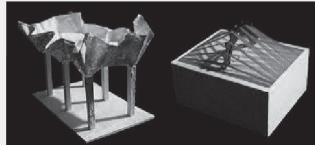
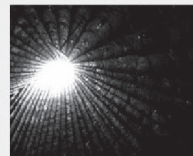
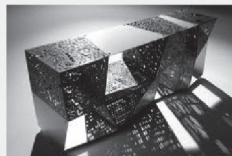
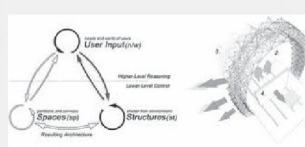
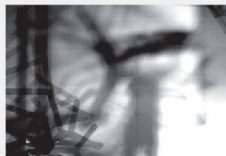
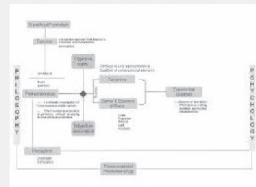
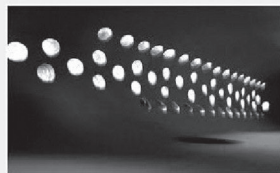
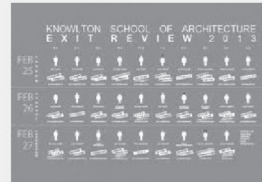
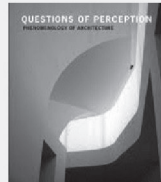


What Is Phenomenology?

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to our readers

What is (Architectural) Phenomenology? To explore this question is to cut across a multi-generational battleground in architecture: a hotbed of conflicting beliefs and ideologies. An investigation of this term has generated contested genealogical and territorial maps of architectural discourse. With more than forty years since the publishing of Christian Norberg-Schulz's seminal *Intentions in Architecture*, it is appropriate to revisit this history now in order to track and understand the way in which this idea has continuously been co-opted, poeticized, and diluted in architecture.

While the term Phenomenology can be traced back to Immanuel Kant, its current usage is shaped by the late-19th century German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Husserl defined it as “a science of phenomenon,”¹ with the philosophical goal of providing a transcendental ground for modern scientific inquiry. Martin Heidegger's philosophical work, such as the essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” provided theoretical backing for the architect concerned with place, who in turn mined the text for ideas to carry out a critique of modernism. Life-world, lived experience, presence, and essence -- these concepts still retain a certain aura, a charismatic indeterminacy, a magic.

Today studio critics use the word interchangeably with experience and atmosphere, while the history and theory faculty approaches it with extreme caution, at times with



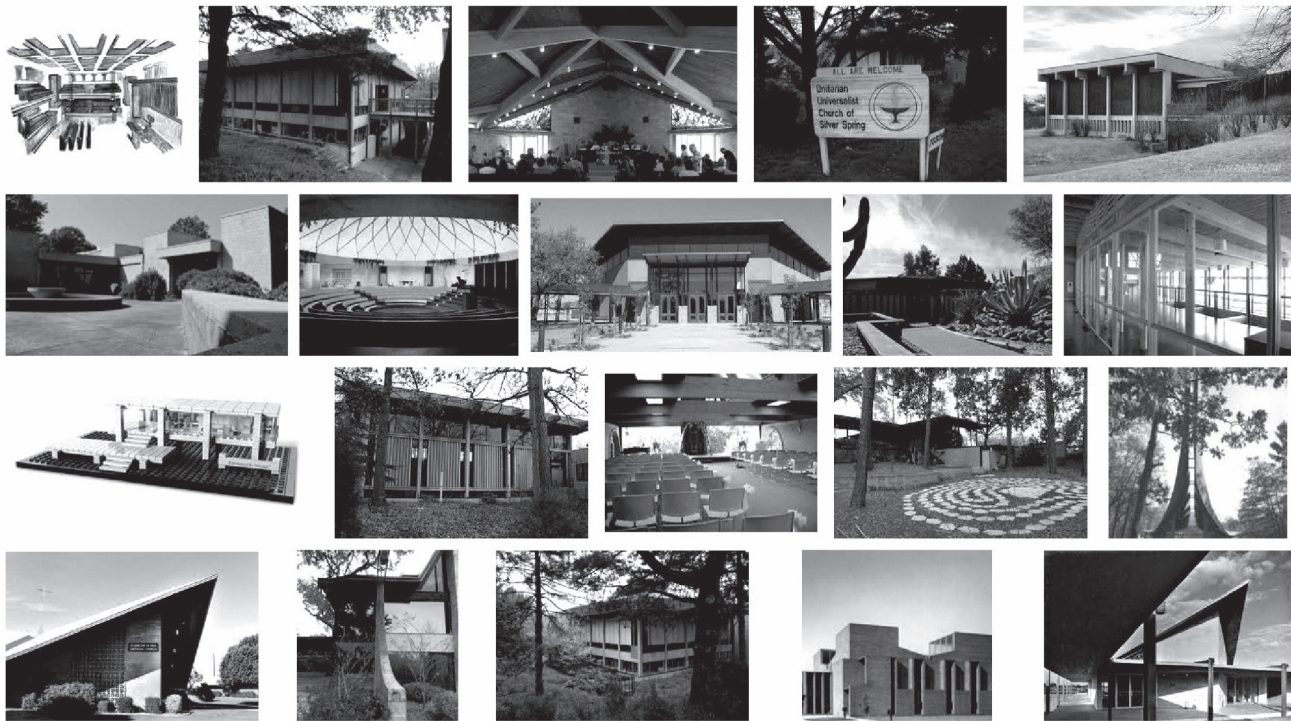
ridicule and condemnation. As Architectural Phenomenology continues to float through the discipline, it has been absorbed into a purely preferential aesthetic disposition. Through this transformation it has shed rigor in defining concepts and critiques. There is also the so-called “digital phenomenology,” sprinkled with Heideggerian rhetoric, that has announced the new “digital being” and a new form of “ontology.” Architectural Phenomenology is far from being “dead.” It has mutated into another beast distinct from its original conception. The convoluted understanding of this term today indicates that a critical stocktaking and an exploration of its influence is necessary.

In this issue we chart the historical context of Architectural Phenomenology with Jorge Otero-Pailos. We confront phenomenological questions and a moment of awakening with Steven Holl. We discuss the relationship between Phenomenology and post-structuralism with Mark Wigley. We wander through the intangible with Robert Irwin. We situate the nature of place with Kenneth Frampton. We seek out indeterminacies with Michelle Fornabai.

Architectural Phenomenology continues to enrage and enrich. We aim to sort the term’s multiple meanings: to establish a platform and move forward, preferring informed debate over detached hostility.

1 Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book*; trans. K. Kersten. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983.





what is architectural intellectuality?

Jorge Otero-Pailos in conversation with G and LW. Recorded on April 2, 2014.

G: How are you feeling?

LW: I am actually really angry now.

JOP: You are also making me angry now. Is that why you want to talk to me? Because everyone else is so angry about Phenomenology?

G: It is an anger-inducing conversation.

JOP: Why is it anger-inducing?

LW: It's actually not that everyone is angry about Phenomenology. The people who are angry are usually architectural theorists.

JOP: Why are the theorists angry?

LW: I think the word Phenomenology carries a negative connotation in architecture now. To a selective group of people it is associated with essentialism and anti-intellectualism.

G: It's a slur. In my earlier conversation with Mario Carpo he mentioned that there is a side that believes in enchantment



and indeterminacy, and that is in opposition to a belief that everything can be rationally defined. If you are on the “rationally define” side, the phenomenologists are the bad guys, while if you are in the enchantment camp, it’s the opposite. However, he also said nobody’s right and nobody’s wrong. There’s no way to prove either.

JOP: Why are you interested in Architectural Phenomenology? Is it really a relevant question today?

G: The first lecture we went to at GSAPP was a conversation between Mark Wigley and Peter Eisenman on Phenomenology. Eisenman claimed that there is a renewal of Phenomenology, in the form of what he calls “digital Phenomenology.” In studio the term Phenomenology comes up often and everyone has his or her own assumption about what it means, without any investigation into the discourse. Wigley has said that after a certain point, a set of discourses becomes digested and gets under the skin. We don’t have to read Le Corbusier because we have already read Le Corbusier. It has been taught to us on a subconscious level.

JOP: Is this a generational problem?

LW: Yes, I think so. We have three generations in this issue: a generation who reads philosophical Phenomenology and borrows heavily from it in practice and writing; a generation

who is invested in the notion of theory and criticizes Phenomenology, by drawing out, for example, the fascism and anti-Semitism allegedly embedded in Heidegger’s thinking; and a generation, like yourself, who has enough historical distance to analyze everything in a boarder context.

JOP: And you are the fourth generation.

G: Yes.

JOP: It is also you then who has to say whether it is relevant and has currency today. I am curious to know the view from your generation. Is it something current, historical or like an anecdote?

LW: For me it is historical. I am more interested in its history and how phenomenological ideas enabled another set of discourses. Also how architecture education changed because Phenomenology was a vehicle for architects to lay claim to knowledge.

G: I think our generation is returning to questions of affect. In studio a lot of people talk about their project by describing what it feels like to be in the design. I think that’s why the word Phenomenology is still pertinent. I think it’s important to know that somewhere along the way it got turned into a bad word and had to go underground. Now it’s reemerging in a different

setting.

LW: Do you think it's relevant today?

JOP: Yes, I think it's relevant. Once I asked Vittorio Gregotti if he thought Architectural Phenomenology was dead and he said something like, "Well, is Plato dead?" I think ideas continue to be relevant when they remain important insights into issues that we continue to grapple with.

LW: Right, I also have my own preoccupation with Phenomenology because I wrote my undergrad thesis on Husserl. When I first came to architecture school I couldn't understand why it had such a negative connotation.

JOP: One of the things I have tried to disprove is the idea that philosophy is at the origin of Architectural Phenomenology. It is not that people started reading philosophy and then said, "Oh, now I can do architecture differently." At first they simply found the words of philosophers useful, like an analogy to explain what they were already doing. In the postwar era, architects found themselves having to defend whether their work was intellectual. It was a time when education was being completely transformed. In the US there was heavy investment in education, and the kind of visual production that architects had assumed to be an expression of knowledge was called into question by expanding university administrations. They asked,

"how do we give tenure to architects? How do we evaluate their intellectual contribution to the university?" Universities had a difficult time evaluating visual discourse and aesthetics as intellectual work. At the heart of it was the question of knowledge—what is architectural intellectuality? The idea that the architect's aesthetic production can be an expression of an idea that cannot be reduced to verbal descriptions was, and remains, very important. In response to these pressures, architects started writing more to become more precise, let's say, more academic, about their contributions to certain questions that were important across disciplines, such as the understanding of human experience. They made a case that architects had a specific grasp of how the built environment was shaped by, and shaped, the quality of human experiences. While philosophy was not the origin of Architectural Phenomenology, it did serve to give legitimacy and rigor to how these issues were unpacked as the movement developed.

LW: What then would be your definition of Architectural Phenomenology?

JOP: I would say it was a historical movement that started as a radical critique of modernism from the point of view of experience. It accused modernist architects of making buildings that diminished the quality of human experience because they were more concerned with the efficiency of construction. Some of the key protagonists of this critique



were Jean Labatut, Charles Moore, Robert Venturi, Christian Norberg-Schulz, Kenneth Frampton, Ernesto Rogers and others. These architectural phenomenologists recognized that while some aspects of human experience were common to most people (our body, for instance, gives everyone a sense of forward and back), experience was neither entirely personal nor universal. They understood that certain experiences were shared within cultures, and that people from different cultures could experience the same building very differently, which made them question the modernist idea of an international or universal architecture. Their analyses described the experience of architecture as never neutral, or simply given. Apart from being shaped by our cultural upbringing, experience was also colored by the mood someone happened to be in, by their memories, and by all those things that make us human. For instance, we don't experience light as an abstraction. We experience light differently when we are just waking up than when we have a migraine. It is experienced as something painful or pleasurable, something that angers us or calms us.

Architectural Phenomenology's critique of the universalist assumptions of modernism was also a critique of the idea that architecture can claim autonomy from culture or from history. In other words, it widened the frame for analyzing buildings beyond the form of the singular object. The questions that architectural phenomenologists raised about culture, place, history and memory in architecture became

the central piloting concepts of postmodernism. As such, Architectural Phenomenology can be said to be one of the main sources of postmodernism, and indeed many architectural phenomenologists were protagonists of postmodernism.

Some of these questions are still worth asking today. For instance, among all the urgent issues that we must address as architects, such as climate change, I don't think we consider culture enough. And yet, the future of culture is just as urgent a question. What's your culture?

LW: I guess, American Chinese.

JOP: You?

G: I am an American born with Greek descent.

JOP: I am an architect.

LW: Huh...that's a good one.

JOP: There are many ways to define a culture. When you are asked to identify your culture you are asked to inhabit a default position that is there, and that you didn't create. It's a construction, but also something that no one person really created or is in control of. Culture is discursive. The positions within it are articulated through communication and debate.

This might help explain why upon entering architecture school, you feel like you found and are inhabiting a position—a number of “skins,” to go back to what you were saying earlier—that everyone recognizes but that you didn’t create. No single individual created Architectural Phenomenology, and no one can will it out of existence.

LW: Can you speak more about what aspects of modernism the generation of the 50’s and 60’s were criticizing and how Phenomenology offered tools or rhetorical devices to critique them? Why did Phenomenology appeal to them?

JOP: Well, there are many reasons, and again I think it’s important to think of the political and historical context. In the 1950s it was a combination of factors that made Phenomenology appealing and radical at the same time. It was very much associated with existentialism after World War II, with the figures of Jean-Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Gaston Bachelard. But because of the strong association with Sartre, who was a communist, it was essentially banned in American universities during the McCarthy era. It was as if somebody told you today to read a book that was written by a leader of the Taliban. Phenomenology was read in Catholic schools because nobody would suspect a Catholic of being a radical communist. There was a Catholic vehicle, let’s say, for this spread of Architectural Phenomenology. Many students at Princeton under Labatut, for instance, came from a number of

Catholic feeder schools.

LW: Phenomenology was also tied in with some Catholic ideas...

JOP: It was overlaid with some Catholic theology about the sacredness of the body. It was sublimated to some degree into theological terms because religion was more acceptable in the postwar than Phenomenology. It was acceptable to speak about certain things, like the body, in religious terms but not in political terms. The first generation of Architectural Phenomenologists was interested in subverting and changing the social political reality that they inhabited. They were trying to be politically active through their architectural practice. They believed that the type of architecture that was being done by modern architects was leading to a worse world. It was complicit in an oppressive economic system that tried to standardize life and human experience, so that people could be governed and managed efficiently. They resisted this aspect of modernization. They argued that if the experience of modernization is standardization, then the role of architects was to resist standardization by pursuing a type of specificity and uniqueness, such as, for instance, traditional building cultures or historic typologies.

G: You’ve already asked us, so we might as well ask you, how did you come into the study of Architectural Phenomenology



and also where do you situate yourself in this discourse?

JOP: When I started architecture school at Cornell, the first book I was given to read was Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Genius Loci*. When I took my first teaching job in Puerto Rico, Architectural Phenomenology was very prominent there too, but I encountered it by that point as a very dogmatic discourse about regional culture, as something that could not be learned or penetrated by foreigners. It had been taken up by architects who felt disenfranchised from the incipient globalization after the fall of the Soviet Union. These so-called local architects, who had nonetheless been trained elsewhere, claimed to be the only ones that could ever understand how to build in "their" culture, even though they had limited knowledge of historic building traditions. It was a type of monopoly over a region. Anything foreign was by definition worse. I was very dissatisfied with that because my own personal life was one of multiple transplants. I didn't feel that culture was bound to place in such an over determined way. So I decided to write a critique of Architectural Phenomenology. As I did my research, I uncovered that early Architectural Phenomenology of the postwar period was much more interesting, open and experimental than what it later became in the 1990s. So I tried to give a balanced account of the historical development of the movement. I don't think of myself as an architectural phenomenologist, but then, again, I also don't feel the need to completely reject its contributions to the intellectual history of

architecture.

LW: You mentioned the word "meaning" earlier, which is a word that is used by architectural phenomenologists to describe their goal to rediscover the meaning of their building or to generate meaning. What is the meaning they are talking about? How does this notion of meaning differ from that in semiology, that is to say, structuralism or even later post-structuralism...

JOP: Is there post-structuralist architecture?

LW: I would claim no. For me, post-structuralism is a discourse about text, textuality, writing and literary discourse more than an architectural idea that can be directly expressed in buildings. But people have borrowed it in architectural discourse.

JOP: This question of meaning is really important. It's interesting when you look at it generationally: the late postmodern, we could call them, versus the early postmodern.

LW: Maybe we could distinguish that by decade.

JOP: Yes, the generation that came into prominence in the 80's and 90's accused the generation that had come into prominence in the 60's of being essentialist, that is to say of thinking that there was only one meaning to each building. This accusation was precisely the same accusation that the 60's generation made

against the 30's generation when they charged modernism of universalism. But when you look at the modernists of the 30's, they were actually in favor of a heterogeneous modernism. What was called pluralism in the 1960s was called internationalism in 1930s. To accuse those in power of not standing up to their own standards is a very typical formula for younger generations to take power from their elders.

G: You also write that some historians reacted against Phenomenology, claiming that it was anti-intellectual or subjective. Is that a similar device used to reject the generation before you in order to allow you come to prominence. To say, "I am now operating at this higher level. You are anti-intellectual. I am intellectual."

JOP: Intellectuality has cultural value. In the case of universities, intellectuality is certainly a basis for advancement. What constitutes intellectuality, what is considered legitimate knowledge, is a fundamental struggle within the disciplines represented in any given university. Who controls and who defines what constitutes intellectual work is really at the heart of tenure decisions and teaching assignments. Architecture schools operate within universities so they have to explain what they do to the university at some point. The university tends to judge architecture according to the standards of other fields, which are mostly not visual fields, except for art. What are other visual fields?

G: There aren't.

JOP: Even in Art History they read and write texts about images, but they don't make them. So, does architecture really belong in a university? This has always been a question for architects. The push for architects has been to advance what we do as intellectual. In the 50's and 60's, architectural phenomenologists were the first to successfully make the claim that we are a full discipline, which means we must award the highest degree the university can offer: a PhD. The first American PhD program in Architecture was founded at Princeton by an architectural phenomenologist...

LW: Labatut.

JOP: Yes, and the PhD curriculum required students to draw. That would be unthinkable today. PhD students in Architecture would show visual materials as evidence of their intellectual capacity and their arguments. If you proposed this today you'd be accused of being an anti-intellectual. Eventually the model didn't hold. In the 1970s architectural PhD programs were recast as architectural history programs. The visual component was dropped, and the work became purely about writing, therefore assuming the form of conventional intellectual work. Architectural phenomenologists were very important in this shift. They argued that architectural history, as they conceived it from the perspective of experience, was



methodologically different from art history's historiography, which was geared towards establishing value in terms of authorship and provenance. Architectural phenomenologists began to take over architectural history and theory teaching positions within schools and displacing the art historians who had been teaching the architectural history survey classes. Architectural phenomenologists created the architectural history positions that the 80's and 90's generation of architects would later inhabit, except that when the younger group began teaching they pushed even further the idea that architectural intellectuality should not be based on the norms of art history, and instead argued that it should be based on the standards of a new type of theoretical work. All this leads us to today. What is intellectual work today? Do you think that architects need to be intellectual?

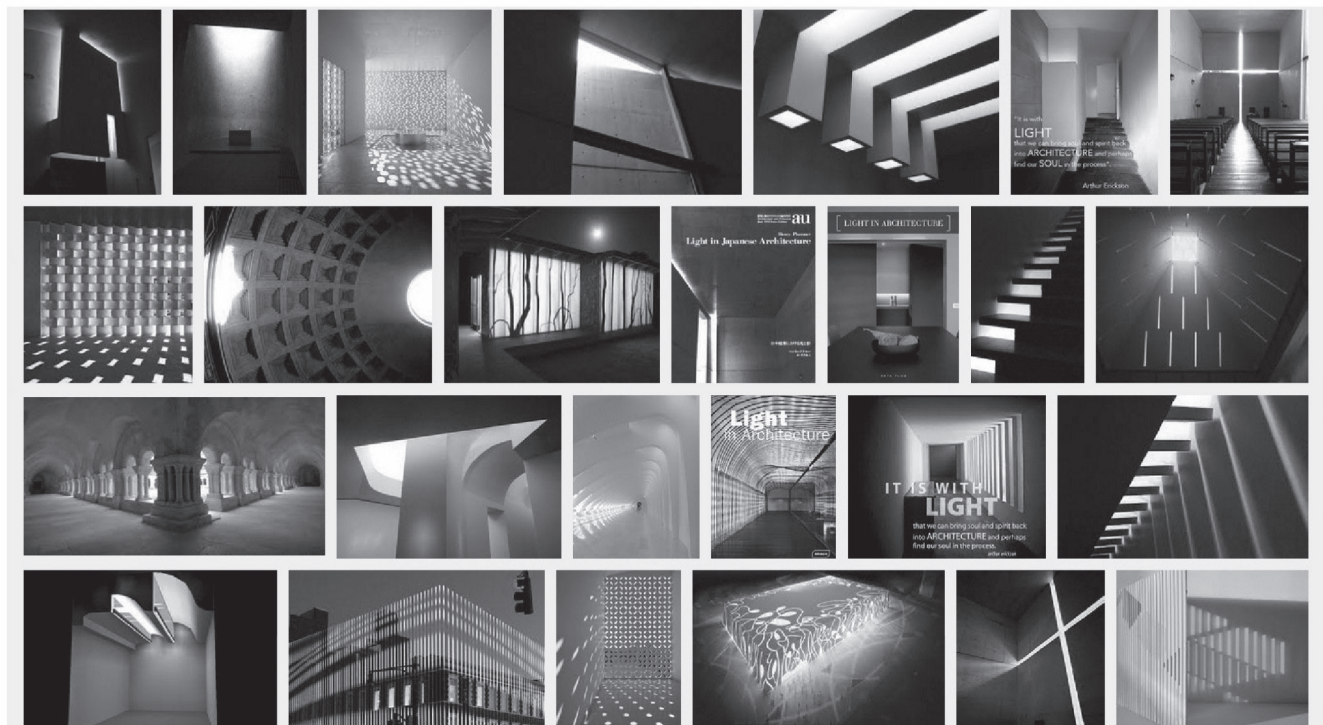
G: I think so. I think it has value. I wouldn't be here if I didn't. I also think you could get away without it. But in order to work at a certain level where you are making provocative architecture, you do need to have a certain level of intellectuality. It's not just about knowing architecture, it's knowing what other people are thinking in these seemingly related and unrelated disciplines. You have to understand the greater world around you.

LW: Last semester we did an issue called "Why Write?" We asked, why architects write? Why architects theorize? And for whom? If you just visit a building, you don't actually need to

read about the building in order to pass any judgment on it. One reason that architects write is to structure the discourse around their building.

JOP: Yes, framing and controlling the discourse determines what has relevance and what doesn't. What Architectural Phenomenology did was to say architectural discourse happens in many ways. It doesn't just happen through writing and it also doesn't happen only through building. All these things need to be taken into account. The generation of the 60's and 70's came to the conclusion that the most important contribution to discourse was to design a building. That was the central expression of what it meant to be an architect. The next generation flipped that around and said what it takes to make a building is actually to make photographs, publications, exhibitions, lectures, and, in sum, that the building is produced discursively as much as materially. The down side is that they tended to overplay the importance of discourse and looked upon physical buildings as compromised discursive epiphenomena. Now I think we are at a different point. The physicality of buildings is once again taken more seriously as something cultural and political. Whether you build a wall that is this high or that high matters greatly for who can have access, and you can have an impact, however small, on social equity. Any introduction of materials to the construction site is a deeply contested reality.





architecture needs a beginning

R and G in email exchange with Steven Holl and Dimitra Tsachrelia on March 14, 2014. Subsequent conversation recorded April 4th, 2014.

1. When we first met and I proposed having a conversation for our Phenomenology issue, I was excited to be told that Phenomenology does not exist. However, in reading your built and written works, it is clear that the ideas of Phenomenology are of great influence. I believe a good question to begin the discussion would be whether you view phenomenology as an ideology or as a kind of lens with which to read and design architecture.

SH: Wittgenstein said, “There is no such thing as phenomenology. There are phenomenological questions.”

Phenomenological questions can be a route to architecture. They give a framework for asking about our experience of space, sound, texture, light, and smell. Over the last 20 years, as architecture has been misrepresented by different media, to ask these questions about experiences of architecture brings us back to the true core—that architecture is the only art capable of bringing a manifold of essential experiences together and must be “seen” via the body moving through space.

G: Documenting the experience of architecture as exactly that, “seen via the body moving through space,” has been a great struggle for many of the figures discussed in Jorge

Otero-Pailos's *Architecture's Historical Turn*.¹ He speaks about the careful and meticulous methods used by Jean Labatut and his students, such as Charles Moore: for instance, photographing the buildings discussed in their writings as a way of communicating their subjective experience of a place. I also am recalling the way that you showed me the images of Doug Wheeler's light pieces on your phone to share a personal experience. How does an architect, who puts so much weight in the sensory experience of a space, deal with the fact that the way the majority of people will see a work is through heavily mediated channels rather than physical occupation of a space?

SH: Maybe the mediated experience isn't that important. Adolf Loos said that his buildings could not be photographed. He wasn't that interested in getting published because he really insisted that you have to experience the condition of the *Raumplan*. When these volumes shift against each other, like in the Müller House in Prague, this condition is something that you simply cannot photograph. It's just the slippage of one cubic volume against the other. If you look at Adolf Loos in books or photographs, you don't understand Adolf Loos. It is the difference between looking at a score of music and actually hearing it.

I would also just add that I have been referred to as an unrelenting modernist. Jorge's book has a postmodern subtext that I don't agree with. When I talk about phenomenology, I am

using examples like Adolf Loos and Luis Barragán. Barragán's work is something that you really have to see—these big fields of color and very simple movement of planes. Le Corbusier is another example, especially in La Tourette and Ronchamp. The way the floor slopes, the way light enters—these things are almost visceral. They have to be felt from being in it.

When I came to New York, postmodernism was the rage. Phillip Johnson had just finished the AT&T Tower. Michael Graves built the Portland Building. It didn't carry that kind of weight in Europe because they had the historic examples in their flesh, in their realities. The sort of stuff that was built in America was just unbelievably bad. Please don't confuse me with that.

G: What I took away from that was not putting you in a box with postmodernism but rather discussing the attempt to communicate these subjective experiences in space through the tool of photography. This was especially true in the work of Labatut and his students at Princeton—this first person view of the photographer. How does the experience of the body in space get communicated to someone who doesn't have the opportunity to go to the building?

SH: We've invested in the medium of small films because they get closer to presenting our architecture than magazines. We've made several films with *Spirit of Space* in order to get you closer to the movement through the space, the sound, the change in



the light. In those videos there is much more than you can get in photographs or a text. So that's a case where I am trying to use the most recent technology at hand to communicate more architecture.

2. In Kenneth Frampton's book *Steven Holl: Architect*, he calls out a shift in your work that gradually occurred in the late 1980s from the earlier typology focused work to having more of a focus on the sensorial experiences of the individual within space. A common debate within architecture is whether practice precedes theory, or vice versa. Was this shift only possible after having the opportunity to build, or was it always an underlying focus of the work that became magnified over time?

SH: My earlier preoccupation with American building types (*Pamphlet Architecture* #5,6, and 7: *The Alphabetical City, Hybrid Buildings, Urban & Rural House Types*) were part of a necessary working through of theoretical fundamentals that led to the breakthrough of the 1986 Porta Vittoria Urban Proposal for the Triennale in Milan, which was published in *Within the City: Phenomena of Relations*. Parallel to these writings, I was building small projects that helped to form other theoretical directions via light, material, and structure.

R: The important part of the Porta Vittoria proposal was the shift to design from a series of first person, subjective

perspectives. This is a radical departure from the primarily orthographic techniques of representation that were used in the *Pamphlet Architecture* projects. Is this a technique that has remained a primary design tool in your work? What advantages do you feel that design through subjective perspective gives you over orthographic drawings?

SH: That moment in 1986 was the height of the Italian Rationalists, especially Leon Krier. It was a polemic that starts with Aldo Rossi, Leon Krier, Giorgio Grassi, and all the Italian Rationalists. The prescription was that you could only do cities from building typology and morphology—the grid pattern of the city.

I said that we were going to do the exact opposite. We are not starting with morphology. We are going to start with space. We are not going to start with typology either. We are going to make up new types. The project began by making this prepositional chart with four kinds of architecture: under the ground, in the ground, on the ground, and over the ground. Then the word “between” was added. We made this complicated chart of prepositional relations. That was going to be the basis on which we would create new types. Then we made perspectives of space and determined what types that space made. These became fragments that were stitched together into a larger ground plan.



Just before that project, I took a train from Toronto to Vancouver. I always say that's where I went through this change. I was sitting beside this phenomenologist. I didn't even know who Merleau-Ponty was—he was teaching Merleau-Ponty. This train went through what is called the “spiral tunnel” in Canada. In order to make the train achieve the necessary elevation change, it goes through a spiraling tunnel under a mountain. I always said when I came out of the other end of that tunnel, I gave up everything I had done before, and I was going to find a new way.

After coming out of the end of that tunnel, when I got to Banff, I swam in this outdoor pool, and it was snowing. The snowflakes were coming down, and I was swimming next to Thom Mayne—that's where we met. I had never met him at that point. That was April of 1984.

3. In the essay from the early 1990s, you open by stating, “Experience of phenomena—sensations in space and time as distinguished from the perception of objects—provides a ‘pre-theoretical’ ground for architecture...Phenomenology as a way of thinking and seeing becomes an agent for architectural conception.”² A common accusation against architectural phenomenology is that it does not operate on a theoretical level, assigning preeminence to individual experience. As a counter to this claim, where does theory play a role in your work?

SH: I purposely went against principles common in Phenomenology from the beginning as I insist on an *a priori* idea that drives a design.

G: This leads us to believe that there is a working partnership between the broad conceptual idea of the project and the kinds of phenomenological questions described by Wittgenstein. It is very clear in your writings and descriptions of your work that there are many external sources from which you derive ideas that influence your work beyond a focus on purely phenomenological questions. How do the theoretical and the phenomenological influence one another?

SH: Working from an *a priori* idea that drives the design doesn't work with phenomenology. I presented this at a conference of philosophers in Helsinki. I wrote a text called “The Crisscrossing” describing the problem—that an idea needs to drive the design by holding all of these manifold pieces together. I said at the conference that I was misusing phenomenology. Those professors said, “No. You just reshaped it for your purposes in architecture.” They were fine with what I was doing.

DT: So phenomenology needs a prescribed form?

SH: First of all there are only phenomenological questions. The problem is that if you base a discipline all on effects and



experiences, then we have to have a pre-existing condition to react to. Architecture needs a beginning, a concept. There's nothing in phenomenology that allows you to do that.

G: A lot of the conversations that we have had look at how architects did not read phenomenology and then go do phenomenological architecture. In the case of Labatut, he was already asking these questions and philosophical phenomenology was used as a tool of justification. There is a big distinction between Phenomenology and architectural phenomenology. They should be understood in relation to one another, but they exist as two separate discourses.

SH: I don't think so. In fact it is precisely the ways that things are not separated that make them interesting. My experience was to be working on projects and reading a longer text in the evening or at lunch. The things that I would read would then filter in and become related to the project. There was one case where there was a direct link. That was for the Kiasma competition, because that comes from a text from Merleau-Ponty's book *The Visible and the Invisible*. There is a chapter called "The Intertwining—the Chiasm." It's the Greek word for crossing. That was the key word for our competition for the Kiasma Museum. When we won that's what they wanted to name the museum, but in Finnish there is no *c-h*, so they used a *K*.

[Yehuda Safran enters]

YS: This is your interview. I was there last time.

SH: Are you coming to my lecture on Tuesday in Glasgow?

YS: I can't I will be giving my own lecture Tuesday at Pratt, but I will be there Wednesday morning.

SH: The building opens at noon on Wednesday—the Glasgow School of Art. That's a very phenomenological building.

YS: Don't say so. There is a phenomenological view, but not a thing. A thing is not phenomenological.

[Yehuda Safran exits]

4. Part of what has led us to the theme of the issue was the reemergence that phenomenology seems to be having with our generation of students and young practitioners. Much of the work being done in schools is largely concerned with affect and attempts to make appeals directly to the senses. Many of these young designers speak using similar terminology when discussing their work with very little knowledge of phenomenology as a pre-existing framework to discuss experience. As a practitioner and an educator of this generation, why do you believe this reconnection between this

emerging group and sensory experience is occurring?

SH: I am not sure that your observation is correct, especially given the dominance of exterior image making and the repetition of iconic images via a plethora of websites. However, a return to core values of the inner experiences of architecture would be welcome. Like my past professor Hermann Pundt said to us in 1970 “A building must be *more* when you go in it than when you look at it.”

R: Last spring George and I were in a studio in which no exterior images of the building were ever shown. It was about the development of interior space across mediums.

G: In studios we are considering this first-person, subjective point of view, an emphasis on the atmospheric qualities of the space. These were essential in that studio but no one really knew at that point the discourse behind it.

SH: It’s a two dollar word. It’s used up already. The point is to look past the word and get into the substance.

G: We were mostly unaware of a prior discourse but were operating very much in the same way. An idea that I brought up was that my whole generation growing up was playing video games in which you are a first-person in space. You experience this world through this very mediated but also very subjective

view. This entire world only exists because you are there to occupy the first person view. This is something that may have had a profound effect on the way that we experience a virtual space. I think a lot of that has filtered over into the way we work digitally.

SH: That’s why such terrible buildings are coming out of the computer. People don’t really understand architecture. So they’re making some of the worst designs ever... this is a tragedy. I read a recent article about a video artist in the *New Yorker*—they describe going into his studio which is piled with pizza boxes and coke cans and has black garbage bags taped over his windows to keep light from going in so he can work on his machines for 20 hours at time. In a way there is this whole mindset that actually has a negative value to the environment. That comes with the territory of staring into the screen all time. This is a tragedy. Light and fresh air are biological needs. Suddenly we are turning against the natural environment. The captive video environment is something else.

7. Something that has become a signature of your work has been the delicate play of light and its effects within your projects. You have discussed the great care your office takes in the design of these effects at length. How does this attention to nuances of lighting scale up from the intimate scales of your earlier work to the mega-scale projects you have been developing in China over the past decade or so?



SH: Light and its effects are crucial in shaping the 3 million square foot urban project, Sliced Porosity Block that we realized in the center of Chengdu, China. The idea of urban porosity, public access from all sides, of this hybrid building is not as form-giving as the actual sun angle zoning rules that literally cut the block into a jagged elevation. In China, the code requires a minimum of two hours of sunlight per day into every apartment. In order to preserve the sunlight shining into apartments on the adjacent city block, our elevation was “sliced” according to those sun angles. At night the Light Pavilion by Lebbeus Woods throws its glowing light out to illuminate the large public space.

G: We do not disagree that the Chengdu project was not heavily influenced by light in its design. However, in this case it seems that light and Chinese building codes shape an overall form. In prior smaller works, the Chapel of St. Ignatius for example, so many of the specific instances where light infiltrates the interior or meets a surface are each heavily considered and calibrated. Is there a certain threshold, whether of scale or other factors, where a high level of attention to the intricate details of natural light becomes difficult? I find it extremely interesting that where so many of the earlier works are highlighted through photographs of the interior, the Chengdu project in particular never is seen through an interior image.

SH: We actually didn’t do the interiors. We did the plaza,

the buildings within buildings, the art, the Lebbeus Woods piece, and the history pavilion. Below the plaza there is a large shopping center. We shaped the section of that space but did not do any further work on the interior.

The project is a piece of a city. Being able to shape the public space is as much as you can hope for. If you had a singular client who was building a headquarters then you could have the chance to do the full project. That’s not what this was.

1 Otero-Pailos, Jorge. *Architecture’s Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Postmodern*. University of Minnesota Press. 2010

2 Holl, Steven. Pallasmaa, Juhani and Perez-Gomez, Alberto. *Questions of Perception*. William K. Stout. 2007



here we are.
we are here.

Mark Wigley in conversation with WC, G and VL. Recorded March 5, 2014

WC: We want to start with the fact that Derrida's earliest published works are about Husserl, the so-called father of Phenomenology. It is apparent that there is a genealogical link between Phenomenology and post-structuralist theory, currently two rather different discursive threads in architecture.

MW: Well, Derrida's thinking is never separate from the tradition that it is critiquing. His position is based on a dissection of the way Western philosophy operates. When you hear that dissection it sounds like the whole thing is going to collapse, because you think there has to be a ground on which the thing stands. He does not say, "I show you that there's no ground so everything falls down." Instead, he says, "I show you there's no ground and it is therefore really impressive that it doesn't fall down." The absence of ground is where things are actually constructed. They are built out of this enigma and gain their strength from it. Derrida is never outside the thing that he's undoing, and the undoing is not a collapsing or taking apart, but a form of deep analysis. He can never extract himself, or does not want to extract himself, from Phenomenology. He's demonstrating that Phenomenology repeats all of the tropes of the tradition of Western philosophy that it wants to undo. He remains, in that sense, a card-carrying phenomenologist, and this becomes very clear when he talks about Heidegger in the

most Heideggerian way.

When architects reached out to Phenomenology, they felt like it was healing a wound—that it would provide the missing magic: the essence of architecture. Phenomenology's foregrounding of experience seemed very close to the idea of the experience of space, of life, and of time. It felt like architecture was being talked about. It was enormously helpful that Heidegger was always using the examples of little huts and bridges and things like that. It seemed like he was the right guy for the job. People in architecture that were reading Heidegger were not really reading him, although some of his texts like "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" were on every architecture school's reading list around the world.¹ You can't underestimate how widespread this virus was. But the level of understanding of that text was minimal, at best. Why would we ask architects to become philosophers or be able to read philosophy philosophically? Architects read it carnivorously, which was fine. But there were certain people in architecture who believed that they authentically understood the truth of all this stuff. They acted as import agents. There was a guy named Dalibor Vesely, who was just this agent for disseminating a particular reading of Phenomenology. He was associated with Joseph Rykwert and the school in Cambridge, which had many victims over the years. There is a whole chain of students of successive generations through which you can follow this influence. He was sort of a cultish figure in possession of a magical truth. In

the end, this particular way of celebrating Phenomenology was a kind of devotion that took the form of belief veiling doubt in the way that we have discussed—complete with a sort of chanting. Certain architects would feel themselves to be the natural inheritors of that, like Daniel Libeskind and John Hejduk to some extent. The whole school of thought perfected a maneuver from architecture to philosophy and back without any awareness of the violence being done to both fields. Nobody in that group really wanted to know what that philosophy was doing. They didn't want to go so deep.

So when Derrida arrived, this was bad news for them, because he was going to go very deep and it all became a bit tricky. The so-called post-structuralist thinking in architecture began to undo this uncritical love affair between architecture and Phenomenology. You could say it's a reversal of the love that Phenomenology had for kind of a cartoon image.

WC: Before we get to the dissemination of this superficial reading of Phenomenology, which becomes embodied in the word experience, these things are, like what you are saying, cartoons taken out of these texts.

MW: Right. To read is always to violate—a faithful reading is violent. It sees in the text what the author didn't think that they were saying. Phenomenology was in this sense creatively used by architects to legitimize their own practice, giving it a kind of



aura. There was an aura to the human body and its experience of the lived world—as well as a lot of writing about the building and the experience of the body as a kind of magic.

WC: And the word magic itself, before Phenomenology became magical, was way of approaching history and theory, calling into question the strict separation of subject and object, and the nature of subjectivity in relation to history. How do you position yourself with that type of historical approach, that way of constructing history?

MW: At sort of a more abstract level, you can't make the clear separation between a theorist and a historian, which could be also the difference between a more philosophical and a more historical mode of thinking. There isn't philosophy without history. Plato devotes himself to the thought of things that go beyond history, the transcendental ideas beyond space and time. In order to construct the idea that there is something beyond history, he tells stories and uses a kind of history. His dialogues are all stories in a sense. But the reverse is also true. There is no history without theory. To tell a story you have to evoke things that are not part of the story—truths that are seen to be unaffected by that story or any particular story.

When Husserl writes *Origin of Geometry*, the *origin* meaning the beginning, he tells the history of geometry, that which supposedly goes beyond history. That is the beauty of Husserl's

argument, to explain how the trans-historical object is produced within history. This is of great relevance to architects since architectural theory in the west begins with the thought that an object produced in a certain place and time resonates with the harmonies of the cosmos that transcend place and time. Husserl goes further to embed the transcendental within the everyday transactions of lived space. There is, as it were, a continual rebirth of truth in the space and time of lived experience.

Derrida's work begins with a reading of Husserl's book that shows how it remains within the metaphysical tradition it wants to escape. The arrival of post-structuralist thought in architecture is therefore not by chance a moment when the status of history and theory is kind of blurred. There is a group that would self-identity as theorists, and this was partially true of figures like Eisenman, but much truer of a generation later, my generation, who were known as theorists. What people meant by that was post-structuralist. We were neither more nor less theoretical than anyone else. Theory was going to take over and control architecture, because it was still thought of as a set of rules. The earlier group who wrote in a kind of poetic way was opposed to and by a younger group of analysts whose writing was very technical, very complex. We were denounced for being difficult to read. "It's such hard work, why does theory have to be so hard?" To which we would say, "Would you like your doctor to write poetically about the condition of



your body or would you like them to use the technical language appropriate to the analysis of your medical condition?” We were of the view that even if what architects were producing was poetry, the analysis of it was not necessarily another form of poetry.

G: This younger generation of analysts accused architectural phenomenologists of mishandling the themes of postmodern theory, such as universal human experience. They also viewed phenomenologists as operating in political bad-faith, in so far as it purported to stand for a place-based architectural practice found in marginal regions in the world. The older generation rebuts that often post-structural theorists were without political commitment, turning the term “pluralism” into a toothless relativity where every idea is given equal value.²

MW: I hesitate in the same way that I hesitated on in your previous question because the word postmodernism was unimportant for this group of theorists I’m talking about.

WC: Because it hadn’t been invented? The word “postmodernism?”

MW: No. It totally existed. It had ruled, but was of no interest to this group at all. Postmodernism existed in a double meaning at that time. It applied to postmodern classicism in architecture, while within the world of critical theory it was used to refer

to post-structuralist theory. Because postmodernism was an aesthetic tendency within architecture, post-structuralist theorists had no use for the word, or any interest in it. If you wanted to trash theory, you would put it into the same box with postmodernism. You’d say this was a symptom of postmodernism. Of course, the theorists were saying it wasn’t a symptom of anything. Jorge Otero-Pailos is different because for him postmodernism itself was the thing he wanted to analyze—particularly its use and abuse of Phenomenology. It’s his subject. But he’s from the next generation: the grandkids, super interesting.

The so-called theorists were sometimes accused of being apolitical. In other words, the technical and complex arguments used by post-structuralists to open architecture up to different understandings were seen as a sort of de-politicization of architecture. To which theorists replied, “oh, contraire!” What post-structuralist theory does is bring all of the forbidden subjects to architectural discourse: race, sex, gender, and post-colonial identity. The general context was a late Marxist despair at the nature of architecture’s relationship to capital. So, you had a group of people who felt that to be serious about politics was to be serious about money—using the economy as the master term—and a new generation for whom the idea of a master term was the political problem. The concern of the new generation was to avoid a fetishization of capital as the only analytic framework and the concern of the older generation



was that a building that questions its own identity might still be deployed as a form of corporate decoration. These were two different ways of understanding architecture's complicity with systems of authority. The debate should have been more interesting but the younger generation was not very impressed by the older generation that talked about political engagement. They were never seen on the street, or fighting any battle, and were in no way progressive within their own institutions—the language of engagement was used as a cover for inactivity.

VL: So, moving back into Phenomenology, Heidegger, in relation to the pre-Socratics, was concerned with finding the original element from which all things are made...

MW: The philosophical question has always been how do to get something out of nothing. It is a question that resonates with architects who are asked to make something, and not just anything, but a thing that talks about its own thingness. This is crude way to say it, but the architect is asked to make an object that foregrounds its own objecthood. It actually says to you, "I'm an object, think about that." Getting back to the pre-Socratics, the question was, "Out of the original chaos, the nothing, how is there now something?" This, by the way, is the question that Husserl echoed when he asked, "How do you produce the timeless in time?"

At some level, the mission of the philosopher and the mission

of the architect are inseparable. To do the work of philosophy, you're going to invent the figure of the architect. In the case of the pre-Socratics, they invent the demiurge, the figure of the creator. Before the idea of god is the idea of the demiurge, the maker. The philosophical quest to understand being, the existence of something out of nothing, to produce a distinction, to draw a line, is very close to the figure of the architect—as the person who draws the line and makes the distinctions. You can think of the architect as a kind of accessory to philosophy, an example of the example that serves to explain or legitimize all the other examples. Architecture serves as the example of the way objects or situations can exemplify a principle. When Plato wants to explain what the other-worldly world of ideas beyond space and time is he says, "Think of the builder. First he has the idea, and then he builds it." He invokes the figure who translates immaterial ideas into the material world. This figure, *arkitekton*, later the "architect" is a requirement of philosophy. Knowing this we architects say back to the philosophers, "We're not just any old discipline; we are your evidence." Philosophers know this too, and find themselves writing about architecture all the time, not always so well, or hardly ever well. When the architect meets the philosopher, it's like the slightly awkward meeting with a long-lost cousin and we think we might get something back from the deal. If philosophy needs architecture to think of itself, perhaps architecture could get more respect, in the university for example. When Phenomenology came around, it looked like a direct path to

renewing the pact between the language of philosophy and the language of architectural production and reflection.

But of course, every architect and every student in this school has to produce something out of nothing. There is this magic—what other word would apply? Because as long as it is nothing in the beginning and something in the end, then it is magic by definition—you can't negotiate a path between something and nothing, it's a leap. In Heidegger's thinking, it is all about that leap. It is what Heidegger calls the thrown-ness of the world. As you know, a lot of Derrida's writing is about this. We are thrown into being, projected into being. The very word "project" at the heart of architectural discourse means to throw. Architecture is all about throwing. And throwing is not to fling something from A to B. To be thrown is to suddenly arrive somewhere as something sometime without knowing what came before. The sense to be is to have been thrown. Like a baby must feel when they are born—there are definitely some kids who want to go back in. [laughs] Maybe all kids want to go back in, but "in" becomes the breast. The sense of where you have been thrown from is retroactively constructed from where you find yourself.

In the famous essay, "The Conflict of the Faculties," Immanuel Kant tries to show how all the foundations of all schools are the same in the end—that knowledge is built up as one.³ What Heidegger does is to show that every discipline is thrown. Architecture doesn't sit on anything, it is thrown. Here we are.

We are here. So actually, the university rests on doubt. Because there is doubt, you engage with this thing, with this doubt, which is where you have come from. That is magic. The world of the university is the world of explanation. It will explain everything to you. But what the university cannot explain is itself, because it too was thrown into being. If you are in my camp, you say it is amazing to think of architecture this way. Architects are not the curators of solidity, of stability as the manifest mission, but are actually responsible for covering up the thrown-ness of things, the lack of security, stability and so on. We are experts in covering the weirdness. The gesture of the architect is profoundly philosophical in a double sense. When I make an architectural object, an object that speaks about itself, I demonstrate the ability to have an object, and to have something out of nothing. It is also fundamentally a theoretical act, even a philosophical act. I actually don't need to have an object. I just need to have a discourse about that object. Architectural schools incubate the discourse in which a certain type of object may or may not appear. The people who believe in Phenomenology couldn't be more conservative from this perspective. This is just the worst of religion, it is unambiguously religion.

WC: We discussed an additive to modernity as an easy way to deal with the lack of truth.

MW: I have an almost physical revulsion against this kind



of acquiescence to the ideology of solidity, the “truth” of lived experience. From the perspective of the pseudo-phenomenologists in architecture, where the truth lies in lived experience, how could any single experience or architectural project be valued over another? The paradox is that these people are very much interested in judging, so of course they secretly invoke criteria from outside lived-experience to endorse certain objects over others. So it’s all fake in the end.

WC: Hilariously enough, at the beginning of your class, you said, “You don’t need to read all of these books.” The point being that a lot of the ideas within them are disseminated to such a degree that you don’t even need to read it. The ideas are already in the vocabulary and language we are using. In what ways do you think Phenomenology itself has performed like this? How does it live now outside of the book?

MW: Phenomenology had a big influence in the previous decades, and it didn’t quite go away. It is still hanging around and returns in the language of juries, for example. You could tape record a jury and identify at which point the members of the jury were invoking a phenomenological account. Because what we have done so far is deal with it as though it were a sports match, like the great Monty Python sketches of philosophers running around on the soccer field. We have treated the phenomenologists as a team on one side and the theory generation of the 80’s as an opposing team. One team

likes to act as marketing agents for architects, explaining why a building is so magical. The other team wants to talk about what it means to explain, what a building is and what magic is. But these are cartoon images. It’s not so much that there are these two positions; most people are operating between these positions or mixing them. There is so much talk about the end of theory—as if there is no longer even a match.

WC: We’ve heard that here, in lectures too.

MW: Right. It’s untrue of course. In reality what happened is that theory got institutionalized in so many different ways. The most obvious form of that is to have a dean of an architectural school that is a theorist—not just this school, almost every school. In some senses, post-structuralist analysis became an integral part of the discourse. For a couple of years a new group of theorists promoted themselves by speaking about a post-theory moment. These were very confused people. They all had one thing in common: for whatever reason, they were not able to write academic books, and displaced this into a generalized disdain for theory. This is a sad or cruel fact. So they said, “What if the real responsibility of theory was to write articles about practicing architects? What if that was our real destiny in life?” And this group also needed to deal with the problem that their parents seemed to be having a good time, so as card-carrying adolescents, they had to rebel. The strongest form of rebellion was to say that theory doesn’t work, which is a



problem because they were all theorists. They wrote hilariously hypocritical theoretical texts saying one shouldn't do theory. My reaction was always like, "Hey! You are probably right, not everybody should do theory. If you want to write about famous architects, write away. But you don't need to tell us that you are doing it. You certainly don't have to theorize why you are doing it since theory is what you want to leave behind. Just do it." They all run schools now so they have discretely withdrawn their argument and now theorize education, which is great. But the main point is that the landscape of architectural theory is finally organized by many debates of which the Phenomenology/post-structuralist debate is only one. There was a battle, which was won by a pathetically small number of theorists, whose students then rebelled by calling for an end to theory in favor of advertising work for practitioners. Now we have yet another generation of scholars. In all of this, nothing ever fully leaves the stage. This creates the possibility for the return of Phenomenology.

WC: The vacancy.

MW: Last question?

WC: There is confusion about Phenomenology for a few different reasons. The meaning of the word has changed over time. It has been appropriated by different people in both theory and practice. The way it is appropriated is different.

The word has this subtle negative connotation. It is important for us in this issue to bring up the word because of its negative connotation, to ask why. What do you think the role of Phenomenology is in the school now, as a belief? Has the word changed in its present use?

MW: At any moment, there is the sense that certain qualities of architectural experiences need to become central to the life of the school. Could there be such a thing as a school of architecture in which a sort of primal experience of the object and of one's own experience is never invoked? Is it technically possible? Of course, my answer would be it is impossible. None of us can escape the lure of the object, nor want to. But this doesn't require us to subscribe to a philosophical framework seen to come from a "higher" discipline. A school needs to devote itself to the thought that architecture itself is the meta-discipline.

1 Heidegger, Martin. "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971 [1951].

2 See Introduction to *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Post-modern*. Jorge Oteros-Pailos, xiv

3 Kant, Immanuel. *The Conflict of the Faculties*. New York, New York: Abaris Books, 1979



nothing comes from nothing

Kenneth Frampton in conversation with S and C. Recorded March 13, 2014.

SL: What does Phenomenology mean to you? How do you see yourself shaping the development of Architectural Phenomenology?

KF: I think it has to be approached with a certain caution in regard to its relevance to the culture of architecture in this particular moment, in which the species being is confronted with a modernization that has a life of its own. The modern project as a humanistic project becomes increasingly problematic, due to its conflict with maximizing modernization. All of which is evident in the environment and the culture of building. The experiencing subject resists western division of the mind from the body, that is to say, from a being responsive to the environment. What is the relationship of the subject to the physical environment in terms of an overall experience? It is not only a question of visual stimuli, the tactile issue is also present, as well as acoustical and olfactory phenomena. There is a great deal of late modern architecture that is more or less indifferent of the experience of the subject. It is entirely preoccupied with the optical and the visual. With the spectacular, the proliferation of images and visual stimuli, one might say, many architects seem to be transfixed before the spectacular. It becomes really hard for architecture schools to acknowledge the more basic limits to the subject in relation to



the environment.

C: Of course every person has an experience of a building and the richness and quality of the experience should be emphasized. How do we then compare experiences against one another, even though every building produces an experience?

KF: Well, maybe it's a matter of reducing stimulation. The problem is that we are over-stimulated. Barragán has this aphorism: an architecture that does not achieve tranquility fails its spiritual mission.

C: Jorge Otero-Pailos writes one of the main rises of Phenomenology in architecture was the reassertion of history: to make a building that produces a sensory experience in the present and also holds a cumulative cultural significance. It seems that all buildings do this in the passage of time...¹

KF: The philosopher Eugeni d'Ors says that all that is not tradition is plagiarism. This is an astonishingly provocative aphorism—the question of the past in relation to the present. I like the fact that the word “tradition” is linked to such words “trade,” “betrayal” and “translation,” all of which involve the idea of transgression. There is an expression in Latin: “all translation is a betrayal.” The translation from one language to the other cannot be done. It is a useful way to look at tradition. Nothing comes from nothing. In the end, the self-

realization of the human subject depends on collective culture. The significance of this resides in the fact that culture can be easily destroyed. One can see that at a particular moment and time, a particular society can produce works of exceptional brilliance, and then quite suddenly it is not possible anymore. What we think of as tradition is transformed through this cycle of inheritance and transformation, as Alvaro Siza once put it, architects don't invent anything, they transform reality.

C: This idea is that buildings receive their being through their environments or locations, not from the spaces necessarily.

KF: This doesn't totally exclude space, however. The spatial organization of the building is not suppressed by its relationship to its context. I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. In relation to modernization process, there is a tendency to see buildings as free standing objects having no essential relationship to the environments in which they are situated. We can think of many recent celebrated buildings with which this is patently the case. Koolhaas's CCTV has nothing to do with its environment, and we could say the same thing with his most recent works.

C: But we could consider that the environment also includes not only the physical but also the cultural and economic environment. The CCTV could probably be argued to not have been built in any other country other than in China.



KF: The section through the CCTV suggests a literal suppression of the subject. Beyond that it is a totally unethical work! It uses an extremely expensive material as if it was nothing more than pieces of balsa wood. Structurally it is completely irrational, requiring an exorbitant use of steel just for the sake of egotistical expression. You could have produced a building for ten thousand people that would not at all look like this and which would perhaps have been more responsible in terms of the environment and the experience of the people within the building.

SL: In Norberg-Schulz's essay "Phenomenology of Place," he defines space as a system of places.² What do you think is the relationship between spaces versus places, and also the non-place?

KF: The modern idea of space is relatively new. It is at the turn of the century that Schmarsow used the German word *raum*, and spoke of architecture as *die Raumgestalterin*, the creatress of space. Schmarsow's perceptual model is anthropomorphic, where the body-being penetrates into space and displaces space with a lateral awareness of what is on the left or the right. You could say his whole idea of space stems from the cathedral. This is the first time space is used in relation to architecture. I don't believe that Violet-le-Duc even used the concept space. Space in architecture is particularly modern and is connected

to geo-physical concepts of space or cosmological models. Since a good deal of built culture involves volumetric enclosure and articulation, then the idea of space is very much connected to our phenomenological experience of space. As soon as you move from the inside to the outside, the boundary between space and place is not so clear. Heidegger uses the term "space endlessness" and I think he has in mind the lack of boundary in the late modern world in general. He has this aphorism that boundary is not where things end but where things begin. The question of the place in relation to the surface of the earth is a very fundamental concept. However it is not antithetical to space as enclosed volume.

The question of the ground and the cultivation of the ground are now much neglected in architecture schools, as opposed to the cult of the freestanding aesthetic object. I think the culture of the ground, i.e. landscape, is increasingly important today, given that the proliferation of buildings without any relationship to each other. Hence, landscape as a critical discourse has the potential of trying the fragmentary parts together.

C: So, place is the harmony between natural environment and urban environment, where both interact—a man-made imposition on the natural environment. Can you still have a dense urban situation that has a place?



KF: I am reminded of Gregotti's aphorism: "The origin of architecture is not the primitive hut, but the making of ground, to establish a cosmic order amid the surrounding chaos of nature." One has to mark the ground in order to distinguish it from the wilderness. The grid marked across North America is a marking of ground, a calibration. I recently became aware through David Leatherbarrow of a Japanese philosopher from the 30's, who wrote a book under the rubric of climate and the cultural mediation of climate that focuses on the climate of specific countries. Coming back to the idea of place, we can't delimit our notion of space to size.

C: Another word that's frequently used could be character—the character of a place. I had a conversation last semester about the characters of New York and Los Angeles, it was suggested that any difference between places was the result of institutional bodies that are operating and directing discourse in each city. However, if we talk about character as climate and incorporate this idea of history, an institution would be considered as something that further adds to define that climate.

KF: To continue with this, one needs to elaborate on the idea of climate in relation to the process of modernization as part of the modern project. The idea of the modern project has to be taken back to the German enlightenment. At the same time, there is an enormous amount of non-places everywhere, the

proliferated by the universal megalopolis. Meanwhile, global climate change continues irrespective of any differentiation we might make between place and non-place. You could argue that the proliferation of non-places directly arises out of the thrust of techno-scientific modernization. I am stuck by the fact that when modern technology operates at a micro-scale, as in medicine or surgery, it is often very precise and effective, but it is the contradictory when it comes to a large scale production and environmental control. In the 19th century, it was possible to believe that this species would be subject to infinite progress. The ideology of late capitalism is still about progress: the constant increase in production and consumption. However, anyone with half a brain can see that this doesn't need to be a particular omen for the future.

C: In some of your own writing you seem to be describing the building as a mediator between a man-made object and man himself. In "The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects" you wrote, "the dependency of political power on its social and physical constitution, that is to say, on its derivation from the living proximity of men and from the physical manifestation of their public being in built form. For architecture at least, the relevance of *The Human Condition* resides in this... between the status of men and the status of their objects."³

KF: As you know, I am obsessed this phrase of Hannah Arendt: "the space of human appearance." She has been criticized

for the fact that she grounds her discourse in the Greek city-state, *polis*, from which the term political originates. The idea of direct democracy is latent in her entire argument. I will never recover from the influence of *The Human Condition*. That book changed my whole view on architecture. For me the space of human appearance permits the body, in a social, cultural and political sense, to come into being. Just to give you a banal example, I detest the current furnishing of the café downstairs. The long table is a total imposition. The original pattern of circular tables with four chairs proliferated around the space would be a much more democratic and humane arrangement, and open to associational groups of varying size. I was looking at the space today. How can such a barbaric collective environment be cradled in the heart of a school of architecture?

1 Otero-Pailos, Jorge. *Architecture's Historical Turn: Phenomenology and the Rise of the Post-modern*. University of Minnesota Press. 2010. pg. xxxiii

2 Norberg-Schulz, Christian. "Phenomenology of Place" in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*. Ed. Nesbitt, Kate. Princeton Architectural Press. 1996. Pg 422

3 Frampton, Kenneth. "The Status of Man and the Status of his Objects" in *Labour, Work and Architecture*. Phaidon Press. New York. 2002. pg. 42



suddenly, it
made no sense
to me at all

W and C in conversation with Robert Irwin. Recorded on March 26th, 2014

W: You gave a lecture at UVA in 2009 in which you spoke about your theoretical grounding. We wanted to start by talking to you about this autodidaction, and the ways that certain texts influenced the way you think and work today.

RI: Well the texts were never a primary line. I came to the whole thing in the most unorthodox way. I started to get involved after I served in the army. I spent some time in Europe and didn't have any money. I was wandering around a very, very inexpensive place called Ibiza, which at that time, you could only get to once a week on a small boat. I ended up on the other side of the island because the city was too complex for me. I had no idea what I was doing, or why I was doing it. I didn't speak Spanish, and nobody there spoke English.

By accident, in a way, I spent eight months without actually carrying on a word of conversation with anybody. I didn't really plan it, but it was an interesting experience. When you first spend a little time like that, you amuse yourself one way or another, primarily taking long walks and browsing around. But, over a period of time, there's a moment of panic because you naturally want to do something: pick up a book, read something, call somebody, you know... I didn't do any of those things and just walked each day. I had a strange experience.



I may have been delusional. I felt that I was examining my mind: how I think, what I feel, and what kind of quirks and odysseys my mind has. After a short amount of time I became extremely peaceful. At first there was a little panic. Then I became absolutely relaxed. I would say that was probably a pivotal moment in my life.

It has also become a base for how I work to this day. For example, when I go to look at a site, the people that bring me there want to walk around with me. I do that for a short period of time, but then I have to be alone. You're split. You have to attend to them and you're also trying to attend to what it is you will deal with in that place.

C: The idea of quantifying intangible things in our world, such as the way we think and our emotions, is something that you have spoken about in terms of shadow and other things in the physical world. I was hoping that you could expand more on this difference between qualitative characteristics, such as shadow or color, and why you reject the attempt to quantify them.

RI: That particular moment of experience where I came to the issues that you have in mind was at the end of a long and very steady phenomenological reduction—in the sense of what Husserl proposed one hundred years earlier. I pretty much got down to the nuts and bolts of the thing. I painted, or tried to

paint a painting, that was slightly curved, just enough to notice if you put it next to a flat painting. It was energized. And there was hardly anything there. But also, it sat up from the wall. Being a painter, I ended up putting dots on it very carefully, red and green dots. If you did them too regularly, they created a pattern. If you did them too irregularly, they were moments. So the discipline was to have them evenly spread, neither too formal nor too informal. And it took a few minutes for them to manifest themselves. What you got, basically, was just energy.

In that moment, because I came to this step by step, I, for the first time, saw a painting—the idea that was on a square. I realized that was a highly stylized learned logic, which is not how we see the world at all. We don't see it in frames. That had become an issue. That was a moment of epiphany for me. Afterwards, I wasn't a painter anymore. There was no reason to paint. It made no sense whatsoever.

One of the other things was the shadow, which I had never really paid attention to prior to that moment. The nice thing about the shadow is that, in this particular context, it was very powerful, very real. I made the distinction between quantitative and qualitative. Qualitatively, it certainly was there. It certainly had a bearing on what I was doing and seeing. At the same time, quantitatively, it didn't exist. It had no body. If you moved the light, it changed. In other words, if you tried to quantify it, you couldn't weigh it. You couldn't really measure it. All of the

sudden, for me, that was the distinction between quantity and quality. I had slipped over into a world in which shadow had a real presence on one level, and no presence or any meaning on another level. That was, for me, a good moment.

W: You spoke briefly about how you walk around a site, and how you are in turn influenced by it. You produce the work as a function of the site, but also you are projecting something back out onto it. You could also say that once you get to the bottom of this phenomenological reduction, you start to develop tactics and tools that you carry with you to these sites. You have your own frameworks and logics, even if they are internal logics, to produce new works. We wanted to also ask you about site-conditioned work—whether you have certain sets of operations that you work with, or whether you try to develop new toolsets specifically for a site.

RI: Obviously the latter is more desirable. Whether you can do it or not is something else altogether. Let's take it step by step. At first I thought, "Ok, how do I deal with this?" I had just, maybe, become a reasonably good painter. Suddenly I was out of business. I played some games in the studio for a while. I did pieces with glass. I did the acrylic columns. I did a series of discs. The reason I did the discs was to push what I had stumbled over, which was to paint a painting that didn't begin and end at the edge in the old sense. I didn't even realize that people would immediately think that they were a mandala, that

I was some spiritual trespasser. But they made sense to me. I realized, at a certain point, what it is I am trying to focus on: it had energy. I was dealing with this ephemeral world in which things have a lot of corporal properties, but none of the normal meanings or structures that go with it. I fumbled around like that. I chose energy over matter. The concrete things—marble, steel, and all of the materials that artists have used over the centuries—had barriers that were difficult to escape.

One thing I did know was that if I stayed in the studio, I would somehow still interact with those processes—all the things I had learned—even if I was reducing them. I figured that as long as I stayed in the studio, I was screwed. I made a gesture that nobody paid any attention to: I would go anywhere anytime for anyone for anything.

C/W: [Laughter]

RI: So that's how I got on this peripatetic trail. Someone would invite me to a little junior college in Arizona, and I would go. And I taught for a while, formally. I had a lot of very famous and good students, who I did not teach. I took a different approach. I realized right away that when you spend time with somebody, the first thing you have to recognize is that the only thing that they really have, what they bring to a situation, is a unique sensibility. If you spend time with that sensibility, exercising it and giving it whatever it needs, at a



certain point it will suddenly take over. It is theirs and there from the beginning. You get them to spend time with it and recognize it. Once they do that, they will do things that you could not have taught. You don't take on the role of a "teacher." You don't "teach" somebody something. You inform them with everything they need, every kind of information, every possible thing they should see. As students, I had the pleasure of having Ed Ruscha, Vija Celmins, and...uh, what's his name...had himself shot...locked himself in a locker...Chris Burden. I'm making that point because it's obvious that I couldn't have taught them those things.

W: So you put your hope and your belief in them, into their specific subjective sensibilities.

RI: I didn't make that kind of evaluation. Basically, that's what makes each of us unique. We are a kind of make-up of what we observe, how we feel... All the things that people call talent are really sensibilities. I spent the next four years out in the desert, in what you would call the Four Corners area, just looking at things—thinking about what I could do, how I could act or interact with those things, clumsily, at best. It also brought up a couple of simple questions. If I did something that I thought had some presence, I couldn't take it back to New York. I could maybe take bus tours out there. [Laughter]

W: And bring people to it.

RI: [Laughs] Pretty silly idea. Basically, I never did anything with those, other than amuse myself. The questions were good. They were fun. It also gave me a very different view of the art world and the idea of that as criteria—that showing the work was even actually essential to it. That's a funny question. You're a human being in a human context, although, in the desert, it's pretty thin.

Obviously light is a major element, you know, in anything. It's present everywhere. It has to be one of the first things you deal with: the character, the quality of the light, what color it acts or interacts with, what all the circumstances are. I love it because it's not controllable like electric light. Turrell is doing very well with all the manipulation and technology of light, which is quite spectacular. But for me it's very mannered—natural light is much more interesting and exciting. It's always there, so it's free. All you do is somehow take advantage of it.

I did a piece recently where a friend who runs a large museum challenged to do this show in Varese at Villa Panza. There were two rooms in the stable by the villa, and Turrell had the major space. This was not a war, but he had the best space in the whole thing. So, the guy asked me to do something in the other room, which from the photos didn't look too horrible. When we got there it was clear that he had taken the photographs from a particular vantage point. When you turned around there was all of this mechanical equipment for air conditioning. When I got



there I thought “oh shoot, this is a bummer.” The space was 60 feet long, 13 feet long and 13 feet high. It had these big terrible windows on one side that swamped the space with south facing light—just criminal. One of the only things to do is to start and look at the site and then make larger circles around it because nothing comes from nowhere. Look at everything that’s going on—the history of the place, its ambitions, the architecture materials, and all of the things that you may or may not use, but that are influencing the site. They are already engaged in a certain sense, or can be engaged with in a certain way. So in this particular case I tamed the light first. I made it really work for me. I did something with the space to articulate it, something like a maze. The best part of it was the character and quality of the light. Instead of just letting the light come straight in, I made four slots in the wall that were 18” deep. There was nothing else there. The quality of the light became the event.

W: An event is something more temporary, something that’s seen just for a short amount of time.

RI: At different moments. The thing about using natural light is that it never repeats itself. So you have a thing that’s continuously energy, always articulating the space.

C: You’re using the term energy a lot, first when speaking about the painting and the way it hung off the wall, and the dots, and now speaking about energy as the light. It seems

in many of your works there is a question of revealing or emphasizing a latent energy that’s already in our world. This leads to something you said before that’s very provocative, that “we don’t perceive our world, we create it” according to guides that emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects of it.

RI: Yes and no. When I open my eyes in the morning the world completely gets formed—instantly it’s there. I don’t ask myself how did I do that, but in a sense it would be a good question. “How did I form this?” Let me go back, did you see the Whitney?

C: Yes we did.

RI: Ok, let me give you just one item, which I’m sure you didn’t see. And that is when you came into the middle of the room, the wall from the window graduates all the way down. One of the key things I did was to paint the rear wall exactly the same color as the sidewalls, which is unnatural. Normally since it faces the light it’s going to be brighter.

When someone walks into a room, the same as when we open our eyes, we make an instant survey of the world around us. The first responsibility of our sensate world is to make sure we didn’t fall through a hole, or a wall is not going to fall on us. We sense something instantly and make sure it is as we expect. So, if something is not right, we’re frozen for a second to figure



out what is wrong. Because, you can't really move forward until you know that it is ok. We are forming the world all of the time. It's not given to us, we are participating in it, and we can structure it like we structure our mind.

The Whitney piece starts out with painting and sculpture on the other floors and ends with a room with just a few elements in it: the black of the floor that's already there, and the window that Breuer used as a perfect set-up for the building across the street. It is pictorial. So the paintings in there look like little flat things. They don't look right—I'm sure he was entertained by that. The angle, the size of the window, the distance, it's dead-on. It's the perfect pictorial set-up.

So essentially there was a question that came to my mind. If you take all of the different elements out of the art from the 200 years prior to that, which is an amazing phenomenological reduction, you get to the point where there's no rules at all except for one—if you're in an museum then its immediately art, you don't get to decide whether it is or is not. So I started with the idea of it not being in the museum. Years before I had done a piece at the Museum of Modern Art, the very first install I did, and the one thing I did was take everything out of it. I took the label off every time. The only thing that MoMA was concerned with was that it was there to put their label on it. I had a kid come every day and take the label off the piece. People kept asking, "is it there? Is it intended? Is it finished?

What is it? Why is it?" The full responsibility was on you. If we are to take everything out of art, then by observation I took the 'making' out of it. Every day you see something probably more interesting and better than anything I could possibly make as an artist. I thought it was a good question, at least one that you can argue with. I never got a word of feedback on any of it.

1 Irwin, Robert. "2009 Thomas Jefferson Foundation Medalist in Architecture lecture." *University of Virginia*. 2009. www.youtube.com

to find that dark or opaque involuntary

Michelle Fornabai in conversation with IKL, W, and R. Recorded March 30, 2014.

W: You shared an outline of some of the studios that you've been holding over the last several years. We looked specifically at the language you used to get a clearer idea of your pedagogy. In the synopsis, the following words appear most frequently: "between" was the most frequent at 19 times; "material" was 17; "object" was 15; "time" was 14; "condition", "sensory", "difference" and "sleep" were 12; "design" and "left" were 11; then "idiosyncrasy" and "structure" were 10. So with these words, you can start constructing a narrative of your view on Phenomenology, but we were wondering if you could define it for us and how you see it.

MF: The (latent) objective of my studios [including the Dream Studio] is to problematize presence, place and properties. "Presence" has to do with the subject; it's subjectivity, sensory perceptions, perceptual experience and their cognitive processing. "Place" has to do with the boundaries between our understanding of ourselves and our environment—perhaps that goes to "between." I think the interest in looking at emergent technologies is the way in which we can start to think of the sensory limits of the body re-circuited to the objects and spaces that surround it. This is a condition that's not just inherent in emergent technologies, but intrinsically part of architecture and materials. And the last, "properties," invokes



materials—whose “essential” properties are not stably defined conceptually or materially. These are the things I look at in studios as a way to think about Phenomenology.

IKL: You seem categorically interested in language—the precise location of words historically and across disciplines – to assert your position on ‘presence,’ ‘materials,’ and ‘properties’. In the past you have used terms like “agnosia” or “hibernal” to frame your studios. How do you begin to choose these words? Is it a way to uncover or recover some of their history, or do you think these words speak to certain qualities that are undetermined as architectural ideas?

MF: It’s funny: I respond to words in terms of their content as meaning, but also in terms of their sensory properties. Often I choose words because of the way they sound and look—the material qualities of the word. I also think the words I’m drawn to are types of curious phenomena. They are words that mark an abnormal moment or something that has been under-thought. Oftentimes, when we’re curious about something there is a large degree of indeterminacy. I think this is a place of productive possibility. I also think these terms tie back to more common words—those common words that often indicate the conventions. My curious word choices lead me back to the conventions I’m hoping to extend or interrogate.

R: It seems that your past sequence of studios are as much a

project as they are careful experiments. What prompted you to start formulating all your studios this way?

MF: I’m trying to decide whether or not to begin at the beginning and go through the studios. They are formed in part as a sequence with information from the previous studios informing subsequent studios, but they are thought in whole as a series exploring sensation and architecture. The first studio was on blindness. I thought this was a critical point of departure within architecture. This was at a time when the discipline was looking very closely at form and maybe not so much at performance. I had recently been studying for ARE exams and was noticing all of the material that constitutes the conventions of architecture: mechanical systems, acoustical tables, everything that’s properly part of architectural practice that tends to be marginalized in the studio. I was looking to shift the studios from being about form to being more about performance, specifically focusing on sensation as a means of doing that. The first studio, ‘Blindness,’ took the image away from architecture, which was quite radical as you can imagine.

W: So you didn’t present any images?

MF: We did present images, but blind images not offered primarily to be seen—of the experience of blindness, its traces or technologies. Blindness tended to force the work away from the production of predominantly visual experience and formal



projects. The discussion at the end of that first semester had to do with whether sensation was residing primarily in the program of the studio. The program was a school for the blind, which didn't necessarily reside in the form of the architecture but in its functional designation. The second studio, then, on 'Sleep,' was a way to rethink program. Sleep is undetermined programmatically but is latent in every architectural program. Afterwards, I considered whether the same type of research could be done within the visual, so the third studio was on 'Illusion' and forms of visual hallucination. More broadly—without going through each studio because there are 11 at this point—I became interested in perceptual phenomena at the juncture between the material stimulus, the sensation of this stimulus, and its cognitive and linguistic processing. So I began to take perceptual problems, like 'Flaws' for example, as points of departure for the studio. In order to define a material flaw, you first have to define a function, because material is just material. The knot in the wood wouldn't be a problem if you were using it as a block. If you are using the wood structurally, then the knot is an issue. It involves some conceptual designation of function to determine whether the material has a flaw. Material perceptions also differ from the pure conceptual idea of wood—at the juncture of our conceptual understanding of wood as it materializes. The "Flaws" studio was looking at our conventions surrounding materials: the program was to design the headquarters for the American Society of Testing Materials (ASTM). It went right to the architectural conventions of

material as a problem.

These studios based in perceptual problems would be intermixed with studios dealing with sensation directly, like "Perfume" (olfaction) or "Touch" (somesthesia). The "Autism" studio was an interesting way to deal with sensory perception, because sensory perception in autistic subjects is non-uniform and non-universal. It represents a way of defining sensory excess or sensory dampening as commonly heterogeneous and was considered in relation to and against the kind of 'universal design' requirements typical to architecture. That studio was looking at conventions of how we understand sensory experience as common to all. In autism it becomes quite idiosyncratic and unique to the individual. 'Holes' are another perceptual problem. These material objects are difficult to define perceptually. They can be filled. They can move. There are multiple ways of defining them mathematically or philosophically. Holes are something between material and conception.

So if we started with sensation, we then moved towards perception. The recent studios have been edging more towards cognitive processing. Last year's studio, "Why Pretend?", was on pretense, and this year's on "Dreams." In both studios, the same sensory pathways are used for the real and unreal. The material conditions of environments and objects don't change, but our cognitive understanding and processing of

these sensations is different. The banana is still a banana, but we understand it as a phone when we pretend. In dreams we have sensory experiences, which are understood as being not real even though they use the same sensory pathways as the real. Those last two studios have also made a concerted effort to make the bodily experience of the students an explicit part of the process. If previous studios had a client (even if it was imaginary), this year, we've taken the client away to consider the perceptions of our own bodies as direct, even involuntary.

IKL: If we consider the studio as a set of serial experiments, are there certain controls or consistencies between them? How do these controls materialize or get problematized in different ways?

MF: Sure, there are controls, and they are usually in the information that's contained in the brief (or syllabus). The earlier studios gave explicit programmatic requirements in square footages or room designations. The "Dream" studio is predicated on a set of experimental experiences in the studio. Designation of a program is difficult, if not impossible, without knowing what will emerge from that experience. It's the chicken or the egg problem. So controls also come up in the types of exercises assigned. Depending on whether something like time is critical in phasing or in sleep, or even in understanding how perfume may move through air space—these critical dependencies (or "differences") will often cause

a set of specific representational requirements (like film, for example). Each studio has problematized representation and architectural convention in a very distinct way. Some types of drawings, like perspective, may appear in "Illusions," then reappear in "Dreams," but in two very different ways.

W: You've also touched briefly on abnormality vs. normality, or flaws and mistakes. In each of these threads you're looking at things outside of convention and outside of the expected. What is it about these situations is useful to you, in seeking them out as a place for production?

MF: Well, there are so many indeterminacies in architectural practice. Many of the anxieties in architecture have to do with things that cannot be controlled—things that happen because of circumstance, contingency or embodiment. For example, in "Flaws", which was right around the time of the crash, the whole studio took the crash on more explicitly: what happens if you can't build or you can only build with cheap labor. Buildings and things on construction sites go awry because the landscape is not logical, or the body of the laborer not working as precisely as the machine. This constitutes the anxiety. The architect makes a drawing that is an abstract ideal, one that he expects to be enacted on the site. But if you take that site or that situation as embodied and circumstantial, the possibilities for error become creative potentials if you accept that there is going to be an amount of difference. Flaws are quite a normal part of



architecture, but they are not normally taken as the creative potential of architecture. They are taken as something that architecture is trying to resist. Many seminars and architecture schools are interested in failure: the catastrophic moment. I'm not interested in failure. The flaws are much more fascinating.

IKL: The malfunctioning body becomes a productive site. Suddenly, it becomes an experiment on the body: the subject is the object, which sounds different from a more Cartesian understanding of subject and object as separate orders of being. How are you defining the relationship between subject and object?

W: And the subject as producer. In "Dreams", the subject produces dreams but is also the object of the studio.

MF: The interest has been to move away from a kind of proper or universal 'subject' to an idea about subjectivity—the embodied subject. The danger of moving too far towards subjective experience is that it becomes purely unique. On the one hand you get the capital "I" of pure presence, and on the other hand you get a kind of morass of unique, individual "i's" of presence purely. So I think the challenge is to find ways of moving subjectivity not so much to a universal "I" or essentialist "i," but instead to find commonalities outside of the subjective experience that allow it to gain some political agency. In terms of the subject itself, I'm also interested in

things that are irrational and involuntary, things that are not part of the subject's own understanding or conception of itself—to find that dark or opaque involuntary. 'Sleep' was definitely one of those things, and "Dreams" certainly.

IKL: It seems much more about the structure of perception and consciousness. I think that's a uniquely philosophical interpretation of Phenomenology. It seems like this framework of subjectivity has gotten a bit lost in architecture.

R: In studio, we're using the Necomimi ears as an introduction into emergent technologies. Can you discuss the relationship of emergent technologies (and their reciprocal relationship to material conditions) to sensation? How does it complicate or help us understand what you call the "logics of bodily intuition"?

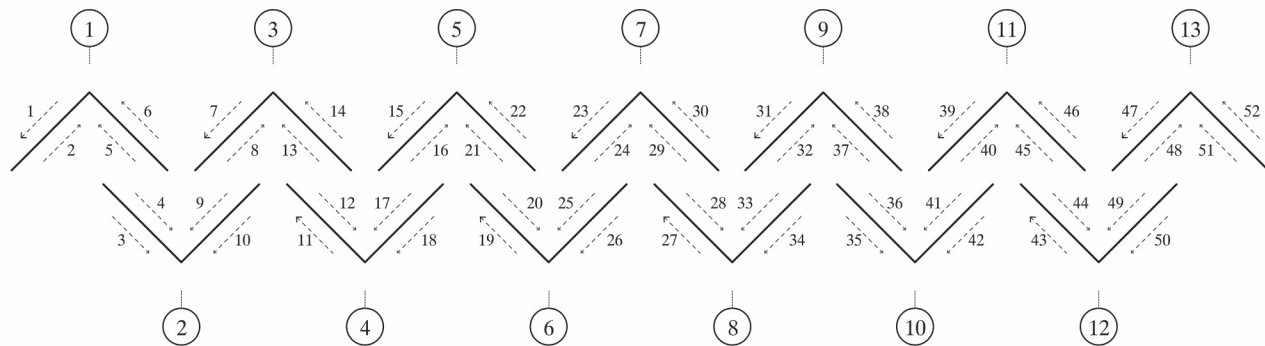
MF: The logic of bodily intuition aspires to move towards a theory of the irrational. The irrational has its own set of logics, but those logics are not properly rational. In the case of the Necomimi, the technology foregrounds the involuntary and opaque aspects of our own thought. The Necomimi shows that we ourselves are material and that material is thick and not necessarily fully in our control. The first experience one generally has with the brainwave controlled cat ears is that they are not actually moving the way you expect them to move. There are all kinds of noise, like the energy used in vision or the



electrical impulses of the heart for example, which constitute noise in the EEG.

Generative architecture sees the script as something we can control in order to increasingly control the outcome. Often technology has been framed in architecture as something that brings us closer to our ideal, and that brings the world closer to our ideal. I think the interest in using the Necomimi is to foreground an embodied experience. Each of these things are utilized in the studio not as a kind of rational argument, a rationalization nor projection of progress, but really as a tool for taking information that's otherwise difficult to see. As we sleepwalk through the city wearing the Necomimi it's interesting how much our situation also inflects "ourselves." It's a corporal experience, not only just internal to us but also us embedded in a complex situation. It's a good way to get a sense of those material conditions—our own body and the city as material.





flip up



fold back



rotate