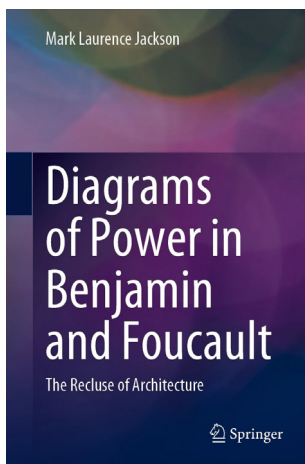


book review / STEPHEN ZEPKE

INTERSTICES 23

Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault: The Recluse of Architecture

By Mark Laurence Jackson
Springer Nature, 2022, 326 pp.



By sub-titling his book, *The Recluse of Architecture*, Mark Jackson places it under the sign of a double movement, a sign—or movement—that is this book’s signature. The signature is a sign that stands in place of someone who is no longer there, signing being a presenting of absence. Architecture in this sense, is “a revealing that cannot help but conceal something,”¹ a double movement of disclosure *and* displacement. Jackson’s magisterial book employs this present-absent sign as its signature, both its subject and as its method, making it more of a book of philosophy than a book *about* architecture in the usual sense. “In fact,” Jackson writes at its beginning, “very little is actually discussed that would go to make up a book on architecture. Perhaps, this is a book *of* architecture.”² Like so much of this complex text, there is a lot to unpack in this seemingly simple statement. On one level, it is empirical, as the author spares few words for describing buildings, the process of building, or indeed architects. Instead, the book focuses on a philosophy of architecture, but again, not as something specifically to do with architecture but rather an investigation into the ontological ground of our dwelling in and shaping of the world. Our ground here is being, and our dwelling is existence, making architecture a language that names and displaces being “itself.” Or, as Jackson puts it: “Can we think architecture in terms of force and signification?”³ If force, or power, is the basic ontological value, then the diagrams, or significations, that shape its existence are its “architecture,” here understood in an almost entirely philosophical sense. Not so much the philosophy of architecture then, as the architecture of being as it is in itself, and as it comes into existence. Jackson calls this doubling of being (in itself and in existence) its “spatial ontology,”⁴ or what Jacques Derrida calls “spacing,” which makes the grounding ground of being nothing other than the recluse.

As he does in Derrida, Heidegger plays a crucial role in *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault: The Recluse of Architecture*, providing the ontological architecture of the recluse in his discussions of *Da-sein*, or being-in-the-world. *Da-sein* is not a being in the world, a subject, but instead a more diffuse sense of how to be, its myriad possibilities. The scope of these possibilities reveals authentic and inauthentic *Da-sein*, the first involving a recognition and expression of how its existence necessarily distances its essential being, the latter misrecognising human being as the essential aspect of life, and in particular scientific

rationality as its mode of mastery. Jackson expresses this architecturally: “Da-sein is essentially *not-at-home* in its comportment to its ‘authentic’ being. Its ‘dwelling’ is this not-at-homeness. Hence, we can only ‘build’ when authentically ‘dwelling,’ which is to say, when authentically homeless.”⁵ Given that this would be a post-metaphysical architecture, it exists in, and offers us, a “perennial homelessness, or not-being-at-home as a self’s ‘authentic’ encounter with its existence.”⁶

Jackson’s book will trace this “structure” of the recluse through the work of Benjamin and Foucault, but not without significant detours into Heidegger, Hegel, Deleuze, Agamben, Schelling, Klossowski, and many others. Indeed, this structure provides a welcome solution to the lack of direct references connecting thinkers (most notably Benjamin and Foucault), insofar as their shared interest in, or use of, the recluse enables their comparison and perhaps occasionally unlikely closeness. Displaced onto the field of their shared structure, not only does each author offer an allegorical account of allegory “itself” (i.e. the recluse), but they can be compared, and contrasted, in this respect, revealing their similarities and differences. Thus, architecture is always both theory and practice, being and doing, a matter of essence and existence, making *The Recluse of Architecture* a “book of architecture,” because its inquiry into the ontology of the recluse must be constructed according to its model, and can only be revealed through its divergences and displacements. The book is full of detours, diversions, digressions, and dalliances, as if this double-movement is not so much one step forward and two back, as three fleet-footed steps sideways, each step echoing its reclusive sources, each step tracing another iteration of its constitutive difference. *The Recluse of Architecture* is a polyphony of references and ideas that goes well beyond its proliferation of footnotes, constituting instead a compositional technique that often seems more suitable to an artwork than an argument. This is one of the book’s most interesting features, presenting itself as both scientific and poetic. On the one hand, connections between authors are specific and even biographical, while on the other they can be what Benjamin calls “allegorical,” unstable forces where, as Jackson puts it, “*anything can be anything else*.”⁷ Such “play,” as Derrida called it, allows Jackson to draw connections between thinkers based on their shared employment of the recluse, an argument of the “like” that is, I would say, literary in its ambitions. This is what Jackson sometimes calls (following Benjamin) “method-as-digression,”⁸ a method enabling him to deliberately avoid “the doxa of inductive-deductive methods in order to distil the *basic* concepts that compose its understanding.”⁹ This is a very creative methodology, one that focuses more, we might say, on form than content, although this distinction also wavers in the recluse. As Jackson writes, and it is a good example, “Though we are *not* saying that Benjamin had Heidegger in mind. We do.”¹⁰ This is perhaps, the distillation of a metaphoric method, insofar as Benjamin’s focus on exile is *like* the absence-presence of being in *Da-sein*. They share a structure, an architecture, and so a constellation. But this constellation is signed by Jackson of course, as he freely admits: “The iterability of a signature-effect happens such that it is the reader who signs a work as idiomatic polysemy of intra-linear translatability.”¹¹

The book’s focus on architecture as a diagram of power in the work of Benjamin and Foucault, and more specifically on how “arcade or disciplinary spacings for *pro-ducing* are modernity’s recluse of architecture”¹² is the author’s response to

the “problem” that, as is noted early on, there are very few books dealing with the relation of Benjamin and Foucault,¹³ no doubt partly due to the dearth of references in Foucault to Benjamin. But Jackson is less interested in drawing out explicit points of reference between these authors, than in discovering (which also means inventing) “resonances” (a favourite term) between them, in particular between the various figures they use to illuminate and obscure the reclusive nature of origins and beginnings. In this sense, Jackson is interested in the “constellation” of and around Benjamin and Foucault, a constellation having, as Benjamin describes it, a relation to its stars as an Idea has to its objects. The recluse, to put it rather bluntly, is the constellation containing Jackson’s “stars,” but it comes in many versions and under many names, all of which Jackson explores quite encyclopaedically. Indeed, the scholarly grasp Jackson has of his subject is impressive, offering exhaustive accounts of his authors that encompasses all of their often-extensive corpus (noteworthy here is his use of Heidegger’s and Foucault’s seminars). We might say, then, that Jackson’s constellation is organised around its recurring if reclusive idea, while the resonance between stars often operates on an allegorical or metaphorical level. This also means that while *The Recluse of Architecture* offers us an impressive edifice reaching for the stars, on another level this construction is always already in ruins, as Benjamin suggests, the naming of its existence also being its recluse, reducing it to the broken promises of its fragments, eternally deferred, their deferral eternally repeated. But there is also redemption in this necessarily allegorical process of life’s ruin, which is also, as I have already mentioned, the “authentic” mode of Heidegger’s *Da-sein*.

Just as this method allows for a great deal of creative freedom, and produces theoretical accumulations often dizzying in their ascendance (the Conclusion’s rapid rhythm through Benjamin-Foucault-Agamben-Klossowski-Deleuze is a particularly vivid example), its play also involves a certain amount of over-reading, which the author happily acknowledges: “Though clearly,” he notes at one point, “we are reading Foucault *into* Benjamin here.”¹⁴ Nevertheless, these “complicated itineraries”¹⁵ are often well worth their speculative imaginings, as with the fascinating series of relations Jackson discovers between Benjamin and Foucault’s respective engagements with Kant’s concept of Enlightenment, and how this contributes to their theories of “counter-modernity” (the term is Foucault’s).¹⁶ As with much of the book, the centre of gravity for such constellations is Heidegger, whose image is found in Benjamin and Foucault, while their description (along with that of much else in this book) tends to employ Heidegger’s vocabulary as well. As a result, Foucault’s understanding of modernity is “retrieved in the anticipatory resoluteness of an ownmost potentiality, a ‘self’s’ relationality with itself as ‘transcendent,’ from out of the futural nullity of its finitude.”¹⁷ This, Jackson immediately admits, is “our Heideggerean leaning to Foucault’s ‘enlightenment,’” but this vocabulary is by no means limited to Foucault insofar as, he continues, “we ‘take in’ Benjamin’s ‘totality-of-experience’ in the ‘occurrence’ of *Da-seins*’ (neither subject nor object) stretch between its ‘ends’—continuous existence.”¹⁸ These aspects of modernity all emphasise the universality of being’s contingency, and promote a discontinuous concept of history where the present works on the past and transforms it, or better, makes history into a process of transformation. This then, would be a further philosophical argument in favour of Jackson’s method, that history is invented as much as it is discovered, a textual effect emerging from reading other texts. History is

as much without origin as *Da-sein*, because its origin is always its contestation in the present. But despite the philosophical consistency of the recluse, its iterative repetitions (itself a theme in the book) can sometimes seem to obscure differences, even while recognising difference as its onto-genetic ground. At these moments it is as if the shared conceptual motif that binds the cluster takes precedence over other differences that might distance the thinkers discussed. Our earlier example had Heidegger “speaking” Foucault and Benjamin, but later it is Deleuze: “The diagram of relations between forces is a non-unifying immanent cause coextensive with the whole social field. This is how we may also come to understand what Benjamin means by ‘constellation.’ It is a virtual immanent diagram of forces and not an arrangement of the seeable and the sayable.”¹⁹ It is Deleuze’s account of the diagram that seems to align Foucault and Benjamin, possibly at the expense of some of their differences, (a mediation, at least in the case of Deleuze and Foucault, that was clearly itself mediated through their shared approach to Nietzsche, or even more precisely, as Jackson elaborates later, to their shared relation to Klossowski’s reading of Nietzsche ... etc.). At other points however, this method of reading seems remarkably productive, as when in a footnote we see the process turned back on Deleuze: “Perhaps this is Deleuze’s peculiar Hegelianism, his bifurcating dialectics, having more in common with Heidegger’s splitting of the Absolute than it does with Hegel’s supposed Logic of a synthetic unity.”²⁰ This is a flash of insight perhaps unfortunately relegated to a note, and a good example of how the reading of Benjamin and Foucault’s relation through their proximity to Deleuze (for example) might create feedback loops that could illuminate Deleuze in new ways as well. Of course, there are real-life difficulties thrown up by such a method too, like the fact (mentioned by Jackson but not developed) that Deleuze does not dwell on Foucault’s influence by Heidegger. In any case, this method of iterative reading where one figure doubles another is infinite, sometimes overwhelmingly so, meaning that on Deleuze’s proximity to Benjamin in his work on the baroque fold, well: “Perhaps all of this needs pursuing at another time.”²¹ And to be fair, Jackson’s method can also be used for differentiating those figures placed in a constellation. This is the function of Edmond Jabès, who is called upon to draw out differences between how Benjamin and Foucault understand tradition at the end of the nineteenth century.

After all this then, Jackson’s question might seem particularly apt: “Can we genuinely say Benjamin and Foucault are close? I would say: not really. Though our aim never was to say they are ultimately saying the same thing but, rather, for us to have something like an involuntary memory, a miracle if you like, such that a flash of *something* happens between them.”²² Clearly then, their differences are no impediment to a flash of insight, or virtuoso reading that might encompass them. So it is no surprise some pages further on, after a fascinating incursion into Benjamin’s thoughts on political violence, that we learn that this flash, this something happening between them, is in fact the flash “itself”: “Their proximity lies in the manner whereby both understand ‘truth’ as ‘evental’ rather than as ‘demonstration.’”²³ This ontological understanding of truth as the production of life outside of boundaries established by law and tradition is shared by Benjamin and Foucault, even if their subsequent understandings of this primal power is radically divergent; for Benjamin divine violence and for Foucault aesthetic modes of subjectivation. As Jackson puts it (and it is in triumph and not in resignation): “The mosaic remains fragmented.”²⁴ Because this is an ontological

statement and not a critical one, and given everything that has passed before regarding the exile of mimesis and its always already destruction of truth, origins, and cause, it is the ultimate ontological justification for Jackson's "wandering and wondering."²⁵ But although this sounds rather casual, it is not, and Jackson's method is continually conjuring complexity, because every "echo" or "resonance" between the protagonists of his constellations is also a diverging path, the constant difference produced by iteration. There is no final word on Benjamin and Foucault's similarities and differences because these continue to be produced as the vitality of their repetitions. This is the genius of the recluse, its palimpsest is always being (over)written, its translation can always give birth to a whole new idiom, because its horizon is the future. As Jackson clearly puts it: "This 'building' of 'my' dwelling from out of dead letters has everything to do with architecture's future-to-come, its possibilities from out of Babel's destructing of the word."²⁶ This is how Jackson extracts architecture's political practice from Benjamin and Foucault, architecture qua diagram of power is a type of social inscription, an apparatus for producing truth and subjectivity, a way of writing the social body. But as well, and as Jackson proposes it, it is also the formulation of a question, the "sheltering-secluding" of this question along with its "ruin," and finally an architecture "capable of reflecting on its own differences,"²⁷ because this form of reflection is "authentic" precisely in freeing itself from simply repeating the same in order to become something new. In this way the recluse of architecture, we might say, becomes the architecture of the future.

My review perhaps unfairly focuses on Jackson's philosophical assumptions rather than the details of his argument, which may be no surprise as I am a philosopher. But I don't want to give the impression that the book is in any way vague or unduly abstract, because it is quite the opposite. Always immersed in its details—the book gives intricate readings of some of the most important concepts of its main characters, along with extraordinary cameos by others in its supporting cast—its level of erudition is quite amazing. If you are a scholar of Heidegger, Benjamin, or Foucault (I am not) there is certainly much here to get your teeth into. But there is also a series of constellations that bring Foucault and Benjamin into resonance with a wide variety of other thinkers and ideas that offer equally gripping narratives. But most impressively of all, Jackson's book manages to talk the talk and walk the walk, not only articulating but also embodying the eternally returning ontology of its (dis)organising figure. The recluse of architecture is something that architecture does, but also something that must be done to it, and Jackson's book not only shows how Benjamin and Foucault each, in their own ways, do this, but in doing so Jackson iterates their ideas into the future, demonstrating how authentic thought is, if nothing else, the ongoing articulation of the recluse.

NOTES

1. Mark Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault: The Recluse of Architecture* (New York, NY: Springer, 2022), 286.
2. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, xi.
3. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 168.
4. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 1.
5. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 12.
6. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 90.
7. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 154.
8. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 96.
9. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 96.
10. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 97.
11. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 170.
12. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 161.
13. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 3.
14. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 131.
15. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 117.
16. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 132.
17. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 132.
18. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 132.
19. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 154.
20. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 154.
21. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 172.
22. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 185.
23. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 195.
24. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 200.
25. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 238.
26. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 241.
27. Jackson, *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault*, 248.