

# Everyone Knows Who is Stupid Around Here

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## Abstract

Far from alien to our daily lives, stupidity seems evident to most people. However, discerning what is stupid may not be as easy as it looks, especially when talking about architecture. To specify what architectural stupidity is, we must acknowledge that not all failures of architecture are 'errors', some are worse. This article discusses the already architecturally situated concept of error and distinguishes it from stupidity in terms of 'technicities' that fail. The Simondonian concept of technicity helps to locate error and stupidity according to their mutative potentials. We argue that the difference between the two is materialised in a failed theme park in Ankara. Planned as one of the municipality's signature projects of the 2010s, Ankapark damages the tangible and intangible relationships within the land it sits on, Atatürk Forest Farm. This park, with its seemingly erroneous processes of engagement with the built environment and human and non-human inhabitants, bypasses any rationale and transforms a productive urban territory into an intransitive field for knowledge systems, institutions

and disciplines. The cancerous mutation it feeds does not inform any knowledge system to the point that 'it can no longer stand itself', providing only 'stupidity in stupidity'.

## Keywords

Stupidity, error, failed architecture, theme park

Everyone knows who is stupid around here and people of Ankara feel in their bones what stupid architecture is. In 2019, a research-based design studio titled 'Deranged Territories' discussed one of the most contested terrains in Turkey. Overall, it was an attempt to recover something useful for architectural knowledge and propose an adaptation strategy for the one of the biggest fiascos of the history of the republic.<sup>1</sup> The evident stupidity of the fiasco left little room to discuss definition of the term. With the perspective gained in time, we will use this chance to specify why and how the people of Ankara know, without an in-depth philosophical inquiry, what architectural stupidity is.

The specific project that painted a clear picture of stupid architecture for the people of Ankara is a deserted theme park. We argue that this specific failure, Ankapark, presents a solid example of what we may call architectural stupidity in its crossing of the borders of a simple error or a generative mutation. To distinguish the border between the related yet distinct concepts of stupidity and error, we will first explore the latter. A term that has been long rooted in architectural theory, error is innately related to order, failure and mistake. A discussion of Ankapark with its process of 'becoming' or impossible being will then decode the distinction between error and stupidity. Lastly, we will end with non-concluding but provocative remarks on why Ankapark is stupid and not a simple error.<sup>2</sup>

By differentiating stupidity from error, we aim to expand the discussion of failures of and in architecture. Starting with the initial claim that error is possible only within a well-set

order, we understand order – despite its manifold history, various interpretations, and loaded definitions – as a regulating mechanism that gives rise to a minimum ground of commensurability, coherency and consistency. An order may refer to a rationale as the order of reasoning, a grid as a formal reflection of a geometrical organisation, an algorithm as a function that defines a mathematical relationality, or a stratification – in metaphorical or geological sense – as the structuring of many layers, or it may refer to the rules of a language, to a discursive practice or an institution. Those orders, whether abstract, like laws, or concrete, like master plans, are mediators of our affinities with the external. To be precise, they are ‘technicities’ that define our modes of relation with the world. This Simondonian term is crucial for our notion of order and, consequently, error and stupidity of architecture as it allows thinking beyond the user-tool distinction, instead focusing on their mutative associations. In other words, in such a conception, order not only modifies the external world but also the subject that is ordering its environment.

Far from being alien to architectural discourse, the historical change in the meanings of the terms order and error turned them into ordinary categories that lost their specificity and, thus, their operability for architectural thinking. Dismissed from the conceptual library of architecture, the term order has been replaced with forms, bodies, isms, and many more. However, the ambivalence of the term error still begs further questioning as we see that not every failure of architecture is the same, and stupidity and error differ in certain senses. In *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze defines error as the implication of the presence of a common sense derived from a partial or constrained baseline or ground for agreement, while he refers to stupidity as ‘neither the ground nor the individual’ but the lack of relationship between them.<sup>3</sup> In our parallel understanding, the difference between stupidity and error yields the specific kind of mutation – a cancerous one, we might say – developed within orders or technicities. We argue that this specific theme park, Ankapark, with its failures, corruption in planning, design, construction, and with its neglect of the environment, from personal to social to non-human domains, presents a strong case of what architectural stupidity might be.

#### **Ambiguity of error in architecture**

In close relation to the technicities that define, modify and multiply the modes of existence of both the environment and the user, error is understood as the ‘possible misadventure of thought’.<sup>4</sup> It can also be understood to imply common sense, and as possible to be ‘identified within a well-defined process’.<sup>5</sup> Although it seems that error is the negative of any term implying structure, system, rationale, order and productivity, this is not the case: the definition of

error is as historical as any other concept. The dictionary definition of the word has mutated from ‘wandering’, which may imply a process of creative exploration, into ‘go astray, transgress’ and ‘mistake’, meaning to be wrong or on the wrong path.<sup>6</sup>

As the dictionary definition of the word changes, the conception of the term in different regimes of thought also differs. Enlightenment thought defines its task as the ‘release of men from error and prejudice – forms of disorder – and as the achievement of truth and human welfare – forms of order’.<sup>7</sup> Relatedly, this dogmatic image of thought referred to error as ‘something to be eliminated in the name of truth and progress’.<sup>8</sup> These limited and bounded definitions situate error in opposition to order and truth, aiming to exclude errors identified as the enemy of progress. Error, the phenomenon that unsettles an ordered unity, jeopardises the homogeneous wholistic constructs of things and processes.

This tension between order and error, particularly within the framework of Enlightenment thought, has been a focal point for critical theorists. The critique of the homogeneous whole is extensive and diverse within critical theory. Although unfolding this extensive critique of the homogeneous whole in a structured manner falls beyond the scope of this article, a parallel, anachronic reading of Theodor Adorno and Lorraine Daston might consolidate the proposition that the relationship between order and error is not always in opposition. Acknowledging that they are from different intellectual traditions – Adorno, a critical theorist and philosopher, shaped intellectual thought in the mid-twentieth century; Daston is a contemporary historian of science actively contributing to the fields of scientific reasoning and history of objectivity – their shared interest in the relationship between order and error, and in limits of human knowledge suggests an evolving continuity in the themes of structure and contingency, rationality and irrationality.

This critique of the homogeneous whole is exemplified in Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, where he proposes an ‘anti-system’ that flouts traditional frameworks.<sup>9</sup> He disavows the homogeneous and holistic understanding of Enlightenment thought with its imposition of a process of thinking that prioritises the principles of unity. Although it is known that totalitarian constructions and defined unities might come with gradations and differences, the focus of Adorno’s criticism is the tendency to accept these without acknowledging possible heterogeneity within them. To him, the faux belief in total harmony and unity leads to illusions regarding orders and errors. Rather than having an illusory view that highlights unity, acknowledging errors as the necessary moments of dialectical tension reveals the complexities and contradictions beneath the apparent order, paving the way for new understandings.

From a different disciplinary perspective, yet aligning with Adorno's understanding, Lorraine Daston discusses the rigid assumption that order and error are in direct opposition. Daston says that although Enlightenment thought draws the line between error and order with ease and in a rather straightforward manner, this seemingly fixed opposition is a later adoption. She discusses historical moments where the potential symbiotic relationship between error and order is put into operation. In her book *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, she connects order with the ordinary, while referring to errors as wonders – deviant and irregular, yet instrumental in studying and defining the ordinary.<sup>10</sup> One of the examples she gives is Francis Bacon, whose understanding of natural history and philosophy does not exclude wonders, abnormalities and strange situations. Calling these 'deviating instances', Bacon listed both 'singular' and 'bordering instances' and classified these under the title of 'nature erring'.<sup>11</sup> Bacon created a collection of what is new, rare and unusual. For Daston, the motive for collecting 'strange facts', nature's error or particularities is to 'unseat the home truths and bland axiom[s]' and to correct generalisations through an investigation of the unusual.<sup>12</sup> As opposed to eliminating errors for the sake of achieving a total, universal truth, Bacon embraced differences and used them to correct uniform conditions.

This exploration of error and its place within scientific and philosophical inquiry highlights a nuanced understanding that opens up a way of thinking beyond accepting the error-order pair as merely opposites. One of the characteristics of Enlightenment thought, the obsession with homogeneous unity, is also related to an urge to achieve an ideal state. For Horkheimer and Adorno, Enlightenment thought 'recognizes being and occurrence in unity' on which everything is dependent and in which multiplicities are reduced.<sup>13</sup> In a way, dissimilarities are reduced to fit into a holistic objective and idealised system. Another reference that depicts the counter-relationality of error to the 'ideal' comes from history, a page of an anatomy atlas by William Cheselden from 1733.<sup>14</sup> This page shows an animal skeleton hung upside down, and a camera obscura set up to depict the skeleton. Peter Galison, a historian of science, reads this image positioned at the intersection of the ideal and the erroneous. This skeleton, according to Galison despite the set-up and the effort to draw it as it is, is fixed and corrected during the process of drawing.<sup>15</sup> The skeleton, which is supposed to enhance scientific knowledge, is not drawn with all its flaws and deficient parts but depicted as what this particular instance aspires to be.<sup>16</sup> The flaws and errors are corrected, eliminating the particularities.

Diverse disciplines have used the concept of error in relation to unity to correct the non-ideal or to redefine the rule. In western history, the primary focus of architectural

treatises is the concept of order. The major use of the term in these treatises was to properly define the act of building, albeit in different manners. The reference to error in such order-oriented texts is rare and pragmatic. Although here, the tracing of error within this context inevitably relies on the disputed Western white male discourse, this 'canonical' historical lineage of architecture gives an insight into the ambiguous nature of the concept 'error'. A brief examination of the frequently referenced treatises, though not exhaustive, can provide an understanding of error in relation to order. In Vitruvius's text, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, the treatise recognised as the earliest written work on architecture surviving from antiquity, errors are defined as defects in building methods or material selection. Vitruvius does not systematise the rules and the errors challenging those rules, but they are interwoven throughout the narrative. He treats errors as if they were a possible part of any process and uses them to differentiate the proper from the improper. Substituting the word 'defect' for 'error', Alberti building upon the foundations of Vitruvius, in turn, categorises errors as innate and external in this work *On Architecture*. He further specifies this two-fold structuring as 'errors of mind' and 'errors of hand.' The first group refers to more serious mistakes, whereas the latter refers to practical mistakes occurring during the construction phase. The striking point is that Alberti leaves an in-between space between order and error. This is 'amendment,' meaning improvement of the work without completely obeying the fixed rules. Such breathing space blurs the border between order and error by highlighting the individual talent and drive of the architect. Although an error is perceived as something that needs to be corrected, there is another concept that accepts a certain level of straying from the well-defined order. Other treatises also use terms that can be related to the idea of error. For example, Serlio introduces the term '*accidenti*'.<sup>17</sup> In the introduction to a contemporary edition of the text, Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks state that the term '*accidenti*' has nothing to do with accident; they argue that '*accidenti*' is used for 'unusual, but predictable enough architectural situations.'<sup>18</sup> Palladio, in his turn, uses the word 'fault' to define the deviant productions of architecture. Perrault mentions 'abuses' that encompass diverse conditions such as wall and column relations, the alteration of orders, and treating parts of the column differently. However, to a certain extent, he thinks that some alterations are good as they pave the way for inventions.<sup>19</sup>

There is, however, a treatise that dwells specifically on errors in architecture. This text, entitled *Trattato Sopra Gli Errori Degli Architetti* (Treatise on the errors of architects), was written by Teofilo Gallaccini in 1625.<sup>20</sup> Gallaccini wrote on these diverse subjects, but his only

published manuscript on architecture is *Trattato Sopra Gli Errori Degli Architetti*.<sup>21</sup> It was published long after Gallaccini's death in 1767, and expanded with commentaries by Antonia Visentini. The treatise consists of three parts, arranged according to the phases of construction as also understood by Alberti. In Part I, errors including site selection and material selection denote pre-construction decisions. Part II is reserved for design-related issues such as the proportions of the parts, placement of elements, and includes a chapter related to the 'abuses' 'modern' architects had perpetrated. The last part focuses largely on construction related issues. There are many plates illustrating the erroneous applications and their corrections. What is interesting here is that the author displays no reservations regarding what is wrong and what is right. His authoritarian listing of errors resonates with the proposition that 'error acquires a sense only once the play of thought ceases to be speculative and becomes a quiz.'<sup>22</sup>

### Affirming the error

All in all, within the treatises errors in architecture are alternatively defined as 'faults', 'defects', 'abuses', '*accidenti*' with reference to the appropriateness of the work. In more accurate words, the terms above describe a specific mode of relationality between the user, the object, the tool and the environment in a broad sense. The lines that determine the contours of a Doric column are only possible with the available tools, the specific type of stone, the tools' ability to perform in this specific material, the skill of the stone mason, and the eye and the mind of the architect. Apart from these forces that draw the lines, the fear of producing architecture in an inappropriate way also draws the limits of the orders defined. Although none of these terms discern a productive potential, Alberti's and Perrault's interpretations specifically leave a neutral, indecisive ground between order and error. Alberti does that by adding a third term, 'amendment' to the duality of order and error, while Perrault, with his definition of arbitrary beauty, highlights the essence of design that does not always comply with the fixed rules. Both Alberti and Perrault assign a certain degree of flexibility to the relationship between order and error.

This indecisive ground between order and error is also affirmed by various contemporary thinkers and makers of architecture. Sean Keller highlights the use of error in architecture as a 'compositional method that not only tolerates but is built upon, a range of "user errors" to generate the work' with an analogy to music.<sup>23</sup> Relating this positioning of error with John Ruskin's understanding of the Gothic, Keller argues that 'classicism overrides the human variation and imperfection with its strict perfectionism, whereas Gothic is formed through these imperfections.'<sup>24</sup>

Aslı Serbest and Mona Mahall challenge error with the term 'chance' within the framework of cybernetics, referring to Gordon Pask, an influential figure for the architects. According to Pask, 'error should be regarded as a figure of innovation or contradiction against the foil of a given context or environment.'<sup>25</sup> Such a recognition of error as a 'figure of innovation' has been discussed in relation to the works of Michelangelo.<sup>26</sup> Daniel Sherer opens up this discussion by referring to Vasari's evaluation of Michelangelo, stating that he was capable of distorting the rules, and in this way, he became the inventor of certain formations in architecture. Vasari continues by differentiating Michelangelo from the other architects of the time and warns them not to stray from the conventions. Thus, he singles out Michelangelo's process of invention through seemingly erroneous production – here defined as wandering and deviating from the conventional.

In his biennale project *Moving Arrows, Eros, and Other Errors*, Peter Eisenman explicitly expands the relationship between error and architecture as a misreading. The project puts three different texts of the same tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, into dialogue and transforms the most definite type of relationality, that is in between Romeo and Juliet, into a free play with the traces present in the narratives such as the castles of both characters, the cemetery and the city walls. The common themes in the story – union, division, and their dialectical relationship – are retold through architectural models, diagrams and drawings with a series of superpositions and juxtapositions, and these creative series are multiplied through the process of scaling. With these acts of juxtaposition and scaling, Eisenman 'introduces the possibility of error, of a text not leading to a truth or a valued conclusion but rather to a sequential tissue of misreading-errors that produce the condition for each new level of reading.'<sup>27</sup> He specifies error as a 'misreading' that will eventually lead to a creative process.

Even though the theories are radically different, they find similar value in errors. Stavros Kousoulas mentions 'spatial stuttering' as a function that recognises the potential inherent in deviations to communicate through differences. He argues that plasticity and stuttering are forms of interaction with open systems.<sup>28</sup> He specifies spatial stuttering as 'any attempt to disrupt metastability' creating 'peculiar moments of architectural noise, able to free architecture from itself and to put it in contact with an intransitive field.'<sup>29</sup> The basic involuntary act of stuttering cannot be reduced to a gap between the letters or repeating a syllable multiple times. In that line of thought, the possible error, voluntary or involuntary, can be read in parallel to the act of stuttering that is a change in an order, which, in this case, is the order of letters, the syllables, and the rhythm in between, or a mutation within a set system. That mutation



redefines the relationality with the technicities, and it reproduces and transforms the interacting forces and components. Therefore, it is productive, not exhausting.

Indeed, with the rapid demystification of Enlightenment myths such as identity, wholeness, universality, truth, beauty and progression in the second half of the twentieth century with the aid of cybernetic and relational theories, error has been established as a productive force within diverse philosophies. Those alternatives, following an affirmative line of thought, have distanced themselves from the grand project of the Enlightenment and its philosophical lineages that prioritise dialectical thinking, confining difference to the negative as in antithesis.<sup>30</sup> Clearly, the error is too complex and rich a notion to be understood only in terms of a negative, something to be neglected or interpolated and normalised. Errors are failures of systems, but depending on the complexity and rigidity of the system, an error may lead to reconfiguration and adaptation of the system.

### Kinds of failures

The discipline of architecture records and interprets these errors in various formats. This self-reflection is a part of the reticularity between the technical object – the architectural artifact in this case – and the technical individuals – the users or inhabitants as well as the architects. This means that an error – purely negative or endlessly affirmed – always entails something as it is deployed in relation to something else. This gives rise to new technical relationships and reconfigures the technicity. In the case of complex arrangements of institutions, technics, tools and concepts such as those in architectural production, every product returns to human life as a source of knowledge.

Errors of the discipline, in this sense, always mean something and continue to be a part of the reticularity between the object and the subject, even after their disappearance. We may define architectural failures as the largest errors of praxis, with wide-reaching consequences for the discipline. Failed architectures of modernist experiments are suitable examples. The first so-called error is the infamous example of the Pruitt-Igoe building, which has become a representative of the conflict between the technical object and the individual until its televised destruction in 1972. In the context of this specific project, Katherine G. Bristol discusses the fiscal crisis and the institutional problems related to social housing projects in the United States. Architecture has failed, but is it all architecture's fault?<sup>31</sup>

The second error is from the French occupation of Algiers from 1830 to 1962. Zeynep Çelik in her article 'Gendered Spaces in Colonial Algiers' elaborates on the colonial and gendered gaze of the European architects and

their irrelevance to the actual context of the city Casbah. Housing projects under colonial rule were not being used as they had been intended. Çelik says that 'French architects were struggling to rationalize, tame, and control indigenous forms.'<sup>32</sup> Women were claiming the inaccessible roofs as terraces and new walls were built for privacy. That residents reterritorialised the architecture and made it more than itself points to a radical fracture between architecture and society. Later, demonstrations and violence surrounding these projects solidified the housing projects' status as failed architectures.<sup>33</sup>

In both the examples of Pruitt-Igoe and Algiers, cultural and political factors play a major role in the construction of the image of failure. Attributing those problems to the discipline of architecture only becomes possible when architecture as material construction is understood as an agency that can substantially affect cultural and political domains, which is, ironically, the same position as that of the modernist architects of the failed projects who claim an instrumental role for architecture. The logical consequence would be either that we (as humanity) have not yet been able to propose an architectural way of knowing that has an extended agency over events, or that those failures are not architectural at all.

Both answers lead to different types of knowledge and require different types of research programmes. These failures inform the discipline and rearticulate to some degree what architecture is. History continues to live on not as a static memory confined to the past but as a potential informing the future. Within this potential, the difference between error and stupidity materialises. Ankapark, as an architectural failure or error of neoliberal urbanisation, does not inform architecture in this way. Blocking the inter-scalar knowledge systems and ignoring cultural, political, economic and ecological relations, the case of Ankapark cannot be summarised as a simple failure. It is a product of human labour that has lost its capacity to fold back into society, and consequently exhausts the technicities that produce it. Here, we propose a definition of stupidity in relation to a tool or modified environment's capacity to reconfigure technical relations through uninterrupted feedback between the user and the tool, constructing both at the same time.

### Crossing the threshold of error: the stupidity of Ankapark

Ankapark was one of the most popular and visible projects in Ankara in the 2010s. However, this popularity stems mostly from the park's financial and political failures. The reports and studies from academia and civic organisations have a great share in this visibility. It was the mainstream

media rather than the opinions of experts that produced the social image of failure surrounding the project. The financial burden that the project placed on the people of Ankara was the main focus of this increased media visibility in the days when the 'author' of the project, the mayor of the town, moved away from the governing party and the municipality. However, the sensational image created by the photographs of the desolate and decaying park, as well as the figures announced by the next mayor in press conferences, constitute only a portion of the extent of the failure of the park.

Ankapark, both in terms of its meaning in the city and its architectural programme, is like a distorted version of the Atatürk Forest Farm on which it was built, becoming postmodern Ankara's response to the modernisation project of the early republic. The Atatürk Forest Farm was established by the founder of the republic in 1925 with the intention of modernising the country. Experts in planning, agriculture and botany, archaeologists, engineers and scientists from several other disciplines were commissioned to transform the barren land into a 'model' to improve the agricultural and industrial activities as an important step in efforts toward self-sufficiency.<sup>34</sup> With the initiation of the theme park, the productive territory of the Atatürk Forest Farm has deteriorated into a pure space of consumption. The extreme consumption of the theme park does not even emanate from the changing function of the land. It was planned to make profit even during construction, to the extent that it did not care about its environment, including its owners.<sup>35</sup> In the end, the agencies that designed, constructed and managed the park failed to keep making a profit after the official opening, and even lost their political power. Emre Sevim, in the piece he wrote for the journal of the Turkish Chamber of Architects, points out how the privatisation of the Forest Farm grounds and the creation of new rent relations were neither feasible nor sustainable. Sevim underlines the financial irrationality of the whole operation, referring to many reports of the time. One of them, an infographic from the Turkish Chamber of City Planners, points out the misuse of land and public resources. For example, approximately three million dollars (2.9 million euros) were spent only on dinosaur statues in 2015.<sup>36</sup>

We will discuss the 'more than an error' condition of this failure with respect to technicities that a failure instigates. Those are financial liabilities, the concept of the theme park, and the construction of devices and toys. They were domains of engagement between society, the terrain of the Atatürk Forest Farm and the city. These are orders, systems, concepts and tools that mediate human labour and project it onto the material of the earth, modifying both human and non-human in the process. An error, in this sense, can be affirmed easily, whether as a mutation or a

'line of flight.' However, stupidity seems to amount to something different.

The first evident failure of Ankapark is its misconception about the definition of a theme park. When proper construction of the park, concerned its reliability and safety, does not take precedence, the theme park programme cannot sustain itself. Although the eclectic simulation within the park resembles international examples on paper, what happened during the zoning, construction and opening stages shows that the administration does not actually care much about its only openly declared goal: building a theme park. Instead, it only considers the interests of the investment by prioritising profit.

The theme park, as a postmodern invention, tries to establish a spatial simulation of historical or fictional environments and does this by thematising and juxtaposing spaces that can never be found together. Almost turning the modern invention of the museum on its head, the theme park does not display history or art; it imitates it. These themes, based on historical fact or fiction, exist not to be viewed, as in an art gallery or natural history museum, but to immerse the visitors. The purpose of the simulation is to bring the experience of this unreal collage to life. To operate this simulation, many infrastructural and legal regulations that do not belong to spatial themes and may even contradict them are required. Many structural and legal requirements, such as seat belts, security cameras, fire exits, guardhouses and ventilation units, accompany the infiltration of this unreality into daily life. In this way, the theme park ensures that the simulation experience can be transferred into the urban reality without risk. The more unreal the spatial simulation, the more intriguing it is. The promise of this simulation is entertainment.

The promotional material for Ankapark by the governmental news agency provides us with a sufficient picture to convey the infrastructural requirements we mentioned and the intended unreal spatial collage:

There are many entertainment units, such as 14 roller coasters with the most twists in the world, Turkey's tallest boat tower, 'Wind Riders,' a 75-meter giant tower, 'Abyss to the Underworld', the 'Digital Dark Ride' and 'Earthquake' designed in Turkey, a lava adventure, an autorobot, Turkey's largest boat tower, Turkey's largest multi-dimensional cinema, an ice cave, a laser arena, a 207-meter-wide music and illuminated water dance. The park, which contains architectural examples of world cultural heritage from the Stone Age to the Seljuks, from the Ottoman Empire to the age of technology, will take its visitors on a journey to the past.<sup>37</sup>

Before its highly promoted and rushed opening, photos of the mayor stranded on one of the roller coasters surfaced.

Evidently, the park failed to provide a safe environment for visitors. Given the context of the Ankapark, the failure of the roller coasters is not a simple error of electrical and mechanical technical objects, but also signals the exhaustion of their aesthetic capacity. In 'Orchestrated (Dis)orientation: Roller Coasters, Theme Parks, and Postmodernism', Michael DeAngelis discusses the role of the roller coaster in a theme park as strategically undulating between orienting and disorienting the visitor. From the outside, it is a marker of the park, with its towering structures in the cityscape. From inside the park, it is a device for relative positioning, since the surrounding simulation aims to scramble the sense of place. The rate of undulation between orientation and disorientation is the most dramatic when aboard a roller coaster. While the sharp movements of the carrier heighten the disorientation, being able to see the theme park from above allows new reference points and opportunities for orientation within the grounds. With this in mind, the roller coaster's failure is not only an error confined to the absolute inputs and outputs of technical objects, but something that fails to deliver its aesthetic promise, as defined by DeAngelis. It does not operate as an ensemble, therefore no new sensibilities are brought forth into the world.<sup>38</sup> [Fig. 1]

Gilbert Simondon differentiates between aesthetic and technical objects in terms of their place in the world, while recognising the fluid boundary between them. While 'aesthetic objects complete the world' with what they bring forth, technical objects do not integrate with the world, as they can function anywhere. For Simondon, talking about the beauty of technical objects requires an understanding of their placement in contexts. 'The sails of a ship are not beautiful when they are at rest, but when the wind billows and inclines the entire mast, carrying the ship on the sea, it is the sail in the wind and on the sea that is beautiful.'<sup>39</sup> Ankapark's dysfunctional roller coasters cannot have a claim to beauty. What about the whole theme park, as an ensemble composed of many technical and aesthetic processes and objects including not only roller coasters but also security lanes, lightbulbs, game machines, but also the more abstract, environmental, institutional and psychological realms?

One need not be an expert to expect failures in the aesthetic and cultural domains. As a city, Ankara is familiar with the notorious mayor's 'playful' approach to urbanism. 'Playful' here refers to the city mascots that appear on television programmes, each seeming to come from a different child's imagination, or the contextless, naive, and absurd statues and monuments that suddenly appear within the cityscape. The flying goalkeeper statue, Transformer knockoffs, random species of dinosaurs, and many more have been removed from the city's intersections and bridges after his term in office. These sculptures give

some clues about the kind of world that was imagined for Ankapark. In fact, some of the equipment and sculptures for the theme park had been bought long before the design phase of the project and were placed onto the city's many public junctions. The theme park was planned only after the mayor had selected and paid for the toys. From a critical perspective, architect and scholar Güven Arif Sargın calls Ankapark a 'teenage whim', referring to the unrealistic desires of the management.<sup>40</sup>

Of course, describing these objects, which sometimes refer to geography and sometimes do not produce any meaning at all, as naive does not mean ignoring the corrupt processes that produce them. In fact, the reason for the inconsistency and madness of sculptures is the profit-oriented understanding of the processes that produce them. This absurdity had also surfaced in the mayor's vision of Ankapark. The themes that the park uses for its eclectic simulation demonstrate a multi-scale miscommunication with the outside that even conventional theme park motives cannot legitimise. The park is disconnected both from the city of Ankara, with its own eclectic culture and demographics, and from the global entertainment industry and international geography. The architectural reflection of this misunderstanding in Ankapark seems to have created many failures when compared to other theme parks in the world.

Ankapark's international image has a considerable role in its eventual failure. It is obvious that Ankapark is too big for Ankara with its population of 5.7 million. Unfortunately, the international role it has chosen for itself to ensure financial continuity is too optimistic. Ankapark has large competitors, like Disneyland, in the international market. Those competitors increase their visibility within the larger market of entertainment industry. However, in Ankapark copyright agreements, which could increase the international visibility by an integration of global capital, have been avoided. Intellectual properties such as Harry Potter, Star Wars, Super Mario, or Jurassic Park, which are owned by entertainment giants like Universal, Warner Brothers, Disney, and Nintendo become the main attractions of theme parks abroad, thus giving them an enormous advantage. All fictional themes in Ankapark are imitations of something; it's as if someone said, 'it should be similar to the things we have seen without violating any copyright.' While the theme parks supported by the global entertainment industry – through cartoons, magazines, licensed toys and various other products – can sustain their profitability in the long term, Ankapark has paradoxically not been interested in the state of its profits after the construction phase, to the extent that it hasn't set up a financial connection with the larger entertainment sector. Rather, the simulation relies on relationships between the heads of national media and Ankapark's bosses. In the end, the supposedly striking

eclectic combination of countless juxtaposed images does not even have the means to convey the promise of entertainment in global media.

A comparable failure surfaces in the imaginary relationship that the park establishes with Ankara and its history. Of course, it is too optimistic to expect a conservative administration to produce a multicultural representation of Ankara's history, but the park's Islamist selection from the city's history consists only of a reductionist Ottoman street.<sup>41</sup> All the remaining themes have a universal and generic feeling that could belong to any global theme park. Apart from productions with a loose sense of narrative such as the 'World Tour Model' or 'Antique Car Models', there are entities such as the 'Ladybug Model' or the 'High Chair Model' that do not offer any narrative. [Fig. 2] Ankapark's curation seems to refer directly to the infamous mayor's period in office rather than to the history of Anatolia or Ankara. The playful 'sculptures' that previously emerged in the city, transforms it into the most comprehensive theme in Ankapark. Ankapark is not a proper simulation where different themes – robots, dinosaurs or janissaries – are brought together with their identities intact. Rather, it assimilates and distorts them, leading to affectual and material homogenisation. These sculptures 'look like a – very bad – copy of something' hijacking any affectual potential or possibility of immersion. They are made of fibreglass polymer, and are very similar to their predecessors, both aesthetically and technically. For years, Ankara has been finding the equivalent of the dinosaur image not in the city's Natural History Museum but in the plastic fantasy objects in the streets, crossings and boulevards.

Years ago, the people of Ankara could see live animals in the Atatürk Forest Farm grounds; now there are plastic dinosaurs in the same place. Ankapark's impact on the cultural and aesthetic world of Ankara includes the erasure of the memory of the early republic. The Atatürk Forest Farm, which tried to establish an urban culture and identity by providing a productive and green land with both agricultural and recreational programmes, is slowly losing its place in urban memory to Ankapark, where different historical and fictional identities are intertwined to increase consumption and profit. Neither the local nature, including the Ankara Stream, which passes through the park land, nor the cultural world that once existed here, seem to have played a role in the planning and design decisions.

As a result, the park remains a dysfunctional pile of concrete, plastic, and metal. [Fig. 3] How the land, infrastructure and superstructure will be evaluated in the future remains unclear. Since the park is permanently closed after its brief open period, we will never be able to see the inside of giant tents or amusements that manage to be both experimental and ordinary at the same time, such as the 'Super

Jumper Model', 'Disco Rail Model', 'Flying Ship Model', and 'Space Travel Model.' Maybe we are lucky that we cannot get too involved in the eclectic simulation created by Ankapark, but the urban relations that the failures of the park make visible are still not resolved. On the one hand, we are hopeful that the eclectic collage in Ankapark of the ideology that equates public interest with profit exposes the destructive nature of investments in the city. On the other hand, the people of Ankara cannot do anything about the park and are confused about the status of an investment that has dominated their relationship with the city, both financially and imaginatively.

The crux of the architectural stupidity materialises here. Ankapark turns into a failure that resists even its own destruction. Rather than an error that turns and reinforms the knowledge mechanisms, institutions, disciplines and individuals that would sustain technicity, Ankapark, lacking the capacity to evolve, exhausts technicities. It is an obstacle to any kind of progress. For many bureaucratic, legal and technical reasons, park is unable to operate, nor can it be properly dismantled. It does not produce technical-aesthetic couplings with the world with safe roller coasters or immersive environments. Moreover, it stays indifferent to human motives. Everything stays there to decay, waiting for the new municipality and courts to uncover the depths of corruption in every sense. It turned into a cancerous tissue that only spread the decay and rust within the once fertile Atatürk Forest Farm grounds and the river. [Fig. 4] The project is not an error of the city of Ankara, its institutions, architects, technicians, bureaucrats, or investors; it is madness and pure stupidity, having lost its productive potential – whether financial, cultural, or political.

### **The diagnosis or: how we learned to stop worrying and love the stupidity**

What experts, architects, geographers and civil society preached during the days of construction has been confirmed. But that does not provide relief, as bitterness about what has been lost has surpassed the anger towards the mayor. In this sense, the last component of the stupidity of architecture comes to the fore. The madness that the society contemplates, as well as the complexity of the corruption at hand, escapes from the institutionalised knowledge systems owing to the exhaustion of technicities. Here, a relationship also exists between the park and Ankara, not only through the completed project, but also in terms of the productive labour that uses a variety of instruments whether concrete or abstract, incorporating many technicities at once. As one of the largest investments in Turkish history, Ankapark demanded different types and rates of labour from many parts of the city during its design and construction. The project, like most of the construction industry,





Fig. 1: One of the coasters in the park from a surrounding road, 2020. Photo: Elif Kalender.

Fig. 2: Unlicensed Transformer and the pavilion titled 'Future Station', 2020. Photo: Elif Kalender.

arises from the concealment of the labour exploited through subcontractors. It remains unclear how many workers, students, artists, architects and engineers worked on Ankapark. It is constantly associated with the only openly known author of the project, the mayor – so much so that even the name of the promised world-famous office that produced the concept designs was not visible to the public.<sup>42</sup> The capitalist process, which fixes the identity of the author, alienates the employee and hides the labour behind a single figure, reaching a dead end here. As the author becomes embroiled in polemics, the park is questioned, and the more the problems in the park become visible, the more the author becomes involved.

A fine arts student who tries to earn pocket money by painting the bootleg Transformers in the park and the engineer who drew the structural details are happy that their names are not associated with the park. Everyone knows that nothing has been done according to the recommendations of experts. Consequently, what is there resists its own producers and cannot be grasped by individuals or disciplines. Technical information seems to have been used merely to hide mismanagement and corruption. Individuals are hesitant to reveal whether they worked in some way or another on the construction of the park. There remains very little to say besides 'we told you so'. In the end, the existence of the park is so absurd that nobody can stand it. Deleuze says that 'madness arises at the point at which the individual contemplates itself in this free ground – and, as a result, stupidity in stupidity and cruelty in cruelty – to the point that it can no longer stand itself.'<sup>43</sup> Even the authors of the park could not stand themselves; their social status literally collapsed in the ensuing corruption scandal. As soon as stupidity was acknowledged by the public, the promise of the land's gradual profit evaporated. Political power collapsed because of Ankapark's debt and poor image. In other words, power could not sustain its status after being exposed to its own stupidity. When the mayor got trapped on one of the roller coasters, the resulting image irreversibly sabotaged the simulation. The park's simple goal was exposed: not to build a convincing simulation but to make short-term profit.

The human, material and financial resources that are mobilised and exploited to create geography fails to deliver any of its promises on human, national or international scales. Ankapark resists itself, its goals, and its capacities as a theme park, as an aesthetic object, and as value to be repurposed in other technical objects owing to the transdisciplinary nature of the disaster. Which authority – legal, municipal, governmental, or technical – has anything to say? How long should we wait for something to become adapted to the city, whether by destruction or a logistical-architectural operation?

Despite efforts to salvage its prospects, Ankapark has languished in a state of limbo, its sprawling grounds standing as a sober testament to corruption, environmental neglect, misplaced ambitions and economic mismanagement. The new municipality has released a series of documents to inform the public and has distributed forms to invite proposals from citizens. However, they cannot go beyond showing how the whole process continues to spiral into ever deeper debt.<sup>44</sup> A lack of knowledge has led to the creation of things that are not technical objects, as they 'cannot be considered as absolute realities and as existing by themselves, even after having been constructed. Their technicity can be understood only through the integration of the activity of a human user or the functioning of a technical ensemble'.<sup>45</sup> Nor is Ankapark an aesthetic object, as it does not complete the world it is placed in; it only erodes it. Giant steel silos, which are tectonically intricate and probably exciting in their unfurnished form for an architect, wait for an apocalypse. Until then, they will house the decaying army of dinosaurs and robots. [Fig. 5]

The difference between stupidity and the errors of failed architecture, as discussed in the Pruitt-Igde and Algiers experiments, is the evident reticularity of errors. They continue to be a part of cultural evolution and institutionalised knowledge even in the case of destruction or radical misuse. Neither of them, as partial deficiencies, spoil the mode of relations between the city and the land. Instead, they work as singular points that signify the disruption and start a revision mechanism. Ankapark, or architectural stupidity, is not an error that can be contemplated by order and cause it to reconfigure itself accordingly. It alienates labour groups, architects, engineers, technicians, painters, everyone exploited, as well as institutions, the new municipality, academia and professionals.

Even though we argue that the stupidity is genuinely incapable of reinforcing the knowledge systems that produced it, paradoxically the condition in Ankapark informs us about the stupidity. All in all, this article is an attempt to distinguish stupid architecture from an error. However, we must also acknowledge the transdisciplinary nature of the disaster, whose stupidity cannot be fully deciphered only within architecture. The profit-driven processes of Ankapark are integral parts of neoliberal urbanisation, which invites corporate and private actors to exploit public, productive and ecologically prolific land, where public, professional, and expert opinion may be less valuable than a shareholder's.

For this reason, the scale of the stupid radically differs from an error. Stupidity cannot be confined within the disciplinary borders of a profession. Unlike a partial error in workmanship or a planning decision that has the potential to re-inform the technicities, stupidity entrenches its own way





Fig. 3: Army of hatching dinosaurs, 2016. Photo: Caner Arikboğa.

Fig. 4: The river passing through the Forest Farm ground, 2020. Photo: Elif Kalender.

of operating and corrupts all productive relations in multiple orders. Distinguishing error from stupidity is a critical act, which should not be misinterpreted as negation. But rather it is an expression of the inability to affirm the cancerous urbanisations, with its institutions, policies and processes. As seen in Ankapark, the affirmation of stupidity means the dissolution of the system that affirms it. While an error indicates a potential going astray and reterritorialisation of a productive milieu, the exploration of desires or forms, stupidity diminishes the power of its environment and does not even empower itself in the process. Architecture should reclaim its critical edge as not every failure is an error; some of them are worse.

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### Notes

1. In the 2020–21 autumn and spring semesters, Ayşen Savaş and an interdisciplinary group of researchers, Arzu Gönenç Sorguç, Funda Baş Bütüner, Emre Erkal, Sinan Cem Kızıl and Elif Bekar conducted a research-based design studio for the final year architecture students in Middle East Technical University, where students discussed and proposed the architectural and ecological transformation of the contested terrain.
2. The subtitle addressing the concept of error is based on a part of Bengisu Derebaşı's ongoing PhD thesis, supervised by Prof. Dr. Ayşen Savaş, which is expected to be completed by September 2025.
3. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 152.
4. Ibid, 148.
5. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972), 223.
6. 'Error (n.)', Online Etymology Dictionary, September 2017, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/error>.
7. Lester G. Crocker, *Diderot's Chaotic Order: Approach to Synthesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 167.
8. David Bates, 'The Epistemology of Error in Late Enlightenment France,' *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29, no. 3 (1996): 307–27, 307.
9. Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 2015), xix. Adorno sets the goal of 'negative dialectics' to free dialectics from the predetermined intent of reaching to a definitive conclusion through affirmative solutions, advocating instead for an engagement with contradictions and tensions.
10. This claim forms a central argument in the book, suggesting that wonders and order are not binary opposites but may actually function together. Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature: 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 2001). On page 291, Daston conveys a similar idea, referring to the ideas of Francis Bacon. Also, Daston's other writings include arguments on Bacon and his classification.
11. Lorraine Daston, *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 16. The full quotation from Bacon is:  
As examples of singular instances, we have the sun and moon among the heavenly bodies; the magnet among minerals; quicksilver among metals; the elephant among quadrupeds; the venereal sensation among the different kinds of touch; the scent of sporting dogs among those of smell. The letter S, too, is considered by the grammarians as sui generis, from its easily uniting with double or triple consonants, which no other letter will. These instances are of great value, because they excite and keep inquiry alive, and correct an understanding depraved by habit and the common course of things. In the eighth rank of prerogative instances, we will place deviating instances, such as the errors of nature, or strange and monstrous objects, in which nature deviates and turns from her ordinary course of things.
12. Ibid., 239.
13. Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso Books, 2016), 7.
14. Peter Galison, 'Objectivity: The Limits of Scientific Sight', *AMIAS Lecture*, 11 November 2011, <https://www.ias.edu/video/galison-amias>.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. The use of the term *accidenti* brings forward the difference between accident and mistake. J. L. Austin, the philosopher of language, dwells on the difference between 'by accident' and 'by mistake' in his 'Plea for Excuses'. This discussion can be further developed in relation to the use of error, accident and mistake in architectural treatises.
18. Sebastiano Serlio, *Sebastiano Serlio on Architecture*, trans. with an introduction and commentary by Vaughan Hart and Peter Hicks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), xxxii.
19. Claude Perrault and Pérez-Gómez Alberto, *Ordonnance for the Five Kinds of Columns After the Method of the Ancients* (Santa Monica: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1993), 16.
20. Gallaccini lived between 1564 and 1641 and worked as a professor of mathematics and logic at the University of Siena. In her book *The Telescope and the Compass: Teofilo Gallaccini and the Dialogue Between Architecture and Science in the Age*





Fig. 5: Adult dinosaurs awaiting their demise, 2016. Photo: Caner Arıkboğa.



- of *Galileo*, Alina Payne critically compiles the information from the biographers of Gallaccini and defines his subjects of interest as poetry, epigraphy, ballistics, anatomy, astronomy, fortification and art. Alina Payne, *The Telescope and the Compass: Teofilo Gallaccini and the Dialogue between Architecture and Science in the Age of Galileo* (Florence: Olschki, 2012).
21. Ibid.
  22. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 150.
  23. Sean Keller, 'Ways about Error,' *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 46 (2013): 29–43, 39.
  24. Ibid.
  25. Aslı Serbest and Mona Mahall, 'Theory of the Impossibility of a Theory of Error,' *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal* 46 (2013): 340–53, 343.
  26. Daniel Sherer, 'Error or Invention? Critical Receptions of Michelangelo's Architecture from Pirro Ligorio to Teofilo Gallaccini,' *Perspecta* 46 (2013): 76–113.
  27. Peter Eisenman, *Tracing Eisenman: Peter Eisenman Complete Works*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 82.
  28. Stavros Kousoulas, *Architectural Technicities: A Foray into Larval Space* (London: Routledge, 2024), 59.
  29. Ibid, 44.
  30. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 52.
  31. Katharine G. Bristol, 'The Pruitt-Igoue Myth', *Journal of Architectural Education* 44, no. 3 (1991): 163–71.
  32. Zeynep Çelik, 'Gendered Spaces in Colonial Algiers,' in *The Sex of Architecture*, ed. Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 127–40, 138.
  33. Ibid.
  34. Selin Çavdar Sert, 'Atatürk Forest Farm as a Heritage Asset within the Context of Turkish Planning Experience 1937–2017' (Ph.D. Thesis, Middle East Technical University, 2017), 4, <https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/26502>.
  35. The aftermath of the theme park is documented in detail in the current municipality's report. Apart from the exorbitant cost of the toys and the technical equipment and infrastructure to run them, the theme park was awarded a 1 million Turkish Lira (approximately €15 000 in 2019) penalty because it failed to open on the scheduled date. From here on, the theme park became an economic burden [to the city]. After a long and difficult bidding process for running the park, the executive firm did not pay the equivalent of the 26 million Turkish Lira (around 3.7 million euro in April 2020). Numerous lawsuits have been brought by both the municipality and the executive firm, and as a small indication of the failure, by 2020, the executive firm had submitted sixteen petitions to close the park to visitors because of the technical deficiency, or using this as an excuse. The document, assessing the damage at 111 million Turkish lira (approximately 11 million euro in October 2020), notes that this assessment is limited because electricity, water and natural gas facilities are not available due to the unsettled debt. Also, during the time that park's status was unknown, cables and equipment were stolen from the park. Over eighty-seven robberies were reported before proper security was deployed. According to a 2022 report, the cost to restore this piece of land to a productive state is 250 million Turkish lira (15 million euro) just for the electricity infrastructure to be replaced. On the municipality's webpage there is a section dedicated to the current state of Ankapark, the title of which can be translated as 'waste page'. For the municipality's report, see: 'İsraf Sayfası', Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/israf-sayfas>.
  36. Emre Sevim, 'Götürüsü Yüksek Bir Proje: Ankapark.' *Mimarlık* 407 (2019), 12–15, 15. Sevim states that the privatisation of the Forest Farm land is realised at approximately a third of the project cost. Also, by referring to the earlier use of the land as the hobby gardens within the city, reserved for the use of inhabitants for rent, he highlights the fact that even in the case in which hobby gardens are present and no investment has been made – meaning the Ankapark project – the rental value of the land was higher. The rental value of hobby gardens was 14.20 Turkish lira per square metre per year, whereas the executive firm pays 12.10 Turkish lira per square metre.
  37. 'Wonderland Eurasia İçin Giriş Ücretleri Belirlendi,' Anadolu Ajansı, 18 March 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/wonderland-eurasia-icin-giris-ucretleri-belirlendi/1421461>.
  38. Michael DeAngelis, 'Orchestrated (Dis)Orientation: Roller Coasters, Theme Parks, and Postmodernism.' *Cultural Critique*, no. 37 (1997): 107–29.
  39. Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2017), 196.
  40. 'Savcılık, Gökçek Döneminde İnşa Edilen Ankapark İçin Harekete Geçti,' *Euronews*, 27 August 2021, <https://tr.euronews.com/2021/08/27/savc-l-k-gokcek-in-ankapark-icin-harekete-gecti-muhafifler-gokcek-in-tazminat-odemesini-is>.
  41. Bülent Batuman provides an extensive account of Islamist architecture and urbanism that guides the transformation of Turkish cities. See: Bülent Batuman, *New Islamist Architecture and Urbanism: Negotiating Nation and Islam through Built Environment in Turkey* (London: Routledge, 2018).
  42. Concept visuals are still present on the Spanish-based international company Immersive Planet's online portfolio under the name 'Wonderland Eurasia', <https://www.immersiveplanet.com/portfolio/>.
  43. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 152.
  44. 'İsraf Sayfası,' Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, <https://www.ankara.bel.tr/israf-sayfas>.
  45. Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, 245.

**Biography**

Bengisu Derebaşı received her bachelor's degree in architecture from Middle East Technical University (METU) and pursued the master's programme in architecture there. During her master's study, she worked as a full-time research assistant in the project granted by the Getty: Keeping It Modern initiative. Her master's thesis dwells on libraries as the mediator between architecture and knowledge; the wall as an architectural element is re-read in relation to the practices of a library: classifying, storing and retrieval. Currently, she is a PhD candidate in the Programme of Architecture, and at the same time, works as a research assistant at METU. Her current research is on order and error in architectural thinking.

Sinan Cem Kızıl, PhD, is an architect and a scholar. He completed his architectural education at METU Faculty of Architecture, Ankara. His dissertation, 'Architecture as Territory: Politico-Aesthetic Constructions and Representations of Space-Time', discusses territory and territoriality, focusing on the political and aesthetic dimensions concerning philosophy and social geography.

