Performance and style

Reservoir thinking

Our world is different from that of the Olgyays

I read with great interest David Leatherbarrow and Richard Wesley's essay on the Olgyay brothers (**arq** 18.2, pp. 167–76), whose influence on my generation of architecture students was confined to Victor Olgyay's *Design with Climate* – and that within the context of technology, not the studio. Bioclimatic design has always sat very comfortably within Modernist functionalism, as maintaining a metabolic equilibrium in buildings is obviously a function but it was, and continues to be, thought of as a separate category to 'design proper', in spite of constant attempts down the decades to persuade architecture schools to stop separating the two. The Olgyays' writings suffered from the pernicious division in architecture between 'culture' and technology, i.e. those who can, do architecture; those who can't, do technology. If the Olgyays did have any influence on the inclination of architects to think simultaneously about form and environmental performance, it was largely limited to the converted, those who already understood that the pedestrian workings of a building's metabolism could serve as a stimulus rather than an impediment to design.

And why not, if we're looking back, Le Corbusier? Surely it wasn't so much that 'the work of the Olgyays cast a shadow on international Modernism', as that the work of Le Corbusier cast a shadow on the Olgyays: 'Le Corbusier's architecture in particular [...] provided the Olgyays with a catalogue of elements that could bring the body into equilibrium with the environment'. Le Corbusier's many and varied experiments, for example the Ministry of Education in Rio de Janeiro (with Oscar Niemeyer and Luis Costa), are testament to the plastic possibilities of environmental design – provided, as ever, it's handled by designers with talent.

On the other hand, the Olgyays addressed the nuts and bolts of environmental design in a way Le Corbusier didn't, and revisiting them allows one to neatly avoid the linguistic, technical and aesthetic complexity that has developed since around bioclimatic/ environmental/ green/ sustainable/ resilient/ new materialist architecture. Digital modelling, smart materials, the question of what 'comfort' means in terms of levels of technology and controls deployed, arguments over what to express architecturally and why, and a much greater cultural awareness of the volatile relationship between the built and natural environments have moved the discussion on from that state of innocence in which the building envelope does the work and the work is clearly defined in simple gestures like the *brise-soleil*. Today, technology has developed to the point where the building envelope can again be ignored and bioclimatic expression suppressed without compromising environmental performance, if that suits the client and/or architect better.

In response to this greater complexity, there are now architecture practices perfectly capable of achieving the required synthesis of bioclimatic design and 'design proper' in a variety of ways, some mainstream, some
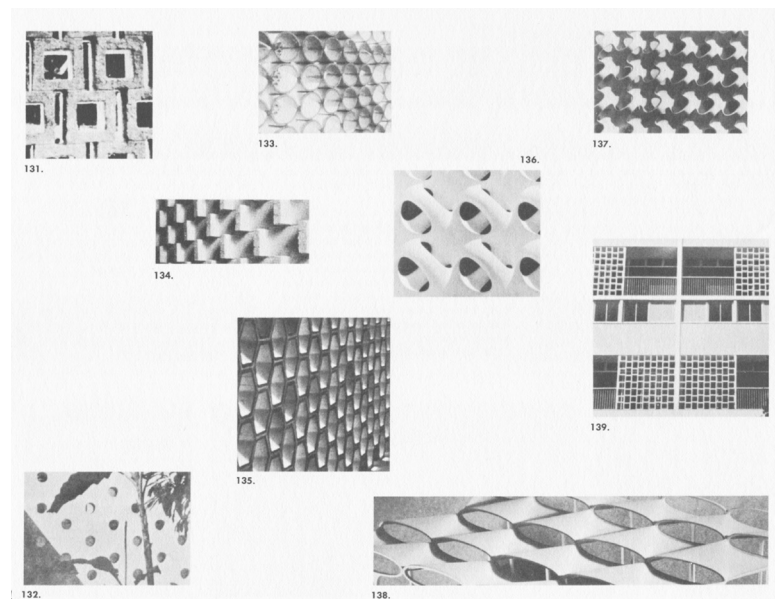
1 Screen patterns. From: Victor Olgyay, *Design with Climate: Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.64
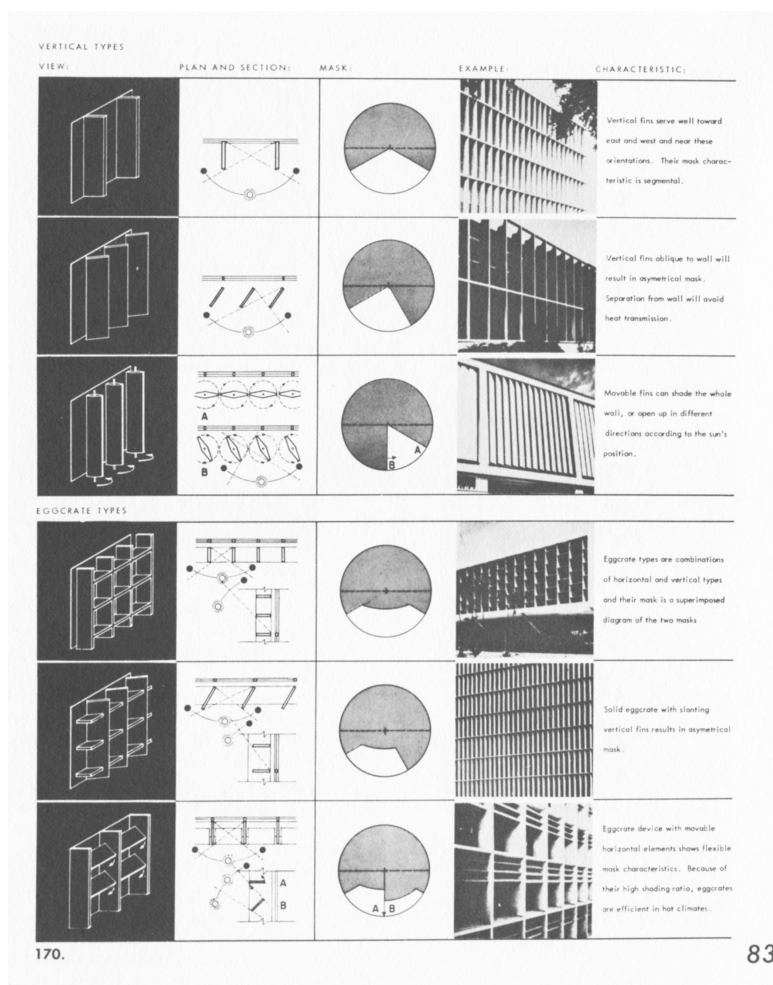
2 Catalogue of Shading Devices. From: Victor Olgyay, *Design with Climate: Bioclimatic Approach to Architectural Regionalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.83

experimental, for example: Aedas London, EcoLogicStudio, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios, MVRDV, Proctor-Rihl Architects, Sauerbruch Hutton, T. R. Hamzah and Yeang. The list is, happily, long and international, with practice far ahead of academia. Though as stylish as they were rigorous, the Olgyay brothers are not the model for the further development of an aesthetically expressive, environmentally competent architecture. Our world is too different from theirs for their architectural solutions to be anything but a small part of a vastly more extended catalogue of explorations and debates.

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When buildings don't speak

Peter Zumthor: guru, shaman and phenomenologist. From where does this reputation arise – the buildings, the man or his thinking? The architect says what he does, or may do what he says. There's the evidence of buildings held to speak for themselves in their authentic concreteness. Like any others, they are only relatively accessible – the interiors that are experienced become representative, while the external appearance of housing and institutional buildings retains only a blunted sense of the sought after 'atmosphere'. We rely on photographs, drawings and word of mouth, while acolytes assume the unmediated materiality of his projects rings true, regardless of his writing, thinking, lectures and conversations. Mediation fogs a celebrity architect's work, heightened ironically by Zumthor's insistent and contrary fervour for the concrete.

The monographs are expensive, substantial and partial. Photographs (especially by Binet and Danuser) and representative drawings affect our view of individual projects. Evocation: illumination and shadow; the notionally tactile *art brut* sketches of the Thermal Baths at Vals; soft pencil perspectives; indicative development drawings, or refined plans and details – all imbricate what we think of as a 'complete' picture of each work (of art).

The 'Topography of Terror' competition stands out in Zumthor's *oeuvre* as un-built, the drawings mute in the context of a landscape implicated in the Holocaust. The dead weight of representation or its absence, building as memento mori, precludes reassuring parallels with the materiality of the early work of Herzog & de Meuron, the thematic preoccupation with slatted enclosures or the theme of material authenticity. This site is not Zumthor's familiar territory and one highly contested. In the Berlin Jewish Museum, at the conclusion of Libeskind's zigzag museum corridor the book of names speaks louder than the expressiveness of his building.

Claudio Leoni's paper 'Peter Zumthor's "Topography of Terror"'(**arq** 18.2, pp. 110–22) is important for it fills a significant lacuna and dares to theorise a Zumthor project beyond the Swiss context (well covered by Spier and Davidovici). Before this year's magnum opus, two earlier monographs published by Lars Müller and *A+U* documented his work, but only until 1997 when his competition-winning entry was first published. In the former it is innocently sandwiched between an earlier mountain cable-car station project and a later proposal for a casino in Lindau. One had occasional news of the inauspicious track record of the Berlin project, an act of restitution which, if not acting directly as a memorial, was conceived as restorative in its institutional programme.

One was aware that the onset of construction had stalled, with legal and financial issues shrouding the project. A third subsequent competition produced the eventual building (and landscape) completed in 2010 and viewed with some distain as sanitising a site directly associated with the security apparatus of the Nazi Reich. Leoni instructively maps out the tangled, later post-war attempts to confront its invidious history, illustrating the aborted construction, demolition and erasure of Zumthor's linear project: its

service towers, foundations, and rails for the construction gantry. In conclusion he discovers a memento, remains 'on site' of the prefabricated concrete structure, juxtaposed with the forceful image of the demolition in progress. It is revealing that German intellectuals argued for retaining the incomplete construction as a ruin, evidence of ambivalent attitudes to the site, while international architects, professionals all, looked for the contract to be completed.

Leoni's text, indebted to James E. Young, examines the project as a form of counter-memorial. He introduces Martin Heidegger (hardly an innocent protagonist) and Jacques Lacan's theories, in order to interrogate the sensitive juncture between Zumthor's habitual aesthetic concerns and the inhuman politics – otherwise *Landscapes of the Metropolis of Death*. In that book Otto Dov Kulka the 'historian', turns to reflect on his repressed childhood memories of Auschwitz – a divide bisecting subjective memory and objective history. Saul Friedlander confronts the same issue in his thoughtful contribution to *Disturbing Remains* ('History, Memory and the Holocaust'). He situates the changing perception and understanding of succeeding generations in the context of the need to 'review' yet also 'evoke' what was beyond description, while addressing the repression of the historical record.

Zumthor aspired to create a reflective space in his building, seeking not to 'represent' but to create a threshold on the site, incorporating its 'contaminated' ground and above which he locates accommodation for the Documentation Centre. Historians are given short shrift for insisting on didactic explanation, rather than accepting that the site and exhibited documents 'speak for themselves' as effectively synonymous with the authenticity he seeks for architectural form and materiality. This conception is characterised by a rhetorical excess, or 'density', of constructed enclosure. Whether presented in the stereotomic or lattice form, elided in the proposal (as also in the filigree brickwork of his museum in Cologne), Gottfried Semper lurks at the margins. His claims regarding the textile analogy are one thing, but material excess tends to produce conflicts about status and cost.

Zumthor's threshold was initially characterised as a linear hall where documents were to be exhibited on raised 'lecterns', just as the building itself 'stands' above the site. Unlike Libeskind, who attempted to integrate memorial representation and museum display in the geometry and voids of his Berlin Jewish Museum (a currency he subsequently devalued), but like Eisenman with his grid, Zumthor follows his own tropes: aspiring to material authenticity; a reflective 'atmosphere' and the art of the 'real'. A romanticism addressed in Terry Eagleton's *Ideology of the Aesthetic* confronts Theodor Adorno's strictures:

> To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric [...] Absolute reification [...] is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely. Critical intelligence cannot be equal to this challenge as long as it confines itself to self-satisfied contemplation.
> ('Cultural Criticism and Society' in *Prisms*)

While he later moderated this opinion, it remains an unavoidable benchmark against which the validity of aesthetic rhetoric, and the art of reflection, is registered in buildings associated with the Holocaust.

Leoni instructively traces how the expectations of the 1990 competition incorporated the legacy of the earlier campaign of 1979. Temporary constructions housing an open-air exhibition remained 'on site' until 2010. Aspects of this 'austere' provision and the exposure of the site as an open wound, remain present in Zumthor's proposal, epitomised by what Leoni terms 'reacting by not reacting'. Significantly the architect's explanation changes over time from effective to affective description, and to finally a sense of valedictory vindication.

The building was originally conceived in Zumthor's laconic text (*Peter Zumthor Works: Buildings and Projects 1979–1997*, 1998, and elsewhere) as a naked 'pure structure, speaking no language but that of its own materials, composition and function': layered from prefabricated construction as a 'constructed object of abstract composition'; predicated on environmental efficiency and 'visibility', and justified contextually as 'architecture intermeshed with topography'. This could equally describe the building eventually realised by the Aachen practice Heinle, Wischer & Partner in 2010. Almost nothing was said of the primary spatial enclosure, with its earth/gravel floor, exhibited documents,

reflective atmosphere, and the stereometric scale and emptiness so clearly delineated in soft pencil.

Having won the competition a later explanatory text published in *A+U* (384, 2002), set aside the historical resumé offered previously, preferring to focus on the incursions of 'nature' within the ruined terrain of the site. The relation of Zumthor's building to the ground, bisecting two existing piles of rubble, was presented as if therapeutic acupuncture (on columns like 'needles') in the form of a double-layered fenced enclosure, otherwise a textile-like 'tracery' or a 'weaving of posts'. Contradictorily he also claimed the building would be 'clamped' to the site: the relative external visibility of the interior, and conversely the site from inside, was presented as all-encompassing. This modified the 'windowless appearance' and 'ample visibility' mentioned earlier in the 'competition' text. The sharper, darker and populated perspectives in *A+U* projected moiré-like glimpses in elevation, emphasising the 'interiority' of the threshold viewed in perspective. Reflections on the narrow strips of glazed infill would, however, have obscured this much-vaunted 'transparency'.

The new monograph (*Peter Zumthor 1985–2013*, 2014) reiterates the earlier texts but employs a different vocabulary inevitably laced with self-justification, defensiveness and regret. The so-called 'bar' structure (earlier described as Vierendeel trusses) takes on a new connotation of 'staves' and 'intervals' (eliding timber framing and musical notation). The pure structure may not have been 'meant to symbolise anything' but the shibboleth of acquired meaning is expanded by ambiguity: needles, bars, posts, uprights, staves, framework or girder, tracery or woven textile. Steven Spier suggests the structure is 'trabeated' but this is not strictly post and lintel architecture. The scale and repetition of these columns or pillars remains redolent of the Neoclassical architecture erased from the site, at odds with the claim 'to invent a building which would resist all existing typologies' (**arq**, 5.1, pp. 31/32).

Zumthor argues the fenestration alludes to fencing, but the relationship to the ground is stolid and a vestigial cornice occurs at the culmination of the glass infill. Livio Vacchini's gymnasium at Losone (1997) is similar but more explicitly Classical. Inside,
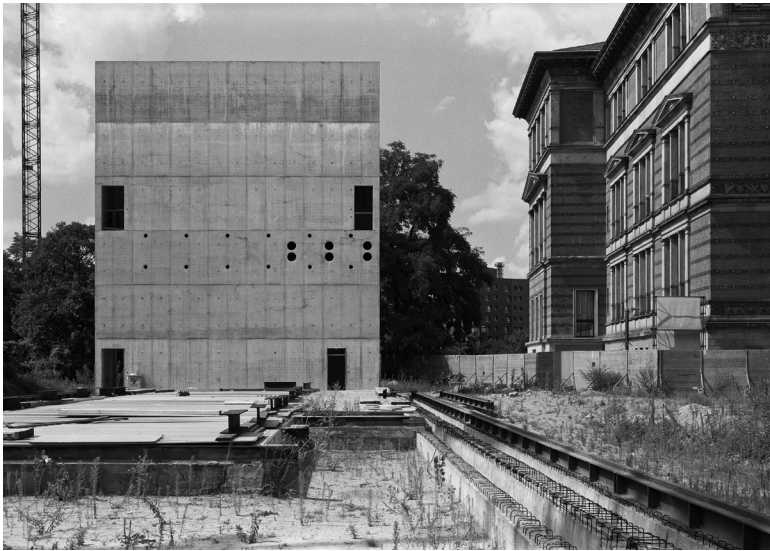
3 The concrete stair towers of Peter Zumthor's 'Topography of Terror' project in Berlin before they were subsequently demolished

4 Visualisation of the interior of Zumthor's design, showing how the site would have disappeared from view behind a diminshing perspective of vertical uprights

Zumthor evokes an ethereal atmosphere but concedes outside that the weathering of the white concrete will quickly subdue its lightness. However formidable the precast-concrete structure and rhetorical interior, is this to build, on an ideologically and ontologically dark and physically ruined terrain, a divergent materiality epitomised by a sober enlightenment? A linear typology associated with a colonnade or stoa, one compressed laterally, expanded vertically, and inhabited on upper storeys?

The new monograph (2014) includes legible 'working' drawings. Pillars are housed in sockets formed within complex foundations. A star-shaped connector conjoins offset structural elements (columns and beams). The railway tracks of the horizontal gantry set out a construction process, envisaged as a tunnel, with disturbing associations. Just as the connectors though not six-pointed stars of David, become so in the imagination. Whatever is manifest on a memorial site will be interrogated for its connotation, however incidental or contingent. Zumthor admits that the 'bar structure' 'will become a symbol', just as despite his best intentions, ultimately, the exhibition is 'mediated' by the building (**arq** 5.1, p. 36).

The geometric *parti* of Heinle, Wischer & Partners' building sets out a problematic relationship between the archaeology of the Holocaust and a remnant of the Berlin Wall. In the *Bauwelt* (16, 2010) building study, the opening illustration is an aerial view, where temporary exhibition screens and accommodation still occupy the margins of the building site. An interview with Jürg Steiner, architect of the temporary pavilion constructed in 1990, follows. Complementing the shelters progressively improvised over the site excavations, it was demolished as a 'barrack' construction in 1997. The 'rough' temporary exhibition persisted, however, integrating the 'traces' below ground with explanatory panels from the pavilion. One cannot blame the 'normalisation' of the site on the architects from Aachen – the rubble mounds were removed previously, and without Zumthor's approval.

Leoni refers to Heidegger and Lacan's thinking in seeking to interpret Zumthor's ambivalent stance, but is inclined towards theoretical 'vindication'. Heidegger posits that the essence of material objects is disrupted in their everyday use, and confronting this incompatibility promotes reflection on their phenomenological qualities. Similarly Lacan's concept of the 'real' hinges on a psychoanalytical understanding of three levels of experience: the symbolic, the imaginary and the real associated respectively with language, perception and a condition beyond language. Lacan's 'return to the real' is proposed as visual conjecture in the face of trauma, seeking to integrate the real with the symbolic. Leoni, like Lacan, regards such reconciliation as being beyond the bounds of reflection, identified with Heidegger's 'questioning of things'. But is the negative dialectic in Zumthor's thinking so different from Libeskind's voids where emptiness provokes thought and manifests absence? In Leoni's view, Zumthor circumvents symbolism: 'embodying the problem of the non-representational'. But just as Libeskind repeated his symbolic language out of context, so Zumthor's formal conception is intrinsic to his wider work. Leoni records the demise of Zumthor's 'outstanding project' noting that its unconventional nature required the unconditional support of the client and the various agencies involved, whereas the boot is ordinarily on the other foot. Is this not inevitable in any contentious prizewinning project? Formal autonomy and material density come at a cost, whether pragmatic or ideological.

One inevitably projects the mateiality associated with Zumthor's built work onto the drawings for his unbuilt project, assuming a material presence not necessarily present. Leoni is inclined to make assumptions based on what Zumthor says rather than what he draws. Irina Davidovici notes in her comparison with Herzog & de Meuron in *Forms of Practice*, that the polarities of artist or craftsman architect are reversible – maintaining a 'continuum' between abstract thought and tangible reality, better expressed as an 'oscillation' between polarities. Leoni speaks in similar terms of the relationship 'between transparency and opacity', dependent on relative conditions of illumination and the reflectivity of white concrete and glass. Drawings published in *A+U* (384, 2002) suggest something else, that an oscillation would be produced by the movement of people appearing, in a flickering

partial view, as ghosted presences between the pillars outside; or in figures, fractured by the fall of light, traversing the interior. Far from the autonomous structure suggested in the empty perspectives, this agency or animation projects us beyond the ambit of a reflective space whose generalised metaphysical aspiration is a questionable response to the trauma engrained in the site. The display of documents is notably absent from the drawings, doubtless a sign of prevailing tension between exhibition designers and architects.

There are revealing parallels with Anselm Kiefer's Expressionist art. His painting 'Der Rhein' (1982), peering through a fence across the Rhine towards a Neoclassical portico on the far bank, mirrors Zumthor's sketch for his enclosure. There is a complementary lectern piece 'The Rhine' (1981), and his paintings and prints present perspectives of *heimatstil* attics and superannuated Classical Nazi halls and colonnades, which are powerful and critical invocations of National Socialist culture, seemingly remote from Zumthor's sensibility. But something of their grandiosity adheres at the margins of the architect's great hall. He neutralises these associations, through structural compression, the a-tectonic order of timber battens rendered in concrete, and the displacement of axiality: 'really nice, calm, soft, spaces' the architect claims (**arq** 5.1, p. 31). In contrast, the building eventually realised by others is conceived as a neutral 'information resource' hovering above a basement level on a site, now surfaced in a homogeneous layer of crushed grey stone. Whether this building or Zumthor's project manifest the neutrality sought is likely partial, since about this particular context buildings themselves are inherently mute and cannot speak.

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'Reservoir thinking':' or the 'problem' of contradictions

I have read with much interest the article 'The Contradictions of Participatory Architecture and *Empire*' by Tahl Kaminer, (**arq** 18.1, pp. 31–7). The author uses a well-established method of argumentation: he sets up an hypothesis, namely, '[...] that a major cause of inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies in the work of a loose group of politically committed architects is no other than Hardt and Negri's *Empire*'. As a good scientist, Kaminer supplies his readers with all necessary material so that they themselves conclude that the hypothesis is well taken and true.

This is, in fact, a good intellectual exercise that confirms the validity of combining deductive and inductive reasoning. The author 'proves' his hypothesis in a 'top-down' deductive process by deploying a 'bottom-up' deductive argumentation; a 'specific observation' regarding the activities of a loose group is used to infer a 'general statement' concerning the contradictions of participatory architecture. The transition from the 'observation' to the 'statement' is effectuated by tracing the contradictions of *Empire* that according to Kaminer provides the grounding of the 'loose movement in question'. As the author sets off to unravel the book's contradictions, he himself remains 'grounded' to a specific approach to history as the transmission of ideas and the tracing of influences.

Kaminer seems well aware of the importance that the contradictions' 'hide and seek' holds for the history of ideas. Although not interested in the 'hide' aspect, i.e., 'to discover from what point of view contradictions can be dissipated or neutralised';[2] he is rather concerned with the 'seek', i.e., exploring 'at what level contradictions can be radicalised and effects become causes'.[3] He actually dismisses the importance of the book (as lacking theoretical rigour due to its intrinsic contradictions[4]) only to recognise the *Empire*'s effect and turn it into a cause.[5] Hence, the contradictions he observes in the statements/practices of the 'loose group of political and socially committed architect' are traced back to the book in which their theoretical position is grounded.

But if contradictions were the 'problem', then they work well as a 'cover up' of important issues involved and never discussed

properly in the article. It is worth reminding here of the double meaning of the word 'problem', as something to put before our eyes to examine and as a cover up behind which one takes shelter to remain protected. It seems that by setting up the problem of contradictions at the core of his analysis, Kaminer craftily constructs a device under which he takes shelter and his argumentation remains safeguarded.

Throughout the text, he seems determined to put a straitjacket to a difficult to tame subject-matter. Namely: how can we understand the intensive presence of a different way of doing architecture that emerged outside the confines of formal education? It was in fact manifested almost as a 'matter out of place' and initially ignored, even scorned, by the established architecture educators and practitioners alike. And how the initial threat of contamination was shiftily twisted around and ended up as an appeasing immunisation of the profession?[6] Can these issues be discussed or understood by pointing out inconsistencies of a loose group due to inconsistencies in a book? In other words, can this article take its readers outside the close-circuit of an academic intellectual exercise? This might appear an irrelevant question at first but it might give us a glimpse of how an academic article can deflect and neutralise important issues intertwined with its subject matter, and could turn our attention to the ways information is circulated and knowledge is produced.

Leaving aside *Empire* and its painstaking analysis of contradictions, let's turn to the thorny problem of the 'loose group in question' and its contradictory statements/practices. What could have been the implications if the author, instead of working within the history of ideas to identify causes of contradictions, had chosen to take up the challenge to consider contradictions as 'objects to be described for themselves'?[7] In the latter case, a detailed mapping of contradictions and irregularities could provide an understanding of the discursive practice within which they are constituted. So what do we learn about the 'loose group', which the author makes a paradigmatic case in order to infer his general statement about the contradictions of participatory architecture?

Apart from a few scattered
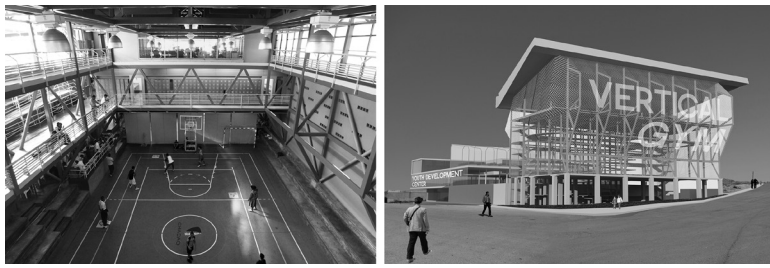
5 Left: Urban-Think Tank Vertical Gym, Caracas. Right: Urban-Think Tank proposal for a Vertical Gym in Amman

names, we learn, in fact, very little or nothing about the individual members or groups that make up this particular 'formation'. We are given scarce and very general information on few gatherings in which the individuals/teams participated. The readers are implicitly expected to know, or it is taken as granted, that they can easily get information on the names of individual/groups or institutions; the author makes them stand as the representatives of another way of doing architecture, for they already fall within the 'distribution of the sensible'.

Kaminer's loose group was, from the beginning, accommodated institutionalised in international university master-classes and biennales; it was the alternative to the star individual architects that were quickly going out of fashion, especially after the 2008 real estate crash in the US and the financial crisis that swept optimism away and took many countries by storm. The case study that opens the article as a paradigmatic case of politically committed architects was none other than an international master class at the Berlage Institute. Thus the participatory movement Kaminer describes was normalised and operated within safe confines. To make this 'loose group' stand for a 'movement of participatory architecture' is a frivolous and rather problematic approach to start with. It takes more time and effort to discern the 'invisible' agents of a different way of thinking about architecture and its practice who didn't, and still do not partake in this specific setting of the 'distribution of the sensible'. The financial crisis that took many countries by storm, inevitably asked for a rethinking of political and 'social' issues and led to the emergence and proliferation of various groups and activities.

The author rightly detects within his 'loose group', whatever that is, the revival of the '68 radical approach which 'failed

previous generations', he points to contradictions in mixing radical and neoliberal views and refers to an initial critical but naïve moment that was quickly corrupted and turned into nuanced positions and professionalism. It is telling that Kaminer chose to comment on the work of just one member of his loose group of 'politically and socially committed architects' at the very end of his article; he mentions the 'vertical gymnasium' generic design project (repetitively applied to different contexts and cities) by Urban-Think Tank (U-TT), and finds it difficult to 'identify their proposition as more "social" than any other architectural design of our era.'

Just to remind here, that the U-TT office is run by Professor Alfredo Brillembourg and Professor Hubert Klumpner who also hold the chair for architecture and urban design at ETH; most of their professional projects are conducted with students in the ETH design studio setting.[8] U-TT acquired fame by winning the 2012 Venice Golden Lion for their Torre David project. This entailed the documentation of a former half-finished financial tower owned by the Brillembourg family which has been turned into a vertical squat in the centre of Caracas, Venezuela. The U-TT work celebrated informality and Alfredo Brillembourg was crystal clear when he formulated his views on 'city retrofitting' in the following interview:

Have you ever heard that lots of cities use interim solutions before development later came to a more sophisticated stage? What do you think happened in Lower Manhattan? That was squatting my friend. Lower Manhattan was squatted with all the artist lofts. There were illegal squats; they set up electricity illegally. What did it become? The hottest area in all of New York. They later got evicted. What I'm saying is just think about it as an interim use.

Our ideas and notions of

property in use are way too archaic, [from the] 19th century. We've got to come up with more flexible systems that do not equate to socialism or anything like that, just equate to realities of our cities.

Who's got the capital to buy that tower and retrofit it with a five-star hotel and office? I don't know, maybe someone from a Chinese bank or something can do it [...] that could be a solution. But then with the payments they better build these guys housing.[9]

And guess what? On 22 July 2014, Reuters reported that the 'eviction of 3,000 squatters from the Tower of David is proceeding peacefully' and the squatters 'are being provided with new homes south of Caracas'.[10] The next day, U-TT uploaded a statement that they closely follow the news of the Chinese investment and the eviction process.[11] Cities have always been in a condition of flux, and it seems the work of the U-TT succeeds in facilitating or accelerating the pace of change. By making the squatting condition stand out, and showing the poor's enjoyment of informal economy and breathtaking views from their makeshift 'informal' homes, U-TT was successful in attracting the Chinese investor who paid the squatters to leave the centre. Informality though is the name of the game, either for the poor or for the rich, and it can be sold as design with local social concerns that serve the financial interest of global operations.

In the autumn of 2013, within their ETH design studio, U-TT 'struck a deal' of some hundred thousand Euros to set up a project named *Re-activate Athens: 101 Ideas*. In crisis-ridden Athens, the amount paid to U-TT by the Onassis Foundation in Greece was rather a provocation. Alfredo Brillembourg looked with contempt at the rich field of independent initiatives, collectives and organisations which didn't conform to his 'political' ideals of recombining Marx and Friedman in retrofitting Athens. He was thus unsuccessful in securing a local 'cover up' organisation to fake the appearance of a bottom-up approach.[12]

Alfredo Brillembourg had no problem, however, getting cheap local labour. In addition to his fee, he had asked for and was given a fully equipped office furnished with 'dying for their one minute of fame' young unemployed Greek architects. The office in the centre of Athens operated under private security guards. U-TT created a

sterile environment where the local cheap labour force had prearranged meetings/events, held discussions with like-minded fellows or conducted interviews/questionnaires with selected representatives of the 'run-down' categories of Athens inhabitants who were asked to produce 101 ideas for reactivating Athens.[13] The project's intention was to provide a bottom-up like gloss to a highly disputed project; *Re-activate* goes hand-in-hand with the *Re-think Athens* project which aims at the creation of a new city centre by turning a main artery of the city into a pedestrian zone.[14] An 'exodus' of the Athenian poor into the periphery is, however, a far more complicated issue than it was in the case of Torre David.

How can we understand the current highly visible and promoted architecture practices that masquerade as bottom-up 'social' activities and create a false impression of standing in for a movement of participatory architecture? To discuss the reasoning of Urban-Think Tank and other similar cases we might need to eschew the type of 'reservoir thinking' that detects contradictions and inconsistencies where there might be none.

Another way to conduct theoretical research might be needed; one that does not hold us captive in the quest for explanations and the tracing of contradictions back to their origins. Then we could become like Agamben's contemporaries,[15] able to discern a paradigm shift unfolding. We might observe that our cities have already changed and segregation has already happened. What would be our conception of the urban – if any – and of architecture theory and practice if we dared to look at urban nomads settling as monads wide shut?[16] To put it differently, if we leave aside the standard conceptual apparatus of architectural categories of 'space', 'public', 'participation' and their apparent current 'state of fluidity', we could possibly discern an ongoing accumulation of self-enclosed urban devices designed and produced by and for capturing the resources of their context without giving anything back.

Instead of discussing the contradictions of participatory architecture, it might be worth approaching contradictions as the side-effect of an emerging potential for agency in the current agglomeration of organic, inorganic, human, non-human,

technical and technological matter and matters. At that point we might start our training in questioning and searching beyond the conditions of visibility that determine (or blind) our choices of topics and case studies.

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Notes

1. Paraphrased here the title of the film *Reservoir Dogs*, which Tarantino 'explained' in an interview, by saying '[...] it's more of a mood title than anything else. It's just the right title, don't ask me why'. See: <http://www.geraldpeary.com/books/tarantino_intro.html> [accessed on 19.9.2014].
2. Michel Foucault devotes Chapter 4 to discussing contradictions. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972); especially, contradictions within the history of ideas, p. 151.
3. Ibid.
4. It is worth noting the difference between Kaminer's approach to *Empire's* contradictions and Rancière's discussion of contradictions related to *Empire's* concept of the 'multitude'. While the former transforms the effect into a cause, Rancière's analysis aims at an understanding of the 'discordant accord', as he eloquently puts it. See Jacques Rancière, 'The People or the Multitudes?', *Dissensus: on Politics and Aesthetics (*London and New York: Continuum, 2010).
5. He writes: '*Empire* can therefore be seen not as unfolding a political theory, but as the symbol which can enable the political articulation of the protest movement.'
6. Maria Theodorou, 'Architecture and Economy: the Ethics of Empowerment' in L. Stergiou (ed.), *AAO: Ethics/Aesthetics* (Athens: Papasotiriou), pp. 141–63.
7. Foucault, op. cit.
8. Ibid.
9. Scott Cartwright and Jenny Lynn Weitz-Amaré Cartwright interview with Alfredo Brillembourg about Torre David and the future of the Global South, available online: <http://offcite.org/2012/10/19/interview-with-

alfredo-brillembourg-about-torre-david-and-the-future-of-the-global-south> [accessed on 19.09.2014].
10. Reuters, Venezuela Tower of David squatters evicted, available online: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-28426529> [accessed on 19.0.2014].
11. See: <http://www.archdaily.com/530345/urban-think-tank-responds-to-the-forced-eviction-of-torre-david-residents/> [accessed on 19.09.2014].
12. See: <http://www.sarcha-architecture.blogspot.co.uk/2013/11/an-impossible-collaboration-sarcha-and_16.html> [accessed on 19.09.2014].
13. See: <http://www.reactivate-athens.com/blog/> [accessed on 19/09/2014].
14. See: <http://www.rethinkathens.org/eng/project> [accessed on 19/09/2014].
15. Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?', *What Is an Apparatus? and Other Essays (*Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), pp. 39–54.
16. As Richard Scoffier puts it, '[...] de prendre enfin au sérieux la conception baroque de l' individu, imaginée par Leibniz dans sa Monadologie, comme une unité hermétiquement close trouvant au fond'elle-même son rapport a la totalité'. Richard Scoffier, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de l' Architecture Contemporaine* (Paris: Norma Editions, 2011).

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Erratum
arq is sorry for an error that crept into the previous edition, no. 18.2. The caption to figure [2] on p.159 in Chris L. Smith and Sandra Kaji-O'Grady's paper should read: 'Double-helical stair at the Chateau de Chambord, Loir-et-Cher, France'. This image is credited to: Flickr Creative Commons, Gwen. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/myoplayer/6883102150/in/photolist-5uBrvX-gqsxXL-bueGt1-4GsL6c-3bW8wG-4GwVt5-7JFRt-cBeXb-4GwXdC-dwz9SW-595ceA-4GwYpG-595bKy> [accessed on 3 April 2014].

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