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Nika Grabar*

Architecture and the Distribution of the Sensible

Introduction

According to Jacques Rancière, some practices and knowledges can be studied in terms of the cartographies of the common worlds they imply. Engaging Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible, this article discusses architecture (along with discourses that produce knowledge of architecture) as one such practice. It raises the question of what role architecture – with its spatio-temporal presence and materiality, along with its forms and purposes – has in the production of social space and time. Following Rancière's understanding of the politics of aesthetics, it examines the different ways in which architecture creates a specific form of sensory experience related to the distribution of the sensible that constitutes a common world.

But in order to grasp the specificity of architecture – after all, Rancière develops his conception of aesthetic politics mainly in relation to artistic practices and discourses – the article opens with Theodor W. Adorno's reflections on architecture as a purposeful art. Adorno's critique of functionalism allows for a thorough rethinking of architecture by questioning the functions and purposes it accommodates as inscribed within social antagonisms. Adorno enables us to understand how architectural imagination includes but also surpasses purposefulness and its social dimension by producing a particular sense of space – an idea that can be compared to what Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible. While Adorno enables us to understand how the social is inscribed in architectural form, Rancière makes it possible to examine the different forms of aesthetic politics that architecture can employ in order to create a framework of a future common world.

With the aim of understanding how architecture can intervene in the dominant order of spatial planning and the real estate market today, we reconsider the aesthetic politics Rancière ascribes to the three "regimes of art" (the ethical, the

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representational, and the aesthetic) in relation to selected examples from architecture past and present, from the Looshouse to the Quinta Monroy housing estate project by the studio Elemental and Jean Nouvel's Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art.

Purposes, Irrationalities, and Contradictions

In one of his rare dealings with architecture, "Functionalism Today", Adorno wrote:

> The work of an artist, whether or not it is directed toward a particular purpose, can no longer proceed naively on a prescribed path. It manifests a crisis, which demands that the expert – regardless of his prideful craftsmanship – go beyond his craft in order to satisfy it.[1]

The text was written in 1965 as a presentation to the German *Werkbund*. Adorno's critical position was based on observing the reconstructions of the post-WWII world and his belief that the crucial dilemmas that brought about the devastation of war were not being addressed. This was also true for architectural (re)constructions. In Adorno's critical re-evaluation of the field, architecture was positioned within the broader social domain of the post-WWII public space. He called for a rethinking of city planning, the principles of reconstruction, and by the same token, raised the question of the existence or non-existence of a collective social subject for the benefit of whom such planning was supposed to be carried out.

In order to address these issues and the crisis the architectural profession found itself in, he highlighted the need to reconsider the double-faced character of architecture: on the one hand, architecture is an autonomous art form, and on the other, a functional object, a *purposeful art*.[2] Defining architecture as a purposeful art implies that there is an inherent link between architecture and social reality. When using the word architecture, there is always an implication of

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1 Theodor W. Adorno, "Functionalism Today", trans. J. Newman and J. Smith, in N. Leach (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London and New York, Routledge, 2005, p. 16.

2 *Ibid*., p. 6.

some kind of societal purpose, of a function the building is to perform. When it comes to design, the intended function of the edifice to be constructed is, in most cases, presented to architects in a simplified, abstract way. Planning a construction entails imagining and drawing the walls and roofs that delimit the areas in which certain activities will take place. In doing so, architects approach the problem with their own imagination and connect building-making to a vast history of architectural ideas. However, any social reality is full of antagonisms that cannot be resolved in the domain of architecture. Rather the opposite, architecture is conditioned precisely by these social antagonisms.

For Adorno, architecture thus clearly manifests a fundamental contradiction between society and "human productive energies."[3] While society develops them, it also chains people to the relations and conditions of production imposed upon them. Consequently, the people who constitute the productive energies become deformed according to their working conditions. If, on the other hand, functionalist architecture is understood in a purely objective manner (as in the New Objectivity movement, which Adorno criticised in his paper), its function appears purposeful only because the interpolation of architecture in the antagonistic socio-economic processes is not given proper consideration:

> Something would be purposeful here and now only if it were so in terms of the present society. Yet, certain irrationalities – Marx's term for them was *faux frais* – are essential to society; the social process always proceeds, in spite of all particular planning, by its own inner nature, aimlessly and irrationally. Such irrationality leaves its mark on all ends and purposes, and thereby also on the rationality of the means devised to achieve those ends.[4]

Function and Ornament

In "Functionalism Today", Adorno discussed the problems concerning functionalism in relation to the work of Adolf Loos, one of its protagonists both as an architect and a cultural critic. Loos is famous for his fierce critique of ornamentality in the name of function, even juxtaposing ornament and crime in the title of his best-known essay. However, Adorno drew attention to Loos's writings on

3 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Schönberg's music, which Adorno considered to be far from anti-ornamental. Adorno skilfully articulated the issues concerning the relation between function and ornamentality through a comparison between architecture and music, making visible how modern concepts developed in both fields. By referencing Schönberg's *First Chamber Symphony*, which Loos himself praised, Adorno pointed out that Schönberg's composition, recalling a central motif from Wagner's *Götterdaämmerung* and the theme from the First Movement of Bruckner's *Seventh Symphony*, actually created an ornamental theme. His observations thus show that the question of ornament was not obsolete in modern music, but became part of an inventive experimental approach, in this case "the model of the first extreme constructivist complex in modern music."[5] Consequently, it was possible to explore the manifold relationships of musical components going beyond the importance of the individual tone.[6]

One can observe similar architectural experimentations during the period. Modern architecture denounced the ornament but continued to employ craft and material in an ornamental way. Its form adapted to the new modes of production, while the configuration of the façades still echoed the tripartite division articulating the base, shaft, and capital, a method of visually organizing the exterior similar to the composition of a classical column. Interior space was reinvented through elements often designed with materials in ornamental fashion; these elements continued to be the carriers of spatial compositions that simultaneously opened the experience of form with transparency, reflections, light, etc. However, even though functionalism presupposed purpose as something self-evident, it was in fact already subdued in socio-economic antagonisms and the accompanying ideologies of usefulness, effectiveness, practicality, and the like.

Adorno also emphasised the contemporary "*Kunstgewerbe* religion," as he called it, which praised the so-called nobility of matter and inspired both architecture and autonomous art.[7] It inspired Schönberg to understand musical material as matter that could be recomposed and situated in a new structure. Similarly, in architecture, spatial compositions were reinterpreted within new methods of

5 *Ibid*., p. 7.
6 *Ibid*., p. 13.
7 *Ibid*., p. 7.

construction, while materials were crafted in a way that follows and articulates their own immanent form.

According to Loos, forms needed to be reinvented through the technological innovation of handicraft and not borrowed from art. This corresponded to the belief in a preconditioned connection between material and form, according to which the material, the substance itself, is already invested with meaning and bears with it its own adequate form. Adorno questioned this "cult of materials," which was, according to him, already denounced by industrially produced materials and other products.[8] Loos's functionalism could not escape the fact that decisions regarding the articulation of form and material are unavoidable. There are no pure functions, ornaments, or materials, as all are based on socio-economic conditions that affect perceptions and bodies and thus the sense of space created by the design.

Composers and architects in Loos's time could experiment with form autonomously to discover new constructions and expressions, but how these were received inevitably depended on the changing world and consequently on the changing sensibilities. It depended on how the public was ready to accept the "recombination" of the old in the new compositions and how the works could produce meaning by creating a sense of space and being purposeful. The physical properties of the material form were only a part of a more significant dilemma about how the sense of space was related to the social and spatial structures and conventions that conditioned its perception. Adorno wrote:

> The tone receives meaning only within the functional structure of the system, without which it would be a merely physical entity. Superstition alone can hope to extract from it a latent aesthetic structure. One speaks with good reason of a sense of space (*Raumgefühl*) in architecture. But this sense of space is not a pure, abstract essence, not a sense of spatiality itself, since space is only conceivable as a concrete space, within specific dimensions.[9]

A concrete physical space is, like sound, not an isolated aesthetic entity; it is a part of a town, city, and landscape. The sense of (architectural) space is condi-

8 *Ibid*.

9 *Ibid*., p. 13.

tioned by such surroundings. Likewise, in music the sensibility needed to hear the delicateness of a theme in a sonata is related to the structure of the musical composition, its history, and the everyday sounds the listener experiences in the background.

The Sense of Architectural Space

For Adorno, the main subject of discussion in "Functionalism Today" was the form of purposeful art and the way the social is inscribed in it. Architectural form uses its materiality to delimit space for a particular purpose. But, according to Adorno, this is not enough for "great architecture": the criterion that defines such greatness is the mandatory elevation of the sense of space beyond the realm of purposefulness with the use of architectural imagination.[10] Though the architectural form is inherent in its purpose, architectural imagination can elevate it from its domain. In doing so, architectural creativity can create a sense of space out of materiality and retroactively elucidate the complex relations of spatial production. Architectural form as such is accessible to the viewer not through the recognition of architectural standards and the social conventions they correspond to, but through the specific aesthetic experience it enables.

Adorno discussed Loos's texts, but his built work is worth reconsidering in the light of these questions, since the sense of space his buildings create speaks of an antagonistic world his architecture belongs to. Adorno was critical of Loos's writings, but in his architecture one can discern an elevation beyond socially prescribed purposes, although it is conditioned by them. This made his objects function differently from the then established norms of the architectural profession. His designs functioned in a subversive way.

Loos was and is today well known for his stripped-off facades and rich interiors. Encountering his white cube-like villas in the bourgeois residential surroundings must have been a perplexing experience at the time of their construction. The interiors were, on the contrary, playful with their use of space and warm, with decorative marble, wooden elements, and oriental rugs. Loos avoided historical ornaments; however, his interiors were still "decorated" with crafted materials. When applied, they had an ornamental effect.

[10] *Ibid*.

The Looshouse, his most controversial project with its bare façade, was built in front of one of the entrances to the Viennese imperial palace. He was heavily criticised for its non-ornamental and white design, and according to a well-known myth, the emperor always used an alternative exit so as not to face it. However, it was not all-white. The ground floor exterior was clad in green marble, the entrance was emphasised with Doric columns, and the interior was covered with wood. At the same time, mirrors alluded to the interior of a French department store. Instead of historicist or secession-like ornaments, Loos incorporated the column as a classical element into the exterior design to articulate the public space of the square the house was facing.

Not far from the Looshouse, Vienna's *Ringstrasse* replaced city walls with public parks and institutional buildings, including the imperial palace. The reconstruction lasted a few decades, spanning from the mid 19th century up to WWI. The representation of public institutions was based on historical styles alluding to the supposed meanings of past eras: the parliament as a Greek temple, the university as a renaissance palace, the town hall as a gothic cathedral, etc. The railroad connected outer districts of Vienna, which had previously functioned outside the centre, to the new emerging metropolis. The city expanded under the new conditions of capitalist production. The change in the material production of space simultaneously affected the relations of power and trade. The growing metropolis tied people to new production processes and, according to Adorno, "deformed" them according to the new working conditions.

Looking at the Looshouse today, it continues to convey the message of a critique of taste from more than one hundred years ago. Over time, the city centre has come under the regulations of historic preservation, attempting to freeze the aesthetic relations in space. The central vertical dominant of the inner city remained the church; the imperial palace was its major horizontal edifice monumentally facing the Ring and the centre. To understand the Looshouse entails understanding its position in the context of the then-growing metropolis, which outside the Ring included construction of "palaces for rent" decorated with ornamental historicist motifs.

Loos's critique of ornament, while applying the material in an ornamental fashion in its distinct location, is not merely a critique of décor, but of the emerg-

ing public space shaped by the new conditions of capitalist production and the tastes of the rising bourgeois society. This critique invented a particular form of aesthetic experience different from that which the dominant order was trying to establish. Its representation was a negation of the dominant architectural conventions of the time.

To experience Loos's villas as a shock, they had to be constructed in bourgeois neighbourhoods. Encountering his blank façade was a micro event in an urban stroll. The way he approached the design of forms ascribed new meaning to space, craft, and the material itself. It produced a new sense of reality – a reality conditioned by the irrationalities hidden by the capitalist society. These new surroundings, conditioned by new materials and industrial production, opened the doors to a new kind of criticism in art and architecture. They created a new public that dissentingly anticipated a new shared world, the form of which was retroactively connected to the sense of space it produced.

With this in mind, we can reconsider Loos's built work following Adorno's social and aesthetic reflections on architecture. According to Adorno, the social is not external to the aesthetic form, be it in the sphere of autonomous artworks or purposeful art. On the contrary, the social is always inscribed immanently into the form itself. This is why at the end of "Functionalism Today" he claims that even as a purposeful art, architecture "demands constant aesthetic reflection."[11] For Adorno, the inscription of the social into the autonomous form – as it is developed historically amidst social antagonisms – is the proper object of aesthetic analysis. This allows us to see how purposes could be elevated by great architecture and ultimately leads to the realisation that there can be no strict division between autonomous and purposeful art:

> The purpose-free (*zweckfrei*) and the purposeful (*zweckgebunden*) arts do not form the radical opposition which [Loos] imputed. The difference between the necessary and the superfluous is inherent in a work and is not defined by the work's relationship – or the lack of it – to something outside itself.[12]

[11] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[12] *Ibid*., p. 6.

Yet, Loos designed his project precisely around the tension between the necessary and the redundant immanent to form. His detailing of materials was rethought in relation to the experience of space defined by the architectural form he invented and not to the past styles and historicist motifs employed by other contemporary developments, and thus to something outside of the invented form itself. Nonetheless, the effect the form had on its public was unavoidably conditioned by the rapidly transforming world, including the expanding industrial production and the production of space appropriate to the needs of the emerging mass society.

Distribution of the Sensible

In order to think architecture socially and aesthetically at the same time, as Adorno does, we should first consider its role in the production of social space. The production of social space begins with planning infrastructure and the uses of buildings. It interpolates the natural environment in planning strategies and transforms landscapes according to the conditions and relations of production. The totality of the activities in the natural and social environments envisaged by architecture with delimited areas of different shapes and materials it designs corresponds to contemporary standards of how society is supposed to function. Yet, the sense of space that architecture introduces is not determined merely by social projections of space, even though they condition it. It is not identical to the social space it overlaps with, nor to the (natural) environment it might overlook or from which materials are gained for its construction.

The material presence of architectural form inevitably mediates a relationship between the environment and the social space-time in a particular way. What elevates the architectural experience beyond function is a sense of space pertaining to a specific type of fiction. It establishes an impression of a shared common world through the sense of space it creates. Here, following Rancière, I do not use the word fiction as the invention of an imaginary world, but as "the construction of a framework within which subjects, things, situations can be perceived as coexisting in a common world and events can be identified and linked in a way that makes sense. Fiction is at work whenever a sense of reality

must be produced."[13] Thus, what Adorno elaborated as a sense of space can be linked to Jacques Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible, which he describes as a "set of relationships between ways of being, seeing, thinking and doing which determines at once a common world and the way in which these or those subjects take part in it."[14]

We often think of artistic practices as establishing their own space-time, and the same can be said about architecture. The distribution of the sensible is present in architecture even before the lines of floor plans and sections are drawn on paper. It is imagined in the form of the presumed uses for which buildings are to be constructed. It is present in how different areas of physical space within the natural environment are planned to be used for food production, the excavation of materials, nature parks, industrial zones, or residential neighbourhoods, schools, and galleries. Furthermore, it is imagined how subjects will move between different activities in certain time intervals, how many years they will attend which institution, and what infrastructure is needed to make this possible. The transformations of land and (public) space are imagined via abstract diagrams and maps that make it possible to transfigure everyday environments according to fictitious conditions in line with contemporary theories of progress. This way of seeing space introduces a particular kind of environment in which activities are seen as purposeful only through the imaginary framework of productivity and profitability, but it does not guarantee a socially just and healthy environment for the future.

Consequently, the conception of space implied by the real estate investment market today does not produce a sense of a functioning common world. Although everything is planned, calculated and legally defined, a sense of reality, a sense of space that would amount to a common world is missing. Empty housing estates sold out before being finished, luxury housing situated next to favelas, spectacular buildings erected in times of humanitarian and environmental crisis – the fiction that produces this space has distorted our sense of reality. The imaginary distribution of the sensible that forms space in our daily

13 Jacques Rancière, *Modern Times: Essays on Temporality in Art and Politics*, Zagreb, Multimedijalni institut, 2017, p. 13.

14 *Ibid*., p. 12. See also Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. G. Rockhill, London and New York, Continuum, 2011, pp. 12–19.

lives is increasingly alien and destructive. A meaningful future seems absent from architecture, which seems to contribute to the space of conflict rather than producing a sense of a common world for emancipated communities.

The categories of time and temporality have disappeared from social questions and projections. Development revolves around the present moment, transience, consumption. Time, which plays a vital role in the distribution of the sensible, has become invisible in planning. Yet, it cannot be avoided as it is critical when considering the cyclical processes of the natural environment and human life. These processes are changing and remind us that we need to encapsulate reality differently. A fiction of a new common world that we could believe in has yet to be reinvented.

Aesthetic Politics

Rancière rarely mentions architecture in his writing, but let us consider his arguments on the politics of modernism in art before returning to the distribution of the sensible at work in architecture today. He maintains that the emergence of the autonomy of art was intrinsically linked to the anticipation of an emancipated community to come, which led to two opposing aesthetic politics. On the one hand, there was the aesthetic politics that equated transforming the forms of art with transforming the world. In this new, transformed world, art would no longer constitute a separate sphere of reality. On the other hand, there was the aesthetic politics that preserved the autonomy of art by rejecting all forms of compromise with the practices of power and the forms of the aestheticisation of life in the capitalist world.[15]

Rancière considers both kinds of aesthetic politics (building a new world and preserving the autonomy of art in the face of the capitalist world) to have been diluted by an ethical turn, which coincided with the end of the Cold War.[16] The first kind of aesthetic politics, which collapsed along with the Soviet dream, underwent a soft version of this ethical turn. This includes, for example, the architects and designers who aimed to revitalise communities by redesigning

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[15] Jacques Ranciere, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, trans. S. Corcoran, Cambridge and Malden, Polity Press, 2009, pp. 129–131.

[16] *Ibid.*

public spaces, or relational artists who made unusual interventions into city suburbs and landscapes.

The second aesthetic politics underwent a hard version of the ethical turn, which transformed the politics of aesthetic autonomy into ethics. The struggle to preserve autonomy made it possible to inscribe into artworks the unresolved contradiction between the aesthetic promise and the reality of an oppressive world. With the turn towards ethics, however, the promise of emancipation disappeared. This promise became interpreted as a lie from the perspective of the catastrophe – the concertation camp – that set the ultimate point of reference for any discourse on art in the irresolvable past event that casts a shadow on any political project in the future.

Modernism contains a contradiction "between two opposed aesthetic politics, two politics that are opposed but on the basis of a common core linking the autonomy of art to the anticipation of a community to come, and therefore linking this autonomy to the promise of its own suppression."[17] According to Rancière, the ethical turn – and not so-called postmodernism – signals the end of modernism, not as a trend or a style, but as a long-lasting contradiction of opposing aesthetic politics that stem from the same core. Rancière is consequently critical of the contemporary artistic dispositives since they refer – through the interpretive schemata of our experience – to a single ethical community in which the distinction between politics and justice can no longer be thought. In an ethical community, politics is no longer possible.

Similar arguments can be detected in architectural discourse. The most symbolic example of the failure of modernist aesthetic politics that can be understood as the point of reversal is probably the demolition of Pruitt-Igoe, a modernist housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972-1976. The project became infamous for its poverty, crime, and racial segregation soon after its completion in 1956. When the buildings were demolished they became a symbol of the failure of urban planning renewal, public-policy planning, and public housing. It also came to be seen as an indictment of architecture's modernist aspirations running contrary to "real-world" social development, making it clear that architecture, with its form alone, cannot provide solutions to political problems. Charles Jencks

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 128.

referred to the demolition as the moment when modernist architecture died.[18] The fate of modernist architecture was also referred to by Fredric Jameson, who acknowledged the importance of Jencks's work for having described the first signs and symptoms of postmodernism.[19] As is well known, the question of postmodernism was first raised precisely in the context of architecture.

The worlds of art and architecture are closely related. Both were affected by the postmodernist discourse, but due to its function, purpose, materiality, and large scale, architecture has wider social consequences in comparison to art. Autonomy in modernist architecture (as in art) was associated with the anticipation of an emancipated community to come. Its sense of space was conditioned by two imagined distributions of the sensible through which its content, materiality, and location were determined to correspond to either the Eastern or the Western "vision" of the future. If modernist architecture in socialist contexts was a material condition of a society supposedly transforming into its socialist future, modernist architecture, conditioned by capitalism, like in art, supposedly resisted forms of compromise with practices of power and the aesthetisation of life. Aesthetic politics was in both cases conditioned by the (spatial) planning of the state via its public institutions. In both cases, modernist architecture also renounced previous practices of representation. Formal concerns superseded stylistic and typological considerations. To achieve an appropriate sense of space, however, architects needed to meaningfully articulate both form and public space. For this reason, architectural modernism invented new details, elements, constructions, spatial compositions, materials, new senses of transparency, etc., to achieve a particular form of sensory experience. In doing so, it also created new conventions and rules on how to envisage form itself.

Even though the same principles of rethinking form in public space can be used today, the fall of the Berlin Wall created a new sense of reality that simultaneously reconditioned the distribution of the sensible. When the market-driven economy became the dominant perspective of "progress", the societal planning of post-socialist contexts dissolved, and their property underwent a process of wild privatisation. The fall of the socialist state in the "East" and the weakening

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18 Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, New York, Rizzoli, 1977, p. 9.

19 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, p. 62.

of the welfare state in the "West" consequently reconditioned spatial planning, while post-WWII development strategies persisted and depoliticised key questions regarding the post-socialist transformations. And it is in this context (in the context of the reimagined distribution of the sensible) that the established rules and conventions of architectural modernism today fail to create a sense of a credible new world. Consequently, architecture is repeatedly criticised as being too formal.

Architecture and its Discontents

The emerging problems brought about by the alien and destructive space produced by construction under the conditions of the market-driven economy have become challenging to address within the existing planning system. Since the issues are globally interconnected, an efficient systemic response in spatial planning would be difficult to achieve. Under such circumstances, what role does architecture play (it should be taken into consideration that architects only design a small percentage of the built environment), and which problems can it address by inventing new fictions that try to encapsulate reality differently? Taking the concept of the distribution of the sensible into account, let us reconsider Adorno's notion of great architecture, supposing that architectural imagination can elevate form from the domain of purpose by creating a sense of space out of materiality and elucidating the complex relations of spatial production.

After the disappointments with modernism and postmodernism, heroic architectural visions do not seem feasible. In the contemporary world, the role of the architect, like the role of architecture, has been radically transformed. Today, the critique of architecture regularly revolves around the figure of a star architect, or "starchitect". Although this critique most obviously refers to spectacular buildings, it can also refer to notable socially engaged projects, which is only one of many symptoms of the contemporary discontent in the field of architecture. One of the high-profile projects to mention in this regard is the Quinta Monroy housing estate by the studio Elemental in Iquique, Chile, built in 2003.

The architects were involved in planning a residential neighbourhood on the site of a favela and needed to provide housing for the one hundred families that lived there. The municipality provided the budget for the project, which allowed for the construction of 40 m^2-sized houses, while the site on its own was not big

enough to provide space for all the families without building higher than the ground floor. The residents threatened to go on a hunger strike if the plan of the architects was to design multiple-storey buildings, since high rise construction would not allow individual families to extend their apartments.[20]

The architects conceded that 40 m² per family was not enough for a decent family life. In a long participatory design process, they negotiated with the future residents that the project would nonetheless be built in three floors, but in a way that would allow the residents themselves to build extensions and double the area of their row houses. The design thus predicted an unplanned intervention, something that was yet to happen. The residents could produce the extensions with their own hands. Their interventions became an integral part of the project and are today visible on the façade.

Looking at the Quinta Monroy situation from outside architectural discourse, but through the lens of what Rancière calls the ethical indistinction, one can observe that with the participatory design process a consensus was achieved as regards how to construct the space. Consequently, the final process of participatory construction left no room for political disagreement concerning the most fundamental issue: how to negotiate for the right to a decent place to live. The apparently successful integration of the residents as participants into the construction and design of the new neighbourhood swept under the carpet the question of how to solve the housing problem as regards those excluded from the property market. In short, if we accept the designed solution as an actual solution to a common existential problem, we thereby obscure the inherent difference between politics and justice.

In the sense of the space produced by the constructed extensions, one can recognise and understand what the project of the architect was and what the residents made themselves. The image of the façade reveals the process. The extensions vary in colour, size, and material. The image they portray can be associated with the image of a self-made favela, only that here it has become part of an

[20] See Alejandro Aravena, "My Architectural Philosophy: Bring the Community into the Process", *TEDGlobal,* 2014, https://www.ted.com/talks/alejandro_aravena_my_architectural_philosophy_bring_the_community_into_the_process?language=en, accessed 1 December 2021.

orchestrated whole and is as such interesting for architectural discourse. What the result brings to the discussion is the inclusion of an unplanned space-time, a process that was not envisioned within the spatial planning strategy; a sense of space this particular community shares and has made visible in materials and in relation to architectural form.

Nevertheless, the project has also been subject to criticism, ranging from its problematic financing, the crime that subsequently emerged after life developed in the neighbourhood, to the fact that the municipality did not sufficiently help the residents find proper jobs, which meant that they became a part of corporate society as marginal exploited subjects, and last but not least, that the architect constructed an image of himself as a starchitect through the social problems of a marginalised community.[21]

Is the Quinta Monroy housing estate relevant as "great" architecture because some kind of emancipatory potential can be discerned in its form, because of the name of the architect, because of the sense of space it creates, the detailing, colours, or materials used? One could discuss all of the above. However, the project caught the attention of the international public due to the social problems it addresses, which can be discerned in its form. The unresolved social conflicts are a part of its aesthetic experience. If this project were to be judged according to conventional architectural criteria abstracted from its social context, it would most probably be regarded as irrelevant. However, in the last decades a certain "type" of architecture has started to be characterised by adjectives such as rebellious, socially engaged, green, sustainable, etc., and has gained a great deal of visibility in architectural discourse. Does this necessarily mean it is great architecture?

Regimes of Architecture

Modernist aesthetic politics might have failed in its attempt to construct a new fiction, a new sense of reality. Yet in doing so, it created new parameters of architectural discourse. Today, architecture is addressed through different discours-

[21] See Sandra Carrasco, David O'Brien, "Revisit: Quinta Monroy by Elemental", *The Architectural Review*, 4 January 2021, https://www.architectural-review.com/buildings/housing/revisit-quinta-monroy-by-elemental, accessed 1 December 2021.

es, which we will relate to Rancière's regimes of art to draw conclusions about the political dimension of architecture and the different futures it envisions.

According to Rancière, a regime of identification of art is a specific relation between artistic practices, forms of visibility, and modes of intelligibility that make it possible for a certain work to be identified as a work of art. In *Aesthetics and its Discontents*, among other works, he historically located the three regimes of art as different ways of recognising and defining objects as belonging to art or to a particular art: the ethical, representational, and aesthetic regimes.[22]

In the ethical regime, a statue, for example, is conceived as an image of the divine. In this regime, images are judged according to their effects on the modus of being of individuals and collectives. The representational regime, on the other hand, considers artworks through the category of mimesis. Here, a statue is a product of a particular art, i.e. sculpture. It enacts a representation through the skill of the sculptor and his or her ability to assign appropriate expressive forms to appropriate figures. In the aesthetic regime, finally, a statue acquires the qualities of a work of art not due to its correspondence to the divine or to the canons of representation, but because of it belonging to an exceptional form of sensory experience based on free appearances. This form of experience opposes the ordinary sensorium, which is permeated with hierarchies and forms of domination.[23]

In the three regimes of art (which emerged in different historical eras but have since coexisted), works are evaluated by different forms of artistic validity, all of which imply a certain relationship to politics. What all three regimes of architecture have in common is that in each one, architecture has a function linked to the construction of the social space within which architecture is installed and to which it responds. As such, architecture can be imagined within the limits of its own rules (the representational regime), by negating those rules in its own way by creating a sense of space (the aesthetical regime), or by addressing the ethical dilemmas of the contemporary world (the ethical regime). One can draw conclusions about the political dimension of architecture in relation to the three regimes. All three make visible the tensions between architecture and politics in the field of spatial planning. As Rancière explains:

[22] Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, pp. 28–30.

[23] *Ibid.*

> First artworks shape a world of pure beauty, which has no political relevance [the representational regime]. Second, they frame a kind of ideal community, fostering fanciful dreams of communities of sense posited beyond political conflict [the ethical regime]. Third, they achieve in their own sphere the same autonomy that is at the core of the modern project and is pursued in democratic or revolutionary politics [the aesthetic regime].[24]

Rancière argues that the latter (the modern) paradigm collapsed with the ethical turn due to the new forms of social life and commodity culture, new techniques of production, reproduction, and communication. What are the consequences?

First, we will consider the Quinta Monroy housing estate as an example of an architecture of the ethical regime. This does not mean that the project is ethical in itself, nor does it necessarily mean that the architect that designed it is ethical. The architecture of the ethical regime creates a space for a community (of sense) to use according to its temporal and material conditions. It therefore makes visible the temporality of that community in space; but at the same time, the political practice of architecture is weakened. The consensus that comes with the project reconfigures the visibility of the common in a way that objectifies the collective situation of the favela, so that the people involved can no longer take part in a dispute, i.e. the polemical framing of a controversial world within the given world. Its aesthetic politics is consequently dismissed. The architecture of the ethical regime frames space for communities of sense beyond political conflict. This architectural space overlaps with social space and establishes its own spatio-temporal conditions as a reaction to the injustices and malfunctions of the spatial planning strategies recognised as flawed.

Second, the representational regime, as transposed into architecture, evaluates constructions through the criteria of beauty, and established rules and conventions. It corresponds to the requirements of architectural codes; that is to say, it is the product of a certain skill on the part of the architect. At the same time, it puts into practice a certain representation that requires architects to assign appropriate expressive forms to their constructions. The representational regime

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[24] Jacques Rancière, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics", in B. Hinderliter, V. Maimon, J. Mansoor, and S. McCormick (eds.), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 32–33.

considers the canon of architecture and builds on it, whether in terms of style, form, space, or typology, by moving within its rules. Despite its political potential during and after the war period, modernism today is often interpreted as a set of rules, almost as a style, often impoverished of any engaging ideas. In this regime, projects today are often iterated as stylistic/typological solutions, without critical social ambition. As such, the architecture of the representational regime is based on the hierarchies and domination inscribed in the sensible, against which the aesthetic regime is established, and is thus not political in an emancipatory sense. Within this regime, architecture articulates public space as envisioned through different forms of power and consent.

The aesthetic regime, finally, is a regime in which architectural works are recognised as part of a specific form of sensory experience, different from the one presupposed by the order of domination. In this regime, sensory experience is situated in the aesthetic experience of the individual, but at the same time it inherently entails a comment on social space. Identified within this regime, works of architecture create an experience that establishes a distance from the social, and at the same time – through the modes of sensory experience and the forms of space they design – opens for reflection the construction of the contemporary world.

The aesthetic regime of architecture achieved the same autonomy that was at the core of the modern project. As we have already seen, Rancière claims that this identification between art, autonomy, and modernity collapsed with the ethical turn, which sacrificed emancipatory futures in the name of a catastrophic event in the past. However, imagining the future through a redistribution of the sensible never disappeared from architecture. Experiencing architectural forms can still create a critical sense of space and thereby render visible a specific relation between social space, human life, and its environment. The experience of architectural forms can still establish an aesthetic distance in the sense that Loos's villas did more than one hundred years ago.

One such example is the architecture of the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art designed by Jean Nouvel in 1994. This building is situated on Boulevard Raspail in Paris. The location is fenced off with a glass screen that constitutes one of the three glass "curtains" between which the architect developed the project. The interior, with all its functions, is located between two glass structures

in the centre, while the front "façade" appears to be missing some glass plates. Large tree branches have been growing through those openings since the 1990s. At first glance, the glass screen with missing plates confuses the passers-by, who might wonder if this is an unfinished building or perhaps a ruin. But the design is not accidental. In order to achieve such an effect, the architect had to carefully consider the composition of the glass wall, which was built around a big protected Lebanese cedar, planted on the site by Chateaubriand, thereby making it a part of the experience. Using transparencies and reflections, the architect created a sense of space in and around the building that contrasts with the experience of the boulevard and comes as something of a surprise, even a shock, to the visitor in the dense urban fabric of Paris.

Clearly, Nouvel invokes the rules and conventions of modernist architecture, but with the addition of a critical architectural gesture that creates a sense of space based on a critical reflection on the relation between the building, the natural processes on site, and the aesthetic experience of its visitors. His articulation of form first confuses visitors, but then creates an exceptional encounter with the building that challenges the linear temporality of construction by involving the temporality of natural processes in the architectural form. This creates a critical sense of space revealing an aesthetic politics that challenges the established norms and hierarchies of the dominant architectural and planning discourse. It enables a community of sense to envision a new framing of reality, to imagine a new fiction of a common world.

Reframing Reality

The emergence of the aesthetic regime of art, which Rancière described as an aesthetic revolution, also coincides with the historical context of a new mode of spatial production, to which, for example, both the Viennese Ring as well as Loos's villas belong. This new form of aesthetic experience intervened in the everyday and made it possible for a new common world and new community of sense to emerge in opposition to the dominant aesthetic order and its political connotations. The context of art and architecture was brimming over with sensory microevents that suggested new possible worlds. While the representational regime of architecture today accelerates temporal processes of spatial planning, the architecture of the aesthetic regime can slow them down through the individual time of the aesthetic experience. The ethical regime, meanwhile,

establishes parallel temporalities by bringing communities together through spatial practices.

The effect of Loos's villas can be seen as being similar to the effect of Nouvel's glass façade or to many contemporary artworks. Recalling Adorno's comments on Schönberg's reinvention of the ornament, we could also reflect on how Edgar Varèse's percussion composition *Ionisation* (1930), for example, incorporated the sound of high and low sirens, bringing the sound of ports into the musical experience. The sound of a distant place re-emerged here and now in a new light. Similarly, Nouvel's construction makes pre-existing trees re-emerge differently within the sense of space created by the building. Such microevents were then and are today testimonies of the new emerging worlds that disrupt the established aesthetic codes. If architecture or music wanted then and want today to create a critical sense of reality, the fictions they construct have to reconsider time and time again the future that the emerging conditions of development and its ideologies bring.

Loos's architecture did not change the logic of capitalist investment, nor did it create a socially inclusive space. It did, however, contribute to constituting a sense of space that presented, with its material presence, a critique of the everyday bourgeois environment. The sensory experience it created by reimagining form, craft, material, space, proportion, mass, etc., contributed to establishing a new context in which an emerging community of sense could discuss the critical role of architecture in society.

Today, the weakening of the welfare state, the speculative visions of destructive consumerist progress, and the grim environmental prognosis call for a critical evaluation of our planning for the future. This comes at a time when room for critique in architecture is inevitably shrinking. Given the sense of societal urgency, the questions regarding the sense of architectural space and the notion of great architecture might seem insignificant. However, the sense of architectural space is inevitably related to the political distribution of the sensible and the way it frames reality through fiction. According to Adorno, great architecture elevates the sense of space beyond the realm of purposefulness with architectural imagination by carving out different experiences of architectural temporalities.

If spatial planning, as practiced by the dominant order, fails to create a sense of a credible future, different temporalities of architecture can be seen as a terrain on which to explore and trace possible futures for emancipated communities to come. Despite Rancière's critique of the ethical turn, the future never escaped architecture. The architectural imagination can help elucidate and reconfigure the distribution of the sensible. Through its material processes that establish a link between the built and natural environment, architecture can create new forms of temporal experiences in space, and invent new spatio-temporal landscapes, different than those produced by contemporary capitalist culture.

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