

**a dialogic tectonic:**

***autonomy and the dialogical model for collaboration and architecture***

**-scott francisco**

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-for Peter Rudd, and a dialogue I abandoned too early,  
and for Amanda, helping me find it again.

***autonomy and the dialogical model for collaboration and architecture*****-scott francisco**

*Speak, if only once in your life, with the voice of a man. –Mikhail Bakhtin*

*If one sees two or more figures overlapping one another, and each of them claim for itself the common overlapped part, then one is confronted with a contradiction of spatial dimensions. –Gyorgy Kepes*

This paper began with a question raised about the notorious and inevitable relationship between Architects and Engineers: How do these professions work together in the overlapping worlds of building and design, and more importantly, how *should* they?

It seemed at first that ‘answers’ would have to be constructed in a form other than an academic paper. A novel for instance or a TV program (say a follow up to *Law and Order* called *Form and Function*.) Maybe a morning radio talk-show, or an advice column in the New York Times—a place where the two professions could confront one another and vent their frustrations or hopes in glorious public anonymity—gossip on the airwaves, or in print. The self-help book might also have been a workable genre, perhaps: “*Architects are from Jupiter, Engineers are from Voyager-II*”. Surely I could have written, directed or produced any one of these instead of a *paper*. After all, don’t we each have our fantasies of stepping out of ourselves, and the parts we are asked to play? But in the end we must all return to our prescribed roles, and tow the line of ‘professional expectations’<sup>1</sup>, as I will shortly as an ‘*academic*’. Or do we?

Before falling so quickly out of this dream world, I want to consider what it is that makes

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<sup>1</sup> Marshal McLuhan, in *The Medium is the Massage*. 1967, speaks about ‘professionalism’ in relation to ‘amateurism’: “...Professionalism is environmental, amateurism is anti-environmental. *Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment*. Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual, and the critical awareness of the groundrules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and specialize, to accept uncritically the groundrules of the environment...provided by the mass response of his colleagues ...a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly unaware.” pg 93 (my emphasis)

these alternative ‘fantastical’ genres both seductive, and even plausible, as a means of exploration. What reveals itself is a particular characteristic that joins each of them, a characteristic that is both unique and critical to the human project in the largest sense: Each of these genres is based on more than one voice—each of these genres is rooted in *dialogue*. These are not monological manifestoes, treatises, dissertations or even essays. They are not *singular* voices or institutions that are projected, imposed or extolled. They present *relationship*; they are fundamentally *responsive*, and as they explicitly reconstruct our everyday experience of hearing more than one voice in mutual interdependent suspension, we naturally intuit that there might be something worth listening to—something both engaging *and* productive. Ironically these ‘pop’ genres would usually be the last place an architectural academic would look, or want to be found—rooting around in the back alleys and dumpsters of an already suspect mainstream culture.

### **So what?**

Back on the main street, there are several important and practical reasons why the question of architect/engineer relations should be raised today: First, at a pragmatic level, the overlapping fields of ‘building’, ‘technology’ and ‘design’ are growing exponentially in both scope and complexity<sup>2</sup>. Given that architects and engineers are each attached to these fields by definition, collaboration is an inevitable consequence of even the current professional structure, problematic as it may be. But perhaps even more important than the structured *professional* relationships, are the relational *potentials* and infrastructures in the conceptual realm. It is here we enter the *discipline* of architecture, a more expansive and inclusive realm where, as Stanford Anderson explains, we “continue to study, that which is external to the range of current practice.” It is in this realm of investigation, external to the ‘profession’ of architecture, that this paper will look for patterns, inspiration and fuel that can be metabolized, and returned to energize the profession through the assimilating filter of the discipline. One of these external fields in which we will forage will be that of anthropological linguistics—the study of *language* and *culture*. We will also revisit the fertile territory of *building tectonics*, which could be considered as “external to the profession” of architecture in order that we see it with fresh eyes. And I also want to look, innocently and

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<sup>2</sup> For an expanded commentary see Michelle A. Rinehart’s: “Creating a Multidisciplinary Architecture”: “...As we prepare to enter the twenty-first century, it is impossible for any of us to ignore that our society is growing increasingly more complex. As each year passes, the postmodern condition reveals that problems cannot easily be categorized and separated into neatly formed disciplines. Boundaries are breaking down and multiplicities of difference exist...”

cautiously, through the well perused thrift-shop of critical and post-structural theory, and see if there are any bargains or must-haves left untried by previous crowds of architectural disciplinarians that might apply to the problem at hand—*the role of dialogue in architecture*.

Although architecture is just a tip of the dialogical iceberg, in its *inhabitability* it happens to be an exceptionally good indicator and spatio-material metaphor for the *effects* of dialogue, collaboration, communication and language in much broader contexts; contexts that cross the whole spectrum of human relations and culture. We find for instance, that the same conditions that empower or stifle productive (dialogical) collaboration between an architect and an engineer are also the ones that operate in the realm of politics and international relations, early childhood development, pedagogical models; and most interestingly, take us back to the realm of 'building design' itself, as it struggles to simultaneously shake off and establish an identity; an identity that has been formed and stretched by forces of globalization, regionalism, materialism, relativism, traditionalism, modernism, and post-structuralism, to name but a few 'isms' that have weighed in. This all goes to say that in order to even broach the question of architect/engineer relations, we are both privileged and condemned to look at the big picture, searching out models and precedents from a wide variety of fields for the kind of relationships that might be endorsed. For example, it is no secret that reductive, cynical relationships fraught with compromise and misunderstanding are all too common between architects and engineers. But collaborative, exponentially productive relations between architects and engineers are also possible, and surely desirable to those who want to build in today's world. Moving towards to this goal, however, will require that form and specificity to be given to the relationship if it is to be more than a utopian fantasy.

### **Is there an ideal relationship between an architect and engineer?**

Would architects, for example, through the patient but relentlessly logical tutelage of the engineer, begin to design in a way that was finally 'rational', 'efficient' and infused with 'structural order' and 'economy'? Or perhaps the engineer, under the charismatic spell of the architect, begins to see the light of 'spatial complexity', 'plasticity', 'formal freedom' 'process' and 'conceptual intent'? These rhetorical scenarios, although exaggerated, are often the way "collaboration" is thought about: "If only *they* could see it *my* way!" It is clear, however, that either of these two scenarios would simply produce a compromise where the predictable reins, and the so-called "collaborative

relationship” essentially offers nothing new. If this “nothing new” is accepted as negative, the positive must be affirmed: that for a relationship to be meaningful, it will have to produce more than merely the sum of its parts. But these extreme scenarios reveal another integral notion: the presence and articulation of unique *values*; distinct perspectives that carry and express individuality, becoming ‘points of departure’ from which both dialogical, and intersubjective relations can begin.

**In a nutshell:** before any critical comment can be made on the relationship *between* architects and engineers, we must first examine the various philosophical underpinnings authorizing or rejecting the identity of these “professions” as legitimate entities in themselves. If this bridge can be crossed, it can then be seen if there are particular ways to which this relationship might aspire.

Through a reading of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of the “dialogic” and Martin Buber and Soren Kierkegaard’s “intersubjectivity”, I propose a dialogical, intersubjective model as a useful and fitting framework for collaboration between architects and engineers. What follows this will be the need to affirm and empower<sup>3</sup> the particular identity, culture and language of each discipline so that they may enter into free dialogical play, each bringing to the exchange a set of strong and catalytic values that will fertilize a specific *event* of dialogical participation. As part of this exploratory proposition, contributions of post-structural and critical theory will be examined, including Derrida’s “deconstruction”, Said’s “role of the intellectual” and Bataille’s concept of the “formless”. The post-structural fascination with “hybridization” and “boundary-blurring” will also be compared and explored in relation to our dialogical intersubjective model. This examination will show that although critical theory has provided many useful tools for loosening and cleansing the disciplinary bowels, it has the potential to leave the body in a diarrheic state by covertly undermining the (nutritional) constructivist dialogical project. As alluded to earlier, several current and specifically “architectural” preoccupations will also be explored, both in physical building and theoretical discourse. As the work of several architectural writers, critics and practitioners is considered, an emerging register becomes apparent between dialogic and monologic tendencies. In Kenneth Frampton’s “tectonic”, architecture is internally dialogical, protecting diversity through the

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<sup>3</sup> James P. Zappen. “Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975)”: “From the perspective of **Bakhtin**’s early ethical work this expressive function is essential to any meaningful dialogue, for if I must actualize my uniqueness, lest “the whole of Being” be somehow incomplete, and if “*To be means to communicate*” (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* 41-42) then the expression of each individual’s, and each culture’s, ideas is a necessary prologue to the dialogical testing of those ideas and of the persons who hold them.”

“redundant” and expressed presence of multiplicity: materials, locales and forces of many kinds. Bill Mitchell on the other hand passively embraces a digital culture that displaces boundaries with networks, as society moves towards the indistinguishable human cyborg. In Mark Goulthourpe’s digitally dependant architecture, “hybridization”, or compression of multiplicity into “topology”, becomes unitary and monological, taking design along a path dangerously close to globalization and centralized control.

## Dialogism

Mikhail Bakhtin, the renowned Russian literary theorist, began writing extensively on the concept of dialogue and dialogic phenomena in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His work, along with the work of several other linguists, anthropologists and psychologists in the Soviet Union, was characterized by an interest in the way everyday language is used in dialogue with others to continually construct, break down, and reconstruct meaning and social orders. But unlike the poststructuralists who came after him, many of whom he inspired, Bakhtin found a unique balance where social critique did not lead to formless relativism. For Bakhtin: “it is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that required a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, by its very nature, full of event potential and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses.”<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin faced considerable persecution and suppression by the Stalinist communist regime, as the theme of his work was interpreted as a critique of this totalitarian government. We see his basic framework for “dialogism” in the following excerpts:

“Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction”<sup>5</sup>.

“The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask

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<sup>4</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. (1984) pg.81.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pg.110

questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium.”<sup>6</sup>

As Bakhtin goes on to develop this participatory dialogical state in greater detail, one of the key components to emerge is the concept of “heteroglossia”: the presence of multiple ‘languages’ or ‘voices’ that operate alternately and simultaneously between ‘self’ and ‘other’. He describes the nature of these multiple ‘layers’ of language as follows:

“As a result of the stratifying forces in language, there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms—words and forms that can belong to ‘no one’; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system...but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All the words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour...all words are populated by *intentions*...”<sup>7</sup>

In his famous paper “Discourse in the Novel”, Bakhtin further explores the notion of dialogism and heteroglossia, and uses them to construct a concept of the “novelistic” by singling out the novel as a literary genre with a unique capability to express the “dialogized heteroglossia” of every day life:

“The language of the novel is a system of languages that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other. It is impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language.”<sup>8</sup>

“The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized...” “The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the diversity of speech types, and by the *differing individual*

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pg. 293

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin . “Discourse in the Novel” The Dialogic Imagination (1981) pg. 293

<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse” The Dialogic Imagination (1981) pg. 47

voices that flourish under such conditions.”<sup>9</sup>

By making clear the importance of ‘diversity’, ‘self’ and ‘other’ in his concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, Bakhtin has provided much more than critical commentary or ‘theoretical’ philosophy. He has revealed and created an attainable model, a ‘liveable’ way of *being* and *operating* in the real world that is practical, instrumental, architectural and specifically *urban*. He exalts, for example, “the life of discourse *outside* of the artist’s study, discourse in the open spaces of public squares, streets, cities and villages, of social groups, generations and epochs.”<sup>10</sup>

Once established, Bakhtin mines the spatio-material quality of the dialogical model or *event* for its more radical nature, and uses it to construct the notion of the “carnavalesque”, an alternative, less literary and more volatile model than the ‘novelistic’. In this model we see the dialogical condition employed as a revolutionary tactic where it can induce:

“...a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men... and of the prohibitions of usual life.”<sup>11</sup> “...groups marginalized by a dominant ideology not only gain a voice during carnival time, but they also say something about the ideology that seeks to silence them. Thus two voices come together in the free and frank communication that carnival permits and, although each retains its own unity and open totality, they are mutually enriched”<sup>12</sup>

“Carnival is the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals . . . People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square”.<sup>13</sup>

Here the dialogic is again presented as a function of both ‘self’ and ‘other’—the body in the shared space of events, things, voices and languages.

According to Bakhtin, then, in order to construct a dialogical model for the relationship between engineers and architects, what must first be addressed is the need for diversity of identity, voice,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pg 263 (my emphasis)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pg. 259

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin, (1984) p. 15

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p. 56

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p. 123



language, culture and values. And here begins the dialogical paradox that will create such problems for critical theorists like Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida: (That) in order to destabilize a dominant ideology *dialogically*, we must begin by affirming *subjectivity*, *voice* and *language* with all of their attendant and contestable values. True dialogue resists homogenizing forces<sup>14</sup>, and can only proceed on this premise. Addressing this issue Bakhtin asks:

“In what way would it enrich the event if I merged with the other, and instead of two there would be now only one? And what would I myself gain by the other’s merging with me? If he did, he would see and know no more than what I see and know myself; ...Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life.”<sup>15</sup>

At one level, then, the consequence for dialogic collaboration between engineers and architects becomes quite evident. Unlike the currently ubiquitous post-structural theoretical models where professional boundaries are “blurred”, “erased” or “absorbed” (i.e. hybridized or homogenized<sup>16</sup>), the dialogical model would suggest the opposite: that engineers and architects should each strive to strengthen their respective “cultures” by employing and understanding the values and aspirations that constitute them, even as these “identifying values” are transformed through time and the collaborative experience itself. As Bakhtin would propose, it is in the realm of a particular dialogic *event* (for example, a meeting between architect and engineer to strategize the structural system of a building) that the ‘in-between’ conditions of hybridization occur. Although the “carnavalesque” would allow that this event might have a transformative effect on each of the participants, it is still premised on the notion that distinctions in general, remain intact after the event. An effective collaboration between an architect and engineer, then, would produce a new spectrum of possibilities unimagined by either party before the event, and would likely leave both

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<sup>14</sup> In architecture these “homogenizing forces” seem to be coming primarily from a combination of *technology* and *theory*. Unlike many of the architectural theorists who are embracing these qualities as novel and unavoidable characteristics of our time, I will argue that the tectonic, inherently dialogical quality of architecture, has a responsibility and particular talent for resisting them.

<sup>15</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin. (1990). *Art and answerability*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press. (1990) p. 87

<sup>16</sup> In “Whatever Happened to Urbanism” Rem Koolhaas describes this (poststructural) condition where we: “will no longer be concerned with...more or less permanent objects but with the irrigation of territories with potential; ...no longer aim for stable configurations, but for the creation of enabling fields ...that refuse to be crystallized into definitive form; it will no longer be about meticulous definition, the imposition of limits, but about expanding notions, *denying* boundaries, not about separating and identifying entities, but about discovering un-nameable hybrids.” (the essay was published in S,M,L,XL 1996 p. 258)

groups questioning and reformulating their particular values, while still resolute in their identity as such.

Following this post-dialogical re-resolution of identity, it becomes evident and critical that identities and dialogue are always a matter of *scale*. Bakhtin refers, for example, to “inner speech”<sup>17</sup> and “inner dialogue” contained in the mind of an individual, but patterned after the external dialogues that surround and constitute the individual subject in relation to others. We are thus confronted with the layered formation of culture at its many levels and stages of development and looking closely can see the networks of dialogue at work in almost every conceivable scale of human interaction.

Here we also start to see ‘physical architecture’ or ‘building’ as a useful spatial diagram for the layers and scale-shifts in dialogic interaction. This is seen, for example at the micro scale in domestic inhabitation, as family members ‘use’, ‘maintain’ and ‘add-to’ to a dwelling or house—a poster on the wall of a child’s bedroom, a new colour of paint, a kitchen renovation, or even flowers in the front yard. Jumping up in scale reveals a parallel dialogue at the scale of a whole city, where large corporations who have created purposefully *singular* (i.e. monological) monumental structures, project their particular voice into the city milieu, thus participating in a dialogue of institutions. And while we might want to critique these mega-buildings as ‘corporate monologues’, what can’t be ignored is that they are usually the result of a dialogical process of their own<sup>18</sup>—a collaboration between architect(s), boards of directors, city codes, officials and master-planning intentions, as well as engineers, program requirements, current technological issues and an existing social fabric which will undoubtedly temper both the ‘illocutionary’ (intended) and ‘perlocutionary’ (received) nature of the architectural ‘utterance’. It would be a rare case, for example, to find a corporate president or CEO, as megalomaniac as some may be, who would try to ‘design a building themselves’ without intense consultation with these specified ‘others’. This is in addition to the fact that there are usually legal boundaries (thank the law-d) to this type of unilateral action, even if money and power often have a way of circumventing these incorporated collective-values.

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<sup>17</sup> For Bakhtin, the consciousness is itself made up of different social sites, essentially participating in dialogue at a micro scale. See Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Harvard, 1986

<sup>18</sup>Examining the formation of the skyscraper as a building type, Colin Rowe’s “Chicago Frame” 1956, pg. 103-105 (published in *Mathematics of the Ideal Villa*, 1976) discusses at length the collaborative relationship between architects, visionary clients, manufacturers and salesmen who collectively brought the steel frame into public use and secured it as a part of architectural language that was instrumental in the manifestation of the skyscraper.

This ambiguous view of ‘incorporation’ is not to condone the consolidation of power or privilege which can and must be challenged dialogically, but what must also be confronted here is that the “dialogical” is made up of a hierarchical network of *transparent layers* that successively resolve themselves into ‘singular’ voices in order to speak at the next dialogical level. For instance, a dialogue of nations is possible only by recognizing a certain threshold of autonomy, agency and ‘right to exist’<sup>19</sup> called sovereignty. It is usually assumed that within any sovereign state are found many ‘institutions’ and ‘incorporations’ at a variety of scales and types, constantly in dialogue (even conflict) with each other, who make up the necessarily dynamic, ‘suspended’ condition that renders the ‘state-as-voice’ even possible. On the other hand any form of authoritarian rule, at the state, institutional, corporate or even familial level, would be anti-dialogical—*at that particular level*, leaving the difficult question of whether or not the sovereignty of such a state, institution etc. should be recognized at the next level up of dialogical participation. For example, should totalitarian states be permitted to contribute in the United Nations? We can see the problematic implications that this creates. Democracy, as Winston Churchill expressed, is a terribly flawed system of government, but just happens to be the best one we’ve found thus far. It also seems to be the model closest to allowing the *dialogical* to permeate all scales of *identity, language, and voice* formation. Although a legitimate exploration of democracy is far beyond the scope of this paper, our emerging dialogical model can already be used as a basis for critiquing and re-founding any system of rule(s) that we are responsible for helping to construct, be they governmental, scholarly, or architectural.

One of the many complex questions that this model of layered identities raises when applied to engineer-architect collaboration is that of *affiliation*. To what degree do individual architects speak as ‘architects in general’, and engineers as ‘engineers in general’; and to what degree are these affiliations conscious or subconscious? As Bakhtin has argued, even language itself is “not neutral”, but rather “...language has been completely taken over”, and that “All words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency,” etc.. To what degree, then, are architects and engineers speaking the same or different languages, and therefore part of different cultures; and what ‘use-value’ is to be found in the centripetal nature of these affiliations and the differences between them? Could it be that calling oneself an ‘architect’ or an ‘engineer’ has dialogical value,

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<sup>19</sup> Certainly this concept is fundamental to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It seems no accident that Said (along with many others) is seen as both a poststructuralist and an advocate of a “bi-national” solution that rejects the adjacent sovereignty of the two independent states with their differing and identifiable ideologies.

and that this identification or 'framing' provides the foundation and actual diversity necessary for particular kinds of discourse?

In his paper "Monoglot 'Standard' in America", renowned linguist Michael Silverstein examines and critiques the tendency of society to unify itself linguistically and culturally; creating a "standard" that becomes hegemonic and dominant at the expense of "plurilingualism" or "polyglossia". Silverstein quotes physicist Freeman Dyson who looks for a biological rationale against this standardization:

"In biology a clone is the opposite of a clade. A clade is a group sharing a common origin but exhibiting genetic diversity. A clone is a single population in which all individuals are genetically identical. Clades are the stuff of which great leaps forward in evolution are made. Clones are slow to adapt and slow to evolve... This too, has its analog in the domain of linguistics. A linguistic clone is a *monglot* culture, a population with a single language sheltered from alien world and alien thoughts. Its linguistic inheritance tends to become gradually impoverished... As centuries go by words become fewer and masterpieces of literature become rarer. Linguistic rejuvenation requires the analog of sexual reproduction, the mixture of languages and cross-fertilization of vocabularies. The great flowering of English culture followed the sexual union of French with Anglo-Saxon in Norman England. ...Are we to be a clade or a clone? This perhaps is the central problem in humanity's future. In other words, how are we to make our social institutions flexible enough to preserve our precious biological and cultural diversity?"<sup>20</sup>

It seems hard to argue with this compelling description of diversity, and the notion of 'sexual union' and 'cross-fertilization' can easily be projected onto engineer-architect relationships that can now be seen as a way to ensure diversity in building through their dialogue. But is it important to find where these different languages/cultures came from to begin with, in general, and in relation to the *language/culture* of architecture or engineering? Are these identifying frameworks taught in schools for example? Are they the result of 'natural' or 'contextual' factors that predispose certain individuals to their chosen professions as engineers or architects? Or could they begin with the legendary "frosh week" of engineering schools across the country, or the notoriously esoteric and

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Silverstein. "Monoglot 'Standard' In America" 1987 pg. 5 Working Papers and Proceedings of the Centre for Psychosocial Studies.

aloof 'design studio' and 'reviews' of the architecture schools. It would be safe to say that these two cultures, with their particular journals, jargon, clubs and codes are each reinforced by their own brand of 'professionalism'<sup>21</sup>, but it is even more likely that they are influenced and nurtured through other structures of value or *evaluation*. Diverse registers of 'success' in each field such as: novelty, safety, dependability, hypability, track-record, national recognition, and awards/critical acclaim from different institutional voices, all create a landscape that is bound to channel architectural and engineering cultures in different directions. Although vastly simplified, these different value systems are also at work in the polarised register of architecture vs. engineering, as *daring* vs. *dependable*. How many people, for example, are likely to hire an engineer who is "known for taking risks"? If we are honest we must confront that this is a contradiction in terms. It is not to say that engineers are never daring, but the risks an engineer takes, are not (thank goodness) *characteristic*. An engineer's work is based in *opposition* to risk, on predictability, or more precisely, the ability to calculate the likelihood of an outcome with as high a degree of precision as possible. To the extent that risks might be 'courted' in an engineer's work, they have likely come from a place outside of the "engineer" proper, a *non-engineering* place, which, as Bakhtin would say, is part of each person's polyglossic makeup. (As in: "That's not the *engineer* in you talking!")

Unlike Engineers, Architects are rarely hired, or known for, their 'dependability' or 'stabilizing effect'. They are typically hired because a client hopes an architect may be able to offer 'hitherto unimagined' form, definition and (re)organization of problems ranging in scale from the urban to the domestic; where layered identities, memories and desires are to be built up in material-space, and a sense of the 'unpredictable' assumed from the start. Thus, even the most conservative client can usually see the merit in having an architect "shake things up," or be "less predictable". It would be hard to imagine, on the other hand, even the most liberal-minded client asking the same of an engineer. Engineers are not asked to be daring but *cautious*, even if employed to structurally resolve an architect's so-called "daring" design. When confronted with life-safety issues or economizing strategy, both architects and clients alike will exclaim with relief: "That's why we have engineers!"

These are obviously highly 'stereotypical' scenarios, but they are intended to once again reveal the paradox in Silverstein's logic. When it comes to encouraging diversity at one level (isn't it great

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<sup>21</sup> See footnote 1, pg. 1 Marshal MacLuan's critique of "professionalism"

that architects are *different* than engineers), we will always find ourselves reinforcing stereotypes at another: (engineers are defined by their ability to accurately predict an outcome i.e. *consistency* and *control*, architects are defined by their ability to reconfigure existing patterns into new forms of expression). Given this paradox, Bakhtin's "dialogicality" offers us a form of *dynamic resolution*. The dialogical model becomes a way to 'structure' a process that automatically engenders a complex response by enlisting diverse subjective 'voices' and 'cultures' in order to co-construct solutions to the challenge of complexity in building—solutions that could never be imagined from a singular voice or point of view.

### Intersubjectivity

Having seen that Bakhtin's dialogism is a state of dynamic interaction between diverse and particular voices or *subjects*; the question of what *constitutes* "subjectivity" remains somewhat unresolved and mysterious. A close relative of dialogism is the concept of "*intersubjectivity*", a field of inquiry concerned with the relationships *between* subjects, as well as the ideological *formation* of the subject 'itself—the subject constituted and operative *in relation to others*; each as a participating subject, as opposed to others as passive *objects*.

In his paper "Subjectivity in Language", linguist Emile Benveniste proposes that the 'subject' is essentially a linguistic phenomenon:

"Consciousness of self is only possible if experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person*, for it implies that reciprocally *I* becomes *you* in the address..."

"Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse. This polarity of persons is the fundamental condition in language..."<sup>22</sup>

Thus for Benveniste language is *only possible* because each speaker differentiates himself and "sets himself up as a *subject*". But revisiting Bakhtin, recalls that language(s) *themselves* are

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<sup>22</sup> Emile Benveniste. "Subjectivity in Language" Problems in General Linguistics. 1971 pg 225

differentiated, and that “language...lies in the borderline between oneself and the other...” and becomes “one’s own” only when “populated with intention”. This brings us to a chicken/egg scenario. Language is both necessary *for*, as well as the result *of* subjectivity—a co-dependency that, although intriguing, casts little light on the real origin of either ‘subject’ or ‘language’.

To break this deadlock, many researchers in the domain of intersubjectivity have looked for the origins of ‘recognition’ *from* and *of* others, and the subsequent intersubjectivity, in the psychology of early mother/child relations. Colwyn Trevarthen is well-known for his research in the field:

“For infants to share mental control with other persons they must have two skills. First, they must be able to exhibit to others at least the rudiments of individual consciousness and intentionality. This attribute of acting is called *subjectivity*. In order to communicate, infants must also be able to adapt or fit this subjective control to the subjectivity of others: they must also demonstrate *intersubjectivity*.” ...I believe a correct description of this behavior must be in terms of mutual intentionality and sharing of mental state. Either partner may initiate a ‘display’ or ‘act of expression’ and both act to sustain a sharing and exchange of initiatives. Both partners express impulses in a form that is infectious for the other. <sup>23</sup>

Martin Buber, one of the founding fathers of intersubjectivity, is also concerned with the relationships between ‘self’ and ‘other’, but in his famous book I and Thou he sees them emerging from a more abstract origin. In a way that is ironically architectural, Buber speaks of the interdependent duality of ‘things and ‘relationships’, ‘self and other’, as follows:

“In the beginning is the relation.”

“...The world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude [the ‘It’-world and the ‘You’-world].

He perceives the being that surrounds him, plain things and beings as things; he perceives what happens around him, plain processes and actions as

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<sup>23</sup> Colwyn Trevarthen , Descriptive Analyses of Infant Communicative Behaviour. In: Studies in Mother-Infant Interaction. (1977) H.R. Schaffer (ed.), London: Academic Press.

processes, things that consist of qualities, and processes that consist of moments, things recorded in terms of spatial coordinates and processes in terms of temporal coordinates...an ordered world, a detached world. This [It] world is somewhat reliable; it has density and duration...one recounts it with one's eyes closed and then checks it with one's eyes open and there it stands—right next to your skin...or nestled into your soul...it is your object and remains that, according to your pleasure—and remains primarily alien both outside and inside you.

*Or*, man encounters *being* and *becoming* as what confronts him —always only *one* being and every 'thing' only as a being. What is there reveals itself to him only in the *occurrence*, and what occurs there happens to him as being. Nothing else is present but this one, but this one cosmically. Measure and comparison have fled. It is up to you how much of the immeasurable becomes reality for you. The encounters do not order themselves to become a world, but each is for you a sign of the world order...The world that appears to you in this way is unreliable, for it appears always new to you...it lacks density, for everything in it permeates everything else...It lacks duration...It cannot be surveyed: if you try to make it surveyable, you lose it. It does not stand outside you, it touches your ground...

The It-world hangs together in space and time.

The You-world does not hang together in space and time.

The individual You must become an It when the event of relation has run its course. The individual It *can* become a You by entering into the event of relation."<sup>24</sup>

Thus Buber describes two worlds, or two ways of understanding and "being" in the world: The "It" world is a place of 'definition', 'boundaries', 'naming' and, fundamentally, separation of 'things' from 'self'. This 'It-world' is (counter-intuitively) 'centripetal'<sup>25</sup>, gathering to a *center*, identities as distinct things, each with its own measurable autonomy. The "You" world is a place where no-

<sup>24</sup> Martin Buber. *I and Thou* 1970 p. 82

<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin speaks repeatedly of the dual nature of dialogue as both centripetal (pulling towards a center) and centrifugal (pulling away from a center): "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The process of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance..." *Discourse in the Novel* (1981) p.272



*thing* exists outside of self, but rather only ‘becomes’ through the ‘being’ of self. This ‘You-world’ is centrifugal, always throwing away from a stabilized center any attempt at a unitary definition. But just as the “dialogic event” paradoxically both *affirms* and *hybridizes* the individual subject, so too does Buber’s “event of relation” where the “It” becomes a “You”.

It is also pertinent to reflect on how this intersubjective model becomes architecturalized through Buber’s use of spatial and material metaphors in both the affirmative and negative sense, with terms like: “density”, “coordinates”, “immeasurable”, “survey” and “ground”. Thus Buber frames the “self-other”, “subject-object” relationship in terms that are material, spatial, human and cosmic, ultimately accounting for these relationships with a *theological* origin. It is just such a metaphysical origin that Derrida will later attempt to shake off through “deconstruction”.

Like Buber, Soren Kierkegaard, another founder of intersubjectivity, also seeks a connection to the infinite in both ideal and practical human relationships. Kierkegaard takes the model of subject-subject relations into more practical territory, as he interrogates the relationships between individual and *community*, shedding some light on our previous problem of ‘affiliation’. Patricia Huntington quotes Kierkegaard on community and individuality as follows:

“When individuals (each one individually) are essentially and passionately related to an idea and together are essentially related to the same idea, the relation is optimal and [binding]. Individually, the relation separates them (each one has himself for himself), and ideally it unites them... Thus the individuals never come too close to each other in the herd sense, simply because they are united on the basis of an ideal distance. On the other hand, if individuals relate to an idea merely *en masse* (consequently without the individual separation of inwardness)... we have a tumultuous self-relating of the mass to an idea... gossip and rumour... and apathetic envy becomes a surrogate of each for all. Individuals do not in inwardness turn away from each other, turn outward in unanimity for an idea, but mutually turn to each other in frustrating and suspicious, aggressive levelling reciprocity.”<sup>26</sup>

To Kierkegaard this public, reflexive ‘homogeneity’ or ‘equality’ is a destructive force, where envy and apathy are the logical extensions of continual reflection and lack of true subjectivity. Clearly

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<sup>26</sup> Huntington, Patricia. “Heidegger’s Reading of Kierkegaard” *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* 1995 pg. 49

this “levelling reciprocity” would not fit in either Bakhtin’s dialogical model, or the generally affirmative notion of intersubjectivity. As a model for community, Kierkegaard’s “relation” that both “separates” and “unites” seems much closer to the dialogic, and in it we begin to see major overlaps between notions of affiliation, community, culture and even language; and by extension that community *is culture*, and *is language*. Huntington goes on to describe Kierkegaard’s ideal or “ethical” individual as an exile within a community: one who takes responsibility for his or her own choices, separating themselves from the “crowd” not by abstracting themselves from their circumstances, but rather by intensifying their participation in the community, with actions that are “critical and engaged” as opposed to “passive and disingenuous”.<sup>27</sup>

This existential relationship between individual subject and community is brought back to the spatial/material realm of the dialogic by Jurgen Habermas writing on Kierkegaard, as he links the intersubjective to the dialogic as follows:

“The dialogical encounter with the addressed *other*, whose response eludes one’s control, first opens to the individual the intersubjective space for his or her authentic selfhood.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus intersubjectivity is a way of individual *being* and *becoming* (of subject-hood) that relies on the perpetual co-recognition of subjectivity or ‘empowered *otherness*’. As we have seen, this empowered otherness is also a necessary condition of dialogue, and critical to the relationship between architects and engineers as they strive to find a voice as individuals, ‘communities’ (affiliations), and linguistic cultures with particular “centripetal”<sup>29</sup> values that can be shared in Bakhtin’s multi-layered, heteroglot, “centrifugal” realm of dialogue.

### Critical Theory

Over the last 40 years voices emerging from various disciplines (particularly literary theory) that focus on challenging “dominant ideologies”, belief systems and power structures throughout society, have been gathered under the banner of *post-structuralism* and *critical theory*. The work

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<sup>27</sup> Huntington, Patricia. “Heidegger’s Reading of Kierkegaard” *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* 1995 pg. 49

<sup>28</sup> Jurgen Habermas: “Communicative Freedom and Negative Theology”, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* 1995. pg. 182 (my emphasis)

<sup>29</sup> see footnote 24

of these theorists has been influenced by a wide variety of philosophers over the last two centuries, but particular unifying inspiration has been drawn from the work of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and the lesser-known George Bataille. If a central theme could be assigned to their work (an act that would be somewhat antithetical to the content of the work itself) it would be that *structures* in general, and particularly of language, knowledge, social hierarchies, cultural/sexual identities, religion and political systems, are, by nature, infused with the problem of *power*. The *structured* possibility of one individual or group securing authority and control over another individual or group, renders any structure as suspect. Each critical theorist in their own way, has sought to problematize these structures of power, exposing them to view, and ultimately “deconstructing” them—breaking down the walled boundaries and self-perpetuating authority they may have previously relied on to maintain control.

However, as critical theory has become increasingly ubiquitous as a theoretical ~~foundation~~ throughout architectural academia, problems are beginning to emerging: If critical theory breaks down ‘structures’ and ‘boundaries’; is it possible that it also act as a force for *diversity*? Or, does it (covertly, relentlessly) become a force to hybridize ‘things’ and ‘voices’ into Silverstein’s “monoglot standard”? Now that architects are self-consciously addressing their need for greater ‘collaboration’, they are also forced to question *theory* by *practice* and ask: *to what degree does critical theory empower dialogue, or a dialogic model?* Is the individual “subject” even possible within the post-structural ~~framework~~; and should cultures, languages, institutions, professions or affiliations *ever* be affirmed as ‘voices’—voices that can enter into Bakhtin’s “open-ended dialogue”, or “free and familiar contact on the carnival square”?

The consequence of these questions has been enormous for architecture, both for the discipline and the profession. They have shaped, and continue to shape, architecture’s conceptual grounding, built form, processes, and relationships with non-architects. In one sense, as mentioned earlier, critical theory has been a *loosening* and *cleansing* process, a process that any nutritionist will claim is essential before switching from a ‘contaminated’ to a ‘healthy’ diet. Through the work of Foucault (knowledge), Derrida (language), Butler (sexuality), Said (politics) along with many others, awareness has been created of particular and systematic forms of repressive power, and consequently, how these abuses are manifest in architectural terms. This loosening of deeply embedded power structures of which we are often unaware, has allowed a re-evaluation and house-cleaning within the discipline and profession. It has allowed us to look

back and critically examine architectural patterns, intentions, built manifestations and their effects. But has critical theory provided either the specific, or infrastructural, content for a progressive reconstruction? Looking again to the nutritionist as a guide, we confront the obvious question: once the 'cleansing' has been accomplished, how do we choose a diet that will nourish and build up the body, while avoiding the re-toxification of previous habits? What will the new relationships that define architecture as a way of working look like? Can architects advance a new way of working together that challenges the human tendencies of hegemonic exploitation and materialistic 'possessionism', and yet supports the notion of dialogic empowerment? Looking more closely at several of the prominent critical theorists will give a better idea as to the potential role of critical theory in developing a dialogic model for collaboration between professions, and as a foundation for building.

George Bataille, the French writer and cultural theorist is widely considered to have had a seminal effect on the general development of post-structuralism and critical theory<sup>30</sup>, and many of the of the post structural thinkers, writers and artists who came after him felt they were expanding on work that he began in the 1920's. In his writing, which includes fiction, poetry, theoretical discourse and dialogues with contemporary artists, we can clearly find the early seeds of deconstruction in his notions of formlessness, entropy and horizontality. His virulent critique of the power structures he saw in the then emerging positivist/rationalist ideologies, or the theology, religion and myth that they had recently replaced, are seen throughout his writings. Because of its obvious shock value, Bataille is perhaps best known for his erotic writings, all of which draw a connection between sex, transgression, mutilation and death. Unlike Kierkegaard, Bataille proposes "that human beings are never united with each other except through tears or wounds, an idea that has a certain logical force in its favor."<sup>31</sup>

'Eroticism' was one of the ways in which Bataille sought to break down and reconfigure what he saw as a controlled, constructed and stable self-identity or "I" in its traditionally structured relation to "other". And unlike Benveniste and Buber who saw in the use of "I" and "you" the very formation of *subject* through language, and thus as reciprocally *affirming*, Bataille positions

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<sup>30</sup> Perhaps the most thorough (i.e. relentless) exploration of Bataille's 'inspirational' or at least prophetic sensibility is found in *FORMLESS: A User's Guide* (1997) by: Yves-Alain Bois and Rosalynd Krauss. This book was written as a catalogue for an exhibition at the Centre George Pompidou, where a reconsideration of "modern" art was conducted under Bataille's concept of "*l'informe*" freeing the work from the modernist project of idea, intention and constructedness. See also Denise Hollier's *Against Architecture*, footnote 32

<sup>31</sup> George Bataille, *Eroticism* 1999

himself in a place of more violent ‘de(con)structive’ oppositions, connecting the sex act with the operation of language, communication, and death. These relational enterprises are characterized by *loss* (of self), or a general *dissolution* of self *in the other*. He thus proposes a perpetual “continuity of being” found in the sexual exchange, and a discard of subjectivity: “Communication only takes place between two people who risk themselves, each lacerated and suspended, perched atop a common *nothingness*.”<sup>32</sup> It is in this perpetual ‘deferral’ that we see the beginning of Derrida’s “difference”.

As is common to many of the post-structural literary theorists, Bataille often uses architecture as both metaphor and representative structure in order to clarify his position. To Bataille, architecture is by nature a prison—a manifestation of ideality and thus hegemonic control:

“Architecture is the expression of every society’s very being...[But] only the ideal being of society, the one that issues orders and interdictions with authority, is expressed in architectural compositions in the strict sense of the word. Thus great monuments rise up like levees, opposing the logic of majesty and authority to any confusion: Church and state in the form of cathedrals and palaces speak to the multitudes, or silence them. It is obvious that the monuments inspire good social behavior, and often even real fear.”<sup>33</sup>

In case there is any confusion left as to where he positions himself in regards to the empowered framework, institution or state, Bataille sums up by declaring that: “*The heart is human to the extent that it rebels [and] (this means: to be human is ‘not to bow down before the law’)*.”<sup>34</sup> But unlike the more ambiguous post-structural writers he continues by fleshing out this way of being in more “life-world”<sup>35</sup> terms as follows:

“I differ from my friends in not caring a damn for convention, taking my pleasure in the basest things. I feel no shame living like a sneaky adolescent, like an old man. Ending up drunk and red faced in a dive of naked women...I feel utterly vulgar and when I cannot

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<sup>32</sup> George Bataille (I have misplaced the origin several of Bataille’s quotes, and this will be corrected in subsequent printing. I believe these are from *Eroticism* 1957, or *Guilty* (trans.)1988

<sup>33</sup> George Bataille, “Architecture” *Documents*, no. 2, May1929

<sup>34</sup> George Bataille...

<sup>35</sup> Kenneth Frampton distinguishes architecture from theory and fine arts as being “inextricably mixed up with the life-world”, and that architecture is “always dependant on material conditions”. Bataille shows that his theories are also based on these material conditions by putting them into practice.

attain my object I at least sink into a real poverty.”<sup>36</sup>

Moving ahead into the post-structural era proper, the words of political activist and critical theorist Edward Said echo some of Bataille’s. Despite Said being commonly viewed as a voice for political reconciliation, his words contain some defining threads that link his values to those of Bataille:

“It is a spirit in opposition, rather than accommodation, that grips me because the romance, the interest the challenge of intellectual life is to be found in dissent against the status quo...(pg. xvii) One task of the intellectual is the effort to break down the stereotypes and reductive categories that are so limiting to human thought and communication.”<sup>37</sup>

A parallel could certainly be drawn between Said’s “spirit in opposition”, and Bataille’s “not bowing down before the law”. Said continues to clarify his position on the formation of identities in his The Role of the Intellectual: “...the intellectual in my sense of the word, is neither a pacifier nor a consensus builder, but someone whose whole being is staked on a critical sense, a sense of being unwilling to accept easy formulas or ready-made clichés...”<sup>38</sup> And unlike what many might initially expect from a voice for the rights of oppressed people groups, Said states that: “the value of multi-culturalism is really in *combating* the various ideologies of ethnic and religious identities—identities as a fixed, stable, essentialized and nativized thing, rather than as a composite, constantly changing, fluid series of currents mixed and varied at all times.”<sup>39</sup> One can’t help but wonder how this constantly shifting ground is related to the accusations that Said has exaggerated and falsified his own geographic origins or ‘identity’, or whether ‘truth’ amidst his “fluid currents” has any place at all. Clearly Said presents a problem for the dialogical intersubjective model, which relies on identities at a variety of scales in order to attain the critical dialogical *event*. But Said, like virtually all of the other critical theorists, seems to be constructing a theory against identity, against structure—“against architecture”<sup>40</sup>—as a means of eliminating the authority of the voice, a voice that seems to haunt from a distant past. Said explains this in

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<sup>36</sup> George Bataille

<sup>37</sup> Edward Said. Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures. Vintage (reprint )1996 pg. xi

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. pg. 23

<sup>39</sup> Said Edward, *Tikkun*, excerpt from “Interview”, by Mark Levine, March-April 1999,

<sup>40</sup> Denise Hollier’s Against Architecture 1999, is a landmark elucidation of Bataille’s work, and the relationship between poststructuralism and architecture.

reference to his own past experience in a recent interview:

“The inner me was always under attack by authority, by the way my parents wanted me to be brought up, by these English schools I went to. So I've always felt this kind of anti-authoritarian strain in me, pushing to express itself...”<sup>41</sup>

It becomes supremely ironic when several lines later in the interview Said feels the need to grasp decidedly for institutional authority and the notion of “commitment” and “title”:

“The whole notion of commitment is deeply important to me... For instance, I have the right, as the president of the Modern Language Association, to organize a presidential forum at the MLA convention this coming December. The title is "Scholarship and Commitment." I've invited Chomsky, Pierre Bourdieu, Michael Freid. Personal example is very important. I want to restore the notion of commitment...”<sup>42</sup>

One has to wonder where Said suddenly finds his sense of authority that empowers him to suggest something as anachronistically *structured* as “rights” or “commitment”, which seem to lead so quickly back towards *identity* and identity to *hierarchy*.

Like Said, Judith Butler is a critical theorist who is concerned with breaking down “stereotypes” and “reductive categories”, in her case, with regards to sexual identity and the language of “injurious speech”. For Butler “naming”, “identity” and “sexuality” are in themselves problematic, containing power structures that, through the very act of naming, tend to oppress, both openly and covertly, even as they constitute the subject:

“A name tends to fix, to freeze, to delimit, to render substantial, indeed it appears to recall a metaphysics of substance, of discrete and singular kinds of beings...”<sup>43</sup>

“After all, to be named by another is traumatic: It is an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise agency at all.

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<sup>41</sup> Said Edward. The Atlantic Online, “Setting the Record Straight” An Interview. September 22, 1999 <theatlantic.com>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, Judith “On Linguistic Vulnerability” Politics of the Performative. pg 35

A founding subordination... This is what I have been called. Because I have been called something, I have entered into linguistic life, refer to myself through the language given by the Other, but perhaps never quite in the same terms that my language mimes. ”<sup>44</sup>

“Identity is a function of that circuit... It seeks to introduce a reality rather than to report an existing one; it accomplishes this introduction through a *citation* of existing convention.”<sup>45</sup>

Thus while Butler confirms Benveniste’s assertion that subjectification is accomplished through language—through *naming*, to her this process, rather than empowering the subject to participate in a dialogical construction of meaning or truth, has instead made the subject instantly and irrevocably vulnerable to the destructive, limiting power of words and names.

Jacques Derrida, credited as the author of “deconstruction”, also has much to say about the power of language. Derrida begins his journey into deconstruction by attacking “logocentrism”: the metaphysics of *presence*, *voice*, and *speech*—in one sense the ideas at the very heart of dialogical interaction:

“All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the ones beyond metaphysical onto-theology...are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the *logos* [speech], in whatever sense it is understood...” ...“This notion remains therefore within the heritage of that logocentrism which is also phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning.”

Derrida’s intentions for deconstruction are to thus address *logocentrism* and *presence* as foundational parts of a repressive structure. Derrida describes the deconstructive process as “...the liberation of the signifier from its dependence or derivation with respect to the *logos* [speech] and the related concept of truth...” and continues that:

“The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take effective aim, except by inhabiting

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pg. 38

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pg 32 (my emphasis)



these structures. Inhabiting in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally.”<sup>46</sup>

Deconstruction is thus a process of dismantling these structures of *speech*, *truth*, and *presence*, by releasing “*text*” from a dependency on presence, or a center of identity and subjectivity<sup>47</sup>. Derrida’s reaction is partly towards the pervasive work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who privileged speech, with its identifiable author, over *writing*, which Derrida feels can be more easily “loosened” from oppressive authorial speech. He speaks of “the death of speech”, “a new mutation in the history of writing”, and a “new situation” where speech and voice is subordinated to writing, a place where continual hybridization can occur without the interference of *presence* or claim to ownership. By extension this “new situation” becomes, a place of “cybernetics”: hybridizing human and machine processes of control and communication:

“If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concept of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—which until recently served to separate the machine from man, ...”<sup>48</sup>

It is in this theoretical work of Derrida that the sharp distinction between ‘intersubjectivity’, ‘dialogism’ and ‘critical theory’ is revealed. Where Derrida would work towards hybridizing or eliminating voice and presence<sup>49</sup>, Bakhtin, Buber and Kierkegaard would encourage them as a necessary component of intersubjective dialogue. And if *speech*, *voice* or *author* become dissolved in a ‘deconstructed’ territory of writing, the “multiple voices and languages” needed for

<sup>46</sup> Derrida, Jacques *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pg. 24

<sup>47</sup> “Deconstruction”, despite its limited readership, can certainly be argued to have had a major disseminating influence on eroding the concept of a ‘*foundational*’ position’, individual expression of *particular* values (valuing one thing *over* another, i.e. *hierarchies*), or collective community values that somehow declare themselves as *exclusive*. But here is the classic impasse: How can a right to freely “express oneself” be upheld, while the right to be convicted or act on convictions is denied?

<sup>48</sup> Derrida, Jacques *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), from “Exergue”, pg 9?

<sup>49</sup> Derrida’s view of “difference” presents many paradoxical notions of “other”. In this excerpt from “Difference” in *Margins of Philosophy* 1972, Derrida wrestles with this paradox:

“What differs? Who differs? What is difference?”

If we answered these questions before examining them as questions, before turning them back on themselves, and before suspecting their very form...we would fall below the level we have now reached...“Thus difference is the name we might give to the “active” discord of different forces, and of differences of forces, set up against the entire system of metaphysical grammar, whenever that system governs culture, philosophy, and science.”

Bakhtin's dialogic 'heteroglot' interaction, seem to recede towards impossibility.

What also becomes apparent is that the very same 'authoritarian regimes' and or 'dominant ideologies' that both critical theory and Bakhtin's "carnavalesque" seek to challenge and break down, are very much necessary components for the energized condition of the carnival itself. For example, it is one thing to overhear at the carnival that: "The prince is here among us, disguised in a mask." and then declare loudly: "F\*\*\* the prince and his armies!" knowing that, although the prince can hear, he is temporarily unable to respond in his princely 'authoritative' fashion. Meanwhile the prince, playing the role of the butcher, is entertaining the butcher's wife in the back of the tent, and perhaps himself declaring: "F\*\*\* the prince!" Quite obviously none of this would be interesting or 'dialogically useful' without the prince and his institutionalized identity, both before and after the event. With Derrida's tendency towards flattening language to voiceless 'text' we have the opposite of the carnival, and move instead towards Silverstein's flaccid "monoglot standard", negating the friction, heat and conflict that powers the site-engine of the carnival, and its ability to effect significant change.

As architects looking for models of interaction with 'others', be they engineers, clients, officials, inhabitants, or even *sites, materials, trades and technologies*, we are faced with a real and fundamental problem: Should we respect and empower the various and different identities of these *others*? Or does this 'naming' "fix, freeze" and enmesh itself in the metaphysical realm to a degree that we become brokers of power, and thus perpetuators of oppression? Is *dialogue* necessary to the practice of architecture? And more broadly, what are the unifying (centripetal) intentions of architectural *practice* and *discipline*? Without first identifying both collective and personal values, it seems we will be hopelessly unable to respond to these questions, and will remain unable to build either educational or professional models, and for that matter, structures of any kind.

### **Building, Language and Tectonics**

...Yet building happens. It goes on around us whether or not we participate, whether or not we are aware. But we do participate, and we are almost always aware. Building is part of who we are. we. We. WE.

## Why we?

As it is sounded it out, it seems this primary 'we' is both radically necessary and hegemonic, just as 'building' is found to be. *We* means: *us* not *them*, *this* not *that*. But it also gathers together the 'not them' along with the 'us', the this and the that. It connects us by whatever is common, namely an overlap of language or culture. So the dialogical process begins in its various layers, and from this beginning we continue to identify, separate, stitch together, synthesize, bound, name and thus transform the world around us. And as soon as we begin, we recognize that we are *building*: we are establishing relationships and even hierarchies; we are putting things together.

Building happens, like this: We take things *apart* and put them *together*.

It is relational

It is hegemonic.

It is tectonic.

Architecture, as Bataille has already described, is a perfect metaphor for language, and power structures in general. The differences, diversity, and *boundaries* between architect and engineer, client and designer—materials, typologies and contexts—are crucial to a dialogical event or existence. Dialogue simultaneously maintains, supports and explores these boundaries and identities in the 'centripetal sense, the 'we' sense, as well as throws them into crisis and potential transformation as they confront one another in the dialogical event.

In a beautiful confluence of architecture, politics and social justice, architect and critic Kenneth Frampton quotes Bent Flyvbjerg, a Danish city planner and author who is becoming a revolutionary force in the social sciences. Flyvbjerg presents the paradoxical role of structure and power, and a way for us to see building as a cultural, political, revolutionary and communal act :

"Power concerns itself with defining reality rather than discovering what reality really is. ...in practice democratic progress is achieved not by constitutional and institutional reform alone, but by facing the *mechanisms of power* and the practices of class and privilege more directly, often head-on [Edward Said's 'spirit in opposition'] ...if you want to participate in politics but find the possibilities for doing so constricting, then *you team up*

*with like minded people* [Kierkegaard's 'community'] and you fight for what you want, utilizing the means that work in your context to undermine those who try to limit participation...If you want more civic reciprocity in political affairs, you work for *civic virtues* that becoming worthy of praise and others becoming undesirable ['values' and 'identity']. At times direct power struggle over specific issues works best; on other occasions changing the *ground rules* for such struggle is necessary, which is where constitutional and institutional reform come in..."<sup>50</sup> (my emphasis)

Flyvbjerg's call for action is centered on the manifestation of power in space—manifestations that oscillate without distinction between metaphor, polity and material construct—revealing once again that architecture 'as politics', 'as law' or 'as building' shares a common need and destiny in the dialogical model. In dialogical practice one must continually search for the impossible-yet-vital balance between *I* and *we*; simultaneously studying relationships *and* boundaries, autonomy *and* convergence for an elusive center.

But there are clearly other forces at work, forces that accept or propose very different strategies than those of the dialogic. In his recent book Me++, architect, educator and cyber-theorist Bill Mitchell addresses what he sees as the spatial paradigm shift between contemporary and traditional cultures found in the contrast between communication technologies and material space. With today's world of electronic connectivity or "networks", Mitchell sees a displacement of the traditional material/spatial relationships or "boundaries":

"If you look again at the history of cities, and cities used to be walled...the boundary, the city wall, clearly distinguished the city from its surroundings. But they also had their networks, ...their street networks and the road networks extending out into the hinterland and so on. ...So the functionality of a place, any kind of place, is really jointly constructed by the boundaries and the networks. If you take a room, the boundaries protect you from the weather, the walls and the floor and the ceiling. But the electrical networks and the communication networks and so on also contribute to making the functions of the space. ...what's happened is that the boundaries used to be dominant—really it was all you had in pre-industrial era—now the networks are dominant in creating functions in space, and that's a fundamental shift..."

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<sup>50</sup> Bent Flyvbjerg. Rationality and Power: Democracy and Practice.

“...the *cyborg* is another powerful metaphor, it’s the image of the technologically extended human being and the technologically extended subject. And to the extent that we become inseparable from our networks, as we really are now, we have to think of ourselves as cyborgs. Our consciousness is formed by the ways that we are embedded in our networks. Our capacity to act is very much mediated by our embedding in networks ...we’ve become inseparable from our networks and it’s impossible to understand us culturally and socially without considering [this]...”<sup>51</sup>

Considering this convincing description and its contrast to the stubborn need of ‘boundaries’ presented in the dialogical model; to what extent is language, culture or architecture made up of boundaries or networks? Or it is possible that there are other factors and referents besides walls, roads and phone lines, that do not fit neatly as either ‘boundary’ or ‘network’? Delving in to this question, it is easy to become disillusioned with Mitchell’s neat and persuasive distinction between these categories. But here the *dialogical* model becomes a mediator, setting itself up as network *and* boundary simultaneously, or a network that *relies* on boundaries. The dialogic is *relational*, it lives in the space “between things”<sup>52</sup> and “processes as things”. In whatever respect we are to see architecture as dialogic, or *dialogue as architectural*, both boundary and network must be embraced as equally foundational parts to the communicative or building act. A ‘dominant’, ‘singular’, ‘monological’, ‘rigid’ structure is therefore no better or worse a model than a ‘passive’, excessively ‘hybridized’, homogeneous network that lacks authority and thus structured empowerment and voice. The dialogical rejects either of these extreme models as dialogue requires identities that are at once empowered and in flux. To be an engineer, for example, must *mean something* if engineers are to play any significant role in a dialogical collaboration with an architect. Likewise, in order for a collaborative process to be *generative*, as it will be if it is truly dialogical, it is imperative that there be a sense of transparency, pliability and enzymatic potential in the particular ‘points of view’.

Our world is defined and understood by relationships and language is the primary means by which we negotiate and develop these relationships, between people and ‘building’, us and the material world. For this reason virtually all of our apperceptive, communicative and creative energy is

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<sup>51</sup> Bill Mitchell in a radio interview in Australia on his new book *Me++*

<sup>52</sup> Scott Francisco. “Between Things” was a Lecture delivered at the University of Kentucky, College of Architecture, 2000, part of the College lecture series. The lecture focused on architecture’s poetic potential emerging from the relationships that it engendered, choreographed and participated in creating.

involved with trying to understand how to *put things together*, or why things are arranged the way they are in the first place—the central theme of all philosophical, political, social, cultural, spiritual and even scientific, investigations. Relationships are the highly charged spaces between things, and a shift in focus to these ‘spaces’ from the objects that define them, will help bridge major disjunctures between eastern and western thinking<sup>53</sup> on fundamental concepts like *self*, *other*, *environment*, *context* and *community*, concepts that are at once deeply cultural, linguistic and architectural.<sup>54</sup>

Ironically, though, before these investigations can even begin, they are already dependant on the very ‘relations’ that they interrogate; they are linguistic events and as such they require communication and therefore some kind of language. But language in its particularity of ‘voice’ as Bakhtin and Derrida have expressed, and even the layperson knows,<sup>55</sup> is imbedded with values. It channels and directs our thoughts and utterances, even as it empowers them. Here again is the paradox: on the one hand relationships are central to understanding our place in the world and society, and yet in order to examine these relationships we have to rely on highly subjective language structures. Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure confronts this difficulty in his famous quote:

"Other sciences work with objects that are given in advance and can be considered from different viewpoints; but not linguistics... Far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object..." ..."there is only one solution to the foregoing difficulties: from the very outset we must put both feet on the ground of language and use language as the norm of all other manifestations of speech"<sup>56</sup>

By putting both our feet firmly “on the ground”, Saussure has perhaps done more than he, or his

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<sup>53</sup> In *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently...and Why*. 2003. Richard Nesbit argues that “the nature of thought is not everywhere the same” and that depending on cultural influence and up-bringing, (particularly marked by “eastern” and “western” patterns) people see and think about the world quite differently. Nesbit shows through historical analysis, psychological experiments and research, that Asians are more tuned into the world of “context”, where westerners are more tuned into the world of “objects” and “things”.

<sup>54</sup> Architecture, (many architects would like to believe) has carved itself out of, and formed itself in, the very heart of this contemplative action. But it also goes one step further: it makes explicit its preoccupation with relationships by creating a realm of ‘*meta-relationships*’—relationships that refer back to, and describe, the relationships themselves. For this and other reasons, architecture can never be satisfied with simply solving problems, however elegantly, but must also *show us* how they are solved, and in so doing *place us* in a kind of relational *network*, which may be *authorizing*, *connotative*, *indexical*, *performative*, *referential* etc. The morphology of these networks as they position and regulate relationships has been explored most thoroughly in the field of linguistics. See the work of

<sup>55</sup> The Sapir-Whorf “Reality Hypothesis” presents a thorough examination of this idea; that language s each present and manifest a kind of ‘world view’ in their grammatical structure.

<sup>56</sup>Ferdinand de Saussure. *Course on General Linguistics*, New York, 1959 (p.9).

many critics, expected. More than just identifying language as a “synchronic” and “immutable” system<sup>57</sup> shared between a community of speakers, Saussure has empowered dialogue, which according to Bakhtin, is exponentially more powerful than language itself. This comes full circle—paradoxically empowering a dialogical reconstruction of the very language that is relied on as “immutable” stable ground. In this way dialogue, with its layered redundancy, has a way of compensating for the subjectivity or ‘slant’ of singular voices, always having more than one and thereby never allowing only one to dominate.

### **And where does this leave ‘builders’ and the choices they make?**

Over the last few decades in architectural discipline and practice there has been a polarity developing between a renewed interest in the concept of ‘tectonics’ at one end, and a rediscovery of ‘plasticity’, digital media, and the newer concept of ‘topology’ at the other. Kenneth Frampton the chief contemporary spokesman for tectonics describes it as follows in the introduction to his 1995 Studies in Tectonic Culture:

“...this study seeks to mediate and enrich the priority given to space by reconsideration of the constructional and structural modes by which, of necessity, it has to be achieved. ...I am not alluding to the mere revelation of constructional technique but rather to its expressive potential. Inasmuch as the tectonic amounts to a poetics of construction it is art, but in this respect the artistic dimension is neither figurative nor abstract.”<sup>58</sup>

In the same passage he goes on to quote art historian Adolf Heinrich Borbein:

“Tectonic becomes the art of *joining*. ‘Art’ here is to be understood as encompassing *tekne*, and therefore indicates tectonic as assemblage not only of building parts, but also of objects...”<sup>59</sup>

Thus the tectonic returns us to “putting things together”; things that, in their particular relationship

<sup>57</sup> In his Course on General Linguistics, Saussure makes a radical case for the “immutability of the sign”, and for “language as a system” that is most profitably studied “synchronically” or relationally. This study although, although ultimately acknowledging the mutability of both sign and system, refocuses linguistics on the relationships that exist in a given ‘current state’ of language usage.

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth Frampton. Studies in Tectonic Culture. 1997 pg. 2, 3

<sup>59</sup> Adolf Hienrich Borbein, “Tectonik, zur Geschichte eines Bgriffs dder Archaologie” Archiv fur Begriffsgeschichte 26, no 1 (1982)

to each other can constitute something greater than themselves.

At the other end of the form making spectrum are a number of voices, or ways of making, that tend to defer ever more decision making to the digital (parametric) realm, focussing on highly technologized solutions, and often seeking to reduce the number of 'differing' materials or 'parts' to as few as possible. This work, mostly un-built due to current difficulties in fabrication, has been termed "blob" architecture referring to its amorphous formal character and lack of distinguishable or identifiable materials. This conceptual strategy is being employed by a growing number of young design firms, many of whom have also created amorphous names for their firms to match their methodology of design. Greg Lynn of *Form* is one of the best-known examples, as is Mark Goulthourpe's *dECOI*. Goulthourpe describes how dECOI has: "demonstrated the possibility of algorithmically-generated components, and linked this creative process to the fabrication potential of numeric command machines. ...attain[ing] a virtuosity in the parametric constraint of an apparently fluid sculptural form".<sup>60</sup> Collaborator Mark Burry expands:

"dECOi is comfortable to devolve design responsibilities around the globe... We have used parametric design to formulate the para-morph, a term we have borrowed from geology referring to an infinitely mutable object whose form may change whilst maintaining topological consistency."<sup>61</sup>

Referring to a current dECOI project, a penthouse to be constructed of 'folded' composite aluminium panels on top of an existing London skyscraper-condominium, Goulthourpe described his intention to "collapse" materials and systems into one parametric 'surface-structure-material' that could function as all of these systems at once, allowing the designers to combine 3D modelling, structural analysis and computerized fabrication; thus giving them tremendous formal freedom.<sup>62</sup> What this inevitably means, however, is that the dialogical condition of diverse materials, systems, trades, and even professional collaboration, is gradually being dealt out of the

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<sup>60</sup> Mark Goulthorpe, dECOI page *Urbandrifft*. website <[www.urbandrift.org](http://www.urbandrift.org)>

<sup>61</sup> Mark Burry, "Modernisme, Modernism and Third Millennium Praxis" 2001

Burry attempts to clarify the methodology of the formless digitized practice, placing dECOi within a (somewhat indiscriminately inclusive) body of historic architecture that is seen as progressive having eschewed flat planes in favor of curved or warped: "In many ways historians have had similar difficulty locating Gaudi's work within a general architectural appreciation, as cultural commentators probably have today with the approach taken by dECOi..."

<sup>62</sup> Mark Goulthourpe lectured in November 2003 on this particular dECOI project in a Faculty Colloquium on the Relationship between Architecture and Engineering at the MIT department of architecture.



game of design.<sup>63</sup> This collapse into one basic ‘material-structural-spatial-formal’ apparatus is ‘unitary’ and ‘centripetal’, and one must be suspicious as to whether it contains the cross-fertilizing complexity of “hetroglossia” found in true dialogue.

This loss of multiple voices can also be seen, for better or worse, as a loss of “redundancy”. In dialogue, redundancy is the inevitable consequence of hearing one’s self speak *through others* as they speak back to us *our* words in *their* own way. Redundancy is also found in the “indexical” function of language as it layers several different meanings onto a given utterance, thus authorizing types of dialogue, debate and even conflict by the way speakers identify their relationships to each other. Redundancy in the engineering profession is also a critical concept in that it protects structures through the diversity of overlapping “secondary systems”, systems or layers that are not part of the more calculated “primary” structure.<sup>64</sup>

In almost direct opposition to redundancy, advocates of the amorphous, or “thin” architecture, look to “topology” for inspiration—the ability to maintain unity of character and properties, despite formal or geometric transformations like ‘folding’, ‘twisting’ or ‘knotting’. Layers are eliminated: floor becomes wall, becomes roof etc. But in this new topological unitary reality, architectural utterances, having dispensed with multiplicity, are quickly reduced to monoglot gurgles or manifestoes, sharply contrasting the complex “novelistic” or “carnavalesque” constructions that employ transparency, overlap, redundancy and layering; employed not only as *formal expressions*, but as a real working methodology that engages choice and diversity of site, material, social systems, building trades, professions, programs voices and memory.

What many advocates of the ‘thin’ architecture proposed by Lynn, Goulthourpe and others fail to recognize or acknowledge, is the latent and covert hegemonic potential of these internally ‘monoglot’ and thus ‘unilateralist’ articulations/utterances. For example the notion, widely held, that

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<sup>63</sup> Although Goulthourpe’s is practice is presently highly collaborative with engineers and many others, this is due to the novelty of the systems. One of the underlying intentions of parametric design is to empower software to interface as directly (or with as few humans) as possible and still produce workable results. For example, a logical extension might be a program that would allow an individual homeowner to digitally “sculpt” an addition to their house on their home computer, while the software would resolve all structural, and systematic requirements of codes etc. This software could then network directly to a remote manufacturing facility where production could begin immediately. The composite all-in-one snap-together panels would arrive by courier some days later, with a bill.

<sup>64</sup> For example in residential construction ‘dry-wall’ is rarely calculated to contribute to the main structure, but it nevertheless adds significantly to the overall performance when the structure is tested to it’s limits in unforeseen events like earthquakes, fires or tornadoes. It is said that the World Trade Centers collapsed as quickly as they did, partly due to a lack of redundancy that is found in older buildings, and/or buildings that have more diversified layered systems of construction.

once the “mass customization” parametric design fabrication technology is fully developed and running smoothly, it will provide an adaptive response to low-cost housing and basic shelter. This sounds excellent, after all, what architect doesn’t want to be seen as an inventor of ‘affordable housing’, particularly if in the process they can ‘write-off’ half a life’s work of costly bourgeois design experiments that pander to architecture’s media-novelty-machine, not to mention the academic institutions who practically demand that young faculty be published in this fashion in order to keep their jobs. But if a deep reading is performed of the underlying intentions and the all to possible consequences of these preoccupations, we may stumble across a ‘deal with the devil’: Somewhere in a dark studio young designers buy ‘just one more hit’ of formal freedom and novelty to support their addicted (hybridized) ego-livelihood, while unknowingly paying the price of potential globalization at a scope never even imagined by modernism. The globalizing potential of this thin architecture is all too easy to see in the highly specific (i.e. centralized and controlled), technologically dependant, mechanized design-production hybridization. It is entirely possible to imagine, for example, that within a few years even the poorest of developing countries could be ‘set up’ with the mechanical and digital machinery to facilitate this “collapse” of engineering, architecture, material supply, fabrication and installation—displacing what little site and culture-specific architecture is left, with standardized ‘all-in-one’ solutions offered by the hands of western technology. Indeed this is what the International Style proponents advocated years ago, and what so many architects with local agendas, like Laurie Baker in south India,<sup>65</sup> sought to resist as he saw these tendencies eroding local economies and cultural identity.

This does not in any way rule out the possibility of using digital design for social ends. But if the current proponents of parametric ‘blob’ construction are committed to low-cost-housing as an ideal, why are they not addressing the problem more directly in ways that are creative, practical and helpful right now? The obvious fact is that for architects in general, and particularly the digital “paramorphic” designers, these social values are subservient to the values of novelty. Identifying these (and any other) values imbedded in our built work, will allow us to revisit and dialogically reform our collective identity while at the same time questioning whether our future progeny will be capable of responding to the social concerns we truly want claim to address. A self-critical look at our work through this lens will reveal the problem faced by eliminating redundancy, a problem that

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<sup>65</sup> The architect Laurie Baker, although little known in mainstream architectural circles, is virtually a household name in the south Indian state of Kerela where he has worked for more than 40 years (and is still working at 85 years old) with the local population to develop buildings and building solutions that empower the regional economy and help create a sense of local culture and identity. His is often to be found working along side local masons on building sites across the state.

will always persist with a lack of diversity, but a problem that can always be solved by reintroducing and dialogically empowering multiple autonomies at all levels of design.

Architect Renzo Piano, a man known for his hands-on tectonic and builderly preoccupation, speaks of these necessary relationships from his "Building Workshop":

"Unless an architect is able to listen to people and understand them, he may simply become someone who creates architecture for his own fame and self-glorification, instead of doing the real work he has to do... ...[this work] involves a circular process that draws you from an idea to a drawing, from a drawing to an experiment, from an experiment to a construction, and from a construction back to an idea again. For me this cycle is fundamental to creative work. Unfortunately many have come to accept each of these steps as independent... Teamwork is essential if creative projects are to come about. Teamwork requires an ability to listen to and engage in a dialogue."<sup>66</sup>

Here Piano uses dialogue in the most literal form, referring to people talking, listening and participating with each other in the design process, and thus co-creating something vital and lasting. But as seen earlier, the dialogic (tectonic) model can also be employed in reference to the various parts of buildings themselves. Frampton looks at how different basic 'parts' of buildings, through layers of necessity and cultural history, have tended to express themselves in relation to each other, creating a collage of 'voices' and values that co-create a building in the same way that Piano's Building Workshop does in its design process.

"Whether the superstructure need be light or temporary may be debated but clearly this dialogical relationship between the earthwork and the roofwork is a productive way of reading the interaction between the wet *landscaped place-form* and the dry, *rationaly assembled product-form*. The capacity of the *place-form* to resist homogenizing tendency of universal technology may not be exclusively restricted to the earthwork, particularly if we turn our attention to the roof and the membrane, both of which are susceptible to the specific location of the work. In this respect the case may be made that both cladding and fenestration are directly expressive of implicit and explicit values as these may be

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<sup>66</sup> Renzo Piano, "Building Workshop 1964/1991: In Search of a Balance" Process Architecture (Tokyo) no.700 (1992) p.12,14

incorporated into a work of architecture in a given location at a specific moment in time.”<sup>67</sup>

Frampton makes no bones about “the homogenizing tendency of universal technology”, and how, in order to resist it we must embrace the particularity of place, materials and construction types. Frampton takes this further as he critiques technology’s tendency for “maximization”, seeing this as another form of reductivism: “As many experts have argued in the past, technological maximization invariably entails negative side-effects in whatever field it occurs...antibiotics in medicine...nitrates and insecticides in agriculture...and numerous examples in building, for instance bulldozing an undulating site flat to achieve optimum economy, or designing museums with no natural light [in order to] maximize the conservation of art objects...”<sup>68</sup> This highly specific “maximization” clearly flies in the face of layered redundancy, be it structural, dialogical or in any sense where overlap occurs.

It is here that Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky’s spatial concept of “phenomenal transparency” becomes a critical addition to the dialogical model where “figures are able to interpenetrate each other without optical destruction...[creating] a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations”<sup>69</sup>. Thus transparency, derived from the spatial paradigms of cubism and relativity, becomes a record of, and diagram for, both the most ancient and forward looking relationships of dialogue. Transposing Bakhtin’s “heteroglossia” onto this ‘diagram of overlaps’ first creates the collage, at a larger scale the city, and finally our whole world—all places where multiple voices participate in the perpetual critique and co-creation of meaning and truth.

And what are these ‘co-created’ aspirations of our time? And to what end should we turn our voices, ears and hands? Architects and engineers surely play a large part in building these visions. We build in order to test our limits, and our understanding of the world. We build to create or reinforce order, arrangements and relationships. We build as a way of dismantling the hierarchical orders and structures that exist to repress us. But above and under it all, we build so that our voice may be affirmed through its autonomy from us—its otherness—and its adoption by others.

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<sup>67</sup> Kenneth Frampton. “Seven Points for the Millennium: an Untimely Manifesto” Keynote Address to the UIA 1999 Conference in Beijing, Published in Architecture Review: November 1999. pg. 78

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. pg 79

<sup>69</sup> Gyorgy Kepes from Language of Vision, as quoted by Rowe and Slutzky in “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal”, 1956 published in The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa MIT 1976

The enterprise of building has a history as old as humanity, and the players involved have spanned the full spectrum of roles, positions and social categories: from Kings to peasants, yuppies, to homeless vagrants, politicians, teenagers, scientists, city planners, grandparents, architects, protesters, farmers, developers and engineers. It is difficult to even define what *building* is in the first place, being that it operates at so many scales of human interaction. It could be said to encompass any purposeful assembly of materials and ideas, the *writing* of codes, formulas, laws, business plans, constitutions and even novels; the *construction* of families, scaffolding systems, dwellings and monuments; the *planning* of cities, infrastructures, state boundaries and “regime changes”. Only a small component of this enormous human project is the construction of spaces that are inhabitable in the spatio-material world—spaces assembled in the realm of materials and physical laws. These are structures that age, sag, collapse and can be renovated. They are structures and spaces that are useable and instrumental in protecting people from the environment, in facilitating programmatic needs like cooking sleeping and eating, storing and reading books, gathering people to worship, performing music, storing and selling goods, organizing people in corporations, cooperatives and institutions. Building is the active process of (re)shaping the world in a way that authoritatively or dialogically, reflects the values, aspirations and intentions of the builder(s). Because building can happen at any scale, it can be accomplished with almost any amount of *power* (although power is always needed in some amount). But for building to be dialogical there must be a *sharing* of power; there must be more than one subject, and there must be an overlapping relationship.

Architecture and Engineering are both part of this long dialogical *becoming*. Professionals, historians, academics, critical theorists and an ever-diversified public all participate in a continual identity crisis around the definition and boundaries of the *profession* and *discipline*. Property lines are staked and contested; propositions, theories and accusations are hurled into the crowds like cream pies and home-made pipe bombs; whistles are blown, rules are broken, new rules made on the fly, prizes, heroes, tear-gas and clowns on stilts. But amidst it all, some people have agreed on something because institutions are being constructed—some quickly erected like portable and impressive circus tents, while others dig trenches and lay stones. To the happiness of most, there is no end in sight to the festivities.

People talk and people build. If architecture is to provide leadership of any kind within or outside of its professional boundaries, it must have something to say—something to give. By engaging in

dialogue at all levels of working process and design decision making, architects can strengthen and challenge their own voice, while at the same time generating work that is full of poetic relationships, complexity and challenge to its inhabitants and environment. Like a great city this work becomes a model for countless layers of future generations, a place of transparency and exchange where voices and dialogue are never silenced.

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