

Félix Guattari

Architectural Enunciation¹

Translation by Tim Adams

For thousands of years, perhaps by imitating crustaceans or termites, human beings have been encasing themselves in all kinds of shells. We are ceaselessly secreting buildings, clothes, cars, images and messages that cling to the flesh of our existence like flesh clings to the bones of our skeletons. Nevertheless, there is one major difference between men, crustaceans and termites, which is that the last two species haven't for the moment been found to include any corporations of architects, artisans and media "pros". Be that as it may, for a very long time, the delineation of social assemblages has been largely due to ecolithic expressions such as the building of ziggurats, the demolition of the Bastille, or the capture of the Winter Palace. Only now, besides stone having been replaced by concrete, steel and glass, the cleavages of power occur above all in terms of the speed of communication and the control of information. Under these conditions architects don't even know which hero to turn to! What use would Le Corbusier be today in a place like Mexico City, that grows uncontrollably towards 40 million inhabitants! Even someone like Haussmann would be useless here because the politicians, technocrats and engineers now manage this sort of thing with the least possible contribution from the men of that art that Hegel once placed on the bottom rank among all other arts. Admittedly architects do maintain a minimal window of control² in the domain of extravagant buildings. But positions in this area come at a high price, and unless they consent to become postmodern dandies, which the politico-financial schemes always imply, the lucky few are subjected to a deceitful degradation of their creative talents. They channel their energies into pure theory, utopia, or a nostalgic return to the past.³ Alternatively, although the times hardly seem to lend themselves to this, there is the possibility for critical contestation.

The architectural object flies to pieces. It is useless to cling to what it has been or should be. Situated at the intersection of political stakes of the utmost importance, of demographic and ethnic tensions, of economic, social and regional antagonisms that are by no means nearing resolution, spurred on by constant technological and industrial mutations, the architectural object is irreversibly condemned to being tugged and torn in all directions. Nothing infers, however, that we should take an eclectic course of action in such a state of affairs, which on the contrary demands an exacerbation of the ethico-political choices that have always underlain the practice of this profession. From now on it will be impossible to take ref-

1. [The source for this translation is "L'énonciation architecturale" from Félix Guattari's *Cartographies schizoanalytiques* (1989: 291-301). Wherever possible I have found existing English texts for Guattari's references and made his quotes correspond to these. Unless indicated by square brackets, all other footnotes are Guattari's. Many thanks to Trudy Agar for her considerable guidance with my translation and grammar. Any errors that remain are entirely my own.—Trans.]

2. [Guattari's term here is *créneau*, which has a double meaning of "crenel of power" and "battlement of a building". My thanks to Trudy Agar for suggesting "window of control".—Trans.]

3. As an example of pure theory, Leon Krier considers that in the face of "the holocaust that raged through our cities ... a responsible architect doesn't want to build anything today", *Babylone* no. 1 (Paris: UGE, 1983), 132. As examples of utopia, the work of Daniel Libeskind or the landscape compositions of Vittorio Gregotti, such as his project for collective housing in Cefalu, have little chance of being realized. For a nostalgic return to the past, see the interesting propositions on regional architecture in Gaudin (1984).

4. I refer here to the exciting analysis of Christian Girard in *Architecture et concepts nomades: Traité d'indiscipline* (1986).

5. On the sometimes decisive position of the programmer and the architect in the modelisation of psychiatric institutions, see the special edition of *Recherches* (June, 1967).

uge behind art for art's sake or pure science with a clear conscience.⁴ To reinvent architecture can no longer be taken to mean the revival of a style, a school, or a theory with hegemonic tendencies, but rather to recompose the *architectural enunciation*, and in a sense, the *métier* of the architect under today's conditions.

When architects stop trying simply to be plasticians of built form and begin to offer their services as revealers of the virtual desires of space, place, journeys and territory, then they will have to analyse the relations between individual and collective corporeities by constantly singularising their approach. And furthermore they will have to become intercessors between those desires revealed to themselves and those interests they oppose; in other words, they will have to be artists and craftsmen of perceptual and relational lived-experience [*vécu*]. Obviously, I have no particular desire for them to lie down on the psychoanalyst's couch so they can come to terms with such a decentring of their role. On the contrary, I believe they are in the position of having to analyse for themselves certain specific functions of subjectivation.⁵ For this reason they will be able to constitute, along with many other social and cultural operators, an essential relay within the multi-headed assemblages of enunciation that can deal with the contemporary productions of subjectivity, both pragmatically and analytically. Consequently, this is far from placing the architect in the role of simply being a critical observer.

The emphasis having thus shifted from object to project, an architectural work, whatever the characteristics of its semiotic expression and its semantic content may be, will now require a specific elaboration of its enunciative "material": how should one practice architecture today? What part of themselves do architects need to mobilize? What kind of commitment should they be making and which operators should they use? What relative importance should they give to the developers, the engineers, the town planners, and the users, both actual and potential? Up to what point will they be justified in making compromises with the various parties involved? It's a matter of a highly elaborate transferential economy, and one that I will now examine from the point of view of the two forms of consistency of the enunciation of an architectural *concept*:

- The first one polyphonic, of the *perceptual* order, inherent to the deployment of the components concurrent with its discursive coming into existence; and
- The second one ethico-aesthetic, of the *affective* order, inherent to its non-discursive "coming into being".

The Polyphonic Components

Under the category of scale, Philippe Boudon has listed twenty ways of conceptualising the architectural object, all essentially based on the category of space. He then proposes to regroup these into four categories:

- Scales that refer real space to itself (geographical, optical visibility, proximity and apportionmental scales);
- Scales that refer architectural space to an exterior referent (formal, symbolic, technical, functional, extensional, dimension-

ally symbolic, socio-cultural, modelling and economic scales);
 —Scales that refer architectural space to its representation (geometric, cartographical, and representational scales); and
 —Lastly, scales of architectural thought processes that involve a constant to-ing and fro-ing between different spaces (to “put into scale”, “give scale” etc.).⁶

One could no doubt list other components of this type, but from the point of view of enunciation rather than a simple taxonomic enumeration of modes of spatialisation, it is evident that their number is potentially infinite. In fact, all of the virtual enunciations can drift into the vicinity of the architectural object. As Henri von Lier writes, “a significant work of architecture always has the ability to be other than what it is. A dwelling is not dwelling *per se*, but refers to dwelling: it is one of its possibilities appearing as such.”⁷ Nevertheless, I have selected eight kinds of assemblages from this continuous spectrum of virtual enunciations to reflect those “voices” that seem to me to be active in contemporary architecture.

1. A geopolitical enunciation taking into account not only the orientation of cardinal points but also the contours of the land and the climatic and demographic givens, which evolve over long periods like Fernand Braudel’s secular trends causing the centre of gravity within “an archipelago of towns” to drift according to the fluctuations of the world-economy.⁸

2. An urbanistic enunciation relative to the laws, regulations, habits and customs, concerning the size of parcels of land, the arrangement and volumes of buildings, as well as the mechanisms for contamination between various models and images (referring to what Philippe Boudon calls the scale of proximity). The interlocutors here can take the hard form of local authorities and state bodies or the “fuzzy” form of a collective state of mind, opinions more or less controlled by the media.

3. An economic enunciation, the capitalistic expression of relations of force between the different systems of individual and collective valorisation: the use of a relative evaluation of costs and demand in terms of projected profits, prestige, political impact and social usefulness to fix the exchange value of real-estate property and to “drive” the choices and scales of investment in the domain of construction.

4. A *functional enunciation* or function of equipment that considers built spaces according to their specific uses. Collective equipment as well as equipment for private use becomes integrated into a double network of:

- a) “horizontal” complementary relations positioning each constructed segment in the set of urban structures now interconnected within world capitalism,⁹ and
- b) “vertical” relations of integration ranging from the micro-equipment (lighting, ventilation, communication, etc.) up to the infrastructural macro-equipment.

6. See Boudon (1971; 1972; and 1975).

7. See van Lier (1985: 554).

8. See Braudel (1992: 76-82). The world economy is the largest zone of consistency in any given period and in any global field, a sum of individualised economic and non-economic spaces that usually transgresses the limits of other large groupings of history. François Fourquet, under the term *écomonde*, has undertaken a systematic theorisation of the conceptions of Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein in *La richesse et la puissance. Publication provisoire: Commissariat général du Plan, Convention d’étude* (1987).

9. Cf. my study in collaboration with Eric Alliez (1984: 273-287).

As Paul Virilio writes:

Today ... the essence of what we insist on calling urbanism is composed/decomposed by these transfer, transit and transmission systems, these transport and transmigration networks whose immaterial configuration reiterates the cadastral organisation and the building of monuments. If there are any monuments today, they are certainly not of the visible order, despite the twists and turns of architectural excess. No longer part of the order of perceptible appearances nor of the aesthetic of the apparition of volumes assembled under the sun, this monumental disproportion now resides within the obscure luminescence of terminals, consoles and other electronic night-stands.¹⁰

10. See Virilio (1991: 21-22).

Consequently, the collective enunciators here will be:

—The social stratifications according to resources, age group, regional characteristics, ethnic divisions, etc.

—The social bodies sectorised according to their specialised activities of an economic, cultural nature or by a state of assistance (internment, incarceration, etc.).

—The programmers, experts, and technicians of all sorts, having the position of stating the constraints and norms of architectural writing.

11. See Boudon (1972: 17).

5. A technical enunciation implying that the equipment and, more generally, the construction materials “speak” in terms of fixed standards, stating, for example, “the slope of a roof according to the relative permeability of the material employed, the thickness of a wall according to its load, the dimensions of a material according to its ease of handling, transportability or implementation.”¹¹

The relay of interlocutors here no longer only includes building engineers but also chemists, who every month invent new materials, electrical and communication engineers, and eventually all the technical and scientific disciplines.

6. A signifying enunciation whose aim, independent of functional semantics, is to allocate a significant content to a built form, which is shared by a more or less extensive human community, but which is always delineated by all the other communities not sharing the same type of content. We rediscover several of Philippe Boudon’s scales here. At one scale a building comes to embody a symbolic form independent of its size (for example, the cross plan of Christian churches). At another scale, the plan of an ideologically explicit model is transferred to a construction (the ideal city of Vitruvius; the rural, industrial and commercial cities of Le Corbusier). At yet another scale, a more or less unconscious socio-cultural scheme intervenes (such as the central courtyard that Arab builders probably inherited from Roman antiquity). Or at another even more vague scale, a global style is conferred onto an urban settlement (such as the self-enclosed character of a small Tuscan town, being the opposite extreme of North American ag-

glomerations that open onto a transfinite spatium and cling, as best they can, to the flow of motorway traffic).

7. An enunciation of existential territorialisation that is as much of an ethological order as of a perspective one, in which I will locate the three types of spaces distinguished by Vittorio Ugo.¹²

- Euclidean spaces under the ægis of Apollo, univocally positioning an object identity within the framework of an axiomatico-deductive logic in which is inscribed a “primary and elementary architecture in all the clarity of its crystalline perfection, always identical to itself and devoid of any ambiguity or internal contradiction”.
- Projective spaces under the ægis of Morpheus, positioning forms of a modulated identity within metamorphic perspectives, affirming the primacy of “the imaginary above the real, vision above speech, extension above usefulness, the plan above perception”.
- Labyrinthine topological spaces under the ægis of Dionysus, functioning as existential space¹³ according to a geometry of the envelopment of the tactile body that already refers us to the register of affects.

Architectural space is one concrete operator among others in the metabolism between objects on the outside and intensities on the inside. But even if the interplay of correspondences between the human body and its habitat has been explored continuously, from Vitruvius to Leonardo da Vinci and Le Corbusier, perhaps it is henceforth less a question of considering these correspondences from a formal point of view than from one that could be described as organic. As Massimo Cacciari writes, “Any authentic organism is labyrinthine”.¹⁴ And let’s not forget that the labyrinthine (or rhizomatic) characteristics of existential territorialisation can have multiple fractal dimensions.

8. A scriptural enunciation that articulates all the other enunciative components. Because of the diagrammatic distance that it introduces between expression and content, and through the coefficients of creativity that it generates, architectural projection promotes new potentialities, new constellations of universes of reference, starting with those which preside over the deployment of ethico-aesthetic aspects of the built object.

The Ethico-Aesthetic Ordinates

Architectural enunciation is not limited to these diachronic discursive components: it is just as much a matter of the capture of consistency within synchronic existential dimensions, or ordinates on a level. Following Bakhtin¹⁵ I will distinguish three types:

- Cognitive ordinates, namely the energetico-spatio-temporal ordinates that pertain to the logic of everything discursive. It is in this register that the scriptural enunciation of architecture concatenates the first five types of assemblages of enunciation listed above.
- Axiological ordinates, including all the systems of anthropo-

12. See Ugo (1987a and 1987b).

13. In the sense that Martin Heidegger gives this term in “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1975: 143-161).

14. See Cacciari (1980).

15. I refer here to the three categories of enunciation (cognitive, ethical, aesthetic) proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin (1990: 257-325).

centric valorisation of aesthetic, economic and political orders. —Aesthetic ordinates determining the thresholds of completion of entities, objects or structural groups, inasmuch as they are able to transmit meaning and form on their own account. It is up to these ethico-aesthetic ordinates to intertwine the components of signifying enunciations and existential deterritorialization with the other components. Thus the built object, lived reality [*le vécu*] and the incorporeal find themselves rearticulating each other, despite the fact that capitalist corporations are ceaselessly trying to eliminate any trace of subjective singularisation from their architecture and urbanism in an effort to achieve a rigorously functional, informational and communicational transparency.

16. [See Guattari (1996: 110), where Guattari compares painting, which for the ruling classes has never been more than a “supplement of the spirit”, a currency of prestige, to architecture that has always had a major role in forming territories of power, fixing its emblems and proclaiming its durability.—Trans.]

It should be clear that the singularisation at issue here is not a simple matter of a “supplement of the spirit”,¹⁶ a “personalisation” filed away under “after-sales services”. It concerns procedures that operate at the heart of the architectural object and grant it its most intrinsic consistency. Under its exterior discursive aspect this object establishes itself at the intersection of a thousand tensions that pull it in every direction, but under its ethico-aesthetic enunciative aspects it reassembles itself in a non-discursive mode, whose phenomenological approach is given to us through the particular experience of spatialised affects. Below the threshold of cognitive consistency the architectural object collapses into the imaginary, the dream or delirium, while below a threshold of axiological consistency the dimensions of alterity and desire are exhausted—like those cinematic images that fail to interest the aborigines of Australia—and below the threshold of aesthetic consistency it ceases to capture the form’s existence and the intensities destined to inhabit it.

17. See Klein (1950).

18. See Winnicott (1958).

19. [The key text for Sartre’s concept of commitment is his short book, *What is Literature?*, where he writes, “the ‘committed’ writer knows that words are action. He knows that to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change. He has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition.” (13)—Trans.]

What therefore defines the art of the architect, in the final analysis, is the capacity to apprehend these affects of spatialised enunciation. But it must be admitted that it concerns paradoxical objects that cannot be delineated by the coordinates of ordinary rationality; they can only be approached indirectly by meta-modelisation, by an aesthetic detour, and by mythical or ideological narratives. Like the part-objects of Melanie Klein,¹⁷ or the transitional objects of Winnicott,¹⁸ this kind of affect establishes itself transversally on the most heterogeneous levels; therefore we must not homogenise them but, on the contrary, engage them further in the fractal process of heterogenesis. Architectural form is not destined to function as a gestalt closed in on itself, but as a catalytic operator setting off chain reactions among the modes of semiotisation, which draw us out of ourselves and expose us to new fields of possibility. The feeling of intimacy and existential singularity contiguous with the aura given off by a familiar situation, an old dwelling or a landscape inhabited by our memories, establishes itself in the rupture of the redundancies emptied of their substance, and can be the generator of a proliferation and lines of flight in all the registers of the desire to live, of the refusal to give in to the dominant inertia. It is the same movement of existential territorialisation and capture of synchronic consistency, for example, that will make things “work” together, things as different as a treasure chest and a shoe box under the bed of a child hospitalised in a psychiatric home, the refrain-password that he perhaps shares with some comrades, the space within the particular constellation that he occupies in the refectory, a totem tree in the playground or a part of the sky

known only to him. The architect's aim, if not to compose a harmonic out of all these fragmentary components of subjectivation, must be at the very least, to allow for all these virtualities and not to mutilate them!

The architect, in order to undertake the recomposition of existential territories in the context of our societies devastated by capitalistic flows, must be able to detect and processually exploit all the points of catalytic singularity likely to establish themselves, not only in the perceptible dimensions of the architectural apparatus, but also in its formal composition and in the most complex institutional problematics as well. All the cartographic methods that can help achieve this will be valid since their *commitment*¹⁹—let's not shrink from this old Sartrean concept that has been taboo for too long—will find its own regime of ethico-aesthetic automatisation. The only criterion of truth confronting the architect will then be the effect of an existential completeness and an overabundance of being, which will never be absent so long as he has the good fortune to be caught up in a process of becoming-an-event, that is to say, the historical enrichment and re-singularisation of desire and values.

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