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## The Door

*Todo es puerta*

Octavio Paz

Among the many kinds of “limits” we come upon in both philosophy and ordinary life, the door is one that “delimits”, or confines, every human world. I would even dare say that without doors there would be no human world at all. But why? Let us start with some basic remarks. On the one hand, the door is an object, a structure that belongs to the material reality of architecture and probably represents the material *a priori* of architecture – indeed, can we think of a building without any door? On the other hand, the door is a notion, a concept, a function, a word, that belongs to the ideal reality of philosophy and politics, myths and religion, poetry and literature, theatre, painting, sculpture. As a material and architectural element, the door is a passage or threshold that can be opened or closed, and through which a living being – say, a human being, but also animals or gods – can enter into a different space or time. As an element of the ideal realm of human beings, the door keeps these same properties, although they are enriched by a symbolic surplus value that plays a crucial role in constructing a human world. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan once said: “The door is a real symbol, the symbol *par excellence*, that symbol in which man’s passing, through the cross it sketches, intersecting access and closure, can always be recognised.”<sup>1</sup>

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In the first part of my paper I will offer a sample of the many and diverse occurrences of the door in our cultural tradition; in the second part I will try to be more specific about what is a door and, above all, what *is not* a door; in the third part I will present my own hypothesis about the nature of the door and its

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book 2. The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954–1955*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 302.

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particular function in the architecture of a human world. In short, I will argue that in a human world there must always be doors, as long as a world as such exists, and one of them has to be kept closed, barred – otherwise our world would fall apart.

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In a sense, the opening scene of Western philosophy is that of an opening door. This is the scene Parmenides describes at the beginning of his poem *On Nature* (fragment 1, lines 1–30) – one of the first philosophical documents of our culture, dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C.

The mares, which carry me as far as my heart desires, were escorting me. They brought and placed me upon the well-spoken path of the Goddess, which carries everywhere unscathed the mortal who knows. Thereon was I carried, for thereon the wise mares did carry me, straining to pull the chariot, with maidens guiding the way. The axle, glowing in its naves, gave forth the shrill sound of a musical pipe, urged on by two rounded wheels on either end, even whilst maidens, Daughters of the Sun, were hastening to escort me, after leaving the House of Night for the light, having pushed back the veils from their heads with their hands.

Ahead are the gates of the paths of Night and Day. A lintel and stone threshold surround them. The aethereal gates themselves are filled with great doors, for which much-avenging Justice holds the keys of retribution. Coaxing her with gentle words, the maidens did cunningly persuade her to push back the bolted bar for them swiftly from the gates. These made of the doors a yawning gap as they were opened wide, swinging in turn the bronze posts in their sockets, fastened with rivets and pins. Straight through them at that point did the maidens drive the chariot and mares along the broad way.

The Goddess received me kindly, took my right hand in Hers, uttered speech and thus addressed me: “Youth, attended by immortal charioteers, who come to our House by these mares that carry you, welcome. For it was no ill fortune that sent you forth to travel this road (lying far indeed from the beaten path of humans), but Right and Justice. And it is right that you should learn all things, both the persuasive, unshaken heart of well-rounded Truth, and the subjective beliefs of mortals, in which there is no true trust.”

As these lines illustrate, the door that philosophy opens, following Parmenides' first steps, will be henceforth the door of Truth, the door dividing Night and Day, Darkness and Light. According to Parmenides, nobody knows the name of the Goddess who greets the arrival of the philosopher – maybe she is Dike, the divine personification of Justice, maybe not. What really matters, however, is something else, something that has to do with the heavy presence of a door between man and Truth. For Parmenides' door separates our world from the divine realm of Truth (*Aletheia*), which is not attainable by humans except in its opposition to the realm of non-Truth (*Doxa*). The two ways, the way of Truth and the way of non-Truth, both lie behind the door, so that one can eventually ask: does Parmenides' door actually open into the Truth? Since his door opens both into the path of Truth and the path of non-Truth, one should finally answer that this door opens into the *opening* dimension of Truth as such, rather than into an already opened and manifest Truth. In other words, this door opens into the *openness* of Truth rather than into a meaningful and defined Truth.

In the context of Parmenides' poem, this explanation helps one to see the structure, or architecture, of the philosophical drama. It becomes apparent, for instance, why the Goddess must remain unnamed, for she gives access, not to a named Truth, but to the unnamed and empty openness of Truth. And it becomes equally apparent that this openness must be qualified not as a specific knowledge, but as a kind of truthful persuasion or conviction (*Peitho*)<sup>2</sup> that is the right attitude towards the Truth. The philosopher, the master of Truth that Parmenides is depicting, does not possess any detailed science of the world. Yet he is endowed with a personal candour that essentially means frankness and fairness.

Most significantly, it becomes evident that no human being can open the door through which we, human beings, enter into the openness of Truth. The first door, the one through which we enter into the opening of Truth, is a gift, and not a product of humans. It is a gift that simultaneously encloses the human world on itself while opening it into the undefined openness of its Truth, by which the world itself is spherically shaped and contained.

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding the relation between Truth (*Aletheia*) and Persuasion (*Peitho*) in ancient Greece, see Marcel Detienne, *The Masters of Truth in Archaic Greece*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996, which offers an original interpretation of Parmenides' poem, as well.

The door then is a gift, the gift of Truth, the gift of philosophy itself. As such, the door will haunt the entire history of Western philosophy after that dazzling beginning. Let us quote a few examples. Very close to Parmenides, Aristotle states in his *Metaphysics* (993b) that the gift of Truth, by which he means once again the mere openness of Truth, looks like an opening door: no one can miss it. “In so far as it seems that Truth is like the proverbial door which no one can miss, in this sense our study will be easy.” However, since Aristotle is speaking here of the empty openness of Truth, what remains debatable for him is the exact knowledge of Truth, its full and detailed content, so that from now on the task of philosophy will turn out to be precisely the discovery and definition of true knowledge. “Philosophy is rightly called the knowledge (*episteme*) of Truth.” Two thousand years later, at the opposite end of our philosophical tradition, someone else seems to announce once and for all the vanishing of Aristotle’s dream. According to Martin Heidegger’s seminar on *Parmenides*, Western philosophy is all about doors that open and shut, but just one step is really decisive, namely the exit from ancient Greek language and the entrance into Latin. The Greek word for Truth, *aletheia*, which meant for the Greek people the openness of the Truth, happens to be replaced by the Latin word *veritas*, which means exactly the opposite, a closed door rather than an opening one. Thus, Heidegger argues, thanks to the Roman Empire, the Latin language and its betrayal of the initial openness of the Truth contaminate the entire Western world, poisoning its philosophical language. As a result, Heidegger concludes, Western philosophy is now completely overwhelmed by a radical oblivion of its initial Truth, while the true translation for the Greek *aletheia* has to be re-called – at least in his anamnestic teaching – as *das Offene*, the Open.

From the original word *ver*, a meaning has been extracted that clearly comes to the fore in the old Latin *veru* in the sense of gate and door, but also in the German *das Wehr*, the gate that shuts and locks, the dam that seals off. The original element in *ver* and *verum* is that of closing off, covering, concealing, and sheltering. ... The corresponding Greek word of this Indo-Germanic stem is *eruma* – the defensive weapon, the covering, the enclosure. *Eruma* – to which the Roman word *verum* is immediately connected – means in Greek, however, precisely the opposite of the Greek word for “true”, i.e., it is the opposite of *aletheia*. *Verum*, *eruma* – the enclosure, the covering; *aletheia* – the dis-covering, the dis-closing. ... The opposite of *ver*, *verum*, as the enclosing, is the non-enclosing. This “opposes” the *verum*. “Opposing”, acting against, is expressed in Latin by the prefix *op-*; to be

“against” the enclosing, against the *ver*, is *op-verio* or *ap-verio*, whence the latin *aperio*: “I open”. ... According to the verbal structure, the participle of *aperio*, *apertum*, the un-enclosed, corresponds to the Greek *alethes*, the unconcealed.<sup>3</sup>

Curiously enough, in this seminar Heidegger quotes the well-known passage from Gospel of John (14, 6), where Jesus says, “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life,” emphasising the shift from the Greek *aletheia* to the Roman *veritas*, but he does not stress the importance of another passage from the same Gospel (10, 9) where the Christ affirms: “I am the Door.” Greek: *Ego eimi he thura*. Latin: *Ego sum ostium*. From my point of view, this passage, extensively commented on by Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Thomas Aquinas, should have interested Heidegger. Indeed, much more than the replacement of *aletheia* with *veritas*, the straight identification of Truth and Door embodied by Jesus, who says both “I am the Door” and “I am the Truth,” is one of the deep genealogical roots of what Heidegger calls the enclosure of the initial openness of Truth. The reason why I am making such a statement would need a long explanation, taking into account Christian theology and its repeated predicament before the question of doors and keys. In short, let us say that if Jesus is the Truth, if he is actually the ultimate revelation of Truth, then we are no longer open to the Truth, simply because the empty openness of the Truth is from now on closed or enclosed by the Christ into one single, available and meaningful, Truth, which is the full content of the Gospels and God’s word. Said in a slightly different way, if Jesus is the Door, then he is an everlasting open door, i.e. a door that cannot be closed; hence he is no longer a real door, i.e. something that by definition can be closed. Rather, through him we face a radical change in the overall architecture of the human world, where an ever-open door denies us any access to the very opening of the Truth, to its initial dis-covering and dis-closing – that dis-covering and dis-closing by which Parmenides’ world was formerly shaped and contained. This Christian anamorphosis of the door, and therefore of human architecture, might remind each us of a widespread nightmare, incisively described by Walter Benjamin as follows:

The dread of doors that won’t close is something everyone knows from dreams. Stated more precisely: these are doors that appear closed without being so. It was with heightened senses that I learned of this phenomenon in a dream in which,

<sup>3</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998, pp. 47–48.

while I was in the company of a friend, a ghost appeared to me in the window of the ground floor of a house to our right. And as we walked on, the ghost accompanied us from inside all the houses. It passed through all the walls and always remained at the same height with us. I saw this, though I was blind. The path we travel through the arcades is fundamentally just such a ghost walk, on which doors give way and walls yield.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus' metaphorical embodiment and ghostly absorption of the door perhaps lies behind modern philosophy's recurrent puzzlement concerning hidden, waning, or missing doors. Consider, for example, Gottfried Leibniz's monad without doors or windows, a metaphysical theorisation that can be seen as an extreme outcome of the fading door in Christianity. Or consider the central episode of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche's "The Vision and the Enigma," where an ancient door suddenly appears as the gateway of eternal return and an answer to Christian nihilism. Closer to our times, many people have speculated about the human relation to doors. In the field of literature alone, examples include Franz Kafka's tale *Vor dem Gesetz*, Simone Weil's lyric *La porte*, and Samuel Beckett's *Four Poems*. In the field of philosophy, at least six major thinkers focused their attention on this topic of doors: Georg Simmel in his paper entitled "Bridge and Door", where the door is presented in its double function of "separating and connecting";<sup>5</sup> Franz Rosenzweig in his masterpiece, *The Star of Redemption*, whose last pages end in a glorious celebration of the door;<sup>6</sup> Walter Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*, already mentioned for his oneiric exploration of doors and thresholds; Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetic of Space*, praising the door as the "cosmos of the Half-open";<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the plan of immanence is termed "the ultimate Door";<sup>8</sup> and finally, Emmanuel Lévinas in *Totality and Infinity*, where the question of hospitality echoes

<sup>4</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 409.

<sup>5</sup> Georg Simmel, "Bridge and Door", Neil Leich (ed.), *Rethinking Architecture*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, p. 441.

<sup>7</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetic of Space*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 222.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, London: Continuum, 2004, p. 277.

the riddle of the door, devoid of any metaphorical meaning and restored as a phenomenological structure of the human being.<sup>9</sup>

Is it insignificant that Lévinas speaks in this place of a door (*porte*)? Is the place that he designates in this way simply a trope in a rhetoric of hospitality? ... The open door, as a manner of speaking, calls for the opening of an exteriority or of a transcendence of the idea of infinity. This idea comes to us through a door.<sup>10</sup>

As Jacques Derrida brilliantly points out, Lévinas's philosophy opens a door that is altogether different from Heidegger's. While opening this door in front of us, Lévinas does not address the question of Truth. Instead, his is the door opened to the Other, the door of hospitality from which a human plurality draws out its ethical and political orientation towards the Other, towards its infinite exteriority and transcendence. Certainly, from Lévinas's perspective, this infinite transcendence of the human Other merely hides and reflects the infinite transcendence of the divine Other. Nevertheless, Lévinas's divinity is not the same as that of Jesus Christ, who swallows every door in the metaphor of his unbounded epiphany. Lévinas's God is more ancient, even older than philosophy, and tells us something about the archaic architecture of doors.

Going far beyond Lévinas's philosophical framework, one can sense some features of this archaic architecture in the works of Mircea Eliade, a historian of religions who has often underscored the centrality of the door in ancient civilisations and its vital role in shaping the human world.

*The world becomes apprehensible as world, as cosmos, in the measure in which it reveals itself as a sacred world. ... Hence there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descend to earth and man can symbolically ascend to heaven. ... Dur-an-ki, "Link between Heaven and Earth", was a name applied to a number of Babylonian sanctuaries (it occurs at Nippur, Larsa, Sippara, and elsewhere). Babylon had many names, among them "House of the Base of Heaven and Earth", "Link between Heaven and Earth". But it was also in Babylon that*

9 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1961.

10 Jacques Derrida, *Adieu to Emmanuel Lévinas*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 26.

the connection between earth and lower regions was made, for the city had been built on *bab apsi*, “the Door of Apsu”, *apsu* being the name for the waters of chaos before Creation.<sup>11</sup>

It is impossible to sum up in a few words the manifold symbolism of this archaic architecture. Moreover, I am not sure that those architectural designs should be read as just “symbols”. Therefore, I shall confine myself to a brief remark. In the archaic universe depicted by Eliade, a door separates the profane world of humans from the sacred world of gods, while another door separates these two worlds from the lower regions of Chaos and shapeless matter. Given this assumption, one can immediately ask: How many worlds are there? And why does Eliade claim that the world becomes graspable as *one* world only as long as it reveals itself as a sacred world? What about the profane world of humans? Is it still a world? If the answer is affirmative, as it must be; it happens to be so just because the human and divine worlds are actually one single world hinged on a single Door, separating and connecting these two sides of the same Cosmos, the sacred and the profane; and also because, in addition to that first Door, there is elsewhere one more Door dividing that single and double-sided world, or Cosmos, from the watery and amorphous matter of deathly Chaos – the Romans called this second Door *mundus*,<sup>12</sup> a word from which stem the Spanish *mundo*, the French *monde* and the Italian *mondo*. As a result, following Eliade’s account, in the archaic world there were always at least two doors, one of which was not to be opened, otherwise the world as such, the Cosmos, would be destroyed. At that time, rituals, myths, and human architecture had to deal with this hierarchy of Doors, which was the hierarchy itself, hierarchy, which literally means “the rule (*arche*) of the sacred (*hieros*)”. The human task was not to open both Doors, but, on the contrary, to keep one of them closed. Humans closed the Door between the Cosmos and Chaos, by assuring the gods that they could walk through the other Door, the one situated between the sacred and the profane, whenever they wanted to. In so far as humans accomplished their mythological task, they preserved the unity, harmony, and integrity of their double-sided Cosmos, keeping it enclosed on itself and making it impervious to the storming hurricane of Chaos.

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<sup>11</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt, 1987, pp. 64, 26, 41–42.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Rykwert, *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988, p. 58.



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In sum, Jesus' ever-open door should not be confused with Parmenides' door of Truth, neither should it be confused with the archaic doors of an even more ancient world. Now, moving from the historical to the phenomenological analysis, I will explore three features or properties of the door that are fundamental to identifying it as an architectural *a priori*. I call them *ontological properties* because they represent a provisional answer to an ontological question: What is a door?

- 1) To start with, the door is an architectural element, perhaps the most important element of all. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to imagine any building or architectural structure without an entrance or exit. Conversely, one might claim that where there is a door, there is architecture. This is why the door is a sort of architectural *a priori*. The same cannot be said about thresholds. One can think of thresholds that do not have architectural connotations. A certain temperature, for instance, can be termed a threshold between liquid and gas; a certain river can be considered a threshold between two countries; and so on. Thus, here is the first property of the door: *a door is not the same as a threshold*, although the two concepts are sometimes confused. As any dictionary of architecture would confirm, a door always includes a threshold, which is its bottom part (occasionally situated beneath the leaf, if the door has any). A door then is a way of dealing with thresholds. A door builds upon a threshold an entrance or an exit – not necessarily visible and tangible as a leaf, but sometimes engraved on matter as a hollow and yet concrete, material structure – that will give or deny access to an inside or an outside. Moreover, thresholds like the temperature or the river mentioned above are not human artefacts, but they simply belong to the realm of nature. Thresholds, then, are both natural and cultural entities, while doors are purely cultural means of dealing with these natural and cultural entities. Unlike thresholds, doors are architected “limits”, designed by humans – so that we could even raise the question of whether the door itself is the very “limit” that separates and connects these two ontological planes: nature and culture.
- 2) From here it is only a short step to raising the question of the relation between doors and animals. Do animals build doors? So it seems when we look at animals like the trap-door spider. But do animals live in a world which is

delimited by doors? By all means, every biological species lives in its own peculiar environment. Still, what is an environment? Is it the same as a human world? The German zoologist Jakob von Uexküll employed the word *Umwelt* to designate the animal environment.<sup>13</sup> For him, animals live in a closed *Umwelt* from which they cannot escape. However, do they perceive that they cannot get out of their environment? According to Heidegger, they do not. If animals had the smallest perception of their environmental cage, they would live in a world quite similar to ours, a world where one or more doors close the passage to a formless and meaningless outside, namely Chaos, thus encircling and shaping the world, namely the Cosmos, as in human architecture. But this cannot be said about animals, unless we project onto them some anthropomorphic qualities or behaviours. As Heidegger famously stated, animals are “poor in world”<sup>14</sup>. Following his line of reasoning, one might also say that they are poor in architecture. On the one hand, in fact, animals do live in a meaningful and well-formed *Umwelt*, so that their behaviour cannot be explained only in terms of instincts and reflexes, as Uexküll stressed in many of his works. In a sense, then, animals are open to a number of truths, just like us, because they truly interpret and truly understand their own environment. Because of this capacity, Uexküll equates humans and animals, calling them both “subjects”. On the other hand, Heidegger polemically contends that animals cannot be described as “being-in-the-world”. Unlike humans, animals are not open to the very openness or “disclosing” of the Truth by which the world as such is enclosed on itself. Although animals can seize the meaning of something occurring in their environment, they cannot seize that something is occurring in a world confined as a whole by its openness to a coming and still empty Truth. Stated differently, animals do not perceive that they perceive like humans do, nor are they haunted by the existence of an outside that is closed off by their environment. Accordingly, animals cannot experience doors, nor can they build doors, as they cannot see the door “as such”, that is, the opening of a world, or Cosmos, against the background of outer Chaos, which is kept off. Animals are trapped in their own environment, and this is the reason why, at most, they can build

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<sup>13</sup> See Jakob von Uexküll, “A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds”, *Semiotica* 89–4 (1992), 319–391.

<sup>14</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 196.

trap-doors. If they pass through real doors, instead, the latter are always human artifacts that animals, differently from humans, could not keep locked until the end of the world. Hence the second property of the door: *that which divides humans and animals is precisely the door*. Probably, there is no single threshold between *humanitas* and *animalitas*, as many philosophers insist nowadays. Indeed, the border between *humanitas* and *animalitas* is more than just a threshold; it is a plurality of doors.

- 3) Lastly, the door has to be reckoned with as the condition of the possibility of a human world where a human community gathers and dwells. By defining the limits of worlds and communities, doors let in or shut out someone or something. A door is always there to welcome or to repel, to group and to estrange, not only humans and other humans, but also humans and animals, or humans and gods. Sheltering behind the door, human communities fix their position in the world by defining their laws of hospitality and hostility, which are the laws of politics, the laws of life in common. This leads to another significant conclusion about the nature of doors. A door always has to do with collective entities rather than individuals. As a matter of fact, it is quite difficult or almost impossible to imagine a door that is simply related to one single person without any connection to other beings. A door is instead a regulated access for a number of people, for human beings (but also animals – and gods) united or divided by the same laws of human hospitality, i.e. by the same doors. In that sense, among the “common notions” Spinoza referred to in his *Ethics*,<sup>15</sup> the door can be seen as the most common notion of all. It is the material, structural, architectural *a priori* of the common as such. The door is always already there before the community, before the world and its inhabitants. It is the access to a community that establishes and defines that very community. Therefore, one might determine its third property as follows: *a door is common and yet is more than common, it is the condition of the possibility of the common itself, it is the law of the common as such, a law that is at the same time internal and external to any given community or being-in-common*. Exceeding and preceding any human world and community as their own condition of possibility, the door is not even universal, since it should more properly be understood as the topological or architectural site

<sup>15</sup> See Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, Ware, Wordsworth, 2001, p. 77 (*Second Part, Proposition 38, Corollary*).

of any conceivable act of universalisation. Absolutely singular (non-universal, or pre-universal) and absolutely common, the door has to be accepted as the “essence” (Spinoza again) of any human world. That essence both grounds and delimits, confines, even drains, every universalisation of the common. Without doors no human community would be possible. And yet, outside the door someone or something is always waiting to get in. This is the law of the door; someone or something has to remain somehow excluded, despite any attempt to fully universalise the common. Given that inflexible law, however, what about our so-called global world? What about a world where the empire of the “open door” has seemingly succeeded in replacing the unreachable “sublime door” of ancient empires? What about a world where the political, historical, cultural order dictates that doors cannot be closed and each of us, at least in principle, has the right to open the door of the Other, so as to finally abolish the Otherness of the others? The question of whether or not we can call this world global, capitalistic, or Christian, etc., remains open, perhaps too open. But the ultimate question, the one that cannot remain unanswered, the one at which we all get mad nowadays, is as simple as follows: Where is the exit?

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A minimal definition of the door might be the following: *a door is a way of closing off an outside*. As a closure is the condition of any opening or openness, including the opening or openness of the world onto its own Truth (from Parmenides to Heidegger), this condition is materialised by the door. In that sense, the door is the material *a priori* of any human architecture, that is, of any humanly designed world and community. A door is required before the world, as long as a world as such exists. And that door, in order to be opened, has to have been formerly closed.

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Given that premise, what happens in a world of open doors like our so-called global world, where apparently the door loses its function, becoming an ever-open threshold in a human global environment? I will not discuss this topic in relation to the most recent evolution of architecture *stricto sensu*, although it

would be worth considering.<sup>16</sup> I would rather raise a more basic philosophical question: Do we still live in a common world? And, if so, where is its door?

If our world still exists as a human world, then its main door, the closed door that allows the opening of our world as such, must be hidden somewhere. What is the name of that door? And who are its guardians? Maybe the arts and literature are today, more than ever, the doorkeepers of our world. Here are two examples.

The first one is Anish Kapoor. One of his works is entitled *Non-object (Door)*. In this, as in many other creations, Kapoor questions the fading border between architecture and sculpture, or between architecture and the visual arts, by insistently provoking our uncanny disease in front of the door, which is sometimes a *Non-object*, sometimes a *Cloud Gate*, sometimes *My Body Your Body*, sometimes the riddle of *Adam*, the first man on Earth. As a critic has sharply remarked, in his works Kapoor does not open any door into a meaning or into a truth. On the contrary, he puts forth the door in all its topological or architectural urgency. But this door cannot be seen. This door is now inside us, as the non-universal and common essence of the human being, closing our being to ourselves, and thus making the existence of a common world still possible – outside the door. Without meaning or truth, this door, the door in the depths of human architecture, is sealed. The Other, or the Otherness, has moved from outside to inside. We are the mouth of Chaos. Each of us is a door before the world.

Kapoor's works are doors or entry signs to other places, they are never symbols or metaphors. Because of this, they are detached both from traditional art, which – whether Western or Eastern – always uses symbols, and from modern art, which tends to express itself in metaphors as best it can. ... The doors open to something that lives beyond what they designate: they open onto the infinitely possible, which as yet does not exist and is therefore called “nothing”. From this “nothing”, however, arises the whole of being: a being that is an all-embracing totality.

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<sup>16</sup> Just an example: Daniel Liebeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin – a building without any entry door; a building that has seemingly been designed as The Door itself (to our world); a building that literally embodies our opening and closing question: Can we think of a building without any door?

... The artist is the one who builds the door, a door structured in the nature of a frame, a prepared area that separates the world and being.<sup>17</sup>

My second example is from a tale by Julio Cortázar, *La puerta condenada* (The Condemned Door). Petrone, the main character, is a businessman from Buenos Aires who has to spend a week in Montevideo. He takes a room in a peaceful and almost empty hotel, where everything is quite ordinary, except that at night he cannot sleep due to the soft cry of a baby in the adjacent room. Behind the wardrobe he discovers a condemned door that once linked his room and the other one, now occupied by a solitary woman. Who is that child? Why is it crying? As Petrone soon learns from the concierge, the woman has no child with her, nor is she the source of that noise that persists even after she has left the room. Is it nothing more than a dream? Petrone's answer, as well as the fact of his weird, obstinate listening to something at the end of the tale, can perhaps help us to fix the role and the place of literature in our world, which is not the place of dreams, but rather the place of a condemned door between us and our dreams. A door that we might simply call "the unconscious".

At last he had all the necessary silence to sleep at ease, and it weighed on him. Turning around and around, he felt almost defeated by that silence he had cunningly claimed and now came back to him whole and vengeful. Ironically, he thought he missed the cry of the baby, and that such perfect calm was not enough for him to sleep or even less to remain awake. He missed the cry of the baby, and when he heard it much later, weak but distinct through the condemned door, over his fear, above his escape in the dead of night he knew the baby was well and the woman had not lied, had not lied to herself on cradling the baby, on wanting the baby to shut up so that they could sleep.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Pier Luigi Tazzi, "Anish Kapoor Biography", <http://www.doononline.net>.

<sup>18</sup> "Por fin tenía todo el silencio necesario para dormir a pierna suelta, y le pesaba. Dando vueltas y vueltas, se sintió como vencido por ese silencio que había reclamado con astucia y que le devolvían entero y vengativo. Irónicamente pensó que extrañaba el llanto del niño, que esa calma perfecta no le bastaba para dormir y todavía menos para estar despierto. Extrañaba el llanto del niño, y cuando mucho más tarde lo oyó. débil pero inconfundible a través de la puerta condenada, por encima del miedo, por encima de la fuga en plena noche supo que estaba bien y que la mujer non había mentido, no se había mentido al arrullar al niño, al querer que al niño se callara para que ellos pudieran dormirse" (Julio Cortázar, *Final de juego*, Madrid: Alfaguara, 1987, p. 50).

THE DOOR

\* \* \*

*Somewhere, in the Slovenian countryside.*

A. – Please, close the door.

B. – Pardon?

A. – I said: please, close the door.

B. – What do you mean? I don't see any door.

A. – Alright, then build one.

B. – What? Now? How can I build one? There are no walls.

A. – I don't mind, build a wall, and then close the door.

B. – What? A wall? But why? What's going on?

A. – I hear voices, and they bother me. I want to shut them out.

B. – Who them? What are you talking about?

A. – The voices.

B. – The voices?

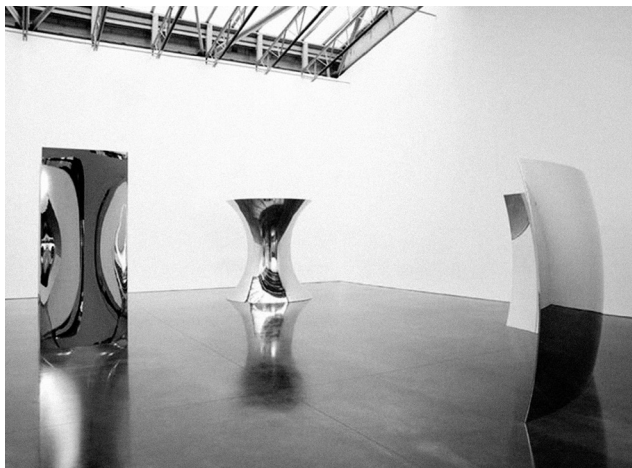
A. – Yes, I hear them, right now.

B. – Look, keep quiet for a moment... Do you hear anything?

A. – No.

B. – So, shut up. The only door around here is your mouth.

Anish Kapoor, *Non-object (Door)*, 2008

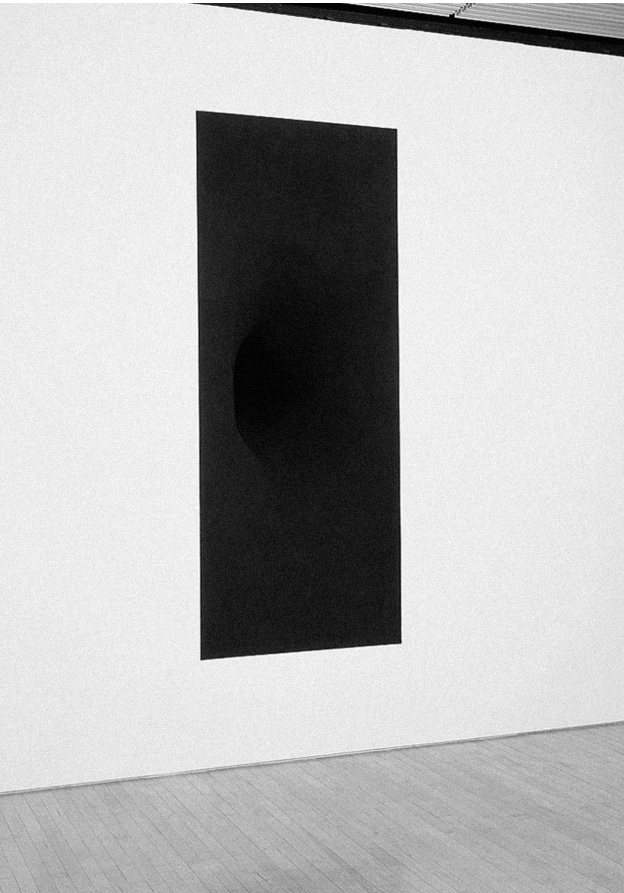




Anish Kapoor, *Cloud Gate*, 2004



Anish Kapoor, *My Body Your Body*, 1993





THE DOOR



Anish Kapoor, *Adam*, 1988–1989