

## **On Power in Architecture #2: A Phenomenological Perspective**

**International Symposium**

**13 September 2018, 10:00–16:00**

**Venue: Museum of Architecture and Design, Ljubljana**

**Speakers:** Andrew Benjamin, Dean Komel, Jeff Malpas, Luka Skansi, Peter Trawny

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### **ABSTRACTS**

**Dean Komel**

#### **A PHENOMENOLOGICAL SKETCH OF THE ORIGIN OF ARCHITECTURAL WORK AND THE QUESTION OF POWER**

The relation between architecture and power seems to offer itself in an immediate way. However, the question arises: What kind of power do we have in mind when we connect it with architecture? Is this political, religious, economical, or another kind of social power? Or should we assume that architecture has to do with some, even more original, power that concerns the *arche of the world* itself? This “arche of the world” is the central theme of phenomenological philosophy as initiated by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century.

I would like to sketch a possible phenomenological approach to the problem of “power within architecture”. A “sketch” can be understood as the key element of architectural praxis itself. On this basis, we can consider the question of whether and how architectural praxis can play a critical role in addressing different positions of social power, rather than finding self-satisfaction as their subservient toy.

**Andrew Benjamin**

#### **THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE COUNTER-MEASURE**

Power in architecture has a number of registrations. In this instance, the operation of power cannot be separated from the conceptualisation of space. Space is constituted by the operative presence of power relations. However, the conceptualisation of space remains merely sociological, and not architectural, unless it is linked to strategies for design. Such strategies need to be evaluative as much as they are creative.

What then opens up the possibilities for design? From one position, power is either reinforced, from another, there can be attempts to distance its hold. The former links creation to iterative processes in which what are repeated are the pre-existing orders of power. *New Urbanism* and *Parametricism* coincide at this precise point. As a result, the deferral of power’s repetition demands another thinking of repetition. The argument is that this deferral involves what Walter Benjamin names the “destructive character”. The “destructive character” is the oppositional architect. Another measure is present. Hence there can be an architecture of the *counter-measure*.

Within the creations prompted by “destruction”, there is a reiteration of the architectural. Building and designing continue. And yet, for there to be an undoing of power, there has to be an inter articulation of repetition and autonomy. The latter will be addressed in terms of *autonomy-within-relationality*; this conception of autonomy allows for a different outcome to processes of judgement and possibilities for design. What might be occasioned is an architecture beyond nihilism.

**Jeff Malpas**

#### **SPATIALISING DESIGN: ARCHITECTURE IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL CAPITALISM**

Architecture has always stood in an important relation to power – not only because of the way governments, organisations and individuals have used built form to express and reinforce their own attempts to exert and maintain control, but because, in a deeper sense, the built forms of a society are the

very forms in which the structure of power, understood as that which is productive of differentiation and order, is materialised.

The relation between architecture and power appears in two ways. In one, it concerns the question of the nature of this materialisation, whether in general or in particular cases, and, since architecture can be said to name such materialisation, this also involves the nature of architecture as built form. In another, it concerns the question of how architecture as a practice participates in this materialisation – how it participates in the materialisation that is architecture as built form (which also casts the relation between architecture and power in a political and ethical light). Materialisation, of course, cannot be understood apart from notions of space and place, especially in a contemporary world dominated by a spatialised mode of ordering that is so much a part of technological capitalism. Today, the question of the relation between architecture and power is then the question as to the character of this spatialised materiality – the nature of its realisation in architecture and the extent to which architecture contributes to it.

**Luka Skansi**

### **THE POWER OF TALENT: “GOOD OLD” ARCHITECTURE IN SOCIALIST YUGOSLAVIA**

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Yugoslavia experienced a period of great architecture. The design strategies and languages which characterise different architectural projects demonstrate substantial differences between individual architects, architectural schools and cultures. One may even say that the most qualifying common characteristic of post-war Yugoslav architecture was, in fact, its heterogeneity.

This paper aims to discuss this heterogeneous adventure and to analyse the aspects of Yugoslav architectural practice through the example of one specific typology: monuments built to commemorate the World War II battles and genocides that occurred during the Nazi-Fascist occupation of former Yugoslavia.

The themes of “power in architecture” and “phenomenology in architecture” will therefore be discussed through this specific case study.

**Peter Trawny**

### **THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS: THE FAVELAS OF RIO DE JANEIRO**

One of the prejudices of architecture is that mostly or even only monumental buildings represent power (cf. Deyan Sudjic: *The Edifice Complex: How the Rich and Powerful Shape the World*). This idea is already influenced by a certain tradition of the overwhelming and the sublime: Big monuments are powerful – actually a banality. In this view, political and economical power has been realising its intrinsic self-understanding since the Egyptian pyramids. But the presence of poverty and social exclusion are even more telling, because they begin to determine a city's situation.

In Rio de Janeiro every tourist immediately remarks and feels the presence of the so called *Favelas* (today, the term *Comunidade* shall replace the old term). The topography of the city (many hills) enables a certain architecture, in which the houses of the poor dominate the houses of the middle-class. Also the traffic-situation, etc., depends on the location (and the cooperation) of those politically powerless neighbourhoods. My paper shall elaborate this situation for another understanding of power in architecture.

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### **AUTHORS**

**Andrew Benjamin** is a professor of philosophy and humanities at Kingston University in London. For the last 14 years, he has taught at the University of Technology in Sydney where he currently holds the position of Distinguished Professor of Architectural Theory. Prior to that he taught for almost 20 years at the Architectural Association in London. His publications which touch on architecture, art history and philosophy include: *Architectural Philosophy* (Continuum, 2001); *Style and Time* (North Western University Press, 2006); *Writing Art and Architecture* (Re:press Books, 2010); *Architectural Projections*

(RMIT Press, 2012); *Art's Philosophical Work* (Rowman and Littlefield International, 2015). He is currently working with Gerard Reinmuth in an ongoing studio investigation of relational architecture.

**Dean Komel** is a professor of contemporary philosophy and philosophy of culture at the Department of Philosophy (Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana), the head of research activities at the Institute for Humanities Nova revija (since 2005) and the president of the Phenomenological Society of Ljubljana (since 1996). He has published his numerous scientific works in prominent journals and book series for phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy and was the initiator of several humanistic institutions within the international and Slovenian scientific community. As a guest professor, he has lectured at many universities across the world. He is the member of several editorial and scientific boards of journals for philosophy and culture and the organiser of more than fifty international scientific conferences.

**Jeff Malpas** is an Australian philosopher and, currently, a Distinguished Professor at the University of Tasmania in Hobart. Known for his work across the analytic and continental traditions, Malpas has also been at the forefront of contemporary philosophical research on the concept of place. He has published several decisive books on space, place and landscape, such as: *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (MIT Press, 2007); *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Routledge, 2nd edn, 2018); *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place: Explorations in the Topology of Being* (MIT Press, 2012). He also edited several publications, such as *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks* (MIT, 2016); *The Intelligence of Place* (Bloomsbury, 2015); *The Place of Landscape: Concepts, Contexts, Studies* (MIT Press, 2012); and *Towards a Philosophy of the City* (Rowman and Littlefield, forthcoming).

**Luka Skansi** is an architectural historian and assistant professor at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. He holds a master of science in architecture from IUAV (Venice) and a doctoral degree from the School for Advanced Studies in Venice. His research interests include Italian architecture and engineering of the 20th century, Russian and Soviet architecture, the architecture in ex-Yugoslavia. Recently, he co-curated the exhibition *Streets and Neighbourhoods* on Slovenian architect Vladimir Braco Mušič (MAO Ljubljana, 2016) and participated in the 2014 Venice Biennale (section "MondoItalia"). He is a member of the curatorial board of the exhibition *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* (MoMA, New York, 2018).

**Peter Trawny**, philosopher and Heidegger-editor, teaches philosophy at the Bergische University Wuppertal. His main writings include: *On Freedom: Technology. Capital. Medium* (Bloomsbury, 2017); *Heidegger and the Myth of a Jewish World-Conspiracy* (English translation, University of Chicago Press, 2015). Forthcoming: *Heidegger Fragmente: Eine philosophische Biographie* (S. Fischer).

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