

The Inner-Outer and the Tickling Object

"Recall the great projects of public buildings in the Soviet Union of the 30s, which put on the top of a flat multi-story office building a gigantic statue of the idealized New Man or a couple: in the span of a couple of years, the tendency to flatten more and more the office building (the actual working place for the living people) became clearly discernible, so that it changed more and more into a mere pedestal for the larger-than-life statue. Does this external, material feature of architectural design not render visible the "truth" of the Stalinist ideology in which actual, living people are reduced to instruments, sacrificed as the pedestal for the specter of the future New Man, an ideological monster which crushes under his feet actual living men?"

The paradox is that were anyone in the Soviet Union of the 30s to say openly that the vision of the Socialist New Man was an ideological monster squashing actual people, they would have been immediately arrested - it was, however, allowed, encouraged even, to make this point via architectural design"¹

Introduction

Zizek's quote is a beautiful meditation on the potential of architecture to make explicit ideas that cannot be accessed via other methods. However, the idea of a cohesive culture upon which Zizek's example has been based has become uncertain - in the sense that in our globally interconnected reality, the very idea of culture as a stable, shared condition is fundamentally questionable. Culture - for those that are internet-connected and able to take advantage of jet travel - is a radically transformed condition and can now be individually constructed according to constellations of Facebook friends, Skype contacts and Twitter followers. What your neighbour does in these conditions can often be simply a coincidence of geography and may mean very little in terms of your own cultural context.

Given this, culture might now be understood as constellational and personal. However, it then follows that culture cannot be understood as a stable value set in designing. Rather, for each project a particular grouping of cultural constellations provides a specific condition that - while it might intersect and overlap with many adjacent cultural conditions - is none the less unique. These conditions provoke serious questions of architecture.

We contest that the constellational and variable nature of communal systems today requires architecture to engage us by means of personal experience, rather than in symbolic terms as illustrated by Zizek's example. In this context, the difference between the subject (the person) and the object (the building) can be described in the difference between two verbs: to subject oneself and to object.² Describing the difference in this way establishes that the object (the building) is not a mute and passive actor - rather, the object acts. If we understand the architectural moment as that in which object (the building) acts on the subject (the occupant), we can say, in Žižekian terms, that the object tickles the subject.³ The architectural question then is how to do the tickling? How can architecture burst into our experiencing of the world other than as a simple material engagement?

Our view is that this tickling occurs in three ways. Firstly, there is the direct experience of the object (phenomenological). Secondly, there is the way that this direct experience is registered in psychological terms. Finally, there is the way in which, at the surface of the building, the logic of the inner and outer might be bought together to have a political effect. The result is a dynamic sociospatial model in which the personal, the social, and the political operate in constellational ways and in which the physical and material world is complicit.

¹ Žižek, Parallax Conference Paper, Melbourne, 2009

² Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p 17.

³ Žižek's proposition of the 'ticklish subject' is met with the question 'what tickles the ticklish subject?' to which he replies 'the tickling object'. Ibid. p 17.

Elements: The Inner, Outer and Poche

Before expanding on this triad of psychoanalysis, politics and phenomenology, it is important to briefly outline the specific architectural elements being addressed in this workshop – that is the inner and outer surfaces, as two boundaries of a space called the poche.

For TERROIR, Andrew Benjamin's writing on the surface has been instructive in this regard. In his essay, *Surface Effects: Borromini, Semper, Loos*, Benjamin responds to renewed interest in the surface (due in part to the operation of contemporary software packages such as Rhino and Maya and their ability to generate complex surfaces) by developing a theory of the surface. This theory works along a historical trajectory provided by the three practitioners who give the essay its name.

The most potent passages in Benjamin's essay occur in his writing about Loos. In relation to Villa Müller, Benjamin notes that:

"The silence of the exterior cannot be enforced. It has an ineliminable potential. What this means is that the interior's presence can be described as functionally indifferent to the exterior of the building. Not only does this create two different surfaces – surfaces held by the literal wall though not reducible to it – it also allows those surfaces programmatic possibilities that are capable of a relationship of indifference."⁴

Benjamin further expands on how this "indifference" works as follows:

The other sense in which the Haus is the work of a surface is the façade. While it is initially only of minor interest to recall the fact that the interior of the building is not legible from the exterior, that observation takes on a different quality when it is used as evidence for the indifference that defines the relationship between the interior and exterior surfaces. Part of the building's productive potential lies in the way it can be conceptualised as the site of two surfaces whose operation defines its architectural presence.⁵

This idea of the house as the site of two surfaces is important. It allows us to understand buildings not as "objects" but as the location of two surfaces which are put to work. With this understanding, we can find a path out of the current obsession with novelty and effects and consider the potential for architecture to change the way we engage with each other and our surrounding context.

Benjamin talks of "indifference" between inner and outer at Villa Müller. However, there is not a dialectical split between the two, in our view. Benjamin's position does not account for the temporal unfolding of the house, its moments of concealment and revealing - a sequence by which the inhabitant comes to know something of the house that is not knowable by any other means. This happens through discovery of things partially revealed.

For example, at the front door a seat unfolds from the interior such that interior and exterior are in fact not kept as discreet conditions. Further, the interior contains further interiors that are discovered through similar acts of partial revealing - for example in the way that the lady's parlour allows a view into the main living space. It is in this palpable moment, the temporal and spatial revelation of the house that another kind of surface condition emerges.

⁴ Benjamin, Andrew. *Surface Effects: Borromini, Semper, Loos*. The Journal of Architecture, 2006.

⁵ Benjamin, Andrew. *Surface Effects: Borromini, Semper, Loos*. The Journal of Architecture, 2006.

Poche

The poche is a condition that is active in the idea of the inner and outer surface and the indeterminacy between them.

In architecture, poche has historically referred to the space between the inner lining and outer cladding of a building. Differences between the organization of the inner and outer (due to competing contextual and programmatic concerns) have resulted in surplus space, usually rendered in black on traditional architectural drawings. The most common experience of this space in its historical context might be the spiral stair in a church that rises to the tower or roof, and which is usually located inside a column or wall thickening.

Benjamin introduces poche as the third element which, along with the inner and outer, comprise Haus Müller:

If the exterior and the initial interior surfaces are viewed as two surfaces held in place by the same structural element, then it can be argued that there are two possible wall effects realised by the same literal wall. In other words, there are three interrelated elements. Once the productive potential of the possibility is taken up, the relationship between these three elements becomes a site of investigation and eventual experimentation.⁶

Nowdays, poche has been reduced to an instrument that provides for the passage of excrement, water, and power networks in the narrow spaces between walls and floors such that the potential of this space is now rarely realized. Žižek notes this in humorous terms:

"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."⁷

But taken as a potential space as opposed to pure service routes, poche becomes the space where the indeterminacy or incommensurability between inside and outside is manifest in very particular ways.

Indeterminacy and the Tickling Object

Indeterminacy

If the relationship between the inner and the outer in Villa Müller is not one of indifference, what is it? We posit the idea that the relationship is one of indeterminacy. Indeterminacy is important as a concept as it provides a critical means of poetic engagement with the inner and outer, and, most importantly, a means of continually opening up the project, of ensuring that it is never "resolved" or completely clear.

Marcelo Stamm has written about TERROIR's use of indeterminacy:

"In general and abstract terms, the grammar which is established by TERROIR architecture is that of indeterminacy. Indeterminacy . . . must not be misunderstood as vagueness, a lack of determinedness or sharpness. The term rather refers to the fact that human architectural action serves as the medium to manifest and expose antagonisms. The claim is that TERROIR architecture manifests clarity and obscurity, transparency and opacity, enigmaticity and perspicuity. The term 'indeterminate' does not stand on the side of 'obscure', 'opaque' or 'enigmatic'. It is rather a meta-concept that embraces the two poles of the logical space and requires both

⁶ Benjamin, Andrew. *Surface Effects: Borromini, Semper, Loos*. The Journal of Architecture, 2006.

⁷ Žižek, Slavoj. *Parallax Conference Paper*, Melbourne, 2009.

logical extremes in order to operate. TERROIR architecture works because it allows for this constitutive indeterminacy to manifest itself in the mode of genuine humane action"⁸

The incompleteness that is at work both in our own work and in Loos' Villa Müller allows for an endless future invention, a kind of continuing open project rather than closing the architecture down to a finite condition. The concept of a controlled indeterminacy is critical for us as it allows for continual acts of rediscovery within repeated experience⁹.

The Tickling Object

In the introduction discussed the architectural moment as that in which object (the building) acts on the subject (the occupant), such that, in Žižekian terms, that the object tickles the subject.¹⁰ The architectural question then was how to do the tickling? The idea of controlled indeterminacy as outlined above is the means via which we seek to generate the "tickling" effect proposed by Zizek. Zizek himself refers to the concept of a "controlled indeterminacy" between the inner spatial organization and outer surface.

This idea of indeterminacy also suggests a non-conclusive relation between the two which builds upon the concept of indifference as discussed by Benjamin. What we are saying here is that while Benjamin describes the two surfaces as indifferent, the very nature of the inner-outer relationship is that they exist with awareness of each other and as such have an inconclusive relationship that manifests in the surface. This inconclusiveness can be understood as a series of questions or provocations. Thus, in Zizek's terms, an *expressive correspondence* between the inside and the outside of a building shifts towards a radical *incommensurability* between the two.

The inner outer in action: phenomenology, politics and psychoanalysis

As discussed in the introduction, our view is that this "tickling" occurs in three ways. Firstly, there is the direct experience of the object (phenomenological). Secondly, there is the way that this direct experience is registered in psychological terms. Finally, there is the way in which, at the surface of the building, the logic of the inner and outer might be bought together to have a political effect.

Phenomenology

There is a significant phenomenological tradition in Scandinavian architecture. In recent history, Steen Eiler Rasmussen's writing and teaching in the post-war period was critical. He taught that phenomenology was fundamental to architectural understanding and design. Rasmussen noted that "it is not enough to *see* architecture; you must experience it." Following from Rasmussen, the Norwegian, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and Finn, Juhani Pallasmaa, have all added significantly to the canon in regard to architecture and phenomenology.

We believe that a phenomenological understanding is a critical part of the concept of the inner and outer given its focus on direct experience. For example, Zizek considers the incommensurability

⁸ Stamm, Marcello. Essay in TERROIR: Cosmopolitan Ground (S Balmforth and G Reinmuth eds), DAB DOCS, Sydney, 2007, p140.

⁹ The philosophical principle of wonder has been useful in determining this position. See for example Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Žižek's proposition of the 'ticklish subject' is met with the question 'what tickles the ticklish subject?' to which he replies 'the tickling object'. Ibid. p 17.

between outside and inside as a transcendental *a priori* and discusses it in phenomenological terms:

"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."¹¹

When this concept is expanded to include architecture, Žižek refers to TERROIR's project at Peppermint Bay, noting that:

"In a large hall, we see the big ancient tree on the grass just outside the building through the windowpane which covers the entire wall and whose zig-zag form vaguely fits the shape of the tree. What we see through the windowpane (the tree, but also grass and water in the background) is an attractive scene of natural landscape - however, one should never forget that we see it as such from the inside of the building, through a frame. We thus have to distinguish between two outsides, the direct outside (the tree seen directly from the grass outside) and the inside-outside (the outside seen from inside). The two are not the same: in the second case, the outside is no longer simply the encompassing unity which contains the inside, but is simultaneously enclosed by the inside (or, one might say, nature is enclosed by culture)."¹²

Thus Žižek talks of the phenomenological experience of the inner and outer as is critical in terms of our connection with the world. The point of his discussion of Peppermint Bay is not that there is a tree to experience. The tree was always there. Rather, via the engagement of a room within the building and this tree, a heightened sensory experience and thus a heightened engagement with the tree are possible.

Politics

Alejandro Zera-Polo has discussed the value of direct experience in political terms. He compares the old radical politics - tending to act as a single agency with the goal to undermine "the system" - with current efforts to enact a redistribution of power work at a sub-political level of local interventions:

"Instead of resorting to predefined and all-encompassing political ideologies or utopian references to frame the practices of architecture, we aim to map possible correlations between architectural strategies and political effects in order to mobilize the discipline on a sub-political level. The question now is not whether certain architecture is aligned to the right, to the left or to a certain political party - as in earlier embodiments of architectural politics - but rather what architectural strategies may trigger effects on the distribution of power."

Alejandro Zera Polo considers that it is the outer - the building envelope - where these political strategies might be put into practice. He defines the "envelope" as the membrane which separates the Inside of a building from its' Outside.ⁱ As such, envelope (the outward appearance of a building volume) is the oldest and most primitive architectural element which materializes the division between exterior and interior and is therefore automatically charged *politically*. He notes that:

"... it is vital to produce an updated politics of architecture in which the discipline is not merely reduced to a representation of ideal political concepts, but conceived as an effective tool for change."

With these comments Zera-Polo reveals a similar concern to ours that a symbolic means of engagement lacks potency given contemporary constellational culture. He also shares Benjamin's

¹¹ Žižek, Slavoj: *Parallax Conference Paper*, Melbourne, 2009.

¹² Žižek, Slavoj: *Parallax Conference Paper*, Melbourne, 2009.

interest in the envelope as something which “does work” and exerts more than a representational power.

Zaera Polo's position has arisen from his resignation to the fact that much of the building interior is now determined by pragmatic demands and pressures from a range of experts who have come to occupy the space traditionally reserved for the architect. Zaera-Polo has suggested that the envelope can function as a potential space of freedom, of aesthetic autonomy, purveying its own message:

“While most other aspects of the architectural project are now in control of other agents (e.g. project managers, specialist contractors) that ensure the efficiency of the project delivery, the increasing facelessness of the client gives architects license to invent the building's interface. The envelope has become the last realm of architectural power, despite the discipline's inability to articulate a theoretical framework capable of structuring its renewed importance. Mobilizing a political critique of the envelope capable of addressing its multiple attachments and complexities may enable us to frame architecture not merely as a representation of the interests of a client, of a certain political ideology or an image of utopia, but as an all-too-real, concrete, and effective political agency able to assemble and mediate the interests of the multiplicities that converge on the architectural project.”¹³

One can take this view as defeatist – that we as architects are now relegated to the “outer” only, or can consider this a radical new mode of engagement with commercial architectural practice. Either way, Zaera-Polo's position on the inner is not of any consequence for this paper. Rather, it is his specific discussion of the potential of the envelope as the space of political engagement in contemporary practice which is of interest. It is also the space where political issues – access, sustainability and image – will be made evident. In addition, and of great importance to us, the exterior is the space where an image can be placed in context – thus asking questions of that context and starting the “tickling” upon which the effectiveness of the object relies.

Psychoanalysis

For this final part of our triad of the inner and outer, we turn to psychoanalysis and in particular the research of Philip Fisher and his *Aesthetics of Wonder and Rare Experiences*. Fisher explains the power of wonder as follows:

“The experience of wonder no less than that of the sublime makes up part of the aesthetics of rare experiences. They are both experiences tied to the visual taken in a deeply intellectual way; they both lead us back to ourselves and reflection and on our human powers.”¹⁴

This idea of reflection upon our human powers quickly leads to a search for understanding of our condition, to philosophy:

“Wonder is . . . the famous Socratic moment of knowing one's ignorance, knowing that one does not know. Socrates . . . says that . . . this ‘feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy . . .”¹⁵

This idea of wonder is significant in the context of the inner-outer as it helps us complete our answer to the question - how can the object/building elicit a response? How can we have people engage with it in a personal way which causes them to ask questions about their world?

¹³ Zaera-Polo, Alejandro. *The Politics of the Surface*, xxxxx. 2008.

¹⁴ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). Page 1

¹⁵ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). Page 10

It is our view that it is important in our globalised condition to articulate what has previously been intrinsic and intuitive, because we no longer share a collective spatial intelligence. Our argument is that a reflection upon intuitive experience increases rather than demystifies that experience. Fisher himself notes that “wonder is thus a returning, sometimes with a sudden shock, to the world to which we already belong – it is at this return that philosophy begins and to which it must always itself go back.”¹⁶

“The drive within wonder toward curiosity, questioning, and the search for explanation seems to involve no less than the religious move toward sign, history, memory, and meaning, a move away from the aesthetic experience itself, a passage from wonder to thinking.”¹⁷

It is worth dwelling on this nature of thinking and the thought processes and it helps us explain how an architectural work can stimulate this questioning of our world.

“The premise of wonder is that we live in a lawful world, one in which the laws of nature, no less than the extraordinary or singular events that seem at first exceptions to the laws and regularity of nature, provide pleasure. The experiential world in which wonder takes place cannot be made up of unordered, singular patches of experience. We wonder at which is momentary surprise within a pattern that we feel confident that we know. It is *extra* ordinary, the unexpected. For there to be anything that can be called “unexpected” there must first be the expected. In other words, years or even centuries of intellectual work must already have taken place in a certain direction before there can be a reality that is viewed as ordinary and expected. Only this makes possible the rare and privileged moment, against a normative frame, when the *extra* ordinary can take place and evoke wonder.”¹⁸

This means that we are not interested here in the shock of the new but a more intense and considered engagement which takes into account the existing context and our knowledge and experience of that context before acting.

The final question then is how one can elicit wonder through architecture. Fisher suggests that wonder and learning are tied by three things:

1. suddenness,
2. the surprise in the moment of first seeing; and
3. the visual presence of the whole object:

“For the full experience of wonder there must be no description beforehand that will lead us to compare what we actually experience with what we were told, or even with the level of expectation raised by the one who told us to close our eyes. The object must be unexpectedly, instantaneously seen for the first time.”¹⁹

Thus, the “poetics of wonder” occurs in the middle zone between the familiar and uninteresting and the unknowable or unthinkable. This poetics appears through the combination of the phenomenological experience of the inner-outer condition, the political potential within this condition of a building and the psychoanalytical impact of our experience of the poetic moment. The bringing together of the inner and outer in a single object surprises and intrigues or tickles the subject/viewer into looking at their world anew. **This studio proposes to use these three frames - psychoanalysis, politics and phenomenology - to frame the design process in search of such a poetic moment.**

¹⁶ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

¹⁷ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). Page 40.

¹⁸ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998). Page 57.

¹⁹ Philip Fisher, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Masterclass Structure

Project

We will select a project from the city of Aarhus which is both topical and complex and which is to be addressed by a strategy founded in the idea of the inner-outer or surface condition as it is understood in TERROIR.

Organisation

TERROIR works as a tri-polar collaboration. This concept is also employed at RMIT (where TERROIR-Director Richard Blythe is Head of School) in the teaching of architecture. The tri-polar idea is based on the concept that the act of design opens up in a moment of crisis – a crisis which occurs when, in this case three, alternate and strongly held views are brought together in the service of a project. Thus, as with contemporary society, the act of design itself is constellational and involves something new that emerges in the crisis of difference, the moving from frame to frame, and in the indeterminacy that results from the eternal failure to fully reconcile our condition. While this is in a sense a failure to totalize our condition it is also the agent of potential, the choric condition that opens up new worlds of possibility precisely because there is room to move within the non-coincident situation.

Following this structure, students will be divided into groups of three for the duration of the project. To further accentuate the moment of crisis and productive potential of this crisis, each group of three will be asked to look at the project through these three lenses:

- The political
- The phenomenal
- The psychoanalytic

This collaboration across three poles will work in many and varied ways. At times, all of you will take a different position. At other times, all of you will be looking together at “the political” for example and arguing within that position.

Content

The masterclass will attempt to provide an introduction to the concept of the inner-outer as used in our work and as outlined in this paper. These concepts and processes will be introduced via the following course content.

Phase 1: Introduction to Project

- Inner-Outer – a TERROIR’ history of the inner-outer;
 - Indeterminacy and the surface (Stamm and Benjamin)
 - Phenomenology (Zizek)
 - Politics (Zaera-Polo)
 - Psychoanalysis (Fisher)
- Introduction to the project and site
 - The brief will be presented

- The site will be visited and observations made about the context (adjacent buildings, history, future, economics, politics, literature, representation, social networks, landscape etc)
- The inner-outer will be discussed in the context of this information.

Phase 2: Defining the contexts of the project

Students will be asked to start working on the project by thinking about the three poles mentioned above. Students should work collectively as they argue through positions and then may work independently as they start to flesh some of them out.

The important thing is to complement the conversations with other activities, such as drawing, mapping, making models, looking for precedents (both inside and outside architecture). This work then provides the fuel for more conversations and reflections upon decisions made.

During this phase students are not to start designing the building per se, but to start designing what the project might be. You should work in argument and explorations to establish a start position for the design (phase 3). For the first critique then, student will be required to present their approach to the three positions in a short presentation that places what they have made/drawn/research at the centre of the discussions.

Phase 3: Project Conception

Having established the way you will address these three issues, and having produced work to explain and spatialise this, you can then start testing these propositions in terms of potential built responses.

Therefore, the presentation material for this critique should be models and drawings that extend the initial work toward propositions for what your built response might be.

Phase 4: Development

The critique for phase 3 will challenge and test your propositions to date. You will find that some of your propositions have worked more successfully than others. The weekend therefore is the time to respond to the Friday crit to arrive on Monday with a revised set of propositions about the project.

What is presented on this day will provide the framework for your resolution of the project in the final few days.

Phase 5: Resolution, Presentation and Exhibition

Student will then resolve the work and prepare it for final review.

At a final review, students will need to present their project and the work which led to this solution. Therefore, all the understandings of context which underpinned the approach need to be included in the final presentation. The presentation will take the form of an installation of drawings and models which best explain this individual logic and cohesive whole.

Program

Monday 12th Introduction to studio, introduction to concepts, introduction to site
Commencement of Step 2.
Tuesday 13th Step 2
Wednesday 14th Presentation by each group of Step 2 to start day. Commence Step 3
Thursday 15th Step 3
Friday 16th Step 3, presentation by each group of Step 3 results to end the day.
Saturday 17th Commence Step 4
Sunday 18th Step 4
Monday 19th Step 4, commencement of Step 5
Tuesday 20th Step 5
Wednesday 21st Step 5
Thursday 22nd Crits

Step 1 Introduction
Step 2 Exemplars
Step 3 Conception
Step 4 Development
Step 5 Resolution and Presentation

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