Architectural Parallax Spandrels and Other Phenomena of Class Struggle

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http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=218

My knowledge of architecture is constrained to a coupler of idiosyncratic data: my love for Ayn Rand and her architecture-novel The Fountainhead; my admiration of the Stalinist "wedding-cake" baroque kitsch; my dream of a house composed only of secondary spaces and places of passage – stairs, corridors, toilets, store-rooms, kitchen – with no living room or bedroom. The danger that I am courting is thus that what I will say will oscillate between the two extremes of unfounded speculations and what most is already known for a long time.

I would like to begin with the notion of parallax which I took from Kojin Karatani. The common definition of parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply "subjective," due to the fact that the same object which exists "out there" is seen from two different stations, or points of view. It is rather that, as Hegel would have put it, subject and object are inherently "mediated," so that an "epistemological" shift in the subject's point of view always reflects an "ontological" shift in the object itself. When confronted with such a parallax gap, one should renounce all attempts to reduce one aspect to the other (or, even more, to enact a kind of "dialectical synthesis" of the opposites); the task is, on the contrary, to conceive all possible positions as responses to a certain underlying deadlock or antagonism, as so many attempts to resolve this deadlock… and this already brings us to so-called postmodern architecture which, sometimes, seems to enact the notion of parallax in a directly-palpable way. Think about Liebeskind or Gehry: their work often appears as a desperate (or joyous) attempt to combine two incompatible structuring principles within the same building (in the case of Liebeskind, horizontal/vertical and oblique cubes; in the case of Gehry, traditional house with modern – concrete, corrugated iron, glass – supplements), as if two principles are locked in a struggle for hegemony.

In his essay on Gehry, Fredric Jameson reads his plans for individual houses as an attempt to mediate tradition (old ornamented wooden structures) and alienated modernity (corrugated iron, concrete and glass). The result is an amphibious building, a freakish combination, an old house to which, like a cancerous outgrowth, a modern concrete-iron part is annexed. In his first landmark, the renovation of his own home in Santa Monica (1977-78), Gehry "took a modest bungalow on a corner lot, wrapped it in layers of corrugated metal and chain-link, and poked glass structures through its exterior. The result was a simple house extruded into surprising shapes and surfaces, spaces and views." Fredric Jameson discerns a quasi-utopian impulse in this "dialectic between the remains of the traditional (rooms from the old house, preserved like archaic dream traces in a museum of the modern), and the 'new' wrappings, themselves constituted in the base materials of the American wasteland." This interaction between the preserved old house space and the interstitial space created by the wrapping generates a new space, a space which "poses a question fundamental to thinking about contemporary American capitalism: that between advanced technological and scientific achievement and poverty and waste." A clear indication, for my Marxist mind, that architectural projects are answers to a problem which is ultimately socio-political.

In this sense, one can even read Psycho, Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece, as the staging of an architectural antagonism: is Norman not split between the two houses, the modern horizontal motel and the vertical Gothic mother's house, forever running between the two, never finding a proper place of his own? In this sense, the unheimlich character of the film's end means that, in his full identification with the mother, he finally found his heim, his home. In modernist works like Psycho, this split is still visible, while the main goal of today's postmodern architecture is to obfuscate it. Suffice it to recall the "New Urbanism" with its return to small family houses in small towns, with front porches, recreating the cozy atmosphere of the local community – clearly, this is the case of architecture as ideology at its purest, providing an imaginary (although "real," materialized in the actual disposition of houses) solution to a real social deadlock which has nothing to do with architecture and all with late capitalist dynamics. A more ambiguous case of the same antagonism is the work of Gehry: he takes as the basis one of the two poles of the antagonism, either the old-fashioned family house or a modernist concrete-and-glass building, and then either submits it to a kind of cubist anamorphic distortion (curved angles of walls and windows, etc.) or combines the old family home with a modernist supplement. So here is my final hypothesis: if the Bates Motel were to be built by Gehry, directly combining the old mother's house and the flat modern motel into a new hybrid entity, there would have been no need for Norman to kill his victims, since he would have been relieved of the unbearable tension that compels him to run between the two places – he would have a third place of mediation between the two extremes.

But are we justified to use the (now already half-obsolete) term "postmodernism"? Insofar as the post-68 capitalism forms a specific economic, social and cultural unity, this very unity justifies the name

"postmodernism." Although many justified criticisms were made of postmodernism as a new form of ideology, one should nonetheless admit that, when Jean-Francois Lyotard, in The Postmodern Condition, elevated this term from the name of certain new artistic tendencies (especially in writing and architecture) to the designation of a new historical epoch, there was an element of authentic nomination in his act: "postmodernism" effectively functioned as a new Master-Signifier which introduced a new order of intelligibility into the confused multiplicity of historical experience.

In what did, more closely, the postmodern shift consist? Boltanski and Chiapello's The New Spirit of Capitalism examines it in detail, and especially apropos France. In a Weberian mode, the book distinguishes three successive "spirits" of capitalism: the first, entrepreneurial, lasted until the Great Depression of the 1930s; the second one took as its ideal not the entrepreneur but the salaried director of the large firm (it is easy to note the close parallel with the well-known notion of the passage from individualist-protestant-ethic capitalism to the corporate-managerial capitalism of the "organization man"). From the 1970s onwards, the third stage, a new figure of the "spirit of capitalism" is emerging: capitalism abandoned the hierarchical Fordist structure of the production process and developed a network-based form of organization founded on employee initiative and autonomy in the workplace. Instead of hierarchical-centralized chain of command, we get networks with a multitude of participants, organizing work in the form of teams or projects, intent on customer satisfaction, and a general mobilization of workers thanks to their leaders' vision. In this way, capitalism is transformed and legitimized as an egalitarian project: by way of accentuating auto-poetic interaction and spontaneous self-organization, it even usurped the far Left's rhetoric of workers' self-management and turned it from an anti-capitalist to a capitalist slogan.

At the level of consumption, this new spirit is the one of the so-called "cultural capitalism": we primarily buy commodities neither on account of their utility nor as status-symbols; we buy them to get the experience provided by them, we consume them in order to make our life pleasurable and meaningful. This triad cannot but evoke the Lacanian triad of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary: the Real of direct utility (good healthy food, the quality of a car, etc.), the Symbolic of the status (I buy a certain car to signal my status – the Torstein Veblen theory), the Imaginary of pleasurable and meaningful experience. Consumption should sustain the quality of life, its time should be "quality time" – not the time of alienation, of imitating models imposed by society, of the fear of not being able to "keep up with Joneses," but the time of the authentic fulfilment of my true Self, of the sensuous play of experience, of caring for others, from ecology to charity. Here is an exemplary case of "cultural capitalism": Starbucks's self-description of their "Ethos water" program:

Ethos Water is a brand with a social mission—helping children around the world get clean water and raising awareness of the World Water Crisis. Every time you purchase a bottle of Ethos Water, Ethos Water will contribute US $0.05 (C$0.10 in Canada) toward our goal of raising at least US $10 million by 2010. Through The Starbucks Foundation, Ethos Water supports humanitarian water programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America. To date, Ethos Water grant commitments exceed $6.2 million. These programs will help an estimated 420,000 people gain access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene education.

This is how capitalism, at the level of consumption, integrated the legacy of '68, the critique of alienated consumption: authentic experience matters. Is this not why we buy organic food? Who really believes that the half-rotten and expensive "organic" apples are really healthier? The reason is that, by way of buying them, we do not just buy and consume a product – we simultaneously do something meaningful, show our care and global awareness, participate in a large collective project…

If, in great classic modernism, a building was supposed to obey one all-encompassing great Code, in postmodernism we get a multiplicity of codes. This multiplicity can be either the multiplicity (ambiguity) of meanings – what Charles Jencks called "alluded metaphor" (is the Sydney opera the growth of a blossom or a series of turtles copulating?) – or the multiplicity of functions, from performances to shopping and cafeterias (the National Opera House in Oslo, designed to appeal to a younger generation, tries to appear "cool" by imitating sleek stealth-bomber lines; furthermore, the roof inclines into the fjord and doubles as a swimming platform).

As it was often remarked, postmodernism can be said to stand for the deregulation of architecture – for radical historicism where, in a globalized pastiche, everything possible, anything goes. Pastiche works like "empty parody": a radical historicism where all the past is equalized in synchronicity of eternal present. The exact functioning of pastiche should be specified by a concrete analysis-work – let me take an

extreme example: in today's Moscow, there are a couple of new exclusive apartment blocks for the new rich which perfectly imitate the outside form of the Stalinist neo-Gothic Baroque (Lomonosov university, the House of Culture in Warsaw, etc.). What does this imitation mean? These buildings obviously integrate Russia's Soviet hangover with its hyper-capitalist present – it is however crucial to analyze the precise modality of this integration. The self-perception of the engaged public is that of playful indifference: the Russia's Soviet hangover is acted out, reduced to an impotent pastiche. Postmodern ironic Stalinism should thus be considered the last stage of Socialist Realism, in which the formula is reflectively redoubled, turning into its own pastiche. We should read this use of "totalitarian" motifs as a case of postmodern irony, as a comic repetition of the "totalitarian" tragedy.

The "class basis" of the neo-Stalinist postmodernism is thus the new wild-capitalist elite which perceives itself as ideologically indifferent, "apolitical," caring only about money and success, despising all big Causes. The "spontaneous ideology" of this new bourgeoisie is paradoxically what appears as the opposite of their vulgar "passion of the real" (pleasures, money, power), a (no less vulgar) pan-aestheticism: all ideologies are equal, equally ridiculous, they are useful only to provide the spice of aesthetic excitement, so the more problematic they are, the more excitement they generate. The neo-Stalinist architecture pretends to pretend – it (and its public) think they just play a game, and what they are unaware of is that, independently of their playful attitude, the game has the potential to get serious. Their "playful indifference" conceals the reality of the ruthless exercise of power: what they stage as aesthetic spectacle is reality for the masses of ordinary people. Their indifference towards ideology is the very form of their complicity with the ruling ideology.

This indifference bears witness to how, in postmodernism, parallax is openly admitted, displayed – and, in this way, neutralized: the antagonistic tension between different standpoints is flattened into indifferent plurality of standpoints. "Contradiction" thus loses its subversive edge: in a space of globalized permissiveness, inconsistent standpoints cynically co-exist – cynicism is the reaction of "So what?" to inconsistency. You ruthlessly exploit natural resources and contribute to green causes – so what… Sometimes, the thing itself can serve as its own mask – the most efficient way to obfuscate social antagonisms is to openly display them.

But perhaps I went too fast and too far ahead – let me step back and address the basic issue: how does an ideological edifice (real architectural edifices included) deal with social antagonisms? In his old classic The Political Unconscious, Fredric Jameson proposes a perspicuous ideologico-critical reading of Claude-Levi Strauss' interpretation of the unique facial decorations of the Caduveo Indians from Brasil: they use "a design which is symmetrical but yet lies across an oblique axis /…/ a complicated situation based upon two contradictory forms of duality, and resulting in a compromise brought about by a secondary opposition between the ideal axis of the object itself /the human face/ and the ideal axis of the figure which it represents." Jameson's comment: "Already on the purely formal level, then, this visual text has been grasped as a contradiction by way of the curiously provisional and asymmetrical resolution it proposes for that contradiction." (Incidentally, does this not sound like a map of Manhattan, where the symmetrical design of streets and avenues is cut across by the oblique axis of Broadway? Or, at the architectural level, like a typical Liebeskind building with its tension between vertical and crooked lines?) In the next, crucial, move, Lévi-Strauss, in Tristes Tropiques, interprets this imagined formal resolution of an antagonism as (not a "reflection," but a) symbolic act, a transposition-displacement of the basic social imbalance-asymmetry-antagonism of Caduveo society: the Caduveo are a hierarchical society, and their

nascent hierarchy is already the place of the emergence, if not of political power in the strict sense, then at least of relations of domination: the inferior status of women, the subordination of youth to elders, and the development of a hereditary aristocracy. Yet whereas this latent power structure is, among the neighboring Guana and Bororo, masked by a division into moieties which cuts across the three castes, and whose exogamous exchange appears to function in a nonhierarchical, essentially egalitarian way, it is openly present in Caduveo life, as surface inequality and conflict. The social institutions of the Guana and Bororo, on the other hand, provide a realm of appearance, in which real hierarchy and inequality are dissimulated by the reciprocity of the moieties, and in which, therefore, 'asymmetry of class is balanced … by symmetry of 'moieties'.

Is this also not our predicament? In bourgeois societies, we are split between formal-legal equality sustained by the institutions of the democratic state, and class distinctions enforced by the economic system. We live the tension between Politically Correct respect for human rights, etc., and the growing inequalities, gated communities, exclusions, etc. This, however, does not mean that the relationship is simply the one between deceiving appearance and reality: apropos liberal egalitarianism, it is not enough to make the old Marxist point about the gap between the ideological appearance of the universal legal form and the particular interests that effectively sustain it – as is so common amongst politically-correct critics on the Left. The counter-argument that the form is never a "mere" form, but involves a dynamic of its own which leaves traces in the materiality of social life, is fully valid. After all the "formal freedom" of

the bourgeois sets in motion the process of altogether "material" political demands and practices, from trade unions to feminism.

And exactly the same goes for architecture: when a building embodies democratic openness, this appearance is never a mere appearance – it has a reality of its own, it structures the way individuals interact in their real lives. The problem with the Caduveo was that (like today's non-democratic states) they lacked this appearance – they were not "lucky enough to resolve their contradictions, or to disguise them with the help of institutions artfully devised for that purpose. /…/ since they were unable to conceptualize or to love this solution directly, they began to dream it, to project it into the imaginary." Levi-Strauss deserves here a precise and close reading: it is not that, simply and directly, the Caduveo facial decorations formulate an imaginary resolution of real contradictions; it is rather that they supplement the lack of a properly functioning "appearance" which would have been inscribed into their very social-institutional organization. In other words, we are not dealing with a longing for real equality, but with the longing for a proper appearance. (Does the same not hold for Niemeyer's plan of Brasilia, this imaginary dream of the resolution of social antagonisms which supplements not the reality of social antagonisms but the lack of ideologico-egalitarian mechanism which would cover them up with a properly-functioning appearance.)

This is why Jameson is fully justified to talk about the "political unconscious": there is a coded message in an architectural formal play, and the message delivered by a building often functions as the "return of the repressed" of the official ideology. Recall Wittgenstein motto: what we cannot directly talk about, it can be shown by the form of our activity. What the official ideology cannot openly talk about can be shown by the mute signs of a building. The two opposed architectural designs of Casa del Fascio (the local headquarters of the Fascist party), Adolfo Coppede's neo-Imperial pastiche from 1928 and Giuseppe Teragni's highly modernist transparent glass-house from 1934-36, do they not, in their simple juxtaposition, reveal the inherent contradiction of the Fascist ideological project which simultaneously advocates a return to pre-modern organicist corporatism and the unheard-of mobilization of all social forces in the service of rapid modernization?

This brings us to an unexpected result: it is not only that the fantasy embodied in the mute language of buildings can articulate the utopia of justice, freedom and equality betrayed by actual social relations; this fantasy can also articulate a LONGING FOR INEQUALITY, for clear hierarchy and class distinctions. Does the Stalinist neo-Gothic architecture not enact the "return of the repressed" of the official egalitarian-emancipatory Socialist ideology, the weird desire for hierarchy and social distinctions? The utopia enacted in architecture can also be a conservative utopia of regained hierarchical order. And does the same not hold for the monumental public buildings from the Roosevelt era, like the central post office in New York? No wonder the NYU central building in downtown Manhattan looks like Lomonosov university in Moscow…

Our application of the Levi-Straussian analysis of Caduveo facial decorations to architecture can be further justified by the fact that Lévi-Strauss himself applies the same type of analysis to urbanism and architecture in his wonderful short essay "Do Dual Organizations Exist?", where he deals the spatial disposition of buildings in the Winnebago, one of the Great Lake tribes. He makes here a further crucial point: since the two sub-groups form one and the same tribe, living in the same village, this identity somehow has to be symbolically inscribed – how, if the entire symbolic articulation, all social institutions, of the tribe are not neutral, but are overdetermined by the fundamental and constitutive antagonistic split? By what Lévi-Strauss ingeniously calls the "zero-institution," a kind of institutional counterpart to the famous mana, the empty signifier with no determinate meaning, since it signifies only the presence of meaning as such, in opposition to its absence: a specific institution which has no positive, determinate function – its only function is the purely negative one of signaling the presence and actuality of social institution as such, in opposition to its absence, to pre-social chaos. It is the reference to such a zero-institution that enables all members of the tribe to experience themselves as such, as members of the same tribe. Is, then, this zero-institution not ideology at its purest, i.e. the direct embodiment of the ideological function of providing a neutral all-encompassing space in which social antagonism is obliterated, in which all members of society can recognize themselves?

And my hypothesis is that big performance-arts complexes, arguably the paragon of today's architecture, try to impose themselves as a kind of architectural zero-institutions. Their very conflictual meanings (amusement and high art, profane and sacred, exclusive and popular) cancel themselves mutually, so that the outcome is the presence of meaning as such as opposed to non-meaning: their meaning is to have meaning, to be islands of meaning in the flow of our meaningless daily existence. In order to provide a brief insight into the "parallactic" nature of their structure, let me begin with Rem Koolhaas's Librairie de France, where the expressive correspondence between the inside (the division of a building into rooms and spaces for different activities) and the outside of a building shifts to radical incommensurability: "the functions, the rooms, the interior, the inner spaces, hang within their enormous container like so many floating organs." These formal shifts in the relation between outside and inside "reincorporate the paradoxes of private property after the end of civil society (in the /Librairie de France in Paris/, by way of

the dialectic of the property of information, in the /in Trade Center in Zeebrugge/, by way of the more classic antinomy of a public space that is privately owned.)"

However, one should not misunderstand this emphasis on the incommensurability between outside and inside as a critique (relying on the demand for the continuity between the two). The incommensurability between outside and inside is a transcendental a priori – in our most elementary phenomenological experience, the reality we see through a window is always minimally spectral, not as fully real as the closed space where we are. This is why, when driving a car or looking through a window of a house, one perceives the reality outside in a weirdly de-realized state, as if one is watching a performance on a screen; when one opens the window, the direct impact of the external reality always causes a minimal shock, we are overwhelmed by its proximity. This is also why, when we enter the closed space of a house, we are often surprised: it seems the inside volume is larger than the outside frame, as if the house is larger from the inside than from the outside.

On the southern side of the demilitarized zone that divides North from South Korea, the South Koreans built a unique visitor's site: a theater building with a large screen-like window in front, opening up onto the North. The spectacle people observe when they take seats and look through the window is reality itself (or, rather, a kind of "desert of the real"): the barren demilitarized zone with walls etc., and, beyond, a glimpse of North Korea. As if to comply with the fiction, North Korea has built in front of this theater a pure fake, a model village with beautiful houses; in the evening, the lights in all the houses are turned on at the same time, people area given good dresses and are obliged to take a stroll every evening... a barren zone is given a fantasmatic status, elevated into a spectacle, solely by being enframed.

One should recall here a minor but crucial feature of Kant's definition of the sublime: the sublime is the overwhelming majesty of nature, the violent explosion of its forces, perceived from a safe position, so that the subject is not immediately threatened by it (there is nothing sublime about being on a ship caught in a storm which threatens to drown it – one is here simply terrified by the prospect of one's painful death...). One can put this into architectural terms: the sublime is the majesty of nature seen from the inside, through a (real or imagined) window frame – it is the distance provided by the frame which makes the scene sublime. (There can also be a false inside. In the ZKM house in Karlsruhe, there is a TV screen in front of the entrance to the main toilet area, showing continuously on its black and white screen the inside of a small toilet cube with the empty toilet bowl. After the first moment of release (thanks god the toilet is free, I cannot wait...), I become aware that it will no longer be empty when I will enter it, so that I will be seen defecating... it is only then that the obvious truth strikes me: it is, of course, a pre-recorded tape we see, not the actual inside of the restroom!)

What this mutual encroaching indicates is that Inside and Outside never cover the entire space: there is always an excess of a third space which gets lost in the division into Outside and Inside. In human dwellings, there is an intermediate space which is disavowed: we all know it exists, but we do not really accept its existence – it remains ignored and (mostly) unsayable. The main content of this invisible space is excrement (canalization), but also the complex network of electricity, digital links, etc. – all this is contained in narrow spaces between walls or floors. We of course know well how excrements leave the house, but our immediate phenomenological relation to it is a more radical one: it is as if shit disappears into some netherworld, out of our sight and out of our world. (This is why one of the most unpleasant experiences is to observe the shit coming back from the hole in the toilet bowl – it is something like the return of the living dead...) What I am talking about here is similar to how we relate to another person's body: we know very well that he or she sweats, defecates and urinates, etc., but we abstract from it in our daily relations – these features are not part of the image of our fellow-man. We rely on this space, but ignore it – no wonder that, in science-fiction, horror films and techno-thrillers, this dark space between walls is the space where horrible threats lurk (from spying machines to monsters or contagious animals like cockroaches and rats). Recall also, in science-fiction architecture, the mysterious topic of an additional floor or room which is not in the building's plan (and where, of course, terrifying things dwell...).

What can architecture do here? One of the possible things is to re-include this excluded space in a domesticated form. With its 509 meters above ground, the Taipei 101 Tower of Taiwan is the tallest building on Earth; since Taiwan is often hit by typhoons, the problem was how to control the swinging when the building is exposed to strong winds. The solution was an original one: to reduce lateral vibrations, a gigantic steel ball weighing 606 tonnes is suspended from the 92nd floor, reaching down to 87th floor; the ball is connected to pistons which drive oil through small holes, thus damping vibrations. What makes this solution especially interesting is that it is not treated as a hidden construction secret: it is publicly displayed as the building's main attraction. That is to say, while the ball occupies the central open space between 92nd and 87th floors, the outside space close to the windows was used as the site of a magnificent restaurant: on one side of the table, one can look through the glass at the panorama of the city, while on the other side, one can see the gigantic ball gently swinging... This transparency is, of course, a pseudo-transparency, like the stalls in big food supermarkets where food is prepared in front of our eyes (fruit is squeezed into juice, meat and vegetables are fried...).

So, back to postmodern architecture, the ambiguously "meaningful" form into which the building is wrapped – often a primitive mimetic symbolism, like the entire building resembling an animal (turtle, bird, bug…) – is not an expression of its inside, but just imposed on the stuff. The link between form and function is cut, there is no causal relationship between the two, i.e., form no longer follows function, function no longer determines form, and the result is a generalized aestheticization. This aestheticization reaches its climax in today's performance-arts venues whose basic feature is the gap between skin and structure. Which are the basic architectural versions of this gap? The non-expressive zero-level is presented in some of Koolhaas's buildings, like the above-mentioned Library of France: the envelope is simply a neutral enormous box that, in its interior, houses the multiple functional spaces which "hang within their enormous container like so many floating organs." (It is the same with many shopping malls contained within grey rectangular boxes.)

Some of Liebeskind's projects reflect the gap between the protective skin and the inner structure into the "skin" itself: the same external form (enormous box) is multiplied, relying on the contrast between the straight vertical/horizontal lines and the diagonal lines of external walls. The result is a hybrid effect, as if the same building is a condensation of two (or more) asymmetrical cubes – as if the same formal principle (a cube box) was applied on different axes. A weird tension and imbalance, a conflict of principles, is thus directly inscribed into the form, as if the actual building lacks a single anchoring point and perspective.

The next step is the aestheticization of the external container: it is no longer just a neutral box, but a round shell protecting the jewel inside. Formally, the contrast between outside and inside is usually the contrast between the roundness of the skin and the straight lines of inner structures – a round envelope (an egg-like cupola) envelops the box-like vertical-horizontal buildings inside, like the "giant teacups" of the Oriental Art Centre in Shanghai, or, by the same architect (Paul Andreu), the National Grand Theatre of China in Beijing with its giant metal-glass cover, an egg-shell protecting the performance buildings. Kinder Surprise, one of the most popular chocolate products on sale all around Central Europe, are empty egg shells made of chocolate and wrapped up in lively-colored paper; after one unwraps the egg and cracks the chocolate shell open, one finds in it a small plastic toy (or small parts from which a toy is to be set together) – one can effectively claim that the National Grand Theatre of China is a gigantic Kinder Surprise egg. This logic of protecting the jewel reaches its climax in the project for the new Marinski Theatre in St Petersburg: the functional box-like theatre building in black marble (an 18th century spreaded palace) is cocooned by a freestanding irregular glaced structure, a "lamella". The aestheticization of the "skin" culminates in the so-called "sculptural Gehry buildings" where the outside shell enveloping the functional inside is no longer just a shell, but a meaningful sculpture of its own – like the Performing Arts Center in Bard College whose skin is a curved aluminum bug-cockroach form.

The central semiotic mystery of performance-arts venues is the mystery of this redoubling: why a house within a house, why does a container itself have to be contained? Does not this (sometimes freakish) display of inconsistency and excess not cry out loudly, functioning as a symptom – a message encoded in this mess? What if this redoubling renders the "contradiction" of public space which is privately controlled, of a sacred space of art which should be open to profane amusement? This brings us to the social antagonism these buildings try to resolve. On the one hand, to build a performing-arts venue rates "as a holy grail for architects": "Unlike the more conventional types of buildings, such as offices, housing and even civic architecture, which have to conform to the streetscape, a performing-arts venue can afford to be bold and unusual, to stand out." However, this space for creative freedom is counteracted by the demand for the building's multi-functionality – venue managers cannot "simply rely on performances themselves to provide a sufficient attraction; the building must create an 'experience' and a 'sense of place' for its increasingly demanding audience. It is with such intangibles that events can really win against home entertainment. Thought must be given to all aspects of a visit, from the foyers and bars to the facilities and ease of access." This demand, however, is not merely financial but profoundly ideological – it reflects a "cultural tension":

The perception that public funds are being spent on 'elitist' buildings has always been an Achilles heel for these projects, leaving them open to attacks from all quarters, and in today's more transparent and politically correct society it is the issue of inclusion more than any other that has influenced the design of contemporary performing spaces. As a result, the performing-arts venue has had to be redefined for the twenty-first century. The new generation of buildings must be part of the public realm, with access to only the core areas being restricted by the requirement for a ticket. These venues include public activities within and around the complex, attracting a wider range of visitors.

This constant effort to counteract the threat of "elitism" signals a series of oppositions with which performance-arts buildings deal: public/private, open/restrained, elite/popular… – all variations on the basic motif of class struggle (which, we are told, no longer exists in our societies). The space of these oppositions delineates the problem to which performance-arts buildings are solutions.

So how does the anti-elitist architecture of performance-arts venues fit these coordinates? Its attempt to overcome elitist exclusivity fails, since it reproduces the paradoxes of the upper-class liberal openness – its falsity, the failure to achieve its goal, is the falsity and limitation of our tolerant liberal capitalism. The effective message of the "political unconscious" of these buildings is democratic exclusivity: they create a multi-functional egalitarian open space, but the very access to this space is invisibly filtered and privately controlled. In more political terms, performance-arts venues try to enact civic normality in a state of emergency (exception): they construct an "open" space which is cocooned, protected and filtered. (This logic is brought to extreme in shopping malls in some Latino-American countries, well protected by security personnel armed with machine guns.) Their "openness" is as fake as the "production process" artificially staged in some food stalls in shopping malls where food or fruit juice is prepared right in front of the customer's eyes.

As such, performance-arts venues are utopian spaces which exclude junkspace: all the foul-smelling "leftovers" of the city space. To use a term coined by Deleuze, a contemporary big city is a space of "disjunctive inclusion": it has to include places whose existence are not part of its "ideal-ego," i.e., which are disjoined from its idealized image of itself. The paradigmatic (but by far not the only) such place are slums (favelas in Latin America), places of spatial deregulation and chaotic mixture, of architectural "tinkering" /bricolage/ with found materials. (It would have been really interesting to study in detail big suburban slums as an architectural phenomenon with a wild aesthetic of its own.)

This brings us to what is false about the anti-elitism of performance-arts venues: it is not that they are secretly elitist, it is their very anti-elitism, its implicit ideological equation of great art with elitism. Difficult as it may sometimes be for the broad public to "get into" Schoenberg or Webern, there is nothing "elitist" about great art – great art is by definition universal-emancipatory, potentially addressing us all. When, in "elite" places like the old Met in New York, upper classes were meeting for an opera performance, their social posturing was in blatant contradiction with the works shown on the stage – to see Mozart and the rich crowd as belonging to the same space is an obscenity. There is a well-known story from the early years of the Met when a high society lady, one of the opera's great patrons, arrived late, half an hour into the first act; she demanded that the performance be interrupted for a couple of minutes and the light turned so that she could inspect the dresses of other ladies with her binoculars (and, of course, her demand was granted). If anything, Mozart belonged to the poor in the upper stalls who spent their last dollars to see the opera. Far from making the exclusive temple of high art more accessible, it is the very surrounding of expensive cafeterias etc. which is effectively exclusive and "elitist." Recall what Walter Benjamin wrote about the Garnier opera palace in Paris: the true focus of the opera is not the performance hall but the wide oval staircase on which high society ladies display their fashion and gentlemen meet for a casual smoke – this social life was the true focus of opera life, "what it really was about." In the terms of Lacan's theory, if the play on stage was the enjoyment which made the public come, the social game which went on on the staircase before the performance and during the intermissions was the fore-play which provided the plus-de-jouir, the surplus-enjoyment making it worthwhile to come there. (Bringing this logic to its absurd extreme, one can imagine a building which would consist only of a gigantic circular staircase, with elevators taking us to the top, so that what is usually just a means, a path to the true goal, would become the main purpose – one goes to such a building to take a slow walk down the stairs… Does the Guggenheim Museum in New York not come pretty close to it, with the art exhibits reduced to de facto decorations destined to make the long walk more pleasant? – Incidentally, for the same reason, I find skiing stupid: why climb to the top of a hill just in order to slide down to the starting point? Is it not better to stay down and, say, read a good book?) And the same also holds for today's performance-arts venues – the truth of their democratic anti-elitism is the cocooning protective wall of the "skin."

Is there a way out of this deadlock? There is an interesting new phenomenon which emerges with this assertion of the gap between skin and structure – an unexpected interstitial space. Let me take the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia: its two halls are like "two jewels in a glass case," covered by a gigantic roof: arching over all the structures is "the vast vaulted roof of folded steel and glass creating a spectacular indoor-outdoor experience." Beneath the vault, on the top of the boxes, there are terraces with greenery, located in this space between inside and outside. There are furthermore open entries on both sides, "creating a sheltered extension of the sidewalk outside, and blurring the distinct between the city and the outside." This "open space inside," this outside which is inside, open to access, is full of cafes, free puppet shows, etc. The same holds for the Esplanade National Performing Arts Centre in Singapore: above the buildings there is a giant metal-class round half-ball, fish-like "skin", a "buffer zone, or bio-climactic environment, that would moderate the climate between the fully conditioned and sealed environments of the two major black-box performance spaces and the ever-changing external environment." This "interstitial space" opened up by the "disconnection between skin and structure" plays a crucial role: "For many, the real magic of this building is the dramatic sense of place in the 'leftover' spaces between the theatres and the enclosure. The curvaceous shapes of these public areas are the by-products of two separate design processes – those of the acoustic- and logistic-driven performing zones,

and the climactic- and structure-driven envelope." Is this space which offers not only exciting viewing areas of inside and outside, but also hidden corners to stroll or rest, not a potential utopian space?

The notion I propose here is ex-aptation, introduced by Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin: it refers to features that did not arise as adaptations through natural selection but rather as side effects of adaptive processes and that have been co-opted for a biological function. What should draw our attention here is that Gould and Lewontin borrowed the architectural term "spandrel" (using the pendentives of San Marco in Venice as an example) to designate the class of forms and spaces that arise as necessary byproducts of another decision in design, and not as adaptations for direct utility in themselves. In architecture, the prototypical spandrel is the triangular space "left over" on top, when a rectangular wall is pierced by a passageway capped with a rounded arch. By extension, a spandrel is any geometric configuration of space inevitably left over as a consequence of other architectural decisions. Say, the spaces between the pillars of a bridge can subsequently be used by homeless persons for sleeping, even though such spaces were not designed for providing such shelter. And as the church spandrels may then incidentally become the locus for decorations such as portraits of the four evangelists, so anatomical spandrels may be co-opted for uses that they were not selected for in the first place.

Are, then, – back to my main line – the "interstitial spaces" opened up by the "disconnection between skin and structure" in performance-arts venues not such spandrels, functionally empty spaces open for exaptation? The struggle is open here – the struggle for who will appropriate them. These "interstitial spaces" are thus the proper place for utopian dreaming – they remind us of architecture's great politico-ethical responsibility: much more is at stake in design than it may appear. Recall William Butler Yeats' well-known lines: "I have spread my dreams under your feet, / Tread softly because you tread on my dreams." They refer also to architecture, so my warning to architecture is: when you are making your plans, tread softly because you tread on the dreams of the people who will live in and look at your buildings.