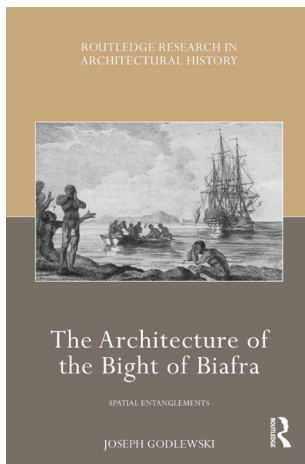book review / MARK L. JACKSON

The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra: Spatial Entanglements **By Joseph Godlewski** Routledge, 2024, 310 pp.

Ékpó èkóm mi ényin.

What is it to review? To see or to see again? To see as if for the first time what, indeed, was always there to be seen (or not seen). This review is of quite a remarkable book by Joseph Godlewski. I write it under the sign of that implicit erasure that every reviewing necessarily entails, necessarily enacts, or performs. Erasures, all manner of them, then, sign this work.

Ékpó èkóm mi ényin.

At the commencement of his book, almost, just a few lines into the "Acknowledgements," Joseph Godlewski has *cause* to quote an Èfìk phrase, we might even say 'proverb.' It 'roughly translates' to "ghost blindfolds my eye."[1] Cause? In an "Acknowledgements" that is one of several exemplary accomplishments of this book, running to almost four pages, Godlewski signs his work over to a small army of colleagues, advisers, publishing agents, and friends. This signing over implicates "this incredible cast of characters" as those who in multiple ways lifted more than one blindfold, more than one haunting. Blindfolds can be personal, and they can be institutional. For in his next sentence Godlewski mentions the emergence, while his project was underway, of the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States, then globally, the necessity to recognise what is there in front of us, "the multifaceted contributions of Black culture." The book, then, is written in order to take on a view of the manner whereby architectural histories and theories, most often grounded in Western knowledge frameworks, require their blindfolds to be removed. The task of the book is to elucidate an architectural history that at every moment challenges how 'architecture' is to be understood, and how 'history' might be written.

The book's cover presents an enigma. Let's aim to read it, from the top. The cover's first announcement references the publisher, Routledge, that this book fits into a series on research into architectural history. We are able to see listed other works in that series.[2] The series list suggests that Routledge is a Western publisher (London and New York) with a hefty global reach. The series emphasis is on research into how histories are written. Below this is an image. In fact, it is the lower half of an image reappearing on page 81 of the book. We find there that this image is dated 1725, an engraving by Serge Daget. Its title, not printed on the

cover, is *Slave Market*. The upper half, missing on the cover, depicts another view of this slave market on the shoreline of Old Calabar. We recognise in the foreground figures on shore, either captives waiting their turn to be rowed to a slave ship, or their captors. We notice that those rowing the captives are themselves Black. Then, below the image we have the book title, referring to architecture and the Bight of Biafra. Then a subtitle: "Spatial Entanglements." Perhaps the image aims to solely alert us to a locale and an era. But surely it cannot be alerting us to 'architecture,' unless the book's focus is on 'naval' architecture, the architecture of floating vessels. The enigma of the cover, and of the book as a whole, is that for Godlewski this image is a vital elucidating on just what it means to loosen those Western blindfolds when it comes to recognising the architecture that is in front of us. The cover does more than simply announce a subheading of "spatial entanglements." The cover performs such entanglement.

Biafra. My own haunting with respect to this word, this name, is the global humanitarian aid that was distressingly visible at the end of the 1960s. I was transitioning from high school to university, beginning an architecture degree at the University of Sydney. There was a war in Biafra, a civil war from 1967 to 1970, between a secessionist State and the military government of Nigeria. An effective blockade of Biafra resulted in famine and attempts at international relief. Biafra, the name, has a very long 'history,' preceding that of Nigeria. It appears on fifteenth-century maps of the West African coast, as do the coastal waters of the Bight of Biafra. Biafra, after the failure of the breakaway movement, underwent erasure. There has not been a Bight of Biafra since 1975. It is the Bight of Bonny. The Bight of Biafra is an historical marker for the West African slave trade. The book's cover image sharpens this reading. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries two locales in the Bight were key trading ports for slaves. The predominant one was Calabar, eventually overtaken in the mid-eighteenth century by Bonny. While the book's title suggests a Biafran region as the location of an architectural study, the genuine, in fact sole, focus of the book is the port city of Calabar, also known as Kalabar and Old Calabar. The traditional inhabitants of this city are the Èfik people, with their own language. We might now assume, then, this is a book that researches the architectural history of Èfik settlement during the volatile centuries of European and American slave trading. But we would be wrong. This is the most surprising thing of all.

My aim in this review is not to tell the story of the book, recount in summary fashion just what Godlewski says and does. In common parlance, that's now called a 'plot spoiler.' Why deprive you of the task, the excitement of reading? But what, then, will a review do? What will I do? In the context of the book's decolonising emphases, its persistent alerting to implicit and explicit racisms, obviously in accounts by Western traders, missionaries, and colonial administrators, but also in accounts by nationalist zealots in post-independent Nigeria, searching for or inventing a unified national tradition, I need to ask a simple but obvious question: How do we read other than by ways of translations that cannot remove the blindfolds or hauntings of persistent blindness? To say we genuinely see is perhaps the gravest loss of vision. I digress momentarily to amplify this. The French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in a remarkable reading of Marx and Marxism, opens his analyses with ghosts, masks, and questions of becoming visible.[3] There is something uncanny, resonant, with things Godlewski explores in Èfik culture. But that's my haunting. Derrida plays on words, on a homophonic

sounding of words. He coins a word, "hauntology," to play out and play on what he terms the "visor effect" of ghosting. The sounding board equally plays out the French 'ontology.' Why am I telling you this? Ontology is something never once mentioned by Godlewski. So, why am I mentioning it? My reckoning is that 'ontology' haunts this work, its ghosting, its blindfolds. In other words, I want to explore the ontological dimensions to a book that occasionally aims to clarify its epistemological framing. To do this, my focus is on the book's Introduction and its Conclusion, what might be called its delineation of methods, and its reiteration of those methods in light of the journey taken. Of course, we know good scholars write their introductions last of all, when even the concluding tropes are settled upon. In passing, I want to mention the gratification I received in reading this Introduction. It is an exemplary model we can all learn from. So, there will be no criticism here, no snarling at something left unsaid.

I asked a few sentences back what reading is. I want to say something more on this, concerning precisely the 'unsaid.' Perhaps what I am pointing to is not 'reading' but 'writing,' a writing that is equally a reading of something. The efficacy of such a writing/reading is not in quietly replying to questions posed, providing answers, as if the certainty of knowing is primarily the stakes of thinking. Efficacy seems, for me, to lie elsewhere, precisely in the questions posed that cannot but lead to further questioning, arriving at basic questions, *arkhē* questioning, arriving at a sense of what is question-worthy. In such a task of writing/reading, we then are alerted not so much to what is said, but to what is left unsaid in what is said, to the tangle of questioning that never aims at closure. This is how I come to understand the *arkhē* of the architecture referenced in the book's title. We listen. This review, then, speaks to things unsaid in what is said, not for a moment to suggest the incompletion of a project, but to alert me, in my own reading, to how this book becomes a call to thinking. The Introduction draws out three structuring frameworks that on the one hand are explained in sequential fashion though, on the other hand, are entirely entangled in the work of historicising. The first comprises what the author calls "Organizing Themes." Organising what? Navigating Calabar's epistemological terrain. There are five of them. Each of them poses a confrontation or challenge to what could be called orthodox (both Western and Nigerian) modes. In this sense, 'epistemology' is a contested 'terrain.'

Briefly they are, firstly, narrative and discourse. Nothing unusual there. What historiography would not be an encountering of narrative and discourses? For Godlewski, the thematic task here is a mode of reading that acknowledges but contests a double blindness in extrinsic Western accounts and intrinsic romanticised nationalism. What 'position' is left? Godlewski suggests a kind of mobile tacking, which I read from my own haunt as a kind of destructing of position. If there is 'position' at all, it must be written in the plural. The second theme acknowledges the challenge of writing on the architecture of Old Calabar, what the word or thing 'architecture' means when for much of Calabar's 'history' structures were highly impermanent. We need a 'new' way of thinking architecture and urbanism that recognises ephemeral performativity as a basis for understanding an architecture eschewing monumentality. Allied to this is a third theme that asks us to think differently about space as dominant practices of containment, to encounter space as processual and diasporic practice: mobile and networked spacings as an essential understanding of the Biafran region. A

fourth theme alerts us to a long history of Western architectural theorising that has avoided race in a depoliticising or neutralising of built environments as either aesthetic wonders or technological feats. Perhaps even both, at once. As Godlewski says, he tackles this 'head on.' Finally, with a proviso, Godlewski nominates his fifth theme: filling the gap. Old Calabar already had quite a bit of scholarship before Godlewski arrived there in 2010 on his first exploration of the region. As a significant slave trading port and early settlement in what was to become Nigeria, the region is well researched. Though accounts of the 'urban landscape' and architecture have always been short on detail, or the kind of detailing that Godlewski recognised as missing. The book redresses this. I note in passing that we are introduced in the discussion of these themes to the extensive bibliography that Godlewski has amassed. This aspect of the book is truly impressive. The bibliography as an archive of historical and contemporary writings on Calabar, Nigeria, architecture, and urbanism more generally, from politicised perspectives of race and African studies, is a tremendous asset to the book and evidences the depth of scholarship the book harbours.

The second structuring ensemble goes under the heading 'entanglements': "To entangle, or *kòmó* in Èfik, means to foul or involve someone in complicated circumstances. It describes the competing and overlapping interests that constitute territory and their intertwined histories."[4] Godlewski suggests four modalities of entanglement. The first is entangled modernities. Let's face it, modernity in its European guise carries the hallmark of enlightenment, universal declaration of the rights of man, a universalism granulated into every political motive of Eurocentric governmentality. Godlewski refuses the corollary to this, that colonialism comprises European violence on passive and servile peoples. Rather, Godlewski looks to evidence of contested modernities, of practices of modification, hybridisation, adaptation, and invention. This is in order to "enfranchise other spatial rationalities."[5] The second entanglement is that of temporalities. European time reckoning, the datable, habitual patterns of consuming time or inventing it all arrive with European traders. Old Calabar becomes a locale of entanglement of European and local modalities of existing in duration. Colonial narratives often describe the colonised as 'timeless' peoples living a static culture, ruptured by the time of modernity as the time of historical peoples. If the first two entanglements refuse what Godlewski calls on occasions a "penetrationist" model of colonising, with respect to spatiality and temporality, the third mode refers to entangled objects, that the importation of European things did not result in either wholesale adoption of the foreign, nor in dumb refusal of what is unknowable, but in practices of incorporation or use that modify how these things may be understood. This witnesses an agency of resistance and reinvention. The fourth sense of entanglement is perhaps the most surprising, a little vexing. Though, that would precisely be its point. Godlewski calls it "quantum entanglement."[6] Its appeal is initially to quantum physics, to the strange attractors at a distance, of quantum particles, to a reference to Einstein who called this aspect of quantum physics "spooky." This is by way of introducing something essential to our understanding of Èfik peoples, especially from the late eighteenth century to the present, with the practice of Ékpè. This is at once a secret society of wealthy men, a system of law and judicial implementation of law, a religious practice, and a public performance of costumed masquerade as an instrument for making visible the force of law that is Ékpè. The word means leopard. That force of law, binding a people religiously, economically, and juridically, is a forest

spirit, made manifest in the masquerade. This is the strange entanglement introduced by a comparing of Newtonian physics to quantum physics. We might momentarily take a breather and reflect on how the five themes and the four entanglements possibly mesh to provide something like the complexity required for rethinking architecture and history in a West African locale. This is something you do . . .

. . . Okay. Back to it. Now we move on to the third ensemble of structuring moves. If the first two become an interweaving meshing throughout the chapters that follow, this third ensemble names the actual chapters. It defines the book as a cohering work. For this reason, I want to spend a little more time with these. There are five of them, called "Paradigmatic Spaces," in Èfìk, *Ùfàn*. In fact, I can name them quickly, for it is not so much what Godlewski nominates as a Spatial Paradigm that I want to discuss, but rather how Godlewski understands this notion, what it is, how it works. It is here that I begin to hone my own questioning, looking for that rich vein of what is unsaid in what is said, if my mixed metaphor makes any sense at all. The five chapters are titled, in sequence: Compound; Masquerade; Offshore; Enclave; Zone. There is a sixth, concluding chapter, Spaces of Entanglement, that summarises and in places reiterates things said in the Introduction. The five chapter-headings/Paradigmatic Spaces do not look that challenging to decipher. They all seem familiar enough. In fact, compound, enclave, and zone have enough allusive association that they could each *almost* be referring to the same entity. Masquerade is something we briefly alluded to in Èfìk cultural practices of Ékpè. And 'offshore' might not be surprising as Calabar is and was an important trading port, a locale of exchanges of all kinds coming from offshore. But, again, we would be wrong. Everything is much more complex, or subtle, than this levelled-off reading. Perhaps these headings lent themselves to Godlewski precisely because they are familiar tropes. To unpack their titular positionings we would need to entangle ourselves for a time in the details of each chapter. Crucially, they need to be read epochally, so to speak, "Compound" nominating the earliest timeframe, displaced yet not erased by the next, "Masquerade," and so on, from the seventeenth century up to the arrival of special economic zones in Nigeria in the late twentieth century. Godlewski does, in the Introduction, spend a little time deliberating on just what these headings name. And reiterates this in the Conclusion. His initial deliberation asks if these headings form a series of types. Is this a typology? Typology seems to have been good enough for other scholars. Though, 'type' constrains, narrows focus, even to the point of resuscitating racial tropes of static, timeless, originary forms. Without any intended irony, Godlewski then comments: "While some have considered alternatives to the idea of type to consider urban transformations and power relations, they often come from a narrowly Eurocentric and white worldview."[7] Godlewski rather deploys the particularly Western 'philosophical concept' of 'paradigmatic spaces': "Spatial paradigms are culturally situated organizations of space and power that are used to typify moments in history."[8] Godlewski will modify this verbal locution derived from 'type' to explain himself, this time suggesting spatial paradigms "represent organizational arrangements typical at particular moments in time."[9] In a sense, 'type' has moved over from a spatialising locution to a temporalising one. Crucial here is the nexus we begin to read in how Godlewski is looking for analyses that alert us to spatio-temporal articulations of power, its exercise, or its substance.

He mentions Thomas Kuhn in passing, the one who made this notion popular in discussing how change happens in science. Though his genuine exemplars are Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault, Benjamin's arcade, and Foucault's panopticon. Siegfried Kracauer and Giorgio Agamben are also mentioned. Mind you, none of this is discussed in detail, just in passing. In his Conclusion, Godlewski reiterates: "This study argued that spatial paradigms are useful mechanisms for tracing transformations in the Bight of Biafra. They have served as productive constructs to convey the history of socio-political dynamics in southeast Nigeria. Similar to Benjamin's arcade or Foucault's panopticon, they have operated as diagrams of power and the spatial intersection of socio-historical forces."[10] Let's break mid-thought here, just for a moment. An attentive and consistent reader of the journal *Interstices* might recognise the uncanny resonance happening at this very moment, an 'untypical' moment. Wasn't it Mark Jackson, the one composing this review, whose own book-length publication, titled *Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault: The Recluse of Architecture*, had been reviewed (by Stephen Zepke), in the last published issue of *Interstices*.[11] I knew nothing of Godlewski's methods, nothing at all concerning Calabar, when I nominated myself to undertake this review. It came as a complete surprise, what Godlewski might himself nominate as an entanglement of the quantum kind, a strange attractor operating at a distance. So, there is a great deal I *can* say concerning diagrams of power, how they might or might not be contiguous with how Godlewski explains spatial paradigms. Let me cut to the chase, which means cutting to the hauntology of this book. So far, we have delineated what might be called the architectonic of the book, its 'organising themes,' its 'spatial entanglements,' and its 'spatial paradigms.' But have we got any closer to the inherent problem which Godlewski grasped and aimed to bring into view? I want to conclude this review in eliciting a response to this question, doing so with a focus on how Godlewski brings into view a spatial-temporalising of power's exercise and in doing so as the genuine efficacy of the project, leaves *unsaid* what I come to understand as the Western metaphysical (ontological) colonising of the project. Godlewski decided on the notion of paradigm over other categorial conceptualisations, especially for the manner whereby there is something inhering to paradigms concerning not their stability or stabilising but concerning forces of or for destabilising. He acutely recognises the difficulties in locating one's own discursive positioning in the motility of incommensurable paradigms. Between Calabar and European traders there are tangled non-commensurabilities even as languages, goods, and human beings become exchangeable.

Power is something mentioned often in Godlewski's close analyses, even if it does not appear as a theme, an entanglement, or a paradigm. It is implicit or implied in all of these. Yet power is not 'unpacked,' itself discussed. This might seem odd given that Foucault was a harbinger of an appropriate synthetic concept. It was not Benjamin who used that expression, "diagram of power." What does it mean? Diagram? Say that word to architects or planners and we are already off on the wrong foot. No, it is not the drawing up of extant entities, not even the drawing up of the relational ties between extant things. If we say we know something, knowing is the form extant things take. Again, say form to architects or planners and we're also wrong-footed. Form means what is determined, with respect to determinable matter. Does this mean Godlewski's paradigms are formal syntheses of a manifold of extant entities? That might well be an epistemological levelling-off of his entire project. But, for a third time we

would be wrong. The problem Godlewski brings into view, nominated under the notion of a diagram of power, is not epistemological, concerning the entangled domains of the certainty of knowing. It is ontological, concerning the entangled exercise of competing forces that are productive of our forms of knowing, along with the subjectivities of those who say they know anything at all. When Gilles Deleuze discusses Foucault's diagram of power, he alerts us to the following differentiations: Knowing concerns us with the forms matter takes and the finality that functions take. Power concerns us with unformed matter and non-finalised functions.[12]

We then need to understand diagram as a 'mapping' of what is possible rather than of the extant that is, as ontological difference. Diagrams are unstable, motile. Godlewski alerts us to this ontological (rather than epistemological) horizon of the project, precisely in what is left unsaid in what he says. He emphasises these paradigms are "fictions . . . composed of heterogeneous and conflicting fragments, processes and meanings . . . I'm inevitably entangled in these constructed spaces."[13] I recognise here a way of reading the book that opens us to a radical understanding of power's exercise. Yet, this comes at a cost. Throughout the book there are assumption that I think of as Western metaphysical colonisations.[4] We are not entirely comfortable with assaying English or Dutch or French or Spanish understandings of spatiality and temporality between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries as more or less monolithically the same. Study of that alone would comprise a rich problematic. Though where is the assaying of Èfik seventeenth-century 'cosmological' 'understandings' of 'space' or 'time'? How are these Western constructs practised otherwise? Surely, they are not the same. How does Èfik language say 'space' or 'time' or 'person' or 'urban landscape'? I don't mean dictionary entries. I mean capacities to exist. Can we even use the entirely Western notion of 'subject' or 'agent' to nominate Èfik 'subjectivities' or 'agencies'? What is 'personhood' in Èfik 'culture'? Can we use the entirely Western notion of 'culture'? These are what I might call ontological entanglements. What are the entities that exist whereby we can ask that 'what is x' question? Is there the verb 'to be' in Èfik? There is not one in pre-colonial te reo Māori,[14] nor in classical Chinese thinking. How, then, do relations of force act on unformed matter and non-finalised functions to produce our knowing selves, always already a blindfolding, a concealing, in whatever we can say we see?

order to represent a persisting world but produces a new kind of reality, a new model of truth. It is neither the subject of history, nor does it survey history. It makes history by unmasking preceding realities and significations, constituting hundreds of points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions or improbable continuums. It doubles history with a sense of continual evolution," 35.

13. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 250.

14. I am especially aided in my thinking of metaphysical colonisation by the Māori philosopher, Carl Mika. In a series of essays, he clarifies his understanding of both the blindness and immense difficulties posed in addressing ontological displacements. See, for example, "Reclaiming Mystery: A Māori Philosophy of Being, in Light of Novalis's Ontology" (PhD thesis, University of Waikato, 2013); "The Co-existence of Self and Things through Ira," *Journal of Aesthetics and Phenomenology* 2, no. 1 (2005): 93–112. See also, for discussion of Mika's work in contexts of urban design in the Anthropocene, Amanda Yates, "Whakaaro Papa: Anthropos Design & Decolonising Metaphysics" (PhD thesis, Auckland University of Technology, 2018).

NOTES

1. Joseph Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra: Spatial Entanglements* (Routledge, 2024), xv.

2. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, iv.

3. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf (Routledge, 1994).

4. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 15.

5. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 15.

6. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 17.

7. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 21.

8. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 21.

9. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 22.

10. Godlewski, *The Architecture of the Bight of Biafra*, 249–250.

11. Stephen Zepke, "Review: Diagrams of Power in Benjamin and Foucault: The Recluse of Architecture," *Interstices* 23 (2024): 137–142.

12. See Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, translated by Seán Hand (University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Deleuze suggests, concerning diagrams of power: "Lastly, every diagram is intersocial and constantly evolving. It never functions in