalyptic present in his novels Les Particules élémentaires (Paris: Flammarion, 1998) and La Possibilité d'une île
inseparable from questions of the body since its origins—may sustain discussion and critique around changes in our hopes for the body, as well as our fears.

The remainder of this introduction discusses the general orientations that underpin this study and situate it with respect to some other approaches to the question of the body in architecture. It addresses in particular what I mean by bodily vitality and by the limits beyond which bodily states are unacceptable for architectural discourse. It gives an overview of the interplay between ways of thinking about the body and architectural works, and sketches how those works might have the potential to reciprocate with visions of unexpected corporealities. This is followed by a discussion of some architectural discourses in which the body and its vitality are central elements, with attention to architectural phenomenology and a tendency that explores social subjectivity in architecture. The introduction closes with a description of the remaining chapters.

Architecture and the Insistence on Life

Architecture—the practice, the discipline, the discourse—is often criticized for being "optico-centric". We pay too much attention to vision, at the expense of

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(Paris: Fayard, 2005). Claire Denis’s 2004 film *l’Intrus* ("The Intruder") was inspired by Jean-Luc Nancy’s short book about his heart transplant, *l’Intrus* (Paris: Galilée, 2000); the film transforms Nancy’s textual disturbances of identity and autobiography into a story about boundaries and alterity on many levels, including international borders, family ties, organ trafficking, and social interaction. In a more medically banal but no less symptomatic way, Xavier Giannoli’s 2003 film *Les Corps impatients* ("Eager Bodies"), based on Christian de Montella’s novel of the same name (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), explores the difficult overlap of bodily maturation and degeneration through the story of a young woman whose battle with cancer is doubled by a period of sexual initiation and discovery in the context of a love triangle.
the other senses. It may be true that next to hearing, touch, smell and taste, vision usually plays the most significant role in works of architecture history, theory, and criticism, and perhaps also in less formal discussions about the built environment. But from a different perspective, vision is merely representative of a more general preconception of the body that seems unavoidable in architecture. The four other senses may be undervalued, but they are not suppressed.

Suppression is the fate reserved for the very opposite of sensation. In architecture, the body must feel. And in order to exercise its capacity to register sensation, that body must move. This is the twofold characteristic that underwrites body-based assertions about architectural objects and architecture generally. In a word, architecture’s ideal body must move. Vision, which depends on the mobile body to get to its viewpoint, is just the most common manifestation of architecture’s insistence on life.

At the risk of reinforcing the apparent hegemony of vision, we could say that a significant “blind spot” for architectural discourse is a body that can neither do what architecture is believed to make doable, nor feel the sensations that architecture is supposed to create. Such a body, which is not fully alive, is not properly part of architecture. Its realm borders that of architecture’s body, but it is not welcome there. Its exclusion or absence gives coherence to our discourse. A moving, feeling and productive body in control of itself underwrites assumptions about the relationship between people and architecture. That body can use and sense architecture without any of the frictions caused by something like physical
impairment, socially unacceptable movements, sickness, or, at a more general level, a lack of vitality that challenges the ideology of constant and accelerating production.

Architectural form is in part a depiction of bodily activity. Whether we consider a building itself, or representations that describe its formal characteristics (drawings, models, photographs, texts, etc.), we are able to imagine its occupation by human beings. Doorways, passages, floors, and stairs are all elements whose physical qualities and disposition refer to the possibility of occupation, movement, and sensation. Architectural form's potential to represent the body's actions is realized in the absence of bodies—perhaps especially in the absence of bodies. Placed before an architectural work with no signs of life, I am nonetheless capable of imagining what people would be able to do, how they would likely move, what they might feel. Virtual bodies are summoned between the object and the thought. My reading draws from and contributes to an understanding of what the body is and what it can do, regardless of the presence of other real bodies.

Understanding form as a depiction does not entail believing that it is a faithful transcription of some actions that have actually occurred, or that it is a reliable tool for inducing certain movements or sensations. It means understanding this non-bodily object called architecture as the foil against which one can exercise a desire to remember bodily activity and to anticipate its return.
It is a form of writing that readily—and perhaps unavoidably—lends itself to this mental practice.

Invoking mobile and sentient bodies is deeply rooted in architecture culture. It makes no sense to discuss an architectural object as suitable for complete inactivity. Even the simplest, most isolated hermitage is likely to be understood as a place for the act of retreat. Likewise, it is impossible to imagine architecture without reference to any sensory stimulation. I may bracket vision, for example; but the deprivation of one sense can only be registered against the continued functioning of another. Like a movie that goes black while sounds continue to play, a non-visual architecture necessarily beckons to one or more other senses. In the theater, if the sound also quits, it is normal to wonder if the movie has stopped. In its own way, architecture stops in the absence of all sensory registration.

Can an immobile body or a body deprived of its senses exist in architecture? Strictly speaking, yes, since I could put one such body in an architectural object, and it would not disappear. But it would at best be tolerated, and certainly not catered to. I can not imagine architectural form doing anything for it: making it see a certain view, or feel cool air descend from a clerestory opening, or experience mild vertigo walking across a catwalk, or sense the calm of a given space. Nor could a body devoid of vitality be the source of knowledge for architectural discourse, for example helping to refine spatial dimensions or the techniques of sensory stimulation. Where I imagine architecture’s relationship to
the body, mobility and sensation are mandatory. Cinema is not understood as a medium for those who can neither hear nor see (notwithstanding that the some deaf and blind individuals can “feel” sound in their chest and “see” variations of light intensities). Similarly, architecture, limited by how I imagine it to work, does not exist for lifeless bodies. Its bodies must live.

Here, “life” does not refer to strict scientific definitions involving heartbeats and cerebral activity. The line between life and its opposite in architectural thought is not necessarily more difficult to define than in contemporary medical practice, but it is different. For example, the distinction between mobility and immobility gains nuance in practice by the varying levels of “disability” that one may experience when faced with a given architectural object. Assuming the necessity for movement, the ability to get from one place to another is determined between the object’s materiality (the height of steps, the width of a passage) and the individual body’s physical traits (its ability to climb, its girth). If a given architectural object is considered usable only by way of stairs and doorways, bodies that cannot climb or traverse those elements are effectively immobile. They are lifeless in the context of that object and the assumptions that surround its perception and assessment, whether those assumptions are rationally established (“it is highly probable that an average occupant can...”) or a matter of convention (“I can’t imagine it being used any other way”). Bodies thus immobilized indicate the limits of thinking about architecture from the foregone conclusion that one must move and feel in the built environment. The distinction
between a living and a lifeless body for architecture is a function of specific contexts, and not simply a matter of breathing and thinking. Neither the predisposition to think about architecture as something “used” nor the architectural object itself produces that distinction alone. Rather, its production occurs where assumptions and objects meet. Once operative, the distinction draws attention away from the grey zone where life in architecture is not so singularly opposed to one other state.

*Proper and Improper Bodies*

The definition of what life means in architecture is not solely a matter of function or form. The relationship of a discipline to human life always includes a social dimension. Where architectural work and architectural discourse play a role in defining the limits between life and its opposite, there are social effects that may be addressed.

The distinction between life and its opposite in architecture can be understood as that between proper and improper bodies. Architectural thinking makes assumptions about the human body. Repeated time and again in a variety of forms, these assumptions produce a set of characteristics that describe the body that is proper to architecture. Those characteristics do not describe all real possibilities, and the body produced through architectural discourse necessarily excludes some bodily traits that can be found to exist elsewhere, for example in other discourses or in experience. In a given architectural discourse, then, there
are limits between the bodies that architecture addresses and acknowledges, and those that it does not. For discourses built on the assumption that people move through architecture and use their senses to perceive it, bodies that can not move or feel are excluded from what is said about buildings. They do not support the way architecture can be thought of within that discourse; rather they challenge it, and therefore must be excluded, expelled, ignored, buried, forgotten, even though they do exist. Those bodies are improper corporealities.12

The word proper is meant to reflect some specific ways of understanding the body. It refers to appropriateness, in the sense of complementarity and correspondence: a climbing body is right for a building with stairs, and vice versa. That which is appropriate also suggests propriety, in the sense that the body evoked in architectural discourse will politely support the argument at hand and not look to undermine it: the assertion that a given building's quality stems from its precise choreography of sectional movement along stairs requires that one imagine a body that can distribute its weight between two alternating legs, and one is unlikely to infer a paralyzed or newborn body as the right one for the task. In discussions of specific social settings, the body's propriety may also refer to cleanliness and poise, in the sense of propreté: the absence of unpleasant body odors and noises is preferable in the dining room, as is the absence of more material bodily products. A final sense for proper is that of possession, as in

12 For a general discussion of the matter of the proper in architecture, see Catherine Ingraham, Architecture and the Burdens of Linearity (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
“proprietary”. The proper body not only belongs to the discourse it facilitates, but is also in possession of itself: such a body is not pushed about by architecture like so much flesh, but is the controlled embodiment of an individual being that can relate physical actions to the capacity to make decisions. Sleepwalkers and the comatose are rarely protagonists in architectural discourse.

That which is proper is appropriate, clean, and (self-) possessed. The proper body is one that is in its place; it belongs to that which it facilitates. Architectural discourse makes this place in architectural work. Something else would be out of place, and by extension that something else would be untidy, disturbing, and dispossessed (expelled, evicted, cast out: abject). Inquiring into architecture’s insistence on life helps to understand what bodies our discourses and practices produce as appropriate, clean, and possessed for their purposes.

Architectural Objects and Thought

Architectural work either explicitly or implicitly addresses the human body. The great expenditure of resources to project and realize buildings is justified because of a shared tacit understanding that human bodies need to be more or less sheltered, for longer or shorter periods of time, in greater or lesser densities, for reasons that range from physical repose to activity, from labor to leisure, from entertainment to cultural consumption, from distraction to contemplation. Perhaps the banality and givenness of this conception is why even architectural works that self-consciously bracket corporal questions are still recognizable as architecture:
intentions aside, architectural form and its means of representation prompt an observer to imagine some sort of corporal accommodation, be it functional, sensible, or analogical. This is not due simply to something inherent in form. It is also due to presuppositions that characterize how one looks at architecture. It is conceptual in the sense that one *thinks* a certain way: about movement, about sensation, about resemblance.

There is a tradition of architectural production that effectively stumps the attempt to read or project a body. Such works, which are often included in the category “paper architecture,” trigger debate about the definition of an architectural work. The questions that these works raise in architectural circles highlight the degree to which very simple assumptions about what architecture is for, and how even its most lofty aspirations can be realized, turn around the human body’s motion and sensation. These works can make great contributions to evolutions in architectural representation, in architecture’s cultural significance, or in the design professions’ political capital. But the large scale transformation of raw material into living environments could (which is not to say should) carry on without that kind of production. It would not continue, however, if we stopped believing that the body needs some help dealing with the elements, or that the

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body is the measure of architecture. This difference is not reducible to either the
opposition between art and architecture or the distinction between building and
architecture: even the avant-garde patron who selects a conceptually innovative
architect for a house design is concerned about how to enter the building and
whether it keeps people dry.

This emphasis on the conceptual tools and dispositions that accompany
one’s encounters with architecture should not suggest that this investigation is
disconnected from real circumstances, operating only at the level where we
debate ideas. The way the discipline imagines the human body has an impact on
how that body may be lived. That impact comes about both discursively—through
the ideas I voice about what the body is, what it is for, and what it could be if only
its environment would allow it—and materially, through the knowledge of the
body that is embedded in architectural form. Whether manifested in casual
discussions or highly structured texts, assumptions about the body in architecture
both inform and are informed by architectural objects. There is a play of
reciprocal reinforcement between specific architectural works and what one can
think about architecture in general. Architecture’s relation to individuals and
groups develops between conceptual and material poles. This dissertation
animates that middle ground in order to show how apparently fixed distinctions
between proper and improper corporealities in architecture may on the contrary
be characterized by an instability that echoes broader and deeper apprehensions
about the body.
A question follows from the pairing of concept and thing: are the objects that prompt and support certain ways of thinking limited to eliciting a restricted interpretation? As a kind of writing about the body, architectural form may fulfill the scientific role of grid and table, backdrop and measuring device, stimulus and reflection. It can be a faithful record of what the body is and should do, as well as an instrument for assessing and training individual bodies. However, architecture is more than an applied science, and, for a variety of reasons, it is often read as though it holds other potentials. Everything from the effort that totalitarian regimes invest in grand schemes, through the exhaustive research of historians, to the unfading childhood memories of rooms and passages attest to the belief in something more. This investigation takes that excess as the raw material for reconsidering the body in architecture. It considers in particular qualities that are not simply opposed to objective uses of architecture in relation to the body, nor that ignore architecture's rationalization of the body in favor of more poetic, spiritual, or critical corporeal prospects, but rather that are inseparable from the tendency of architectural work to define the body's variety and workings in greater detail, and to accommodate its needs and desires with increasing finesse. To paraphrase Balzac once again, it places itself where science meets madness, where, for example, immobility is an intolerable form of mobility, and not just something one refrains from thinking about. The study proposes that something in architecture exceeds the minimal task of rational bodily inscription
precisely where architectural tools and concepts threaten to reduce the body to its capacity for production and consumption, and to eliminate from social consciousness the bodily states that threaten that ideal. It looks for the different ways, more or less affirmative, more or less troubling, that architecture's material dimensions acknowledge the scandalous bodies that are pushed out by a discourse centered on activity and sensation—bodies that we know exist but whose uncomfortable truth we keep at bay with visions of ideal corporeality.

I therefore ask if the objects that perpetuate the conventional limits around architecture's proper bodies lend themselves to that role only. Is there any slippage between what architecture needs to say about the body, and what it is able to say? Does the persistent refrain from articulating how architecture relates to motionless or numb bodies mean that the material and formal qualities of architectural works do not sustain, through more or less attentive reading, a preoccupation with the prospect of immobility and insentience?

To read suggests legibility and meaning. But what is improper to a given discourse is also illegible and nonsensical for it. This does not mean that discussing corporal limits in architecture is an impossible task. On the other hand, neither does it mean that architectural objects may simply portray the image of the kinds of bodies that architectural discourses generally suppress. The characteristics of architecture's improper bodies are not to be read themselves in architecture, as though a broken column means a broken back
and rotting wood siding means a decomposing corpse.\textsuperscript{14} Rather, I look for how architectural objects articulate the problem of the limits between proper and improper bodies in cultural and social terms. If architecture’s proper body is legible in architectural form because its movements, dimensions and capabilities have been translated into recognizable signs (doorways, passages, stairs, window sills), then improper bodies manifest themselves like wordless cries. Those cries cannot be translated into the language of a culture based on ceaseless body motion and production, and which assumes self-discipline in the area of bodily performance. They come forth like nonsensical sounds. They indicate both the limits of architecture’s grip on experience, and the continued existence of bodies that escape the rationalizing tendency in how we talk about and produce architecture. The way to “read” this phenomenon is to identify the effects of those cries on the legibility of architectural work.

Space versus Writing

Before situating this investigation with respect to phenomenological and socially critical approaches to experience in architecture, I will clarify its approach to architectural works as repositories of knowledge about the body. Within the broad area of inquiry into architecture and society, this project might be said to read architectural form for what it knows about bodies. This is different from reading how real or imagined bodies establish interrelationships in material space, or from reading how a physical environment helps to structure those relationships. I distinguish between looking at architectural form as part of a concrete environment in which living bodies exert themselves, and looking at it as a form of knowledge about bodies. My principal concern is not how specific compositions of architectural form produce, support or hinder specific social formations through the bodily positions and motion that they allow or disallow. My main interest is how architectural works, because they write about the body in the context of its construction and reconstruction as a social entity, are a means by which body concepts are produced and perpetuated. Instead of asking what social effects are produced when certain bodies interact in certain architectural spaces, I ask what concepts about the body and the limits of its acceptability are conveyed by architectural form, and how this relates to broader sociopolitical and existential issues.

Bracketing the concern with how individuals may or may not interact in the built environment does not detract from understanding the social content of
architecture. An architectural object's accommodation of physical relationships between individual bodies no doubt makes manifest its social dimension. However, this study focuses on the social implications of how such objects mark the limits within which a moving and feeling body is even thinkable.

**Experiential Phenomena**

The approach to architecture explored here is related to approaches based on action and sensation, although its preoccupations differ enough to elicit some tension. Those approaches encompass a variety of concerns, ranging from how the body makes use of architecture to how architecture makes bodies useful. At one end, a flight of stairs is alternately a seat, a bookshelf, a mountain, and a means to access an upper level, depending on the user's needs and imagination.\(^{15}\) At the other end, the factory floor is a place to arrange machines and people for the optimal extraction of the body's labor.\(^{16}\) I also include here a loosely phenomenological line of thought in architecture, which—and this is not the same as strict philosophical phenomenology—posits the human body's sensual experience as the legitimate reference for material form. This view characterizes a range of studies and projects that highlight the rapport between

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architectural form and sound, smell, touch and (more commonly) vision. In contrast to these lines of thought, this study is concerned with the place, in architectural work, of corporealties that in particular contexts are neither capable of experience, nor of any use. It attempts to articulate a relationship between architecture and the human condition that can not be addressed through approaches where activity is the sole basis for an architectural object's efficacy. This is not to say that those approaches can neither reveal the richness of architecture's occupation nor contribute to improving the adequacy of buildings to defined needs, be they of humanist or productionist nature. Rather, it suggests that a different yet related approach may better address certain existential and socio-political issues that require attention to corporealties that defy attempts to make the body live.

Two strong currents in architecture theory are important points of reference for this study. The first is a more properly philosophical current of architectural phenomenology; the second approach is concerned with experience and social subjectivity in architecture. Both depend on the body's motion and sensation in order to make claims about architectural form. They therefore constitute reserves for an investigation of architecture's insistence on life. However, they are not closed or finished, and indeed already overlap insofar as the second developed in part as a critique of the first. Furthermore, each states the basic problem of corporal limits in a particular way: in the first, it takes the form of mortality as an existential predicament, while the problem manifests itself
in the second as the differentiation of social beings based on bodily traits. This dissertation attempts to draw transversal connections between these two dimensions of the body in order to disrupt what functions as a stable division in both. It therefore poses a critique of aspects of these two currents in order to extend the field of possible inquiry to zones they have tended to avoid. Shedding light on additional points of contact between architecture and the human condition may contribute to developing both phenomenological and social-subjective approaches to architecture. Whether or not that contribution proves beneficial, my investigation would not be conceivable without phenomenological and social-subjective currents. It is therefore better understood in relation to them.

The first current draws on the writings of Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger and others, and sees itself as the antidote to the “functionalization” of architecture theory. It is strongly represented by the work of Alberto Pérez-Gómez, who argues that architecture theory’s gradual domination by a technological world view began in the middle of the seventeenth century and accelerated rapidly around 1800, culminating in what is perceived as a twentieth-century crisis in the interrelationships of theory, practice and embodied experience.17 For Pérez-Gómez, the problem is that architecture theory has developed through a scientific conceptual framework that is not

17 Alberto Pérez-Gómez distinguishes between on the one hand technology, which eschews the lived world (Lebenswelt) and its related mythos and poiesis in favor of the truth of scientific laws, and, on the other hand,
compatible with reality. That framework “rejects, or at least is unable to cope
with, the richness and ambiguity of symbolic thought.”\textsuperscript{18} It has produced a set of
methodologies, typologies, and functionalisms that maintain the primacy of
mathematical exactitude over the primacy of perception.\textsuperscript{19} Architectural
phenomenology therefore revalorizes the body's sentience as an integral aspect
of meaning and knowledge. It would overcome the body's Cartesian divorce from
the mind with a belief in the continuity between thought and action. This line of
phenomenological thinking tactically resituates embodied perception as the
“primary form of knowing” in opposition to the abstractions that facilitate modern
science. From there, architectural design theory can be reconceptualized as the
extension of the body's "geometry of experience" outside of its own spatiality into
the built world, where it would create "an order resonant with the body's own."\textsuperscript{20}
Like the less formal phenomenological approaches but with greater stakes and

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\textsuperscript{18} Pérez-Gómez, 6.

\textsuperscript{19} This notion of "the primacy of perception" is a major aspect of
architectural phenomenology. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, \textit{The Primacy of
Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy
of Art, History and Politics}, ed. James M. Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern

\textsuperscript{20} Pérez-Gómez, 3.
more rigor, the body’s “engagement in the world” here is the locus of architectural meaning.

The present investigation shares this phenomenology’s interest in architecture’s link to existential problems and the body’s importance in that relation. So, too, for the presumed rupture between what pure science can address and how individuals understand their world. A related concern is the ethical lapse that occurs when life itself comes under the same process- and product-oriented scientific apparatus as other parts of the world that humans modify and transform.

However, a few aspects of phenomenological architecture theory in its current form are problematic for the questions pursued here. Like approaches based on interaction with the built environment, phenomenology’s body is a priori more or less mobile and sensate. The insistence on life in this phenomenological strain of architectural thought is not more problematic on its own than in other cases. However, discussing its link with few key issues help to clarify the present investigation’s position. First, Pérez-Gómez’s architectural phenomenology tends to downplay both social aspects of experience and historically contingent changes in how the body is understood. For Pérez-Gómez, phenomenology discloses the world of experience “as one where the universal and the specific are given simultaneously in the mystery of perception, in the space between
Being and Becoming.”


23 Regarding the body's essence, Marc Perelman explores what might be the other side of the phenomenological coin. His “negative” criticism of architecture's relation to the body, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, aims to “liberate, in the most profound sense, the body and architecture from all forms of constraint, of power, that subject one to the other, one by the other, and that finally mutilate them.” His study, which focuses mostly on the Renaissance through Enlightenment to the modern period, attempts to reveal what he considers “one of the main mechanisms [rouages] of society in its current form ..., and to perform a systematic critique of that state.” Instead of a critical architecture, Perelman calls for a critique of architecture, which "would not be a utopia for the body but rather the body of utopia. We may not yet know what architecture should be for the body, but at least we now know what it should not be.” Notwithstanding Pérez-Gómez’s aversion to the line of Frankfurt School thought that Perelman follows, it strikes me that both attempts to trace architecture’s historical drift from an acceptable relationship with the body towards its corporeally impoverished state tend to construct, by default, an
positivist attitudes toward the body, I am uncomfortable with the notion that we can conceive, independently of our own social and cultural moment, of a body that is prior to historically contingent ideas.\textsuperscript{24} In contrast, I am interested in the process by which use-based invocations of the body define acceptable corporealities. The concepts that result are not screens in front of the body’s essence, but the means to an end with social and historical repercussions that should be engaged. The phenomenological current argues that architecture theory has excluded a more real or authentic corporeality that should be rehabilitated; I claim that the phenomenon of exclusion is the source of a critical engagement with dominant ways of thinking about the body, including those that posit an essence for it.

On another register, Pérez-Gómez’s phenomenology asserts that embodied experience realizes an intentionality that the architect has embedded in the work. This is why the architect’s intentions must be relieved of their objectivist technological orientation and grounded in the life-world. Indeed, the stakes are about correcting a historical anomaly. For Pérez-Gómez, the divorce untainted, generic, essential body. On another note, Perelman’s study also considers urban questions. Marc Perelman, \textit{Construction du corps, Fabrique de l’architecture: Figures, histoire, spectacle: Une Critique de l’ordre visuel moderne} (Montreuil: Editions de la Passion, 1994), 33-34. My translations.

\textsuperscript{24} The degree to which ideas of normal corporeality change through time and cultures, without necessarily indicating a prior or superior state, is brought into relief in David Theodore’s observation that early seventeenth-century architect Inigo Jones, an adept of a humoral medicine that prescribed therapeutic vomiting and nourishing clysters, “regularly ate food through his ass and shat waste out his mouth.” David Theodore, “‘Aproufl on my self’: Inbetweent the Sheets of Inigo Jones’s Palladio” (Masters Thesis, McGill University, 2000), 14.
between mind and body is suffered today only by an uninformed majority whose ranks include architects and others: "Although Cartesian dualism is no longer a viable philosophical model, faith in mathematics and logic as the only legitimate way of thinking is still commonplace." The "inversion of priorities that originated in the scientific and philosophical speculations of the seventeenth century has never, at a popular level, been corrected." Inverting the original inversion would seem to return us to a prior relation to the world, and this can be carried out in part through the architect's "poetic making."

That hypothesis assumes that bad ideas make bad objects, which prevent individuals from reconciling the ambiguities of human existence. I am skeptical of the one-to-one translation of intentions into form. Too many of the pieces that go into constructing architecture find their place independently of the architect's conscious decisions or intuitive moves, even when the process is immersed in a careful understanding of the rituals that await their architectural setting. Is it not possible for a supremely mathematical and economical architect to produce a work that provides its occupants with the kind of reconciliation that Pérez-Gómez desires? This is not the same as the monkey-typewriter-masterpiece argument, which assumes both non-understanding of the medium in production and transparent reception. Regardless of the quality of their intentions, architects design buildings with at least a minimal knowledge of how they work. On the other hand, the problem that phenomenology wishes to address through a

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revolution of the design process might be better addressed where users take
hold of the meaning-making process. I am not suggesting that building occupants
are like primates who can not read. The problem is that phenomenology would
bring the good news of reconciliation to the masses through the buildings that
good architects make. It tends to cast the object as a reliable vessel for
transmitting a poetic consciousness of the human condition. It therefore places
much more emphasis on improving or celebrating the architect’s way of thinking
than on analyzing architectural form’s capacity to manifest what is intended.²⁶

Robert McAnulty points out that while Pérez-Gómez identifies
“authenticity” at work in John Hejduk’s Masque projects, Le Corbusier’s Priory of
La Tourette, Alvar Aalto’s Paimio Sanatorium, Mies van der Rohe’s Barcelona
Pavilion, and Antoni Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia church, it is not clear what shared
characteristics make each work capable of embodied transcendence.²⁷ I am not
certain that common architectural qualities or effects could not be found in Pérez-
Gómez’s explanations. However, the more problematic aspect of this sort of
architectural analysis is its circularity, in which it assumes the kind of bodily

²⁶ This is a simplified presentation of intentionality in architecture. The full
implications of intentionality would require more space than is available here.
However, even if a properly phenomenological notion of intentionality joins
building occupant and architect in the same orientation toward the life-world,
Pérez-Gómez’s argument and its manifestation in his pedagogy implies the
priority of the architect’s intentions.

²⁷ Robert McAnulty, “Body Troubles,” in Strategies in Architectural
Thinking, ed. John Whiteman, Jeffrey Kipnis and Richard Burdett (Chicago, IL:
Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism, 1992), 185.
experience that would “reconcile” the “mystery” of perception, finds it (and only it) possible in the work, and attributes its presence to the architect’s avoidance of modern architecture theory.²⁸ To be fair, such an approach does not deny that an architectural work may either allow “authentic” experience despite its architect’s functionalist intentions, or alternatively allow non-authentic experience despite its architect’s “poetic” intentions. However, neither does it help to understand those possibilities, which, even if conceivable, are not easily compatible with promoting the architect’s role in the matter. In contrast, I speculate that architecture is unreliable precisely where it demands embodied experience to make its point. Therefore, I am not concerned with asking if conceptual limits in modern architectural thought cause bad architectural design (it may be true, although perhaps for reasons other than those claimed by architectural phenomenologists). I am interested rather in whether an aspect of architecture’s relationship to corporeality goes unaddressed so long as embodied experience is “given.” That aspect is specifically the limit between bodies that could fulfill the

²⁸ “Theory may work well on a formal level, but it is unable to come to terms with reality. Correlatively, practice has been transformed into a process of production without existential meaning, clearly defined aims, or reference to human values. Or else practice has ignored its connections to theory in order to recover its poetic dimension. This last situation is evident in some of the best examples of contemporary architecture. Obviously, certain buildings by Le Corbusier have very little to do with stated theoretical intentions.” Pérez-Gómez, 8. This last reference to Le Corbusier appears to distinguish between “stated” intentions and another intentionality still residing in the architect’s agency. I will discuss the case of La Tourette in chapter 2.
intentions that architectural phenomenology would invest in a work, and those that could not.

The corporal limits that I am referring to are not endemic to architecture. Their links to both broad social phenomena (ideologies of stimulation and performance) and existential preoccupations (desire and the apprehension of death) suggest that they are neither solely a matter of architectural intentions nor independent of historical contingencies. Encounters with architecture happen in contexts with unpredictable social, cultural and individual mediating factors. One could ask if architectural phenomenology’s dependence on a human essence and its related corporeality can account for individual experiences that are in part determined by the body’s sex, its sickness, its age, or by social environments characterized by discrimination, oppression or on the contrary encouragement and even insistence on particularities. One could answer that yes it can, since it seeks to provide the transcendence that all humans can recognize. However, the ease with which reconciling the human condition can become synonymous with accepting “how things are” is reason for caution. Thinking of architecture as that which helps to transcend problems on the ground risks passing over its capacity to sustain a discussion about those problems.

The extreme case serves as an example. Phenomenological architecture theory aims to reconcile the “eternal and immutable dimension of ideas” with the human being’s finite existence.29 “Authentic architecture,” Pérez-Gómez asserts,

"has always enabled man to come to terms with his mortality and to transcend it."\(^{30}\) Mortality is one of the "radical ambiguities of existence" that, up until about 1800, "were always explained by acknowledging a residual but most important mythos," which has been excluded from positivist and functionalist theories of architecture.\(^{31}\) Reconciliation and transcendence could occur if the knowledge that founds architectural design takes mythos into account. To realize this goal, however, bodies must use architectural objects. The prospect of non-sentience that characterizes death is elided. By a strange reversal, this forecloses an investigation of how the insistence on bodily vitality helps to leverage knowledge of the body into a finer and more pervasive grasp of existence. The search for authentic architecture may intend to undermine instrumental notions of life. However, as I will explain in chapter 3, such invocations of vital bodies fit uncomfortably well with the epistemological phenomenon that Michel Foucault describes under the rubric "bio-power," and which is characterized by the body's instrumentalization.\(^{32}\)

The mythos that reconciles ambiguities also seems to avoid questioning how the notion of death functions in the contemporary moment. Since architectural phenomenology assumes that architecture's inability to address

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\(^{32}\) I discuss the relationship between the discourse of bodily experience and the body's instrumentalization in chapter 3.
death is an error of history that ought to be corrected, it is not concerned with what that supposed failure means beyond signaling a need for better architectural praxis. For architectural phenomenology, the disjunction between what exists and what can be thought is a gap to close. In contrast, I am interested in prying into that gap to reveal something about the ground that is taken for granted. Who is this “man” who should transcend his mortality? If architectural objects fail to support reconciling his awareness of death, what do their remains say about the culture that hosts them? What is hidden by the modern myth that tolerates neither signs of the body’s failure nor reminders of mortality? Death is only one of the “radical ambiguities of existence” that a phenomenology-inspired architecture would transcend. Would the other ambiguities not better be questioned?

Architecture’s failure to take hold of the body fully may not indicate a lack, but on the contrary an excess. My interest is not to reincorporate an excluded mythos into knowledge, but rather to see exclusion as that through which architecture sustains its potential to “mean” something more than what a body can reveal through use. Between what architecture can address through ideal mobility and sensation and the absolute absence of life, there is a grey zone of bodily ambiguity: infirmity, disability, and, in certain social and cultural contexts that remain familiar, non-maleness and non-whiteness. This dissertation asks how that grey zone facilitates a critical engagement with the definition of bodies that fulfill the role of realizing architecture’s meaning. That process of definition is
inseparable from a larger dynamics that links the broadly social to the specifically individual. A critical exploration of how these planes interact requires suspending both architectural phenomenology’s belief that the object is a reliable vessel for transcendental intentions, and its implied reliance on normal embodied experience as a way of reconciling ambiguities.

*Subjective Experiences and the Lack of Experience*

Some of the limitations of phenomenology that I have outlined here have been addressed by other approaches to architecture, which notably subscribe to the primacy of embodied experience while trying to maintain its potential for a radical engagement with the world “as given.” John Biln identifies the unfortunate persistence of “essentialist” phenomenologies in architecture, which have not confronted the conservatism that critical reassessments of phenomenology in other fields have addressed.\(^{33}\) Some have argued that recourses to a “universal subject” in phenomenology are unwarranted, as they instrumentalize perception in support of metaphysical assumptions. In contrast, there is evidence that the tradition linking Hegel through Husserl to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty contains the understanding that “human experience must always be partial, contingent

and intersubjective." Biln suggests that it may be possible for a practice to adopt some basic phenomenological concerns without positing a universal perceiver. Such work might address the social and ethical project that characterized architectural modernism, and which is resurfacing in some recent movements, with an anti-essentialist approach to sensual perception that is perhaps closer to Hegel’s phenomenological epistemology than that normally found in architectural writing. This alternative points in the direction of architectural studies and theoretical models that would account for phenomenology’s shortcomings without renouncing the importance of spatial occupation and sensory perception for any theory of architecture.

A number of investigations in the last twenty years have looked into the relationship between architecture and experience rooted in corporal specificity. Although not all could be included under the rubric of a non-essentialist phenomenology, their engagement with a variety of issues that link social and cultural phenomena to highly personal experiences contributes to a broad investigation of social subjectivity in architecture. Discussions have focused on race, gender, sexuality and class, categories that offer strong critical tools for


35 Biln considers Ben van Berkel and Caroline Boos’s architectural production and commentary (and, with some reservation, the work of Steven Holl) to be headed in that direction. “Lines of Encounter,” 311-312.
understanding architecture and society. Each of these areas of critical investigation contains a corporeal aspect: biological sex for gender; body form and skin color for race; poise, comportment and utility for class. Depending on the point of view, it can appear that discriminatory structures based on some "real" quality of the body are supported by architectural form, or that such qualities are a byproduct of architecture, or are recorded in it, or that a link between a quality and an experience is mediated by architectural objects. In the wake of the variety of careful investigations into architecture's place in the relationship between corporeality and society, it is difficult to deny that buildings and architectural discourse contribute at least in part with the differential treatment of bodies according to their individual markings. One of the difficult subjects explored in that work is the degree to which that contribution is inherent in architecture's materiality, or rather is a function of socially-determined spatial practices, or is situated in between.

A common assumption in such discussions of gendered, sexed, raced and classed bodies is that all bodies falling within architecture's realm of significance move and feel. For example, whether considering feminist studies of the discipline's alternating refusal and appropriation of women's bodies, or post-

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colonial critiques of architecture used in socially oppressive contexts, or Marxian analyses of the rise of the housing problem in relation to industrialized production processes, the necessary precondition is that all the bodies involved see architectural objects, are affected by them through various senses, use them in some way or another or, alternatively, are prevented from using them as others can and do. If those studies trace a line that separates a dominant discourse or culture’s proper body from improper corporealities—woman, native, replaceable—it still assumes an underlying predisposition for mobility and sentience in each individual.

In contrast, this investigation focuses on how the difference between a condition recognized as properly corporeal in architecture and one that is not is structured around the problem of non-life. This is not to deny that one social implication of architecture is that a built line can separate two types of people (black/white, male/female, free/imprisoned), but to ask further: how are bodies that would not make the scene is involved with architecture?

The topic of bodily vitality in architecture is not simply a matter of a generic opposition between life and death. Rather, it can contribute to explaining specific social phenomena where the absence of vitality occupies a grey zone of corporealities that are not fully alive for architecture. By explaining social phenomena, I mean both explaining them away (in the ideological sense) and, more optimistically, pursuing them to their critical limits. Understanding architecture’s insistence on the body’s vitality could never address the full range
of social phenomena on its own. My goal here is to ask whether life’s opposite in architecture helps to imagine extending certain critiques beyond their proper realm of application. I therefore do not discuss social subjectivity as a function of specific architectural forms or settings. Rather, I focus on the disruptive potential of architecture’s physical, material qualities, which I argue may be activated by suspending the requirement that architecture relate directly to the body’s vitality. In other words, I entertain a certain lack of experience when reading an architectural work. This position’s transversal nature with respect to critiques based on specificities may contribute to delving further into architecture’s relationship to social subjectivities and identities that are mediated by the body.

A final note about my intentions: this investigation does not attempt to emancipate bodies deemed abnormal from an oppression that excludes them from experiencing architecture “like everyone else.” I fear that such an effort might only encourage the incorporation of secret and informal areas of daily life into a relatively narrow view of experience. Rather, I am trying to understand how architectural work relates to human experience taken broadly (and not only as the byproduct of using or occupying buildings), how it marks where it fails that relationship, and how that failure opens up other prospects for thinking about architecture and the body.
Outline

Chapter 2 (Straddling the Limits: Vitality in Architectural Writing) considers a selection of writing pieces whose discussions of architectural objects invoke bodies to support them. This is not a priori unusual, but these texts are cases where seemingly awkward references to dead or otherwise incapacitated bodies throw light on the assumptions of vitality that underwrite different aspects of architectural thought. Moreover, the bodies from beyond the limits of conceivable corporeality suggest a rereading of each text’s explicit argument, and point to alternative ways to understand the social and poetic aspects of architecture’s relationship to the body. The limits of intelligibility in architecture seem to be linked to the limits of normal or acceptable corporeality—the extreme case where Balzac suggested that “science becomes madness”. In order to pursue questions around those limits, I consider Aldo Rossi’s use of the term “the deposition of the body.” I recast it as an approach that brackets the body’s vitality, physical ability, and self-control as preconditions for architecture to make sense, and thereby open up the intermediate space where life and non-life are not so readily distinguishable.

This theoretical approach involves questioning the interpretation of architectural works. It hypothesizes a reading practice for architecture that is neither hypercritical of contemporary body concepts nor complicit with them, but that rather displaces some assumptions about corporeality in architecture to reveal the complexity of a work’s social and cultural dimensions. Architecture
would not be only the representation of an ideal body, nor the codification of knowledge about the body, nor a multidimensional stimulant, nor a device of bodily control or liberation, but rather the *mise en scène*—perhaps despite itself—of struggles around defining the limits of corporeality.

At the same time, the texts discussed in the second chapter suggest how architectural writing produces and reproduces notions of normal corporeality. The bodies in architecture tend to be “on the move,” doing something or other. They are generally productive: of meaning, of effects, of more architecture. Taken to an extreme, one might worry that architecture has the potential to develop knowledge about the body, to reduce what one imagines the body to be and what corporealities are acceptable, and to channel the body to ends only measurable in terms of utility. Chapter 3 (Establishing Boundaries: Michel Foucault) reviews some key notions from Michel Foucault’s genealogies of modern society in order to speculate on architecture’s role in extending certain conceptions of the body to greater areas of human experience.

On the one hand, that discussion raises the question of our compulsion to make and to read architectural works with a body in mind. On the other hand, it draws attention to the limits that Foucault’s notions of bio-power and normalization imply. Chapter 4 (Border Struggles: Michel de Certeau) explores these two aspects of the problem through the writings of Michel de Certeau, with a focus on his preoccupation with the relationship between the body and writing in modern societies. Starting from de Certeau’s interpretation and extension of
Foucault’s conceptualization of the body and society, this architectural reassessment of de Certeau’s thought highlights its synthesis of the socio-political and literary-poetic aspects of creative works. It focuses on de Certeau’s recurring interest in how works that record the body as traces partake of a “scriptural economy” with both social and existential dimensions. De Certeau’s notion of a scriptural economy links the social dynamics that determine the limits of acceptable corporeality with existential preoccupations with those limits. The chapter discusses how approaching architecture as a cultural work in such a scriptural economy of the body may reveal its pertinence with respect to both social and intimate aspects of corporeality, such as desire and the apprehension of bodily illness, failure and death. It reconsiders the deposition of the body as an orientation for reading architectural works, and introduces the notion of nonsense as that which expands architecture’s relation to the body beyond its comfort, utility and leisure.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider two cases where architecture hosts struggles over the definition of corporal limits. Each chapter draws from diverse fields in order to read architectural objects through a deposition of the body. These readings focus on domestic architectural works: The Stone House (Herzog and de Meuron, Tavole, Italy, 1985-88), and the houses that appear in the film Margaret’s Museum (Mort Ransen, Canada, 1995). The readings reveal profound relationships between architecture and the anxieties about the body that preoccupy individuals and societies. They map how different aspects of
architectural form participate in that relationship, including spatial arrangements, material qualities, construction processes, and formal transformations. Each case is a marker for how a critical approach to bodily vitality can initiate the unraveling of specific social issues through architectural means.

The first reading addresses the distinction between a body that controls its waste, and a body that does not. I discuss the Stone House in relation to episodes of socialization in which the conjunction of the body, its filth and space become problematic in the domestic realm. With reference to political philosophy and psychoanalytic theory, the Stone House's spatial and material qualities support an exploration of bodily propriety in relation to childhood development. The combination of self-control and social control suggests considering how architecture crystallizes preoccupations with the body's limits beyond childhood, in particular with regards to illness and aging.

The second reading engages the complex overlap of the body's sex, instrumentalization and death. Two houses animate that conjunction in Margaret's Museum, a melodramatic film set in a 1950s Nova Scotia coalmining town. The respective houses of a young woman and her mother negotiate the figure of the widow. The widow is problematic in this setting because the lost male body is both privileged by patriarchal social structures and de-privileged through the impersonal mechanisms of capitalist modes of production. The houses' contrasting landscape situations, construction processes, formal structures and programs parlay the film's narrative into a reconsideration of the
distinctions between bodies that are useful and useless, male and female, scientific and poetic, and alive and dead. The reading describes how architecture can orchestrate a struggle at the social and cultural limits of the utilitarian notion of the body with its assumptions of self-control, mobility and vitality.

The conclusion reviews the theoretical framework developed in the investigation, as well as the findings in the readings. It discusses some of the shortcomings in the proposed approach to architecture, as well as some potential areas of development. It returns on the place of Michel Foucault and Michel de Certeau in the study, and proposes a broader intellectual framework for this kind of work. In particular, it considers how an investigation into bodily vitality in architecture seems inseparable from questions raised in gender studies, and how it may draw from and enter into the growing field of disability studies.
CHAPTER 2

STRADDLING THE LIMITS: VITALITY IN ARCHITECTURAL WRITING

Discussions of architecture tend to reproduce conventional ideas about the body by implying average bodily states as the basis of an argument. Those states inhabit the reader's thoughts even when they are not mentioned or described—and perhaps especially when they are passed over in silence. The conceptual framework around architecture is replete with references to physical experience whose byproduct is an image of a body of average size, with normal sensory perception, and having the ability to move around without any particular problem. This is especially true in texts that focus on architectural form.

Occasionally, a text makes reference to a bodily state that undermines rather than supports its argument. The coherence of the text depends on evoking bodily vitality and self-possession, but it inexplicably mentions their opposites. These are not the kinds of references to specific bodies that one finds in focused discussions about blindness, physical disability, or infancy. They erupt as strange apparitions rather than as controlled specimens. As though burdened by guilt or disappointment for failing to accommodate certain kinds of bodies in the language that we wrap around buildings, we sometimes write them back into the script, without being able to make them fit. In an apparent challenge to the
discourse's unstated enabling assumptions about architecture's proper body, excluded improper bodily states return. Some hindrance or another, and more particularly some failure of the body indicates a limit condition for understanding architecture in its generally unquestioned role as the setting for life.

Such texts point beyond their own particular terms to a larger problematic in architectural discourse. They indicate the slippage between what architectural discourse apparently needs to say about the body in order to ensure its own coherence, and what can be read in the translation of that need into words. What we read suggests that the demands of architectural thinking cannot encompass many bodily realities that are significant preoccupations of human experience. These realities trouble the writing that we use to represent architectural thought.

This chapter discusses some examples of this phenomenon, covering a variety of types of architectural writing. The first considers the architectural phenomenology that supports Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier's discussion of Le Corbusier's Priory of La Tourette. The second considers Beatriz Colomina's gender critique of Adolf Loos's domestic architecture, which uses the language of subjectivity. The third reviews Aldo Rossi's design narrative about the Modena Cemetery project, as presented in his *Scientific Autobiography*. These discussions address various facets of how architectural form lends itself to considering the limits between bodies that are proper and improper to architectural discourse. Where the first two focus on the break between life and death, Rossi's text allows the discussion to expand what may be called the
border zone. There, the absolute opposition between life and death is nuanced by the different contrasts that can be drawn between any pair of bodies: mobile or motionless, sensate or numb, able or impaired, young or old.

A Limit of Experience

At a glance, there is nothing surprising about Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier’s argument regarding the La Tourette priory (Eveux, France, 1955-59). In their book *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*, this work from Le Corbusier’s late career is held up as proof that a “rich” building “is emphatically not an aesthetic object; it must be used.”¹ Such an appeal is to be expected, as Pérez-Gómez’s previous work had promoted the primacy of bodily experience in architecture, leveling a thorough critique of modern forms of architectural projection that privilege the image over the real.² In this text, the authors call on the personal experiences of a variety of individuals to support their claims. But a conceptual knot arises when the testimony of one witness smuggles a lifeless body into the discussion. The sudden appearance of a body incapable of “using” the building as advocated by the authors seems inexplicable:

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the argument is not only based on real experience, but posits such experience as the only legitimate end for architecture. Adding to the confusion, the testimony states that the building only “functioned” properly in the presence of that precise corpse. In an architectural discourse influenced by phenomenological thinking, an architectural object is paradoxically cast not as that which cradles the body’s sentence, but as that which makes tangible the limits of the physical experience on which that discourse is based.

*Individual Use and De-idealized Experience*

There are a number of distinct but related claims in the La Tourette text. As mentioned above, Le Corbusier’s priory is presented as an example of how good architecture reveals its significance when it is used, and not only when it is seen. A related claim is that “architecture must both reveal and constitute itself through *experience* as a de-idealized notion.”

More specifically, La Tourette successfully communicates, through such experience, the intention of “a careful and thorough, if subversive, rewriting of the traditional programs and rituals” of this kind of building. Another is that La Tourette transforms “the traditional paradigm of Daedalus, the archetypal architectural idea of our Western tradition, [...] into embodied experience,” that is the “experience of the labyrinth.” We might say that the composite claim is that embodied experience—and only

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3 Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, 363. Emphasis in original.

4 Ibid., 362, 363.
embodied experience—allows one to grasp how La Tourette reworks the conventions of a priory; that this entails a labyrinth-like feeling of disorientation; and that La Tourette is therefore good architecture. In other words, under normal conditions, the building is confusing for its users, and that’s a good thing. The accuracy of this assertion can ostensibly be confirmed by individual, particular, “de-idealized” experience. If a body exerts energy to “use” La Tourette, it will sense its meaning as an architectural work. The body’s vitality and sentience will work together in time to fulfill “the work’s intentions.”

The text provides testimony to support its claim. It reports that the building’s “sensitive clients, the Dominican brothers, appreciate it as a most special place, ‘the most spiritual of all Dominican monasteries in France.’”6 The brothers’ words are supported by “distinguished architects” including Juhani Pallasmaa and Daniel Libeskind, who are listed as “witnesses to these remarkable revelations.”7 In a fragment from an interview between Pérez-Gómez and “a young novice,” the latter reveals that “the space is rigorous and demanding”, “always discomforting in a way that vibrates with spirituality.”8 Finally, the claim benefits from the testimony of Alberto Pérez-Gómez himself,

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6 Ibid., 363.
6 Ibid., 361.
7 Ibid., 452.
8 Ibid., 362.
who, we are told, lodged at La Tourette for three days in 1985\textsuperscript{9}: "our experience of the building, despite its remarkably simple plan and the 'familiarity' of all parts of the program, is one of utter and complete disorientation."\textsuperscript{10}

These citations offer a broad range of expertise. Through them, the text about La Tourette creates a place of authority from which it speaks. This is different from compiling testimonials that nameless individuals offer about their understanding of a given built environment.\textsuperscript{11} In contrast to the anonymity of statistical studies that are in the end authorized by the presumed objectivity of science, Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier provide a sample of witnesses whose authority emanates from very specific locations. First, the text cites some of the "clients", then summons "distinguished architects" as witnesses to those reports, moves on to the revelations of "a young novice," and finally invokes its own authorial voice. Together, these appeals to authority cover a lot of ground: the elder brothers' continual presence since the building's origins; the specialized knowledge of significant architects; the initiate's fresh perspective; and the author's erudition. In the confined space of four distinct testimonials, each is leverage for the others, creating a structure of credibility that is the seat of the text's authority to pronounce a fact about individual experience. In a different way

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 452.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 362.

\textsuperscript{11} A classic example of such a study is Kevin Lynch's analysis of a city's visual quality through its residents' mental representations: \textit{The Image of the City} (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
from a statistical analysis of experience, but to similar effect, the La Tourette text incorporates markings that distinguish it from the clamor of other claims.

*The Guarantee of Bodily Speech*

The gallery of experts that we find in the La Tourette text is consistent with a "de-idealized" notion of experience. If the reports from bodies that have used the building are to support the claim, they should be identified with individuals. The names and credentials only serve the text because they can be attached to specific bodies. As a result, the text prompts us to imagine these bodies in the building. There, they speak, they hear, they move, they feel. Each piece of evidence presumes the sentience of the body to which it is attached. For example, Alberto Pérez-Gómez's body is invoked as a guarantor of the argument's truth. The text constructs its authority on the bodily presence and experience of one who writes it. One should believe these words about La Tourette because they come from a body that lived it. An embodied consciousness sensed certain things during its stay at the monastery, and the combination of things sensed supports an argument about what the building is and how it operates.

The words about how the building feels are not copied from another text: one of the authors heard the brothers speak them. (If we doubt him, we are practically encouraged to ask the other architect-witnesses ourselves.) These words refer to speech, and therefore to a physical production. But that kind of
speech refers to another kind of speech, if we understand speech as more than what comes from the mouth. Speech may be all that emanates from the body and that, while offering itself to the senses of others (vision, hearing, touch...), is ephemeral. Speech is perhaps material in its effects (the way shouting "fire" can clear a room), but not in its endurance. It is bodiless and immaterial. Movements and expressions are instances of a “body speech” that is formed through “body language”. From this perspective, material traces such as drawings or writing that refer to using architecture are defined in opposition to the human activity that escapes them. Oral speech is irreducible to the textual transposition that can only organize its ephemerality in a relatively durable form. In a similar way, the actions that architectural drawings, texts and even objects attempt to portray are precisely that which those forms of writing cannot capture, all the while being their very object. Writing about architecture cannot reproduce the experience of occupation or use, so it settles for giving textual form to its different manifestations. These come forth in the code of language, words on paper that take the place of speech.

In the absence of an immediate perception of speech, material traces offer a transcription of words or movements that must have come forth from a living body. Reports about speech imply the existence somewhere else of a sentient body. A text that cites an individual speaking about his or her bodily experience necessarily displays a faith in his or her body’s vitality. The textual conventions that guarantee authoritative testimony (e.g. quotations, footnotes) offer the
additional assurance that once—if not right now—there was a body that emitted sounds, heard them, moved, felt. Each citation in the La Tourette text is a rhetorical device that evokes and frames a specific body’s vitality in terms of its “body speech”. As I read Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s writing about La Tourette, I am compelled to infer steps falling on concrete floors, legs bending to climb stairs, eyes moving across the windows frames, all of the bodily acts that are needed to support the truth of how the building feels (spiritual, uncomfortable, disorienting). In the case of Pérez-Gómez’s testimony, there is no additional mediation. Like the brothers’ bodies but more directly, his body’s “statements” habilitate him to bear witness through textual statements. Beyond asserting only that he was there, the text makes his body “speak” in support of its claim. Each of these speech acts takes the form of a voice that writing tries to preserve. Recorded in material form, the voice can be “heard” far from its point of origin.

In its manifestation in the La Tourette text, phenomenological discourse about architecture invokes a series of named bodies whose sentience must be assumed. It is a risky tactic: to understand what we are saying about the building, you really have to live it; but in case you can not, you must trust the transcription of what others sensed. It is a paradox that a certain kind of architecture theory must accept, and its acceptance allows this discourse to address a range of significant architectural issues. But if we dwell on the paradox a bit more, we can discern an interesting implication regarding the relation between architectural
form and the limit that architectural discourse sets for the bodies that are proper to it.

An Intentional Suffering

Throughout the text, the bodies cited as reference are implied to be living, breathing people. Amidst the many samples of body speech, a quote from one of the senior resident brothers places a body devoid of life inside the Priory: “The only time when the Church has fit like a glove to a function ... is when Le Corbusier’s dead body spent the night here, on its way between the Mediterranean and Paris.”¹²

In Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text, the “austere church”, which defines the northern side of the Priory, is raised as an example of how this architecture “is purposeful, yet it never yields to comfortable use.”¹³ In the church, “the rituals are always uneasy”: the crucifix is off center, the confessional is easily viewed from all angles, and the side altars are accessed through a difficult underground passage. These departures from conventional church planning create confusion, tension and unease. Like the priory as a whole, the church supports Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s claim that Le Corbusier reworked the conventions of this kind of building, and that this intention can be grasped through embodied experience.

¹² Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, 367. Emphasis in original.

¹³ Ibid., 366.
Le Corbusier, having drowned in the sea, rests in this church for one night on his final journey back to Paris.\footnote{Le Corbusier drowned in the Mediterranean Sea off Cap Martin in 1965. His body was transported back to Paris, his principal place of residence, and spent one night at the Priory of La Tourette, which is near Lyon.} His lifeless body is in transit between its two anchors in life: his “cabanon” at Cap-Martin, and Paris, where he has an architecture practice on the rue de Sèvres and an apartment and painting studio on rue Nungesser-et-Coli. The brother’s words suggest that the building temporarily abandoned its tendency to prove unsuitable for the uses to which it is put, and on the contrary corresponded perfectly to the function of Le Corbusier’s wake. On the one hand, this could suggest that the church’s uneasiness and discomfort were suitable for this ritual. To paraphrase Le Corbusier, if a house is a machine in which to live, this church is perhaps tuned to the needs of the dead: unfitness fits, disorientation makes sense, discomfort is just right.

On the other hand, in the context of Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s argument, this testimony indicates the limits inherent in discussing architecture in terms of experience. Le Corbusier’s corpse is the only body in the text that does not possess the vitality necessary to “use” the building. It has no speech and cannot corroborate the claim. Meanwhile, it seems that the dead body’s presence makes the church yield to comfortable use, in contrast to everything the text has claimed so far. The brother’s words present the one case where La Tourette is not lived as disorienting, uncomfortable architecture. At that moment, using the building no longer reveals its intention.
Recall the text’s explicit argument: using La Tourette reveals its intention to rework the conventions of a Priory through an uneasy and disorienting architecture that does not correspond to its function. Judging from references to movement and rituals, those conventions are conventions of use. At the same time, use is embodied experience that reveals intentions. In short, the building functions by not fulfilling its function. But it also functions when it fits the task of housing Le Corbusier’s corpse. It functions for a specific use, whereas it malfunctions (or functions badly) for all other uses, and this malfunctioning is ultimately its true function. This is perhaps the place that Balzac was referring to, “where science becomes madness” for “those accustomed to finding ... in immobility the most horrible of movements.” Where Le Corbusier’s inanimate body is concerned, the reasoned argument about use and experience walks a razor’s edge beyond which its terms cease to make sense.

This observation in no way suggests that we cannot understand what Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier mean. However, the incongruous appearance of a body from beyond the limits of discourse, and its threat to meaning, invites us to “overstand” the text.  

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16 Overstanding includes, for example, asking “What do you have to say, you seemingly innocent child’s tale of three little pigs and a wicked wolf, about the culture that preserves and responds to you?” See Wayne Booth, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 243.
The anecdote about Le Corbusier’s corpse brings into focus the limit beyond which embodied experience ceases to support assertions about architectural form. As a general rule, this may not be surprising. However, the way this limit is raised in the La Tourette text is significant. It is not the same as when a scientific text describes the boundary of its field of relevance (e.g. under certain atmospheric conditions, or for test subjects of a certain age). The text does not say or even imply that Le Corbusier’s dead body is not a good candidate for fulfilling the building’s intentions through use. It suggests that the body’s presence changes how the building feels to those who use it. The brother’s testimony refers to his experience of what it felt like when the church fit its function. The text retrieves Le Corbusier’s body by making the older brother’s body speak. Side by side, it summons two bodies, one necessarily alive, the other necessarily dead. They are in the church, separated by the casket’s wall, but also by the greatest divide known to human kind.

Here, the architectural distinction between life and lifelessness is not what one would expect. The lifeless body is not opposed to the vital body in terms of movement and sensation, but rather inverts how La Tourette’s specific architectural configuration functions. Normally, the building is disorienting, exceptionally it is not; normally it resists easy use, exceptionally it does not. Architecture registers death not as the absence of experience, but as a different experience. What does that other experience suggest about architecture’s relation to life?
Le Corbusier’s presence suspends the architectural intention identified by Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier. By the same stroke, it suggests a different intention on the part of the building. The text implies that La Tourette’s discomfort and disorientation are due to the absence of its architect’s body. Perhaps La Tourette is in its normal state when it houses its architect’s corpse. Its performance under that circumstance would be the datum against which its effects in other states are to be read. When the architect’s body is not there, as is always the case except for that one night, it performs in the mal-functional way that Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier describe. The building is in waiting of a certain body, and in the meantime suffers its inability to seize it. This suffering is passed along to all others who would use it.

This sounds like pettiness. But consider the relation between “architectural writing” (understood as drawings, texts, or objects) and “body speech” (understood as the activity and sentience that writing is supposed to transcribe). They are mutually opposing concepts that can never meet. This material thing—the building—is the trace of a body that has passed by but that it cannot seize. That body is definitely irrecoverable, and the state of suffering becomes the norm. Understood through Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s reading, the building’s effect on living bodies always refers back to this impossibility. The building’s uneasiness and disorientation convey the insurmountable gap between a work of architecture and the body that is its origin and its destination. Yet the building still prompts bodies to engage it, and thereby regenerates infinite times
the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of an encounter between architectural writing and body speech. La Tourette would therefore be a case in which specific architectural form manages to communicate its inability to fulfill the desire inherent in architectural work: to seize the body’s life. From this perspective, the conveyance of suffering is not due to meanness, but to a kind a generosity in which architecture shares a small truth about itself.

When we read backwards from the appearance of the architect’s body at La Tourette, we find a parallel meaning-making process in Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text. Separate from the assertion regarding embodied experience and intentions in architecture, we can understand (by overstanding) that architecture is troubled by its radical difference from the vitality that is its object. It is stone (or reinforced concrete in this case) that comes from flesh, but that can never return. For Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier, the building’s intention involves “a careful and thorough” rewriting of “traditional programs and rituals.” This meticulous transcription of how living bodies may use the building, however, is inhabited itself by an unrelenting reference to a bodily state beyond the architect’s reach. Like the rigor mortis that haunts Perec’s painter’s attempt to depict the lives of his neighbors, death determines La Tourette’s effect on the living.

Just as the absence of Le Corbusier’s body appears to leave La Tourette in a state of perpetual discomfort, the text about La Tourette is left troubled by the impossibility of recovering the bodies it summons. It, too, mourns an absence. For its discourse, architecture’s proper body is that whose movement
and sensation can support claims about good and bad buildings. Its improper body returns in the text as an unassimilated death. It points to the different and perhaps more powerful prospect that corporal limits in architecture are not merely a matter of cohesiveness in a discourse about experience, but are related to the absolute limit that each human knows but cannot claim to have experienced.

**Death in the Family**

In the essay "The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism," Beatriz Cololina explores representation, subjectivity, and gender in Modernist domestic architecture. Cololina develops her argument through readings of house designs by Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier. The evidence consists of drawings, photographs and films of different projects, as well as fragments from both architects' published writing. Her principal claim is historical: in the passage from Loos's *Raumplan* configuration to Le Corbusier's *plan libre*, "The organizing geometry of architecture slips from the perspective cone of vision, from the humanist eye, to the camera angle." This evolution from one conception of architectural form's visual dimension to another is accompanied by changes in how modern subjectivity is understood. In both conceptions, however, the subject

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that goes along with a given work of architecture is constituted through the gaze of a man, and the object of the gaze is gendered female. Each gender maintains its place from one stage of this evolution to the next. But whereas Loos’s perspectival architecture constitutes the subject’s gaze in relation to objectified bodies that appear from and disappear behind walls, the dematerialization of walls in Le Corbusier’s cinematic architecture encloses the female body-object “by a space whose limits are defined by a gaze.”\textsuperscript{19} In other words, Le Corbusier’s architecture is complicit with the camera-like ability of the male gaze to discern the woman’s body wherever it may be found.

Of particular interest in this essay is the hypothesis that Loos’s “definition of architecture is really a definition of theatrical architecture.”\textsuperscript{20} The discussion that supports viewing Loos’s architecture in terms of theatricality casts each individual occupant of his houses as both actor and spectator in a “domestic melodrama”. Everybody in a Loos house may both perform and watch, changing activity depending on the circumstances. The argument therefore rests on the assumption of bodies that move and see. But at a crucial moment in the development of Colomina’s theatrical architecture hypothesis, a dead body is smuggled into her discourse. The smuggler is none other than Loos himself, who is cited to corroborate the argument. This apparently incongruous appearance of a corpse in a text that insists on life links the architectural production of social

\textsuperscript{19} Colomina, “The Split Wall,” 128.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 92.
subjectivity through movement and sensation with the problem of the body’s
terminal lack of vitality, apparently despite the author’s intentions.

Theatricality

Cololina argues that Loos’ work mounts a challenge to the popular
nineteenth century opposition between the external world of business and social
life and the internalized realm of domesticity. In Walter Benjamin’s description of
the nineteenth century, the domestic realm is “a box in the world theater.” In
Cololina’s reading of Loos’s work, however:

It is no longer the house that is a theater box; there is a theater box inside
the house, overlooking the internal social spaces. The inhabitants in Loos’
houses are both actors in and spectators of the family scene.21

The architectural configuration of Loos’s Raumplan, in which “the classical
distinction between inside and outside, private and public, object and subject,
becomes convoluted,” reorganizes the lived experience of the domestic realm.22

For Cololina, the principle architectural element of Loos’s conceptual and
architectural reorganization of domesticity is the raised sitting area that is
perched above the other rooms of the main floor in some of Loos’s houses.
These alcoves are often backlit by a window, adjacent to or surrounded by the
stairs that lead to the upper floors. These “theater boxes” combine intimacy and

21 Ibid., 80.

22 Ibid., 80.
control for the person sitting there, as Colomina suggests in her description of the Moller house:

Anyone who, ascending the stairs from the entrance..., enters the living room, would take a few minutes to recognize a person sitting in the couch [in the raised sitting area]. Conversely, any intrusion would soon be detected by a person occupying this area, just as an actor entering the stage is immediately seen by a spectator in a theater box.\(^{23}\)

A person seated in the alcove is therefore a spectator of the actions of others “onstage” in the house. Colomina notes, however, that “the theater box is a device which both provides protection and draws attention to itself.” The gaze of someone entering the house eventually settles on the box’s intimate space and on its occupant:

The ‘voyeur’ in the ‘theater box’ has become the object of another’s gaze; she is caught in the act of seeing, entrapped in the very moment of control. In framing the view, the theater box also frames that viewer. It is impossible to abandon the space, let alone leave the house, without being seen by those over whom control is being exerted. Object and subject exchange places.\(^{24}\)

With their sitting perches and layers of architectural space, Loos’s houses construct a seated viewing subject that both surveys and risks being surveyed by others. Conversely, these houses construct moving subjects that, walking across thresholds, through rooms and up stairs, are prey to the gaze that emanates from the theater boxes. Here, subjectivity is a question of moving bodies, or soon to be moving bodies, seeing and being seen. For Colomina, Loos’s houses

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 76.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 82.
transform each occupant into a split subject, part actor and part spectator in the melodrama of domestic life.

_Beyond Vitality_

Colomina’s concern with subjectivity contrasts with the preoccupation of Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s reading of La Tourette. While both texts posit the sentient body as the key to pronouncing a “truth” (however limited) about specific architectural objects, they differ greatly in what the appeal to experience is meant to support. Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s phenomenological approach brackets bodily differences and their social effects (e.g. gender, race) in favor of a general “subject” (although this word and its cognates hardly ever figure in their language). The priority of lived experience is both the means and the end. Colomina appears to adhere to some phenomenological tenets, insofar as her readings are not strictly formalist and depend greatly on the inference of lived experience. However, far from subordinating difference to transcendence, she deploys a spatially produced subjectivity in order to discuss how architecture is an agent of difference, specifically sexual difference. We might say that the La Tourette text deals in generalities, while Colomina’s Loos text deals with the particular. But this contrast reverses if we consider the evidence brought forth in each text. Colomina’s readings rely almost exclusively on architectural drawings and photographs of the Loos houses. In contrast to Alberto Pérez-Gómez’s testimony regarding his experience at La Tourette, Colomina builds her
arguments on visual evidence that any reader may study alongside the text. In her text, architectural objects are mechanisms that produce subjects, and their workings can be studied by projecting bodies into their representations, imagining individuals moving through the houses, crossing thresholds and taking their place on couches or at tables. It seems that social subjectivity in a Loos house can be grasped fully as long as we—that is, anyone—imagine bodies with the potential to move. From this perspective, Colomina dwells on the universal, and, by comparison, the La Tourette text concerns the particular.

Despite the seemingly irreconcilable gap between these two ways of understanding the body and architecture, both the La Tourette text and Colomina’s text include references to corpses. As we have seen with the La Tourette text, such references introduce the possibility of reading for implications that extend beyond the stated areas of concern.

Death appears in Colomina’s discussion linking socio-spatial subjectivity to theatrical notions of family life. To illustrate this connection, she quotes Loos writing in *Das Andere*:

Try to describe how birth and death, the screams of pain for an aborted son, the death rattle of a dying mother, the last thoughts of a young woman who wishes to die ... unfold and unravel in a room by Olbrich! Just an image: the young women who has put herself to death. She is lying on the wooden floor. One of her hands still holds the smoking revolver. On

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25 The La Tourette text includes three drawings and three photographs. However, they are not related to the text’s spatial descriptions or argument in the same way as the visual material in Colomina’s text relates to her analysis. In the latter case, the images themselves are presented as the subject of analysis.
the table a letter, the farewell letter. Is the room in which this is happening of good taste? Who will ask that? It is just a room.²⁶

This is the only quote in Colomina’s essay in which Loos reflects on “the question of the house.” One could imagine other domestic dramas that correspond better with a discussion of cones of vision, of seeing and being seen, and of lived intersubjectivity: the “family romance,” sibling relations, peeping toms. Perhaps Loos’s reflection on pain and suicide is only one of many “domestic melodramas” to be found in Loos’s writings, very few of which discuss death. Or perhaps Loos does not discuss such “lively” events anywhere. Regardless, we may inquire into the effects of a dead body’s apparition in the text.

While Colomina’s meditation on the theatrical nature of Loos’s houses rests on the mobility and senses of the bodies that roamed them, here she offers us Loos’s words about the tragedy of dying. Where Colomina’s text appeals to Loos’s own words regarding “domestic melodramas,” there emerges a body from beyond the limit that circumscribes the bodies that are proper to the argument. It is incongruous with the dynamic bias of the text. From Colomina’s perspective, Loos’s complex vertical circulation systems, the sitting nooks, and the hidden steps that slide out from the stage-like drop between contiguous rooms all insist on a sentient body that “gets around”: it climbs stairs, appears across a threshold, is frustrated by the dissociation between visual and physical connections, takes its place in a seat that is simultaneously controlling and

controlled. But the reflection on domesticity from *Das Andere* is not concerned with movement at all. Half of it is devoted to conjuring the image of a dead woman’s body. Loos’s words should support thinking of the house as environment and stage, but it paradoxically dwells on death. Here, *life* in early twentieth century domestic environments is identified with *death*. Loos’s intervention suggests that a dead rather than living body is the index for architecture and family life.

Colomina’s interpretation of the quote is more puzzling: “Loos is saying that the house must not be conceived as a work of art [...] Whereas a work of art, a painting, presents itself to critical attention as an object, the house is received as an environment, as a stage.” Loos’s reference to Olbrich may effectively contrast the gravity of tragic occurrences with the triviality of the decorative style of its setting, and it may be reasonable to infer a conception of the house as environment as opposed to a house as a “series of decorated rooms.” Furthermore, the Loos quote posits a spectator for this ghastly “image”, and death’s domain is ostensibly limited to the stage.

However, the quote sits within an argument that, on the one hand, is based on vision and movement, and, on the other, emphasizes the reversibility of viewer and viewed. If Loos’s houses represent an architecture of “cones of vision” that produce subjectivity through the interplay of physical and visual connections, the young woman who has committed suicide is out of place. Her

dead body does not fit with the text's explicit argument. The dead body does not see, and therefore does not become a subject. But neither does seeing that body produce the kind of subjectivity under consideration. An architectural object may produce subjectivity in an individual in the absence of any other; this is one of Foucault's points in his discussion of the panopticon. Colomina adopts a similar position with regard to how Loos's houses construct crossing gazes: "Whether or not there is actually a person behind either gaze is irrelevant." For Colomina, "architecture is not simply a platform that accommodates the viewing subject. It is a viewing mechanism that produces the subject. It precedes and frames its occupant." She cites Lacan's observation that the gaze functions regardless of the presence of a gazing body:

I can feel myself under the gaze of someone whose eyes I do not even see, not even discern. All that is necessary is for something to signify to me that there may be others there. The window if it gets a bit dark and if I have reasons for thinking that there is someone behind it, is straightaway a gaze. From the moment this gaze exists, I am already something other, in that I feel myself becoming an object for the gaze of others. But in this position, which is a reciprocal one, others also know that I am an object who knows himself to be seen.


29 Colomina, "The Split Wall," 82-83.

The apparent coincidence of Lacanian and Foucauldian thought is not so odd if we bracket their respective larger arguments and consider the basic assertion at this intersection: to think that one is the object of another viewing subject is to become a subject ("an object who knows himself to be seen"). The other body's vitality is central in either case. The threat that induces the reciprocal movement of objectification and subjectification consists of the unperceivable yet potential presence of another living, seeing body. For Lacan, the potential presence is "signified" by the window; for Foucault, it is manifested by the tower at the center of the prison or asylum; for Cololina, it arises from the architectural framing that splits every occupant into part spectator, part actor. The intersubjectivity that Cololina discusses may be based on how the architecture of Loos's houses creates that potential for visual encounters between bodies and not on actual encounters themselves. But the potential only exists as long as one assumes bodies that move and see.\(^{31}\) Subjectivity is intersubjectivity, insofar as it is a function of the belief in another's presence. Within this discourse, the dead body can not itself be subjectified, since it neither moves nor sees; and its objectification by living eyes does not fit the mechanics that Cololina attributes to Loos's houses, in which the object viewed must reciprocate the sense of objectification through its own ability to see. Incapable of intersubjectivity, this young woman's body is not proper to Cololina's discourse.

\(^{31}\) For example, Cololina remarks that "photographs of Loos' interiors give the impression that somebody is about to enter the room." "The Split Wall," 98.
We might say that the potential for one of Colomina’s imagined occupants to see the woman’s dead body is peripheral to the discussion. Such a body cannot be read in the plans or sections (no sight lines originate from it); it is not inferred from the photographs (it is not about to enter to room). Yet it appears in the text, through Loos’s own words. What is the effect of the reader reading about it? It at least suggests a way of thinking about architecture that differs from the one that Colomina finds in the evidence. Taking the Loos quote alongside the photographs and plans, and in light of Colomina’s development of theatrical architecture, it would seem that all of the domestic method acting that can be read in drawings and images anticipates a very real end to the vitality on which Colomina bases her assessment of the houses. The threat of “being seen while seeing” may be only one aspect of the reciprocal production of subjects and objects in domestic space. The quote form Loos betrays a “stage fright” that tends toward a paralysis of the body rather than toward its movement, and toward its frozen eyes rather than toward its active gaze. Perhaps subjectivity in domestic realms is a function not only of gazes between actually or possibly present bodies, but also of an anticipation of a time when familiar bodies may no longer wander the halls. The possibility that one might discover a corpse in this “stage set” may constitute another kind of threat through which one becomes the subject of domestic social relations. In such a case, it is not the other body’s liveliness through which I become the subject/object—that is, its capacity to move into the scene and see me—but its lifelessness.
This reading does not necessarily exclude that of Colomina. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the construction of a text that directs its readers to consider specific architectural objects in terms of movement and sensation incorporates a reference to a body that undermines its precondition of vitality. That body is not recuperated by the argument, but rather sits with incongruity amidst an ambitious text.\textsuperscript{32} A body that neither moves nor sees troubles Colomina's description of architecture's relation to social experience. That which escapes the textual attempt to grasp the body's movement and sensation returns. Michel de Certeau observed that "Death is the problem of the subject."\textsuperscript{33} Colomina's reflection on gender and intersubjectivity in architectural representation encounters that difficulty, just where it must rely on the body's life.

\textsuperscript{32} The only recuperation that I can identify relates to Colomina's gender critique, which constitutes a common thread throughout the article. She asks "why it is only women who die and cry and commit suicide." However, this question is left aside "for the moment," implying a subsequent return; from what I can tell, that return never occurs. On the other hand, Colomina pursues the idea that, for these architects, women "see nothing"; this is especially clear in Colomina's interpretation of certain texts and images from Le Corbusier. In this light, the inability of the woman's dead body to enter into Loos's architectural intersubjectivity machines is even more pronounced. Working backwards from the observations on Le Corbusier, the inability of the female body to see, and therefore to embody the male gaze, appears consistent with Colomina's argument about gender. But this argument would conflict with the means of its construction, which posits a controlling and controlled seeing subject in the "theater box" alcoves in Loos's houses, which the text states are gendered female.

The Breadth of a Limit

In April of 1971, on the road to Istanbul between Belgrade and Zagreb, I was involved in a serious auto accident. Perhaps as a result of this incident, the project for the cemetery at Modena was born in the little hospital of Slawonski Brod, and simultaneously, my youth reached its end. I lay in a small, ground floor room near a window through which I looked at the sky and a little garden. Lying nearly immobile, I thought of the past, but sometimes I did not think: I merely gazed at the trees and the sky. This presence of things and of my separation from things—bound up also with the painful awareness of my own bones—brought me back to my childhood. During the following summer, in my study for the project, perhaps only this image and the pain in my bones remained with me: I saw the skeletal structure of the body as a series of fractures to be reassembled. At Slawonski Brod, I had identified death with the morphology of the skeleton and the alterations it could undergo. I now realize, however, that to regard death as a kind of fracture is a one-sided interpretation.

Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* 34

Near-immobility caused by a traumatic accident, bones broken from head to toe. Looking, but not thinking: the gaze bereft of cognition or contemplation. Here is a body that architectural writing could not ask to move around and feel, to read design intentions, to perform measured tasks, to acquire subjectivity in a spatial machine, or to become one with its environment in a transcendental experience. It is even less a model for desirable biological or physiological metaphors. This body is characterized by what escapes the purview of architectural description, or perhaps what representations of architecture need to forget. Flesh that neither moves nor thinks is not conducive to architectural work.

It may exist and even be inevitable, but it is anathema to conventional conceptions of what architecture is and how it relates to human beings.

A Design Narrative

Yet this body is evoked in a text about architecture. This section of Aldo Rossi's *Scientific Autobiography* discusses his winning design for the San Cataldo cemetery in Modena, Italy.\(^{35}\) It is a narrative account: the project is "born", there are "subsequent drawings", a "first analysis", references to the influence of Italian painting and Turkish architecture, and even to the building's state of construction. These paragraphs are dedicated to the act of design, where the architect projects buildings for a program and a site through a labor of reflection on what exists and on what he or she wishes to exist. As with texts that discuss built works (such as La Tourette or a house by Loos), the act of architectural design is normally inescapably linked to the evocation of vital bodies. That happens here, too, but the presence of a kind of physical disability in Rossi's design narrative suggests closer reading.

Bodily States

Rossi’s references to corporal immobility might be understood to follow from the resonance between his near-death experience and the competition’s building program. The architect’s broken body is ostensibly a point of departure for his conception of a house for the dead. Indeed, the image of skeletal fracture that preoccupied Rossi can be found in the cemetery plan, suggesting at least one clear link between the image of a certain bodily state and architectural form.\(^{36}\) Rossi also describes his design work from the competition period as an attempt “to represent a deposed architecture,” where deposed is understood in relation to “the mechanical possibilities of the body” that are studied in paintings of Christ’s Deposition from the Cross. Furthermore, Rossi identifies a precise moment as both that of his project’s birth and that when his “youth reached its end,” as though becoming aware of his own mortality were inseparable from imagining his specific architectural proposal. In this narrative, the architect’s experience of immobility and the sudden closeness of death appear to condition a particular formal response for funerary architecture.

There is, however, more to this short text than an association between the architect’s suffering and his project. In the space of a few paragraphs, we read about five cities, three or four countries, Renaissance painting, theater, skeletal morphology, serious injury, and childhood memories. And there are other bodies, numerous bodies inhabiting this design story: Rossi’s own able body, first

\(^{36}\) Johnson develops the formal parallels between the human skeletal structure and Rossi’s cemetery design in “What Remains of Man.”
commuting in Eastern Europe, then as a child-like “invisible” body “on the other side of the spectacle”; but also those in paintings, including Christ being removed from the cross and “old people’s bodies” in a poorhouse. The genesis story of Rossi’s Modena project covers the range of bodily states from mobility and sentience through fragility and pain to death. Juxtaposed with references to form, memory and representation, these states offer a sketch of different approaches to the body. It is perhaps only a sketch, but one with many of the necessary elements for a picture of the body that may include immobility, but that is not reducible to it. The bedridden Rossi is not alone. He is just one figure on the shoreline between the body and architecture.

_Bodies at the Limit_

If Rossi’s text is not limited to evoking the bodies that most obviously correspond to funerary architecture, neither is it restricted to the able bodies that generally underwrite architectural thinking. These latter kind of able bodies are indeed here: the driver of a car, the architect observing the construction process, the mourner at a grave. But there are also bodies that seem out of place in architectural description: a body laid up in hospital, old bodies, the cemetery’s eventual “residents”, and a body being removed from a painted scene, its sickly “deposed form” like “the abnormal position which a corpse assumes when it is carried.”\(^{37}\) Throughout these passages, mobility and sensation are contrasted

\(^{37}\) Rossi, 12.
with motionlessness and numbness, disability and suffering. The general
opposition between life and death is nuanced by the different contrasts that can
be drawn between any pair of bodies. Instead of the definitive opposition
between the cemetery’s visitors and its residents, there are relative contrasts
between, for example, the hospitalized body and the old person’s body, the
child’s body and the deposed body. Corporeal life and lifelessness are surely at
play here, and death is the ultimate index against which any of these various
bodily states appears “lively”, if only marginally so. Despite the theme of funerary
architecture, however, the text does not so much operate through the contrast
between life and death as dwell on the limit condition between them.

Rossi’s text gives space to this limit condition. It articulates itself through a
number of cases. In hospital, Rossi himself is at the limits of experience, his eyes
staring without cognition: “sometimes I did not think. I merely gazed at the trees
and the sky”. This leads immediately to an observation about the particularity of
childhood experience: “this presence of things and of my separation from things
... brought me back to my childhood.” Later, the child’s sense of separation is
described as the sensation “of being invisible, of being on the other side of the
spectacle,” a sensation that returns in the adult Rossi as an architectural
experience at the green Mosque of Bursa. Finally, the sense of being invisible is
associated with the general problem of “the inability to live [something] fully” (“art,
except in the theater, is never a satisfying experience” because “of this inability to
live it fully”). This “not living fully” is not quite death, but is rather a border
populated by children's bodies, injured bodies, and bodies that can observe but neither think nor move. Rossi's reflection on designing the cemetery is not an extended analogy between a broken body and broken architecture, but rather an excursus that develops breadth for the limit condition between a living and an unliving body.

Architecture at the Limit

Rossi articulates a concern with this notion of the limit. Reflecting on the cultural specificity of cemeteries, he observes that "There are different customs and forms for the places of death as for those of life, but often we hardly grasp the boundary between the two conditions." Situated at the end of the section on the Modena cemetery, this statement seems to be an invitation to review the formal elaboration of Rossi's design as an attempt to articulate the life/death boundary through architecture.

For the Modena project, one of Rossi's avowed concerns was light and shadow. He mentions the paintings of Angelo Morbelli in the context of "the romanticism of the excluded, of ancient courts and Milanese buildings, public spaces, exaggerated and almost infamous institutions." Morbelli's painting of a hospice served "as the plastic and figurative means for this project":

The study of light, the great bands of light that fall on the benches filled with old people, the precise shadows cast by the geometrical forms of

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38 Ibid., 15.

39 Ibid., 12.
these seats and by the stove, seem to be taken from a manual on the theory of shadow. [...] A diffuse luminosity pervades the large room, where the figures lose themselves as in a piazza. The practice of carrying naturalism to its extreme consequences leads to a kind of metaphysics of the object; things, old people's bodies, light, a cold ambience—all are offered through a kind of observation that seems distant.\textsuperscript{40}

Rossi "constantly thought" about this hospice while designing the cemetery, "and the light which traces precise bands on that section of the painting is the same as that which passes through the windows of this project." It seems that Rossi sought to reproduce in an architectural project the same "metaphysics of the object" that he found in Morbelli's work, through which "old people's bodies" and "light" appear to be objects just like "things." Flesh, light and shadow are discussed in terms of a kind of architectonics that finds its way into the Modena project. The architectural gaze directed at the object of design is the same as that which analyzes Morbelli's painting. Both are a "kind of observation that seems distant." In the painting, the "emotionless distance" is "precisely the deathly air" of the hospice, a place for dying, a threshold between life and death.

The architect's vision takes the body as an object, and Rossi's text develops the ambiguity of that objectification. By drawing a parallel between the architectonic modeling of light and shadow in the hospice painting and that in the Modena design, the narrative account suggests that the cemetery is more a boundary than a city for the dead. Like the hospice, it is a place that accommodates the meeting between the body's life and its opposite.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
Rossi’s more familiar preoccupation with the place of architectural types in the evolution of urban form also arises in the text.⁴¹ Here, as with the architectonics of light and shadow, a seemingly formalist concern is inflected with the problem of bodily states. Furthermore, after having flirted with the Modena project as an architecture of anti-vitality, the narrative now reaffirms architecture’s inseparability from life itself. Observing the project’s erection on site, Rossi finds that “this house of the dead, constructed according to the rhythm of urban mortality itself, has a tempo linked to life, as all structures ultimately do.”⁴² During construction, the cemetery’s form resonates with the processes by which the city builds and rebuilds itself in the face of decay. Designed through attention to “the architecture of the city,” the cemetery buildings establish the relation between the seeming permanence of urban form and the relative ephemerality of individual constructions. Because Rossi cites his own physical experience to authorize this assertion about architecture’s capacity to address both sides of the boundary, the relative contrast between ephemerality and endurance in urban form migrates to the contrast between the body and the object: as architecture, the cemetery sits in relation to both the city’s near imperceptible evolution over the long term, and the comparable transience of individual human lives. Grasping the city’s endurance through time requires that we recognize the mortality of its individual

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⁴² Rossi, A Scientific Autobiography, 15.
parts. In a similar way, gaining an understanding of the city based on the general ability of bodies to experience it must assume the individual body's ephemerality.

The references to architectural light and shadow and to "urban mortality" situate the Modena project's formal elaboration in relation to the problem of grasping the boundary between two conditions: life and non-life. The design process appears to consist of distilling formal influences in order to achieve architectural objects that may or may not be "lived fully". That kind of architecture would evoke bodies with an uncertain status in architectural thinking. As presented in these passages, the Modena project is neither the city of the living nor that of the dead, but the boundary where they meet. It is a boundary that expands into an ambiguous terrain populated by the injured, the sick, the very young and the very old.

More or less normal bodies do appear in Rossi's text. The most conspicuous is that of Rossi himself, suddenly a finely-tuned instrument: "now when I look at those huge, blue, sheet-metal roofs, so sensitive to day and evening light as well as to that of the seasons, they sometimes seem deep blue, sometimes the clearest azure." Whether or not the Modena cemetery produces specific sensations or choreographies is beyond the scope of the present study. Of great interest, however, is the particular way in which the text organizes the distinction between bodies that could corroborate any claim about how Modena makes one move or feel, and those that could not.
The texts about La Tourette and the Loos houses suggest a clean break: dead or alive. Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text implies that La Tourette’s form produces certain effects in vital bodies because a specific dead body is missing. The building alternates between being in and out of sync with its “function” depending on whether or not death is explicitly present. The phenomenological perspective of how the building functions holds as long as death is warded off, but the building malfunctions as long as the dead body is away. In Colomina’s essay, the appearance of a corpse brings the text to imply that a building’s form can structure the anticipation of death’s sudden presence. Precise spatial relationships built from basic architectural elements set the scene for the fear of discovering a lifeless body around every corner. The potential immobility of both viewer and viewed undermines the focus on an intersubjectivity predicated on the body’s motion and vision.

Both these examples throw the limits of architectural thought into strong relief. It is a non-negotiable frontier. In contrast, Rossi’s narrative paints a grey area in architectural discourse. His realization that “to regard death as a kind of fracture is a one-sided interpretation” may refer to more than just bones and their representation in architectural plans. The difference between the ideal body and its nemesis is not drawn along a straight line. There are many forms for the non-life that challenges architectural thinking that relies on an ideal moving and feeling body. Rossi’s text is troubled by the question of limits in a different way from those of Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier and of Colomina, and it is perhaps all
the more troubling for the reader. Where in architectural discourse do we place the young, the injured and the dying? Where can we accommodate those bodies? The programmatic answer is schools, hospitals and hospices. However, the question is not how to distribute bodies in space according to activities and needs. It is about how the mind and material construct one another. In an architectural discourse that relies on making the body live, death is indeed a fracture. But there are bodily conditions and states that, while they do not constitute medical death, are not alive for the sake of architecture. They nonetheless exist, and our awareness of them comes to architecture like a foreign presence. Rossi’s discourse functions like the border zone between two worlds, a staging area where selection has not yet occurred. Between the bedridden architect and the architect supervising construction, a host of bodily states that are not properly architectural are brought into the vicinity of architecture. There, they raise questions about the assumptions that underlie architectural production and reception, and the related disjunction between how we think about the body and what we know about it.

*The Deposition of the Body*

This part of Rossi’s autobiography is evidence that architecture is a foil against which to develop a preoccupation with the body’s fragility and, ultimately, mortality. The limits that fuel such a preoccupation—between mobility and
immobility, sensation and numbness, life and death—traverse the text and are
drawn into a sophisticated discourse about architectural form.

This phenomenon might be named after a phrase from Rossi’s narrative:
the deposition of the body. After describing his stay at the hospital in Sławoski
Brod, Rossi discusses paintings whose theme is the Christ’s deposition from the
cross. They study “the mechanical possibilities of the body,” and convey “a
certain pathos through the abnormal position which a corpse assumes when it is
carried.” The bodily positions depicted “do not occur as a result of an internal
movement,” and “represent everything that is object-like in the body.”

For Rossi, however, “deposed architecture is only partially
anthropomorphic.” The deposition also “admits of a system, an edifice, a body,
wanting at the same time to break that frame of reference and thereby compel us
to see a different significance.” Rossi reveals neither that significance nor the one
from which it differs. On the other hand, he states that this different significance
“is certainly more disquieting by virtue of its impossibility.” This may be an
allusion to the Christian belief in resurrection and afterlife that the paintings in
question assume of their viewers. The disquieting “impossible” significance would
then differ not only from that stemming from a morphological comparison
between the body’s form and a building’s form. It would also differ from that
inherent in the hard distinction between an object-like body and a living body.
Similarly, breaking the frame of reference in which the only significant relation
between architecture and the body insists on the latter's life allows non-life to be something other than nonsense. It requires a suspension of disbelief.

I have discussed how architectural writing invokes bodies to make assertions about architectural form, and how this phenomenon is part of a larger discursive and conceptual assumption of a moving and sensate body. The bodies summoned through such invocations are asked to be present and stand witness. The representational limits of that demand are starkly outlined by the abrupt appearance of corpses. In contrast, Rossi's text does not invoke bodies as witnesses to its assertions. It "de-positions" the body, removing it from its role as the living presence that underwrites architectural truths. For the most part, the bodies it mentions are improper to architectural thought. They loiter in the borderzone, and it is unclear how to assimilate them into conventional ways of conceiving of architecture and the body. Rossi's deposition of the body suspends the insistence on corporal vitality in architectural discourse and thought, and accepts the confusion caused by the irruption of bodies from beyond the limits. If we accept their impossibility for discourse, or their necessary absence from normal architectural thought, we may receive their textual testimony—that is, their deposition—of a significance for architecture independent of insisting on the body's life. That significance may be, as Rossi suggests, "disquieting". But architecture has never been exclusively, or even primarily, a matter of comfort.
Further Questions

The texts discussed in this chapter are examples of how two seemingly opposing needs coexist in one place. On the one hand, there is the tacit assumption of bodily vitality as the basis of statements about architectural objects. On the other hand, there is the need to vent a preoccupation with lifelessness, disability, sickness, or death. The cohabitation is not always without trouble. To the extent that they are implicit rather than explicit, the corporal limits that caution architectural writing are generally more clear than those that haunt the human mind. It is probably no coincidence that Rossi’s prose is inhabited by the question of limits in a way so distinct from the others. As a form, the reasoned argument demands assertions with limits of applicability. Rossi’s design story in the guise of ethereal recollections never has to imply or define its area of relevance. It does not invoke specific bodily states or characteristics to explain how architecture functions. The relation of each body to architecture is oblique. Each contributes to a discussion of memory, of cognition or of contemplation, rather than of how a building makes one feel or what it allows one to see. Those bodies’ failings or qualities are peripheral to the question of architectural effects. The questions they raise, however, are not peripheral to architecture.

Two lines of inquiry stem from this discussion. First, if we can read the problem of holding together the discursive necessity of bodily vitality and the human preoccupation with life’s opposite in texts about architecture, do
architectural works such as buildings also lend themselves to such a reading? It is easy to read the return of exiled bodies in the text. They have adjectives: broken, frozen, disabled, dead. They are special cases: infant, invalid, corpse. But how would such improper bodies manifest themselves in an architectural project? Can we also “read” them there? Beyond architectural form’s familiar capacity to spell out how vital bodies would occupy it, can it refer to bodily states that are not usually understood to fall under architecture’s purview? Second, what stakes are at play in the distinction between proper and improper bodies in architecture? How does this phenomenon in architectural writing relate to conceptualizations of the body at individual and social levels? Is there a theoretical framework that allows a critical approach to reading architecture with respect to body issues? The next two chapters develop the theoretical question through a rereading of the works of Michel Foucault and of Michel de Certeau. Chapters 5 and 6 then return to the practical question—that is, the question of reading works—by considering two cases where architectural form animates the struggle over defining the limits of the body.
CHAPTER 3
ESTABLISHING BOUNDARIES: MICHEL FOUCAULT

The phenomenon of bodily limits in architectural writing suggests a relationship between two major areas of interest in architecture: poetics and socio-politics. On the one hand, imagining bodies in architecture is part of the process of making. This individual creative moment includes architectural design, writing about architecture, and the receptive work of transforming experience into thought. We could inquire into the motivations and stakes at play when one imagines bodies at moments of architectural poïesis. On the other hand, the subject of bodily limits is necessarily a sociopolitical issue. The distinction between proper and improper bodies in architecture has echoes beyond the discipline’s borders, and is affected by developments there as well. The way of imagining corporal vitality, performance, and sensation in daily life as well as in juridical, medical or economic contexts is related to social and political dynamics. Architecture is neither dominant nor isolated in those dynamics, but rather one of many factors that shape the body concepts of a given society. The sometimes turbulent interplay between life and its opposite partakes of both these aspects of architecture. Inquiring into the phenomenon of corporal limits in architectural work requires understanding how these two planes meet.
Michel Foucault’s discussion of “the power over life” and of “the power of writing” in normalizing and regulatory societies provides a theoretical framework for considering the socio-political significance of bodily limits in architectural writing. The notion of knowledge/power is especially important in assessing the stakes of architecture’s “insistence on life.” Resituating architecture in Foucault’s discussion of writing as an aspect of disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms, rather than in the more common spatial discussion, allows us to address epistemological dimensions of corporal limits. Thinking about architectural writing in this way draws relationships between, on the one hand, the texts by Colomina, Rossi, and Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier reviewed in the preceding chapter, and, on the other hand, architecture as writing in general, insofar as architectural form is a medium for representing, developing and applying knowledge about the body. Understood as body writing, architectural work of any kind appears to be caught in a double-bind: the more it is deployed with a view to accommodating individual corporealities, the further power relations extend into the social body. Whether they be medical reports, essays or buildings, traces that produce and reproduce knowledge about the body in general make it possible to draw ever more real bodies under the auspices of a power oriented around corporal vitality. The knowledge used to create architectural work, and the knowledge potentially generated by that work, contribute to focusing our conception of human life on its utility and productive and reproductive capacities.
This appears to be a dead end for any kind of intellectual practice involving architecture and the body. One aspect of Michel de Certeau’s diverse body of work addresses this totalizing scenario in Foucault. Like Foucault, de Certeau discusses writing in relation to life and the body. He speaks of a “scriptural economy” that includes alternating moments of “intextuation” and “incarnation” that tend toward a sort of normalization of the body. In contrast to Foucault, however, de Certeau distinguishes between different approaches to writing in that scriptural economy: that of scientific discourse on the one hand, and literary attitudes on the other. For de Certeau, scientific writing is limited by the body’s death, which it faces “as a defeat, a fall, or a threat.” It wards off an inevitable limit by replacing flesh with text. In contrast, literary writing “is constructed in relation to death.” It is animated by that which Foucault’s disciplinary and regulatory dynamics leave beyond the grasp of knowledge: flesh that is not amenable to the techniques of a society whose power relations thrive on the body’s life. The literary attitude addresses aspects of human existence that elude what de Certeau characterizes as “the framework of levelling rationalities” by hosting the return of corporealities that pose problems for a society organized around utility and constant progress. As a cultural object, such writing testifies to the persistence of something other than the corporealities that lend themselves to the regulation of what the body is and should be. It holds the promise of a critical perspective on the insistence on life in contemporary society, as well as on ethical issues concerning the body that follow from it.
From this perspective, the references to childlike and immobile states in Aldo Rossi's text, for example, are bridges that link architecture to social and political dynamics that define the limits between acceptable and unacceptable corporealities. Suspending architecture's "scientific" or rational relationship to the body reveals how the problems brought by bodily states from beyond society's borders pervade architecture just as they do other works that lend themselves to interpretation and appropriation. In such moments, architecture's relation to the body consists of more than accommodating and harnessing bodily vitality, and its stakes are greater than the coherence of architectural discourse.

This chapter reviews some major themes in two books from Michel Foucault's middle period, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality Volume 1.* Foucault suggests a relationship between the insistence on life, writing, and the spread of productivist notions of the body that establishes a context in which to consider the problem of corporal limits in architecture. I will not undertake a historical study that relates the evolution of architectural discourse with that of the disciplinary and regulatory societies that Foucault discusses in these two books. That would no doubt be a rich and fruitful project, but it is beyond the scope of the present study. The immediate concern here is to develop a set of concepts to situate one aspect of architecture's relation to the body. Casting light on the assumptions of bodily vitality in contemporary

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architectural work will help to describe the social and political terrain where we draw boundaries that keep unacceptable corporealities out of mind.

**Bio-power and the Insistence on Life**

For the first time in history, no doubt, biological existence was reflected in political existence; ... it was the taking charge of life, more than the threat of death, that gave power its access even to the body.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*  

We can consider architecture's insistence on the body's vitality through Michel Foucault's concept of "bio-power". Bio-power describes the relations of forces that, originating in the late seventeenth century, come to surround and traverse the human body in modern Western societies during the nineteenth century. The era of bio-power is that of "techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations." Bio-power is a "power over life" that takes the body as an object of knowledge, a subject of corrective intervention, a target of controlled stimulation and a source of energy. It is characterized by how it "exerts a positive influence on life," in contrast to the repressive mode that

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2 Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1, 142.


4 Foucault, *History of Sexuality* 1, 140.
power assumes in relation to the body in pre-modern societies.\(^5\) Where earlier forms of power were exercised by threatening the body with death, bio-power insists on making the body live. The socio-political dimension of architecture since the Enlightenment, and especially since the early twentieth century, is in part a function of a concern with the body’s well being and the public’s general health that the concept of bio-power describes at the scale of major transformations in Western society.

The “positive” orientation of power over the body’s life is a reversal of social and political forms in which the sovereign’s power was displayed through exemplary corporal punishment. The highest form of such punishment consisted of extinguishing the body’s life: to inflict death was both a way to leverage relative power (by way of physical force in the immediate situation) into absolute power (the prospect of exercising political force over the long run), and a way to demonstrate absolute power through restrained and precise interventions. But as the body came to be perceived as a force of production and reproduction, the power that invested it lost interest in exclusively impeding forces, in “making them submit, or destroying them.” The “deduction” of life “has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others, working to incite, reinforce, control, monitor, optimize, and organize the forces under it: a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them.”\(^6\)

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\(^5\) Ibid., 139.

\(^6\) Ibid., 137.
power describes the relations of forces that invest the body in a world where “the ancient right to take life or let live was replaced by a power to foster life or disallow it to the point of death.”

A more diffuse form of power that exploits the body’s forces in order to further its own political reach replaced the system in which political power over the body was concentrated in the sovereign’s hands. The value of a human life is no longer assessed in relation to an individual who holds power over it, but is a function of its contribution to producing and reproducing the forces that coordinate the political existence of a group. In this context, the body’s life must be sustained, and death marks the limit beyond which power no longer functions, rather than the point at which it finds its highest expression. Henceforth, political goals can be met without the need for exemplary executions. Executions in general are no longer justified in terms of a threat to a specific individual body (i.e. the sovereign’s), but of a threat to the well-being of a collective of bodies. Indeed, execution appears to be a problem, a contradiction: “How could power exercise its highest prerogatives by putting people to death, when its main role was to ensure, sustain, and multiply life?” Only by invoking “the monstrosity of the criminal, his incorrigibility, and the safeguard of society. One had the right to kill those who represented a kind of biological danger to others”—that is, a threat to their individual and collective vitality. The state-sanctioned killing of an individual is no longer justified by the danger he or she poses to a particular

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7}}\text{ Ibid., 137.}\]
body’s life, but to the body’s life in general. In a somewhat symmetrical manner, technologies for the mass destruction of human life developed in the twentieth century, such a nuclear and biological arms, address the limit condition where the survival of a politically circumscribed portion of the human species relies on the deterrence posed by the prospect of the total destruction of life. That kind of power over life in the interest of maximizing the possibilities for living suggests that “a society’s ‘threshold of modernity’ has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies.”

Politics and Biology

Bio-power establishes a link between an individual’s political existence and biological existence, or between socially constructed power relations and the body’s own forces. The body’s life becomes a central actor on the political scene: “the fact of living was no longer an inaccessible substrate that only emerged from time to time, amid the randomness of death and its fatality; part of it passed into knowledge’s field of control and power’s sphere of intervention.” Bio-power is a bridge between the public realm (i.e. control and intervention) and something else. We can’t use the expression “the private realm”, because it is not a question of opposing two levels of individual experience and consciousness, or of collective social organization. The private already assumes a schema of social

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8 Ibid., 143.

9 Ibid., 142.
relations that place individuals in relative positions. The counterpart to public in
this case should be understood as that which is devoid of any official or de facto
“policy” construed in socio-spatial terms. As much as we should avoid positing
the body as something with pre-social essence, for the purposes of
conceptualizing bio-power it is necessary to imagine the simultaneity of a human-
made construct (knowledge-power) and a natural entity that is the object of
knowledge and the subject of power. Bio-power plays by the rules of science,
and therefore partakes of science’s fiction of a natural, pre-social body. Whether
or not there is such a body does not change that scientific knowledge (and here
we can include both the physical and social sciences) has inaugurated a dizzying
array of modifications to the human body by maintaining the distinction between
culture and nature. Whether measured in terms of energy or profits, more can be
extracted from an individual unit of flesh today than ever before. To understand
that development in terms of bio-power, we must grasp the complementary
relationship between politics and biology as that between the forces at play in the
public realm and those emitted by individual bodies.

This new investment of power in life evolved around two poles: an
anatomo-politics of the human body, and a bio-politics of the population. The
former focused on the body as a machine: “its disciplining, the optimization of its
capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and
its docility, its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls.” This
anatomo-politics is associated with the rise of what Foucault called the
“disciplinary society” during the seventeenth and eighteenth century. At another scale, bio-politics concerns the individual body as only one instance of a species, one particle “imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity.” Its main science is demography, addressing such problems as “birth rate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration,” and its goal is to control populations through regulatory processes. These two orientations—the discipline of the body and the regulation of the population—coalesce in “concrete arrangements” such as sexuality and capitalist production during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{10} The “bipolar technology” of these arrangements characterizes bio-power, “a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through.”\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{The Normalizing Society}

A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life.

Michel Foucault, \textit{The History of Sexuality}\textsuperscript{12}

In order to fulfill its task of mastering the processes of life, bio-power relies on “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms.” Bio-power not only

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 139.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 137-9.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 144.
fosters life; it “endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations.”\textsuperscript{13} Proliferations of political technologies assist this regulation, “investing the body, health, modes of subsistence and habitation, living conditions, the whole space of existence.”\textsuperscript{14} In its own turn, this regulatory imperative relies on qualitative and quantitative measurement, along with related functions such as comparison and ordering: “Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus bio-power brings “life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations.”\textsuperscript{16}

There, norms inevitably appear. With qualitative and quantitative information about individual bodies organized in tables and grids, it is possible to develop averages and deviations for the body’s characteristics, actions and behavior—a kind of arithmetic and algebra of the forces of life. Norms are produced from an assessment of real bodies, and can then be applied to qualifying other bodies. Measurements about the body may be direct, such as height, weight, strength, vision and fertility; indirect, such as productivity, adaptability, and reproductive success; and subjective, such as quality of life and desirability. In order to coordinate optimal combinations of living forces, a “technology of power centered on life,” working as both an anatomo-politics and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 144 and 139.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 143-4.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 144.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 143
a bio-politics, tends to effect “distributions around the norm.”\textsuperscript{17} Each body and its actions can be located with respect to what bio-power’s associated knowledge determines to be normal. Concepts about how normal bodies work, what they need, what a body should do, or which bodies are in place and out of place are the foundation for bio-power’s access to everyday actions and experiences. This normalizing dynamic does not arise simply because one corporal activity is promoted over another. Rather, it arises because everything the body is and does is identified, named, and given a place in a table or grid.

\textit{Bio-power and the Disciplinary Society}

The action of the norm marks a profound institutional transformation. The judicial system, formerly focused on exemplary punishment where the body was concerned, “is increasingly incorporated into a continuum of apparatuses (medical, administrative, and so on) whose functions are for the most part regulatory.”\textsuperscript{18}

What operations characterize a “normalizing society?” How are we “made normal?” As far as the art of punishment is concerned, five distinct operations are put into play: comparing individual actions to a rule; differentiating amongst individual actors in relation to the rule, whether that rule indicates a minimum threshold of performance, an expected average performance, or an optimal

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 144. Also see Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 199.

\textsuperscript{18} Foucault, \textit{History of Sexuality 1}, 144.
performance; hierarchizing individuals in terms of whether and how they perform with respect to the rule, which is effectively the location of individuals in precise positions in a system; homogenizing what are understood to be expected and acceptable actions; and excluding those whose difference cannot be recuperated.\textsuperscript{19}

We will consider this last operation—exclusion—in detail later. For now, we will observe that while Foucault develops the idea of a technology that normalizes in the specific context of education (both military and civil) in \textit{Discipline and Punish}, normalization proves to be central to his theorization of bio-power in \textit{The History of Sexuality Volume 1}. For Foucault, “a normalizing society is the historical outcome of a technology of power centered on life.”\textsuperscript{20} Bio-power and normalization are inseparable from the rise of what Foucault calls the disciplinary society, although they each operate at different levels. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the “mechanisms of discipline” applied to individuals “spread throughout the whole social body”, resulting in a form of “generalized surveillance” famously embodied by Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. The possibility of continuous observation and examination facilitated by spatial or technical means contrasted with the pre-modern “schema of exceptional discipline”, embodied by the protocol for handling plague-ridden towns.\textsuperscript{21} In the

\textsuperscript{19} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 182-3.

\textsuperscript{20} Foucault, \textit{History of Sexuality 1}, 144.

\textsuperscript{21} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 209.
disciplinary society, there is no exceptional case, and one's physical and mental state is constantly amenable to assessment and to categorization with respect to norms.

Disciplinary dispositifs—variously called "apparatus," "instrumentations," "techniques," "mechanisms," and "machineries"—came to pervade numerous aspects of human life. They appear in "some of the great essential functions: factory production, the transmission of knowledge, the diffusion of aptitudes and skills, the war-machine." The disciplinary mechanisms discussed in Discipline and Punish share numerous qualities with the regulatory mechanisms that characterize bio-power in The History of Sexuality Volume 1. The qualitative and quantitative assessment of individual cases, with the intention to both act on that case and use it to develop specialized knowledge, is common to both kinds of mechanisms. For example, medicine, psychiatry, education, and criminal law use "techniques and institutions for measuring, supervising and correcting the abnormal." They employ a double mode of controlling individuals: "binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal)..."; and "differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be

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23 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 211.
exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" 24 While this characterization of disciplinary mechanisms refers explicitly to problems of behavior, binary division and differential distribution are actions that also apply to the specific case of the body and its forces, where bio-power has “to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” the bodies in its midst.

*Individualization and Utility*

In light of Foucault's critique of the "repressive hypothesis" and his insistence on the positive, productive aspect of power relations, normalization here does not refer to the increasing hold of constraints over individual acts, as though the problem were that we do less with our bodies today than before the Enlightenment. We no longer do some things while other things we never did before, and arguably an accounting would show that we are in the black. But the question is not whether modern societies reduce the *variety* of actions that we can perform eliminate differences. The question is *to what end* the body's life is oriented, and how:

In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties, and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences. 25

24 Ibid., 199.

25 Ibid., 184.
Individuality is not threatened. Rather, it is exploited to some other end: the production of effects. The processes of normalization tend to optimize the utility of individuals, rather than homogenize their qualities or actions. Conformity is a means, not an end, a "useful imperative" rather than a goal. The norm is a point of reference, a concept that allows us to combine the "shadings of individual difference" in an efficient manner, whether on the factory floor, on the battlefield, or in the testing programs related to human reproduction.

Normalizing the human body is a joint venture of the disciplines and bio-power, where the former "function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals" and the latter is a matter of "distributing the living in the domain of value and utility." The insistence on the body's life in matters of health, behavior, economics and defense led to the possibility of regulating and combining the forces of different bodies for a variety of ends. Disciplinary techniques and the concern with corporal vitality converged to prescribe movements, to impose exercises, and to construct, "with located bodies, coded activities and trained aptitudes, mechanisms in which the product of the various forces is increased by their calculated combination."

Power in a disciplinary society is not something that the managerial or governmental classes hold over others. It is not an individual's exploitable

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26 Ibid., 211.
27 Foucault, History of Sexuality 1, 144.
28 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 167.
property; it works to extend its own reach. We must distinguish between the intentions expressed by those with the resources to create social situations—work, education, correction—and the power effects that result. For example, a sheen of morality lies over the discipline of the workshop: enforce respect for rules and authorities, prevent theft and waste, inculcate a work ethic. But parallel to explicit intentions about reform and the masses, a form of discipline completely devoid of moral content pervades the workshop. It is concerned with aptitude, speed, output and profit; “it treats actions in terms of their results.” A factory manager’s intentions are no doubt influenced by these same concerns and criteria. However, those intentions neither create discipline nor even attempt to justify it. They are parasitic on a way of thinking about human activity that characterizes modern societies, so much so that it is practically invisible. The non-moral content of the disciplines allows power to extend its reach further and further into human experience, without the need for justifications from, for example, managers or teachers. It is nearly impossible to think of the human body in terms other than its productive capacity and ability to improve that capacity (or, in negative terms, to have that capacity diminish through sickness and ageing), and there is no sense that this conceptualization of the body need be explained in moral terms.

A normalizing society cannot be reproached on the grounds that it reduces what people do with their bodies. On the contrary, it disappoints because in

\[29\] Ibid., 210
encouraging us to do more, it reduces what we imagine the body to be.\textsuperscript{30}

Normalization’s byproduct and fuel is the reduction of the conceptual resources at our disposal to think about the body. An impoverishment of vocabulary abets the paucity of imagination, like the loss or elimination of words in Orwell’s 1984, Godard’s Alphaville, and Pèrej’s Le Vie Mode d’Emploi. In the midst of bio-power, our focus narrows on the body’s productive and reproductive capacities, on its contribution to society through its output, its health, its store of genetic heritage. Performance must be optimized. Even where the goals appear to be leisurely, our body’s actions are conceptualized in terms of regeneration or improvement. Hedonism has become a competitive sport. As far as a split between mind and body can be sustained, one relates to one’s own body as a power supply and a stimulant. Every human action is amenable to a power relation whose principle criterion is utility. The poverty of contemporary society is found here, where the twin notion that one has rights over one’s body and that one’s body has rights is inseparable from the notion that one’s body should be put to good use.

The Ford assembly line is a telling example of how factory management, process design and medicine cooperated to normalize the worker’s body. There, the insistence on the body’s vitality and the dynamics of normalization coordinated the different productive capacities of a selection of heterogeneous

\textsuperscript{30} Foucault’s critique of “the repressive hypothesis” is analogous to this situation: Victorian society made us talk and think about sex more rather than less, resulting in the conceptual channeling of sexual activity into clear types (good or bad, productive or fruitless).
bodies. The testimony of the French Doctor Destouches, who had a career as a writer under the name Louis-Ferdinand Céline, is especially useful. Céline (for he is better known under that name) visited the Ford plants in the Detroit area in the late 1930s to study workers’ health in relation to the capacity to work. Based on that what he observed, Céline developed some ideas about the body that exhibit the strange reversals that the dynamic of normalization brings to otherwise well-intentioned and even progressive endeavors.\(^{31}\)

On the Ford assembly line, the production process had been broken down into discrete tasks, each of which consisted of an action that required almost no skill. The machines were designed so that anyone could ensure their operation: “due to the extreme mechanization of its factories, workers’ tasks at Ford are reduced to a few motions, always the same, repeated in front of a machine, a known and more or less invariable number of times each day.” As a result, “anybody can replace any worker in any job, immediately, with no (or almost no) consequent reduction in the number of parts manufactured by the end of the day.” Céline reports that the doctor who performed the employees’ medical exams “confessed that what were needed were chimpanzees, that they sufficed for the work for which these workers were destined.”\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) Céline presented his findings as a lecture to the Société de Médecine de Paris and published them in Lecture 40, 1 August (1941). The following quotes are from L’Herne: L. F. Céline, ed. Dominique de Roux (Paris: 1972), which is a reprint of Cahier de l’Herne n. 3 (1963) and n. 5 (1965). My translations.

\(^{32}\) Céline, 27.
This extreme mechanization also meant that workers with physical handicaps could be incorporated into the manufacturing process. At Ford, Céline observed that the manufacturing process and its related machines had evolved such that “wretched” bodies not only could contribute to production, but also were desirable to have in the factory. According to Céline, close to one third of Ford’s 44,500 workers in the Detroit area “suffered from serious and chronic ailments and disability,” including asthma, tuberculosis, epilepsy, hernias, cardiac troubles, and blindness. Otherwise inapt bodies could be deployed on the assembly line because the manufacturing process had been so radically fractured into isolated tasks. For example, a blind worker could correctly orient a component on its way to the next step using his sense of touch. It is not a matter of making blind eyes see, but of rethinking what seeing needs to be. It is normal to see; but normalization does not mean making everybody see the same way. “Distributing around the norm” made it possible to redesign the production process to incorporate as many bodies as possible. Knowledge of the individual body’s capacities (can not see, can feel) allows its placement in a redesigned process. The norm is a concept that, presuming usefulness as an end, points to a means of incorporating almost any body. In this case, the body is left unchanged while its environment is modified, as though the assembly line were an overscaled prosthetic device that gives vision to the blind. This characteristic of the Ford factory corresponds to Foucault’s idea that normalization renders

33 Ibid., 28.
differences useful “by fitting them one to another,” and entertains individuality rather than quashing it as long as the body is considered in terms of its “usefulness”.

This appropriation of difference has its limits, however, and there is also a tendency for homogenization at the Ford factory. A “normal” worker could replace a physically disabled worker, but not necessarily vice versa (one imagines that the blind man could not be attributed a task that required vision in its traditional sense, such as efficiently applying paint). This would appear to contradict the ideal by which any worker could replace any other. But there were other benefits to be had by incorporating the disabled that diminished this apparent problem. In the hiring process, Céline observed that “the most physically and psychically wretched are the most appreciated by factory management” because, in contrast to brighter and fitter workers, “they make for stable labor that resigns itself to the extremely limited role reserved for it by modern industry.”\(^{34}\) Exceptionally strong performances posed a threat to long term stability that outweighed the punctual increased productivity that those performances could promise (recalling the expression “it’s hard to keep a good man down”). The key notion here is expectation. Ford’s manufacturing process both benefited from and furthered a normalization of what the body was expected to be. It is different from the normalization that eliminates eccentricities in a group of heterogeneous bodies (which is the kind of normalization that comes to mind in Foucault’s discussion of

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 28.
military approaches to the body). It also departs from a normalization that consists of cultivating individual capacities to extract optimal performances for a team effort (which one finds in sports training). Rather, what is normalized is what one can expect one’s body to be worth: six dollars a day when Céline visited Detroit. While the value of otherwise incapable bodies increased, bodies with higher aptitudes and greater abilities saw their relative worth decline. This kind of normalization does not force you to do less; it simply does not need you to do more, and you therefore should not expect more in return. Being useful is not synonymous with being better.

What happens when a punctual or chronic ailment, such as a hernia or an epileptic seizure, keeps the worker at home? Then “his wife, his daughter, his son-in-law, anybody can replace him immediately in the factory and earn the 6 dollars per day required for his family’s maintenance. The factory’s mechanization permits the instantaneous replacement of individuals.” In a sense, utility is dissociated from the individual body and transferred to the household, such that the epileptic’s daughter can ensure the usefulness of her father’s labor by rushing to the factory herself.

For Céline, this form of corporal industrialization would inevitably spread to Europe. He proposed to harness it for more humane ends than what he had witnessed in the United States. In addition to making use of previously “useless” bodies, Céline proposed that their integration into the economy could also be an opportunity for medical surveillance and treatment. He pointed out that such
medical oversight would have the benefit of moving people from hospitals, dispensaries and the street—where they are a cost to the community—into the factory, where they could fulfill a need. Thus the doctor’s good intentions reinforce the conceptual reduction of the human body to its industrial utility. However, Céline’s principle interest was developing a “more rational, less humanely indifferent” use of labor than that of Ford.\textsuperscript{35} Not only could the bodies work; their health could be managed. Not only can they be made useful, but we can create knowledge from them to develop treatments and to fix them. Medicine could make them live. This kind of medical surveillance is a regulatory mechanism that produces knowledge through its interest in the forces of life. It is an example of the many techniques by which bio-power can extend its reach into the population. Such knowledge contributes to the progressively finer gridding of the human body, and therefore to the refinement of the norms that serve to conceptualize ways of making more kinds of bodies useful. These include both correcting the body itself through therapy or prosthetics, and modifying the means of production or the way that work needs to be carried out. At the larger scale of bio-politics, such a research program naturally contributes to a general picture of the population and its health, and therefore to macro-techniques for regulating life. Producing knowledge through and for bio-power is as important as manning the factory machines.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 31.
Transformations

Céline's well-meaning association of industrial and medical techniques with ideas for social reform was not uncommon for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such programs, which would harness the wonders of science to progressive ends, were some of those double-edged swords whose good intentions were accompanied by what I called the non-moral content of the disciplines. Their effects were and are real. The insistence on life—the tendency to assume activity, production, sensation as the bases of our relation to the world and to each other—is part of a larger epistemological formation (knowledge) which, in conjunction with certain force relations (power) that both result from and facilitate the production of knowledge, transforms how individuals live within a given society. Bio-power "made knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life."36 Knowledge about the human body in general allows the power over life to take hold of individual bodies, where that power is understood as something that produces effects through the differential relation of forces around the body within social settings. The rise of capitalism in Western society serves as an example of how bio-power relates to how we live. Capitalism's development "would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes."37 A form of knowledge-power that thrives on

36 Foucault, History of Sexuality 1, 143.

37 Ibid., 141.
bodily vitality was key to the rise of this specific way of organizing work and resources, both of which concern each individual body within that economic system. But this is just one of many aspects of life that could be transformed through bio-power. The discovery that the human body possessed “forces that could be modified” and “a space in which they could be distributed in an optimal manner” happened in conjunction with a variety of real practices.\textsuperscript{38} Scientific inquiry and managerial actions shared this change in how the body was conceived. Medicine, correction, education, manufacturing: the living body was approached from all sides by interventions that, while often grounded in the best intentions, contributed to further circumscribing the possibilities for life. The way we think about the body and what the body is able to do today is the outcome of those interventions, and the associated forms of bio-power are the context in which further action is taken.

In light of these concepts from Foucault, we may recall that discussions of the body in architecture tend to assume two things: that the body senses and feels its built environment, and that the body makes use of the built environment to productive ends, whether those ends be economic, social, or recreational. Because these assumptions pervade design work and criticism, the tendency for modern societies to “invest life through and through” is extended to the realm of architecture. As a discipline invested with bio-power, architecture might be said to contribute to the normalization of what a human body is, how it should behave,

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 142.
and what its capacities should be. Where architectural discourse invokes bodily vitality in relation to buildings or projects, it corresponds to power-knowledge by realizing concepts about the body in material form, making it possible to apply what is known about the body to specific ends. This is the case even when the body is invoked as an agent that might transgress social norms. Michel de Certeau observes that *Discipline and Punish* “describes the triumph of a political technology of the body over an elaborated system of doctrine.” In Foucault’s model, it does not matter whether intentions are good or bad, because technologies are never the exclusive domain of one ideology, but rather migrate and constitute a social, political and historical force of their own. In the realm of bio-power, this force is the normalization of the human body. Architecture’s deeply ingrained tendency to invoke a sentient body through its graphic, textual and built works appears to extend the grip of knowledge/power over increasingly large areas of human experience. The tabulation of knowledge about bodies in architectural work may be understood as a disciplinary mechanism that colonizes greater and greater areas of human possibility as it distributes real bodies around an evolving norm. Standards for human architectural dimensions are repeated and refined in the design process, and the object itself is an instrument against which the body’s performance can be assessed. At another scale, there is the body of the masses. Housing the popular strata of society became of interest for the discipline only relatively recently. Using architectural knowledge to care for

any body means that increasing numbers of bodies come under the scrutiny of the discipline, with its existing tools serving to produce new ones to accommodate the new challenge.

Has architectural discourse, with its assumption of bodily vitality, also contributed to modern society’s investment in life through a dialogue of reciprocating influence? Does it not relate to areas of inquiry and practice that make the body available to power? We can conceive of the built environment as a way of distributing bodies, keeping them healthy, having them move efficiently without undue duress, differentiating their settings (public/private, home/work, servant/served). All these conjugations of the body through architecture result from a modern épistémè as much as they contribute to it. It may be true that architectural objects have, in effect, always stimulated the body and cradled its movement; but it is also probably true that they were not always thought of in that way, and that those qualities did not always rank so high in the discourses that surrounded architecture’s production and reception. If it is difficult today to think of architecture without assuming that it orchestrates the body’s senses and forces to generate desired effects, it is because of how the current structure of knowledge organizes what is thinkable. It is a historically situated way of thinking that differs from that which witnessed the construction of Greek temples or Gothic cathedrals. This is not to say that the body was not a consideration in Western architecture at other times, but rather that the peculiar emphasis on optimizing both sensations and activity is characteristic of a larger
epistemological formation that, although perhaps mutating in the face of recent technological and medical developments, still separates us from other world views.

Reform and progressive thought in architecture have a long and broad history. There are numerous architectural and urban projects from the last two and a half centuries alone that contain a utopian moment. Foucault points out that “Historians of ideas usually attribute the dream of a perfect society to the philosophers and jurists of the eighteenth century,” whose textual and juridical artifacts make reference to the state of nature, the primal social contract, and fundamental rights. One could say that these ideas have lived their dream-life in architectural work, too, from Claude-Nicholas Ledoux’s ideal city of Chaux, through Frank Lloyd Wright’s uncannily premonitory suburban Broadacre City, to contemporary projects that exhibit a longing for ideal social relations and opportunities for individual self-realization. “But there was also a military dream of society,” Foucault continues, whose references were “the meticulously subordinated cogs of a machine,” “permanent coercions,” “indefinitely progressive forms of training,” and an “automatic docility.” Might there be a parallel development alongside the “natural” utopian architectural and urban projects whose model is a social machine that is most discernible in, yet not limited to, the military? Does architectural thought harbor a dream of orderly movement and proper response, a dream that summons the bodies of

40 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 169.
anticipated occupants in order to implement a discipline that three centuries of
design and construction have progressively refined? Is the discipline of
architecture not suited to participate in the production of an archive and of the
knowledge necessary to maintain order? Is architectural discourse a science of
the body that serves bio-power's extension into the progressively finer grain of
daily life?

These questions are beyond the scope of this investigation, but they
suggest the stakes at play when considering the body's life in architecture. Ways
of thinking beget objects, which in turn become material for thinking some more.
Our objects and our thoughts frame each other. An architectural discourse that
relates to architectural objects by invoking bodies that are full of life might
therefore be understood as both a side-effect of a larger discursive formation
regarding bodily vitality, and a contributor to that discursive formation's
development. The risk is at best a progressive drift of the architect's imagination
toward normative conceptions of the body and away from the social debates
about how the body should be thought. At worst it is the colonization of the
imagination of non-specialists by the architectural discipline's conceptions of the
body.

*Bio-power in Post-disciplinary Societies*

The concern with normalization in relation to bio-power is hardly
dependent on living in a society of total control, where bodies have literally been
seized by some greater power and harnessed like oxen for a milling machine. This fear is expressed collectively through popular works such as the film *The Matrix*, in which the useful technologies developed by humans have turned the tables and transformed their creators into sources of energy.\(^{41}\) Such fantasies accurately reflect a tragedy of contemporary society, but portray a far less efficient system than in reality. In contrast to the literal enslavement and mind control seen in *The Matrix*, the State’s relation to the body in liberal society might be understood rather as one of minimal interference. Indeed, while liberalism maintains the same concern to govern best at least cost that characterizes all forms of power that would maximize their effects, it posits a new goal that betrays a strange kind of modesty: “how not to govern too closely those things that, by nature, escape governmental control.”\(^{42}\) Liberalism introduces a new rationality in the art of government: “in the interest of maximal efficiency, govern less as a function of the naturalness of the phenomena at hand.” Political economy is henceforth a matter of governmental reason setting limits on itself based on “a knowledge of the natural course of things.” Demographics and economic theory are just two of the tools used to produce that knowledge. Concepts and figures


\(^{42}\) Michel Senellart, “La Question du Libéralisme,” *Magazine Littéraire* no. 435 (October 2004): 55-7; my translations. Senellart’s contribution to a special issue of *La Magazine Littéraire* on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Foucault’s death deals with the role of bio-power in the rise of liberal political thought, itself the subject of Foucault’s seminars at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979, *Sécurité, territoire, population* and *Naissance de la biopolitique*. 
that describe the dynamics of a population or of an economy allow the State to intervene only when necessary, and through the most efficient means. The population is no longer understood as “a collection of subjects that must obey a sovereign, but as a reality that depends on a number of variables (climate, physical environment, subsistence, production and circulation of wealth, etc.) that must be known in order to act on it.” Individual bodies are not so much seized as they are observed in their “natural” setting. The resulting knowledge serves as the basis for making necessary adjustments to the population’s environment (legal, economic, physical, social) in order to increase both production and the extent of power. The ends have not changed: “it is still a matter of increasing the State’s forces in the context of a certain political equilibrium.” But the means are different: “no longer disciplinary techniques that constrain the body, but mechanisms of security that allow the management of natural economic and demographic processes, and the integration of individuals in their dynamics.” Knowing the body—both the individual life and the unit of a population—as an active agent within a web of interrelationships, rather than as subject to be dominated, is characteristic of liberal societies. There is no need to feel threatened that police (or renegade machines) will physically seize individual bodies and place them where they are needed in order to maximize production. In the midst of the power relations of liberal societies, the more refined knowledge of what can and cannot be controlled in and around the body, of what will likely happen or what can be made to happen, allows the processes of
normalization to advance independently of the kinds of obvious shows of force that ultimately prove inefficient in a liberal political economy.

The rise of a regulatory society alongside political liberalism modifies some of the questions usually posed of architecture in relation to disciplinary mechanisms. Is architecture part of a search for minimal intervention? In matters of corporal productivity, health, and reproduction, does architectural research contribute to learning about what will naturally happen and what can be made to happen? Insofar as architecture is an environmental science, does architectural knowledge contribute to the forces that have succeeded those formerly at the service of a military dream of society? Is architectural form simply a form of writing that encodes knowledge about the body and places it at the service of a self-perpetuating dynamic of constantly increasing productivity?

Along with law, industry, medicine, and other disciplines, architecture maintains its corporal role. It helps to optimize the distribution of bodies and to provide knowledge of the minimum intervention necessary to sustain its utility. The panopticon is perhaps less than ever the architectural figure for Foucault’s analysis of how power relates to the body. But architecture, as a science par excellence of the relationship between the body and its natural environment, is more than ever at the disposal of the forces that would increase each body’s output.
Foucault's Limits

This discussion of some aspects of Foucault's thought has focused on the vast territory of human activity in which knowledge and power interact through techniques that target the body. The possibility of bodily activity is the principle enabling assumption for this theory of society. Foucault hints at the limits of that assumption when he includes exclusion as one operation in the normalizing process. Exclusion "traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal."^{43} Within that frontier, we find "all the shading of individual differences" that are visible in relation to the norm. Beyond it are cases of physical conditions that cannot be incorporated into the process, neither to contribute to determining a norm nor to be made useful. The exclusion operation highlights the limit within which individual differences are homogenized as a field of normalized cases, a limit whose "without" is the zone of ungraspable abnormality. Such a limit distinguishes between those bodies that are amenable to normalization, and those that are not; between those uses, capacities, states, forms, products and appearances of the body that lend themselves to the action of the norm, and those that do not.

Normalization may therefore also be understood as the dynamic that produces, maintains and modifies this limit. The Ford example suggests that a combination of medical knowledge and work organization constantly advances this limit into the territory of previously un-normalizable bodies, such as the

^{43} Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 183.
physically handicapped. Whether or not that limit will expand indefinitely—that is, whether there will always be an outside that bounds the territory of human activity—is beyond the scope of this study (although death remains, at least for now, the final frontier). However, observation suggests that the human species manages to present a variety of challenges that keep the process moving; some contemporary examples include the progression of obesity, “orphan” diseases, and allergies. While Foucault’s model does not explicitly theorize the limits of bio-power’s field of operation, the concept of a limit is fundamental to grasping the dynamics that normalize.

As suggested above, the limit par excellence is death. Bio-power seems to be one reason why death is such a conceptual problem in modern societies. Less because death is unbearable for us than because “the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death.”

If power’s main role is “to ensure, sustain, and multiply life,” then the dead body represents a failure, or at least a lost cause: “death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it.”

It is no coincidence that the subject of one’s control over one’s own death, which is one of few ways that the contemporary subject can escape the grasp of institutional power, occasionally arises elsewhere in Foucault’s writings (“death becomes the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’”).

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44 Foucault, History of Sexuality 1, 138.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.
Architecture Writes the Body

Space and Writing

The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible. [...] Side by side with the major technology of the telescope, the lens and the light beam ... there were the minor techniques of multiple and intersecting observations, of eyes that must see without being seen; using techniques of subjection and methods of exploitation, an obscure art of light and the visible was secretly preparing a new knowledge of man.

Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish

In architectural discourse, the body’s relation to knowledge and power is usually understood to be spatial in nature. This position is supported by a wide variety of references in Foucault’s writings. The institutions that accommodate the rise of disciplinary technologies and anatomo-politics almost always have precise architectural forms, such as the military camp, the panopticon, the orphanage and the hospital. Foucault’s discussions of buildings highlights two points: first, a spatial arrangement that induces the constant threat of observation is a means of controlling bodies; and second, such a spatial arrangement is also a means of knowledge production, since it makes observation not simply palpable but possible. This architectural position may be summed up thus:

Stones can make people docile and knowable. The old simple schema of confinement and enclosure ... began to be replaced by the calculation of openings, of filled and empty spaces, passages and transparencies.

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47 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 171.
Specific arrangements of architectural form and space are tools of research and control. Where one is aware that one may be observed, there can be coercion; where observation is practiced, there can be a production of knowledge. These institutional spaces are like machines whose mechanical advantage produces volumes of information about people and their bodies as it organizes their disposition and coordinates their actions. This argument is not about oppression per se. For example, the hospital was, “in its very materiality, a therapeutic operator”: it was to allow better observation of patients and therefore better treatment; it was to prevent contagion through separation; and was to prevent deleterious vapors with ventilation and air circulation. Being “docile” and “known” can have advantages. Even then, however, the building’s materiality contributes to the process of normalization, and in the case of medicine it establishes a clear channel of communication between anatomo-politics and bio-politics, between the stakes of power at the individual and collective levels.

While this spatial focus is well founded textually, it tends to distract from another relation amongst the body, knowledge and power that has significant architectural implications. It is an aspect that is far too easily overlooked amidst the imagery of bodies that move, see, produce, feel or heal. This is because it is precisely that which operates in the absence of bodies: writing. For Foucault, the ability to document is fundamental: “A ‘power of writing’ was constituted as an

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48 Ibid., 172.
essential part of the mechanisms of discipline." Tabulating information about bodies is the prerequisite for prescribing movements, imposing exercises, and creating body-based mechanisms that multiply the forces that go into them.\textsuperscript{50} A variety of graphic and textual representations of the body—what it is and could be, what it does and could do—are critical components of anatomo-politics, the power that invests the body as a machine. Writing is the medium by which a discipline’s knowledge of the human body circulates in the absence bodies, in particular those bodies that were observed in the “drawing up of tables” and those for which the written prescriptions are intended. The corporal dimension of power/knowledge grows not only through a spatial choreography in which real bodies are seeing and being seen, but also through a medium that records information about the body. The play of gazes in buildings alone is not enough to allow the refinement of knowledge about the body and the slow but constant colonization of its life by power. Writing maintains disciplinary mechanisms without the need for one individual to act on another. At the moment when, in any disciplinary mechanism, a body is both a memory and an anticipated return, writing necessarily intervenes.

The rise of video surveillance is a revealing phenomenon. A conspicuous video camera combines the threat of the eye with precision recording, fulfilling at once the coercive and informational aspects of discipline while reducing the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 189.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 167.
extent to which architectural form needs to put people on display. We cannot say that the shape of the building or street no longer matters; the camera's presence betrays some significance for the particular physical form it surveys. Image technology simply allows the architecture of surveillance to take shapes other that Bentham's spokes and rings. On the other hand, we can observe that the decline of architectural form's relative importance in how knowledge about the body is produced and applied has not been accompanied by a decrease of the body's subjection to normalizing tendencies. This phenomenon highlights the importance of writing—whether analog or digital—in the process by which the body is made available to bio-power's inherent expansion program.

When referring to Foucault's thought, then, we can distinguish between two concepts: space and writing. On the one hand, Foucault uses spatial relationships to explain the historical development of panoptic disciplinary societies; on the other hand, he stresses that the ability to record was crucial for that development. Each of these two very different aspects of Foucault's model offers a distinct way to understand the interrelationships of architectural form, the body, and society. Thinking about an architectural object as the receptacle for more or less violent physical coercion is not the same as thinking about it as a kind of table of knowledge about the body. In the first case, architectural form is taken as an apparatus that composes specific physical and visual relationships between bodies, following Foucault's descriptions of prisons, military camps, schools, and a number of other institutional building types. In the second case,
architectural form can be understood as a kind of writing about the body whose contribution to the development of power/knowledge and bio-power is dependent on something other than the presence of actual bodies in space. Here, it is not a matter of how the object's physical structure makes vision both coercive and informative. Instead, the question is how the material object is already a transcription of information or knowledge about the body. Where the spatial aspect in Foucault’s work might explain how the panopticon continues to produce effects when the observer’s body is absent, the writing hypothesis suggests that the panopticon operates even when there are no bodies to observe. For example, we assume vision, impeded movement, and certain minimum and maximum sizes.

The spatial understanding of Foucault’s model is concerned with how architectural objects make manifest certain social forms by placing actual bodies in precise relationships to each other; arguments about how such objects operate therefore require reproducing the image of bodies occupying, using and sensing architecture. In contrast, the “writing” interpretation of Foucault’s thought allows us to ask what notions about the human body are retrievable from a given architectural object, taking into account the modes of signification that are proper to architecture as a medium. The object of study—a building—is the same, but instead of using it as the foil against which imagined bodies exercise their vitality (i.e. instead of making bodies live), it is taken as writing about the body that may betray its dependence on insisting on life.
Notwithstanding this opposition between space and writing, we may be reminded that any form of writing depends on space: the space between letters and words or between squares in a chart, or simply the space over which a diagram develops the relationships of its different parts. If architecture is a form of writing that conveys knowledge of the body, its spaces are surely fundamental to its readability. Our distinction between writing and space in Foucault’s thought is not meant to operate at this level. We will downplay how architecture is a space to be occupied in favor of its role as coded knowledge about the body in order to draw attention to certain social dimensions of architecture, not to question architecture’s spatiality altogether. It is therefore necessary to maintain a further distinction between conceiving of space as, on the one hand, a fundament of architecture’s ability to be meaningful for human beings, and, on the other, a concrete environment that constitutes architecture’s social dimension only when experienced by a sentient body. This latter conception is suspended here in order to consider its undesirable effects while broadening our understanding of architecture’s relation to human experience.

Writing Broadly Defined

This interpretation of writing as a technique of discipline implies a broad definition that includes more that what the pen can commit to paper. We have already suggested that video recording is such a form of writing, even more so if we take into account the editing techniques that allow an analysis and synthesis
of existing and possible uses of the body. A general definition for our purposes here is that writing is a trace that in referring to the body makes it possible to know it and to act on it. The arrangement of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions in a text; the layout of a factory floor; the height of a doorknob; population pyramids: these are all ways to transmit information or knowledge about the body in the absence of the body, and each constitutes a form of writing as long as it is readable according to a set of conventions about meaning.

A broad definition of body writing helps to understand the links between bio-power operating at the scale of individual bodies—the scale of Foucault’s disciplinary society, with its orphanages, military camps, factories and prisons as analogs for numerous aspects of modern life—and at the scale of the population. Bio-politics and its regulatory (as opposed to disciplinary) focus takes textual form in the demographic charts that depict age, size, and fertility and mortality rates; in the territorial development plans that sought ideal population dispersion models during the Cold War; and more recently in the map of the human genome.

Architecture as Writing

Architecture is one such medium because, in addition to placing bodies in particular relationships to one another, it also records information about the body and makes that information retrievable. Specific historical contingencies have

allowed architecture to develop as body writing in numerous directions. For example, formal and functional analogies between the body and the building were established through Renaissance thinking that integrated architecture, anatomy, physiology and medicine. Later in eighteenth-century France, new building types such as the national assembly, the public library, and the courthouse were linked to new forms of accounting for the bodies of the masses (politically, demographically, legally).\textsuperscript{52} And since the late nineteenth century, the intersection between cinema and industrial modes of production has created knowledge about the choreography of bodies in architectural space.\textsuperscript{53} Through such developments, contemporary architectural thought can consider a work of architecture as a complex form of knowledge about the body. To take one definition of architecture as a frame of reference, this knowledge can be sensed in how an architectural object responds to the physical forces that a body applies (\textit{firmitas}); in how it accommodates a body’s functional needs (\textit{utilitas}); and in how it addresses a body’s apparatus of sensory perception (\textit{venustas}). By giving form to knowledge about the body on many different registers, a given architectural


object is not only a bio-technology insofar as it promotes or hinders movement, but also because it writes about human bodies in their absence.

Architecture substitutes a formalized environment for the body for a physical body remembered in part from a social context, in part from other formalized substitutions. In architectural work, knowledge of the body is produced through the many writing techniques at our disposal. The discipline of architecture commands a whole apparatus of observing and recording aspects of the human body. Architectural projects and objects record observations and information about bodies, and they are ways of producing a progressively refined knowledge of those bodies. A building may be understood as larger, more permanent manifestation of more familiar body notation systems such as anatomical drawings or performance charts (which is merely to bracket, not deny, the building’s other qualities and dimensions). Works of architecture can be taken as complex pieces of writing about the body that incorporate socially- and culturally-specific knowledge.

Mapping the human genome is an example of a language that describes the body at the service of sustaining the population’s vitality. The map furnishes knowledge for efforts to eliminate disease and to foster a stronger and more resistant organism. As we suggested earlier, the medical sciences are especially suited to demonstrating how knowledge and power shuttle between individual bodies and the species. Hospital architecture is one example of the relation between design and Foucault’s disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms.
However, the writing forms that facilitate the human genome map point to other architectural dimensions of the body question. The map of the genome is a way of writing knowledge of the body. It is a non-bodily medium that supports the production and maintenance of concepts about bodily normality and abnormality. For example, the map reinforces the concept that the human species in general would be better off if genetic screening and engineering could eliminate certain perceived morphological and functional abnormalities that are held responsible for the suffering of individual bodies. As we will see, architectural discourse’s insistence on the body’s mobility and sensorial capacity both affects and is affected by this concept, and architectural form is itself a more or less implicit form of body writing.

The importance that we give to writing here should not eclipse the body as the focus of concern. Like prescribed movements, imposed exercises, and combined activities (that is, the other three techniques of discipline in Foucault’s thought), the written work (whether examination answer, attendance roster, or house plan) instantiates a technique whose object is the body, even though it is part of a peculiar structure that implies the temporary absence of bodies. That structure is not as paradoxical as it is disturbing, since it highlights how institutions are not only built on flesh but survive it: the “ignoble” archives of hospitals, schools, and the military of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after all, show the beginnings of the “modern play of coercion over bodies, gestures and behaviour,” while the bodies that observed and the subjected
bodies do not survive.\textsuperscript{54} An architectural object is one such archive, a unique form of accumulated body knowledge in that it endures not hidden away in storage, but as a perpetually occupied record whose reference to bodies that have long since vanished is a constant reminder of our own fragility and mortality. This fundamental characteristic of architecture is so unrelenting that we manage to forget it time and again. This project is in part an attempt to see what architecture can tell us when this somewhat disturbing quality is recalled.

\textit{Writing and Self-regulation}

A case regarding disability highlights how disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms invest both the body and our conceptualization of the body through a form of writing. In an essay about disability studies and Foucauldian thought, Shelley Tremain discusses the Disability Allowance Program in the United Kingdom, a policy “designed to distribute resources to those who need assistance with ‘personal care’ and ‘getting around’.” Tremain recounts how the program deploys norms even as it collects information for developing further norms, all the while inducing individuals to conceive of their body in specific ways:

\textit{T}he questionnaire that prospective recipients must administer to themselves abstracts from the heterogeneity of \textit{their own} bodies to produce a regulatory category—impairment—that operates as a homogeneous entity in the \textit{social} body. [...] The definitional parameters of the questionnaire ... posit an allegedly pre-existing and stable entity (impairment) on the basis of regulatory norms and ideals about (for

\textsuperscript{54} Foucault, \textit{Discipline and Punish}, 191.
example) function, utility and independence. By virtue of responses given to the assortment of questions posed on the form, the subject/recipient is compelled to engage in self-surveillance ... in order to elaborate the specifications of this entity. [...] To produce the full and transparent report that government officials demand, the most minute experiences of pain, disruptions of one's menstrual cycle, lapses of fatigue and difficulty in operating household appliances must be documented, and associated in some way with this abstraction. [...] Thus, through a performance of textual confession, the potential recipient is made a subject of impairment, in addition to being made a subject of the state [...] [T]he more individualizing is the nature of the state's identification of us, the further is the reach of its normalizing disciplinary apparatus in the administration of our lives.55

The notion of "textual confession" underscores how the ability to record aspects of the body is central not only to turning individuals into political subjects (that is, beings amenable to power relations), but also to the production of knowledge about the population that power would invest. It also relates the dynamics of bio-power to Foucault's concept of the examination. Camps and panopticons tend to limit an appreciation of Foucault's argument about disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms to military and penal circumstances. The notion of the examination, which encompasses such mechanisms as the disability questionnaire, offers critical distance from examples that rely on space and confinement.

For Foucault, the examination is a mechanism through which individuals volunteer information, or at least offer themselves for its retrieval, in the hopes of receiving recognition, confirmation or advancement in return. In school, in a medical center, or at work, the examination is an apparatus that induces individuals to perpetuate specific power relationships. In addition to that mild coercive function, the examination allows a productive form of feedback. In the context of education, for example, “the examination enabled the teacher, while transmitting his knowledge, to transform his pupils into a whole field of knowledge.” Students become the subjects of examination. Their knowledge and skills, their actions and affects, their pathologies and delinquencies, their capacities and deficiencies: all of these become available to analysis. The educational apparatus develops a self-consciousness that allows it to refine its methods: “the age of the ‘examining’ school marked the beginning of a pedagogy that functions as a science.”

In order to examine a subject, “seeing” is not only a matter of retinal registration. Similarly, inducing ways of thinking and performing is not only accomplished through the perceived threat of being seen through an optical phenomenon. The examination, while in some cases carried out with the eyes, does not require a real or even imagined proximity of bodies. The examination can function as a disciplinary and regulatory mechanism whether or not any one

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56 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 186.
body can see another. In such cases, however, it cannot operate without a form of writing.

In part because of the distancing that writing technologies offer, power in the regulatory society loses the mark of physical violence that haunts the military and the prison. The examination form, of which the disability questionnaire is an example, is often characterized by good intentions.

There is another corporal aspect to the examination that is distinct from how writing allows the body’s absence without compromising power’s effectiveness. Taking a philosophy exam is different from applying for a disability allowance. Certain forms of examination concern the body itself, and their associated writing technologies never cease to refine their accuracy and precision, or to expand the ends to which they are directed. Instead of the panopticon’s spatial order, we have a material object: the written artifact, an object that endures and circulates, that needs no author to operate. That object crystallizes a knowledge of space, time, and bodies: “The examination leaves behind it a whole meticulous archive constituted in terms of bodies and days.” Observation is only one part of a “system of intense registration and of documentary accumulation.” Writing allows disciplinary power to use and produce knowledge conceived through a distribution of bodies in space and in time. The body can leave a staggering variety of traces, including footsteps, fingerprints, heart rates, blood composition, facial structure, and measured performances of all types. All are available to collection, analysis, and synthesis
as a global picture of what the human body is and could be, what it does and could do, and what it needs or could transcend.

A whole range of issues encountered in Foucault's work crystallize in the disability questionnaire: the insistence on conceiving of the body's ability to feel and to perform (mobility, pain); the operative distinction between biology (impairment) and politics (disabling experience); the traffic between anatomo-politics and bio-politics; the voluntary perpetuation of bio-power; the normalizing society; individualization; the transformation of daily life; and of course writing as a fundamental technique in disciplinary and regulatory societies. Considering disability in this way has important consequences for understanding architecture as a form of writing and knowledge about the body. Those consequences are one aspect of this project's investigation into architecture's complex relationship to the body.

The concept of bio-power describes how knowledge formation and power relations intersect at a body whose every ounce of force can be leveraged to extend its own subjection to research and production. There are specific places where such dynamics overlap with the bias for vitality in architectural discourse. One could use bio-power as an analytical concept, for example, where medicine or industrial production have had recourse to architecture as an enabling instrument or environment. But architecture is traversed by bio-power at a general, and not only specific, level. A building need not be “about” corporeality to contribute to the production of knowledge about the body, or to the organizing
of its forces to productive ends. An architectural object can “enable” some bodies and not others, whether or not disability is made thematic in it. We do not hesitate to read architectural form for its effects on the body or its conformity to bodily needs, whether the object in question is a sports complex or sanitarium (buildings that are ostensibly “about” the body) or a banal office building or house. Regardless or in spite of programs and intentions, architecture is immersed in an epistemological field powered by the unquestioned need to improve or optimize the body’s life. The question here is not: what is the architecture of or for abnormal bodies?; but rather: in what ways does architectural form participate in establishing, reproducing or challenging the limit between normal and abnormal, proper and improper?

*Knowledge, Writing and Normalization*

Architecture has a vocation to know and to record the life of the body. This vocation finds its motor in our compulsion to understand and to control what others do and feel. By control, we mean the usually well-intentioned attitude that architecture can induce and channel movement and sensation in order to elicit specific mental, emotional or physical responses (contemplation, awe, invigoration), and in some cases generate cumulative effects (a crowd, the play of crossing glances, an assembly line). It is a desire that we can entertain through design, history, criticism and theory. But we cannot necessarily satisfy it. The products of our efforts do not exercise definitive power, but rather offer
themselves for interpretation and appropriation. Nevertheless, they frame the discourse that produces ways of thinking about the body in architecture. They take the form of writing, which here encompasses drawings and buildings as well as books. These textual representations refer to actions (to walk, to climb, to see) that have passed by and that might return. Whether buildings, plans or essays, they anticipate future bodily movement and sensation as much as they denote a correspondence between form and action in the past. Their common denominator is an insistence on the body’s vitality.

This process can be observed where there is an interest in the relationship between architectural form and the body of a skateboarder or of a person with a physical disability. There, architecture succeeds in formalizing previously informal ways of experiencing the world. This is often justified by the emancipation of individuals from the constraints that oppress them. But the knowledge about those ways of experiencing the world is drawn irresistibly into regulating where, when and why they can happen. It makes them acceptable by assigning them proper places, proper moments and proper reasons. Every perceivable bodily trait and act can be drawn into this process of normalization through architecture’s material qualities.

For example, acrobatic skateboarding was developed when idle surfers appropriated empty swimming pools and drainage pipes. It quickly became an organized pastime with specially designed and designated installations. Thanks
to these “skateparks”, one need not trespass in order to “practice.” Clandestine acts are still performed; but they are henceforth judged against the alternative of an authorized practice that happens in the right place. Whether one is for or against illegal activities, the skatepark—an architecture of performance and spectatorship—imposes itself as the reference for all skateboarding. It stands in for the bodily movements that different levels of social and political organization—including the family, the municipality, and mainstream society in general—would control. The skatepark gives a named place, built of wood and concrete, to acts that it cannot fully capture, but that henceforth can be measured against it in terms of proficiency, invention and legitimacy. Once those bodily movements have a place that gives them physical dimensions, they can be organized to productive ends: a tournament not only produces a winner, but also reproduces social structures, beliefs, ideals, and interactions. This is the dynamics of a normalizing society, orchestrated between an active body and architectural form. Although this example may push the insistence on movement and performance rather far, it nonetheless indicates how the vocation to know and to record the life of the body through architecture spreads normalization over wider areas of human experience. The same process is at work in the architectural definition of hybrid programs, or the standardization of accessibility.

In all cases, our discourse expands to formalize larger areas of human life. Good intentions do not prevent the irreversible changes that ensue when these ways of being are channeled into instrumental ways of thinking about them.

This review of Foucault's work points to a gloomy scenario for architecture. Insofar as architecture is similar to numerous areas of knowledge that concern the human body, it is implicated in what might be called a double-bind. On the one hand, such areas of knowledge attempt to elucidate the complexity of human life. On the other hand, that elucidation entails classifying a wide spectrum of possible bodily forms and capacities, thereby providing the tools necessary to draw real, individual bodies into the processes of normalization. Different forms of writing facilitate both the analytic and synthetic moments of this dynamic. Textual articulations of how individuals “experience” or “act out” material that is already a codification of human activity (such as ethnography, laws, furniture, and architecture) necessarily contribute to encode further what people do and feel. When such articulations emanate from places of relative authority and power, as is the case with the human sciences, they are likely to have been produced through methods and tools that apply order to what is otherwise chaotic and illegible. The outcome moves in two seemingly contradictory directions: extending the orderly formalization of activity over wider areas of life, and narrowing the field of imaginable future activity. These two directions work together as a normalization of the human body.
This double-bind creates a specific phenomenon in disciplines that have the human body as a major figure. The byproduct of writing that transforms real activity into text is the image of a body capable of that activity. Thus where architectural work houses an idea about human activity, it also offers an organized and focused set of body characteristics. Taken together, these characteristics add up to a concept of the kind of body that “fits”. For some, this may be a worthy goal, and there is no shortage of examples where architecture or other disciplines have tried to alleviate or eliminate problems that the deviations of individual bodies cause. As we have seen, however, normalization produces effects independent of intentions. That analytical efforts are carried out with good intentions does not prevent normalization from producing undesirable effects. The dynamics by which knowledge production and power extension support one another is in great part independent of any social projects that engage it. Michel de Certeau’s description of a “cybernetic society” sums up Foucault’s warning about the power of writing: “the scriptural system moves forward on its own; it is becoming self-moving and technocratic; it transforms the subjects that controlled it into operators of the writing machine that orders and uses them.”

This is a significant problem facing, for example, the study of physical disability in architecture, which entails defining what a disabled body is in order to identify whether or not a given architectural environment is “accessible” to it in

terms of movement and sensation. The resulting modified architectural works encode that definition, which thereby acquires a naturalness that distracts from the question of whether mobility and sensation are necessary in the first place, and why all bodies must conform to the imperative to move and to sense. Similarly, the research that determines how a blind man can earn a living on Ford’s assembly line has not necessarily bettered that person’s situation by codifying the knowledge necessary to extend a particular economic and social model to ever larger segments of the population.

Thinking of architecture in terms of bio-power and the body’s normalization raises two principle lines of interrogation. First: if we do not intend for our writing practices (including statistical, legal, and architectural) to extend the grip of production mechanisms on the body, what drives us individually and collectively to contribute to the dynamic of normalization? What is the relationship between the body’s vitality and our writing habits? More specifically, why are we compelled to conceive of architectural form in terms of the body’s life? Why does architectural discourse articulate the convergence of knowledge and power on the body through design work, and why does anyone “read” that work as such? Second: what is the nature of what Foucault calls “the external frontier of the abnormal”, or “the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences”?\(^{59}\) What social function does it fulfill? How is it formed, maintained, redefined? We already noted that Foucault’s analysis implies that normalization

\(^{59}\) Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 183.
tends to expand that frontier. Does the limit condition disturb the modes of writing that contribute to normalization? Does architecture necessarily and exclusively operate within that frontier as a mechanism of normalization? The next chapter will consider the work of Michel de Certeau, which addresses some of the concepts and questions found in Foucault’s writings.
VOLUME II

The Deposition of the Body:
Architecture and Corporal Limits

by

Juan Kent Fitzsimons
CHAPTER 4

BORDER STRUGGLES: MICHEL DE CERTEAU

The previous chapter reviewed some aspects of Michel Foucault’s thought in order to discuss the socio-political aspects of corporal limits in architecture. Notwithstanding our interest in a critique of what Michel de Certeau called “the framework of levelling rationalities,” the phenomenon of body limits does not exist in the socio-political realm alone. This overview of the insistence on life in Foucault’s normalizing and regulating mechanisms should not distract attention from another set of questions. The interplay of body knowledge and real bodies is only possible through countless individual acts of reading and writing. This massive parallel processing machine creates the effects of writing and of the breaches in it. But on a different plane, the insistence on life that structures architectural production and interpretation has another history and another relevance. The impetus to read and to write of a living, feeling body is not simply a function of the coercive power of social participation. And the haunting image of bodies bereft of life is not only the just desserts of a power that insists on making people live. The painter in George Perec’s novel may employ a medium that serves the anonymous purposes of documenting people in space. The grid that he traces on his canvas, the simultaneous representation of temporally distinct
events, and the pictorial identification of individuals are hallmarks of a writing
technology at the service of distributing different types of bodies more efficiently
in the space of production, whether it be a school, a battlefield, a factory, or a
territory. However, the doubts he suffers have a direct impact on his making
process. Haunted by the prospect of imposing death, he stalls production: the
painter dies having left only the outline of a grid on his canvas. From the
perspective of a machine that produces social norms and legislation, such
reticence or “writer’s block” is an anomaly, thankfully limited to artists. From the
perspective of one who reads or writes architecture, it takes on a wholly different
proportion and is related to different stakes.

The body’s failure to perform is the limit of our grasp of the environment.
In order to think or say something objective about architecture, the prospect of
mortality must be placed aside. This is as true for architects who project pieces of
the built environment as for non-architects who inhabit it. That objectivity may be
only a state of mind that easily gives way to an awareness of one’s own mortality.
However temporary, it is the precondition for producing a concept about
architecture and its inhabitation. Insofar as mental constructs and texts are made
things, they involve a poetics that somehow holds together the individual’s
consciousness of bodily mortality and the necessities of discourse. How to make
something that denies what everybody knows is an artistic problem. It seems
that, at least in the texts discussed in the chapter 2, the product incorporates
traces of the artifice. In a similar way, the reading process involves a creative
orchestration of assumptions about bodily vitality and its negation, and it too may be marked by what it must refuse.

Michel de Certeau’s reflections on writing and the body help to ask what motivations and mechanisms are at play when we enter into a discourse that allows us momentarily to inhabit a world where we and others live a healthy life forever. The movement and sensation that we imagine are the body’s voice. Its breath is necessarily absent in the text or building that invokes its presence. Here, the moving and feeling body is not an anonymous source of energy. The drive to produce and read architecture in terms of a living body raises questions about both the human preoccupation with dying—that is, with one’s own last breath—and the longing for another’s whisper, a longing perhaps best attested to in love letters and other material missives that try to link bodies across space and time. In the individual creative act, bodily vitality is not reducible to function, and the signs of non-life in the made thing are not only overtures to social critique. The insistence on life at this poetic level, and the irruption of bodies that disturb reasoned architectural production and interpretation, seem to be related to problems in human existence that, while not without social and political dimensions, can not be addressed through a discussion of policies and norms alone.

Beyond addressing and expanding some aspects of Foucault’s painting of modern society, Michel de Certeau’s work develops a broad investigation into this poetic aspect of writing and the body. His readings of essays, travel
accounts, novels, films and paintings, and perhaps especially his investigation into mystic speech, sketch what might be called "an anthropology of the voice." Jean-Jacques Courtine notes that this anthropology of the voice is never assembled into a theory, but is nonetheless essential for articulating the objects in his texts, "in particular the fundamental objects that are language and the body, the written and the oral, the sense and the sound, the sign and the voice." Those scattered hints of a theory suggest possible links between, on the one hand, the disciplinary struggle to maintain a realm within which each body can be put to best use, and, on the other, the creative struggle to hold together irreconcilable demands brought on by modernity's reshuffle of the relationship between writing and the body.

Architecture is conspicuously absent in the roster of works that de Certeau examines as artifacts of intimate scriptural struggles with the body. Indeed, de Certeau portrays architecture in negative light. However, resituating architectural work within de Certeau's "anthropology of the voice" moves the question of architecture and the bodily limits to new ground. The search for a theoretical framework to pass from reading texts about architecture to reading architectural works revisits some of the problems and potentials in what we called Rossi's "deposition of the body." It deals with more than the problem of discursive consistency. It also adventures beyond purely critical approaches that

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alternatively reveal socially negative aspects of a work or discover progressive potentials in architecture. Finally, it abandons celebrating the conscious or unconscious creative genius of the author responsible for a given work. Here, understanding corporal limits in architectural work requires sketching the complex relationship between a normalizing conception of the body as a productive force, and the desire and apprehension that accompany acts that invoke the body’s voice. Each of these two dimensions struggles to ward off life’s opposite for different reasons, but the return of non-life in architectural work troubles both at the same time. The question of corporal limits in architecture leads to the difficult intersection of the political and the personal, of the social and the poetic, where architecture’s implication in human matters is not stopped by the conceptual border imposed by death or other states that undermine mobility, sensation and self-control.

In this chapter, I will discuss some aspects of de Certeau’s work that lay the ground for exploring architecture as something other than a body-writing that indefinitely expands to draw more and more bodies into the ideology of utility. In particular, this involves questioning whether architectural work as a kind of writing simply serves architectural discourse’s insistence on movement and sensation, or if on the contrary something about architectural work resists or poses problems for the corporeal normalization that discourse tends to support.
De Certeau, the Body, Architecture

Limits of Propriety

A place for everything, and everything in its place.

Samuel Smiles, *Thrift*.

De Certeau rewrites Foucault's critique of modern societies, with particular attention to what Foucault calls "the external frontier of the abnormal", or the "limit that [defines] difference in relation to all other differences." De Certeau notes in particular that disciplinary and regulatory mechanisms apply in a "proper" place, suggesting an "improper" situation where normalization does not occur. Where Foucault focuses on the space within the frontier, notably where the differences between one body and another serve to distribute them around a norm and thereby contribute to its evolution, de Certeau considers the dynamics at the boundary. That limit defines the difference between proper bodies that are seized by knowledge/power and the improper flesh that is excluded or left alone. This distinction is related to such fundamental human problems as alterity, illness, and of course death.

De Certeau notes that throughout Foucault's work, the disciplinary procedures that he studies have "their own place (un lieu propre) on which the panoptic machinery can operate." This is only in part a reference to physical

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places such a the hospital, the psychiatric ward, the prison, and the school. More generally, these *proper places* refer to the realms in which particular technologies are applied. Each such *clean, self-possessed* place is a discipline, such as medicine, military logistics, and correctional science.

The dilemma for those interested in exploring aspects of the human body in modern society is that their study methods inevitably create precisely this kind of proper place, thus making the object of study available to the processes of normalization. Starting from this problem, de Certeau sketches the possibilities for further action. He comments that “In undertaking to produce an archeology of the human sciences ... Foucault is led to make a *selection* from the ensemble of procedures that form the fabric of social activity.”⁴ Outside of Foucault’s analysis, then, there may be numerous apparatuses or procedures that “have not given rise to a discursive configuration or to a technological systematization,” and that therefore “could be considered as an *immense* reserve constituting either the beginnings or traces of *different developments*.”⁵

If a procedure operates upon a body in a discipline’s “own place,” we can say that the body is made proper to that discipline, and by extension to the society that supports that discipline while being supported by it. Bodies neglected

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⁵ Ibid., 47-8. Emphasis in original.
by that procedure are “improper.” These bodies may lend themselves to procedures that have been disregarded in the formation of disciplines, but they remain useless and unacceptable for the technologies of power that Foucault describes. A given body is not proper or improper absolutely, but is qualified as one or the other by the discipline or social organization that it encounters.

The lifeless body is the extreme case of impropriety for Foucault’s analysis. The body’s death is beyond the grasp of the disciplines in a society centered on corporal vitality: “the procedures of power have not ceased to turn away from death,” “death is power’s limit, the moment that escapes it.”\(^6\) There is no proper place for a corpse in the apparatuses that distribute bodily forces in the interest of production.\(^7\) By the same token, state-sanctioned death in modern societies is scandalous without a discourse that justifies its necessity: the disciplines that ensure the security of the people are what create a proper place for the executed convict and the war dead.

This schema that opposes proper and improper bodies with respect to disciplines and discourses echoes that in the architectural texts discussed in chapter 2. Discussions of experiential aspects of La Tourette or a house by Adolf Loos assume and invoke the kind of corporal vitality that drives modern power

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\(^7\) De Certeau points to one exception: “It took Nazism, which was logical in its technocratic totalitarianism, to treat the dead and make available to the procedures of exploitation the limit that usually opposes them: the inert, the cadaver.” *Practice*, 191.
relationships. A reference to a lifeless body in such a text signals the limits of that discussion by introducing something that is not proper to it. In Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text about La Tourette, the presence of Le Corbusier’s corpse negates the disorientation and discomfort that are the basis for the authors’ assertions about the building. The dead body is *out of place*, improper. A similar condition arises in Colomina’s text about Loos’s domestic architecture. The dead women in Loos’s quote defines the logical limit of the intersubjectivity at the base of Colomina’s argument about his architecture. Where Colomina’s text asserts that the social effects of a Loos house are a function of seeing *and* being seen, the paragraph cited from *Das Andere* draws our attention to other possible sources for subjectivity in domestic architecture, in particular the prospect of encountering a dead rather than living body.

In both these cases, descriptions of and allusions to bodily movement and sensation are the basis for assertions about specific architectural objects. They also participate in the process of normalization by evoking the image of a normal body that moves and feels. Each text creates a proper place not only for its own argument, but more generally for the larger phenomenon whereby architectural discourse produces and reproduces modern society’s definition of normal corporeality. The impropriety of lifeless bodies in those texts indicate that bio-power’s architectural grasp of the human body has limits. Moreover, they suggest how writing about the body is an event in which the limits between proper and improper corporeality are raised.
Aldo Rossi’s design narrative adds another layer of complexity to this schema. Its broad discussion of the events surrounding the architect’s design for the Modena Cemetery shows how the preoccupation with the limit between architecture’s proper and improper bodies applies not only to life and death, but more broadly to recurring architectural pairs such as mobility and immobility, sensation and numbness, and presence and absence.

Beyond Foucault’s “exterior frontier of the abnormal” are improper bodies that can neither be distributed around a norm nor contribute to the evolution of the norm. Despite this reference to the limit, however, Foucault’s work draws our attention to a contained, amorphous mass of individual bodies in a place where disciplinary dynamics carry out the work of normalization. In contrast, de Certeau’s work focuses on the boundaries. It draws our attention to the limits beyond which discipline ceases to apply, and to the dynamic by which a limit is established between the bodies that are seized and the flesh that is excluded or left alone. Investigations of corporal practices that have not been incorporated into organized disciplines recur throughout his research. Whether discussing historiography, psychoanalysis, religion, literature or popular culture, de Certeau gravitates around the notion that certain bodies are *a priori* excluded from the interiority of disciplines and institutions. This applies as well to de Certeau’s scholarly work on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mystics such as Jean-Joseph Surin and Jean de Labadie, as it does to his pursuit of everyday New Yorkers and other urbanites in “Walking in the City” or to his concern with the
plight of Native Americans since Columbus. Throughout these studies, de Certeau explores how a concern with improper bodies is the basis for the institutions that displace them.

In this light, the common thread throughout de Certeau's excursions into ethnography, historiography, psychoanalysis, cartography and sociology is the body of alterity. I will return to how otherness underpins de Certeau's attempts to explain the body and writing in modernity.

Science and Literature

The normalization scenario may be less totalizing than it appears at first glance. Foucault's model of disciplinary and regulatory societies assumes an objective form of writing. Such writing purports to represent something faithfully, while accepting the premise of its own falsifiability. It is either true or false, it either "works" or it does not. We can verify its accuracy with respect to what it depicts, and its fitness for specific applications can be measured and evaluated. We could include here anatomical charts, performance statistics, some forms of historiography, and of course architectural writing that enables, for example, designing assembly lines or accessibility standards in buildings.

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In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau's discusses how this perspective on writing leaves out whole areas of production that would include literary and poetic texts and artifacts. He further offers a conceptual structure for understanding how two parallel forms of knowledge production relate through two opposing constructions of the human body. One, "scientific," must drive out the other, "literary." The scientific system insists on the body's productivity, on its need for management, on its necessary emancipation from sickness, and ignores the existential problem of the body's inevitable demise. It "starts out from a break between life and death, and faces death as a defeat, a fall, or a threat." It inscribed Western society's ceaseless progress on the body:

But like writing paper, this body-support wears out. What is produced as a management of life, as a mastery or writing of the body constantly bespeaks death at work. What escapes or returns into scientific discourse betrays the obsessive adversary it claims to exorcise. And on all sides, a literature proliferates around political and therapeutic institutions. It brings this devil back to the surface and narrates the disturbing proximity of what has been exiled. [...] It acknowledges that part of knowledge to which knowledge does not speak. [...] [It is] 'fiction' in the sense that, within the space of the book, it allows the reappearance of the indiscreet other whose place the *social* text wanted to take; it dramatizes, in the very place where it was eliminated, the inseparable excluded element whose question is raised repeatedly by sexuality or death. Answering science ... , scriptural space becomes erotic.⁹

The "literary" writing that "proliferates around political and therapeutic institutions" is "constructed in relation to death"—that is, to the opposite of the life on which discipline and regulation insist. In it, that which scientific discourse excludes as scandalous returns. "From Nietzsche to Bataille, from Sade to Lacan," a kind of

derisive writing is “[m]arked by the fantastic vision science has created” or “in terms of a poetics of alteration and dispossession.” That which returns to mark writing is precisely the body. Not only a body that is the subject of Foucault’s bio-power, but also the flesh that disrupts bio-power: “the body returns as the instant, the simultaneity of life and death: both of them in the same place.” There, in contrast to scientific discourse’s objective view of the body, “Scriptural space becomes erotic.”

The body’s vitality is inseparable from its mortality, and while some forms of writing appear to stave off death by replacing flesh with text, others host the return of some aspects of the body that pose problems for a society organized around utility and constant progress. These latter literary forms testify to the persistence of something other than the corporealities that lend themselves to the techniques of bio-power; that is, to the regulation of what the body is and should be for power relations based on life. In contrast to a scientific writing whose goal is to eliminate that which cannot be controlled, such writing addresses the trouble we have with bodily characteristics that fall outside the limits set by a given society. As a cultural object, it holds the promise of a critical perspective on the insistence on life in contemporary society, as well as on ethical issues concerning the body that follow from it.

That proliferating literature is a material production, a writing of the body. What if architectural objects are more like literature than scientific papers? The

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10 Ibid.
discourse that wraps itself around architecture may tend to rationalize the body, to normalize our corporeality. Architecture would seem to be an ideal tool with a singular contribution to mastering each body's life in order to optimize exploiting its forces production and reproduction. But form exceeds this role. Its scriptural quality introduces a devil into the works. Architecture as spatial structure has limits to the corporeality that it can address: its bodies must live. Architecture as writing animates our hopes and fears about bodily limits, and perhaps even the erotics that productive society represses. Despite the apparent exclusion of bodily characteristics that challenge the "will to produce," the vital body's opposite returns in architectural work.

*Politics and Poetics*

The problem of propriety and impropriety that de Certeau explores with reference to Foucault's work is one aspect of a larger project that we find animates his research. That project is the search for an ethical practice for the researcher who, working in a social context where knowledge and power mutually extend through their use of writing technologies, wants to understand social experience without institutionalizing it as the Law. The circularity by which naming something frames its subsequent reproduction has two moments. "Intextuation" describes "packing bodies into a text," whereby living beings are transformed into signifiers of rules organized in textual form. The reciprocal moment, "incarnation," describes bodies becoming society's reason or Logos
made flesh. Legal systems, for example, rely on an individualized body that can both be marked by the Law and provide its foundation. In penal justice, that body can be marked by punishment; in matrimonial law “with a price in transactions among collectivities.” It incarnates the Law through, borrowing Elizabeth Grosz’s words, “a movement of the text into the body and the body outside of itself and into sociocultural life.” There, the law-become-flesh is experienced and observed, sensed and made into sense, formalized in modes of representation: intextuated again. Incarnation and intextuation effectively delimit both the body’s possible existence and the concepts used to perceive it within a given cultural and social moment.

In his book on the cultural theory in de Certeau’s work, Ian Buchanan interprets the problem of intextuation and incarnation in the context of the human sciences. He suggests that de Certeau “presents an all but insoluble double-bind: in attempting to articulate [incarnation], the way the concept body is made flesh in other words, [the human sciences] cannot help perpetuating ... the blanket intextuation of voiceless, faceless others.”

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11 de Certeau, *Practice*, 140.

12 Ibid., 139.


This double-bind recalls the normalization and regulation in Foucault’s model. We could, for example, rewrite Shelley Tremain’s argument regarding the Disability Allowance Program in the United Kingdom: the questionnaire reproduces the body concepts codified in textual form as state policy, and in associating real physical experiences to its categories, the individual not only becomes the subject of impairment and the state, but also become the law made flesh.

It seems that everything one does contributes to the expansion of the Law over the body, and to its related foreclosing of non-functional conceptions of life. Buchanan suggests that de Certeau addresses “the inexorability of this theoretical and practical bind” by concentrating on articulating “the means of escape from processes of incarnation.” This assertion is disappointing because such an articulation arguably draws more and more ways of being and doing into the machinery and the Law. We might note here that while de Certeau describes the prospect of attentively studying the creative and wily practices of everyday life, and refers to such studies in positive light, he does not himself “intertextuate” in such detail.15

Roger Chartier recalls de Certeau's awareness that dealing with practices discursively is doubly paradoxical because it requires *thinking of* practice and *writing down* practices. In his biography of de Certeau, François Dosse observes that his subject's oeuvre, "which reflects at the heart of this question" and "posits at once both the necessity and the impossibility of writing down practices," is haunted by that tension. In line with these observations, an alternative interpretation of de Certeau's approach to the double-bind is to consider what his work implies about writing itself. Foucault responded to accusations of the perceived negativity and hopelessness in his work with a challenge:

My point is not the everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. [...] I think that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger.

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17 Dosse, 499. My translation. "Cette tension habite toute l'oeuvre de Certeau qui réfléchit au coeur de cette interrogation, posant la nécessité et en même temps l'impossibilité d'écrire les pratiques." See the previous note regarding translation difficulties.

As though in reply, de Certeau appears to avoid having to choose the lesser of two (or more) evils by taking an oblique approach to the dilemma of scholarly work. What if writing about power relations, experience and everyday practices does not assume that it is scientific? As an answer, we might consider de Certeau’s comparison of Foucault’s own writing to “a ballet dancer disguised as a librarian”\(^\text{19}\): it is nothing less than a body out of place, a *corps impropre* introducing alterity in the system of knowledge. Such a body is active in de Certeau’s own writing. His investigations of epistemological problems take the body as both the source and target of writing practices. While writing technologies are complicit with “the framework of levelling rationalities” that pervade modern society, de Certeau’s production implies that writing as both *practice* and *product* is haunted by a preoccupation about how it relates to human life through the body. Whether the field of intervention is politics, historiography, history, or sociology, de Certeau’s work is an interrogation into the body as a social and political subject, while simultaneously accounting for the poetic dimensions of human productions.\(^\text{20}\) The ambiguity of the word incarnation in French—which in addition to its literal meaning of enfleshment also refers to an actor’s interpretation of a scripted role and thus to creation, ruse and even

\(^{19}\) de Certeau, *Heterologies*, 192. Also see 193-198.

deception—is only the most conspicuous of the lines of escape that characterize de Certeau’s language.\textsuperscript{21} His wide ranging studies may indeed be understood as a constant retreat from the intextuation inherent in the human sciences, and an equally constant pursuit of beings that elude incarnation. However, the success of either operation is less important than the nature of the traces left behind.

The political and poetical vectors in de Certeau’s writings converge for the most part on literary and artistic works (for example mystical writings, Bosch, Daniel Dafoe, Alfred Jarry, Marcel Duchamp). Here we will attempt to inform the study of architecture with de Certeau’s complex investigation of both political and poetic dimensions of the human condition. Whether architecture is scientific or literary or a combination of both is at least in part a question of our capacity for imagination. What is at stake is how the limits of discourse can or should be altered. Considering some of de Certeau’s concepts about writing and the body alongside those of Foucault can help to understand how architectural form relates to the human concern with corporal limits. Without abandoning the political and social questions about architecture that Foucault’s texts raise, de Certeau’s work will allow us to consider further significance for architectural work and other stakes in its relation to human experience.

\textsuperscript{21} That de Certeau was a Jesuit suggests a further religious denotation for incarnation as God’s Word made flesh. The discussion about faith and erotics below suggests a conceptual framework by which de Certeau perhaps held together these different meanings.
De Certeau on Architecture

Discussing architecture and Michel de Certeau requires certain clarifications. For the most part, explicit references to architecture in de Certeau’s work portray it in negative light. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, for example, The World Trade Center in New York is reduced to one of those tools that planners use to construct panoramic images of the city based on “a misunderstanding of practices.” It provides the height that serves our “scopic and gnostic drive,” combining “the fiction of knowledge” with the “lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.” In this iconic example, a single architectural object represents an entire epistemological disposition that de Certeau intends to critique.

In more nuanced passages where architectural objects are not explicitly discussed, aspects of de Certeau’s thought suggest that the built environment’s form is ultimately of little interest. This is greatly a consequence of his assimilating architectural work to urban design.

De Certeau’s treatment of architecture as either suspicious or insignificant contrasts with his readings of literary and aesthetic works. References to essays,

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22 In addition to *Practice*, see “The Imaginary of the City,” in Michel de Certeau, *Culture in the Plural* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 17-27.


24 De Certeau wrote this of the World Trade Center more than two decades before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 that destroyed the two 110-storey towers and some other buildings in the complex, killing almost three thousand people.
travel accounts, novels, films and paintings are scattered throughout his texts. Some are mentioned briefly while others are objects of extensive analysis. They are attributed a complexity that reveals the cultural problematics that interest de Certeau. Even maps are considered simultaneously as scientific, symbolic and mnemonic works in which the problem of space and alterity comes alive.\textsuperscript{25} In comparison with such objects of study, architectural works are deprived of complexity and depth in de Certeau’s writing.

More generally, de Certeau associates architectural work with “strategies,” as opposed to “tactics.” Strategy describes the force relationships that are possible when “a subject of will and power ... can be isolated from an ‘environment’ ” upon which that subject can apply transformations.\textsuperscript{26} Strategies are constructed in places removed from the area where they are eventually imposed; they master space (urban infrastructure, an assembly line floor, a school building). In de Certeau’s writings, the power relationships that allow planners and architects to produce the built environment are assimilated to the structures that concentrate productive capacities in an elite social minority.

\textsuperscript{25} In 1980, de Certeau worked on the question of cartography with Franck Lestringant in the context of a colloquium on spatial stories (récits d’espace) in Urbino. The two researchers focused on Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues’s maps of a sixteenth century protestant colonial tentative in Florida. According to Lestringant, “What interested us was that these maps were not only representations of the world or of a region, but also the expression of a political vision, the expression of a memory, a souvenir of a place.” From Dosse, Michel de Certeau, 541. My translation.

\textsuperscript{26} For de Certeau’s discussion of tactics and strategies, see Practice, xix.
In contrast, a tactic is "a calculus [of force relationships] which cannot count on a 'proper'." It is the characteristic of those practices that do not target an "environment" from without, but rather take place within it. Tactics do not benefit from the strategy’s totalized view (however simplified). They cannot depend on "a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality."\(^{27}\) The World Trade Center represents the strategic mode because it creates such a boundary between the observer and the city, while Manhattan pedestrians, "though visible from on high, are themselves unable to see," "as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness."\(^{28}\) For those who do not benefit from the knowledge and effectivity that accrue to strategic positions, acts must be tactical. If producing television broadcasts, managing factories and planning cities are strategic, then tactical practices include interpreting the news, "stealing time" on the assembly line and walking in the city.

De Certeau’s terminology here resonates with his comments on Foucault’s disciplines: "A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it."\(^{29}\) This "proper place" can be spatial or institutional. In contrast, the everyday life characterized by tactics "invents itself by poaching in countless

\(^{27}\) de Certeau, Practice, xix.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 92-3.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., xix.
ways on the property of others." Ownership and strategy line up opposite theft and tactics, just as the proper falls within the purview of the disciplines while the improper falls outside. This schema in de Certeau’s thought extends to a further opposition between space and time:

The ‘proper’ is a victory of space over time. On the contrary, because it does not have a place, a tactic depends on time—it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized ‘on the wing.’

The distinction between strategy and tactic means that the architectural or urban plan, which holds together disparate places in one time, is contrasted with what people make of their occupation and use of the resulting built environment. The architect’s acts have a proper place and produce a proper place; the occupant’s acts have no place, and their transgression of property and propriety is temporal, ideally temporary.

Architects and urban planners work in a proper place: both the studio with its means of representing different kinds of territories, and the professional position from which to alter those territories. Modern means of representation created this space by allowing “the transformation of the urban fact into the concept of a city.” Henceforth, the production and alteration of architectural and urban space is a question of knowledge and power:

Linking the city to the concept never makes them identical, but it plays on their progressive symbiosis: to plan a city is both to think the very plurality

[^30]: Ibid., xii. Emphasis in original.
[^31]: Ibid., xix.
of the real and to make that way of thinking the plural effective; it is to know how to articulate it and be able to do it.\textsuperscript{32}

For de Certeau, writing is strategic:

The writing laboratory has a "strategic" function: either an item of information received from tradition or from the outside is collected, classified, inserted into a system and thereby transformed, or the rules and models developed in this place (which is not governed by them) allow one to act on the environment and to transform it. ... The scriptural enterprise transforms or retains within itself what it receives from its outside and creates internally the instruments for an appropriation of the external space. It stocks up what it sifts out and gives itself the means to expand.\textsuperscript{33}

With only a few changes, this definition of the writing laboratory could apply to the architecture studio or architectural practice in general. The designer collects and classifies information about what already exists, but also develops rules and models for creating new things. The relation of forces that allows the design process to consume what it encounters also gives it "the means to expand," just as it does in the symbiosis between the city as fact and as concept.

The production and execution of legal norms that relate human behavior and abilities to physical dimensions (location and sizes of exit doors in public buildings, turning radii in bathrooms) is only the most formalized and quantified aspect of the architect's grasp on the body through form. Architecture as writing here assists the architect's intellectual, technical and political ability to encode aspects of the human body.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 94.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 135.
De Certeau does not argue that architecture itself is bad in essence. Rather, his critique of the assumptions that underlie the production of major political, scientific and cultural works applies as well to the processes of architectural production as it does to colonization, marketing, and literature. This critique is clearly laid out in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This essay is presented as “part of a continuing investigation of the ways in which users—commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules—operate.” Its goal is “to bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society [...] is concealed by the euphemistic term ‘consumers.’” De Certeau notes a void in sociological work, and proposes a project to fill it:

For example, the analysis of the images broadcast by television (representation) and of the time spent watching television (behavior) should be complemented by a study of what the cultural consumer “makes” or “does” during this time and with these images. The same goes for the use of urban space, the products purchased in the supermarket, the stories and legends distributed by the newspapers, and so on.

If Foucault’s analysis in *Discipline and Punish* shows how “silent technologies determine and short-circuit institutional stage directions,” it nonetheless “privileges the productive apparatus.” De Certeau’s analogous yet opposite goal

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34 Ibid., xi.

36 Ibid., xi-xii.

36 Ibid., xii.

37 Elsewhere, de Certeau appears to criticize studies derived from Foucault’s initial work: “Even the analysis of the repression exercised by the
in Practice is to privilege "the innumerable practices by means of which users reappropriate the space organized by techniques of sociocultural production."\textsuperscript{38} Those silent practices presumably short-circuit the "institutional stage directions"—including all those well-intentioned plans for social reform—in the same way as Foucault’s micro-techniques of power.\textsuperscript{39}

De Certeau’s project casts architecture in two different lights. On the one hand, the architectural object is the artifact of a mastery of space over time. It is planned and composed using conceptual and technical tools in a physical and institutional place separate from those places it affects. Architecture represents strategic forms of production, and is precisely the kind of stage direction that de Certeau’s study is supposed to undermine. It is simply an imposed physical order through and against which individuals resist and transform certain social and political relationships.

On the other hand, de Certeau’s spatial and temporal analysis of society also suggests that the architectural object’s precise nature and form is inconsequential. De Certeau reminds us that:

\begin{quote}
mechanisms of this system of disciplinary enclosure continues to assume that the public is passive, "informed," processed, marked, and has no historical role." Practice, 167.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., xii.

\textsuperscript{39} Interestingly, Practice lays out a conceptual framework for such research while pointing to cultural objects that display symptoms of society’s malaise with body technologies (Robinson Crusoe, popular song lyrics, poems). It does not carry out detailed research about practices themselves, nor does de Certeau contribute such a study to Volume 2. See note 15 above.
whereas the scientific apparatus (ours) is led to share the illusion of the powers it necessarily supports, that is, to assume that the masses are transformed by the conquests and victories of expansionist production, it is always good to remind ourselves that we mustn’t take people for fools.  

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The problem is not that architectural works (or cities or television shows) make manifest a planned form of society or sociability. Rather, de Certeau objects to building systems of knowledge around the belief that they do. The epistemological problem is primary. De Certeau’s investigation into consumption-as-production implies that how individuals use architectural form to various ends is important, but that form itself is not determinant. Despite the dreams of planners and architects, form does not determine what happens or who does what. Imposed structures may create a set of possible actions; but the variations, as they unfold in time, are so numerous that there can be no claim to predetermined outcomes.  

41 Meanwhile, studying the producer’s intentions, the resulting representations, and the user’s behavior leads to a skewed form of knowledge that perpetuates the notion that the only way to consume is as a fool. The implicit lesson regarding architecture in Practice is that the architectural discipline is wrong to assume that “users” who do not themselves have the

40 de Certeau, Practice, 176.

41 Robin Evans proposed a more nuanced formula: “Certainly it would be foolish to suggest that there is anything in a plan which could compel people to behave in a specific way towards one another, enforcing a day-to-day regime of gregarious sensuality. It would be still more foolish, however, to suggest that a plan could not prevent people from behaving in a particular way, or at least hinder them from doing so.” Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages [1978],” in Translations from Drawing to Building and Other Essays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 89.
means to create the built environment play no role in creating its social
significance and effects.

De Certeau's apparent rehabilitation of architecture as something to be
used and appropriated is trapped in the objective position that the body must
move and feel, act and produce. The apparent alternatives architecture as
strategy and architecture at the disposal of tactics are in fact two sides of the
same coin: architecture is only related to a body that can move, feel and
produce; infirm, disabled, unproductive, immobile or unfeeling bodies can only be
thought in architecture insofar as they are incorporated into a disciplinary and
regulatory system based on bio-power.

Earlier we discussed de Certeau's distinction between writing in scientific
discourse, and a literary form of writing that revels in its exclusion from science.
Where The Practice of Everyday Life casts architecture as a strategy, it fails to
consider the possibility that architectural form might oppose an objective grasp of
the body and its life with derision and folly, just as the texts of Sade or Bataille
sap the "political and therapeutic institutions" whose scientific discourse drives
them out.\(^{42}\) The explicit references to architecture in The Practice of Everyday
Life distract from understanding architecture through a broader consideration of
writing and the body in de Certeau's thought. Indeed, the reduction of
architecture to scientific discourse or passive object with use value alone is

\(^{42}\) de Certeau, Practice, 197.
effectively problematized in the broader conceptual field staked out in de Certeau’s work.

The rest of this chapter hypothesizes how architectural work might be approached with the conceptual framework that grows from and informs de Certeau’s wide ranging studies of maps, fables, fictions, memoirs, essays, and other creative works. In other words, architecture here is not the raw material for considering the creative and resistant relation between relatively powerless individuals and the structures in which they must live. It is rather the byproduct of individuals living their lives in a complex world of knowledge and action, and consequently offers a lens through which to consider the culture in which it holds currency. Considering architectural work in the same way that de Certeau considers Montaigne’s essays, early cartographer’s maps, Bosch’s *Garden of Delights*, or Catherine Pozzi’s poetry allows us to ask certain questions about society and human experience, notably concerning the limits of corporeality. It can account for the kinds of observations found in Foucault’s work without settling for an exclusively negative evaluation of architecture. It allows us to connect the architect’s situation to that of the non-specialist “consumer” of architecture through large scale evolutions in the body’s social and cultural definition. In short, we can draw from how de Certeau “reads” or “uses” literary and artistic works in order to read architecture; and this despite his own assessment of architecture.
The resulting discussion is not concerned with how architectural writing contributes to normalizing and regulating the human body, but rather with how it addresses aspects of human experience that fall outside Foucault’s model of modern society. This raises the possibility that architecture occupies a line between bio-power’s realm of application and a territory where corporeality is both a terrifying and revolutionary prospect. My rereading of de Certeau’s work proposes that architectural works be considered as cultural objects that address existential problems that scientific discourse can not.

Using de Certeau to speak about architecture seems all the more necessary in light of the body’s place in his work. Notwithstanding that conviction, I am not concerned with whether or not de Certeau produced a coherent theory of the body,\textsuperscript{43} nor with what, if it exists, that theory is.\textsuperscript{44} It is not the body of a theory that preoccupies me.\textsuperscript{45} De Certeau’s work does not offer a theory of the body. Perhaps it offers a theory of “scientific” work (history, anthropology, sociology), a theory of the mechanics of knowledge production, in which the body is the source of epistemological motion. The discipline of architecture and the

\textsuperscript{43} This concern is expressed in Buchanan, \textit{Michel de Certeau}, 81

\textsuperscript{44} This concern is developed in Grosz, \textit{Volatile Bodies}, 117-120.

\textsuperscript{45} For example, Buchanan’s assertion that de Certeau’s “interest in the body seems only to run skin deep,” based on the observation that “he is fascinated by tattoos and stigmata for instance, but not the viscera,” (81) does not account for numerous references to mystic “hand-to-hand” combat, sacramental transubstantiation, malnourishment, etc., found especially in \textit{The Mystic Fable}. Buchanan’s contrast between de Certeau’s “scriptural economy” of the body (surface) and the guts (interior) is problematic in its literal superficiality.
practices organized therein correspond to a particular understanding of the body and knowledge that pervades de Certeau’s writing.

François Dosse suggests that de Certeau’s interest in cartography understood the map as “the intersection of three different dimensions: that of its production by the cartographer, that of the look directed at it, and that of a material object, a referent.” The present work is interested in the look that we might cast on architecture—that material object—in order to disrupt the quasi-scientific, strategic disposition that its producer must at some point adopt.

An Anthropology of the Voice

The dedication at the beginning of The Practice of Everyday Life situates the book’s discussion of the body in the broader context of his preoccupations. The book can be understood as part of a larger project, of which conceiving of consumers as more than social automatons is only a part. The dedication already suggests a challenge to the limited view of architecture therein, where the one who “writes” the built environment necessarily takes people for fools, and what is written is necessarily scientific in nature:

To the ordinary man.
... In invoking here at the outset of my narratives the absent figure who provides both their beginning and their necessity, I inquire into the desire whose impossible object he represents. What are we asking this oracle whose voice is almost indistinguishable from the rumble of history to

46 Dosse, 540.
license us, to authorize us to say, when we dedicate to him the writing that
one formerly offered in praise of gods or the inspiring muses?\footnote{47}

The book opens with a question: what is the desire whose impossible object is
represented by the figure of the ordinary man? This question tempers any
altruism or suspicion surrounding the study of quotidian life. The “ordinary man”
is a function of a desire that cannot be fulfilled. Moreover, his absence makes
writing a \textit{necessity}. By extension, architectural production is perhaps not
reducible to a strategy, but rather mixed up with other motives and impulses.

The dedication also suggests a reservation about authority. The author
hesitates when seizing the ordinary man’s voice. What can be said through it?
What kind of license to write does the posture of dedication hope to acquire? For
de Certeau, invoking the ordinary man happens after the death of God. It is a
modern act, caught up in the scriptural economy and “power of writing” of the
modern world. The question may be rephrased: how can one respond to desire
knowing that it risks perpetuating the structure of strategy and tactic, plan and
action, in which the writer is always a strategist? Will the writing not expand the
Law’s grip over the object of its dedication, independently of its author’s
intentions? The architect may have similar questions about attempts to capture
the “ordinary man’s” movement and sensation in concrete form.

Finally, de Certeau’s dedication casts the book as a series of narratives,
placing it in the realm of literature rather than scientific discourse. This is no
doubt related to his observation that Foucault’s writing uses “the rhetorical

\footnote{47} de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, v.
techniques of a narrative" to subvert scientific discourses—such as history or sociology—based on panoptical conceptions. This seems to answer the previous question: one is licensed to respond to desire with literature, not discourse. If we can read de Certeau's writing that way, perhaps we can offer architectural works the same treatment.

Very near the end of the book, de Certeau returns to the notion of desire, this time with reference to the problem of the living conceiving of death:

To write (this book), then, is to be forced to march through enemy territory, in the very area where loss prevails, beyond the protected domain that had been delimited by the act of localizing death elsewhere. It is to produce sentences with the lexicon of the mortal, in proximity to and even within the space of death. [...] In this respect, the writer is also a dying man who is trying to speak. But in the death that his footsteps inscribe on a black (and not blank) page, he knows and he can express the desire that expects from the other the marvellous and ephemeral excess of surviving through the attention that it alters.

The desire that de Certeau inquires about at the book's outset reappears. Here, this desire is that which is expressed through a writing born of and bearing a reciprocal absence. The desire is known and expressed in the act of dying, which itself is the writer's "speech." "This book" allows his desire to survive "through the attention that it alters": a reading where it is received. It is the medium of exchange in the "scriptural economy" that organizes the endless interplay of writing and the missing body's voice.

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48 de Certeau, Heterologies, 192. "Thus, there is in Foucault's book an internal tension between his historical thesis (the triumph of a panoptical system) and his own way of writing (the subversion of a panoptical discourse)."

49 de Certeau, Practice, 198.
Insofar as architectural work invokes users and occupants who provide both its “beginning” and “necessity,” it partakes of this movement of desire where production and reception take or mistake absence for death. I will attempt a rapprochement between de Certeau’s description of that movement and architectural phenomena where the body and its vitality are motors for a dynamics involving authors, objects and readers.

*The Erotics of the Text*

True love leaves no traces
If you and I are one
They’re lost in our embraces
Like stars against the sun

Leonard Cohen, *True Love
Leaves No Traces*, 1977

For Michel de Certeau, modernity is characterized by a slow but inexorable transformation of faith into eroticism. The diminishing power of the Church in the passage from the medieval period to the Renaissance created a void where God once stood as the Other, the ultimate index of alterity. Religious demythification is mirrored by the mythification of erotic love. The object of love is less and less God, while the body of the Other is increasingly evoked in expressions of longing. That “adored body” is “as elusive as the vanishing god”: “It haunts writing, which sings its loss without being able to accept it.”

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50 de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 5.
This mutation is related to a growing doubt concerning the origin and
destination of speech. Beginning in the seventeenth century, the statement itself
is devalued in favor of the act of enunciation. When God’s voice could be
deciphered as revealing “the ‘mysteries’ of the world”—which already presumes
that it was heard—one’s place in the cosmos was assigned by “a cosmological
language.” But the crisis of the political and religious institutions that guaranteed
the certainty of one’s place inaugurates an era whose quest is to find substitutes
for the unique speaker: “who is going to speak? and to whom?” A scrum of sorts
ensues, in which every “placement in the order of the world” has become a
“nothing,” a void that “drives the subject to make himself the master of a space
and to set himself up as a producer of writing.”

Thus with God’s waning, writing transforms language into “a field to be
plowed rather than to be deciphered.” The metaphor of physical work
underscores the agitation of desire in modernity: “Despite the change of scene,
the One does not cease organizing by its absence a ‘Western’ productivity.”

That drive to produce develops in two directions. On the one hand, it
advances as “proliferating conquests destined to fill an original lack.” The
Christian Church built its liturgical institution on a body missing from its tomb.

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51 de Certeau, Practice, 138.

52 Ibid.

53 de Certeau, Mystic Fable, 4.

54 Ibid.
Modern historiography carries forth this task of producing “the relationship that a society maintains with its dead.” An explicitly erotic literature continues this “work of mourning,” exemplified in Don Juan’s adventures, which only “repeat the absence of the unique, inaccessible ‘woman’.”

On the other hand, the productivity that this lack organizes returns “to the principle of these conquests” and wonders about “the ‘vacancy’ of which they are the effects.” This is the subject of de Certeau’s *The Mystic Fable*, which considers certain Christian “productions” in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that bear witness “to the slow transformation of the religious setting into an amorous one.” *Mystics*, like the eroticism that appeared in the same period

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55 de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 11. For de Certeau, Christianity’s missing body is both specific and general: that of Jesus and that lost in the break with the tradition of blood filiations in Judaism: “Christianity takes place on the absence of a body, on an empty tomb. This absence is formed specifically in the loss of Jesus’s body, which was supposed to have taken the place of all others. But it also has a general form in the detachment that separates Christianity from its ethnic origin and from the biological, familial and hereditary reality of the Jewish body. The Evangelical discourse, the *Logos*, is based on this loss and, in contrast to ancient Semitic speech, it must take on the production of bodies of ecclesiastical doctrine and sacrament that substitute for the ‘missing body.’” With the wane of religion, modern historiography takes over the latter problem of a coherent social body: “scientific history is only a late variation of this work, which henceforth attempts to construct, through discourse, social bodies – nations, parties, groups.” Michel de Certeau, “Histoires de corps,” interview by Georges Vigarello and Olivier Mongin, *Esprit* 62 (February 1982): 179-185. My translation. Perhaps, then, the tradition of amorous or erotic literature took over the specific task that Christianity had addressed through Christ’s incarnation of God, the One.


57 Ibid.
that it was developing and declining in Europe, is an effect of separation and
springs from “a ‘nostalgia’ connected to the progressive decline of God as One,
the object of love.”\textsuperscript{59} The Mystic Fable dwells on the “dichotomy between love
and knowledge” that marked the passage from the medieval universe into the
modern period, a dichotomy or “way of inquiring we can recognize today as that
of the speech act.”\textsuperscript{60}

Burned by the love of (or for) an Other, the (often feminine) subject speaks
its desire for an impossible encounter... The way of saying it matters more
the what is said, and its speech comes as music, poetry, dialog and
fable.\textsuperscript{61}

The mystics wander and speak, leaving no traces, always receding when the
spotlight shines on them, like the mad woman who flees the nunnery where a
holy man has come to praise her, performing a challenge to the religious
institution that is then growing and taking more coherent form. The Church must
plan the performance of rituals; the mystics perform their religion, their suffering

\textsuperscript{58} de Certeau, Mystic Fable, 5.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 4.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{61} Michel de Certeau, Fable Mystique, back cover. My translation. “Brûlé
par l’amour d’un Autre, le sujet (souvent féminin) dit son désir d’une impossible
rencontre, à travers les surprises et les violences d’un récit d’extases, de grâces
et de blessures. La manière de le dire lui importe davantage que le dit, et sa
parole se fait musique, poème, dialogue et fable.” The question of virility (Don
Juan) and femininity may be asked in relation to Roland Barthes observation that
“the feminine” declares itself in he “who speaks of the other’s absence”:
“Historically, the woman gives form to absence, elaborates its fiction, because
she has time; she weaves and she sings.” Roland Barthes, Fragments d’un
absence. The transubstantiation of Christ in the Eucharist gives body to the spoken word and makes the Good News readable. The mystic body “became opaque” and “ceased being transparent of meaning,” failing to communicate a message but nonetheless “engraved with the sufferings of love.”

The *fabula* in question consists of narrative and orality. This is in distinct contrast with the other productions destined to fill the lack, be they religio-institutional, literary, or historiographical. The case of historiography is notable. For de Certeau, there is no doubt a “continuity” from *mystics* to historiography, “since both have taken in hand the relationship that a society maintains with its dead.” Furthermore, they both (for the most part) take the form of narrative. Of course, for the mystics God is their mortally wounded Other. But the writing of history further differs from *mystics* in the traces it leaves and in its relation to difference. For the historian, difference is “an instrument to make distinctions in his material [sic],” while for the mystic it is “a split inaugurating the question of the subject.” The historian “‘calms’ the dead and struggles against violence by producing a reason for things (an ‘explanation’) that overcomes their disorder and assumes *permanence.*” The written (never only oral) history is the material for an institution, a society, and perhaps moreover constructs a model for society that describes reasonable relationships between different bodily movements, gestures and capabilities. We will return to this social dimension below.

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63 Ibid., 11. My emphasis. See also de Certeau, *Writing of History*, in particular the chapter “The Historiographical Operation,” 56-113.
Regarding the play of death, difference and order in historiography, Jules Michelet, the self-appointed nineteenth-century historian of the French Revolution, offers a concise formula: "Easy, my dead sirs; let us proceed in orderly fashion. Each of you has a right to the story. The individual's beauty is that of the individual, the general's that of the general."\(^{64}\)

De Certeau's history of mystic speech exacerbates the problem of ephemerality and permanence. The historian who summons the mystics "to say the other" undertakes an exercise of absence that "defines at once the operation by which he produces his text and that which constructed theirs." Like Pèrec's painter, and like the architect. Reflecting on the drive behind his attempt to write this particular book, de Certeau confesses that:

> What should be here is missing. Quietly, almost painlessly, this discovery takes effect. It afflicts us in a region we cannot identify, as if we had been stricken by the separation long before realizing it. [...] But the necessary, having become improbable, is in fact the impossible. Such is the figure of desire.\(^{65}\)

The separation, the *difference*, precedes the consciousness of its happening, which occurs elsewhere, in an unknown place. De Certeau's history nonetheless "emerges from a mourning, an unaccepted mourning that has become the

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\(^{65}\) de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 1-2.
malady of bereavement, perhaps akin to the ailment of melancholia.\textsuperscript{66} His longing for his object of study makes the necessity of writing proportional to the impossibility of grasping it. The same equation underlies the dedication to the “ordinary man” in \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life}. There, God or the Muse have been replaced by the “everyman and nobody” whose role in literature “is to formulate a universal connection between ... scriptural productions and death.”\textsuperscript{67} The mystics and the faceless other hold the place of what one is missing, what one mourns. The mystics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are distant in time from de Certeau’s Manhattan wanderers or factory workers, but they are bound by the structure—the figure of desire—that organizes the scriptural production around each.

\textit{The Erotics of Architecture}

Different kinds of cultural works have similar dynamics in their production and reception: both moments are driven by a lack. A body is missing. Writing “spells out an absence that is its precondition and its goal.” It articulates itself on an “addressee come from abroad, a visitor who is expected but never heard on the scriptural paths that the travels of a desire have traced on the page.”\textsuperscript{68} The architect’s work is, in some part, one of these productions, one of these written

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 1.

\textsuperscript{67} de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, 2.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 194-5.
works that posits an ephemeral body that it expects but that remains elusive. Architectural work speaks its desire for an impossible encounter, and it moves forward through "proliferating conquests."

Architecture may be compared with the love letter. Farès el-Dahdah explores their similarities in his discussion of the house that Adolf Loos designed for Josephine Baker in 1928.69 The love letter is a material thing that one sends to another so that, at the very least, his or her hands will touch it ("your dear hands will touch this note"). The note is an extension of the sender's body, and it touches the addressee by being touched. This is, at least, the belief espoused by the sender who desires to overcome the other's absence.

For el-Dahdah, Loos's design is "an admirateur's letter that was never sent." Consisting of a model and a few drawings that Baker may or may not have seen, Loos's project is:

an epistolary attempt to detail her image ... through a kind of writing that stretches a third skin between the body of the architect and that of the dancer. The house is an apparatus (like the note) through which one can somehow rub against, or trap, a dancer's exoticized body. ... In other words, this house corroborates someone's yearning to touch the absent body of Josephine.70

This architectural love note is addressed to Baker's body which, like the recipient of amorous correspondence, may touch it, and thereby be touched by the desiring architect. In a manner analogous to the interpretation of prose, el-


70 Ibid., 75.
Dahdah identifies Loos's "longing to signify desire" by reading between the lines of this architectural project, lines found on its facade as well as in the plans that describe the distribution of rooms. Loos's architecture reaches for Baker's body with horizontal black and white stripes that encode conventions of gender and race, and through walls and openings that define pathways, spaces and views throughout the house. Loos makes the building "a tactile extension of his senses in order to covet the exoticized body of an absent Josephine Baker."71 The building need not actually grasp Baker's body to fulfill its role; it is enough to momentarily (and perhaps even repeatedly) sustain the sensation of "coveting," of desiring.

Decoding the design in this way takes architecture as what Roland Barthes called "correspondence," a "tactical enterprise intended to defend positions, insure conquests."72 It is written in a language that is legible and decipherable. We can read where Loos engages a specific black female body, just as Josephine Baker presumably would have, had she received this missive. Barthes suggests that this role of the love letter is stressed by someone who is not necessarily in love. In contrast, for the truly amorous writer, the letter is not tactical, but simply expressive. Through it, one engages the desired other in a relationship, not a correspondence.

71 Ibid.

72 Barthes, 188.
If a given letter has nothing to say, or is illegible or nonsensical, this second, relational role continues to function. The “paradoxical dimension” of the love letter is that it “can convey an amorous message even though it may be empty or say nothing at all.” As the substrate of words and sentences, it is an “instrument of a tactile extension just as it transmits the language of devotion.”

The letter continues to function because it materializes the distance between two bodies. In the absence of all other meaning, its very existence says, at the very least, that one is thinking of another. It is the very matter of desire: a vessel between two bodies that do not touch it simultaneously. And it only exists with respect to tactility, to sensation. A compulsory belief underlies this vocation for both the love letter and architecture: the body for which this object is destined may touch it and be touched. No one need decipher or interpret the letter’s message. The enabling assumption is that there will be a physical encounter between this “tactile extension” and another body. (S/he will smell my perfume, though I will not be there.) Where words might fail, the writer expresses desire through the letter’s materiality alone: carefully drawn lines hidden on the inside surface of a folded sheet.

Love letters and drawings, and buildings even more, are apt to outlast the generation that produced them. Like the amorous correspondence discovered in a forgotten corner of the attic, an architectural project may err far from the body for which it is destined. But it at least maintains the promise that somebody was

73 el-Dahdah, 75.
being thought of, and that anybody might be touched. Its cultural form ferries longing from one body to another. The object circulates, passing through many hands that recognize its desire without knowing to whom it is destined. Like us, they are nonetheless “touched” by it.

For Barthes, talk of love is never detached or disinterested, but always in reference to someone. Whether our discourse on love is philosophical, lyrical, or novelistic, “there is always a person whom we address.” “No one wishes to talk of love unless it is for someone.” This may be hidden in a thousand ways. But “all talk whose object is love (and in spite its disinterested stance) inevitably holds a secret address (you don’t know it, but I address someone who is there, where my sayings end).” 74 We would add that he or she who knows neither sender nor destination still receives the message. If I find a letter on the ground, and it is in a language I can not read, I might determine from certain evidence that it is amorous in nature, for example by the shape of the script or indications of excessive care or desperation. I understand what it signifies without knowing either its author or addressee: one body longs to touch another.

The danger with this comparison is that it seems to account for a very limited range of architectural works. How might we consider projects that are not ostensibly intended for a specific person? Or those whose authorship is not known or certain? Are they disqualified as evidence of architecture’s erotic dimension? Architectural work differs from the love letter; or else the love letter

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74 Barthes, 88.
needs to be reconsidered within the larger context of writing in general. Looking at Loos’s project, we should ask if we need to know that he designed it or that it was intended for Josephine Baker in order to understand its erotic substance. Like the love letter that once read can reveal a range of seductive techniques and emotions, architectural objects envelop bodies with more or less finesse, more or less honesty, more or less self-loathing. But they always trace some contour within which a body would be wrapped. Even before reading Loos’s project for the specific ways in which it would embrace Josephine Baker, as architecture it at minimum says that it is destined for a body. It cannot but betray this intention. Loos’s house may dissimulate more or less well that it constructs the image of an exotic female body, but it can not hide that it at least speaks of a body.

An architectural project may be made from one’s desire for a specific other. But its unavoidable corporal reference discloses a desire prior to encoded meaning, and a third, unrelated party can recognize its longing. Even where architecture cannot be read for its intended addressee and subsequent effects, it still indicates the desire to touch another body: a desire that may or may not have been encoded during production. This kind of “tactile extension” does not need a specific, named object: its desire is more general, it precedes the encounter with the individuals whom we come to desire in particular.

Architectural works cradle and caress the body in highly formalized ways. They are a kind of writing that one produces in the absence of a body and its
“statements” or movements. Parallel to Foucault’s bio-power, the historical formation of an erotics of the text explains the compulsion to bring the body’s vitality together with architecture as though they were inseparable, to have the eternal and the ephemeral at once. That figure of desire describes how material productions are intertwined with the absence of a body, or more specifically with the absence of its life. In this figure, writing tries to envelope that from which it is split, the other through which it is defined. This does not refer to essential objects, as though text were always written in stone, and flesh always fading away, but rather to an arrangement of things in precise relationships at distinct moments. A love letter may be used as a placemat or as evidence in a crime investigation, and fire may prove it as ephemeral as the embrace it longs for. But it nonetheless materializes the fleeting breath of another, so long as that other body is absent. So too with the architectural work, in which the voids left for a body indicate a longing at its origin.

We could extend this analogy to the architectural writing that is a text about architecture. It, too, is animated by a figure of desire. Architectural writing joins the need to produce with the longing for the life it cannot have. Like the persistent referral back to vital bodies in Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text about La Tourette, the necessary lack of an implied erotic presence drives the movement of writing and reading. This occurs even where there is no explicit intention about embodiment in architecture. The content of a story (or history) of how people live is doubled by the life-longing inherent in its material form.
Moreover, the architect's intentions may be drowned in the intentionality that architectural objects or texts reveal or elicit themselves. The productivity that for de Certeau is organized around an absence is evidenced by the proliferation of texts that create the illusion of bodily speech, which in turn sustain the promise that a body may return for a tactile experience.

*The Erotics of Knowledge*

It is no coincidence that de Certeau places historiography alongside the Church's institutionalization, and both of these in distinction to the ecstasy of abandonment that characterizes the mystics. Michelet insisted that the historian's task is to make the dead speak (and moreover to have them mean what they themselves were unable to say). Through historical writing, the dead "now live among us and we feel like their relatives, their friends. Thus a family is made, a city common to the living and the dead."75 The text is a settlement where the present and the past coexist, like Aldo Rossi's design narrative (which implies the same capacity for buildings). This "political" (in the sense of *polis*) aspect of writing brings us from speculations about the figure of desire in personal works to the social realm.

We need not assess Rossi’s success at fulfilling an architectural version of Michelet’s *historical* urbanism to observe that architecture, or at least buildings, make our settlements. Unlike love letters sealed in envelopes or hidden away in shoeboxes, architectural productions easily travel through the circuits of knowledge. Similarly, architecture, like historiography, is not—can not be—the same as mystic speech. The latter recedes from the places of enunciation, while the former is a trace drawn up or written down in durable form. Architectural work institutionalizes its knowledge of the body that it awaits.

The figure of desire ties the depths of human existence to the heights of knowledge. Georges Vigarello suggests that a specific form of nostalgia drives the dynamic by which the human sciences produce knowledge about the human body. That dynamic would have the body become “the site of potential completeness and totalization.” While psychoanalysis lays a path with a labored end, “a necessary mourning,” the human sciences “end at the persistent illusion of potential completeness,” a “fictitious infinitude and totalization.” It is “an illusion of ‘recovered’ plenitude, as though the lack could finally be neutralized.” The belief in this “contemporary version of both the myth of origins and the myth of all-powerful being” explains the “seductive force that is able to accumulate theoretical simplifications and promises of union.”76 For Vigarello, the operations at work in ostensibly objective pursuits are homologous to those at work in the mind that suffers its inaugural split, as though individual longing had amplified

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itself to the scale of cultural production.\textsuperscript{77} The same could be said of history, religion and, we would argue, architecture.

Vigarello’s dynamic of belief in the human sciences recalls de Certeau’s notion of an “erotics of knowledge.”\textsuperscript{78} De Certeau uses the World Trade Center in Manhattan as a metaphor for the tools and techniques used by “strategists” whose writing would transform what they observe. What one sees from these heights is “the analogue of the facsimile produced ... by the space planner urbanist, city planner or cartographer.” Standing on the World Trade Center’s viewing platform creates a distance from the city and “transforms the bewitching world” into a text that lies before one’s eyes. The viewer’s body is “lifted out of the city’s grasp,” where the streets “turn and return” the bodies left behind “according to an anonymous law.” Elevation allows one to escape being written and to look down “like a god.” The view from on high offers the “voluptuous pleasure ... of ‘seeing the whole,’ of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts.” A scopic and gnostic drive joins “the fiction of knowledge” with a “lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more.” The “ecstasy of reading” produced by the World Trade Center belongs to an erotics of knowledge in which a totalized view of the object of study feels like becoming a point, a god,

\textsuperscript{77} Juliet Flower MacCannell discusses a similar scale for the desire to become One in her book on what she call Lacan’s “cultural criticism.” Juliet Flower MacCannell, \textit{Figuring Lacan: Criticism and the Cultural Unconscious} (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1986).

\textsuperscript{78} de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, 92-3 for all quotes in this paragraph. Emphasis in original.
a singularity. The skyscraper is a promise to see and to know that sustains the desire of becoming One through the “illusion of ‘recovered’ plenitude” (Vigarello).

The mechanism that allows us to read Manhattan’s text is the same as that which makes it possible to rewrite it. The capacity to construct a text depends on being isolated from that which it would alter. Writing constructs “on its own, blank space (un espace propre)—the page—a text that has power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated.”\textsuperscript{79} That power serves the ambition “to reform” the “reality of things” that has been articulated in a text.\textsuperscript{80} The whole image of the city is analogous to that of the planner not only through resemblance, but also because it places the viewer in the distant position from which its alteration can be projected.

Back on the street, the body must turn itself into writing if it is to get anywhere. In Michelet’s city (the one made of history), only what de Certeau calls “quasi-bodies” or “body doubles” are recognized. These bodies are written by history, “constructed” by it. De Certeau describes historical work as culling from texts fragments of a body that once was, and producing from these quotes “a cartography of bodily schemas—ways of acting, of fighting, of sitting/laying siege, of hailing.” Historiography selects gestures, producing “topographies that organize typical actions in a single table,” and thus the system of conventions that define a society. Historical work “substitutes the rules of a social body

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 134.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 153.
(‘civility’) for the social workings of a physical body.” This is the alchemy of history: “it transforms the physical into social; it leverages the former to build models of the latter; it uses body parts to produce images of society.\textsuperscript{81}

This intextuation is one aspect of normalization: selecting some movements and capacities over others, exorcising “the disquieting unknowns of the body” (de Certeau) and banishing them beyond the “external frontier of the abnormal” (Foucault). It defines the proper and acceptable ways for each individual in a group to act (bow, do not drool, stand straight, do not smell). The resulting body maps or tables inspire fascination just as they are imbued with scientific authority; these “fictions” can therefore exercise a “regulating” function. With both representational and normative value, their circulation sustains their applicability.\textsuperscript{82}

In order to have a place in the historical city or in the planner’s city, one must incarnate the fiction that knowledge has produced. The law says: “Give me your body and I will give you meaning, I will make you a name and a word in my discourse.”\textsuperscript{83} Real bodies carry out its “incarnation.” For de Certeau, this is both a social and an amorous experience:

\begin{quote}
The act of suffering oneself to be written by the group’s law is oddly accompanied by a pleasure, that of being recognized (but one does not know by whom), of becoming an identifiable and legible word in a social
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{81} de Certeau, “Histoires de corps,” 181. My translation.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 180. My translation.

\textsuperscript{83} de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, 149.
language, of being changed into a fragment within an anonymous text, of being inscribed in a symbolic order that has neither owner nor author. The body's objective textualization in history, public policy or architecture constructs an anonymous order whose embodiment in human acts does not result from some simple automatism. "Becoming identifiable" and "being recognized" are not questionable in themselves. In the context of the disability allowances in the United Kingdom, for example, associating one's experience with a list of possibilities and representing that framework in social settings are, under the circumstances, comprehensible acts. And this is before accounting for all of the ruses and "poaching" that a tactical incarnation or role-playing might realize.

However, notwithstanding the social implications of these incarnations (whether passive or transformative), de Certeau alludes to the gratifying aspect of upholding the social text with one's body. This sensation is attested to in the satisfaction of dressing up or down, of posing, of corresponding to an image or expectation, of controlling one's movements and gestures through an effort whose rewards one values—a contract whose terms one learns in the earliest stages of development.

With de Certeau, then, there is pleasure all around: for the disembodied eye on the viewing platform as well as for the body entangled in the web of social texts produced by history, public policy, entertainment media, and architectural discourse. At the same time, pushing the circularity of incarnation and

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84 Ibid., 140.
intextuation forward necessarily contributes to more of the city planner's abstractions, more of the sociologists categorizations, more of the architect's programmatic simplifications, all of which are manifested in textual and otherwise concrete forms that enter into the circuits of both specialized and profane knowledge. "Every printed text repeats this ambivalent experience of the body written by the law of the other"\(^{85}\): this is like the ethico-political ambivalence that requires one to "determine the main danger" with Foucault. But Foucault posits the autonomy of the technologies that target the body's life in modern societies, at the same time making his own work appear to hold a panoptic position external to the field in which those technologies apply. In contrast, de Certeau associates the possibility for a scriptural economy to problems of the flesh. The necessary absence of the body from the text causes the movement, which is therefore a function of very human factors: desire, lust, pleasure. Through modernity, the evolution of faith into eroticism reconfigured the relationship between writing and the body, setting up the individual as both the producer and the subject of a writing that crafts body doubles as surely as it manifests a longing for corporeality. Any text refers to at least two positions: the god-like eye that (momentarily) escapes being written and that contemplates the exteriority that it will organize (events from the past, urban space, social phenomena); and the written body that incarnates the law. Both positions are amorous, but in their

\(^{85}\) Ibid.
(frustrated) pleasure they each contribute to refining and extending our knowledge of the body and the norms against which it is assessed.

In this erotics of knowledge, the link between the individual and the social is a non-corporeal object (a laboratory report, a statistical picture, a novel, a film, a house). That object or text is the setting for rehearsing the irreconcilable distance between one body and another. It occurs on two stages, back to back: that on which the stakes are about the body's utility, energy, productivity, with laws and policies, peer pressure, social coercion, advertising, culture; and that on which one suffers the paradoxes, the longing, the impossibility of encounter, and the promise of recognition. The text's position between bodies guarantees its erotic content, and therefore its ability to drive knowledge production.

A history book commands interest by sustaining a society's relation to its dead. But it seizes corporeality at another level, one that transmits its effects into the future by using "body parts to produce images of society" imbued with authority due to the scientific place that emits them. The text is inhabited by a final corporeality: "The defining counterpoint for the text that stages social models is the obscure structuring (collective as well as individual) of the historian's body." Therefore, "models of social bodies are haunted by another body which, though hidden, nonetheless gives them structure." We could construct an analogous complexity for architecture, which would, for example, allow a global appreciation

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86 de Certeau, "Histoires de corps," 181. My translation. De Certeau cites as examples the obsession with feminine blood and the fascination with whiteness in Michelet's work.
of Loos's houses, including those discussed by Colomina and that discussed by el-Dahdah. There, the complex intertwining between a social eros and a personal eros could be explored through the notion of an erotics of knowledge.

With the body in the text in religion, history, and literature, the line between undertaking the conquest and suffering it blurs. In architectural work, proliferating references to activity sustain the nostalgia for Oneness. Architecture, imbibed with a desire to recover a missing body, narrates corporal movement and its corresponding sensations. To make bodies live is to bring them back and to open the possibility of becoming whole with them, of overcoming the lack: a formative psychological one, one that is due to actual loss (of a loved one), the lack that haunts a society aware of its ancestors and anxious about its descendents. Making or reading architectural works and texts about architecture sustains the illusion of potential completion at many levels.

At the same time, architecture is cultural work carried out by individuals in the context of a discipline. Architecture transforms its evocations of bodies into proliferating images of movement and sensation. The "dynamic of belief," as Vigarello calls it, fuels the work's epistemological effects, whereby a knowledge of what bodies are and what they can do works its way into individual expectations and social norms, where it is in turn tested, refined and sent back into the circuit in the form of more body writing. An architectural work intextuates through its legible reflection of bodily occupation, and prompts incarnation through the bodily schemas that it demands, thereby strengthening social law's
grasp on the human body. In Loos’s architectural love letter to Josephine Baker, the plans and the model describe how bodies might move and what they might see and hear. Perhaps those motions and sensations are traceable back to Loos’s own desires. The project asks me to project his body ascending stairs, traversing a room, peering through a picture window into a swimming pool’s watery mass, where Baker’s body glides and turns in the buoyant medium. But those bodies’ capacities and gestures are recognizable without knowing their specific names. The stairs, walls and windows drawn in plan reproduce the elements that correspond to certain corporealities. They refer to a more general knowledge of bodies and to the desire to accommodate them. I write a body into the work’s lines, alternately as guest and as swimmer, two of my others in whose motion and sensation I believe despite all reason. Where architecture’s author and addressee are anonymous, this identification is with “no-body” in particular, but rather with a body whose existence is promised in the script. It is a promise that is never kept. Asked to provide what is missing, I comply with pleasure.
Death Threats

Beaten paths make charming cadavers

Guillaume Apollinaire

I have discussed how the body activates architectural work with an erotic dimension organized around a life-longing, and how this has both individual and social dimensions. The place of life’s opposite in this discussion has been confined to the historian’s material and to individual and collective mourning. Where death has been mentioned, it has not been a matter of the limits beyond which meaning falls apart. Rather, the relationship between death and the text has been described as somewhat functional: mourning initiates a production. It links a society to its past (its dead) and a science to its object, or through literature to a contemporary figure: the “ordinary man” as ordinary in his life as in his death. Non-life in these cases helps to drive the economy that intextuates and incarnates knowledge of the body.

The phenomenon identified in the architectural texts in chapter 2 is something else, although it is not unrelated to this economy. Those texts do indeed partake of this erotics of knowledge, evoking living bodies at an epistemological level with social and political implications. They link us to more or less anonymous figures from the past, whose fleeting presence in the buildings is

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simulated in the text. However, the incongruous appearance of bodies lacking the vitality promised or guaranteed by writing does not play that game. Those bodies do not come forth, as Michelet might have wished, in calm and orderly fashion. They are disruptive, disturbing the celebration of revitalized voices with cries.

De Certeau's skyscraper metaphor for planning and the knowledge it creates is a critique of the urbanist's "misunderstanding of practices." The everyday escapes "the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye." 88 Parallel to de Certeau's explicit critique, we can identify another aspect of his metaphor that returns to the principle question of writing and bodily vitality. For de Certeau, the "voyeur-god" created by the "panorama-city" makes himself alien to daily life, and, "like Schreber's God, knows only cadavers." 89 This is a reference to Daniel Paul Schreber, the late-nineteenth century German judge who committed his psychosis to paper in his memoirs. 90 There, Schreber asserts that "God knows nothing of the real and living human being, ... his only dealings should be with

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88 de Certeau, Practice, 93.

89 Ibid. Also: "Indeed, like Schreber's God, who 'communicates only with cadavers,' our knowledge seems to consider and tolerate in a social body only inert objects." 20-21.

cadavers." Through this allusion, de Certeau associates the writer's disembodied view with, on the one hand, an erotics of knowledge, and, on the other, the opposite of life. The tension between bodily life and death is here again related to the tools and positions that representation and knowledge require. It recalls the artist in Pèrec's novel who plans a painting of a cross-section through his apartment building, in which he will represent "the people who had lived there and the people still living there and all the details of their lives." Like de Certeau's ordinary man, the painter's subjects provide the beginning and the necessity of putting marks down on a blank sheet. But having put himself in the position of the all-seeing eye at infinity, he only sees the building's residents "petrified in terminal postures as insignificant in their solemnity as they were in their ordinariness." The ordinariness of life escapes Schreber's God, Pèrec's painter and de Certeau's urbanist, leaving them only solemn corpses as interlocutors.

Such writing is haunted by the prospect that its god knows only cadavers. This appears to occur in some texts about architecture that make bodies live in support of their assertions. Writing tools create the distant point from where the

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91 Schreber, Mémoires, 60. My Translation. "Dieu, selon l'ordre de l'univers, ne sait rien de l'être humain réel et vivant et n'a pas à en connaître, il ne doit, selon l'ordre de l'univers, avoir commerce qu'avec des cadavres."


overall picture of the building and the life within can be drafted. The argument constructed on evocations of movement and sensation is troubled by another possibility indicated by the inanimate body. Recalling Rossi’s discussion of deposed architecture, the unexpected body “breaks the frame of reference” in which architecture’s significance relies on corporal vitality. Within that frame, architecture relates to the body insofar as it accommodates its movement and sensation. It structures an imagination that corresponds to the knowledge that supports a power based on the forces of life. It reproduces norms and locates individual corporealities in the interest of efficiency: getting from one point to another with the least effort and eliminating frictions and uncertainties. The selection process that eliminates the body’s “disquieting unknowns” and its unpredictable actions is not only a matter of the building’s efficiency, but of the argument’s efficiency as well.

Beyond the frame drawn by the text, architecture’s relationship to the body can be less utilitarian and demand more effort. The frame shatters abruptly in the texts on La Tourette and Loos’s architecture, carried out by bodies undisputedly devoid of life. In Rossi, the body that breaks step with architecture’s orderly parade of inhabitants is not only that which is dead and gone, but is also that which is immobilized, numb, dying, or too young to “live fully.” In architecture, the opposite of bodily vitality does not have to be death. For example, the La Tourette text does not require Le Corbusier’s corpse to break its frame; a wheelchair-bound guest would disrupt the text’s underlying assumptions without
resorting to death. On the one hand, using the sole elevator in the building would save him or her the disorientation caused by the different stairways, and, on the other hand, the building's resistance to easy use might not seem unlike the resistance encountered elsewhere. In a similar way, a blind woman in a Loos house would not support Colomina's scopic argument about theatricality and would underline the universal assumption of vision in architectural discourse.

Neither of these speculations suggests that the authors should have done otherwise. Counterfactual examples help to further understand the operations at play in architectural works, and this can be done independently of a critique of the authors' intentions. Moreover, it can and perhaps should be done without the pretense that including more bodies in architecture is better. This is particularly true if we are interested in how the "non-sense" of any of these bodies for architectural discourse is the beginning of an inquiry into the problems they pose for the society that hosts those writings.

Before addressing the question of sense and non-sense, we should clarify the status of the architectural object in this discussion. The example of the World Trade Center can bring some confusion. Through de Certeau's reference to the skyscraper, one might be tempted to see architecture as nothing more than a tool that creates distance and sustains a lust to be an eye at infinity. No doubt architecture is a useful strategic tool and that the tactics that "users" employ are of boundless interest. Here, however, I will focus on the architectural work as something made in relation to a knowledge of the body, and as something that
beckons its interlocutors to give their bodies up for meaning. The threat of the body's non-life troubles both the strategic and the "economic" dimensions of architecture, but I feel that the significance of that threat is of greater interest in the latter case.

Orality in the Text

For de Certeau, there is no "pure" voice that one could try to hear or recover. Only a fiction collects the sounds of pre-modern enunciations under the sign of a unique Voice, Culture, or Being. Whatever authentic speech was:

Today it is 'recorded' in every imaginable way, normalized, audible everywhere, but only when it has been 'cut' (as one 'cuts a record'), and thus mediated by radio, television, or the phonograph record, and 'cleaned up' by the techniques of diffusion. Where it does manage to infiltrate itself, the sound of the body often becomes an imitation of this part of itself that is produced and reproduced by the media—i.e. the copy of its own artifact.⁹⁴

This normalization of the body’s speech is a historical specificity. A society based on a scriptural economy, where the body is inducted into a text that it then acts out, introduces a disjunction between writing and orality.⁹⁵ It constructs orality as an impediment to its rationalization of expression and communication:

⁹⁴ de Certeau, Practice, 132.

‘Progress’ is scriptural in type. In very diverse ways, orality is defined by (or as) that from which a ‘legitimate’ practice—whether in science, politics, or the classroom, etc.—must differentiate itself. The ‘oral’ is that which does not contribute to progress; reciprocally, the ‘scriptural’ is that which separates itself from the magical world of voices and tradition.\footnote{de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, 134. For example, the dialects and tongues whose repression in favor of national languages beginning in the late eighteenth century is still today a bone of contention in many parts of Europe. The survival of Breton, Occitan, Catalan, and Basque has been assured in part by adopting the same systematization that justified the preeminence of French and Spanish, in particular their integration into the educational setting. Regarding the disappearance of local tongues in France, see Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, \textit{Une Politique de la langue: La Révolution française et les patois} (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).}

Orality here does not mean simply that which is said; it refers to that whose saying is not formed from and forming a rational system whose model is the written text. We could extend this to the domain of bodily emanations that are not only vocal. As the go-between two moments in the textualization of society, the body is useful for progress. But flesh must become scriptural if it is to be a body. Writing changes flesh into a body. It has many tools at its disposal, from the artifacts of punishment through artificial pumps and joints to the techniques that remove or add hair. Those tools indicate “the necessity that introduces the law into the flesh by means of iron and that, in a culture, neither authorizes nor recognizes as bodies flesh that has not been written out by the tool.” The rise of chemical medicine and of cybernetic models has not displaced the apparent necessity to modify the body with calibrated instruments if a culture is to recognize it.\footnote{de Certeau, \textit{Practice}, 142-3.} In a culture of progress, the body’s unknowns are either under the
cutting edge of corrective technologies or are banished to the same exile as oral history, at best tolerated as unfortunate casualties of an advancing civilization and certainly not reliable on the front lines.

We discussed earlier the pleasure in becoming legible with respect to a social text. We must note the near impossibility of imaging an alternative. The normative discourse long ago became a story, “a text articulated on something real and speaking in its name, ... recounted by bodies.” Its demands for compliance rest on a credibility whose evidence is so apparent as to make the question of legitimacy absurd.

Throughout de Certeau’s oeuvre, “the cry” represents the possibility that some part of the body cannot be transcribed: “Perhaps at the extreme limit of these tireless inscriptions, or perforating them with lapses, there remains only the cry: it escapes, it escapes them.” The newborn’s cry and the cry at the moment of death bracket a life of encoded speech acts. In between, the cry breaks out as “the body’s difference, alternately in-fans and ill-bred, intolerable in the child, the possessed, the madman or the sick”—lapses on the road to progress. As flesh “resists successive efforts to modify and control it,” the apparatus that inscribes knowledge recalibrates and multiplies its tools, forcing “opaque carnal reality” to gradually reveal its complex organization:

Between the tool and the flesh, there is thus an interaction that shows itself on the one hand by a change in the fiction (a correction of

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98 Ibid., 149.

99 Ibid., 147-8.
knowledge) and, on the other, by the cry, which shrieks an inarticulable pain and constitutes the unthought part of bodily difference.\textsuperscript{100} Knowledge is corrected through the incarnation of body-texts, which relies on “the obscure desire to exchange one’s flesh for a glorious body, ... and to be transformed into a recognized word.” The only force that opposes this passion is “the cry, a deviation or ecstasy, a revolt or flight of that which, within the body, escapes the law of the named.”\textsuperscript{101} The cry is beyond Foucault’s “external frontier of the abnormal,” where it is not amenable to normalization or regulation. It is the sound of a corporeality that poses questions of place and propriety in modern society.

The cry is the hypothesis that de Certeau posits in his attempt “to hear these fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language.”\textsuperscript{102} His analysis of the scriptural economy is the way “to locate the points at which voices slip into the great book of our law,”\textsuperscript{103} voices that “can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur.”\textsuperscript{104} There, they constitute an orality that insinuates itself into the scriptural economy’s “endless tapestry.”\textsuperscript{105} Those threads disturb the progress sanctioned by writing. They chart

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 145.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 131.
the course of an unrecognizable corporeality, weaving "what is not 'remade' by the order of scriptural instrumentality" into the script itself.\textsuperscript{106}

We return here to the question of scientific and literary approaches to writing. While writing promises comprehensive and controlled representation of the body as a means to the rational and productive distribution of its resources, something else happens in the erotic space of the text: "What is produced as a management of life, as a mastery or writing of the body constantly bespeaks death at work. What escapes or returns into scientific discourse betrays the obsessive adversary it claims to exorcize."\textsuperscript{107} The ceaseless attempts to place life within a frame, to accumulate its forces and "to make capital substitute for immortality," brings the devil into the works. These disturbances are the effect of the cry. Thus the form used to transcribe life in a syntagmatic space is traversed by a senselessness that recalls the impossibility of its task.

\textit{Recuperating Nonsense}

Fragments of the body beckon the observer to find sense and meaning in them, to discern the mechanism for meaning production in the sounds coming from someone else's mouth, to infer a language from speech, a body language from body motion, a sense to sensation. The non-sense or pre-sense or a-sense of bodily movements, sounds and sensations is made into sense through an act

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 132.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 150.

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 196.
of interpretation that uses specific tools, and that crafts new tools when needed. Those tools include rules of composition, of signification, of semantics and syntax, of proportions between cause and effect.

There is no shortage of attempts to tame the devil. Upon hearing a voice, the scientist looks for a system. Speaking in tongues or glossolalia perhaps stimulate the most interest, as they concern the most obvious of scripturalized meaning-making media. De Certeau suggests that the history of glossolalia is almost entirely that of the interpretations which would have a vocal delinquency speak sentences.\(^{108}\) Jean-Jacques Courtine points out that there is no glossolalia without an interpreter.\(^{109}\) The fictional language that supposedly underpins the strange sounds is built entirely in the oral realm, but only “where there must be speech.” The observer’s search for sense in the body’s emanations instigates their production. Like tourists curious to know what the different parts of a traditional dance mean, the scientific gaze creates the setting for a performance. This is exemplified in the case of Elise Muller (alias Hélène Smith), whose oral expression in invented languages drew the attention of Théodore Flournoy, Ferdinand de Saussure and others in the intellectual circles of Geneva in the late 1890s. Muller’s séances as a medium progressed from communicating with the dead to traveling to Mars when the attendants’ interests, fueled by an *air du temps*, had turned to the red planet. Having already “spoken” a half-dozen

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\(^{109}\) Courtine, 184.
invented languages, Muller had no trouble providing a babbling Martian akin to religious glossolalia. But Flournoy's high expectations initiated a series of séances over two years that would result in, on the one hand, a dictionary of the Martian language,\textsuperscript{110} and, on the other, Flournoy's frustrated realization that Muller's Martian structure was a simplistic copy of French linguistic conventions. For Courtine, "the subliminal invention of Martian owes its structure—a limited vocabulary, elementary rules, a possible word for word translation into French—to Flournoy's desire to have a language come from the voice."

There is perhaps an amorous dimension to this scientific work, akin to the erotics of knowledge discussed earlier. Roland Barthes notes that the necessity that the other's bodily gestures contain meaning differentiates love from fetishism. When in love, all contact is like a question that requires a reply: "I will tear open the other's body, obligate it ... to enter into a game of meaning: I will make it speak."\textsuperscript{111} This is not to suggest that Flournoy was in love with Muller, but rather that the scientist's rapport with the body's emanations is likely inseparable from a desire that precedes encounters with specific individuals. The call and response that characterizes those encounters follows a meaning-making process that applies to research as well as to love.

This search for meaning echoes that of the historian who must make sense of what the archives are saying, who overcomes disorder, produces a


\textsuperscript{111} Barthes, 82. My translation.
reason for things, assimilates bodily acts to systems of comportment. Michelet's city for the dead and the living is a utopian scheme, not a haphazard settlement. Likewise the architect who observes human action and transcribes it into form, where one can recognize one's body written by the other (the skateboarder, for example). Some collect data about peoples' reactions to environmental stimuli, and craft an organized palette for considered implementation (to increase productivity in an office, to heighten the sense of relaxation or security, to reduce agitation and foster concentration). As in the case of Martian languages, the truth of the proposed system is less important than the intensity with which order and meaning are sought, and how this quest stimulates the production of further material for analysis.

Even where disorientation is valued, as in Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier's appreciation of La Tourette, the text needs to make sense of confusion, to give it a meaning, to tie it back to an intention that has at its disposal an understanding of the relationship between one's motion and one's comprehension. The text invokes both a body that would experience and understand disorientation in the manner described, and an architect able to deploy a knowledge of architecture and perception to intended ends. It summons the dead for authority and frames the way a body should experience the architectural object in question. It indicates a way of looking that must make sense at all costs.
The Irrecoverable

The furious production of reasonable associations between voices and systems can lead astray. Elsewhere Barthes catches himself scrutinizing the loved body, excavating it, as though he would see the mechanical cause of his desire inside the other’s body: “I am like a child who dismantles a clock to know what time is.”¹¹² One might study the “practices of everyday life” in order to understand how society works in space, but this does not guarantee that one would understand people any better. Some works lay traps, such as Bosch’s Garden of Delights. That triptych, de Certeau argues, filled with bodies in various positions, both demands that sense be sought, and refuses to offer that sense up to the observer. The figures “are neither words nor meanings but silent graphemes, straight, slanted, reversible, and changeable,” they are “glossography and calligraphy.” Distributed over the painting’s surface, the bodies “form flowery downstrokes and dropped initials, a chain of forms and

¹¹² Barthes, 85. My translation. Robin Evans uses a complementary timepiece analogy in his discussion of linguistic approaches to architecture: “Taking an old-fashioned watch apart to learn how watches are made is not an unreasonable activity. But determining the motions of the clockwork and then reproducing these in concrete is not reasonable if you want either to tell the time or to represent it.” Robin Evans, “Not To Be Used for Wrapping Purposes: A Review of the Exhibition of Peter Eisenman’s Fin d’Ou T Hou S Shown at the Architectural Association, London [1985],” in Translations From Drawing to Building and other Essays (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 126-127.
strokes, in short, a *beautiful but illegible handwriting.*"\(^{113}\) There is nothing to read in the painting; it "organizes, aesthetically, a loss of meaning."\(^{114}\)

Perhaps Bosch’s tableau is less a trap than an invitation for a deposition of the body, where we suspend the assumption that the body’s ready legibility gives sense to the work in order to consider another rapport of the work with questions of corporeality. This would require a way to identity the effects of something from beyond expected corporal limits on the work itself.

In the séances where we observe the body’s performance, that which can not be admitted by the organizational schema is a cry. The progressively refined and recalibrated tools for intextuation turn away from it. They refrain from giving it a name. But the cry marks the material produced. It is the orality in the text. Countering the logic by which sounds are transcribed as words in a semantic and syntactic system, an unknown corporeality returns as “words that become sounds again.”\(^{115}\) “Hickory, dickory, dock / The mouse ran up the clock:” part of this rhyme describes motion in a language we understand. Another part entertains a tongue or ear that can remain blissfully unaware of the transformations that erased the traces of a lost meaning. It just *sounds.*

In the final chapter or epilogue of *The Mystic Fable,* “Overture to a Poetics of the Body,” Michel de Certeau explores this phenomenon in a poem by

\(^{113}\) de Certeau, *Mystic Fable,* 70. Emphasis in original.

\(^{114}\) Ibid., 49.

\(^{115}\) de Certeau, *Practice,* 163.
Catherine Pozzi. "Très haut amour, s'il se peut que je meure / Sans avoir su d'où je vous possédais / En quel soleil était votre demeure / En quel passé votre temps, en quelle heure / Je vous aimais ... ": for de Certeau, it is an amorous poem recounting separation, despair and an "unjustifiable and self-assured" expectation "of a reconstitution by the unknown, loved interlocutor."\(^{116}\) Parallel to this content and at times mingling with it, a sound comes from the words carried by a rhythm:

Its movement is repetition: it recasts phrases in the form of incantations (je meure/demeure/quelle heure). It whispers the same syllables to the ear (mille corps/encor/trésor/mille corps) and the same phonetic insistences (the chant is a variation in m: mou/meu/mais/mé/moil/meil/moi-même/ment, etc.).\(^{117}\)

These recurring sound fragments and alliterations are what de Certeau elsewhere called the "fragile ways in which the body makes itself heard in the language," the voices that "can no longer be heard except within the interior of the scriptural systems where they recur."\(^{118}\) In Pozzi's poetry, they "form an uncanny memory, prior to meaning." That memory "recalls something that is not a past; it awakens what the body does not know about itself." The poem says "more than fully formed sentences" in the thousand paths through its sonic

\(^{116}\) de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 297-8. This is the poem's first stanza of five. The English edition reproduces the poem in French and English: "Most high love, if I should die / Without having learned whence I possessed you / In what sun was your abode / Or in what past your time, at what hour / I loved you."

\(^{117}\) de Certeau, *Mystic Fable*, 297.

\(^{118}\) de Certeau, *Practice*, 131.
landscape. These sounds need not offer themselves up to making sense in order to indicate something. They are not the survivors of an authentic voice, but rather "enunciative gaps in a syntagmatic organization of statements" that certify that "there is something else, something other." They do not take effect in a cognitive setting, but nevertheless signal a corporeality.

Orality insinuates itself as a non-sense. It is not simply the opposite of something comprehensible, forming a paradox or a denial. It opens rather than closes the possibility for the work to mean. Orality is an excess. The rhyming and hopping interfere with meaning or temper it: "amorous intertwinnings ... lie hidden in the poem’s musicality—that is, in what is audible, not legible." One example among many:

The mémoire/histoire parallel allows us to hear the moi/toi duo, which the reader does not see. To the ear it intimates a closeness underlying the visible (legible) opposition separating the time of the Other (history) from internal duration (memory).

Thus de Certeau has us hear an orality that collapses the temporal and spatial gap that the text spells out. He finds a closeness beneath separation. In this discovery, we must distinguish between two moments. On the one hand, de Certeau makes sense of the sounds: moi and toi, I and you, one and other. This allows making more sense of the legible opposition between memory and history. On the other hand—in fact preceding the first moment and negating its objective

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119 de Certeau, Mystic Fable, 297 and 298.

120 de Certeau, Practice, 163-4.

121 de Certeau, Mystic Fable, 298.
stance—he harvests the excess by violating the conventions on which reasonable transcription and decoding rely. He tears words apart. His reading of the poem (which is its hearing) makes it speak of a closeness that the words and sentences are not aware of. It is nonsense to read that way, but that does not prevent the textual object from intimating bodily positions normally held apart.

Breaking the frame in which writing confines the body allows the orality in the text not only to become apparent, but also to make the work speak of problems beyond what normally makes sense. In Rossi’s text about the Modena cemetery, the infantile, injured and dying bodies do not simply negate its assertions about how the buildings would relate the their occupants. Rather, they invite the focus of interest to move beyond the limits of conventional invocations of bodies in architecture. In particular, they raise the possibility that architecture also poses questions of corporeality that exist only where the impetus to move, to feel, and to produce sense is suspended. Problems with mobility or the senses are normally treated in architecture as obstacles in the progressive integration of the body into its environment, which I have argued is inseparable from its instrumentalization. Deposing the ideal of such an integrated body might allow architectural work to reveal how it is inhabited by the doubts and fears concerning the body that, due to the preoccupation they cause on individual and social planes, should be the material for debate.

This comparison is less than satisfying. In the Rossi text, we read the words “old person,” “child,” “broken bones.” In Pozzi’s poem, the orality—and
therefore the indication of a cry that cannot be encoded—is "heard," not read. This is less a failure than a function of the path that has led here, and therefore an indication of the path ahead. The discussion of essays about architecture in chapter 2 identified a conceptual problem: how does a way of reasoning in architecture deal with what it must exclude as unreasonable, but that nevertheless continues to exist? At first glance, it looked like that messy reality smuggled itself back into the text with more or less subtlety. This led to an interest in whether or not the same occurred in design work, and to hypothesizing that there is a way to read it there. Chapter 3 contextualized the issue in the stakes laid out by Michel Foucault, which led to a journey through Michel de Certeau's dealings with problems of the body and the work. The problem now is not to return to writing about architecture and to read it like de Certeau reads Pozzi. Rather, the primary concern remains determining whether something in architectural works can, like the "words become sound" in Pozzi's poem, trouble the conventional meaning-making process with an excess (and not simply a negation). Rossi's text highlights the specificity of architecture, and the need to adapt what has been culled from de Certeau to the circumstances.

There is a temptation to follow the analogy: if one must speak the poem aloud to hear these voices that haunt a language that cannot make sense of them, then one must use a building to hear the body's cries in architecture. De Certeau hints at this conclusion: "These quotations of voices mark themselves on an everyday prose that can only produce some of their effects—in the form of
statements and practices." Here we encounter a variation on the problem that attends any attempt to explore architecture through ideas developed in relation to other kinds of works. The difficulty is compounded by our critique of the insistence on life that characterizes architectural thinking along with countless other areas that accommodate the human body. Of course one could (and should) use buildings, experience them; there is a whole knowledge to be acquired there. Perhaps the active body will sense the haptic equivalents of the repetitions, rhymes and alliterations that one hears and feels when reciting Pozzi's poem. But that is an option best left to "practitioners," and, for reasons I have discussed, it is best that we not head to the field with an analytical apparatus to prove how it works.

On the other hand, to leave it here fails to account for the effectivity of de Certeau's text when read silently. Reading de Certeau's "Overture to a Poetics of the Body," I understand its implications without having recited the poem. The body is indeed in the text, so much so that I hear it without sound waves caressing an ear drum. The task is then to create, in the space of writing, the same possibility for "hearing" an architectural work that de Certeau creates in his reading of Pozzi's poem. That is one modest step in bringing architecture to address more than the corporealities that it spells out in its openings and paths, its anthropomorphology or its composition.

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122 de Certeau, Practice, 164.
Nonsense

The key notion is that the cry does not make sense to the apparatus that writes the body. What is non-sense in architecture? Death is, of course, the datum of senselessness. It is an “elsewhere” for a society “that officially recognizes ‘rest’ only in the forms of inertia or waste.” For de Certeau, “the absence of work is non-sense” in modern society. That absence must be eliminated for the sake of the discourse whose credo is “There’s always something to do.” Thus we move beyond sight and mind “everything that might hinder the chain of production and consumption.” The dying man is “at the extreme frontier of inaction.” He “falls outside the thinkable, which is identified with what one can do.” He therefore constitutes a lapse in that discourse and must be “wrapped up in a shroud of silence: the unnamable.” Only cries escape the “law of the named,” which beckons all other bodily emanations to identify with its lexicon. If the dying man is at “the extreme frontier of inaction,” there are other unnamables within the border’s breadth. The cry indicates a body that is “in-fans and ill-bred,” displaying a lack of “good manners.” Its corporeality is “intolerable in the child, the possessed, the madman or the sick.”

In architecture, sense comes through the moving and feeling bodies that it invokes. They are furthermore bodies in control of themselves. Their speech in

\[123\text{ Ibid., 190-1.}\]
\[124\text{ Ibid., 149.}\]
\[125\text{ Ibid., 147-8.}\]
the text is what discourse needs. They hold the building together and make its qualities and shortcomings visible. They are, moreover, amenable to social dynamics because of their legibility: they can be named. In architecture, the cry—that “unthought part of bodily difference”\textsuperscript{126}—would then indicate immobility and numbness; it would raise the specter of uncontrolled, unsocialized, useless corporealities that threaten progress and good etiquette. Its bodies are characterized by inability, a hesitation, “bad manners,” a lack of seriousness, a failure to contribute. They mourn, languish, die. They are improper and are only thinkable where there is nothing to do and nothing to feel—in a word, where architecture usually is not.

We should search for the orality in architectural works that signals the cry of improper bodies. One the one hand, it gives perspective on some of the body issues that pose problems for contemporary society. On the other hand, it suggests a different relationship for architecture and the body.

These nonsensical corporealities are not to be sought as though a broken column meant a broken back and rotting wood siding meant a decomposing corpse. Architecture’s proper body is legible in architectural form because its movements, dimensions and capabilities have been translated into recognizable signs (doorways, passages, stairs, window sills). The indications of “something other” will not simply negate or upset those signs. They can not be interpreted as architectural elements-cum-words. The nonsensical aspects of corporeality—that

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 145.
is, those beyond the limits of architecture’s discourse—are only discernible through their effects on architecture’s sense, like the collapse of space and time that de Certeau writes into what Pozzi’s poem seems to say. There, a certain violence to the system initiates another movement. Illegitimate fragments (moi and toi) are brought together, and their effect redeems the initial act not through faithfulness, but through its opening of another possibility. In architecture, being open for the cry of a corporeality that does not “make sense” except where it alters an attention means accepting that not working, doing something, moving forward, or behaving with good manners contribute to making architecture. They are not all that is necessary, but they guarantee that architecture is not simply a matter of the body’s comfort, utility and leisure.

Like the rhythms, alliterations or repetitions that can only be heard in a poem, the body’s nonsense attests to a corporeality embedded in architectural form that otherwise seems to address only the narrow view that the body produces, and especially produces sense. The orality that has insinuated itself into architecture is where design fails to correspond to bodies in search of their meaning, and is unable to indicate where more writing needs to be done; that is, where design could be altered to draw more bodies into the logic of progress. The architectural work must be addressed not for what it says about this or that body, but for the parts of corporeality that preoccupy its culture. It is not like a prism that breaks light into an ordered composition, but like a canyon whose
many scales of relief send back layered echoes of civilization’s sounds. A cacophony in which to ponder “the unthought part of bodily difference.”
CHAPTER 5
ARCHITECTURE AND THE BODY IMPROPRE

Pictures and plans of the Stone House in Tavole (Herzog and de Meuron, Italy, 1985-1988) depict a troubling architecture. It is difficult to say what makes this project stand out as both grim and promising. (Figures 1 to 5; figures at end of chapter.) On the one hand, the Stone House appears vacant, grey, spiritless. It is funerary, cold, grave. On the other hand, the unorthodox plan and unfinished appearance seem to be an invitation to occupy it, which plays to a pervasive architectural interest in appropriation, critique, and transformation, perhaps even of a social (and not only physical) nature. It has other ambiguities. Inside, walls cross in plan to produce the principle figure of the house. This cross is reproduced as a motif in the façade of dry masonry walls. There, the figure is drawn by the exposed slab and columns that, as the armature for the building, may be said to store the enclosing walls that seemed a minute ago to store the figure. To see if that vacillation between structure and surface continues inside, one is limited to the drawings: it is next to impossible to find anything but exterior photos of the Stone House, as though it were a sepulcher or sarcophagus whose interior was of limited interest. Perhaps this is reasonable. Compared to its contemporary houses of note on the architectural scene, the Stone House’s
interior is relatively devoid of life. Noteworthy projects often have bridges, double height spaces, nooks, mirrors, level changes or other exceptional elements. There is none of that here. In a published text about the Stone House, architect Jacques Herzog comments that he and partner Pierre de Meuron “didn’t want to create a perfect, jewel-like object.”1 This is possibly a comment on the preciousness of highly articulated architecture.

Yet looking again at images of the Stone House, we might be baffled by the discrepancy between the architects’ intention and the result. Despite its ambiguity, the building, like so much of Herzog and de Meuron’s work, appears to be a flawless gem. Such inconsistency between intention and outcome is common in architectural design. We could approach it as a problem to be criticized or overcome. On the other hand, we could enter into the project, risking the same confusion that may trouble the architects themselves. The ambivalence or contradiction may be the effects of mixed signals between different levels of reading architecture. There may be more reversals due to the excess that an improper corporeality has woven into the project.

_The Stone House Plan_

An initial glance at the Stone House plans reveals an unusual arrangement of walls, passages and rooms. (Figure 5) On the main floor, two walls intersect at right angles to form the figure of a cross. These interior

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partitions do not reach the House's exterior wall, and the passage from room to room happens at the building's periphery. The interior space could be understood as a large block partitioned by the cruciform wall, or alternatively as a collection of rooms that have come together to form an aggregated whole. The text that accompanies the plan explains that the architects “renounced corridors, serving and served spaces.” This subtle change to an otherwise typical plan for a small house has profound architectural consequences. The passages from one part to the next are more like lapses than doorways, resulting from a difference rather than from a removal of matter. (Figure 6) More importantly, there is nothing that one usually calls circulation space, yet every space (save two, which we will discuss later) connects two others. None of these spaces is solely a room or a corridor, but rather a hybrid of both. The same could be said of a canonical plan libre, such as Mies van der Rohe’s plan for a Brick Villa (1923) or Le Corbusier and Jeanneret’s Villa Stein-de-Monzie at Garches (1927). But the Stone House is very different from these elaborate Modern Movement works. In contrast, the Stone House poses an almost simplistic challenge to the division of servant and served spaces.

The Stone House’s distinction can be explored through a review of traditional domestic planning. Robin Evans has argued that walls, doors, windows and stairs “are employed first to divide and then selectively to re-unite

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2 Herzog, 8.
inhabited space." As an example of division and fusion in architectural planning, Evans shows that the appearance of corridors in domestic environments was accompanied by an attitude on the part of architects that good planning would reduce the frequency of unwanted contact between the inhabitants of a house. Architects like John Webb and Sir Roger Pratt designed country houses for the English rich in which a corridor installed parallel to a series of rooms allowed for their direct access, preventing any one room from becoming the link between two others. This was in marked contrast to, for example, domestic architecture before the mid-sixteenth century, in which "there is no qualitative distinction between the way through the house and the inhabited spaces within it." The English country house did not bank everything on the corridor. Adjacent rooms were often connected by direct passages, so that the main apartments were enfiladed by a vista of doors. (Figure 7) Pratt had a specific effect in mind when he designed such houses:

As to the smaller doors within, let them all lie in a direct line one against another out of one room into another so that they being all open you may see from one end of the house to the other; answerable to which of the windows be placed at each end, the vista of the whole will be so much the more pleasant.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) Ibid., 64.

There were two parallel means of circulation in a house, each with a distinct role to play. The passage, or corridor, allowed the simultaneous separation and servicing of rooms, while the enfilade of doors produced a pleasing aesthetic experience. As Evans interpreted the situation, “the integration of household space was for the sake of beauty, its separation for convenience.”

Regardless of architects’ intentions, the split between utility and beauty acquires great significance in the context of the domestic social arrangements that it described. Pratt’s clients, as well as those of his fellow architects, headed households in which employed servants were the norm. The proper management of the house, which implied commodity as well as delight, found expression in the division between the rooms that were served and the spaces that served them. Evans distilled the consequences for social relations:

From these plans it can be seen how the introduction of the through-passage into a domestic architecture first inscribed a deeper division between the upper and lower ranks of society by maintaining direct sequential access for the privileged family circle while consigning servants to a limited territory always adjacent to, but never within the house proper; where they were always on hand but never present unless required.7

The material form of corridors and doorways found conceptual counterparts in utility and beauty, which themselves placed foundations in the experience of servants and served. The social law written into these houses produced different subjectivities, which were intimately linked with architectural form. In the daily

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6 Evans, 73.

7 Ibid., 71.
experience of domestic space, the law of the house and the economy of architecture were one and the same.

Much domestic planning in the twentieth-century retained the division between servant and served space. Theoretical texts made the preference for division explicit, as in Le Corbusier’s claim that “In a decent house the servants’ stairs do not go through the drawing room—even if the maid is charming.”

Where servants themselves disappeared from the house, the preoccupation with eliminating intersecting paths in the home persisted. Typical of this trend is Alexander Klein’s “Functional House for Frictionless Living” of 1928, which he designed from research conducted for a German housing agency. The drawing that compares his plan with that of a common nineteenth-century house reveals a concern with preventing lines of travel from crossing, even in a house for a nuclear family. (Figure 8) The logic is so acceptable that it is hardly noticed. To borrow Evans’s words again, here the “journey between bedroom and bath—where trod the naked to enact the rawest acts of the body”—was carefully separated from the circulation between other spaces. Evans points out that the notion that convenience in a house means reducing contact underwrites the codes, design methods and rules-of-thumb applied to the production of much

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8 Le Corbusier, “A Contemporary City [1929],” in *The City of To-Morrow and its Planning* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), 157-178. Here, Le Corbusier mentions this “obvious” criterion for domestic architecture to explain, through analogy, that the river serving a decent city should be discrete, too.

9 Discussed in Evans, 84-5.

10 Ibid., 85.
contemporary housing. But the roots of that logic lie with Pratt’s clients, and corridors and vistas in even small houses continue to produce situations in which one’s subjection to the presence of another from room to passage and passage to room is of significance.

The Stone House presents a problem for this logic. Each enclosed space is simultaneously both corridor and room. None are conventional rooms, as each is crossed diagonally by the only path to and from adjoining rooms. But neither are any of these spaces conventional corridors, as none efficiently serve any rooms. The plan perfectly superposes the servant and the served in a single group of spaces. The house is both corridor and suite at the same time. It is very different from Pratt’s notion of a house, and from its descendants. On the one hand, the corridor passes right through all the rooms rather than discretely serve them. The house dissipates the subject positions of servant and served in a single space that wavers between two mutually exclusive possibilities. Where a corridor solves the problem of the servant’s presence being part of their service, the Stone House offers only the absence of service. There is no architectural discrimination amongst the bodies whose paths cross in the Stone House. This is not simply a matter of domestic employees; the house would surely serve as a bad example in a Kleinian study. On the other hand, where a conventional enfilade of rooms allows a vista extending to the house’s exterior, the kite-shaped “vista” that connects the rooms in the Stone House does not correspond to any windows. A vista flatters the individual who observed it, the Stone house
makes no humble gestures. Applying Evans’s reading of domestic space, this plan offers neither beauty nor convenience.

Beyond questioning functional and aesthetic performance, the Stone House plan disrupts a more general concern with keeping people separated. For Evans, the division of spaces with different uses and occupants would not only eliminate inopportune meetings, but also keep passion and carnality at bay.\textsuperscript{11} While hierarchical social conventions are clearly embedded in the distinction between the servant and the served, so are moral imperatives that pertain to proper conduct. In the Stone House, the superposition of corridor and \textit{en suite} rooms might be interpreted as the sign and even medium for dissent from norms of propriety, promoting what might be called indecent behavior of the kind that Klein’s ideal house was to discourage.

But closer inspection of the plan tempers this reading. In fact, the plan reveals an unusual preoccupation with decency. One cannot circumnavigate the kite-shaped path. It is not circular. It has a beginning and an end. Any point along this line is between an origin and a destination that are the same: a water closet. (Figure 5) These two water closets have fixtures drawn in them, and might therefore be better called toilets. Whereas the water closet describes a small room with plumbing to carry away waste, the toilet carries the name of the specific fixture whose design, at least in much of the Western world, prompts one unmistakable position for the body. The two toilets produce a definite division in

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 88 and 90.
the house. Because the path that joins them cuts diagonally across each room, any point off the line is literally marginalized. Being off the path means being in the corner. And because the plan superposes corridor and *enfilade*, there are no rooms in which to take refuge from the circulation's dominant orientation, and no corridors to hide the architectural concern with bodily functions. One is either on the road to the privy, or at the edge of that road. The only alternative is to be in one of the water closets, which are the only dead-end spaces in the house, each a *cul-du-sac*. Paradoxically, their position, which seems to be discrete, is in effect domineering by virtue of the circulation pattern. By exacerbating the distinctions between types of spaces (through versus terminal) and bodily positions (standing versus sitting), the Stone House plan stresses the importance of confining a particular bodily activity to its proper place.

This reading of the Stone House plan recalls Foucault's notion of a disciplinary mechanism. The plan represents a real spatial arrangement that, through vision, would place the body under scrutiny and compel it to conform to expectations. On the other hand, we are reading the drawing, not the building. It uses a language that allows certain concepts to arise; for example, the opposition between being on the path or in the corner. Since we are not in the house subjected to the pressure it sets up, we have the luxury of considering this writing a bit longer and listening for what it might say about the kind of corporeality it appears to demand.
In chapter 4, I discussed de Certeau’s observation that Foucault’s disciplinary procedures have “their own place (un lieu propre) on which the panoptic machinery can operate.” The hospital, the psychiatric ward, the prison, the army, the school, the family: from book to book, power/knowledge and biopower concern bodies that are in a proper place. In French, propre refers to the specificity of something, such as the characteristics inherent in a place. Propre also carries connotations of propriety or appropriateness, for example of an activity. Furthermore, a toilet-trained child is called propre, meaning clean, like a “big person.” Insofar as the infant’s body does not yet control the boundaries between its interior and exterior, it is improper. But what is tolerated in the child is not in the adult. In domestic space, propriety is in part a matter of controlling the body’s functions. When reading a house plan (or office plan or museum plan), that assumption about proper corporeality gives sense to differentiating washrooms from other rooms. The limits between bodily characteristics or acts that can be accepted by architectural thought and those that cannot are clear: you only have a place here if you can hold on.

In practice, the infant’s body traverses the boundary. It can “go” anywhere. Applying Foucault’s terms to this situation, the infant’s body is beyond the

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dynamics of normalization. In domestic space, its bowel movements do not contribute to refining the norm about controlling the body’s functions, and it is not expected to conform to socio-spatial rules. In the adult, an inability to conform, whether due to physiological or mental problems, requires dissimulation or explanation, both of which further the grasp of regulatory mechanisms into individual lives while providing more raw information for what de Certeau called the body’s intextuation. Infantile corporeality is improper to architectural discourse not because it is characterized by bad behavior, but because it needs no excuse. It is an unthinkable and unknowable state, a non-life if compared with the mobility, sensation and self-possession that underwrite architectural thought. The child in diapers is not drawn onto the map, and therefore crosses borders like a ghost.

At a certain age, however, the child’s bodily control becomes a pressing concern. The requirement that children be toilet trained in order to attend preschool or kindergarten is just one case in which controlling one’s body is a precondition for developing an independent life beyond the domestic realm. The Stone House plan throws the geography of cleanliness and control into relief. All spaces that are not dedicated to what Evans called the body’s rawest acts are divided in two parts by the path that crosses them and that leads to the toilets. This exaggerated, almost didactic distinction echoes that employed to the

13 This is not to say that the infant’s body is not subject to regulatory mechanisms; parents and caregivers constantly compare body weight and size, food intake, frequency of urination and defecation, and many other ‘performances’ with statistics and anecdotal facts.
moment when an infant is compelled to control its bodily functions. We will therefore pursue how the Stone House sits at the border between the undisciplined and the proper body.

In "Lacanian algebra," that from which the subject has separated itself in an act of self-constitution is called the "objet a," the small "a" object or "objet petit a." This characteristically ambiguous term highlights the difficulty surrounding toilet training: petit a sounds like petit tas, or little pile, like the feces that the child is taught to think about. For the child, the objects status is confusing. Is it part of me? Did I craft it? Is it my baby? Or is it harmful to me, a danger? Is it a kind of death? The stakes at play for those around the child further complicate these questions. At this formative moment, a new distinction between the body's interior and the outside world is established, along with all the consequences concerning the way others relate to the child, in particular the parents.

Under the Freudian model of child development, this period of socialization corresponds with the anal phase. Literary critic Norman Holland observes that a child's "first moral imperative comes in the field of toilet training." During the anal phase, the parental emphasis on proper behavior is met by the infant's ambivalence and confusion. The anal erotic infant learning to control his or her filth is conflicted, because while physical pleasure is derived


from elimination, other pleasures may be had from temporary retention. Freud
suggests that one such pleasure is derived from “doing all sorts of unseemly
things with the faeces that had been passed.”\footnote{16} This requires \textit{not} defecating in
the accepted place, where it would be flushed down the toilet, and instead hiding
somewhere. Improper behavior in the house goes hand in hand with an improper
body—unclean, uncontrolled, and out of place.

In the Stone House, the oscillation between being on and off the toilet path
echoes the infantile play between retention and elimination. As such, it recalls an
ambivalence between defiance and submission that characterizes the infant’s
new relationship to its parents.\footnote{17} Defiance places the child in the corner of the
room, immobile. The corporeality that defies the adult injunction to behave
properly does not correspond with the mobility that holds the plan together. It is,
to paraphrase Balzac, the madness for architecture, a body from beyond the
limits of reasonable expectations.

The Stone House plan may challenge the social division inherent in
separating served and servant spaces. But the form this takes returns to a
fundamental moment of socialization in which the body, its dirt, and space
become problematic in the domestic realm. Where the House seems to dispel
with the social domination between masters and servants, it displaces attention

\footnote{16} Sigmund Freud, “Character and Anal Eroticism [1908],” in \textit{The Standard
James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis,

\footnote{17} Holland, \textit{Dynamics}, 39.
to the problems of control that arise between children and adults. The servant-
versus-served debate focuses on bodies in their proper place. The Stone House
plan raises the question of proper and improper corporeality in both social and
architectural realms. It speaks of the border between the pre-social and the
social, between impropriety and self-discipline. The “orality” of infantile
corporeality, which is not incidentally associated here with its “anality,” makes the
plan resonate with aspects of human experience that are beyond the proper
realm of architectural design—that are, in fact, beyond its control.

The ability to control sphincter movements is related to other motor skills
in the child. It is not only a question muscular maturity. It also concerns the
child’s development of a mastery over the body, which is related to profound
psychological changes. Françoise Dolto points out that the ability to climb and
descend stairs is one of many skills that signal a child’s physical and
psychological readiness for “becoming clean.”

Despite that it lacks what could be called the special effects of vertical
movement in more elaborate houses, the Stone house’s stair adds some
complexity to a discussion of cleanliness and architecture. It leads to a space
that contrasts with the main floor. The upstairs floor plan is open, offering
freedom of movement for the body that, having climbed the stairs, is in control of
itself. (Figure 9) Unlike the obstacle created by the water closets on the first floor,

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there is no impediment to circumambulation. The only closed room is the toilet, which sits a bit off center in the open space, backed against the continuation of the wall from below. On the other side of that wall, one finds that stair, leading down to where it intrudes ever so slightly on the kite-shaped path discussed earlier. Upstairs, the toilet and stair’s placement does not create a distinction between a dominant path and a margin where one hides or is placed. It simply offers a choice, in a very obvious place, once a privy is needed.

The Stone House Facade

A related preoccupation with the body’s cleanliness and control can be found in the Stone House facades. (Figures 1 to 3) The Stone House’s elevations seem to be generated by the house’s plan, with the walls’ cruciform figure rotated into section and then crystallized on the exterior vertical surface. The figure is exposed reinforced concrete, and the wall infill is mortarless stone. In the same text that mentions jewel-like objects, Jacques Herzog writes that the House’s exterior aspect was “inspired by the houses that one finds along the street in Italy, built by the inhabitants themselves and never quite finished.” The text explains that “the residents would have to pay taxes if they finished the house,” implying that an aversion to giving money to public coffers is why “One can still see some of the bare concrete structures, with no stucco on the walls.” The unfinished quality of the house is reinforced elsewhere. The windows in the dry-fit

19 Herzog, 9.
stone walls are detailed such that the interior surface of the glass lines up with the interior wall finish. (Figure 10) The windowpanes are moved as far into the wall’s depth as possible, at which point they achieve the least visibility from the outside without protruding into the space inside. The concrete, dry stone and deep-set windows form a rhetoric of incompletition.

By proposing an allusion between the Stone House and vernacular unfinished houses, the text, photographs and plan detail suggest that the household would refrain from the responsibilities of public life. The house’s private realm expresses that position to the public realm. But civic responsibilities are only one side of the tax coin, and the notion that the house would so readily wear its defiance on its face is more significant if we consider the privileges of public expression.

The private and the public have maintained an intimate relationship in the development of political life in the Western tradition. Wherever a public sphere of economic, social and political exchanges existed, a private sphere was produced as the site where those exchanges did not take place. Jürgen Habermas, among others, has discussed the Greek origin of the categories of public and private.

In the fully developed city-state the sphere of the polis, which was common (koïne) to the free citizens, was strictly separated from the sphere of the oikos [the household of the citizen] ... It was, however, their [the citizen’s] private autonomy as masters of households on which their participation in public life depended ... Status in the polis was therefore based upon status as the unlimited master of an oikos.20

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The prerequisite for participation in political life was a household under the law of a patriarch. The private and the public where thereby linked by a most vital tendon. While political life in Tavole today is surely different from that of Classical Greece (not least because the former does not rest on a patrimonial slave economy), the relationship between the integrity of one’s household and one’s public privileges has been maintained through modern institutions, both official and informal. What is unusual in the Stone House is that the direction of dependence has been reversed: by clearly signaling its exclusion from the public sphere, the house erodes the integrity of its own law, the nomos of the oikos. It implies that it is not a household with a master, and therefore not a household at all. It uses architectural references from without to suggest a social and political situation within.

Because the Stone House alludes to defrauding the public coffers, it appears to signal its voluntary exclusion from the public sphere. By implying that there is no master within, the House might be understood to challenge the types of domestic social organization upon which public life depends. This recalls the disruption of hierarchical servant-served relationships found in the plan. But just as the question of the infant’s body suggested social and psychological vicissitudes in the plan, a look at the corporealities raised by the facade reveals similar reversals.

In “Character and Anal Eroticism,” Freud speculates on how an individual’s infantile anal experience is related to his or her adult characteristics.
Based on his clinical research, he suggests that an adult’s orderliness, parsimony and obstinacy may result from the disappearance of the infant’s anal eroticism. For Freud, these character traits, “which are so often prominent in people who were formerly anal erotics, are to be regarded as the first and most constant results of the sublimation of anal eroticism.”21 Sublimating anal eroticism includes putting an end to using bodily functions to fulfill pleasures that are not socially acceptable. It is linked to the socialization of the infant within the household, a process that sets the basis for an individual’s participation in society beyond the family.

Orderliness is a “reaction-formation against an interest in what is unclean and disturbing.”22 The Stone House’s architecture, with its clean lines, symmetrical short elevations, and clear definition of materials, is certainly orderly in appearance. Obstinacy is related to the struggle between defiance and submission that characterize the anal phase, which we discussed in relation to divisions in the house’s plan. Parsimony seems to have a less obvious link to anal eroticism. But Freud observed that “The connections between the complexes of interest in money and of defaecation ... appear to be the most extensive of all.”23 In myths, fairy tales, superstitions, and dreams, “Money is brought into the most intimate relationship with dirt.” For Freud, “archaic modes

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21 Freud, 171.

22 Ibid., 172.

23 Ibid., 173.
of thinking have predominated or persist" in these narratives and beliefs. Herzog's anecdote about the house's design suggests a relationship between its facade and unpaid taxes, which echoes the stinginess that is characteristic of sublimated anal eroticism. At the same time, the contradiction between the refusal to create "a perfect, jewel-like object" and the building's high aesthetic quality produces the same kind of confusion as the connection, in the minds of former anal erotics, between "the most precious substance known to men and the most worthless."\(^2^4\)

Taken together, these resonances between Freud's notion of anal eroticism and the Stone House's architecture suggest that the work describes an aspect of corporeality that has little to do with the mobility and sensation that characterize architecture's ideal body. With its *mise en scene* of the struggle to control bowel movements, the house plans recall the concern with preventing organic matter, with its unpleasing odors and aspect, from appearing in the wrong place. The building's exterior, which exhibits characteristics that are related to sublimating anal eroticism, relates that struggle more specifically to the pleasure that can be derived during the anal phase. These topics are prior to, and perhaps beneath, the bodily considerations that enter into architectural discourse. However, when we read the architectural material independent of the framing device that admits only the body that controls itself like an average adult, a corporeality that involves significant overlaps between the individual and social

\(^2^4\) Ibid., 174.
realms speaks through architecture. Those bodies exist, and we encounter them everyday. Yet, for some reason, the concepts that structure architectural thought "forget" them. They are unthinkable and make no sense. Notwithstanding the inability to name them after elements of design, the architectural object hosts their murmurings through some excess inherent in its materiality. As de Certeau suggests, it is not a memory of a past, but of something other than what architecture can address with the means proper to it. It nonetheless resonates in the work, linking very personal and public aspects of human experience.

_Beyond Childhood_

Bowel control is not only a matter of growing up. It is also of concern with growing old, and even has connotations of death. Incontinence in the adult can have different causes. It is all the more preoccupying because, unlike the two or three year-old child, the incontinent adult will not be excused on the grounds that a bit of defiance with regard to social norms around feces is a healthy character trait. The adult who loses bowel control is a problem in the geography of our living environments. The discomfort that many feel at the mention of adult diapers is an indication of how much the control of the body's functions is a prerequisite for normal social interactions. That control is part of the increasingly restrictive notion of the normalized body that Foucault argued was a consequence of the insistence on vitality. The problem with incontinence is not simply due to the inconvenience caused by foul smells and stains. It represents
aging in a society that is unable to face that inevitable prospect. A lack of bowel control in the adult is a reminder of the body’s deterioration as it gets older. It is linked to a fear of aging whose intensity is matched only by the medical and marketing campaigns that target it.

Taking this perspective on the Stone House plan, an orality—understood in terms discussed by Michel de Certeau—institutes itself into the inhabitable space. That orality resonates with a concern whose scope is greater than infantile corporeality. The domineering presence of the toilets and the agitation that the diagonal path brings to each room can be understood as injunctions for adults as well. The plan alludes to incontinence in the body that is expected to control itself, and thus to the remapping of space that an undesirable situation requires.

The struggle for controlling bowel movements has a final connotation. Kenneth Burke offers this observation:

> Probably, whatever our struggles against it, there is a final moment of delicious yielding, sometimes bathetically announced, in temporal terms, even as a last neo-infantile surrender to sudden defecation. Every cell of the Stoic body, that for so many years had fought to discipline itself, is then probably—I first wrote ‘now’—ecstatic in its state of surrender.25

Becoming _propre_ is a matter of self-discipline, and all one’s life is spent attaining various levels of stoicism. In the last moments, despite resistance, the body becomes uncontrollable for the consciousness that had been built to master it.

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The same sometimes happens in near-death experiences. We discussed how the Stone House’s exterior alludes to parsimony and its associated anal eroticism. Its funerary connotations suggest a parallel evocation of the body, which does not so much negate the other as point to the ambiguity that improper corporealities introduce into architecture. In this light, that the toilets are the only dead-ends no longer seems unrelated to the topic: these cul-de-sacs activate a language whose connotations resonate with other architectural qualities. The appeal of the Stone House may lie precisely in this confused association of the pleasures, defiance and ecstatic surrender that occupy the border between acceptable and unacceptable corporealities.

Infantile corporeality is not normally a concern in design processes or discussion about architectural works. There may be good reasons for this: relative to other practical and aesthetic matters, it is a minor, passing problem that is worked out other ways. However, the architecture of the Stone House seems to invite breaking the frame around the bodily characteristics that are proper to architecture. The reversals and distractions in the Stone House’s apparent challenge to domestic hierarchies and rules of thumb occur where bodily characteristics such as immobility and filthiness orient our reading of the drawings and photos. Elements of architecture resonate with one another and allude to body problems that are not legible solely by projecting occupants into the plans, sections or photographs. A socially alert reading driven by a

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26 A friend survived a heart attack, which he enthusiastically described as being accompanied by sudden defecation.
conventional body that moves and feels is disturbed by the orality of infantile corporeality. It is not negated, but its interest in the social differentiation between servant and served bodies is parlayed into a general consideration of the concern with filth that attends many aspects of the body’s existence. While architecture’s proper realm of application may not regard bowel control as a priority, some other preoccupations may be speaking through architecture. If the unclean and hence un-socialized body has no place in architecture, its exclusion returns as an orality that interferes with architecture’s conventions.

One might be tempted to speculate that the Stone House’s architects are former anal erotics. But paths of intention and decision-making are difficult to map. In a partnership like that of Herzog and de Meuron, this is an even more risky proposition. Such speculation would also limit this reading’s repercussions for understanding architecture to the correspondences between a thing and its maker. On the other hand, how architectural work gives form to some preoccupations surrounding bowel control is perhaps an important question. Not because it concerns infants or the elderly in particular, but because it addresses one of a number of corporal conditions that, while they potentially affect us all, make no sense for architectural thinking. There is no reason to ask why Herzog and de Meuron bring their jewels into the world, or whether they should be allowed that pleasure. There is something to learn by asking why and how architecture addresses much more about the body than architects can. There
may not be definite answers, but asking reveals much about our human and social condition.

Figure 2. Stone House at Tavole. Reprinted from Wang *Herzog and de Meuron*, 25.
Figure 3. Stone House at Tavole. Terrace detail. Reprinted from Wang Herzog and de Meuron, 24.

Figure 4. Stone House at Tavole. Elevation. Reprinted from Wang Herzog and de Meuron, 23.
Figure 5. Stone House at Tavole. Main floor plan. Reprinted from Wang *Herzog and de Meuron*, 23.

Figure 6. Stone House at Tavole. Section. Reprinted from Wang *Herzog and de Meuron*, 23.

Figure 9. Stone House at Tavole. Upstairs plan. Reprinted from Wang *Herzog and de Meuron*, 23.

Figure 10. Stone House at Tavole. Plan detail. Reprinted from Wang *Herzog and de Meuron*, 24.
CHAPTER 6

WIDOW’S WORK IN MARGARET’S MUSEUM

_Margaret’s Museum_ is a melodramatic film based on a series of short stories by Sheldon Currie.¹ It is set in 1940s Glace Bay, a coal-mining town in Nova Scotia’s Cape Breton. Here, industrial coal mining relies on the ultimate rationalization of human bodies as units of labor: miners work in shifts around the clock, and, like a good example of Taylorism, the individuals breaking and shoveling coal in the earth’s depths are interchangeable. (Figure 11; figures at end of chapter.) The film is set in a world of coal, the darkest of material drawn from the earth’s belly. Its extraction is driven by and drives the materialism of the industrialized world. While mining in Glace Bay is a significant element in the story, the film also develops a critical connection between industrial and domestic environments. Through the carbon and heat it provides, coal is the basis for the steel that makes buildings, bridges and engines. But it is also the source of heat in the hearth around which family members sit at home. The film develops the relationship between the body’s use as a machine in the mines and its social and

erotic role in the domestic realm by casting two unusual houses as crucial agents in the narrative about industrial violence and personal loss in Glace Bay.

The film’s main plot recounts the courtship and marriage of Margaret MacNeil (played by Helena Bonham Carter) and Neil Currie (played by Clive Russell). At the end of the story, Margaret, widowed by a mine collapse, retreats to her mother’s house to dissect and dismember Neil’s body, extracting specific body parts for display in the museum of mining history that she later opens in her own house. There, Margaret also displays body parts taken from her brother Jimmy, who dies working with Neil in the doomed mine, and from her grandfather, who chokes on his own coal-blackened lungs while Margaret is recovering Neil’s and Jimmy’s bodies. Two houses are thus transformed into the curatorial and exhibition components of a museum program. In contrast to other mining museums that display the industry’s achievements alongside its equipment, Margaret’s museum displays carefully selected body parts and relates them to their erotic, rather than industrial, lives.

*Margaret’s Museum* contains an implicit critique both of patriarchal domesticity’s organization around sexed bodies and of industrialized society’s organization around rationalized bodies. In the film, industrial and domestic social issues converge at the site of architecture’s production, use, and transformation. The film portrays a world in which ideal bodies are, on the one hand, male, and, on the other, units of labor. Architecture is roped into muddying the ease of that distinction. The architectural interplay between Margaret’s house and that of her
mother addresses different aspects of the figure of the widow, a figure that is problematic where the lost male body paradoxically has dominant status in patriarchal social structures while it is instrumentalized through the impersonal mechanisms of capitalist modes of industrial production. The houses’ contrasting landscape situations, construction processes, formal structures and programs parlay the film’s narrative into a reconsideration of the distinctions between bodies that are useful and useless, male and female, scientific and poetic, and alive and dead. Through close readings of the two houses used by Margaret, we will explore how architectural form establishes a critical relationship with aspects of corporeality that blurs the distinctions between socio-political issues and existential preoccupations. That relationship is created not through the camera’s architectural framing of bodies full of life, but through architecture’s resonances with the body’s mortality and the mourning that inevitably attends it.

Architectural Work and Feminist Critique

The film’s third scene portrays Margaret as a poor, unsociable young woman sitting in mining town café, stretching her order of tea so as to spend as much time as possible in the role of customer. In a voiceover, she locates the film’s story in a field populated by dyads such as big or small, straddling or walking, naked or covered:
The first time I ever saw the bugger, I thought to myself, him as big as he is, me as small as I am, if he was astraddle on the road, naked, I could walk under him without a hair touching.²

Margaret’s words concern Neil Currie, a man who, having just entered the room, stares at her as though she were the only person there. Neil Currie is the new man in town whose nostalgia and pride for Gaelic culture feeds his hatred for working in the Protestant-owned mines. In this scene, we see the first encounter between Margaret and Neil, while we hear Margaret’s rendition of their meeting. This oral mise-en-scène within a scene not only reveals the film’s corporeal subtext, but also opens a reading of its architectural objects as more than mere film sets.

In Margaret’s mind, her motion is enabled because Neil’s legs are long enough. If this image foreshadows the marriage of Margaret and Neil, it also recalls Sappho’s mocking of the lanky groom in one of her wedding songs:

Raise high the roof beam, joiners,
_Hymen, O Hymen!
As high as e’er you can,
For Marslike comes the bridegroom proud,
_Hymen, O Hymen!
Tall as Terpander o’er the crowd,
A tower, not a man!³

² This sentence differs slightly from the first sentence of the original 1975 short story that would eventually be made into a screenplay: “The first time I ever saw the bugger, I thought to myself, him as big as he is, me as small as I am, if he was astraddle on the road, naked, I could walk under him without a hair touching a hair.” See Currie, “Glace Bay.”

In contrast to Sappho’s poem, which first demands that the architectural object be altered in anticipation of the groom’s arrival, Margaret only transforms the (eventual) groom himself—a “towering” man—into an architectural object, not unlike Sappho’s second reference to buildings. The (soon-to-be) bride—“on her way” along the road—is the measure of the building, whose beam needs no raising at all. Margaret renders Neil as a proper piece of architecture, an object adequate for her passage, “A tower, not a man!”

The big, naked object straddles a space through which the small person walks, and that person is thereby sheltered, even if only momentarily. In the context of the implied inevitability of a heterosexual relationship between the two protagonists, Margaret’s words recall the way a woman is thought to be covered by her husband upon marriage, incorporated into his legal existence and protected under his wing.4 Such a person lies under the shadow of marriage, an institution: the Law of the House. Margaret’s transformation of Neil into an edifice seems to indicate her auto-subjection to that Law. Her architectural work—an otherwise independent act—seems paradoxically to produce her erasure as an autonomous being.

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4 Such cultural beliefs are codified in many ways. In the English-speaking world, William Blackstone’s legal metaphors are vivid examples: “By marriage, the very being or legal existence of a woman is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection, and cover she performs everything, and she is therefore called in our law a femme couvert.” William Blackstone, Commentaries on the Laws of England, in Ehrlich’s Blackstone, ed. J. W. Ehrlich (San Carlos: California, 1959) 83. Quoted in Gilbert below.
On the other hand, Margaret suggests that she might keep walking, rather than forever subordinate her personhood to that of another (man-cum-institution). To “walk right under him without a hair touching” may betray her hope of escaping their encounter unharmed. Furthermore, because the film satisfies our expectations with the subsequent wedding of Margaret and Neil, and because the film also hints that Neil will not forever resist working in the deadly mines, it may be that Margaret’s image of the encounter foreshadows her becoming a merry widow who, as poet and scholar Sandra Gilbert describes it, “wakes up from the long dream called marriage.” Perhaps the significance of Margaret’s comment lies in the uncovering it suggests, whereby she emerges from Neil’s shadow as though widowhood’s reversal of the legally prescribed incorporation of the woman into the man left her untouched.

*Loss*

At the film’s outset, Margaret MacNeil has already lost her father and older brother in a mine collapse. Margaret lives with her widowed mother Catherine, her teenage brother Jimmy, and her grandfather, himself incapacitated by the black lung disease that is the fate of many miners.

The MacNeil family, then, is one that has lost its two principal adult males, leaving behind mourners of different sorts (spouse, children, parent). Similarly, the building that houses this family—the MacNeil House—seems to missing

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something. (Figures 12 to 14) Early in the film, Margaret explains to Neil that the neighboring house sunk into the ground. Beneath the surface of Glace Bay is a maze of old unmapped mines. Their tunnels follow veins of coal deposits now gone, invisible scars whose tortuous paths mark an absence. The subterranean physical void occasionally erupts onto the surface with architectural consequences: a pair of semi-detached houses is reduced to a single-family home. The MacNeil household inhabits a building that is both like and unlike every other house in Glace Bay's residential quarter. These are all company houses, rented by company employees or by their survivors. By design, each house is attached to one other, such that every residential structure houses two families. There are two forms of repetition produced by the quarter's residential landscape. First, there is the series of almost identical structures, each of which resembles the typical wood frame clapboard dwellings known throughout the Maritime region of the Northeastern seaboard, and differing only in color. (Figure 15) Second, there is a repetition that appears as an instance of architectural symmetry within each structure, whereby its geometric center is a mirror plane through which each house is repeated in reverse. (Figure 16) Because the MacNeil house was originally one half of a typical residential building, its interior is the same as those of all of the houses in town (as far as symmetry allows).

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6 The film’s rendition of a mine manager’s house offers material for further elaboration of the symbolic location of these two houses. The manager’s house, in which Margaret works as a maid and Jimmy instructs the manager’s daughter in dance, has a generous porch, large-pane windows, an entrance hall, and a salon.
On the outside, the MacNeil house associates losing a husband (or father or brother or son) when a new mine collapses to losing architecture when old mines collapse. By referring to death, this relationship between architecture and the body differs from more familiar correspondences. A programmatic relationship based on occupancy and use does not apply, since the architectural form emphasized in the MacNeil House is not related to the number of people in Margaret’s family or to the needs resulting from their presence. While there is one less occupant, the change in the building’s exterior appearance does not alter its interior shape or size. At the same time, the house does not establish an anthropomorphic connection with the loss at hand, as it suggests amputation rather than death. Perhaps a phenomenological discourse relates architecture to the body here, as the house’s exterior is visually striking to the observer. But this hypothesis is problematic for two reasons. First, as we have mentioned, the house’s interior is not affected by its exterior modification, so the perception of its specific qualities is limited. Second, and perhaps more interesting, perceiving the relation between widowhood and architectural loss in Margaret’s Museum necessarily refers to death, a state devoid of the movement and sensation that phenomenological approaches to architecture require. The bodies that tie architectural form to lived experience in the MacNeil House are gone and irrecoverable, like Le Corbusier’s body for La Tourette in Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier’s text about disorientation and discomfort. They are neither accommodated nor affected by architecture, but their absence structures the
building's effects. Perception is necessarily evoked in this discussion of architecture, but, as we will see, Margaret's Museum troubles the frame that keeps the wrong kind of corporealities from interfering with discourse.

*Mourning Difference*

Because the MacNeil House was originally one half of a typical residential building, it is internally identical to all of the houses in town. But its external aspect is an uncanny presence for the residential landscape in which it sits. The MacNeil House appears to have suffered a loss, its disposition suggesting that it is mourning.

For Freud, mourning is understood as a normal reaction to the loss of a loved person. Mourning facilitates a process of libidinal detachment. The state of grief that characterizes mourning is usually overcome over a definite period of time, after which the "ego becomes free and uninhibited again."7

There is a noticeable distinction in patriarchal culture between the modes of grieving expected of men and of women. Sandra Gilbert observes that the intimate and informal lament that mutters an expression of grief is generally gendered female, while the normal masculine form of mourning emphasizes a distance between the man and his loss through "highly structured, eloquently styled, and clearly resolved modes" such as the public eulogy and the pastoral

elegy. In cases of the death of a spouse, “the widower ... often stands apart from his loss, enshrining it in solemn measures, while the widow more frequently mutters or croons a lullaby to the lost one.” Muttered words and lullabies are directed to the dead man himself. In contrast, male grief work is a realization of mourning in material form. The author/mourner can separate himself from his work. We might borrow Réné Char’s observation of poetry and say that in public mourning “one only creates the work one detaches oneself from.” The work of mourning is a work of detachment, and its public display tends to be the activity of men.

In the MacNeil household, Catherine would be expected to undertake a “female-authored lament” rather than perform a “male-crafted elegy” following her husband’s death. In contrast, Catherine’s house—the MacNeil House—resembles a masculine form of mourning. It is a resolved material object in the public realm. Insofar as the film structures a relationship between Catherine’s loss and the collapse of the neighboring house, the architectural characteristic whereby buildings form figures in the landscape may be said to fulfill the social responsibilities of masculine mourning, while the architectural

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8 Gilbert, 572.


10 Gilbert, 571.
envelope hides the dishevelment of feminine grief within the enclosed space of
the house.

Widow’s Work

This division of labor seems to follow clean lines. However, because it
endures in the landscape, the elegy in architectural form poses a problem for the
work of mourning. Unlike exequial words, which even when written on paper are
not guaranteed repeated returns to their audience, the MacNeil House’s public
recognition of loss has lasting consequences in the townscape. Whereas regular
mourning is overcome after a certain period, architectural objects can last
generations.

The apparent contradiction between architecture and grieving practices is
tempered somewhat if we reexamine the film’s association between Catherine’s
loss and the MacNeil House’s architectural subtraction, this time considering the
demands that society places specifically on the widow. In addition to detaching
herself from the lost object (her husband) through feminine means, the widow is
expected to perform two more tasks. First, she is to keep the memory of the
departed spouse alive. This responsibility stems from a social malaise that
members of a group feel when another member’s death reminds them of their
own mortality. The rituals around death are part of a social, and not only
individual, acknowledgement of loss. In addition, by maintaining the presence of
the dead, social histories assure members that they will in some way survive
their own deaths, and that they therefore have a stake in the social ties that bind them. Patriarchal cultures expect the widow to be the deceased man’s living history, and it falls to the widow to keep him somehow “socially alive.”11 The widow’s second task is to “establish for herself a new role conception as an adult woman without a partner.”12 Uncovered by the death of her husband, the woman enters the third stage (after maiden and matron) that patriarchal society has planned for her.13 The widow is abruptly awakened from society’s dream of becoming whole through institutionalized coupling. She must quickly put on a face of completeness alone.14

The MacNeil House persists in the urban fabric, thereby ensuring through architectural means that the departed man is remembered in the social networks that survive him. (Figure 17) The same quality that differentiates the house from the elegy helps it to fulfill part of Catherine’s task as a widow. The question of


13 “Surely, after all, it’s the society that defines the maiden as an empty cipher, a virginal blankness, and the matron as a femme couvert—a woman concealed or enclosed in the blanket of her husband’s authority—surely it’s this society that asserts the widow’s emptiness and not the widow herself.” Gilbert, 566.

14 These responsibilities of the widow may also be seen as a threat to patriarchy. Gilbert suggests that the widespread insistence on the emptiness of the widow in poetry by men and women alike indicates that there is a labor of defense to be undertaken against the dangers posed by her agency.
wholeness requires a closer look at the building’s exterior. The MacNeil House is really more than half of the former whole. In the aftermath of the neighboring house’s collapse, the fourth wall of Catherine’s house seems to have been boarded up in a gesture of pure practicality, protecting the structure, the finishes, the furnishings, and the occupants from the elements. (Figure 14) No windows interrupt the new clapboard cladding, although they would have been an obvious benefit to the interior spaces. On the outside, the party wall is turned into a blind wall, while within it is maintained as the same impenetrable mirror plane that divides all the other worker houses in town. The new cladding both makes the house appear complete and marks an unrecoverable loss. The house turns its back on the lost half whose return it would also clearly welcome. Despite the cladding’s negligible thickness, it marks the depth of the house’s affect. It crosses out an absence, and thereby both highlights what the house lacks and flaunts its completeness relative to neighboring houses.

On one hand, the house’s highly visible materiality assures the public memory of the dead husband. On the other hand, a more intimate view shows that the house both satisfies the widow’s need to (re)produce herself as a single adult woman (the new “whole house”), and fulfills the expectation that she bear witness to the life of her deceased husband (the marking of loss). The division of the sexes, their subsequent joining through matrimony, and the social primacy of the male half are all accommodated in the MacNeil House, since it can only refer to Catherine by referring first to her departed husband. Thus the MacNeil House
manages to balance the demands of private and public mourning without putting into question either the traditional male-dominated family structure or the virtually systematized death of men in the mines. Because it so closely meets the expectations of socially prescribed widow’s work, the MacNeil house is also the domus in which patriarchy and capitalism lie together. It is, in that strange way, a single-family house.

From this point of view, all of the other domestic buildings in Glace Bay are already divided inside. They are as easily understood to be undertaking a process of separation as they are to be coming together. A typical company house in Glace Bay is thus another instance of the cohabitation between patriarchy and capitalism: it enacts the desire to become one, while perpetually inscribing alienation through the architectural figure of the mirroring party wall. But compared with these houses, the MacNeil house has come closer to wholeness through the violence that the past exacts on it. It also expresses a concealed truth that lies within every other house in the quarter. It shows how complete the other houses could be, if only they would submit to division. It serves what Juliet Flower-MacCannell calls “The ideology of unity, of indivisibility,” where in the “joining and union promised all those who submit to division, only a ‘half’ will masquerade as a ‘one’.”

What appeared to be an analogical relationship between Catherine’s loss and the MacNeil house’s architectural modification may have the more specific

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structure of metaphor. Metaphor is based on a conceptual similarity between two structures. But in producing one figure from two, metaphor suppresses something. The figure of the metaphor dominates a scene of “splitting and disconnection, covered up by an illusion of unity and wholeness.” It is violent, yet, as Jacques Derrida observes, its “obliteration constitutes the legibility of what it erases.” “Borders are the scars of history” is a metaphor that functions because it excludes the body. In a similar way, the MacNeil house is a mining town’s widow’s work, and only a man’s death initiates its reading as such. The architectural resolution of widowhood’s difficulties arises through allusions to a body that never makes an appearance in the film, let alone in the house itself. The MacNeil House corresponds so closely to the patriarchal demands of widowhood because it adopts the same metaphorical structure in which only a half masquerades as a one and where “All the prestige, all the power, and all the satisfaction will be on the one side and none on the other.” This applies even (perhaps especially) when the privileged side is a ghost, and both Catherine and her house are left to deal with the consequences.

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16 Ibid., 158.

17 Jacques Derrida, quoted in MacCannell, 159.

18 MacCannell, 71.
Architecture Otherwise

This analysis of the MacNeil House has focused on the lasting effects of past events into the film's proper moment. While the film tries to encompass a distinct narrative within that moment, it is haunted by the past that it summons. Because it portrays Margaret's departure from the MacNeil House after she marries Neil, we might say that Margaret's Museum performs division and the illusion of unity in its own present. An analogical relationship appears between the film's present and its past. And insofar as Margaret's marriage to Neil sets in motion the construction of her own house, which itself precipitates her leaving the MacNeil House, the place of architecture in this tie may be explored. As we will see, Margaret's House structures the relationship between the body and architecture in a very different manner from that of her father(mother), and demonstrates a critical rather than ideological dimension of architectural form in the social context of Glace Bay.

Neil builds Margaret's house by hand from elements that he steals from demolished factories and houses, all of it the property of the mining company. (Figure 18) The construction materials are collected gradually, and the resulting structure suggests that chance and adaptation are as determinate of its form as is an abstract plan. (Figure 19, 20) Neil's nostalgic attitude unexpectedly produces a building that boldly rejects traditional forms and materials. Margaret's house might even be said to suffer from the pretensions of academic collage, incorporating constructivist leanings with the studied oddities of Sea Ranch and
the material sensibilities of an Aalto or a Scarpa. Its clearly articulated volumes, blank surfaces activated by texture, and compositional concentration of transparency give the impression that there is knowledge of twentieth-century architectural discourse somewhere in its production. In any case, it is very different from the mass-produced faux-traditional of the MacNeil house.

Margaret’s house can be contrasted with that of her mother along numerous other axes. Whereas the MacNeil house sits over the unmapped tunnels of the past, Margaret’s house is founded on the consummation of her marriage to Neil.¹⁹ (Figure 21) Where the bedrooms in the MacNeil house are crowded beneath the gable roof, the walls and ceiling in Margaret’s bedroom are made of glass. (Figure 22) The seaside setting of Margaret’s house contrasts with the urban context of the house where she grew up. (Figure 23) Perhaps the most significant departure in Margaret’s House is how its parts undermine the possibility of the composite image of loss and wholeness found in the MacNeil House. While the MacNeil House became whole by becoming slightly more than half of something else, Margaret’s House is an assemblage of parts that do not subordinate themselves to a unity.

The house’s pilfered origins produce tension between those parts where the scarcity of certain materials elicited their frugal use, and those parts where the scale of found objects testifies that the building is not from the world of

¹⁹ On their wedding night, Neil carries Margaret across the imaginary threshold of the not-yet-existing house. The next time she goes to the site, the house is there.
rationalized production. As a result, the whole figure of this house is constantly questioned by the wholeness of each of its parts. Each window and truss and even each piece of siding is immediately available to perception. The composite, assembled nature of the house is its primary characteristic. Unlike the MacNeil House, any image of the whole in Margaret's House does not arise from the removal of a part. The MacNeil House refers primarily to a lost male body, and balances the figure of a complete adult women without a partner with that of the women bereft of a man. In contrast, Margaret's House does not lend itself to the metaphors that support the convergence of industrialization and patriarchy. If the MacNeil house turns subtraction into completion, Margaret's House performs addition, with one piece after another coming together in a chain of associations.

MacCannell observes that, in contrast to metaphor's realm of activity, the scene of metonymy is characterized by "a combinatorial, associative mode." Margaret's house combines and associates different architectural elements and forms without evoking the image of a loss or erasure. The house does not attain legibility as a whole through suppression, but rather multiplies the connections between individual elements. No part of the house stands in for the whole, yet each raises the same associations of poaching, adapting, "making do." In the "cultural economy," which functions through metaphor that binds and controls free libidinal energy, "metonymy, real connection, is seen as retrogressive, inefficient, un(re)productive, an unnecessary doubling and expenditure of

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20 MacCannell, 158.
energy. 21 From the town’s perspective, the oversized truss above the porch, the concentration of glazing in the top room, and the cantilever might appear to be inefficient and unnecessary.

Another aspect of the house’s construction creates a metonymic link between architecture and a human body. While the MacNeil house is built of mass-produced parts on a cookie-cutter plan, Margaret’s house uses the detritus of industrial society and composes it to very specific—indeed unique—measurements. During construction, Neil refers directly to Margaret’s body as the ultimate generator of the building’s scale and form. He measures Margaret against a recuperated plank of wood and remarks that “it will serve twice”, since it is more than twice as long as Margaret is tall. (Figure 24) Since there is no mention of where it will be used, all planks in the house are potentially associated with Margaret’s body. Just as the relationship between Catherine and her house is based on dissociation, Margaret’s relationship to her house is associative. Where Catherine became one with her husband (and the MacNeil House) through marriage (which posits the division of the sexes and covers it up with union), Margaret becomes one with her house through the association of her body and architecture. (Figure 25) Even her clothes draw this connection between her body and the assemblage of poached materials: she makes her dresses from recuperated flour sacks, the printed company logo like an insignia on her chest. (Figure 26)

21 Ibid.
Anticipatory Mourning and Alienation

The measured plank raises the question of Neil’s place in the home. He seems to rule out his place from the start: how could a house measured for Margaret suit him, a “towering man?” This is part of a broader problem that hangs over Glace Bay. Because of the constant threat to mortality posed by the mine, it is possible that mourning begins long before physical death, and that any libidinal connection to a love object is tempered by a gradual separation from it that is already in process. The miners are like the dying who, for de Certeau, are outcasts in the hospital, and whose “‘anticipated mourning’ puts them away in advance in ‘the dead man’s room.’” 22 They have already begun their fall outside of the “thinkable.” This anticipated mourning is like an exacerbation of the phenomenon by which all of one’s friendships, and indeed all of one’s social relationships, are haunted by the prospect that the other will die first. 23 In Glace Bay, conjugal heterosexual relationships, which under patriarchy enact the desire of becoming one, suffer this anticipation with particular weight on the side of the woman. In the context of industrial mining in the 1940s and 1950s, it might even be said that this social structure exemplifies a certain definition of capitalist


alienation. The family unit, under constant threat of the father’s depersonalized
death in the mining machine, mediates its inner relationships through the
commodities whose purchase at the company store is made possible by male
labor. A subplot involving Margaret’s uncle portrays a caricatured vicious circle
whereby the husband doubles up his shifts in order to pay the debts that his wife
accumulates at the company store—in part because her husband is never home.
Meanwhile, female labor is limited to sexual reproduction for the purposes of
further production and consumption under the company’s auspices.

Juliet Flower MacCannell observes that Lacan looks past the unkept
promises of Oedipal culture to a situation in which culture no longer makes
promises: a “post-Oedipal culture.” For MacCannell:

we live in a condition in which the presumable ‘appeal’ of heterosexuality
is no longer an operative force. The ‘promise’ of ‘passion’ is absent from
modern life. Yet culture persists all the more effectively—it marches on
dividing, disconnecting and making (pseudo-) unifications—but no longer
in the familiar forms of love, family, sociability.24

The industrialization and consumption portrayed in Margaret’s Museum
resembles this “culture that no longer promises.” Highly gender-specific labor
causes an alienation that desexualizes the conjugal relationship, transferring
desire to consumer objects. The film presents both the evacuation of the family
romance within the household and the preservation of a patriarchal order within
the larger social context.

24 MacCannell, 70.
Margaret and Neil's relationship is exceptional. He does not work in the mines, and she does not want to have children, at least not while they have financial difficulties (hence the poached construction materials). Neil's refusal to return to the mines condemns him to scarce and unprofitable repair jobs around town. He is hired to wash dishes at the local Chinese café, but is soon let go because the owner's nephew comes to town and needs a job. When Margaret suggests that Neil use contraception as long as money is short, the blow is so great that he decides to go back to the mines. This in turn angers Margaret, who leaves the conjugal home and moves back to her mother's house. It is an insoluble bind: Margaret is reluctant to have children without financial security, but neither will she accept her children losing their father in the mines, as she herself lost hers.

The exceptional nature of Margaret and Neil's couple underscores the house's difference with respect to the workers' housing in town. It not only contrasts with the MacNeil house, but also with the intact semi-detached houses. In those houses, architecture conforms to a culture that "divides" in order to "unify." Their repetition corresponds to the ease of interchanging or replacing male workers in the mine, as well as to the imagery of mass production and consumption. They pull the town together as a whole, "but no longer in the familiar forms of love, family, sociability." The architectural qualities of Margaret's house correspond to an entirely different culture. The lack of a clear typological reference hinders a whole image of the building that would reflect a family
situation within; the assemblage of autonomous building components corresponds to associative rather than submissive relationships; the bedroom is a glass box on display; and the measured board implies that the woman, not the man, is architecture's referent. Like Neil, Margaret works, too; she cleans house, notably for the mine manager and for the town hospital. She is not re-productive; sex is play, potentially on stage. Her relationship with Neil is unlike that between the other women and the miners. The two are, for a short time, associates, and the departure of either party would not entail the same consequences as in other households. The architecture that shelters them has the same particularity: it does not hearken back to a tradition prior to industrio-sexual alienation, but to something other.

_Margaret's Museum_

Inevitably, Neil is killed in the mine and Margaret enters widowhood. When Neil and Jimmy (Margaret's brother) die deep beneath the surface of the earth, they are disinterred so that doctors may confirm their deaths and the community can mourn their loss. In the lapse between exhumation and legitimate medical intervention, Margaret seizes the two bodies and forces another miner to put them on his truck. (Figure 27) There will be no death certificates. They drive the bodies to the MacNeil House, from which Catherine is absent while visiting family in Antigonish. Margaret discovers that her grandfather, whom she had left alone upon hearing the mine's siren, has choked to death on the blackness of his lungs
during one of his coughing fits. In the kitchen, Margaret dissects the remains of Neil, Jimmy and her grandfather. (Figures 28, 29) She removes specific body parts and places them in a suitcase, leaving the bodies behind.

For her paramedical acts, Margaret is sent to a psychiatric penitentiary, where questioning by an all-male board of medical professionals reveals why she had removed specific body parts, but not where she had hidden them. Margaret explains that she severed Neil’s fingers to remember the way they danced when he played the bagpipes. Neil had brought the pipes back to Glace Bay, entertaining retired and disabled miners in Catherine’s living room and serenading Margaret while she washed windows—much to the dismay of Catherine and the mine manager’s wife. Playing the pipes amounted to resisting the mine’s seizing of the body to utilitarian ends, in particular the hands and the lungs. Margaret removed Neil’s tongue from his corpse because she had loved hearing him speak. She removed his and her grandfather’s lungs because, as she explains to the board, next to the old man’s blackened pulmonary sacks, Neil’s are those of a healthy adult. Finally, she removed Jimmy’s penis because, in her words, “at his age it was the only thing that mattered.”

After two years of detention, Margaret is released. She retrieves the suitcase containing the body parts, fixes up her abandoned house, and opens a “Miner’s Museum” whose curatorial line is “The Price of Coal.” (Figure 30)

25 Another of the film’s subplots is a secret romance between Irish Catholic Jimmy and the Protestant mine manager’s daughter, a romance of which both Margaret and Neil are aware. One scene depicts a symbolic wedding that the two teenagers perform in an abandoned mine shaft.
Carefully labeled jars containing fingers, lungs, tongue and penis adorn the shelves. (Figure 31) We now understand the film’s second scene, in which a tourist runs screaming from the house back to her car, which races away leaving Margaret looking on with incomprehension.

Margaret’s behavior seems mad to the world that surrounds her. Her work on the men’s bodies appears to enact the “culture of dissection” that characterizes modern patriarchal society. But her hostility to the medical institution that does not recognize “the price of coal” puts her squarely in the patient’s role in the psychiatric scene. Her anatomical studies are outside the dominant discourse, as is clear in her creative resistance during her interrogation before the medical establishment. The “truth” about mining—and furthermore about bodies—that her exhibition reveals is not recognizable to science. Neil’s lungs moved the air for music played with fingers and speech formed by the tongue. Any additional erotic connotations are explicitly denoted by Jimmy’s penis. The private, erotic dimension is inseparable from social questions about gender and labor. What is man’s work, and what is woman’s work? What is work, and what is play? What is music, storytelling, sex? What is the body for? These are the questions that Margaret’s museum asks, where other museums of mining history assume the body’s utility in order to tell a more heroic story.

Margaret transforms her widowhood into the curatorial position of a museum of mining history. Rather than become the living memory of men, Margaret incorporates fragments of their bodies into her house. In this combinatory mode, the museum associates architecture and flesh in commemoration of bodies that dance and desire. It incorporates body parts into the building's interrelationships: a window, a lung, a penis, a truss, a tongue, planks of wood, fingers, rusted metal sheets. The problem of lifelessness is posed through architectural means that contrast with those of the company houses, where unity and division are resolved in a clear architectural type.

Margaret's museum also reorients the relationship between the MacNeil house and her own house. Specimens are extracted and prepared in the MacNeil House. It is the private area where the curator's intellectual and manual work is carried out. The publicly accessible exhibition space is in Margaret's House. This functional separation projects the interdependent relationship of private and public spaces in both the house and the cultural institution into the urban realm. On the one hand, this confirms that Neil's construction eschews the domesticity that characterizes other houses in Glace Bay. On the other hand, it suggests that the MacNeil House has awaited not the return of a lost half, but rather its induction into a new pair through something other than the institution of marriage. It is no longer the half that must stand in for something whole, but another piece in the associative matrix of Margaret's museum. It is a fragment in the same family as the trusses, steel sheets, and windows in Margaret's House. The two
buildings are joined in Margaret’s construction of herself as a woman whose work—architectural and otherwise—troubles both the patriarchal division of bodies and their industrial rationalization.

Margaret’s widow’s work draws architecture into a social critique of both the gendered division of labor and the body’s instrumentalization in general. Her poetics seem to come from an architectural reading. She is the architect of conversion when she turns Neil’s bricolage and her mother’s house into a building complex whose architectural qualities resonate with the program that she has brought to it. That new role for architecture is part of how Margaret rewrites the widow’s responsibilities. She does not cover up division and loss with an image of wholeness, like the MacNeil house and its metaphorical structure. Conventional public and private forms of mourning are displaced by another proposition. MacCannell observes that “the death of the individual can be mourned when it is metaphorised, and sacrificed to a greater Individual—the collective Order; but metonymised, it can be seen as a retrieval of connection, a loss of isolation.”27 The loss of isolation is not a denial of death, but rather the initiation of further association, which in Margaret’s museum takes the form of making public a knowledge about the body: not only its functions and sufferings, but its joys and pleasures. It is perhaps the beginning of a challenge to “the collective Order” that divides to reunite in the interest of ever-increasing productivity.

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27 MacCannell, 159-160.
The preoccupations with both the male and female body's fate that haunt in Glace Bay work their way into architecture as an orality—that is, a trace of corporealities that make no sense. That orality takes the form of the tropes metaphor and metonymy. These characteristics of the two houses are an excess that allows architectural work to address human conditions from beyond the conceptual limits established by the insistence to produce, to reproduce, and to consume. "The deceased are men who cease to function ... They no longer produce or consume."28 they are from beyond the limits of what one can do and feel in architecture. By drawing such bodies into architecture, Margaret's widow's work—that is, the conversion of the houses into a museum, of body parts into histories, and of widowhood into social criticism—is a case where architecture contributes to imaginative critique and the hope for change.

Despite this affirmative evaluation, Margaret's Museum is a melodramatic film whose feminist and socially progressive credentials are certainly not guaranteed. In the end, the film tells the story of a young woman who goes mad after losing her hopelessly nostalgic husband, and many aspects of the narrative support rather than question conservative notions of sex and work. We find, however, that a careful look at the architectural work in the film disrupts the melodrama. The aspects of architecture that escape the insistence on life create a parallel story in which Margaret disturbs the frame that holds together the gendered division of labor and the body's extreme instrumentalization. The

architectural excess that appears when we consider the place of death helps to ask if Margaret’s museum and her mind are the sites of madness, or if that madness does not reside elsewhere in Glace Bay.
Figure 11. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Mort Ransen, director. Men descending into the coal mine.

Figure 12. Still from Margaret’s Museum. The MacNeil House.
Figure 13. Still from Margaret's Museum. The MacNeil House.

Figure 14. Still from Margaret's Museum. The MacNeil House.
Figure 15. Still from Margaret's Museum. Glace Bay urban landscape.

Figure 16. Still from Margaret's Museum. Glace Bay company houses.
Figure 17. Still from Margaret's Museum. The MacNeil House.

Figure 18. Still from Margaret's Museum. Neil poaching building materials.
Figure 19. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Margaret’s House.

Figure 20. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Housewarming at Margaret’s House.
Figure 21. Still from Margaret's Museum. Margaret and Neil's wedding night.

Figure 22. Still from Margaret's Museum. Margaret's House.
Figure 23. Still from Margaret's Museum. Margaret's House.

Figure 24. Still from Margaret's Museum. Neil measures Margaret against a board.
Figure 25. Still from *Margaret's Museum*. Margaret and her porch.

Figure 26. Still from *Margaret's Museum*. Margaret in homemade dress.
Figure 27. Still from Margaret's Museum. Margaret transporting Neil and Jimmy's bodies from mine to the MacNeil House.

Figure 28. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Margaret with Neil and Jimmy's bodies in the MacNeil House kitchen.
Figure 29. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Margaret dissecting bodies.

Figure 30. Still from Margaret’s Museum. Margaret returning home.
Figure 31. Still from Margaret's Museum. Display jars in Margaret's Museum of Mining History.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This investigation considered different aspects of the insistence on life in architectural discourse and thought. It included moments of perplexity in the face of references to death in architecture theory, suspicion with regards to architecture’s positivist grip on the body, and optimism about architectural form’s capacity to disturb conventional boundaries between proper and improper bodies. The main architectural problem was neither to determine whether an architectural object meets the performance expected of it, nor to define its categorical effects. Rather, the challenge was to understand a role for architecture over and beyond fulfilling the basic requirement to accommodate and stimulate the body’s motion and sensation. This amounted to defining a dimension in architecture similar to that which, in literature, permits a book like Georges Perec’s Life, A User’s Manual both to summon vital bodies and to provide matter for reflecting on the social and existential implications of that summoning. Individual architectural works have been the opportunity to explore how and why de-positioning the body from its usual active and sensate role in architecture transforms the boundary between life and its opposite into a grey zone where a number of body issues overlap.
My unease with architecture’s potential complicity with the rationalization of life in contemporary society has been a driving force throughout this study. The hope of finding a greater and perhaps critical role for architecture has at times seemed naive: the “philosophy of suspicion” has a nature of being all-encompassing. On other occasions it has seemed redundant, as there are already discourses in architecture theory that draw optimistic connections between buildings and human experience. Architectural phenomenology aims to address what it casts as the universal problem of human existence, while social-subjectivist studies seek to link identity formation and its potential for emancipation with social aspects of architectural form. In my cautious periods, I observe that both of these currents rely on evocations of mobile and sensate bodies, and that they therefore further architecture’s contribution to refining and extending instrumental conceptions of the body. The concept of normalization and the reciprocating moments of intextuation and incarnation, borrowed from Foucault and de Certeau respectively, describe a phenomenon that is independent from intentions. The goal of these architectural discourses may be transcendence, emancipation or more modestly critique, but the means have ends of their own.

My optimistic moments have prevented this apprehension from giving way to a one-sided critique of phenomenology or social subjectivity. Identifying their common insistence on life has pointed to another path for exploring architecture’s relationship to the human condition. It has furthermore positioned that way of
thinking as not only an alternative to the body's rationalization through tools such as architecture, but as a potential reconfiguration of rationalization's means to other ends. Thus the body's limits in these architectural discourses, which are the same as those in Foucault's process of normalization, appeared as a space to be occupied rather than a line that divides.

In chapter 2, the analysis of texts by Alberto Pérez-Gómez and Louise Pelletier and by Beatriz Colomina discussed how the incongruous appearance of bodies beyond the limits in architectural texts may open a sociopolitical dimension for architecture distinct from those that consciously address accessibility, control, or social interaction in architectural space. Those bodies are identifiable because they challenge the text's explicit assertions about architectural form. The arguments rely on fitting the body's capacities into a language or program which allows something to be done. Those bodies' particularities remain invisible as long as they make sense; that is, as long as they make the text work as a communicative medium. In Pérez-Gómez and Pelletier's description of La Tourette's qualities, as in Colomina's discussion of Loos's houses, the dead body initiates a parallel reading beyond the constructed argument's control. These irruptions of the body's non-life threaten the objective posture that invokes corporal vitality to define the life or experience produced in architectural objects. This recalls the implied warning in Life, A User's Manual, where progressively refined techniques for depicting life raise the specter that denotes their true detachment from it. The means of capturing life rely on the
conventions that link traces (words, walls, doors) with movement and sensation. This meaning system renders death unthinkable. The body's lack of vitality can return as nonsense whose effects make rereading the texts amenable to reflecting on relationships between architecture and the body outside the discussion's explicit framework. The consequences for conceiving of architecture as an instrument for normalizing the body are categorical: it may work sometimes, but it is in no way reliable if looked at a certain way.

Aldo Rossi's design narrative for the Modena Cemetery helped to conceptualize that way of looking. In Rossi, death is much less present than in the first two texts. Furthermore, the unremarkable bodies that usually support discussions of architecture are matched, if not outnumbered, by a variety of corporealities that, while not devoid of life, would be as disruptive in the first two texts as are the corpses. Rossi's literary rather than objective form no doubt plays a role in this paradox. His text conveys ideas about architecture by displacing the primacy of the body's vitality, and instead multiplies allusions to bodily states that would not make sense where architecture is constructed from or for movement and sensation. This deposition of the body supports thinking about the boundary between life and death in architecture as a broad zone populated by bodies whose impossibility for conventional architectural thought renders them disquieting and therefore unwelcome.

All these texts refer to architectural objects. Any thinking that happens by reading what are essentially readings of buildings is possible because of qualities
that are inherent in architectural form. If the instability of corporal limits was to be read more directly in architectural works themselves, then those qualities needed to be described. The discussion of Michel de Certeau’s writings explored two dimensions of this. First, the description of an “erotics of architecture” cast the architectural work as that which, because it lacks the corporeality that is its subject, sustains the circular movement where one draws near to other bodies by invoking them. On the one hand, I design buildings with a body in mind, deploying architectural tools and elements to accommodate as many states, conditions, needs, and pleasures as possible. That body is written in a thousand ways in the drawing of a simple hut—or in the hut itself. Yet it is not there. On the other hand, at the moment of reading, the hut both draws my body into proximity with another, and creates an insurmountable distance between them. This piece of body writing that offers space in the place of breath satisfies while it taunts. It answers the hope that there is a body other than my own. But that writing’s very existence means that we will not meet here: it says that body has already moved on. A voice alone seems to swell in its materiality. The body’s emanations are immaterial and fleeting: recorded sound or movement is only the hint of an impossible encounter between two bodies. Impressions do not bring the body back; they are only more props that further my desire for its life. I do not even see its clear silhouette, yet I hear its voice and can imagine it passing by. Where this kind of writing is involved, the price for quenching the desire to know of another
body is the renewal of the desire to embrace it. I pay to read architecture: an erotic economy.

This erotic characteristic of architecture has general relevance insofar as it may apply to a number of phenomena, ranging from architectural phenomenology's summoning of bodies to more objective scientific research involving bodies and built form, for example those leading directly to normalization through design standards. The more specific question of conceptual limits in architecture related to life and lifelessness was addressed through a second aspect of de Certeau's work. I adopted a pair of concepts from de Certeau that complement the description of architecture as a kind of love letter. On the one hand, the notion of the cry describes where architecture fails to make the body's acts legible. On the other hand, the notion of orality explains how the lack of legibility insinuates itself into architecture's tapestry as the memory of a corporeality other than that which contributes to progress. Orality is an excess that allows a parallel story. Reading Catherine Pozzi's poem offered an example: to understand its explicit content, one can not doubt that the words on the page make sense rather than nonsense. Yet this is precisely de Certeau's game of “make believe,” and what returns is the murmur and rhythm that convey a body's longing in a way that signifying words can not. Moreover, the words-become-sound play tricks on the poem, changing how it fits together.

The cry represents an outside to the scriptural economy which circumscribes the body through its life, and orality is the cry's interference with
the operations within. Based on this model, I suggested that architectural works that support readings that tend toward normalization may also lend themselves to the kind of disruptive reading that de Certeau demonstrates with Pozzi's poem. Finding an excess orality in architectural works would initiate parallel readings that expose architecture’s tendency to constrain body conceptions while identifying other resonances between buildings and human experience. This more elaborate structure for de-positioning the body offered a grasp of the architectural qualities that would support this kind of reading: its capacity to drive the dynamics in which visions of bodies are projected and received, and its material excess whereby form is not reducible to any single statement about the body.

The chapters with building readings offered a couple of examples where social and existential aspects of human experience overlap in surprising ways. Suspending the body’s vitality allowed these readings to discuss the complex relationships amongst authority, control, utilitarianism, gender, and death. They demonstrate how architectural qualities can extend an evaluation of architecture’s corporal dimension to the limit conditions that are problematic on both individual and social planes.

My reading of Herzog and de Meuron’s Stone House found recurring references to the body’s self-discipline in the plans, sections, and photographs. The Stone House’s spatial arrangement and material qualities resonate with, on the one hand, the individual’s psychical formation in relation to the body’s
functions and, on the other hand, the social norms regarding behavior and space. These references pollute the building’s pristine calm with evocations of toilet training, incontinence and death. They insinuate themselves into the project as a memory that, borrowing de Certeau’s words, “recalls something that is not past; it awakens what the body does not know about itself.”¹ In this context, it is also something that architecture does not know about the body. Whatever human and social distress is caused by sudden defecation, it is not a properly architectural problem. Space is a factor in that distress, but better planning or finishes would not temper it much, and they certainly can not prevent death. Those corporealities are beyond the architect’s grasp, but they nonetheless work their way into architecture. The same conventions that allow the designer to piece together a plan or to frame a wall allow us to see the building’s variations on infantile corporeality. By bringing the infant’s body—a ghost that passes through walls—to the stoic body’s domain, the reading transforms a critique of spatialized social divisions into an excavation of socialization’s traces in architecture’s materiality.

In my reading of the film *Margaret’s Museum*, the relationship that mining disasters suggest between the formal “halfness” of one house and the programmatic incompleteness of the other house places the body at the intersection of sex-based gender distinctions and labor-based class distinctions. The

architectural fragments in Margaret's house, strung together one after another, undermine the integrity of the other houses in town, whose artifice of splitting and recombination points to the extreme alienation amongst individuals and between each person and their body. When the MacNeil house is retroactively incorporated into Margaret's museum, its halfness ceases to represent the widow's whole incompleteness. The new relationship is based on a curatorial choice to highlight the ludic and erotic rather than functional value of body parts. Unlike the metaphor that allows the company houses to dissipulate their violence, the relationship between the MacNeil house and Margaret's house is one that neither patriarchy, with its heterosexual injunction, nor industrial ideology, with its logic of production, can imagine. Furthermore, the display of body parts in Margaret's museum enters into this chain of associations. The lungs give no energy for breaking the coal that the fingers would move onto carts, and the penis does not produce future consumers and miners. These body parts are extracted from the machine that turns meaning into profit by harnessing pleasure and suppressing death. Like the repeating sounds in a poem and the poached materials of Margaret's house, they say what cannot be heard when everything is in its proper place. Margaret's poetic transformation of architecture into a critique of body-based divisions of labor—in particular coal mining and the work of mourning—is also a transformation of the body into architectural critique. It challenges both patriarchy and the body's instrumentalization at the intersection of the personal and the political.
The body's erotic dimension is a significant aspect of the trouble that Margaret's Museum stirs up in a society where women's and workers' bodies need be controlled. Its appearance in chapter 6 suggests a look back at how I deployed the idea of an erotics of architecture elsewhere in the dissertation. In the building readings, I minimized the thematic presence of eroticism in order to focus on a more pervasive, although perhaps less stimulating, phenomenon. The domestic setting is not overdetermined in the same way as places that are first and foremost settings for various kinds and degrees of sexual interaction. It is, of course, overdetermined in other ways. Indeed, compared with more obviously erotic architectural programs, the domestic environment's ideological capacity to mediate internal and external conflicts regarding gender, power, and representation in contemporary Western society makes it ideal for the kind of reading that I propose. Regardless, the erotics of architecture that I have tried to describe operates at a level independent of specific programs and forms. Where writing and knowledge are concerned, such an erotics describes a movement of projection and interpretation through architectural works without a necessary reference to a specific object of love. For example, the illusion of potential completion that Georges Vigarello identifies in the human sciences may be operating in an attempt to analyze drawings and photographs of the Stone House. Projecting a body in order to make sense of architecture both entertains the desire for and reproduces knowledge about human beings.
The melodramatic love story in *Margaret's Museum* structures and supports my reading of the houses, although I do not acknowledge it in relation to the process of reading and writing architecture. Returning to the discussion of architectural texts in chapter 2, Beatriz Colomina is explicit about her interest with Loos's notions of sexuality, although I do not pursue it. Like a pendent, the homosocial world of La Tourette is addressed in neither Louise Pelletier and Alberto Pérez-Gómez's reading, nor in my discussion of that reading. This shared bracketing of sexual undertones has allowed me to focus on how different forms of architecture's non-life initiate a reading that engages other social and existential questions. However, it may both confuse what I mean by an erotics of architecture and fail to leverage its full potential for considering the selected objects of study, notably where gender studies and queer theory might be concerned.

In a different way, the refusal for outright spatial and choreographic analyses of architectural objects also limits the readings while producing some inconsistencies. In *Margaret's Museum*, for example, the house interiors are not studied for how they relate to social aspects of architecture, although the film offers a few scenes that would support extending the investigation. At the same time, the comparison between the houses sets up a virtual urban choreography that, while perhaps not easily mapped onto Glace Bay's fictional spatiality as set

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2 Two in particular: men congregated in the MacNeil house to drink, play bagpipes and sing; and Margaret in her own house bragging to her mother about her "modern" interior toilet, which is somewhat awkwardly placed off a mid-flight stair landing in the house's central large vertical space.
up in the film, implies an experience that effectively structures the reading. In the Stone House reading, the effort to restrain from setting up encounters between adults, children and others is palpable, and whatever immobility is sustained by insisting on the ambivalence of being on or off a path is compromised by the ascent up the stairs.

Furthermore, the readings are predicated on a posture of disembodiment. Compared to the fully haptic embodiment that architecture could assume, it is negligible. Nonetheless, I am still seeing, and touching and turning pages, looking for good lighting conditions and sitting positions. In light of the risks that I have argued attend the insistence on life in writing, this project may be caught in its own trap. Overt mobility and sensation have been bracketed with the pretension that this is less negative. But there is still an implied vitality in this work. It relies on vision to look at the images and to read the drawings. It discusses spatial relationships that implicitly are not limited to the page. In the sense that it invokes unremarkable and therefore normal corporealities, it extends architecture’s contribution to circulating a knowledge of the body.

These inconsistencies highlight the centrality of bodily vitality in architecture, and suggest that attempts to address its negative potential must proceed with the strategies that they oppose. This is the double-bind inherent in the theorist’s position. The deposition of the body may therefore be best understood as a “moment” in architectural discourses and theories that invoke the body’s life in a way that assumes the problem of corporal limits without
necessarily addressing it. I am referring in particular to architectural
phenomenology, with its concern for “radical ambiguities of existence” such as
mortality, and social-subjectivist architecture theory, with its incorporation of
theories of difference from sociology, anthropology, philosophy and other fields. I
approached the distinction between life and its opposite as the ultimate limit
problem for architecture, and therefore as that which would cause auto-critique in
life-inducing architectural discourses. It seems now that the deposition of the
body is itself haunted by the insistence on life. Nevertheless, as the different
readings of texts and architectural objects have demonstrated, this border-
suspending moment of an investigation into architecture’s relationship to the
human condition can reconfigure ways of understanding the overlap of different
social and existential concerns, such as age, self-control, gender, and death. To
determine whether that moment occurs inside other discourses—understood as
a heuristic device—or amongst them—as though it too insisted first and foremost
on making the body live—would require further transversal studies.3 The
remainder of this conclusion considers a few different vectors that such studies
could take.

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3 Regarding social and subjective aspects of architecture, such a
transversal study might begin with Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson, The Social
Hiller and Hanson’s method is employed and tested in, for example, John Biln,
“Given Domain: Mockbee-Coker-Howorth, ‘Breaking the Cycle of Poverty,’”
Assemblage 16 (1991): 73-91; and in Thomas A. Markus, Buildings and Power:
Freedom and Control in the Origins of Modern Building Types (London:
Routledge, 1993).
The Foucault discussed and applied in this investigation is in great part de Certeau's Foucault. I have gone to some lengths exploring the works from Foucault's middle period on their own account. Nonetheless, by bracketing Foucault's earlier and later works I have hoped to avoid complicating the use of de Certeau's thought beyond the problems it poses on its own. There are some reasons for this, and also some losses that I will briefly address.

Regarding the earlier work, the notions of archaeology and genealogy that are useful in other architectural settings are not considered adapted to this theoretical project, except insofar as Foucault's development and use of them in his work sets the scene for my investigation. However, the concept of "heterotopia," which has been widely discussed in architecture theory, would perhaps help to refine the hypothesis that architectural works sustain a juxtaposition of otherwise incompatible spaces or locations.

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On the other hand, the investigations in the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality* address ethics and the self, which are in some way related to what I have tried to deal with here.\(^6\) However, my focus has been on the materiality of a medium such as architecture as the support for practices of interpretation, which is often an important part of different forms of subjectivization. In his later work, Foucault focuses much more on practices themselves, in particular those between individuals but especially those that one operates on oneself. One exception is his discussion of a specific writing technology that appeared in Greek antiquity and evolved through different periods of Christianity. In Greek civilization, the *hypomnemata* or notebook allowed the "constitution of a permanent relation to oneself," in a "culture of the self" whose goal is "the perfect government of the self." The *hypomnemata* "constituted a material memory of things read, heard, or thought, thus offering these as an accumulated treasure for rereading and later meditation."\(^7\) Later in the Christian era, this note-taking adopted the form of confession as a way of deciphering the truth of a self whose desires of the flesh required constant examination. Even in this case, however, Foucault does not explore how the materiality of these notebooks structures interpretation or interferes with its intentionality. I have preferred de Certeau's portrayal of writing not only as a


central element of the dynamic that produces knowledge, but also as a somewhat dangerous medium. The transparent quality of writing in Foucault’s disciplinary and regulatory models set the scene for finding in de Certeau’s model of body writing a way to engage architecture’s excess in a critical way. So while the broader questions of ethics and subjectification that Foucault raises in his last works may be of interest, their distance from what I have identified as an architectural property does not facilitate their exploration in this study.

Nevertheless, that work could inform a more comprehensive study of ethics in architecture with respect to bodies and subjectivity, especially in the context of more contemporary manifestations of “the culture of the self.” Furthermore, the notion that the hypomnemata lends itself to constituting “a permanent relation to oneself” on an ascetic, confessional or other basis is of some interest for investigating the poetics that link an architectural work to its architect.

The heavy reliance on de Certeau’s writing brings up other questions about references. All the more so because that work draws Foucault’s posture of exteriority into the same investigative framework as what is considered an incompatible posture of interiority. De Certeau’s careful reading and unique incorporation of Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud makes for a rich resource when considering cultural objects. The potential is increased when brought together with his rereading of Foucault, as well as a broader

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selection of theory in semiotics and sociology. At the same time, however, that world of references makes it difficult to control bringing de Certeau—in some way against his will—back to architecture. This explains in part, for example, the way the readings of architectural texts and objects resemble a deconstruction that dare not speak its name—and further the way the hypothesis itself suggests that lineage. This is perhaps less a problem of signatures and patents than of a lack of clarity regarding de Certeau’s particular contributions or adaptations—and by extension my own—of the notion of excess or residue. Such clarification would require a more critical appreciation of de Certeau’s work. On the one hand, this would mean mapping some of his readings and misreadings of the psychoanalytic tradition in relation to his theological background and to his specific social engagements, regarding for example everyday life and political speech. On the other hand, it would require comparing his work with that of his contemporaries who address other lines of that tradition from their own perspective. In addition to Derrida, this would include Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in particular. Given the common themes of corporeality, writing-machines and desire that link de Certeau’s thinking with Deleuze and with

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Guattari, the absence of the latter two can only be explained by a consciously restrained scope that serves an intention to draw certain aspects of de Certeau work into architecture theory. Indeed, with respect to questions around the body (though not necessarily with respect to practices), Deleuze and Guattari are much more present in recent architecture theory than is de Certeau. This both explains why a focus on de Certeau might be useful, and calls urgently for extending a critical appreciation of his work in relation to other ways that the body is being addressed in architecture.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{Gender}

Parallel to that necessary undertaking, aspects of this investigation raise some important questions about gender. Time and again in the readings of architectural texts and works, female corporeality and gender issues more generally come to the fore. In some cases, the thematic matter determines this, such as in Colomina’s text and in \textit{Margaret’s Museum}. But gender may also be addressed in the Stone House through the question of housework and child-rearing. The discussion in chapter 5 concerning servants and served, money economies, and the infant’s body avoids it. Yet the domestic polarization of who serves and who does not occurs most often around bodily specificity. The evolution of house plans does not only indicate evolving economic structures and

\textsuperscript{10} The interest for Nietzsche found in both Foucault and Deleuze suggests the degree to which an intellectual history around questions of the body would consist of forks and confluences.
customs around carnality, but also renders service invisible on the page. Furthermore, the child’s socialization is historically gendered. These questions could be addressed in almost any reading of a house. However, the focus on the threat of spatial pollution and bodily control in the Stone House suggests profound and disturbing ways that architecture’s exclusion of immobility and non-sentience from the corporealities that it addresses is related to broader social and cultural phenomena about women and their bodies. My intention to address ideals and fears about the body referred consciously to illness, disability and death. However, further investigation into how improper corporeality in architecture is so closely linked to gender constructions and ideas about female sexuality is necessary.\(^{11}\) Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection alone would add perspective to this phenomenon.\(^{12}\) The infantilization of women through a variety of legal, social and even physical means throughout history has been founded on themes that are also applied to children: leaks, uncontrollability, filthiness.\(^{13}\)


Critical work on those means would also shed light on how immobility, childhood and gender are interrelated in architectural objects and thought.¹⁴

Much of the scholarly work on women, gender and sexuality that could extend this study has been addressed in architecture theory. At the same time, I mentioned in the introduction that one of the aspirations in this investigation about bodily vitality is to engage research on social subjectivity in transversal ways. In that light, it is interesting to note how the metaphor of immobility often describes the exclusion from or repulsion for certain spaces. In an essay on women, urban space and agoraphobia, for example, Esther da Costa Meyer points to a persistent contrast in children’s books between boys “shown actively exploring the environment” and girls “shown immobilized in the house, behind the protection of windows, fences, porches.” Da Costa Meyer notes that although “women are no longer inexorably trapped in this circularity that culturally constitutes them through images,” a phenomenon of effective immobilization continues because of the threat of sexual violence: “When one woman out of every four is raped in the United States ... agoraphobia—the fear of public space—takes on a different coloration altogether.” As a result, “even the most

emancipated [women] come up against a major obstacle that retains them behind walls."¹⁵

Without questioning da Costa Meyer's overall discussion, I think it worth noting how easily immobility describes a negative and even oppressive situation here, in particular in the context of architectural and urban space. The notion of being trapped and retained by walls and other obstacles casts architecture as that which enforces immobility. In contrast, urban space has the higher function to provide an environment for the unbounded activity that "boys" and men enjoy. If I look into the role that immobility plays in this construction, however, a set of questions related to yet beyond the argument's grasp begin to unravel. For example, the text lines up activity, public space and sexual violence in conceptual opposition to immobility, domestic space and protection. This map of agoraphobia opposes dangerous yet liberated male space with a female space that is ambiguously prison-like and out of harm's way. The cohabitation of undesirable immobility and sought-after protection in the house suggests an uneasiness that is difficult to resolve with the notion of staying indoors out of fear. This seems to resonate with the paradox of domestic violence, whose structure both tethers the victim to the home and motivates her leaving. But leaving—a forced mobilization—is like renouncing a right while it necessarily initiates the search for a protected space: stasis once again. In the argument about agoraphobia, immobility holds the negative role in architectural and urban

space's ability to make meaning: the difference between outside and inside, exposure and defense, and male and female gender positions. Yet at the same time, the assumption that mobility is ideal tends to draw attention away from a related issue that associates sexuality and space. It seems that in the specific case of violence in a gender-asymmetrical domestic setting, the ideal that holds mobility over stasis loses sense, if only temporarily. This disrupts clear distinctions between architectural and urban space, between a house and its outside, in terms of either how they are gendered or the bodily ideal they accommodate.

The distinction between an ideal mobile bodily state and a feared immobility—an incontestably logical distinction in architectural thought—allows da Costa Meyer's discussion to say specific things about space and society. When I inquire into that distinction and suspend its attribution of value—an act that I called the deposition of the body—the same spatial elements point to a further complexity of the social issues. Looking at immobility's exclusion from what da Costa Meyer's text portrays as an ideal state—that is, unrestrained mobility—is one way to extend her discussion of spatial, corporeal and social phenomena beyond its own terms without negating what it says.

In addition to the issue of domestic violence, considering how immobility functions here can lead to other questions. The house is equated with more or less forced enclosure, and the world beyond it with a freedom that is gendered male. Is there not at each scale a different but equally powerful differential
between mobility and stasis? Does the urban imagination function through an association between movement and gender independently of a reference to the finer texture of housing? What does considering the house separately from the urban scale reveal? How does the ideal of autonomous mobility and accessibility in architectural or urban space relate to sexed and gendered notions of stasis? Does the maleness of urban space gender disability female? How does the cultural tradition that portrays the feminine threat as precisely its mobility, its transgression of boundaries, relate to the house/city metaphor?¹⁶ More generally, what other social subjectivities are wound up with bodily mobility in architecture?

These questions, which may tentatively disrupt the conceptual construction that explains an aspect of agoraphobia’s relationship to violence against women, sketch how the topic of bodily vitality in architecture is not simply a matter of a generic opposition between life and death. Rather, it can contribute to explaining specific social phenomena where the absence of vitality occupies a grey zone of corporealities that are not fully alive for architecture. By explaining social phenomena, I mean both explaining them away (in the ideological sense) and, more optimistically, pursuing them to their critical limits. Understanding architecture’s insistence on the body’s vitality could never address a full range of social phenomena on its own. Yet its transversal nature with respect to critiques based on particularities may contribute to delving further into architecture’s relationship to social subjectivities and identities that are mediated by the body.

¹⁶ For this discussion in the context of ancient Greek society, see Carson, “Dirt and Desire.”
Inquiring into corporal limits in terms of vitality appears to be impossible without reference to other corporealities, related in particular to gender, but also to age, physical ability, and economic class. Those corporealities exist in the grey zone between life and non-life that Aldo Rossi paints in a haze of architectural recollections. Understanding how to reach and occupy that border zone in architectural works may open new critical fronts.

Disability

One such front is the place of physical ability in architecture. This investigation tried to avoid positing a traditional or pre-modern body in order to consider contemporary body questions. It speculated that displacing the body from its usual role as the moving and feeling cipher that holds meaning together would facilitate understanding architecture’s place in evolving norms and expectations about the body’s size, form and abilities. For example, shared conventions about the difference between being able or unable to walk provide a context for human interaction. The relative importance of walking changes throughout history, as does the point beyond which one is considered disabled. Meanwhile, the difference between an infant who crawls and a toddler who walks is conceived in very different terms from those applied to the same distinction in adults. The nature of the distinction and the way it changes through time are constitutive elements of a given society. Architectural form and the ideas that surround it have been part of that changing equation, and will no doubt continue that role.
The social aspects of bodily distinctions based on ability are related to politics through public policy about resource distribution, building codes, and discrimination. Also, the body’s place in contemporary ethical and political debates around the beginning and the end of life—where untreatable morphological or functional problems identified in utero suggest pregnancy termination, and where the question of “a life worth living” is often indistinguishable from that of “a body worth suffering”—underscore how our conceptualization of appropriate and inappropriate corporealities is constantly reproduced or modified at multiple levels of human action.¹⁷ Medical and technological developments are accelerating the debate regarding the body’s viability or its modification through various means, including prosthetics and genetic or drug-based therapies. The limits of acceptable corporeality are changing.

Architecture’s relationship to these issues is complex and difficult to map. The implications of this study are even harder to sketch. I will point to two potential areas of investigation.

The social consequences of cultural transformations with respect to impairment, ageing and death in Western culture are in part physical. John Hockenberry, a wheelchair-bound war reporter who spent time in the Middle East, observes what is perhaps at stake when the body’s demands are met by

¹⁷ See for example Dominique Memmi, Faire vivre et laisser mourir: Le Gouvernement contemporain de la naissance et de la mort (Paris: La Découverte, 2003).
writing practices: "In America access is always about architecture and never about human beings. Among Israelis and Palestinians, access was rarely about anything but people." Hockenberry's point is that the able-bodied in a society that legislates access for the disabled tend to look away from signs of difference. Rules seem to correspond to a reality where problems had been solved, and any difficulties could be attributed to a fault of application or enforcement; in other words, it is someone else's problem. In a society that does not want to see the body's limits, technical solutions give the appearance of homogeneity. One form of social integration also desocializes aspects of bodily difference by transferring troubling corporealities from the realm of human interaction to a technical scene.

Blaming architectural work would be overestimating its reach, but underestimating the degree to which its knowledge of the body puts limits around what is thinkable is no less naive. I argued that architecture as body writing incorporates increasingly varied bodily states into an instrumental process, and that architectural works can exhibit disturbances caused by preoccupations with corporealities that must remain unthought in such a process. The paradoxical socialization and desocialization of disability that is in part carried out through architectural means may perhaps be studied through the gray areas that I discussed, at the limit between the bodily states that "normal" people want to see, and those they do not.

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Architecture's direct relationship to the body and its ability to do more than simply accommodate movement and sensation offers much in the way of cultural analysis. It is a privileged medium for investigating the concepts that underlie a society's intentions for the body, and their effects. This means that in addition to asking how architecture can address physical impairment as a problem of access, we should ask how architecture is a cultural site where social and personal preoccupations with disability are played out. The issue is not whether architecture can or should improve individual lives. Architecture's deeply rooted relationship to the body, and the social settings that it facilitates or hinders, should not be eclipsed by its technical prowess in solving accessibility problems. Architecture is in some ways a prosthetic device for everyone, and its failure to perform for specific bodily states is in that sense a design problem. However, to extend that analogy (which is not without problems), a broad study about prosthetic devices would not consider only whether they meet legislated and functional requirements. It would also consider how their users relate to their bodily extensions. More importantly here, such a study would furthermore examine how prosthetic objects are windows on a culture's ideas about the body.¹⁹ That domains such as medicine are dealing with disability in their own ways suggests that architecture theory urgently leverage its unique critical role.

The second possible area of investigation is related to the first through the notion of the transversal role that the deposition of the body can play. In design, a certain fluidity of movement is brought about by ramps and more often—perhaps to the chagrin of those nostalgic for a certain modernism—by minimizing the use of small level changes and by the ubiquity of elevators. This changes how mobility is imagined in architectural thought and beyond. Recalling the discussion of gender and immobility above, evolutions in architectural form and architectural discourse may have echoes in other social settings. It is perhaps no coincidence that Julia Kristeva was commissioned to produce a report on the handicapped in France.\textsuperscript{20} Carol Breckenridge and Candace Vogler note that “disability studies reminds us that feminism, sexuality, and gender studies, and critical race theory meet at a point of incomprehension when faced with the corporeality of the disabled body.”\textsuperscript{21} This theme recurs in the different disciplines and forms collected under the rubric of disability studies, including history, literary criticism, sociology and the observational essay.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{20} Julia Kristeva, \textit{Lettre au president de la République sur les citoyens en situation de handicap, à l’usage de ceux qui le sont et de ceux qui ne le sont pas} (Paris: Fayard, 2003). This report was the basis for one of the three principal missions that President Jacques Chirac set for his second mandate. In the context of a discussion on the insistence on life, it is worth noting that the other two projects were the fight against cancer and road safety, the latter a response to France’s relatively high motor accident death rate.


\textsuperscript{22} For examples, see Brendan Gleeson, \textit{Geographies of Disability} (London: Routledge, 1999); David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, \textit{Narrative
At an urban scale, Celeste Langan suggests that economic factors "can create mobility disabilities that diminish the difference between the 'cripple' and the ambulatory person who may well wish to move." For Langan, the "mass-transit dependent" in the American city have a natural alliance with "individuals with wheelchairs." The modernist idea of a functionalist city dared not dream of the infrastructural and computational abilities that are now at the disposal of planning a territory where points of rest are mapped with respect to a world network of moving bodies. But as some become more mobile, others become less so, and not necessarily because of a physical impairment.

The formal changes that accommodate physical accessibility in buildings and cities are also part of a conceptual framework that links mobility (although not only mobility) with gender, race, and sexuality through notions of ideal or natural corporealities, and to economics through differential effects. As with non-


architectural ways of handling impairment, changes in the built environment will modify ideas about what physical conditions constitute a handicap. The differential effects with regard to other corporealities and social situations that follow from those changes may be easier to seize if architecture and urbanism are addressed as cultural objects in addition to technical ones. Breckenridge and Vogler suggest that "reconfiguring knowledge in light of disability criticism is a project that is likely to take longer than making public space accessible." Architectural studies related to disability could be ambitious about their role in that project.

Poetics

The focus on gender and disability here demands a final reflection on this investigation of architecture and bodily vitality. The problem that I have repeatedly faced in this study is that it must refrain from highlighting the specificity of a body using architectural space, or risk furthering the scope and detail of architecture’s knowledge; but at the same time, passing over specificity in silence risks perpetuating a normality that is simply no longer acceptable.

I have tried to allay that dilemma in two ways. On the one hand, I have focused on how different aspects of architecture can sustain a dynamic critique of specific conceptions of the body. The plans, materials, forms, and sitings of buildings were taken not as the reality of the buildings, but as the substance for

25 Breckenridge and Vogler, 350.
comparison and contrast in which sometimes incompatible references coexist. This is meant to suggest the possibility of other appropriations. I discussed some of the problems with this approach above.

On the other hand, the architectural objects are always accessed through a filter that acted as a context. In fact, I do not say much about the Loos houses, La Tourette or the Modena cemetery. With the Stone House, the textual explanation provided a fictional situation that oriented my reading of the drawings and photographs. Indeed, my reading probably has little to do with the real client or occupant, with the way the building is used, or with the architects. This highlights the reading's temporality and contingency, which in any case only takes place through lines and shade on a page.

In contrast, the elaborate narrative in Margaret’s Museum provides an overabundant context for reading the houses. It is a case where the fictional drama represents real kinds of events (mine collapses, low-cost construction), real kinds of social relationships (mother and daughter, marriages, labor and management), and real kinds of bodies (of different sizes, forms, sexes, abilities). These relate the context for reading the houses to certain recognizable features of contemporary society—although deindustrialization in the West means both globalizing that perspective and turning it to the new local phenomena of service societies. The characters in the film provide specific corporal differences, making it possible to sustain a critique through architecture’s elements without generalizing a user or occupant. The reading says less about the houses’
physical effects on bodies than about how their qualities might support thinking about the body under certain circumstances.

Through these two means, this investigation attempted to refrain from describing a relationship between specific bodies and architecture as though it were necessary and inevitable. The real body, however, must return. It has been hidden in the word “corporeality.” It is also dissimilated in the disturbances that white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied experience brings to attempts to write objectively about other bodies. Individual perspectives on a given architectural work will vary, depending in great part on each person’s corporeality and the personal history it has helped to construct. Architecture’s resonance with deeply rooted anxieties about the body’s vitality as well as with concrete social experience is no doubt a constitutive element of identity formation, just as it is more or less perceptible depending on the receptive acuteness of the identity brought to it.

This is where the complexity of the relationships between biological sex and gender, physical impairment and disability, or bodily appearance and quality return to the picture—a place where the ontological and epistemological quagmires that oppose a supposed natural corporeality with a social or cultural construction await. It is also where the social, cultural and political implications of architecture’s insistence on life intersect with the poetics that confront the existential problems with bodies in the gray area at corporal limits. It is an embodied struggle against attempts to have the eternal and the ephemeral, or
stone and flesh, in one place and at one time: attempts that may close down the reconfiguration of knowledge that bodily difference could initiate. I have tried to identify architecture as the raw material for that encounter, leaving open the form that poïesis will take in specific circumstances. The stakes are about using architecture’s qualities to open up debates around how we think about what the body is, and what it is for. It is best that the eternal and the ephemeral not meet in architectural work of any kind, whether it be textual or physical. That missed encounter is the interval in which the desire to fix bodies in their place is most exposed, and where different prospects for the body can be imagined.
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