A 'THESIS STUDIO' PERFORMANCE

Following the example of '24 Psycho', the concept of thesis is recontextualized in terms of work that is stretched apart to reveal the 'efficient cause' and, in this stretching, allow new connections and new original formations. The idea of the fictional artist/architect is employed, in multiples. A studio is envisioned, populated by ghosts whose work, with insightful demonic and angelic accesses, works hard to conceal the fact that the studio members are 'between the two deaths' in Lacanian terms … wandering souls who are given one last opportunity to have a successful final thesis project.

Psycho **(Alfred Hitchcock, 1960)**. The idea for this film was proffered by Peggy Robertson, a production assistant, who had a positive reaction to the 1959 novel, also named *Psycho*, by Robert Bloch. Reviewers at Paramount did not think the premise would make a good film, but Hitchcock saw this as an opportunity to recover from two botched earlier projects. The crew and set were lifted from Hitchcock's television series, 'Alfred Hitchcock Presents'. The production costs were held to a minimum, although the leading actors, Anthony Perkins and Janet Leigh, were well known enough to be box-office draws. Hitchcock rejected the first treatment as 'too much like television'. The film is unlike most other Hitchcock films, but it does resemble *Lifeboat*, *Rope*, and *The Wrong Man* in that it emphasizes psychological tension rooted in the psychosis of a character or situation.

24 Psycho. The conceptual-performance artist Douglas Gordon created a new reading of *Psycho* by presenting the film at 2 frames per second rather than the usual 24. This deprives viewers of the illusion of motion, the so-called Ø function. The result however was not a breakdown of meaning but a portal through which viewers began to supply their own scenarios, stimulated by the still frames lasting approximately .5 seconds. This experiment shows that the Ø function cannot be eradicated but filled in with alternatives. The empty interval is thus a gateway, a hole in the work of art that corresponds to the audience's silent presence as an automaton, a machine that experiences the desire of the Other without being aware of the inverted topology of the situation.

The Building Comes First. The standard etiology of architecture thesis projects is to begin with an abstract condition formalized through photographs, statements, sketches, etc. that typically focus on some need for a 'correction', to be embodied by the future project. As investigation proceeds, a built response is put forward tentatively and studied. Its performance is gauged against a broadening conceptualization of the need for correction and, finally, the details and other final touches combine to produce a building whose response to the needed correction is argued orally. This view contains an implicit argument that is never examined: the argument that the idea precedes the building and can generate it. However, theoreticians since Vitruvius have pointed to the complex interaction with the notion of 'type' as originative. The type is not the degenerate idea of the template-to-be-copied but, rather, the idea of Form, taken from Plato's famous but misunderstood theory of the idea, ιδέες. In degraded form, the idea is akin to a ghost: something that 'refuses to die', between the two deaths; but in ancient Greece and Rome, this interval was, ambiguously, either life or death. In a common literary device, the death narrative, an apparently living character undergoes a series of experiences that, actually, take place in the underworld, after their barely noticed event of death. Macrobius annotated Cicero's work on 'the dream of Scipio', where in a dream Scipio is told that, for the soul, the life of the body is really death, and *vice versa*.

This un-decidable flip between life and death applies to architecture; in fact architecture, because of its primary sheltering/concealing function, is the 'subjective object' that supports the operations where 'extimacy' (the inside-out function) are the basis of uncanny transformations. This flip means that, within or beside ('para-site') every 'literal' instance of architecture, there is a virtual, or 'ghost' building whose indeterminate meaning and use creates a permanent but autonomous shadow. This shadow is the unconscious of architecture. It is present whether or not the architect is aware of it, whether or not the inhabitants pay attention to it. Despite this anonymity, a ghost building is a proper — perhaps the only proper — object of design that aims to explore the full range of architecture's significance.

 Because in some important senses the virtual ghost building is present before and after the literal one, generated retroactively to the past and surviving the actual building's deterioration and disappearance, the ghost building's presence is particularly intense during the early phases of construction and the later phases of ruin. This is a key to the recognition of the significance of ghost architecture in the past. Sir John Soane (1753-1837) directed his draftsman, Joseph Gandy, to draw up his design for the Bank of England as a ruin; Piranesi created his *Carceri* in the spirit of a prospectus about the real nature of architecture. Relating to the virtual time phases of before and after are a key to the more important time phase, the interval (Ø) inserted between literal 'slices' of the building's temporalized reality. Like the gap between still frames in a strip of celluloid film, the interval makes the illusion of motion possible *by its purely negative existence*. The Ø, an 'interior version' of the 'marginal versions' of construction and ruin, use the conversion logic of the death narrative and, hence, the full potentiality of the Platonic ιδέες. They are the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire, the inversion of the subject's desire as the desire of the Other, a desire that turns the subject into an automaton, a pleasure machine for the Other's enjoyment.[1]

The idea that 'the building comes first' overcomes the principal conceptual conundrum of contemporary academic academic projects. To move past the linear-and-impossible conception of the creation of architecture out of ideas and research, the ghost building is sought. As with communication with ghosts in popular culture, this method borrows from the (entirely fake) techniques of mystics, mediums, and spiritualists of the 19th century. The logic of this is not based on any accreditation of occult belief but, rather, on Blaise Pascal's observation of the inverse logic of religious observance. Pascal noticed that conversion to Christianity did not depend on any intellectual discovery or change of belief but, rather, in the adoption of ritual movements and ceremonial forms: 'kneel and pray, and then you will believe'. The switched position of cause and effect means that the cause — in this case the nonexistent 'ghost building' — is based on the material procedures taken to invoke it. The slogan, 'the building comes first', is thus both a mandate for a radical materialism and a restoration of the idea of type, as an embodiment of the Platonic ιδέες. Contemporary attempts to substitute concepts and abstractions for more realistic applications of the Platonic ιδέες are doubly false. They distort and falsify the nature of the Platonic ιδέες; at the same time they not only postpone but preclude the existence of the material building by an insistence on extending the abstract at the very point where materialistic procedures are clearly the only effective means of provoking the Ø-aspect of architecture.

Ø Architecture. A studio is proposed that uses the idea of the extimate as primary, not just to simulations of architectural creation enacted as learning experiences in schools, but as the actual and true basis of architecture. Following the lead of Soane, Piranesi, and others (e.g. Alberti, Serlio, Palladio, Wright), a studio of fictional operators and operations will be constructed at two scales, larger and smaller than the usual operations (<>, a 'big studio' and 'tiny studio' respectively). With ghost ('fictive') members, the ghost studio treats design as divination, in the fullest and most accurate ethnographical sense possible. With a radical transformation of the usual operative ideas of achievement and performance, the studio adopts a radically materialist view: the building precedes the ideas that created it through a reverse action of 'engendering' (again in the literal sense of sexuating architecture and the reception of architecture into the sensory realm.

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[1] This was precisely the fantasy of Daniel Paul Schreber, whose account of his own psychosis was the basis of Freud's after-the-fact analysis of paranoia.