

JUHANI PALLASMAA

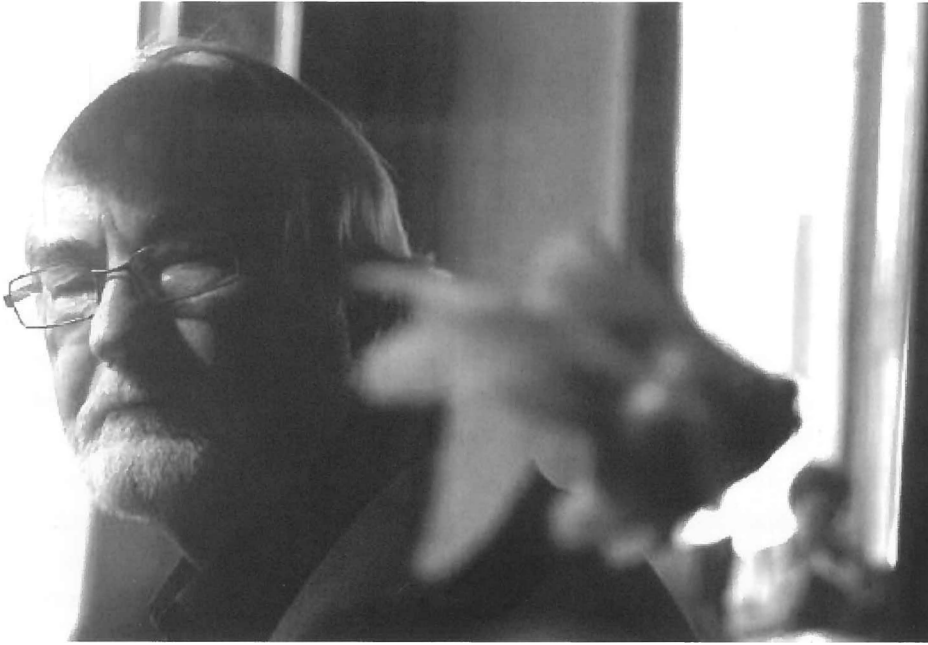
Plym Distinguished Professor

2010 - 2011

School of Architecture
University of Illinois
at Urbana-Champaign

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JUHANI PALLASMAA

Juhani Pallasmaa (b. 1936), architect SAFA, Hon. FAIA, Int FRIBA, and professor, runs an architectural office in Helsinki. Since the 1960's he has been active in urban planning, architecture, exhibition design, product design, and graphic design.

Rector of the Institute of Design - Helsinki - 1970-1971

Associate Professor - Haile Selassie I University - Addis Ababa - 1972-1974

Director of the Museum of Finnish Architecture - 1978-1983

Professor and Dean - Helsinki University - 1991-1997

Eero Saarinen Visiting Professor - Yale University - 1993

Raymond E. Maritz Visiting Professor - Washington University - 1999-2004

Thomas Jefferson Visiting Professor - University of Virginia - 2002

Plym Distinguished Professor - University of Illinois - 2010

Books include:

The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses - 1995 and 2005

The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema - 2001 and 2007

Encounters: Architectural Essays - 2005

The Thinking Hand - 2009

The Embodied Image - 2011

Juhani has also published more than 300 essays, received honorary doctorates in the arts from Helsinki University of Industrial Arts in 1993, the Estonian Academy of Art in 2004, and an honorary doctorate in technology from Helsinki University of Technology in 1998.

THE PLYM DISTINGUISHED PROFESSORSHIP

David Chasco

Director | School of Architecture
University of Illinois

The Plym Distinguished Professorship is a very special position within the School of Architecture. It was made possible by a gift to the School in 1981 by the late Lawrence J. Plym of Niles, Michigan. Mr. Plym was past president of the Kawneer Corporation. Mr. Plym and his family have a very warm association with the University of Illinois and the School of Architecture.

The Plym Professorship is conferred on an architect who has a distinguished record of achievement and can make a positive contribution to the enrichment of the professional education of students in the School. Our past Plym Professors have included Gunnar Birkerts, Paul Rudolph, Joseph Esherick, Minoru Takeyama, Edmund Bacon, Thom Mayne, Carme Pinos, Dominique Perrault, Frances Halsband, William Miller, Norman Crowe, Ken Yeang, Kengo Kuma and Kenneth Frampton.

The School of Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign was delighted to appoint Juhani Pallasmaa, one of Finland's most significant internationally known architects and theorist, as the Distinguished Endowed Plym Professor in Architecture for the Fall 2010 school semester.

Juhani Pallasmaa was in residence at the School of Architecture's Erlanger House for the entire fall term. Professor Kevin Hinders served as the faculty host and collaborated with Juhani on the development of a graduate studio. Kevin also coordinated Juhani's various activities such as lectures, exhibitions and symposiums.

As part of Juhani's Plym tenure, and coordinated with Juhani, was the development of a special lecture series including Alberto Perez-Gomez and Carlos Jimenez, as well as two special Finnish artists who shared their intellectual and theoretical leanings: ceramist, Kristina Riska and composer, Kalevi Aho. Each made presentations on their discipline in support of Pallasmaa's "psychological, phenomenological and architectural observations."

Juhani Pallasmaa, born 1936 in Hämeenlinna, Finland, is a Helsinki-based architect, exhibition designer, and town planner. He is also a prolific essayist and the former director of both the Finnish Museum of Architecture and the architecture program at Helsinki University of Technology, where he graduated in 1966. A winner of the Finnish State Architecture Award, he taught at the Helsinki University of Technology and still maintains an architecture office in Helsinki. He lectures widely and has been a visiting professor in Ethiopia and the United States.

Pallasmaa's notable built works include: *Moduli 225* (1969 with Kristian Gullichsen), *Atelier for Tor Arne, Vano Island* (1970), the *Rovaniemi Art Museum Renovation* (1986), the granite column entrance for the installation "Arrival Plaza" at the *Cranbrook Academy* (1994), and the *Sami Lapp Museum and Northern Lapland Visitors Center* (1998). In addition to built works Pallasmaa's talents include comprehensive design projects in building restoration, as well as graphic, product and exhibition design. Numerous notable restoration projects, product design (in the grand Finnish tradition of modernists), graphic design and exhibition design characterize the comprehensive and engaged design talents of Juhani.

Pallasmaa's critical publications include: *Alvar Aalto Furniture*, 1987; *Hvittrask—Home as a Work of Art*, 1987; *Language of Wood: Wood in Finnish Sculpture, Design, and Architecture*, 1987; "Tradition and Modernity: The Feasibility of Regional Architecture in Postmodern Society," *The Architectural Review*, 1988); *Mailmassaolon taide (The Art of Being in the World)*, 1993; *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, 2005; Pallasmaa, Juhani and Andrei Gozak, *The Melnikov House: Moscow (1927-1929)*, 1996; and *Alvar Aalto: Villa Mairea 1938-39*, 1998; *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, 2006; *The Thinking Hand*, 2009; *Encounter: Architectural Essays*, 2005. "Archipelago, Essays on Architecture," for Juhani Pallasmaa (editor Peter MacKeith) is a wonderful testament by over 20 international friends celebrating his "amazing creativity."

Juhani provided our students and faculty the gift of time, spending the whole semester in residence at the Erlanger House, the contemporary masterpiece by Professor Emeritus Jack Sherman Baker and now owned by the School of Architecture. The house was designed as a residential stage set for a 2-story dance studio for the former Department of Dance Head, Margaret Erlanger. With respect, Juhani transformed the space into an incubator of architectural activity, entertaining groups large and small of faculty, students and guests. Architectural discourse flowed freely from the warmth of his Finnish soul.

Juhani co-taught a studio with Professor Hinders, conducted multiple public lectures, and lectured in our graduate theory course. He sat on countless design reviews, often exclaiming that it “was such a humane review,” reminding us that, for a student, design is a long-engaged intellectual process to be nurtured. With Juhani, we are reminded that we are teachers, mentors and then long-time colleagues of our students. Our discussions with such young minds never end, even as we grow ourselves.

We would see Juhani in Temple Buell Hall most days. We had the great pleasure to watch Juhani at work. Several white tables were set up near the great south 2-story window of the Erlanger House dance space. He wrote endlessly. Some publication was always in the works. He kept assistants busy with deadlines, faxes and mailings. It was joyful to see such a committed engagement of time!

Around campus, we would see him out and about, often with his wife, Hannele, who joined him in October. Many guests quietly came to campus to visit and sit with him at the outdoor Bread Company café, sharing a deep discussion over a glass of wine. Of course, many faculty and students did the same. Perhaps the fullness of engagement with life and architecture is the legacy Juhani’s Plym Professorship will leave us. His was a calm and elegant presence in the School that leaves a lasting philosophical impression, a presence with many more chapters to write, as we hope time will provide us future visits with this Finnish soul!



1 - Alvar Aalto, Villa Mairea, Noormarkku, 1941.



2 - Sverre Fehn, Villa Busk, Bamble, 1990.



3 - Architecture that breathes well. Jørn Utzon, Can Lis, Mallorca, 1972.

THE RISK AND NECESSITY OF POETIC IMAGINATION

Henry Plummer

Professor Emeritus | School of Architecture
University of Illinois

In his captivating and mysterious book *The Poetics of Space*, French philosopher Gaston Bachelard opens our eyes to the deepest roots and satisfactions of architecture as a human pursuit. Through an examination of “primal images” rooted in everyday life, including “corners” and “miniature”, “nests” and “shells”, “attics” and “cellars,” Bachelard exposes a number of our most basic sources of well-being in the physical environment. [Images 1 and 2] These inviting and often mesmerizing phenomena, which seem to precede our own immediate memory and to be physically inscribed into our muscles, and one might say our innermost soul, help us inhabit the world more completely and intimately. And by touching us through eternal values that are essentially our own, images such as the “house that breathes in and out” or the “lamp in the window at night” bring greater depth to our own existence, for they uncover and return to us lost dimensions of being. [Image 3]

These ontological concerns for what Bachelard calls the “passionate liaison of our bodies” with space are evidently, and sadly, of little interest to contemporary architecture.¹ One might even conclude, considering the architectural developments of the past century, that, whether consciously or not, modest and enduring human traces of this kind are being annihilated without any sign of regret, from either architects or the people who live and work in their buildings. The most obvious of these culprits, buildings that may be started up but are otherwise based on a ruthless kind of mechanistic efficiency, whether for economies of production or energy, are not fit for the richness of human life. Their narrowly defined modes of technical progress turn people effectively into machines, robbing them of their own dreams and bodily existence. Buildings based on over-prescribed imperatives—such as an extreme economy of human movements, cellular divisions into compartments, flat and routine floors, and interchangeable parts—may maximize speed and profit, but they are also coercive and act to render the body submissive, crushing its basic animal spirits.

An equally chilling devaluation of human life is produced by the other, more honorific stream of contemporary architecture, the one that is continually celebrated in the current outpour of books and magazines devoted to celebrities and fads. Buildings conceived primarily in formal terms as displays of virtuoso design have their own unique manner of passivating human beings and, in so doing, making them less than human. These fabricated images are inherently egotistical, and in all but the rarest cases depend for success on completely avoiding the “wealth of imagined being” valorized by Bachelard, whose humility and primitiveness appeal less to the eye and more to the very center of our being, where they waken remains of our human origins. The role of the architectural spectacle is to express

Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), p. xxxii.

the cleverness of its maker, and ultimately his or her thirst for glory, rather than to empower its audience to act out their own hopes and aspirations. We are expected to be awed by each new display, which may momentarily impress us but fails to grip our very being. We are essentially reduced to docile spectators of somebody else’s creative act, instead of being invited to show who we are, create our own deeds in the world, and in the process disclose what our powers may be.

Contributing to the decline of architecture into a state of exhaustive use and passing amusement has been an uncritical use of the computer—an undeniably important tool that is generally employed with insufficient restraint and skepticism. When directed to normalize space by eliminating impurities and economizing the time of life, or conversely, to fabricate over-picturesque fantasies that entertain our eyes rather than engage our bodies and souls, this tool runs the risk of becoming a technique of subjugation rather than freedom. There is no need to question the merits of this instrument for many crucial operations and procedures, but there is a need to be concerned with its consequences, and to recognize its inherent limitations in any attempt to invest the art of building with genuine human experience and powers.

One might argue, fatalistically, that all these distressing aspects of architecture today merely reflect a widespread culture of techno-amusement. But trend is not destiny, and the human spirit has a tremendous capacity to shape events and overcome societal forces, resisting what is easy or conventional and choosing actions, instead, that may require self-sacrifice. Fortunately there are architects who have not been willing to remain passive witnesses to what they regard as deprivations of human nature. I am thinking of people such as Alvar Aalto in Finland, Aldo van Eyck in the Netherlands, Carlo Scarpa in Italy, Sverre Fehn in Norway, Maurice Smith in America, Peter Zumthor in Switzerland. [Images 4-6] At the core of their efforts is a re-enchantment of architecture by endowing space with stimuli that nurture us at a meaningful level, inviting us to respond and act through our imaginations as well as our bodies. For as Bachelard has argued: “Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction.”²

The simplest of these “attractions” are concrete phenomena that make the world real and tangible—palpable columns and walls, floors and ceilings, doors and windows, stairs and bridges, houses and cities. [Images 7-9] Things that are tangibly “built” with an immediately graspable substance and shape, texture and color, especially when their underlying structure or character is distinctive and unforgettable, display an essence that is instantly felt through skin and bones long before we are consciously aware of what we are looking at. These elements are what the father of phenomenology Edmund Husserl calls “essential beings” and radiate, in the words of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, their own “thinghood.”³ When they are “vividly identified” and “powerfully structured” they illustrate as



4 - Aldo van Eyck, Catholic Church, Den Haag, 1970.



5 - Carlo Scarpa, Olivetti Showroom, Venice, 1958.



6 - Maurice Smith, House, Groton, Massachusetts, 1963.

2 Ibid, p.15.

3 See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Bibson (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 43-71; Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Row, 1971), pp. 165-186.

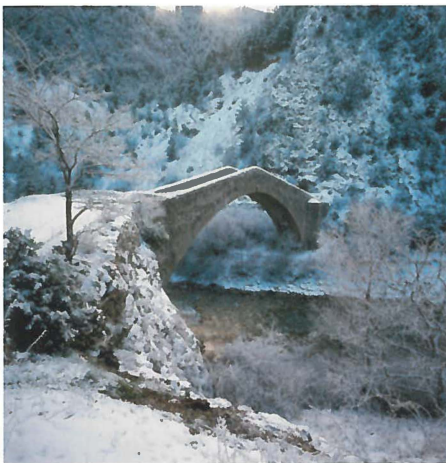


7 - Column. Santillana del Mar.

well a capacity for what American urbanist Kevin Lynch terms “imageability,” in that they elicit strong mental images that are capable of being recognized and remembered.⁴

We have inherited many powerful constructs of this kind, which help us to understand the Greek term explored by Heidegger—“*techne*”—which “signifies neither craft nor art,” and never merely a “technical” or “practical performance,” but rather a profound and miraculous “bringing forth of beings.”⁵ Consider the muscular bearing and distinct assembly of a Doric temple, or the bamboo members lashed with string in a Japanese fence. [Images 10-11] The softly contoured and voluptuous walls of a hand-imprinted Southwest Pueblo or Greek Island village. [Image 12] The interlocking of massive logs in a Norwegian peasant house. [Image 13] The blocky and footworn pavement of an archaic Italian street. [Image 14] The intricate timber lattice of a traditional Japanese house or temple. [Image 15]

While not abundant, there are recent works that are showing the way in helping restore an existential dimension to architecture. I am thinking of the wealth of personified details and collaged layers in buildings by Carlo Scarpa, the fields of space assembled from fragments of interlocking walls and windows in the houses of Maurice Smith, the seaside accretion of tactile wood volumes in the Sea Ranch condominium by MLTW, the concrete shells and elemental voids of Tadao Ando, the nest-like spaces interwoven at every scale by Fay Jones, the embryonic volumes and pent-up energy of Morphosis. [Images 16-17]



8 - Bridge. Provence.



9 - City. Riomaggiore.



10 - Greek Temples. Paestum.

4 Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), p. 9.

5 Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 59.



11 - Bamboo Fence. Koetsu-ji, Kyoto.



13 - Norwegian log hut.



12 - Stair. Oia, Santorini.



14 - Pavement. Sermoneta.



15 - Structural cage. Yoshijima House, Takayama, 1905.



16 - Archaic voids. Tadao Ando, Church of Light, Ibaraki, 1989.

These constructions that seem so strongly “there” tug and pull on the human psyche and sensory antennae of the human body, providing them with something gripping and vital to identify with, and producing in the process a direct kind of visceral contact with the environment. Just as our body is the means by which we exist in the world, so these astonishingly “real” buildings thicken the world and give it existence by imparting to architecture its own corporeal matter and weight, flesh and bone, gravity and energy.

The same point has been made with far greater elegance by the poet Rainer Rilke in his oft quoted Ninth Elegy, whose words about things transcending themselves could be equally applied to actual buildings that are conceived and experienced through poetic imagination:

Maybe we’re here only to say: house,
bridge, well, gate, jug, olive tree, window —
at most, pillar, tower . . . but to say them, remember,
oh, to say them in a way that the things themselves
never dreamed of existing so intensely.⁶



17 - Skeletal woodwork. Fay Jones, Thorncrown Chapel, Eureka Springs, 1980.

As we are drawn towards these vibrant phenomena, which appear not merely as retinal images but as images of concentrated being that touch us at the deepest level, they arouse a kind of reverie, setting off many subliminal images that stir and sometimes penetrate into our conscious minds. When standing before the woven reeds and elemental woodwork of an old Japanese teahouse, or immersed inside the cavernous chambers of greenish-grey stone at Zumthor’s thermal baths in Vals, we don’t merely look at its phenomena but we look and probe into their fathomless substance, feel the hands and acts that built them, and grasp within them primitive images that draw us into ruminations on earth and forest, huts and lairs, nests and shells. [Images 18-19] At the same time these phenomena seduce and prod us into action, both imaginatively and physically, to wander over their uneven surface and sense their texture in the soles of our feet, to stroke and massage their sensuous forms, feeling our way into their pores and contours, to explore and get ecstatically lost in their hidden spaces and miniature landscapes.

Of course a palpable presence in architecture need not be solid, and can originate in the immaterial atmosphere of a place. Acoustic experience as well as adventure is brought into play in sonic environments whose unique properties of silence or sounds, murmurs and echoes, sighs or creaks, can be recognized and remembered quite apart from their physical containers. Equally vivid are aromatic spaces surrounding their source but free of its fixed dimensions—the pungent smell of a tar-impregnated stave church in Norway, the fresh emanations from straw tatami in a Japanese house, or the pleasing scent of a building made solely of wood. Thermal zones are no less riveting, from a frigid cathedral built of stone to the field of warmth surrounding a hearth or coolness around a fountain, to the more fluid domains of sinking cold air and rising heat, siphoned breeze and captured sun, all triggering powerful emotions before we have a chance to consciously



18 - Tactile substance. Shokin-tei, Katsura Imperial Villa, Kyoto, 1645.

⁶ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies and the Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. A. Poulin, Jr. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), p. 75.

consider them. These phenomena can, by themselves, form “essences” that stand forth and exist, providing another intensely emotional means of identification with the environment. As these phenomena conjure up and softly detonate a stream of fleeting memories, we don’t passively receive them but rather creatively participate in shaping and modulating their experience according to our own sensory faculties and past experience, and the way we choose to move in space, thereby expanding our field of influence and sense of belonging in the world.

Arguably our most powerful metaphysical places are created by light and its dimming into shadows, whose seemingly infinite tones and shapes are able to create their own remarkable sense of place and incite human movements within it. True masters of light and mood—the Mexican Luis Barragán, the American Louis Kahn, the Swiss Le Corbusier, the Dane Jørn Utzon, the Portuguese Álvaro Siza, the Finn Juha Leiviskä, the Spaniard Alberto Campo Baeza—create softly incandescent spaces that contain and give off their own light, forming atmospheric realms that people are able to inhabit with intensity. [Images 20-23] Our immediate bond with these luminous spaces is in many ways the purest instance of sublimation, since it is totally free of mental activity and physical desire, and by directly touching our emotional chords is able to engage and bring into play our deepest joys and emotions. Despite its ethereality, light embodies human meaning in the way it projects onto buildings the echoes of a cultural ethos and at times the architect’s own soul, and thanks to this analogy makes it a language of their and their audience’s innermost being.

In all these appeals to the deepest modes of human involvement with architecture something important happens, for we find that certain eternal qualities are restored to buildings that we cannot rightly live without. The true human value of these phenomena, the one we cannot do without if we wish to retain any genuine powers of identification with the physical world, is their capacity to bring right up to our eyes an image of our often hidden aspirations for vital existence. For buildings to mirror the emotional resonance of our inner life, they need as well to transcend their own physical boundaries, rising beyond the realm of fact to embody what we most desire as human beings—an exhilarating consciousness.

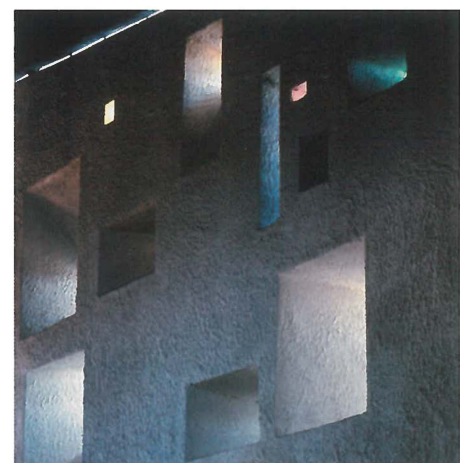
The proposition that the basic role of architecture is to make the world more intensely human—so that it becomes emotionally and spiritually as well as sensually and physically habitable—carries rather important implications for architectural education. Today’s students are in many ways being quietly prepared to perpetuate the contemporary drift towards instrumentation and novelty. The former is imposed by a narrow professional training based on normative judgments, information, and images, reinforced by an obsession with computers that supersedes and renders inefficient, even quaint, the messiness of human imprints through hand drawing and physical modeling. At the same time the capacity to fabricate buildings into amusements is invisibly influenced by design reviews and competitions that emphasize the spectacular over the meaningful, and are largely based on immediate visual gratification rather than the slower and more deeply moving sublimations of human nature. Being encouraged, in a sense, is a world without us since we cannot recognize ourselves in its forms.



19 - Caves of stone. Peter Zumthor, Thermal Baths, Vals, 1996.



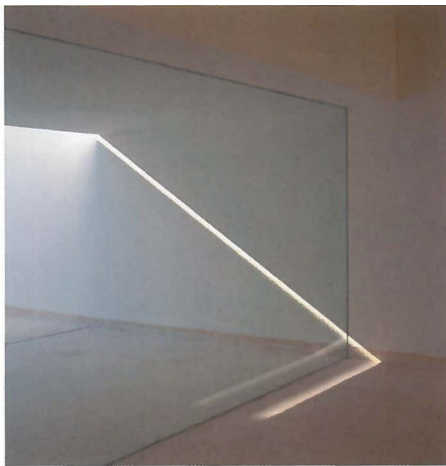
20 - Entry porch. Louis Kahn, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, 1972.



21 - Trapped light. Le Corbusier, Chapel at Ronchamp, 1955.



22 - Light-washed walls. Juha Leiviskä, Männistö Church, Kuopio, 1992.



23 - Light in space. Alberto Campo Baeza, Guerrero House, Cadiz, 2005.

Any optimism about reversing these trends must remain dim as long as market demands—from succeeding in school to finding a job and securing commissions, not to mention achieving fame—are the sole measure of value. One can only hope that architectural schools may recognize and find the will to reassert the capacity of buildings to be formed into catalysts that waken and sustain the everyday powers of human nature—an effort that demands a ratcheting down of our culture of self-glorification, and thus entails a real risk and self-sacrifice on the part of those designing buildings, not the least of whom are vulnerable students.

Adding a further challenge to any such change is the problem that the most important aspects of human nature lay completely outside the detached gaze of scientific thought and the objective mind. Our most fundamental experiences of architecture, as in life—joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, hope and despair, suspense and discovery, generosity and camaraderie, mystery and enlightenment—can be felt but not thought. Efforts to recapture the wholeness and integrity of man will need to approach these aspects of being through an appreciation of qualities and phenomena that are accessible to the poetic imagination but not to rational thought. By poetic I do not mean a search for beauty, but a method of stepping up the intensity of experience as a more sensual world is opened up for us, one where all of us are allowed to imaginatively participate. Such a world embodies our own consciousness, since it reflects back to us the sensitivity, intuitions, and pathos of our own flesh and blood.

While the poetry of words and the poetry of space are by no means identical, they share an ability to overcome the limits of objectivity—to see and communicate, even celebrate, aspects of reality to which the rational gaze is blind. This point has been made many times but it has to be reiterated. Poetry expresses more and says it with far more intensity than ordinary language. Whereas prosaic language, whether consisting of words or space, communicates information and serves practical ends, poetic language deepens our perception of life, and serves to broaden and sharpen our sense of existence. Architecture endowed with poetic powers has the effect of slowing down time, concentrating experience, and increasing awareness. The essence rather than surface of things are, in a sense, freshly revealed and opened up to us, so as to bring us more fully into the world as an infinitely vibrant and living place. We are brought into contact with forms and spaces that are no longer reduced to commodities or merchandise, but are realities we actually care about, and in their appeal to our most intimate dreams and images help us possess and take root in the world.

Poetic space is also a source of human freedom, for its unstable images are inherently unpredictable and fail to follow the sequence of logic. They unfold themselves to caring exploration, and free our imaginations and bodies to soar out and away from the ordinary course of things, to commingle with the world in an indeterminate manner—a joyful world that awakens our “dreaming consciousness” and invites us out from what is known. Poetic space is thus in many ways both dense and transparent, combining the weight of what it offers with the weightlessness of human seeking, a combination that offers a world which is new every time we experience it.

Architects and students who wish to reinvest space with the active means of feeling alive would do well to study the work of artists—from poets and painters, to ceramicists and sculptors, filmmakers and composers—not to mine their work for novel forms but to understand how these “born phenomenologists” select, combine, and reorganize their own store of felt, observed, and imagined experience.⁷ Because of their freedom from architecture’s constant pressure of practical obligations, artists are in many ways freer to explore all kinds of experience, which can be satisfying whether it acts to charm or disturb, for we can find some value in the liberating force of all intense living.

I would like to end with the words of Wallace Stevens, who points us towards what is essential in life and the world where we live, in his poem “Description Without Place”:

. . . Description is
Composed of a sight indifferent to the eye.

It is an expectation, a desire,
A palm that rises up beyond the sea,

A little different from reality:
The difference that we make in what we see

And our memorials of that difference,
Sprinklings of bright particulars from the sky.⁸

7 The phrase is Gaston Bachelard’s. Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, p. xxiv.

8 Wallace Stevens, *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 343-344.

LIGHT, LIGHT AND FRAGILE

Kristina Riska

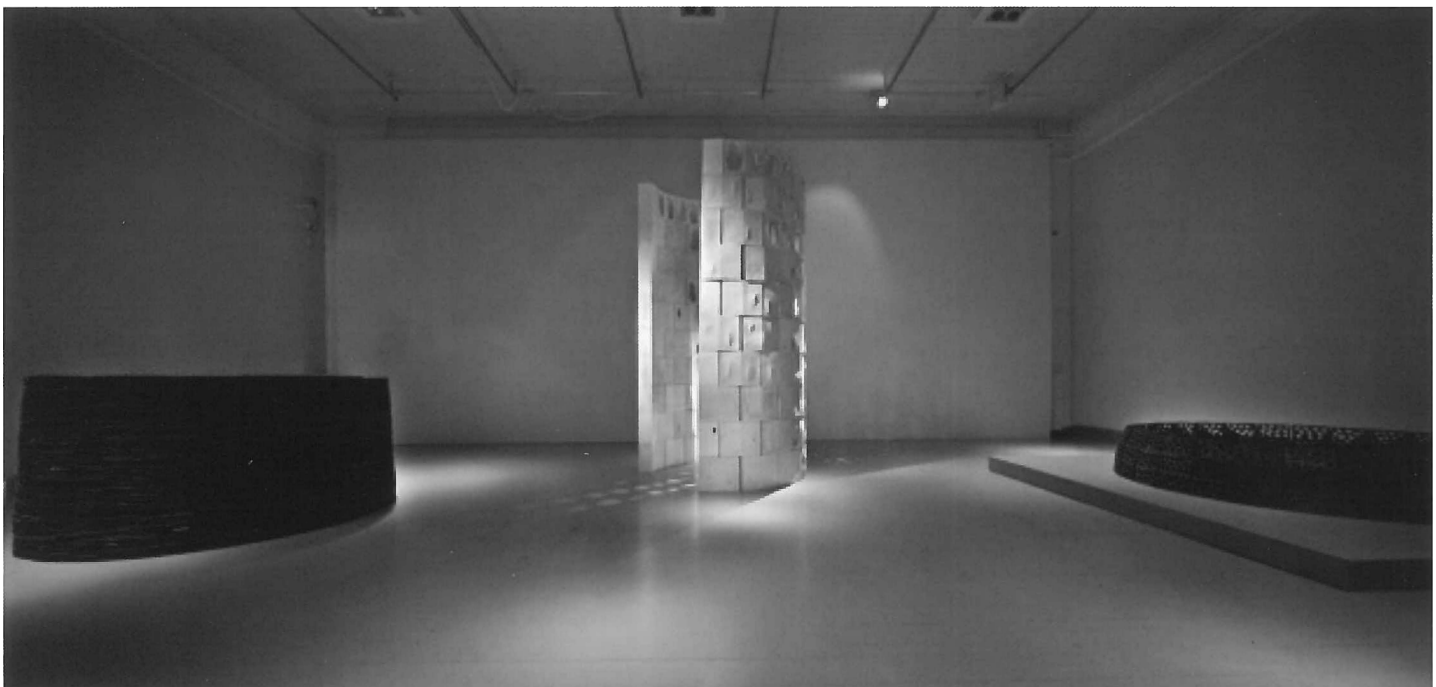
Ceramicist | Arabia Factory
Helsinki, Finland

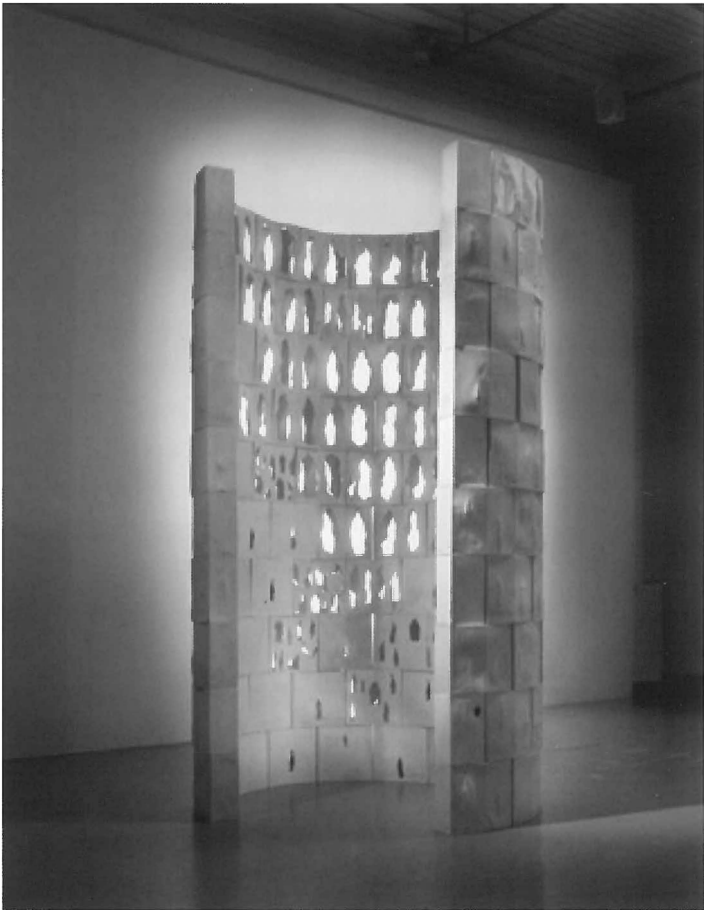
One of my very first memories is a narrow stripe of sunlight coming in to the room. Light moving on the wall creating shadows. The room is very quiet and the feeling is poetic.

This early impression can be one reason why light -invisible material- is an important starting point in my artwork. Thin pieces are made from rough clay with plain surfaces, but when the light comes into the piece the material becomes immaterial.

Several layers of plain aluminium oxide slips or slips colored with metal oxides creates a surface that wakes up in the light. At first sight the walls in the hollow pieces seem to be plain and empty. But when the light or the shadow touches the surface, when the viewer moves, all the small details become visible. In the work "Angels," a big half round ceramic installation made of bricks, the surface hides several small figures like pictures of ancestors cherished in the walls of a room. Through the holes in the bricks the light comes in and out creating a constantly moving silent picture. The pieces are partly broken, there are several fractures in the body. The thin walls together with the big size creates a combination almost unbearable.

Fragility is essential in my works and it can also be seen as a metaphor - to be fragile is to be vulnerable. It took many years to accept that the works must be done the way they appear, not the way I would want them to be. It took years to accept that the odd malformed beauty had its silent place somewhere in between the borderlines.





THE CONTEMPORARY COMPOSER, PROGRESS AND VALUES

Kalevi Aho

Composer
Helsinki, Finland

The last of the dinosaurs at the end of time

In October 2001, the Society of Finnish Composers organized a public seminar in Helsinki on the topic “Values and the Composer.” In his opening statement at the seminar, composer Mikko Heiniö (b. 1948) posed a provocative question: “What if we are the last of the dinosaurs, overweight vegetarians thriving in an abundantly favourable climate and not noticing that a meteor is already approaching?”¹ In Central Europe, the aesthetics of composition and the values of the contemporary composer have been debated in equally pointed terms. German composer and musicologist Rainer Riehn has questioned the very concept of composition in modern times. He asks:

Does it make any sense at all to compose in this day and age? ... Have not all models ‘political and autonomous’ broken down? And when I say ‘broken down,’ I mean that they no longer prompt any response at all. The avant-garde is completely integrated, consumer-friendly, digestible; it no longer provokes the slightest controversy. People who go to concerts applaud more or less everything without discretion. Political music has also, as we know, broken down and has not the slightest impact anymore. Where can we find opportunity or incentive for a composer these days?²

Criticism of the plight of the composer and the state of contemporary audiences has been gaining momentum in the compositional circles. As British composer John Tavener says, “we live in a culture in ruins at the end of an epoch.”³ He claims that the secularization of music derailed Western music long ago. He writes:

Messiaen said that music took a wrong turn hundreds of years ago. I can only assume he meant that with the introduction of the ego in the Renaissance, art became less sacred. I mean it may have reached great human heights at the time of Beethoven, but there is nothing sacred in late Beethoven.⁴

Heiniö, Mikko, “Olemmeko viimeisiä dinosaurusia?” [‘Are we the last of the dinosaurs?’], *Kompositio*, 4 (2001), 3-5, p. 3.

2 Metzger, Heinz-Klaus and Rainer Riehn, ‘Hat es noch Sinn? Aus einem Gespräch zwischen Mathias Spahlinger, Heinz-Klaus Metzger und Rainer Riehn,’ in Heinz-Klaus Metzger und Rainer Riehn, eds., *Was heisst Fortschritt? Musik-Konzepte*, 100 (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1998), 78-82, pp. 81-82. Translations from the original German by Kalevi Aho.

3 Andrew Ford, *Composer to Composer: Conversations about Contemporary Music* (London: Quartet Books, 1993), p. 90.

4 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 90.

Russian composer Vladimir Martinov (b. 1946) goes even further than Tavener and completely abandons the concept of “composition” that is an inseparable part of traditional Western music today. Martinov no longer considers himself “a composer-individual, a subject or a self in the traditional sense.”⁵ In his book *The End of the Time of Composers*, he presents a Zen-influenced conception of composition as an act in which he suggests that it is futile even to contemplate whether the subject, or the self, exists.

As early as the 1950’s, John Cage came to an even more extreme conclusion in his philosophy of music, which was also heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism. Cage arrived at absolute zero where musical structure was replaced with chance operations and the content and message of music was replaced with the complete absence of what we would traditionally call musical “sense.” In Cage’s *Music of Changes* (1951), for example, the composer tosses dice to choose his musical material, a procedure that results in the “random” accumulation of musical gestures in the finished score. In pieces such as *Imaginary Landscape No. 4 for 12 radios* (1951) and *4’33”* (1952), the very idea of the composition becomes blurred. Notation no longer acts to indicate how the “composition” should be performed and it ceases to have a distinctive aural identity.

Musical material and social progress

How did we reach this “absolute zero” in classical music and can anything be done to re-engage composition with its traditional communicative framework? What explanation can we find for what Riehn calls the “broken down” state of composition today? Much inspired by Olivier Messiaen, John Tavener suggests that the current problems in Western music began with the development of harmony and counterpoint. It was then, he maintains, that musical material and its manipulation by a composer began to take center stage.⁶ Messiaen took the view that, although the situation was far from ideal, there is no other choice than just to “get on with” the act of composition, where the composer is lumbered with harmony and counterpoint. Tavener, however, raises the possibility of a return to the roots of classical composition. As he writes, it would require,

Great courage and, perhaps, humility to let go and to say, ‘no counterpoint, no harmony; is it possible to return to these simple modes’ I believe that all the modes, Byzantine, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, I think they all have things in common; they go back to the dawn of civilization. So, maybe, to write really theophanic music - music coming from God - one has to go that way.⁷

5 Hannu-Ilari Lampila, “‘Tärkeitä vain sisäiset muutokset:’ Vladimir Martinovin Apokalypsis yhdistää kirkkomusiikkiperinteitä” [“Only internal change is important:” Vladimir Martinov’s Apokalypsis merges traditions of sacred music], *Helsingin Sanomat*, 23 March, 2002.

6 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 91.

7 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 92.

As a rule, this kind of thinking is strongly rejected in contemporary musical circles because musical material - its complexity, its timelessness and its organization - is still held by many to be the most important thing in composition. Many young Finnish composers hold this view. At the “Values and the composer” seminar, Lauri Kilpiö (b. 1974) explained that his compositional values were formed through the discovery of modes of expression and ways of processing musical material that were new to him. He could identify no other values at work when he was composing. As Kilpiö puts it:

So, novelty is a value for me. On the other hand, I do want to be as conscious as possible of tradition. On the level of composition style, I aim at a wealth of detail, a richness of sonority, complexity and expressiveness.⁸

Compositional values that are unrelated to style and technique - and by this I mean values such as dimensions of content, social values, suitability for a particular occasion, emotional appeal, communicativeness, entertainment value or sacral value - still seem to be somehow shameful or taboo in contemporary music. It seems as if many composers are afraid that they would look ridiculous in the eyes of their colleagues if they suddenly began to talk about, for instance, the “message” of music.

It is quite common in contemporary music that the prominence afforded musical material cannot be separated from the inescapable influence of dominant musical institutions and the genres and styles that they engender. As composer Harri Wessman (b. 1949) says, contemporary music has become hermetic. Composers of concert music want to restrict their work mainly to the context provided by contemporary music institutions. As a result, the “domain” of the contemporary composer is restricted to instrumental music for relatively small ensembles, electro-acoustic music and computer music. Only in the rare cases when a composer is successful in persuading an orchestra to perform his music can this “domain” be extended to include orchestral composition. Wessman has developed a number of strategies for “dismantling the ivory tower” as he puts it, notably by writing a vast amount of educational music and Gebrauchsmusik or occasional music.⁹ He is of the opinion that contemporary composers should expand their sphere of operations considerably; otherwise, we face the danger that contemporary music will shrink into an even more marginal and meaningless phenomenon than it is now.

The marginalizing of compositional values also occurs when composers sublimate the idea of the “message” of music into the cult of musical material. For these composers, it is possible to couple a composer’s social responsibility on the one hand, with musical style, material and technique on the other. Their claim is that a composer’s social awareness is directly proportional to the progressiveness of his musical material and compositional techniques. In other words, if music uses “topical” material or compositional techniques, it will automatically be socially

⁸ Lauri Kilpiö, “Kommenttipuheenvuoro I” [“Comment”], *Kompositio*, 4 (2001), 10, p. 10. Translated from Finnish by Kalevi Aho.

⁹ Harri Wessman, “Norsunluutornin purkustrategioita” [“Strategies for Dismantling the Ivory Tower”], *Kompositio*, 4 (2001), p. 9.

aware, and no further social dimension is needed. Composer Paavo Heininen (b. 1938) expresses this conception in this way:

Style is not a measure of the value of a composition - but it would represent a woeful bankruptcy of critical consciousness to claim that anything and everything written this year is 'contemporary music.' [...] On the other hand, it is clear that the choice of a style is of paramount importance, a statement that can either address the human condition in our times - and thus contribute to life - or be the response of a 'yes-man,' or avoid the issue altogether.¹⁰

Luigi Nono, who has laid heavy emphasis on social themes in his music, has also defended the use of advanced musical material and techniques. His statement that the music of Shostakovich has "no future and therefore no function" takes as a point of departure the belief that composers have a duty to maximize the potential embodied in musical material available today.¹¹ Nono calls the music of Shostakovich "Socialist Realism in the bad sense - old forms that people try to fill with new content, misunderstood folkishness."¹²

Progress-induced regression

Nono's 1971 prophesy about the future of Shostakovich's music was completely wrong. Shostakovich's works have proved to be highly viable, and his reputation shows no signs of declining. Nono's music, by contrast, has almost completely disappeared from concert programs - it is now mostly performed only at festivals of contemporary music. For a long time, those composers who focused on new materials and techniques explained their lack of success with the public by stressing that the best composers have always been pioneers and that the public taste is always a few decades behind musical innovation. Even in the 1960's, there was optimistic talk of how complex, "difficult" contemporary music would eventually take its place in the standard concert repertoire. Decades have passed, but this has not happened. As Rainer Riehn observed, people have indeed become accustomed to avant-garde works, but the music described as avant-garde no longer shocks anyone, let alone deeply moving or exciting anyone.

So, has the public at large remained stubbornly stupid and conservative, even after decades of bombardment? Or is the conservative nature of music institutions to blame? Should composers think again? Are composers such as Arvo Pärt, Vladimir Martinov, Valentin Silvestrov and John Tavener correct when they say that there is something fundamentally wrong with the aesthetics of modernism, which values technique and material above all?

10 Paavo Heininen, "Einar Englund," *Musiikii*, 4 (1976), p. 62.

11 Hansjörg Pauli, *Für Wen Komponieren Sie Eigentlich?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), pp. 682-683.

12 Pauli, *Für Wen Komponieren Sie Eigentlich?*, p. 116.

We can begin to answer these questions by examining our relationship with the idea of progress and its central role in authenticating the cult of musical material that lies at the heart of modernism. In a discussion of the concept of technological and artistic progress, Italian composer Paolo Emilio Carapezza made the point that technological advances are rarely in step with the advances in human capabilities. Rather, the most impressive advances in the realm of technology often cause “disastrous regression.”¹³ As German author and philosopher Walter Benjamin maintains, the very concept of progress involves the acceptance of disaster:

The concept of progress is grounded in the concept of catastrophe. For something to “go forward” is the catastrophe; not that which is to come but that which already is. As Strindberg said: hell is not what is coming - it is this our life.¹⁴

We could identify any number of examples of regression and disaster caused by progress. For example, technological and economic advances have led to an unprecedented standard of living in the Western world, but the price has been catastrophic: pollution, destruction of the environment, and increased social inequality in the past few decades. Also, technology has not made people happier or the world a safer place. New technology has even provided us with the means for the collective suicide of humanity.

In music, too, we can find plenty of examples of how technical progress in one area caused regression elsewhere. In the early 18th century, equal temperament began to replace mean-tone temperament under the influence of J.S. Bach, among others. As a result, differences of sonority between keys were eliminated, which in turn greatly expanded the potential for modulation. At the same time, keyboard music became considerably poorer in sonority because the keys each lost their special individual character: pure or impure keys no longer existed, because all the keys sounded the same - not really impure, but not wholly pure, either.

Schoenberg’s development of the twelve-tone technique, similarly, had both advantages and disadvantages. Schoenberg aimed to achieve maximum equality between all pitches of the chromatic scale, an approach that destroyed all the countless nuances of meaning accumulated across centuries of tonal tradition. Its extension, total serialism, represented an organization of rhythm, tonal color and dynamics that mechanized the process of composition. Total serialism also narrowed the scope for interpretation on the part of the performer to virtually nil. If the control of the composer extends to the tiniest details of a composition, as is often the case in contemporary music, there is nothing left for the performer to do except reproduce the music with machine-like precision. It seems as if many

¹³ Paolo Emilio Carapezza, “Fortschritt, Rückschritt, Stabilität und onsolidierung,” in Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, 31-36, p. 33.

¹⁴ Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1-2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), pp. 682-683.

contemporary composers are afraid of a musician's personal input in a performance. To name one example among many, German composer Helmut Lachenmann has said that one should never interpret music - one should just play it.¹⁵

It is for these reasons, among others, that composer and theoretician Konrad Boehmer has accused Pierre Boulez (one of the founding fathers of total serialism) of a dictatorial approach to music. Boehmer considers Boulez's aesthetic approach irrelevant and outdated, and describes Boulez's philosophy of music as "the musical thinking of the day before yesterday, or *Le Maître sans Marteau*."¹⁶

The conservative avant-garde and the temporal coordinates of composition

Accusations of petrified conservatism have also been leveled at Brian Ferneyhough, who has created some of the most tightly controlled and complex scores in the whole of Western contemporary music. As Peter Franklin wrote as early as 1985, Ferneyhough's music was "showing every sign of synthesizing a final *ne plus ultra* of orthodox avant-garde conservatism."¹⁷

The extreme complexity of post-war musical modernism has prompted reactions from composers, notably the move to indeterminacy and developments in musical minimalism. As American composer John Adams puts it:

The times demanded the kind of musical revolution that minimalism brought about. It had to happen. When you look at a score by Ferneyhough or Boulez, you realize that kind of complexity couldn't go any further. There had to be a violent reaction against it.¹⁸

Nevertheless, many modernist composers persist in the view that, just as it is not possible to turn back the clock, it is not feasible for contemporary music to revert to some sort of new simplicity or to the recycling of old tools. Pierre Boulez bluntly dismisses this sort of compositional nostalgia:

I find that these people are tired; they are afraid of complications, of complexity, and they say that we cannot communicate with an audience because our music is too complex. Okay, what are they doing? They are going back to something. For me, that's impossible because history never goes backwards. And when I see people who are writing pseudo-Mahler [...] well, there is enough Mahler for me, I don't need pseudo-Mahler. I compare postmodernism with neo-classicism between the two wars. What remains of neo-classicism? Absolutely nothing.¹⁹

15 Jakob Ullmann, "O_xp_vos," in Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, 88-131, p. 128.

16 Konrad Boehmer, "Musikdenken Vorgestern oder: *Le Maître sans Marteau*" in Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, 5-30, p. 5.

17 Peter Franklin, *The Idea of Music: Schoenberg and Others*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p. 113.

18 Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 180.

19 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 23.

Boulez's justification of his own musical aesthetic hinges on two tenuous premises: his rejection of postmodernism and neo-classicism, and his belief in the essential contemporaneity of his own musical language. For him, the composer does not subscribe to a particular compositional school; rather, he simply expresses himself "according to the coordinates of [his] time". He has expressed this as follows:

I don't see a future for Modernism; I don't see a future for Post-Modernism. You are not modern—you are merely expressing yourself according to the coordinates of your time, and that's not being modern, that's being what you are. All kinds of references, for me, are absolutely useless. If I want to be myself, I don't need references, I want to be myself. Period. I really can't see any interest in going back to a lost paradise. For me there is no loss—of any kind.²⁰

As composer Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928) puts it, convictions such as these in fact delimit rather than increase the relevance of the contemporary music. Rautavaara writes:

I do not really believe in the 'demands of the times' that some people say we should take into account. Time does not demand anything at all, it lets you be yourself any way you like – assuming that you have found yourself to begin with. People of course have demands, but these demands are ephemeral if anything. If you choose to 'move with the times', you are doomed to be behind the times, by definition, from now to doomsday. ... Before you know it, the most radical modernists have turned into the most rabid conservatives. ... It is not necessary to be arrogant all the time and say that 'if my art is not in tune with the times, then that is the fault of the times'. But I can point out that I would prefer my music to be timeless rather than in tune with the times.²¹

Progress as a form of denial and an absence of history

So, does musical progress exist at all, in objective terms? If it does, progress certainly does not depend on a composer's choice of materials or techniques. As Theodor W. Adorno puts it, "Advances in the control of material in art are in no way immediately equivalent to advances in art itself."²² Author Franz Kafka expressed the same idea thus: "To believe in progress is not to believe that progress has already happened."²³

The notion that progress manifests itself above all in the novelty of material or idiom involves the composer of necessity denying the value of anything that is

20 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 24.

21 Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Mieltymyksestä äärettömään* ["Affinity with Infinity"], (Juva: WSOY, 1998), pp. 19-21.

22 Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, p. 3.

23 Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, p. 3.

old. For example, a composer may choose to abandon tonality, triads, melody, and a clearly definable pulse, a decision that will certainly make his music sound different from that which was written a hundred years ago. By denying the essential content of tradition, he has created music with no history. But does this automatically mean that his music has become more progressive and therefore timeless? I have already explained that all advances in compositional technique have led to some degree of regression. Additionally, the doctrine of progress is based on forgetting, denial and an absence of history. When applied to art, this doctrine smacks strongly of self-deception.

Composer and conductor Hans Zender makes an interesting point about the connection between progress, regression, and conservatism. He draws a parallel between the doctrine of progress in society (meaning continuous economic growth and an increasingly technological way of life) and a similar approach in the arts. “Paradoxically”, he states, the pursuit of progress in the arts “turn one into a conservative, and one is unable to prevent one’s work from sounding like a quote – exactly that which one mostly abhors: it becomes a quote from the 1950’s.”²⁴

The belief that musical progress brings greater aesthetic value is turned on its head, a fact that remains the same for arts other than music. Far more literature was written in the 20th century than in any century before it, but the best novels of the 20th century cannot objectively be considered any “better” than the great works of earlier centuries.²⁵ Similarly, although the abstract art of the 20th century is certainly different, it is not in any sense better than the older style of representational art. And I have not yet heard anyone claim that modern glass-and-steel skyscrapers are of greater architectural value than medieval gothic cathedrals. Why, then, should we consider that avant-garde composers are any more advanced than their colleagues in earlier centuries?

Artists today are not any less talented or intelligent than their predecessors. Potentially talented composers of the order of a Bach or a Mozart have existed in recent centuries and there may even be such people alive today. So why has the music of today’s Bachs and Mozarts been unable to displace the original Bach and Mozart?

One reason for this is the arrogance of the modernist art philosophy and its attitude to tradition and past achievements. Something valuable has been abandoned in the name of progress – the same thing that makes the music of Bach and Mozart timeless and universal.

A problem in the reception of modern music is also the compositional attitude of many contemporary composers, which I would describe as narcissistic absolutism. This approach requires both musicians and audiences to submit unconditionally to the artistic vision of the composer, who shirks what I believe to be his fundamental responsibility to performers and listeners. The diametrical opposite of this attitude could be described as compliant pragmatism. This attitude can be found in its purest form in pop music, in which all musical considerations

24 Hans Zender, “Fortschritt und Erinnerungen,” in Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, 146-151, p. 146.

25 In spring 2002, Norwegian book clubs asked 100 world-famous authors what they thought was the best novel of all time. The most votes went to Cervantes *Don Quixote*. The author with the most works selected was Dostoevsky.

are subjected to an imagined vision of the public's current demands. Narcissistic absolutism in music (and other branches of the arts) is a relatively new phenomenon; it did not emerge until the middle of the 19th century (e.g. Wagner), when it came about as a result of the improvement of the social and financial status of artists. In the 20th century, this attitude has been enabled by the emergence of contemporary music institutions, which have become safe havens for music that would not otherwise gain access to the concert platform. Neither extreme narcissistic absolutism nor extreme compliant pragmatism has produced much art of lasting value. Indeed, at any given time, any music of significant substance has combined the two approaches.²⁶ Preserving one's individuality and integrity should not preclude consideration for other people.

The third contributing factor is the social development of the modern world. Extreme materialism and technological dominance is constantly eroding the social significance of the arts, at least in the Western world. The spirit of the times is not favourable for the flourishing of the creative arts.

The span of tradition

Contemporary music is bereft of history. As I explained at the beginning of this essay in my discussion of some of the ideas of John Tavener, the homogeneity that was once at the heart of the tradition of European art music has been lost. At one time, it rested on the shared foundation of a musical language derived from Gregorian chant, which spread all over Western Europe with the expanding Christian church. (The counterpart to Gregorian chant in Eastern Europe was Orthodox chant.) The invention of staff notation in Western Europe in the 11th century began a process that gradually enabled the documentation and transfer of musical traditions in something other than oral form. Musical notation also encouraged the development of music in many parts, such as that written during the golden age of polyphony by the Netherlands School. As instrumental music developed, Italy took a leading role, and in France, too, art music developed to a high level. After the Reformation, Protestant sacred music began to diverge from that of Catholic composers, a new line of development that culminated in the music of J.S. Bach. Despite these stylistic divergences, however, the interaction between nations was lively. As a result, differences in national characteristics in music remained negligible.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the culture of art music from the German language area gained prominence. This development went on to exert a strong influence in particular over instrumental music, and continues to do so even today. German orchestral composers established the symphony orchestra, whose range

26 In Finnish music, this dichotomy has been highlighted quite amusingly by Einojuhani Rautavaara. Some young Finnish composers have accused Rautavaara of being a bad influence and have claimed that commercialism and pandering to audiences are his only goals. Rautavaara himself has defended the position of absolute narcissism, however, notably by declaring that he only writes music for himself in his own private ivory tower. It is my opinion that Rautavaara's music in fact incorporates a healthy synthesis of both approaches, and that he will remain a classic of Finnish music.

of instruments gradually became standardized across Europe.²⁷ The influence of this tradition remains especially strong in the art music of the countries of northern Europe. For example, both Finland and Sweden can trace the roots of their art music to Germany. The honorary title “father of Finnish music” was given to the German-born composer Fredrik Pacius (1809-1891), who emigrated to Helsinki.

Even many national styles in European art music are grounded in the German musical tradition. A good example is the “Finnish” style of Jean Sibelius (1865-1957). The earliest compositions of Sibelius are linked to the tradition represented by Pacius. Sibelius studied further in Berlin and Vienna, and at about the same time he discovered the most ancient existing stratum of Finnish folk music, known colloquially as Kalevala music after the name of the Finnish national epic. In his *Kullervo* Symphony (1891-1892) Sibelius applied its melodic features to his own writing. His development towards a more original stylistic idiom was also influenced by Russian music, particularly Tchaikovsky, whose “Russian” style has also its roots in the German tradition. But it was at this point, in the 1890s, that Sibelius consciously sought to distance himself from Central European late Romanticism and to create a new, Finnish tradition.

Sibelius’s personal style was thus grounded in the German tradition and augmented with features from ancient Finnish folk music and Russian concert music, all of which was merged in the composer’s highly original personality and powerful innovative approach to composition. It was this mixture that later came to be regarded abroad as typically Finnish tradition.

But we may ask: Is Sibelius’s music in fact particularly Finnish? Or is it just the idiosyncratic and inimitable personal style of a great composer? To take another example from Finnish music, Leevi Madetoja (1887-1947) was also trained in the German-oriented disciplines of counterpoint and harmony, and derived certain influences from Russian music. Unlike Sibelius, he incorporated melodic elements from a younger stratum of Finnish folk music from the province of Ostrobothnia and elements from French contemporary music into his idiom. When we add to this Madetoja’s own melancholic personality, we arrive at a personal style that mixes heaviness of expression with lightness of texture—another style that has often been described as being very “Finnish”.

Modernism, and in particular its focus on progress and its faith in the cult of musical material, marks a radical departure from the tradition of stylistic continuity with common roots. It is of course possible to trace a single line of stylistic development from the “endless melody” of Richard Wagner, past the “emancipation of the dissonance” at the turn of 20th century, to Schoenberg’s twelve-note method and Webernian serialism. In so doing, one can construct an “uninterrupted” stylistic evolution connecting the Austro-German instrumental tradition of the mid-19th century to the musical modernism of post-Webernian composers such as Boulez. But confidence in the viability of this chronology hinges on a crucial leap of faith in the inherent musical value and historical

²⁷ This progress caused regression elsewhere, however: the range of standard instruments was reduced, and the entire families of instruments such as viols and certain wind instruments became obsolete. A similar loss of diversity occurred in keyboard music when the modern piano replaced the harpsichord and the clavichord.

authenticity of Schoenberg's twelve-note method. As I explained earlier, in my opinion the extensions and consequences of this method destroyed finally the precious nuances of musical meaning accumulated over centuries. Thus, this line of stylistic development leads only to counterfeit tradition.

The duties of a composer today

So, how can composers respond to what Tavener calls the "culture in ruins, at the end of an epoch"? How are we to answer Rainer Riehn's question: "Does it make any sense to compose at all in this day and age?" In this paper, I have outlined what in my opinion is the failure of modernism and I have shown how so-called musical progress has induced a state of regression in which compositional value has been sacrificed at the altar of the cult of musical material. At the beginning of my discussion, I also touched on John Cage's solution to the crisis of musical modernism – the return to "absolute zero" where musical structure and traditional notions of musical content were negated by the nature of his compositional aesthetic. Cage's solution, while thought provoking, leads to nothing constructive in the context of the development of Western music from my perspective. Cage may lead us to the origin – to silence – but the ultimate objective of music can never be emptiness. On the contrary, if contemporary music is to be saved, the composer must undertake five duties, each of which addresses a different aspect of the current state of regression in contemporary musical values.

The composer's first duty is to rediscover an audience, to make listeners believe that music is meaningful, to move them and to solicit their opinions. Thus, we need to look more closely at what it is that contemporary music lacks by asking what listeners want to find in it. Two features with great appeal to listeners are tranquility and sacrality. By "sacrality", I mean moments of illumination and enlightenment, which can be found in secular as well as sacred music. Unlike John Tavener, I do experience such "holy" or sacral moments also in many non-sacred musical compositions, as in the secular late works of Beethoven. Paradoxically, I find it difficult to experience similar moments of universal miraculous sacrality in Tavener's sacred works, however.

Some composers have attempted to restore contemporary music to its religious origins. The main works by Arvo Pärt are religious works, in which he restores the tonality and uses a composition technique of his own, called the "tintinnabuli technique". Vladimir Martinov's mystery play *Apocalypsis for boys'* choir, male voice choir and soloists combines the Orthodox chant tradition with 16th-century polyphony. John Tavener has explored Byzantine chant and Sufi music in his compositions because, as he puts it, "...almost all Western music... doesn't inspire me to go on doing what I'm doing."²⁸ There is clearly a huge demand for music that reaches into the remote past because it provides listeners

with an opportunity to take time out from the hectic pace of life and return to an experience of the mythical, the mysterious and the holy. In my view, this approach denies too many of the most valuable things in Western music, however, not least the whole corpus of pure instrumental music. Tavener's and Martinov's approach, as bold as it is, also demonstrates that they see no hope at all in improving the artistic and social situation of today's world from a contemporary perspective. I believe that it is possible to experience a feeling of the sacred and the mysterious without limiting oneself to the distant past, as Sofia Gubaidulina has convincingly demonstrated.

After the composer has established a target group in contemporary listeners, his second duty must be to construct an exit from the hermetic, technocratic-modernist (or, as with Stockhausen, quasi-religious) solipsism of the avant-garde. The composer must restore the sense of history, tradition, and the past to music. Finnish composer Erkki Salmenhaara (1941-2002) believed that this could be achieved by using quotes or allusions, or by reverting to tonality. As he aptly put it: "when we had for decades chased feverishly after something new and unprecedented, there was only one thing left that was new: that which was old."²⁹ As an artistic credo of sorts, he once declared:

Only by re-acknowledging tonality -- by which I do not mean certain specific historical styles -- Western music can restore the boundless richness of musical meaning. This does not mean a return to the past but the creating of a future with materials provided by the past.³⁰

Third, composers must undertake to restore to contemporary music a greater sense of social significance than it has at present. It is surprising that many contemporary composers deny the social dimension of their music. Steve Reich does not believe that political art has an impact "The Threepenny Opera had absolutely no effect in stopping the Nazis; Guernica is a masterpiece but it didn't stop Franco or Hitler or Mussolini for two seconds."³¹ Einojuhani Rautavaara is much of the same opinion. In his autobiography *Omakuva* (Self-portrait), he writes: "I have never paid attention to politics. What purpose would it serve in art?"³² But denying the social dimension of music is in itself political; it is a case of the artist silently approving of everything that is going on. To understand how much impact artists can have on society we need only look to Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, where artists were banished, isolated, or imprisoned.

However, the majority of great composers from Beethoven to Hans-Werner Henze or John Adams have been aware of their social responsibility and they have taken some sort of stand also in current events. A case in point is Sibelius, whose tone poem *Finlandia* and *Second Symphony* represented to his contemporaries a symbolic vision of Finland's independence and freedom from Russian rule. Sibelius' music had an enormously uplifting effect on the Finnish national spirit,

29 Erkki Salmenhaara, *Löytöretkiä musiikkiin* [Explorations in Music] (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1991), p. 296.

30 Salmenhaara, *Löytöretkiä musiikkiin*, p. 326.

31 Ford, *Composer to Composer*, p. 67.

32 Einojuhani Rautavaara, *Omakuva* [Self-portrait] (Portvoo: WSOY, 1989), p. 196.

and he remains a national hero. Similarly, Shostakovich was considered the voice of social conscience in his home country. Richard Strauss, by contrast remained silent politically in Nazi Germany, a reaction that led to an ethical and moral bankruptcy in his artistic career in the 1930s. Contemporary German composer Manfred Trojahn puts the connection between musical language and social responsibility succinctly: "I believe that the 'Zeitgeist' is an important aspect, and I observe it by being moved by what goes on around me."³³

A fourth duty for the contemporary composer is to expand the domain of the composer -- to develop "strategies for dismantling the ivory tower", as Harri Wessman put it. Here, too, we can learn from the masters of previous generations. Sibelius wrote music on a variety of levels: serious instrumental and vocal music, lighter salon music and entertainment music, incidental music for plays and tableaux, and occasional music for a variety of purposes. He was also active as a conductor. Working on several levels adds to the composer's flexibility, since it forces him to choose his compositional style to suit the purpose of the work being written. One must dare to be simple and naïve in educational music written for children; if one is writing music for dance, one cannot be concerned solely with fulfilling a particular modernist criterion. As composer Jakob Ullmann has said: "The danger of being anachronistic is the least of our worries."³⁴

Finally, a contemporary composer should be able to restore meaningful emotional content to contemporary music. Why do people listen to music and go to concerts in the first place? They may wish to take time out from their everyday lives and experience beauty. They may be emotionally distraught, seeking solace and comfort in music. They may be happy and in love and seeking a reflection of these feelings in music. They may go to a concert to gain new vitality, energy, and strength. Or perhaps they wish to experience a strong sense of drama in music. It is my opinion that any composer's output should include works that can satisfy all these and other similar emotional expectations from the audience. The question of style or technique is secondary -- anything is appropriate, providing the music fulfils these emotional goals.

There is a desperate need for a new kind of art, a more human art, in today's world where technological and materialist values are overemphasized in all walks of life. As philosopher Edmund Husserl has said:

Matter-of-fact science creates matter-of-fact people. In our anguish [...] this science has nothing to say to us. It excludes on principle the questions that are most burning ones for people who are victims of the most far-reaching upheavals of our unhappy times: the questions of the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of human existence as a whole.³⁵

If modern art can help us to answer such questions, then art will truly have fulfilled its purpose.

33 Hans-Klaus Jungenreich, ed., *Lust am Komponieren*, *Musicalische Zeitfragen* 16 (Kassel, Basel and London: Bärenreiter, 1985), p. 70.

34 Ullmann, "O_xp_vos." p. 89.

35 Edmund Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*, *Philosophische Bibliothek* 292, 2., Revised Edition, ed. Elisabeth Ströker, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996), p. 4. ff. Quoted in Metzger and Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte*, p. 33.

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THE MARVEL OF ARCHITECTURE

Carlos Jimenez

Architect | Professor
Rice University

*Lecture at School of Architecture University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign -
Monday, September 13, 2010*

Thank you Professor Chasco for inviting me to be part of this lecture series celebrating the appointment of Juhani Pallasmaa as Plym Distinguished Professor for 2010-2011. I am honored to be here this evening as I much admire Juhani's insightful writings on the "embodied essence of architecture." In his honor I want to speak about one of my favorite subjects: the marvel of architecture. I am sure that everyone can recall one or more examples of what such marvels might be, maybe evident this morning while crossing the hazy campus lawn, or perhaps discovered on a visit to a building whose presence has since grown indelible in your recollection, or better yet evoked by the persistent memory of a window in some distant interior. I am continually collecting such experiences as I walk by, inhabit or simply remember works of architecture, regardless of its pedigree or location. I often think of architecture as if it possesses its own version of Scheherazade's timeless serenade, prolonging time through its own thousand and one marvels night after night. Time is suspended and everything else dissolves as architecture quietly ushers or murmurs its particular story.

I am humbled every time I begin a new work, for it is like entering an entirely new world that nonetheless intimates familiar destinations. When designing a new work I imagine the stories that might or might not take place across its spaces, just as I long to discover or be surprised by those I had not foreseen. Life happens in architecture and one must leave ample room for it to unfold. The marvel of architecture arrives in the act of making, and it remains in the act of living in it. Marvel resides in the capacity of the work to at times step back, linger, open, close, awaken, remember, return, reappear, forget, desire, dream: in short a living architecture unfolding in time.

I want to highlight two recent works in Texas. The first is a house in Marfa, a small town located 600 miles west of Houston, a ten-hour drive. Marfa gained notoriety in the mid- 1950s when the film *Giant*, George Stevens's classic Texan melodrama, was filmed there. In the early 1970's the town encountered a different kind of giant, not from Texan lore but from the New York art world, the artist Donald Judd, who arrived in Marfa intent on finding clean open spaces as far away from SoHo as could be. He found plenty of them in Marfa, a sparse yet enthralling place where time and light acquire a sublime stillness. An entrancing atmosphere permeates every single moment of the day, whether the hours move slowly or quickly. I first visited Marfa in 1993 to write about Judd's architecture and to see firsthand his masterwork, *100 Untitled Works in Mill Aluminum*, an installation of exquisite and complex simplicity housed in two converted garages that the artist had transformed to his demanding specifications. During the late summer of 2000, I was approached by Lynn and Tim Crowley to design a house for them on a property they owned six miles south of town. I had known them

for a decade as I had worked on two projects for them in Houston and we were friends. As the Crowleys were now living full time in Marfa they wanted a primary residence with plenty of room for entertaining and for their family and friends to visit. I recall that during our first visit to the site to find a precise spot to place the house, I was seized by a certain sensation as we explored the terrain of their three thousand acres. Earlier that day we had flown above the area and all that could be seen was the Chihuahuan desert in its full, desolate magnitude. Once on the ground the experience was mesmerizing. The wild grasses of the surrounding hills swayed toward the Davis Mountains to the north and toward Cathedral Mountain on the south. The clouds that afternoon had a tungsten lining and moved with ceremonial slowness, giving the scene a breathtaking beauty. I kept thinking about the wonder of it all while postponing the critical question: where should the house be placed? Not an easy answer, as everywhere one looked there was something that captivated one's attention. The Davis Mountains became a visual anchor in the vastness surrounding us, and it would remain so as the house developed. Prior to that visit, I had met the Crowleys in my studio, where we discussed their house as a sanctuary, an open yet protected place where one could measure and retain intimacy in the midst of their unencumbered site. We talked about variations on the low, one-story ranch houses that Mr. Crowley admired. These discussions led to a design whose constant one-room-wide layout encircles two distinct courtyards. Each room relates to a particular element across either of the two courtyards or the distant landscape beyond. Visually the setting is always charged by ephemeral or reliable moments throughout the day. The house is always still, yet silence can be heard through its infinite dispatches. Still, yes, but like Scheherazade anticipating the arrival of the next day to tell another tale of landscape, light and shadow.

The second project consists of a master plan and two buildings for an auxiliary campus for Rice University in Houston. The university's 290-acre campus is a lesson on the virtues of visionary planning in a city known for its chronic aversion to planning. For one hundred years this vision has provided Rice University with a set of parameters and guidelines to guide the architectural growth of their institution. With this precedent in mind we persuaded the board of trustees to let us design a master plan for a new piece of property donated to Rice, lying five miles south of the main campus. The flat, treeless, thirty-two-acre property, a trapezoid in plan, was the site we were given to locate a book and document storage warehouse for the university library. We felt that it was critical to plan the entire site in order to best locate the Library Service Center and avoid the random placement of future buildings. We proposed a planned auxiliary campus where other types of non-academic service buildings, such as storage facilities, could be built. The site is bordered on three sides by a dead-end frontage road, an elevated highway overpass, and a railroad line. First we planted live oak trees along the perimeter of the thirty-two acres to demarcate the edges of the auxiliary campus. Our proposal bisects the site with a central elongated loop road with sites for future buildings on either side. Half the site is allocated for storage buildings and parking areas, while the other half accommodates more irregularly shaped buildings as well as water detention-retention zones, a requirement in flood-prone Houston. Another important factor in our plan was to establish a material palette for the auxiliary campus so that, much like the sandstruck, salmon-colored brick which gives the main campus its singular texture and color, this campus would also

possess a distinct identity, albeit at much less cost. We opted for an economical, customized tilt-up concrete wall system with differing sectional profiles, sealed and painted with varying tones of the color green.

The 18,500 square-foot Library Service Center (completed 2004) is a high-density book depository with an anticipated capacity of two million volumes. The building consists of two distinct sections: a two-story office and processing area, and a three-story vault filled with rows of modular steel shelving units forty feet tall. This vault is a controlled environment with a year round constant temperature of 50 degrees Fahrenheit and 30 percent humidity, where books, fragile documents, and all kinds of archival materials are preserved. After successfully consolidating and storing thousands of volumes and materials in one location, Rice decided to do something similar for its scattered data centers by combining them into one center. Thus to our surprise a second building was soon added to our campus design, an opportunity that allowed us to explore and extend our design and planning initiatives. The 20,000 square-foot Primary Data Center (completed 2007) fit within the master plan and is now the first building visible on approaching the campus. Although it is a lower structure than the Library Service Center, we managed to get more height than required for the Data Center's server and mechanical rooms. This extra height transforms the cramped standards typical for this building type and does wonders for the experience of these equipment-saturated rooms. The two buildings along with their mechanical yards, detention-retention ponds, and parking areas, comprise a third of the master plan. The cascading pattern of each building's concrete panels animates and brings a sense of scale gradation to what are primarily large, windowless structures. Painted in a spectrum of bright fluorescent greens, the buildings acquire the presence of geometric topiaries across an open verdant field.

These two projects could be described as having the most remote or residual of sites, conditions where architecture must not only integrate but also transform the circumstances of its place. Each work belongs to a complex immersion in a set of singular circumstances. Each work is far from being an isolated object in an endless environment, whether natural or man-made. In Marfa, the Crowley House revolves as though it were a timepiece in the limitless landscape, marking the passing of the hours and the arrival of new seasons. In Houston, the buildings for Rice sit unperturbed in their counterpoint mass, while daylight throws into animated relief their exterior wall profiles. Memories enter and exit in the Crowley house. Time is stored in the Library Service Center shelf by shelf as if in an infinite ladder. Time swirls behind the humming glow of countless servers in the Primary Data Center. But architecture does not move. Things, events, stories move through its spaces infusing them with life: the marvel of architecture.

BUILT UPON LOVE

Alberto Pérez-Gómez

Professor | School of Architecture
McGill University

Can we imagine an architecture that is both beautiful and contributes to the common good? Given our complex world, burdened by environmental degradation and social inequity, the question of architecture's contribution to humanity's well being is not an obvious one, but it seems to have an urgency that it lacked during the earlier, more optimistic phases of modernity. Our central modern institutions have become problematic. Democratic national governments act like police states and corporations operate like pathological criminals. Should architects design comfortable hospitals more concerned with business than with healing, or well-detailed prisons that will never hold the real criminals that destroy the environment or exploit and decimate the economic and social fabric of the world?

I wish to offer some thoughts concerning strategies that might help conceive an appropriate architecture for our world, for a global civilization whose fundamental values and pathologies had their origin in the European industrial and political revolutions of the late Eighteenth century. My wager is that architecture has indeed something specific to contribute. It can embody seduction and compassion, allowing for beauty to coincide with justice and the common good, as has been suggested by Elaine Scarry in her recent book. Yet the terms of this equation have to be understood properly and modulated by a sense of responsibility on the part of the architect that goes far beyond global planning, gestural formal innovations resulting from sophisticated computations, and the notion of merely serving a client through codes of professional deontology. Ethics cannot be tabulated and made into a rigid code—it is not a matter of correct versus incorrect. Equally, relevant beauty cannot be assessed by philosophical logic. Understood as the very possibility of perceptual meaning or sense in architecture, it concerns emotion and longing, a seductive and even terrifying quality, destabilizing through its novelty yet recognizable as familiar, and thus capable of bringing about an attunement of human life with cultural and natural orders, resonant also with the much later German concept of *stimmung*, referring to a resonant environment or atmosphere (*milieu* or *ambiance* would be more appropriate translations), understood in our Western architectural tradition as harmony.

To unpack this hypothesis I believe we must first recognize the historical complexity of our discipline: both shifting with cultural changes, and in some ways also remaining the same. Though the questions are similar, architecture provides diverse answers appropriate to specific times and places. It is naïve to identify our shared tradition of architecture with a chronological collection of buildings, understood as useful creations, whose main significance was to delight through more or less irrelevant aesthetic ornament. This definition, associating architecture with the Fine Arts, dates only from the Eighteenth century, and hardly does justice to the broad changing historical definitions of the field in human civilization. A few simple examples may shed some light upon this observation. In Ancient Greece, for instance, there was no word for architecture. There was, however, a word to name the architect, meaning in most cases the principal craftsman. The *architekton*'s responsibilities included the crafting of defensive weapons, wondrous

bronze sculptures, ships, textiles and some buildings. Yet the *architekton* was also a dramatic character in the theatre, like Odysseus in the satyr play *Cyclops* by Euripides, responsible for making possible a cultural order, an original social foundation, often in the absence of a divinity in the plot. During the European Middle Ages, on the other hand, *Architectus* was a term associated with the Judeo-Christian God as Creator, and sometimes with the Bishop or the Abbot that may be the patrons of a building enterprise. At the time of the Renaissance, once the creative capacities of individual humans potentially endowed with divine minds were acknowledged, the architect became one of us. Yet, despite the associations sometimes put forward between architecture with painting and sculpture, most famously by Vasari in the Sixteenth Century, architecture always remained distinct in approach and methods of representation, and included the design of machines, fortifications, gardens, stage-set designs and ephemeral structures, as well as buildings.

Indeed, a more careful appraisal of our architectural traditions and their changing political and epistemological contexts, suggests a different way to understand architecture's "universe of discourse"—operating in the realm of what Giambattista Vico called in the early 1700's "imaginative universals." Architecture may then be understood as a discipline that over the centuries has seemed capable of offering humanity, through widely different incarnations and modes of production, far more than superfluous pleasure or a technical solution to pragmatic necessities. Architecture is manifest in those rare places that speak back to us and resonate with our dreams, it incites us to real meditation, to personal thought and imagination, opening up the "space of desire" that allows us to be "at home" while remaining always "incomplete" and open to our personal death, unveiling a glimpse of the sense of existence and revealing our limits.

My discussion leads by necessity to the valorization of the poetic imagination of the architect: a controversial position for our world of complex, interrelated environmental problems, in which planning and democratic consensus seems to be the obvious answer. In other words, from my point of view to speak of architecture as a mere product of social or economic forces misses the point. While granting the collaborative nature of our discipline, a personal imagination with deep cultural roots has been at work in the most moving architecture from the past.

As I have suggested, the products of architecture in the Western tradition have been varied, and included more than buildings. This genealogy started with the so-called *daidala* of classical antiquity, named in the Homeric poems and in the *Theogony* by Hesiod, the objects eventually attributed to the mythical *Dedalus*, the first architect about whom we have a fragmented story, and that included ships, temples and deceptive war machines. What these artefacts had in common was "harmony," they were all well articulated, like a human body: all having been put together from small parts through carefully crafted joints. Vitruvius continued this tradition in the first architectural theory text that has reached us, dating from the first century CE, and includes sundials, machines and buildings as the three main products of architecture, all capable of meaning through a mimesis of the cosmos, reflecting through their order the star-dance of the heavens. The Greeks qualified all these artefacts made by the architect as *thaumata*, because their main purpose was to convey wonder, both fear and admiration, a form of beauty grounded in

eros, ultimately sexual desire. Thus Vitruvius declares that besides solidity and commodity, the main quality of architecture is *Venus-tas*. This has been translated as beauty by later theoreticians, but the Latin word for beauty is *pulchritudo*, more connected to hygiene. Vitruvius used *venustas* instead, clearly to connote the quality of Venus—the goddess of love: thus architecture must be able of to seduce and by inspiring desire, make evident to the inhabitant the significant, yet limited and finite nature of the space of human dwelling. This was still clearly understood during the Renaissance by most architects and theoreticians: it is a quality altogether different from formal composition in the sense of modern aesthetics. Renaissance architects created veritable wonders generated from magical images governed by proportion and geometry, manifestations of a human imagination that had gained independence from divine will, to propitiate a good life in a dangerous world where nature was not mechanistic and everything was linked through sympathies and antipathies.

Architecture sharing this intentionality has been also conceived and built after the Baroque period and during the last two centuries. But this work usually appears as a practice of resistance, whether in exceptional buildings or often in the form of theoretical projects, against the more conventional understanding of architecture as either functional or ornamented building. I can't elaborate in a short lecture like this, but let me tease you with some examples pointing out some relevant features of these practices. Piranesi, during the mid-18th century, is perhaps the first to question the reduction of lived space to geometric Cartesian space. His poetic architecture is inhabitable to the imagination, yet deliberately unbuildable: it seeks to escape a site that might trivialize a significant depth of embodiment by identifying it with an infinite third dimension. Thus his exploded perspectival constructions temporalize space and deny the homology of perspective with orthogonal drawings. Later in the same century, J.J. Lequeu uses the very methods of descriptive geometry, the privileged and indispensable reductive tool of the Industrial Revolution, to eroticize space in his theoretical projects, including an emphasis on materiality through writing and the invention of programs. Indeed, the creation of new spaces of participation, alternative political spaces at the end of the Ancien Régime, becomes a guiding quest in Ledoux's City of Chaux: evidently for Ledoux architecture is meaningless if not participatory, its formal invention must include a vision for a poetic life and a concern for the common good. By the mid-20th century, Le Corbusier, after embracing the axonometric space of modernity, recognized mostly through his practice as a painter, that significant space is enigmatic depth, the space of desire, and endeavoured to translate this insight into building. La Tourette accomplished just that: the most spiritual Dominican monastery in Europe that has paradoxically nothing to do with Catholicism or dogma. By turning the program on its head and rejecting traditional rituals, and through a historical understanding and a surreal sensibility, Le Corbusier built instead a place of ecumenical spirituality manifested as an impenetrable space of desire. Friederich Kiesler, through a very different formal search, tried to understand endless space as a metaphor for the surrealist convulsive beauty, also a space of desire, a non-stylistic architecture, making the inhabitant of the Endless House, our new sacred space as he states, aware of his or her limits. There are of course many other examples that can be cited, ranging from John Hejduk's masques to Daniel Libeskind's Berlin Museum, from Sigurd

Lewerentz's wonderful churches to Luis Barragan's amazing houses.

My point is that most crucial to works of architecture in the sense that I evoke is not the capacity to communicate a particular meaning through some formal syntax, but rather the possibility of recognizing ourselves as complete, in order to dwell poetically on earth and thus be wholly human. This recognition of wholeness is not merely one of semantic equivalence, rather it occurs in experience, and like in a poem, its meaning is inseparable from the experience of the poem itself. The moment of recognition is embedded in culture, it is playful by definition, and is always circumstantial. When successful, architecture allows for participation in meaningful action, conveying to the participant an understanding of his or her place in the world. In other words, it opens up a clearing for the individual's experience of purpose through participation in cultural institutions. In this way, architecture offers societies a place for existential orientation and its meaning is bounded by time. Vitruvius provides a fine example when he describes the manner in which the theatre, that paradigmatic ancient institution, conveys its sense to the spectators as they participate in the event of the dramatic representation. The circular plan of the building is mimetic of the cosmos, its twelve divisions generating the parts of the building emulate the order of the zodiac, and proportional harmony is crucial. Yet the meaning of the building is not given as an aesthetic experience (in the reduced sense of modern aesthetics): it is not in the details, the materials, or our experience as voyeurs. Rather it is only conveyed "when the spectators sit, with their pores open" in a performance, and the whole event becomes cathartic: a purification that allows for the spectators to understand, through their participation in the space of drama which is also the space of architecture, their place in the universe and in the civic world.

Thus it follows that architecture's disclosure of beauty and meaning is ephemeral, yet it has the capacity of changing one's life in the vivid present—exactly like magic, or like an erotic encounter might transform us. In this sense, it has important resonances with the insights of surrealism from the 20th century. Like falling in love, architecture's disclosure of beauty strikes a blow that reveals reality as it is, according to Socrates thus providing a foundation for all further possible linguistic articulations of truth. Therefore, it can be said that architecture embodies knowledge, but rather than clear logic, it is knowledge understood in the Biblical sense: a carnal, fully sexual and therefore opaque experience of truth. For this reason architectural "meaning" can never be objectified, reduced to functions, ideological programs, formal or stylistic formulas. And this is particularly important for modernity, for it seems that whenever buildings become "idols" (or signposts—like the logo of a corporation or a national government) they lose their capacity for edification. They should rather allow us to see through to meaning precisely by not restricting it, meaning no single thing.

Following this reflection is a good place to invoke Plato and argue that beauty, as a form of deeply shared cultural experience, understood as a priori meaning in cultural worlds, is a fundamental category. This is the experience that produces catharsis in the theatre. In Phaedrus the experience of beauty is a vehicle for the soul to ascend towards truth, (p)eros provides the wings. Beauty is truth incarnated in the human realm; it is a trace of the light of Being that mortals can seldom contemplate directly. In other words: it is the purposefulness of nature mimetically reflected by an artefact. Following from this reading of Plato, Gadamer

has argued that while we can be deceived by what only seems wise, or what merely appears to be good, even in our world of appearances all beauty is true beauty, because it is in the nature of beauty to appear. This is what makes the beautiful distinct among ideas, according to Socrates. This Platonic formulation is of course challenging for our epoch of cultural relativism. Indeed, it is easy to dismiss taste as merely subjective, participating in local, historically determined norms. Yet, when we move beyond aesthetics, taste takes its place among other forms of phronesis, Aristotle's "practical wisdom," grounded in the habits and values which we share with others in a particular cultural and linguistic context, and that appear with utmost clarity and certainty as long as we trust perception as a final arbiter of truth. Such self-evidence, manifested in the poetic artefacts and stories of our traditions, can produce judgements that are no less rational for being grounded in prudent understanding. These works of architecture, art and poetry are indeed capable of moving us, they transform our life and ground our very being.

Eros and the imagination are inextricably linked. This is more than a physiological fact. Our love of beauty is our desire to be whole and to be holy, beauty transcends the contradiction of necessity and superfluity; it is both necessary for reproduction, and crucial for our spiritual well-being, the defining characteristic of our humanity. Contrary to the view that there exists an irreconcilable contradiction between the poetic imagination and an ethics based on rationality and consensus, it is the lack of imagination that may be at the root of our worse moral failures. Imagination is precisely our capacity for love and compassion, for both "recognizing" and "valorizing" the other, for understanding the other as myself, over and above differences of culture and belief. Thus in my book I argue for building an architecture upon love, understood both as erotic seduction and as brotherly compassion. Imagination is both, our capacity for truly free play, and our faculty to make stories and to partake from the language and vision of others.

And yet, it must be emphasized that unreflective intuitive action, often associated with the personal imagination, does not suffice and is indeed dangerous. Contemporary humanity must assume a great responsibility, for in fact, unlike our ancestors until the seventeenth century, we effectively make history. We have the technological tools to destroy the world, and this not necessarily through war. The technological project goes hand in hand with the self-evidence of human-generated change, a particularity of the Western (originally Christian) project that has become universalized. Thus history—our diverse stories, as varied as our cultures—is what we share as a ground for action, together with an indeterminate, somewhat infirm more-than-human world that appears forever fragmented. We don't share, like our more distant ancestors, a cosmological ground, a perception of the universe as a fundamentally changeless totality, limited and straightforward. Only by grounding the architectural imagination in historical precedent can it realize its capacity to create compassionately and negotiate the nearly infinite possibilities for production, in view of our now real cultural diversity, and the proliferation of instrumental methodologies and computer software, capable of producing endless novelties. Our post-modern condition may now reveal the futility of Utopia and the early modern ideal of progress, yet to project inherently means to propose, through the imagination, a better future for a society; it is inherently an ethical practice, and this should not be equivalent to a mindless search for consumable novelties disconnected from history.

Let me emphasize the crucial role of a theory based on historical interpretation for an ethical practice. The architect must act responsibly, and language plays a crucial role, allowing him or her to articulate a position. The production of precise working drawings and specifications following building codes, potentially actualized through robotic fabrication, is obviously not the end of our social responsibility, and its transparency, operating through mathematical codes, creates a dangerous delusion. While we must grant that words and deeds never fully coincide, this is to be celebrated rather than deplored. This opaqueness of language characterizes the very nature of human communication, never coincidental with the Word of a god for who to name is to make. Like the making of technical artefacts, the possession of symbolic, multivocal languages, is among the most precious gifts that makes us human, perhaps more precious than our approximations to an ideal, scientific or mathematical universal language. As George Steiner has eloquently stated, our over three-and-a-half thousand distinct languages for a single species, often in close proximity to each other and mysteriously diverse, and capable of speaking poetically in ways that always enrich our experience of reality, is the ultimate enigma which no evolutionary theory of man can ever reduce.

No matter what we produce as architects, once the work inhabits the public realm, it is truly beyond our control. An expressed intention can never fully predict the work's meaning. It is the "others" that decide its destiny and its final significance. Despite this apparent limitation, understanding that there is a phenomenological continuity between thinking and making, between our words, in our particular language, and our deeds, is still our best bet. What we control, and must be accountable for, is our intentions. Despite the usual saying dismissing good intentions in view of "real" deeds, well-grounded intentions are crucial and rare in the modern world, and imply a whole style of thinking and action, a past life and thick network of connections with a culture, far more than what an individual is capable of articulating at the surface of consciousness, or through one particular product. This is the nature of an ethical practice guided by practical philosophy or phronesis, by prudence, in the sense of Aristotle.

Prudence is a rhetorical skill, based on historical understanding, one that has little to do with formal descriptions and stylistic classification. It is essential for the development of a coherent praxis: To articulate a political position with regards to a given task. History in this sense provides guidance, since it engages alien artefacts to tell us their stories through a hermeneutic process, one that acknowledges as positive the potential bias implicit in the questions that are crucial for contemporary practice. This is essentially a history for the future, one meant to enhance our vitality and creativity, rather than one that may immobilize us through useless data, an immoderate respect for the old for its own sake, or unattainable idealized models. The architecture and words that express the praxis of other times and places must be understood in light of relevant contemporary questions, yet with full consideration of the cultural context of their makers. Thus the process of interpretation, appropriating that which is acknowledged as truly distant, makes it possible to render their voices into our own specific time and politics, rather than assuming a universal language at work, or a progressive teleology. The aim is to read "between the lines" and with courtesy, the world of the work, and the world in front of the work; acknowledging that the human pursuit of meaning is present above other motivations. This means bracketing the cynical tendencies of Marxist

or feminist scholarship that sees power and deceit behind most historical artifacts. Yet, hermeneutics also engages a critical dimension, seeking to understand how these architectural works may respond to the questions of our present humanity. A critical hermeneutics rejects the historical flattening and homogenization of deconstruction and proposes the valorization of experiential content, the mystery that is human purpose and the presence of spirituality. To account for what matters and can change our life. Needless to say, this hermeneutic understanding is equally applicable to our engagement with other synchronic cultures and should be, at all levels, present in the education of design professionals.

The poetic and critical dimension of architecture, like other relevant artistic products, addresses the questions that truly matter for our humanity in culturally specific terms, revealing an enigma behind everyday events and objects. The cultural specificity of practices in our global village is therefore absolutely crucial. Though technologies contribute to homogenization, praxis involves much more than technical means and scientific operations—it concerns values, articulated through the stories that ground acts and deeds in a particular culture. This practical wisdom is conveyed primarily through oral transmission, in conventional apprenticeship. Varied but culturally specific practices are capable of poetic expression precisely through the specificity of languages. Each diverse poetic articulation of a shared more-than-human world contributes to our rich human heritage, and is always accessible to others through translation, which is nothing less than the fundamental condition of human understanding. Local architectural practices are like valuable endangered species, and must be preserved, for paradoxically, true understanding depends on difference rather than on homogeneity.

I am convinced that the stakes for change are very high. Our built environment is pregnant with ambivalent meanings exacerbated by the mock impartiality of technology. In this sense it is unimportant if buildings in search of novelty look like circulation flows, blobs, shoeboxes, or spiky stars. Self-referential buildings expressing no more than a marketable style, a technological process, or a single fashionable meaning, play a crucial role in forming, if not increasing, our psychosomatic pathologies and political crises. We need to question the assumed neutrality of techno-capitalism and the false values that often ground our way of living and producing such as the unceasing pursuit of ever more efficient means while always postponing an accountability of ends. Architects, seeking in their work a coincidence of the good and the beautiful, should have a vital role to play in the survival of human cultures.

ARTISTIC GENEROSITY, HUMILITY, AND EXPRESSION

reality, sense and idealization in architecture

Juhani Pallasmaa

Architect | Professor
Helsinki, Finland

Artistic expression and metaphor

Architecture is usually regarded as a form of artistic expression. But what do the arts and architecture express? In our time that values unforeseen novelty and uniqueness, the prevailing view in architectural education as well as practise and criticism seems to be that buildings express the personal aesthetic ideals and aspirations of the designer, or even characteristics of his/her unique personality. A personality cult is clearly part of today's architectural value system.

A few years ago, I visited the memorial exhibition of Balthus, the painter, in the Palazzo Grassi in Venice. Count Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, to use his real name, was one of the great figurative painters of twentieth century, whose paintings are characterized by an extraordinary sensuality and eroticism. Upon entry to the exhibition, the visitor was confronted with a striking statement by the artist: "I hear artists speak about expressing themselves in their works; nothing like that has ever occurred to me." In another context the artist elaborates his position further: "If a work only expresses the person who created it, it wasn't worth doing. [...] Expressing the world, understanding it, that is what seems interesting to me."¹ This position is surprising for an eccentric artist, but in fact, no profound artist or architect of any time would be self-centered enough to see his/her art as self-expression. A few months before his death in 2001, Balthus re-formulated his argument: "Great painting has to have universal meaning. This is sadly no longer so today and this is why I want to give painting back its lost universality and anonymity, because the more anonymous painting is, the more real it is."²

The idea of artistic self-expression continues the 19th century romantic idea of the haunted genius, but it is based on a shallow understanding of the artistic phenomenon. Instead of seeking personal expression, works of art as well as architecture aspire to create artistic analogues and metaphors that express the encounter of the artist and the world through the means and materials specific to the art form. Existential analogues of architecture are constructed of space, matter, gravity and light.

Claude Roy, Balthus. Boston, New York, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1996, p. 18.

2 Balthus in His Own Words: A Conversation with Christina Carrillo de Albornoz, New York: Assouline, 2001, p. 6.

“How would the painter or poet express anything other than his encounter with the world?”, exclaims Maurice Merleau-Ponty.³ How could the architect express anything else through his/her art, we must also ask. Architecture, as all art, “makes visible how the world touches us”, as Merleau-Ponty wrote of the paintings of Paul Cézanne.⁴ Art and architecture articulate and structure our being-in-the-world, or the experiential inner space of the world, the *Weltinnenraum*, to use a beautiful notion of Rainer Maria Rilke.⁵ “If the painter presents us with a field or a vase of flowers, his paintings are windows which are open on the whole world”, Jean-Paul Sartre states.⁶ Architecture, also, mediates between the outer and the inner worlds by means of its suggestive and mediating metaphors. I need to be more precise in order to prevent misunderstanding. The existential metaphors do not have a symbolizing relationship with reality; they are lived reality themselves. True works of architecture turn our attention away from the building back to the world and our own being. Architecture, also, is “open on the whole world.”

Fusion of the self and the world

In the text that he wrote in memory of Herbert Read in 1990, Salman Rushdie describes the weakening of the boundary between the self and the world that takes place in artistic phenomena both in the processes of conceiving and experiencing the work: “Literature is made at the boundary between self and the world, and during the creative act this borderline softens, turns penetrable and allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist flow into the world.”⁷ The writer’s description applies precisely to the making of architecture: the architect internalizes his existential experience and sense of being, and embodies the countless parameters of the design task, and this fusion gradually gives rise to an architectural analogue of the utterly compressed condition. “Writing is literally an existential process,” the poet Joseph Brodsky argues,⁸ and the same must surely be said of both the conception and experience of architecture. Architectural works reach beyond visual aesthetics towards the enigma of human existence itself. Artistic and architectural works emerge and exist in a mental state of divided awareness, or as Sartre writes, in an “imaginative consciousness.”⁹ An existential awareness gives rise to an artistic image that is not simply a product of intellectual deduction, aesthetic elaboration, or emotional expression. We should rather say, that it is all of this fused into simultaneously diffuse, compressed, and pregnant embodied mental imagery.

3 As quoted in Richard Kearney, “Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” in Richard Kearney, *Modern Movements in European Philosophy*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 82.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Cezanne’s Doubt,” in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964, p. 48.

5 Liisa Enwald, editor, “Lukijalle” [To the reader], Rainer Maria Rilke, *Hiljainen taiteen sisin: kirjeitä vuosilta 1900-1926* [The silent innermost core of art: letters 1900-1926]. Helsinki: TAI-teos, 1997, p.8.

6 Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?* reprinted in Jean-Paul Sartre: *Basic Writings*, edited by Stephen Priest. London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 272.

7 Salman Rushdie, “Eikö mikään ole pyhää? [Isn’t Anything Sacred?].” Helsinki, Parnasso 1: 1996, p. 8.

8 Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1986, p. 124.

9 As quoted in Jean-Paul Sartre: *Basic Writings*, op. cit., p. 291.

As we settle in a space, we similarly allow the boundary between ourselves and the space to soften and become sensitized. The external space and the internal space, the physical and the mental, real and imaginary, constitute an indivisible continuum, a singularity. “I am the space where I am,” as poet Noël Arnaud confesses.¹⁰ After thirty years, I can still vividly recall the complete loss of my separate self as I was forced to identify myself with the space, matter and time of the gigantic and shockingly silent Peristyle of the Karnak Temple in Luxor. That very space remains in me forever and a part of me was eternally left in that space. Every profound artistic experience is an exchange.

I could tell of countless spaces and places that I have encapsulated in my memory and that have altered my very being. I am convinced that every one of us can recall such transformative experiences. This is the power of architecture; it changes us, and it changes us for the better through opening and emancipating our view of the world.

All great artistic works are complete universes and microcosmic representations of the world. They are pieces of magic that manage to contain everything in a singular mental and experiential image. Ezra Pound, the arch-modernist poet, gives a most convincing definition of the power of the artistic image: “An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. Only such an image, such poetry, could give us that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.”¹¹ Constantin Brancusi, the mythical modern sculptor, the Romanian shepherd and saint, makes a surprisingly similar statement: “Art must give suddenly, all at once, the shock of life, the sensation of breathing.”¹² The sculptor’s stunning notion “the shock of life” is an equally valid criteria in architecture. Great buildings are not about aesthetics; they are about life.

Condensation of experience

Poetic images are not mere formal inventions of an artistic ingenuity; they are condensations of countless experiences, perceptions and memories. They are fruits of profound life. Rilke expresses the idea of artistic condensation touchingly, indeed: “[...] Verses are not, as people imagine simply feelings [...] they are experiences. For the sake of a single verse, one must see many cities, men and things, one must know the animals, one must feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning.”¹³

10 As quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 137.

11 As quoted in McClatchky, J.D. “Introduction,” *Poets on Painters*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, p. XI.

12 Quoted by Dorothy Dudley in “Brancusi,” *Dial* 82 (February 1927). As republished in Eric Shines, *Brancusi*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1989, p. 107.

13 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, p. 26.

Architecture, like poetry, arises from existential experiences, not from mere formal ideas or a quest for expression, or a forceful image. Brancusi, whose sculptures combine purity and evocative power, rejects entirely the idea of form as an aesthetic preconception: “I never seek to make what they call a pure or abstract form. Pureness, simplicity is never in my mind; to arrive at the real sense of things is the one aim.”¹⁴ He offers another view to the usual way we tend to understand artistic simplicity: “Simplicity is not an end of art, but one arrives at simplicity in spite of oneself in approaching the real essence of things, simplicity is at bottom complexity and one must be nourished on its essence to understand its significance.”¹⁵ To arrive at the reality and essence of things must also be the architect’s true aim, and meaningful architectural simplicity is likewise utter complexity and compression. As a consequence, true minimalism is not an explicit aesthetic intention; one arrives at simplicity “in spite of oneself,” as Brancusi teaches us.

During the past couple of decades, I have hardly given a lecture anywhere on any subject without showing an image of Giorgio Morandi’s still-lives. This painter rarely crossed the boundaries of his native city, Bologna, but he was able to condense our entire existential mystery in these metaphysical works. His minute paintings of a couple of bottles and glasses on a table top are deep meditations on the fundamental questions of being: Why does something exist rather than not. They are, in fact, akin to Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, yet, the painter’s, the poet’s, and the architect’s philosophizings are fundamentally untranslatable into verbal concepts and constructs. They are “a philosophy in the flesh,” to paraphrase the title of the thought-provoking book by Mark Johnson and George Lakoff.¹⁶

We should not, however, dismiss the role of the artist’s intelligence, either. Henry Moore, one of the great masters of twentieth century sculpture, gives us a lesson: “The artist works with a concentration of his whole personality, and the conscious part of it resolves conflicts, organizes memories, and prevents him from trying to walk in two directions at the same time.”¹⁷ Even poetic imagery and creativity have their logic of “poetic chemistry”, to use a notion of Bachelard.

Generosity

During the past couple of decades, the phenomenological approach has been accepted as one of the significant ways of investigating architectural experience, but the ideas of the existentialist philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre are not very often discussed in the context of architecture. Yet, I have found Sartre’s books and essays very stimulating and surprisingly gentle and optimistic considering the general gloomy reputation of his existentialist thinking. Books like *Sketch for a*

14 Quoted by Dorothy Dudley, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

15 Catalogue of Brancusi Exhibition, Brummer Gallery, New York, 1926. As republished in Erik Shines, *Brancusi*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1989, p. 106.

16 Mark Johnson, George Lakoff, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. New York: Basic Books, 1999.

17 Henry Moore, *Henry Moore on Sculpture*. London: MacDonald, 1968, p. 62.

Theory of the Emotions (1939), *What Is Literature?* (1948), and his improvised lecture *Existentialism and Humanism* (1945) are thought-provoking reading for an architect. They help to shatter the naïve realist view of architecture as a professional craft that serves only practical and economic purposes by means of building technology.

Sartre writes about generosity and confidence as necessary relationships between the writer and his/her reader: “[R]eading is an exercise in generosity, and what the writer requires of the reader is not the application of abstract freedom, but the gift of his whole person, with his passions, his prepossessions, his sympathies, his sexual temperament, and scale of values. Only this person will give himself generously [...] Reading is a pact of generosity between author and reader. Each one trusts the other; each one counts on the other demands of the other as much as he demands of himself. For this confidence is itself generosity.”¹⁸

Allow me to project Sartre’s idea of the writer’s generosity, and the mutual confidence of the writer and the reader, to the field of architecture. The relationship of the client, or better, the occupant, and the architect is not usually thought of in such personal and intimate terms. Yet, architectural impact is also a matter of generosity and confidence. We may well think of the interaction of the client and the architect during the design process, but generally we regard buildings as self-sufficient objects cast into the world to be encountered anonymously without any intimate relationship between the maker and the observer. As a building is finalized, it is expected to sail independently through time and human destiny.

However, as we encounter a building, say, Brunelleschi’s Foundling Hospital or Michelangelo’s Laurentian Library, our own sense and intentionality encounter the architect’s existential sense across the abyss of half a millennium. I am not suggesting that the two Renaissance master-architects would arise from death to communicate with us, but there is an encounter, a way of touching, in the very sense that Merleau-Ponty speaks of the painter’s or poet’s encounter with the world. We encounter the architect’s architectural metaphor of his existential world and this imagery inspires, frames, and strengthens our own existential encounter with our own world. In architectural generosity the designer donates his existential sense, his life experience and existential wisdom, to the occupant. The architect holds the occupant by hand, as it were, and narrates the specific existential situation of that specific place. Experiencing an artistic work is always an exchange: the work lends me its magic aura, and I lend the work my personal feelings and emotions. The emancipation and joy I encounter in Brunelleschi’s hospital, and the healing melancholy I confront in Michelangelo’s library are undoubtedly both reflections of my own emotional condition. Architectural works create frames and horizons of perception, experience and meaning, and ultimately, I confront myself through the work of the other. This is architectural confidence and generosity.

The two realities of art

The mental re-orientation caused by an architectural work can be truly surprising. A dozen years ago I had the opportunity of visiting the Currutchet House (1948-55) of Le Corbusier in La Plata, Argentina. I found the embodied spatiality of the house exceptionally moving and forceful. The House is simultaneously below and above, in front and behind, left and right of the visitor. It embraces the occupant like a “cradle,”¹⁹ to use Gaston Bachelard’s metaphor for the protective embrace of architecture. Le Corbusier’s house marks the edge of the city powerfully and stretches itself and the occupant’s awareness towards the open view of the adjacent park, and eventually to the whole wide world. After having returned back to my own country on the opposite side of the globe, I felt that my senses of gravity and horizon, up and down, and of the cardinal orientations were all recalibrated by this extraordinary house; a piece of modern architecture turned literally into “an instrument to confront cosmos,”²⁰ as Bachelard famously describes the metaphysical power of architecture.

We tend to take reality as something given, objective and unproblematic; this view is called “naïve realism”. But there is nothing axiomatic or revealed about “reality”. As the therapist Viktor von Weizsäcker tells us: “Reality is the opposite of the obvious.”²¹ Sartre points out that artistic experience always takes place in the dimension of unreality, or the imaginary. Surely, the performance of a symphony orchestra, a book of poetry, or a building are real, but the experience of the symphonic work, the poem, as well as of the building is unreal, or imaginative. It has its mental and experiential existence only.

An artistic work exists thought-provokingly simultaneously in two realities, the physical reality of its material essence, making, and performance on the one hand, and in the imaginative reality of its artistic image and expressive structure, on the other. A painting is paint on canvas, on the one hand, and an imaginary picture or world, on the other. A sculpture is similarly a piece of stone and an image, and a building an object of utility, matter and structure, as well as an imaginative spatio-temporal metaphor of human existence that seeks its embodied identification. The tension between the two existences charges an artistic work with a hypnotizing power. As we are experiencing an artistic work, we are suspended between the two realities.

The generosity of the writer and the architect lies in the fact that they offer their freedom of imagination, identity and association to the reader and the occupant. Whenever I enter the Villa Mairea (1938-39) by Alvar Aalto, I am touched and welcomed by the building; it promises to take good care of me. A work of art is always a promise and an appeal.

Skillfully designed buildings are usually expected to direct and channel the occupant’s experiences, feelings and thoughts. In my view, this attitude is fundamentally wrong; architecture offers an open field of possibilities, and it stimulates and emancipates perceptions, associations, feelings, and thoughts. A

19 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 7.

20 Gaston Bachelard, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

21 Viktor von Weizsäcker, *Der Gestaltkreis*. Stuttgart: Georg Thieme, 1968.

meaningful building does not argue or propose anything; it inspires us to see, sense and think ourselves. A great architectural work sharpens our senses, opens our perceptions, and makes us receptive to the realities of the world. The reality of the work also inspires us to dream. It helps us to see a fine view of the garden, feel the silent persistence of a tree, or the presence of the other, but it does not indoctrinate or bind us.

There are two kinds of mental images: the first type forces and indoctrinates attention and interpretation, as in the case of commercial and political images, whereas the second, the poetic image, emancipates and sets free. As the first type of images closes and limits, the second opens up by offering new horizons of possibility and understanding.

“The writer should not seek to overwhelm; otherwise he is in contradiction with himself; if he wishes to make demands he must propose only the task to be fulfilled. Hence the character of pure presentation which appears essential to the work of art,”²² Sartre reasons and continues: “The reader must be able to make a certain aesthetical withdrawal [...] [Jean] Genet justly calls it the author’s politeness towards the reader.”²³

In addition to an “aesthetic withdrawal” and “politeness”, I have spoken of an “architectural courtesy” referring to the way a sensuous building offers gentle and subconscious gestures for the pleasure of the occupant: a door-handle offers itself courteously to the approaching hand, the first step of a stairway appears exactly at the moment you wish to proceed upstairs, and the window is exactly where you wish to look out. The building is in full resonance with the wider setting and with your body, movements and desires. Architecture constitutes an empathetic choreography for events and incidents of life.

Instead of imposing its own aesthetic formalism, a meaningful building resonates with the landscape and situations of life. Kengo Kuma, one of today’s “minimalist” architects, aspires to design buildings that “listen” to the place instead of dominating or appropriating the landscape and using it as a spring board for an artistic effect. “Listening to the place is a method that has not been used by modern architects,” he says.²⁴ Kuma’s observation is a call for a deliberate artistic withdrawal, passivity and repetition that aim at creating a pensive and receptive silence. Architectural “politeness” or “courtesy” also implies the unviolability and integrity of the occupant; situations of life and actions are allowed to unfold naturally as if the architectural ensemble constituted a second nature.

22 Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268.

23 Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

24 Kengo Kuma, “Particle on Horizontal Plane,” Stone Museum, project description, Kengo Kuma, Tokyo, *The Japan Architect*, 38: summer 2000, p. 26.

Reality and idealization

“Realism usually provides the strongest stimulus to my imagination,” Alvar Aalto confesses.²⁵ On the other hand, he makes clear that his design method is that of a poetic logic: “Whatever our task, whether large or small, whether it arises from ugly banality or the most sensitive emotional element, be it a city or its part, a building or a transport network, a painting, a sculpture, or a piece of utility-ware, there is one absolute condition for its creation before it can attain a value that qualifies it as culture [...] in every case, opposites must be reconciled [...] Almost every formal assignment involves dozens, often hundreds, sometimes thousands of conflicting elements that can be forced into functional harmony only by an act of will. This harmony cannot be achieved by any other means than art.”²⁶ At the same time Aalto acknowledges the significance of idealization in architecture: “Architecture has an ulterior motif [...] the idea of creating paradise. That is the only purpose of our buildings [...] Every building, every architectural product that is its symbol, is intended to show that we wish to build a paradise on earth for man.”²⁷

Uniting the polarities of realism and paradise is another example of the miracles attainable through art. Aalto’s idea can easily be dismissed as a literary metaphor or romantic naïveté, but the dimension of idealization is equally essential in poetry, painting and architecture. As Rilke notes in a letter: “Art is not a little selective sample of the world, it is a transformation of the world, an endless transformation towards the good.”²⁸ Every profound piece of art addresses a world that presents a better reality, a more sensitive, cultured and compassionate Humankind than today’s, “if ever so slightly,”²⁹ to use the expression by which T.S. Eliot describes the secret way how a profoundly novel work re-structures the entire history of art. This idealizing dimension of art is true regardless of the genre, or the emotional tone of the narrative. Kafka’s novels and short stories present gloomy and hopeless life situations, yet their mental impact is integrating and invigorating because of the unique ethical and literary strength of the work. The hopelessness of the protagonist’s situation magically promotes hope in human reason and compassion. The generosity and freedom of the work lay in the qualities of the literary construction, independently of the anxiety and lack of freedom in the depicted life of the protagonist. “Thus, there are only good and bad novels. The bad novel aims to please by flattering, whereas the good one is an exigence and an act of faith,” Sartre explains.³⁰ He reminds us again of the dual reality of the artistic work: “Aesthetic contemplation is an induced dream and the passing into the real is an actual waking up.”³¹

25 Interview for Finnish Television, July 1972 in Göran Schildt, ed., *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*. Helsinki: Otava Publishing Company, 1997, p. 174.

26 Alvar Aalto, “Art and Technology,” 1955, inaugural lecture as member of the Finnish Academy, 3 October, 1955. In *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*, *ibid.*, p. 174.

27 Alvar Aalto, lecture at the jubilee meeting of the Southern Sweden Master Builders’ Society in Malmö, 1957. In *Alvar Aalto in His Own Words*, *ibid.*, p. 215.

28 Rainer Maria Rilke, letter to Jacob Baron Uexkull, Paris 19.8.1909, *Enwald*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

29 T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and Individual Talent,” *Selected Essays*, new edition. New York: Harcourt, Brace World, 1964.

30 Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

31 Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

The reality of the client

At this point of my argumentation, a professionalist architect would most likely arise to defend his/her realist position by arguing that one must identify precisely the client's requirements, needs and desires to produce a design in direct response to this reality. However, I would like to make the opposite argument: the architect needs to create an ideal client - "if ever so slightly"- in order to elevate his work to the realm of architecture.

This is surely what a true writer does. "Thinking about the reader is a deadly error for the writer", as J.M. Coetzee, the Nobel laureate writer argues.³² In the "Postscript" to his immensely successful *The Name of the Rose* Umberto Eco explains that there are two types of writers: the first type writes what he expects the reader to want to read, the second creates his ideal reader as he writes. In Eco's view, the first writer will be able to write mere kiosk literature, whereas the second type is capable of writing literature that timelessly touches and elevates the human soul.³³ Architecture must similarly aim at a better world and it has to be based on an optimistic view of the human destiny. Without optimism architecture is bound to produce architectural kitsch, or cynical and apocalyptic settings. Indeed, the Patron Saint of architecture is Hope.

This view of idealization that I am promoting does not imply self-centeredness or narcissism of the architect. On the contrary, it calls for a heightened sense of responsibility. In my view, meaningful architecture must be conceived for a "glorified" client, and it must aspire for an idealized world, a condition that is more cultured, humane and subtle, than the concurrent actuality. Meaningful architecture always transcends its given conditions and achieves more than it is consciously commissioned to do. This is the true political dimension of our craft.

To be more provocative, and at the same time, more precise, I wish to argue that a true architect does not at all design for a client as an external "other". He/she internalizes his/her client as well as all the physical and logistic parameters, and designs for him/herself in his/her internalized role as the client. True architectural experiences and emotions cannot be analyzed, deducted, or projected, they have to be lived through one's embodied imagination and body. I cannot divine how another person feels, I can only sensitize my own capacity of compassion. At the end of the design process the architect donates the house to the actual external client, the other. Like love, architecture is always a gift and a miracle. It achieves and embraces more than it was set out to do, and more than anyone could have imagined. Significant architecture always constructs a new and unforeseen world at the same time that it reinforces tradition and cultural continuity. The more radical the work is, the more firmly does it end up strengthening the continuum of cultural and artistic tradition.

32 Interview of J.M. Coetzee, *Helsingin Sanomat* (summer 1987).

33 Umberto Eco, "Postscript to the Name of the Rose," *Matka arkipäivän todellisuuteen [Travels in Hyperreality]*. Helsinki: Werner Söderström Oy, 1985, pp. 231-264.

I wish to argue firmly that the ethical potential and task of architecture resides in its very capacity to transcend naïve realism and instrumentality, to dream of a better and more sensitive and sensuous world, and to facilitate the emergence of this world in the realm of the real. Architectural reason and sensitivity, sincerity and beauty surely resonate with ethical ideals. Beauty itself evokes the existential core of being and it is a harbinger of eternal life. Beauty will save the world, as Fyodor Dostoevsky believed. As Joseph Brodsky argues: “On the whole, every new aesthetic reality makes man’s ethical reality more precise. For aesthetics is the mother of ethics. The categories of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are, first and foremost aesthetic ones, at least etymologically preceding the categories of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’”³⁴

Sartre writes beautifully about this longing for a more beautiful and just world: “Through the various objects which it produces or reproduces, the creative act aims at a total renewal of the world. Each painting, each book, is a recovery of the totality of being. Each of them presents this totality to the freedom of the spectator. For this is quite the final goal of art: to recover this world by giving it to be seen as it is, but as if it had its source in human freedom.”³⁵

Architecture as mental collaboration

Artistic work is always bound to be a collaboration simultaneously on several levels. As John Dewey informs us in his seminal book *Art As Experience* (1934),³⁶ the artistic dimension arises from the encounter of the work and its reader/viewer. The artistic experience is a collaborative effort of the writer and the reader, the painter and the viewer, the architect and the occupant. As Sartre argues: “It is the joint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind. There is no art except for and by others”.³⁷

“Great poetry is possible only if there are great readers”, argues Walt Whitman significantly.³⁸ It is equally evident that there are good buildings only as long as there are good dwellers and occupants, but aren’t we, citizens of this obsessively materialist consumer world, loosing our capacity to dwell, and as a consequence, becoming unable to promote architecture? The modern man’s ideal condition is the journey, not dwelling. In one of his notes Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests: “Architecture immortalizes and glorifies something. Hence, there can be no architecture, where there is nothing to glorify.”³⁹ Architectural thought arises from given conditions, but it always aspires for an ideal. Hence, the loss of the ideal dimension of life implies the disappearance of architecture.

Architectural works are rarely built by the architect himself alone; buildings

34 Joseph Brodsky, “Uncommon Visage,” *On Grief and Reason*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p. 49.

35 Jean-Paul Sartre, *ibid.*, p. 272.

36 John Dewey, *Art As Experience*. New York: Perigree Books, 1980.

37 Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

38 Quoted in Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997, p. 179.

39 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, George Henrik von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, editors. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 74e.

arise from the collaborative effort of tens, often thousands of individuals, experts, builders, craftsmen, engineers, and investors. But architecture is collaboration also in another and, perhaps, more fundamental sense. Meaningful buildings arise from tradition and they constitute and continue a tradition. In his book *The Art of the Novel*, Milan Kundera writes of “the wisdom of the novel,”⁴⁰ and he argues that all great writers listen to this wisdom, and as a consequence, all great novels are wiser than their writers. No doubt, there is also a “wisdom of architecture”, and all profound architects listen to this wisdom in their work. No architect worthy of his craft works alone; he works with the entire history of architecture “in his bones,”⁴¹ as T.S. Eliot writes about the tradition-conscious writer. The great gift of tradition is that we can choose our collaborators; we can collaborate with Brunelleschi and Michelangelo if we are wise enough to do so.

My view of architecture as collaboration certainly takes away some of the glory from the unique individual invention that today’s cult of the creator tends to cast on it. In fact, I dare to suggest that our profession should re-learn the art of humility and modesty to replace the air of arrogance and self-centeredness that often prevails in today’s architectural world. “Poetry is a tremendous school of insecurity and uncertainty”, Joseph Brodsky, one of the greatest poetic minds of our time, writes poetically and continues: “Poetry - writing it as well as reading it – will teach you humility and rather quickly at that. Especially if you are both writing it and reading it.”⁴² So will architecture. The art of architecture does not simplify the world into self-evident truths. On the contrary, great buildings reveal the mysteries, complexities and unpredictabilities of the world and human life, but in doing so they provide the true ground for human dignity and freedom.

Why is a poem written, a painting painted, and a piece of architecture conceived?
Don’t they all arise from faith in Humanity?

40 Milan Kundera, *Romaanin taide [The Art of the Novel]*. Helsinki: Werner Södrström Oy, 1986, p. 165.

41 [...] The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write, not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of literature [...] has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.”

T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” *op. cit.*,

42 Joseph Brodsky, “In Memory of Stephen Spender,” *On Grief and Reason*, *op. cit.*, pp. 473 and 475.

