The Anxiety of Appraisal

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Abstract
The starting point of this article is the struggle to articulate concrete hypotheses and questions regarding the appraisal of theory. I argue that the growth of knowledge, in architecture as in science, is closely associated with the anxiety to appraise our theories. Referring to Slavoj Žižek's reading of German Idealism, I suggest that appraisal does not occur because our theories are imperfect, but is grounded instead on a fundamental lack in reality itself. To overcome that lack, theories fabricate models, which are artificial conceptions of architecture that block any direct access to what might be called 'the real of architecture'. The limit which is generated from that lack, takes its creative power in Aldo Rossi's theoretical work on the architecture of the city. Here, architecture theory performs its ontological role to complete the cracked reality of the city. The article concludes with the observation that appraisal is a perpetual retroactive operation, immanent in formulating theories and reformulating them into series of theories.

Keywords
Anxiety, choice, lack, limited rationality, invisible remainder

One Sentence Summary
The article argues that architectural knowledge grows from an inherent lack in human rationality to fully grasp reality; theories work to complete this cracked reality with models which we appraise.

The form of theory

Theory comes from the Greek noun theōria, rooted in the verb horáō: to see, to observe. In its earliest senses, the term points to the action of viewing (theōros means 'the spectator'; 'theatre' shares the same root). In ancient Greece, theōries were official delegations sent by one city-state to another to attend a festival or a game – the eyes of the state. Eventually the term came to describe attempts to explain phenomena, aiming at the growth of knowledge. Interestingly enough, although the origins of theory refer to the action of seeing, the term corresponds better to the discursive process of articulating something that stems from the realm of ideas. (The word 'idea' shares the same root as 'theory': the Greek 'idea' means 'the form, the look of a thing', from the Proto-Indo-European root weyd-, 'to see' and 'to know'). It appears that the emergence of theory assumes that the things we sense cannot be described directly; we need to theorise them in advance.

That process of theorising is closely related to the way philosophy developed especially after Kant – sense certainty cannot be accurate: we base our knowledge on

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sets of hypotheses or conjectures we make according to our observations. Knowledge on a matter has to do with representing it in a systematic way. However, the term 'theory' refers also to 'a belief, policy, or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action', a definition that corresponds better to how we commonly use 'theory' in architecture.[1] For example, Vitruvius's *De architectura* or Le Corbusier's *Five Points of Modern Architecture* operate as theories that give the world of architecture the principles according to which the profession should set its course of action – how reality should be shaped. Of course, they are conjectures, but they are presented as future-oriented axioms; they do not aim at explaining and gaining knowledge but at creating. Touching upon this, Stanford Anderson has noted: 'The architect is involved in making his own reality as well as his theory… this new reality may serve as the fulfilment of the theory rather than as its empirical constraint.'[2] Here, it is architecture practice, the construction of reality that materialises theory and turns it into a visible material object. Theory, Anderson implies, can be ahead of practice.

To sum up, a distinction can be made between a retroactive interpretative theory of architecture, which emerges after the architectural object, and a theory of architecture that functions as the presupposed rational framework of practice. In this sense, we can differentiate between theories that interpret material reality and those that actively shape it – a distinction that parallels knowledge acquired through experience and knowledge assumed to exist in advance. Building on the issues raised by the editors of this issue of *Footprint* regarding the rationality of architectural decisions, two key questions arise: first, how does one assess and choose between different interpretations of architecture – what makes one more accurate than another? Second, how do architects navigate and select among alternative possible realities in their creative process?

In this article I consider architectural theory not as a description of architecture but as an active intervention in it. Put differently, the idea of a good theory – one that describes the object of architecture in its essence or reveals a hidden concept behind architecture form – is considered irrelevant, because such an approach would frame the given architecture in a single fixed, correct understanding, denying any further growth of knowledge on the matter. Instead, I emphasise the moment of reflexivity embodied in the act of theorising and its appraisal. The argument is primarily developed along the line that runs through German idealism with a particular focus on Slavoj Žižek's interpretation of Hegel, Kant and Schelling. Architecture theory is comprised of narratives; they are mostly texts, ways of presenting or understanding the reality of space and architecture, but they operate outside of it.[3] They push beyond the experience of the physical world of architecture and aim at alternative realities; in that sense, German idealism can provide a proper framework for making our case. Hegel's words from his lectures on the *Philosophy of History* outline how a narrative may sublate its subject: 'In the Peloponnesian War, the struggle was essentially between Athens and Sparta. Thucydides has left us the history of the greater part of it, and his immortal work is the absolute gain which humanity has derived from that contest.'[4]

The history of the Peloponnesian war sublates the war's immediate reality, that is, the facts, instituting the narrative of the war rather than the war itself as the important event in human history. An 'ideological narrativization of our experience and activity', in Žižek's words. The event does not appear to us immaculate, but it always brings an excess – the story in storytelling – which is what we eventually keep.[5]

In Lacan's psychoanalytic theory the real, or what is perceived as such, is described as what resists symbolisation absolutely.[6] It is what cannot be fully articulated, captured or processed through language or representation: a raw, unstructured state that has no gaps or lacks. In Lacan's view, once the subject acquires language and symbolic structures, they are forever alienated from the real, considering that language always structures reality imperfectly. Within this context, I will argue that theories are originally bad. This is the paradox of the form of theory: architecture theories are texts, narratives that discuss, explain, make claims about architecture. Yet, as linguistic constructs, they fabricate an artificial, consistent totality on architecture by blocking any direct access to the real of architecture.

Such a position belongs to what the philosopher Levi Bryant calls the hegemonic fallacy, that is, 'beings are hegemonized under the signifier or language… the hegemon of the hegemonic fallacy thus functions like an active form giving structure or formatting a passive, structureless matter'.[7] Still, when discussing architecture theories and their appraisals, one unavoidably falls into that fallacy, since by definition theories speak about physical objects using language or other symbolic formations such as diagrams, models and drawings. In fact, the hegemonic fallacy could be considered a precondition for a theory to exist and function. Whether we talk about a single theory, or series of theories, their appraisal is grounded on that fallacy, that is, the power the symbolic and the imaginary exert over architecture.

A pervert's guide to knowledge

Ian Hacking and Richard Rorty, two philosophers of science who promote experimentation over theory, would wonder why we should aim for the most accurate explanation in the first place.[8] According to both of them, philosophy must keep the conversation going, rather than aiming at the 'objective truth'.[9] Seeing philosophy of science from a historicist perspective, Rorty follows Thomas Kuhn's idea that truth is not universal but it is a result of discourse. Scientific theories cannot mirror nature, because they are products of human practice and hence they will always be infected. Regardless of one's position in relation to historicism, what matters is not to refute the possibility of the most accurate description of nature, but the work one does towards that, what Rorty describes as 'the infinite strive for truth'.[10] Rorty gives Jean-Paul Sartre credit for seeing 'the attempt to gain objective knowledge of the world, and thus of oneself, as an attempt to avoid the responsibility for choosing one's project'.[11] What is important is not whether one makes the right or the wrong choice, or to evaluate a theory as bad or good, but choice itself. The existence and obligation of choice is a precondition for the growth of knowledge. Sartre in his work *Being and Nothingness* repeatedly says that 'being [and freedom] is condemned to be free'.[12] One is responsible for the world and for one's way of being.[13]

Freedom is to be understood here in F.W.J. Schelling's sense, 'as the capacity for good and evil', that is, not one's power to determine oneself independently of any external limitations, but as Žižek in his book on Schelling has put it, 'it concerns the most concrete experience of the tension within a living, acting and suffering person between Good and Evil – there is no actual freedom without an unbearable anxiety'.[14] This may offer a brief response to the questions raised by the editors of this issue of *Footprint* regarding how we demarcate between theories. The process of differentiating between good and bad theories is driven by an underlying anxiety that precedes appraisal, serving as a foundational and preconditional characteristic of knowledge and its way forward. Conversely, we can argue that the existence of choice is based on the lack of objective knowledge and truth. In other words, it is the lack of objectivity that makes knowledge possible in the first place. According to Sartre:

> The very meaning of knowledge is what it is not and is not what it is; for in order to know being such as it is, it would be necessary to be that being. But there is this 'such as it is' only because I am not the being which I know; and if I should become it, then the 'such as it is' would vanish and could no longer even be thought.[15]

Therefore, the competition between theories may not be taken as a problem to be solved but as the ontological structure of knowledge and its way forward. This brings us to the Hegelian reading of reality as cracked and contradictory. In Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Pure Reason* the limits of reason appear when sense-certainty runs into contradictions, into antinomies.[16] Departing from that, Hegel argues that precisely this failure of choice, this failure of knowledge corresponds to the level of the being; reality itself is antinomic. As Žižek remarks:

> For Hegel, the Idea of the State, say, is a problem, and each specific form of the state … simply proposes a solution, redefining the problem itself. The passage to the next "higher" stage of the dialectical process occurs precisely when, instead of continuing to search for a solution, we problematize the problem itself … A problem is thus not only "subjective"; not just epistemological, a problem for the subject who tries to solve it; it is *stricto sensu* ontological, inscribed into the thing itself: the structure of reality is "problematic".[17]

In terms of scientific knowledge, a similar argument has been developed by the philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend. He claimed that the way to knowledge is not through increasingly restricting the range of ideas we have about looking at the world while establishing a single point of view about the correct picture of reality. This aligns with Hegel's idea that the fear of error obscures the fear to encounter truth:

> If the fear of falling into error sets up a mistrust of science, which in the absence of such scruples gets on with the work itself, and actually cognizes something, it is hard to see why we should not turn round and mistrust this very mistrust. Should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself?[18]

Theoretical pluralism in this sense paves a path towards error; it 'is required both in order to strengthen our tests and in order to bring to light refuting facts that would otherwise remain inaccessible. The progress of science is unthinkable without it'.[19] By claiming this, Feyerabend illustrated that the proliferation of theories and theoretical pluralism is not just the method but the form of the body of science itself. Feyerabend succinctly states that the rationality of our decisions is formed by the internal contradictions of the scientific enterprise, by the freedom to choose between contradictory theories, not by any external parameters:

> Choice confronts the scientist even at the most trite step of his research and it cannot be replaced by any appeal to

> standards. One might call the omnipresence of this choice the "existential dimension" of research. The fact that there is such an existential dimension to every single action we carry out shows that rationalism is not an agency that forms an otherwise chaotic material, but is itself material to be formed by personal decisions. The questions "What shall we do? How shall we proceed? What rules shall we adopt? What standards are there to guide us?" however, are answered by saying: "You are grown up now, children, and so you have to find your own way."[20]

Feyerabend does not seem to care about how the individual will proceed with his or her research. The problem is transferred from the particular to the universal. The important thing is that science as a universal project of culture where truths proliferate.

Feyerabend's attitude towards a theoretical pluralism in science hints at what psychoanalysis describes as perversion. Žižek recalls that the classic version of a pervert is to openly actualise any repressed content. Perverts, thinking they are in direct contact with truth, are allowed to do anything, yet this permissiveness, this freedom, causes anxiety and impotence, the strongest possible repression.[21] 'Once I know too much, I am no longer in a position to accomplish the act.'[22] Attempting to overcome the repression of the single correct theory, Feyerabend proposed a model of excess that can be seen as the ultimate repression.

Proliferation and theoretical diversity go hand in hand with the anxiety to appraise. Anxiety, as defined by Jacques Lacan in his 1962–63 seminar on the theme, is structured on the lack of desire, the lack of lack, since 'desire is lack and we shall say that this flaw lies at the root of desire, in the sense of something that is missing'.[23] Lacan explains that the most anguishing experience for an infant occurs when the relationship that forms the foundation of his existence is disrupted. That foundation is based on the lack that turns him into desire, therefore 'this relationship is most disrupted when there's no possibility of any lack, when his mother is on his back all the while … Anxiety isn't about the loss of the object, but its presence.'[24]

Theoretical pluralism as it has been elaborated by Feyerabend contradicts lack. Feyerabend opposes the idea that a single scientific method or theory should dominate. Instead, growth takes place when different perspectives are allowed to develop and challenge existing paradigms. Advancements can emerge from the coexistence of competing theories, and Lacan's approach to anxiety can help us shape a psychoanalytic connection. What is missing from Feyerabend's model is the support provided by lack. Lack specifies which theory to desire. Lacan argues that although doubt is related to anxiety, 'anxiety is not doubt, anxiety is the cause of doubt … the effort the doubt expends is exerted merely to combat anxiety.'[25] An evident paradox is at work here: whereas the acute awareness of the multitude of theories triggers an inability to act, this turns into doubt as the effort to fight impotence. This certainty of doubt is what shapes the Cartesian subject of science.[26]

The limit in the given

My argument has been that evaluating theories is not about securing certainty for the future, but about cultivating doubt. It is precisely this uncertainty that drives knowledge forward, so that doubt becomes integral to the pursuit of rationality. This view is everywhere in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit,* where truth is related to the labour of the scientist: 'knowledge … in order to become genuine knowledge, to beget the element of science … must travel a long way and work its passage'.[27] He continues: 'Truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made.'[28]

Moreover, we must consider whether, when evaluating theories, we seek certainty, a definitive conclusion, or a guiding principle for the future. Or, perhaps, by emphasising the uncertainties within the field of architecture, the process of appraisal itself becomes the rational way to proceed. Therefore, the resolution of a conflict between theories should not be justified by its contribution to the progress of a scientific field, but rather viewed as the self-dissolution of the scientific community itself. In Hegel's view, while scientists occupy themselves with a project, in reality they are working on themselves. Explaining provides a sense of self-satisfaction because 'consciousness is, so to speak, communing directly with itself, enjoying only itself; although it seems to be busy with something else, it is in fact occupied only with itself.'[29]

Stanford Anderson suggested as early as 1971 that critiques of architecture's shortcomings in serving society's well-being should not be seen as a call to abandon architecture as a means of shaping our built environment. Instead, he viewed them as an appeal to continually refine and strengthen our imperfect rationality.[30] Anderson's claim here is Hegelian, namely that human rationality is expressed in the work of architecture. As mentioned above, for Hegel scientific work looks for subjectivity as it is being expressed out in the world:

> Consciousness *observes;* i.e. Reason wants to find and to have itself as existent object, as an object that is actually and sensuously present … Reason, therefore, in its observational activity, approaches things in the belief that it truly apprehends

> them as sensuous things opposite to the 'I'; but what it actually does, contradicts this belief, for it apprehends them *intellectually,* it transforms their sensuous being into *Notions,* i.e. into just that kind of being which is at the same time 'I', hence transforms thought into the form of being, or being into the form of thought; it maintains, in fact, that it is only as Notions that things have truth. Consciousness, in this observational activity, comes to know what *things* are; but *we* come to know what *consciousness itself* is.[31]

The idea that reconstruction happens through the lens of language is related to what Lacan describes as the symbolic function. We need language to outline a form, but Lacan teaches us that 'saying the whole truth is materially impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.'[32] What H.P. Lovecraft calls the indescribable 'thing' in his story *The Call of Cthulhu*: 'there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order.' Cthulhu, the Thing itself, the real in its purest form, resists becoming part of our symbolic reality. But it is fundamental to understand that it is not Lovecraft who neglects to see the 'thing' that exists out there independent of our gaze; on the contrary, Lovecraft's narration retroactively produces Cthulhu as an irreducible gap in his articulation; the real is the by-product of the symbolic, and product of the imaginary.

In Lacanian terms, architecture, a practice of three-dimensional built forms, needs wordy articulations to make itself describable. While by doing so, it will never be fully grasped. Joan Copjec in her book *Read my Desire* explains:

> Painting, drawing, all forms of picture making are fundamentally graphic arts. And because signifiers are material, that is, because they are opaque rather than translucent, refer to other signifiers rather than directly to a signified, the field of vision is neither clear nor easily traversable. It is instead ambiguous and treacherous, full of traps.[33]

The fundamental trap is that we are not aware that 'beyond appearance there is nothing in itself; there is the gaze'.[34] In Hegel's words, 'It is manifest that behind the so-called curtain which is supposed to conceal the inner world, there is nothing to be seen unless we go behind it ourselves.'[35] Consequently, we enunciate theories that are secondary signifiers, supposing that we are grasping the given primary signifiers. Buildings are mistakenly thought to be signifiers, more than actual material forms; they function as surpluses. However, this illusion is fundamental, for it retroactively produces the lack of some 'substantial Real behind it' which must become accessible.[36] What then are Christo and Jeanne-Claude's famous wrapping projects if not both the acknowledgment and the demonstration of this illusion? The fundamental illusion is explained in what Žižek has called the parallax gap. Žižek takes this idea from the apparent shift in an object's position when viewed from different angles, and he radicalises it as the underlying antagonism within reality itself, 'which forever eludes the symbolic grasp, and thus causes the multiplicity of symbolic perspectives'.[37] By literally placing a curtain in front of a well-known building, Christo and Jeanne-Claude alter the obvious perception of it, they produce a lack, revealing that the substantial real was not hiding behind the appearance of the building, but the real is the appearance itself, which emerges only when hidden. Žižek notes:

> The appearance implies that there is something behind it which appears through it; it conceals a truth and by the same gesture gives a foreboding thereof, it simultaneously hides and reveals the essence behind its curtain. But what is hidden behind the phenomenal appearance? Precisely the fact that there is nothing to hide. What is concealed is that the very act of concealing conceals nothing.[38]

It is in this light that we can also understand modernist art and its sublime experience. Following the art critic Clement Greenberg, modernist art made the limit of representation its project. According to Greenberg, by orienting itself to the flatness of the canvas – the limitations that constitute the medium of painting – modernist painting is seen as a picture first rather than content in a picture.[39] Yet, adopting Žižek's interpretation of the Kantian sublime as something that fills the original void opened up by the inherent limitation of the 'nothing' represented in the symbolic, one could argue that the literal 'nothing' given in modernist painting is what has elevated it to the level of the 'Thing'.[40]

Let us take Villa Savoye, for example. It has been designated a World Heritage Site by Unesco not because of its positive attributes – an elevated white suburban house with free floor-plan standing on thin cylindrical columns. Rather, as emphasised in the criteria established by Unesco, the architectural objects designed by Le Corbusier signify for human consciousness a cultural move beyond the limits of the architectural objects:

> Criterion (i): The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier represents a masterpiece of human creative genius, providing an outstanding response to certain fundamental architectural and social challenges of the twentieth century. Criterion (ii) the

> architectural work of Le Corbusier exhibits an unprecedented interchange of human values, on a worldwide scale over half a century, in relation to the birth and development of the Modern Movement … Criterion (vi) the architectural work of Le Corbusier is directly and materially associated with ideas of the Modern Movement, of which the theories and works possessed outstanding universal significance in the twentieth century. The series represents a 'New Spirit' that reflects a synthesis of architecture, painting and sculpture.[41]

Unesco praises the theories and the works of modernism not because of their content, it does not praise the particular formal synthesis between walls, columns, windows, ramps, terraces and so on. Instead, it praises a 'New Spirit': humanity recognises its own presence within the work of architecture and celebrates itself. Villa Savoye and other modernist buildings that have been recognised as World Heritage Sites by Unesco, or have been appraised by the historiography of architecture, function as signifiers invested with meaning, but they are actually empty: the material leftovers of a bygone 'New Spirit', their symbolic overdetermination elevated them 'to the status of the impossible Thing.'[42]

Under these circumstances we can understand the anxiety of contemporary society about the restoration of monuments and the appraisal of buildings and cities. Copjec notes that anxiety appears as 'an affect aroused in reaction to an existence, to pure existence, without sense'.[43] Maybe this takes its architectural dimension in what Bernard Tschumi has called 'the meeting point of ideal and real space … the place where life touches death … the rotten place where spatial praxis meets mental constructs'.[44] Tschumi, in his book *Architecture and Disjunction*, has expounded upon modernity's anguish regarding the death implicit in decaying buildings.[45] In Tschumi's words, 'life was seen as a negation of death … a negation that went beyond the idea of death itself and extended to the rot of the putrefying flesh. Architecture reflected these deep feelings.'[46] The campaign to save the threatened purity of the derelict Villa Savoye after it was registered as historical monument in 1965 manifests a refusal to acknowledge the traces of decay in buildings.[47] But these traces, the mouldy marks of time on built form, are important to Tschumi, for they shape a place of transgression of an established paradigm by 'negating the form that society expects of it'.[48] In this sense, considering Žižek's hypothesis that the Titanic's tremendous impact stems from Europe's ideological investment in it, we could say that European reason could not stand the anxiety of experiencing its own death via the decay of the Villa Savoye.[49]

The symptom of the city

My purpose so far has been to show that appraisal serves as an exercise of human reason. The process of developing and appraising architectural theories is not confined solely to the discipline of architecture. It is part of a broader endeavour that reflects our ongoing attempt to navigate and extend the boundaries of our own rationality. The enunciation of a theory allows us to manage what might otherwise appear raw, chaotic or incomprehensible. This is one of the founding elements of German Idealism and Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy. Kant raised the question regarding the application of 'pure concepts of the understanding [such as causality, space and time] to appearances'.[50] He proposed a 'mediating pure (without anything empirical) yet intellectual representation called the transcendental schema', which is in itself a product of the imagination and relates the concepts of pure understanding with objects, thus with significance.[51] Following Kant, Hegel suggested that before we intervene in reality, we must first conceptualise it; we must take it as our own product:

> Action *qua* actualization is thus the pure form of will - the simple conversion of a reality that merely *is* into a reality that results from *action*, the conversion of the bare mode of *objective* knowing [i.e. knowing an object] into one of knowing *reality* as something produced by consciousness.[52]

Kant underlines that the schema of a triangle exists only in thought. The schema forms a rule of synthesis without being restricted to a specific image. In *The Architecture of the City*, Aldo Rossi brings this idea into the realm of architecture. Rossi wrote a theory of the architecture of the city which progresses from the rich immediacy of the city to its conceptual structure, in order to initially comprehend and then intervene in the city and its architecture. He argues that while cities evolve though material transformations, carrying remnants of their past, there are deeper urban layers that are not necessarily material, yet they are real and persist over time, determining urban dynamics.[53] One can observe a kinship between Rossi's use of the concept of the type and the Kantian transcendental schema. Rossi adopts type as a logical principle that is prior to form and constitutes it, insisting that a type does not represent an image of an object but it is the underlying rule for its formation.[54] Type is transcendental in the way that it is solely a product of human thought and imagination, which nonetheless determines the conditions for experiencing architecture and forming the city. I would suggest that the type is a product of refinement. It becomes comprehensible when the form is seen as purely as possible. In Hegel's words, 'The

statues are now only stones from which the living soul has flown, just as the hymns are words from which belief has gone.'[55] Hegel's plain stones, the empty statues, are Rossi's architectural remainders, types with animated attributes.

Rossi comprehends the city by its formal characteristics. However, the importance of his theory lies in the fact that his 'notional determination' is not truly notional but purely architectural. This is expressed in what he calls 'pathological permanences'.[56] These permanences are architectural remainders that may sometimes seem like isolated artifacts within the city, yet they serve as the defining elements of an underlying urban system that continues to shape the present, as in the case of the Alhambra in Granada. It is detached from its original function as a royal residence. No additions can alter its form, as it embodies an essential and immutable experience that resists modification.[57]

But Rossi's permanences can be also catalysing elements for development, such as the Palazzo della Regione in Padua, whose form has remained unchanged while accommodating different functions over the years. They can also be propulsive in the way they incarnate a city's potential, such as Hausmann's plan for Paris. Rossi understands Haussmann's plan not for its design but as a propelling force of Paris's urban evolution.[58] He does not fall into the trap of revealing a secret content, or some kind of order behind the architecture of the city. Instead, architecture is the formal remainder of the city's sociohistorical context, the tangible record of its biography, extending beyond the experiences through which we perceive it.[59] Schelling's concept of the 'invisible remainder' is helpful here for making clear that understanding is always an outcome of some incomprehensible, primordial base: 'the invisible remainder'.[60] In Schelling the activity that gives birth to reason is triggered by something which is initially formless, lawless and has been brough to order: 'The seed kernel must be sunk into the earth and die in darkness so that the more beautiful shape of light may lift and unfold itself in the radiance of the sun.'[61]

For Schelling reason appears from an irrational ground, the indivisible remainder. Similarly, for Rossi, any rational conception and actual development of the city emerges through irrational architectural remainders. Rossi's theory has thrown light on the existence of formal leftovers in the city, which pre-structure the ground of the future urban growth. Rossi did not read Haussmann's plan for Paris as an attempt to 'introduce a minimum of Order into the wide ocean of primordial chaos'.[62] Rather, the imposition of Haussmann's plan is read as an irrational 'act of supreme violence' which continues to determine the rationalities of Parisian urban growth.[63] Similarly, Rossi discusses Diocletian's Palace in Split as a large building that had been transformed into a city. The building's attributes became urban, 'demonstrating the infinite richness of analogical transformations in architecture when they operate on specific forms'.[64] The formal remainder constitutes the irrational ground and 'predominates over questions of functional organization'.[65] Diocletian's Palace or Hausmann's plan can be seen as the forms of the Schellingian primordial 'nothing' out of which rationality arises.[66] We pass analogically from raw, pre-existing forms into the rational articulation of a city.

As described above, Lacan's concept of the real refers to raw existence that cannot be fully represented in the subject's symbolic constructions. It has to do with the leftovers, the parts of reality that constantly escape signification. Seen from this perspective, Rossi's theory acknowledges that such an invisible yet present Lacanian real exerts control over the form of the city. Psychoanalytic terminology could help clarify the argument: Rossi's theory illustrates a city formed by its symptoms.

Usually, during medical treatment, the doctor asks about one's symptoms, and tries to cure the underlying disorder causing those symptoms. In a sense, Freud follows medicine when he writes that a symptom 'is a consequence of the process of repression'.[67] That is to say, the symptom is there because something is being repressed. The distinctive element, however, is that in psychoanalytic theory one does not get rid of one's symptom. In fact, 'a symptom is considered as subject's true identity'.[68] Similar to Schelling's invisible remainder, a symptom is a pathological formation such as a slip of the tongue, an irrationality which causes discomfort and displeasure when it occurs but nonetheless gives the subject a positive account of their being. 'Symptom is the way we – the subjects – "avoid madness", the way we "choose something (the symptom-formation) instead of nothing …"'.[69] The task for the subject is to acknowledge the symptom in analysis and change their relationship with it. This is where Rossi's theory converges with psychoanalytic theory: he acknowledges the architectural symptoms that give the city form. Just as psychoanalytic symptoms are pathological particularities that give consistency to our being, so Rossi's architectural permanences function and give consistency to the architecture of the city.

My purpose here is of course far from appraising Aldo Rossi's theory. It is to acknowledge that architecture theory is not a description of the objective, given nature of the architecture or the city, but that even that nature is a

product of human thought and practice. ‘As soon as the form of spirit begins to reign … the subject is formally responsible for it even if it is materially something which he simply found.’[70] It is in this light that we must understand the creative character and the ethical dimension of architecture theory.

Appraisal, a retroactive public act

Gilbert Simondon’s observation on the *Encyclopédia* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert is revelatory regarding the universal character of knowledge:

> The prints of schemas and models of machines … do not have the role of pure, disinterested documentation for a public eager to satisfy curiosity; the information in them is complete enough to constitute a useable practical documentation, such that anyone who owns the book would be capable of building the described machine or of further advancing the state reached by technics in that domain through invention, and to begin his research where that of others who preceded him leaves off … For the first time one sees a technical universe constituting itself, a cosmos wherein everything is related to everything else rather than being jealously guarded by a guild.[71]

What we see is the open-source model in its foundation. An open-source model can refer to any system, framework, or methodology of which underlying code, data or methodology is freely available for public use, modification and distribution, like Wikipedia, or the Linux operating system, whose code is open for anyone to view, modify and distribute. Developers can customise Linux for their needs, contribute improvements and share their versions.

The principal characteristic of knowledge, as Western thought inherited it from the Enlightenment, is that it is public and hence open for appraisal and reformulation. If, for instance, avant-garde modernism is seen like this, it corresponds more to the mediaeval guilds, the guardians and secret keepers of a specified technological know-how, than to the universal spirit that the Enlightenment had put forth. Only once a technique such as architecture is described and inscribed into the symbolic realm, into the field of representations, where it can be related with and become available to others, does rationality emerge via this universal form of knowledge. Publication in the literal sense – to become public and hence open for appraisal – is an ontological precondition for scientific theories. The universality of science lies precisely in its incomplete and open structure.

Regardless of whether one claims to know the subject or is confident in one’s theory, one’s arguments are never self-sufficient; the ‘big Other’ is always responsible for appraising a theory. In Lacanian theory, the concept of the ‘big Other’ represents an imaginary form of authority that guaranties the proper function of reality. Lacan originally describes the big Other not as another subject but as the locus, seat or witness that the subject makes reference to as the guarantor of truth.[72]

In psychoanalytic terms, we can argue that the theories are castrated. The appraisal always presupposes a master, a Lacanian ‘subject supposed to know’ who verifies or falsifies: ‘The analyst is not an empiricist, probing the patient with different hypotheses, searching for proofs; instead, he embodies the absolute certainty … of the patient’s unconscious desire.’[73]

The dominant scientific publication process, and more specifically the blind peer-review process, constitutes a typical paradigm of appraisal, functioning as Lacan’s big Other within both university and scientific discourse. As Žižek notes, ‘The big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly virtual, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only in so far as subjects act as if it exists.’[74] It is commonly accepted that the identity of the reviewers must remain unknown for the obvious ethical reason of preventing bias that comes from personal beliefs, funding sources, institutional affiliations and others, ensuring the fairness of the publication process. The reviewers are elevated into a form of censorship, which although subjective at its core (reviewers are actual subjects), must be perceived as if it is not, since otherwise the scientific publication would lose its claims to objectivity and neutrality. The scientific enterprise assumes an internal split. Accepting that human rationality is limited and turning to the big Other for appraising our theories, the collective spirit presupposes itself to be cracked, and perpetually evolves.

This is how we can explain the universal appeal of science: it is founded upon its own always imperfect ability to get in direct touch with the real, with the whole of reality which exists independent of our gaze. Scientific theories derive their scientific character from this fact: they always lack. Žižek repeatedly stresses that ‘the Real is not a hard external kernel which resists symbolization, but the product of a deadlock in the process of symbolization’.[75] This statement is derived from Kant’s demarcation between the phenomenon and the noumenon – the ‘thing in-itself’. Whereas phenomena are appearances given to sensible intuition, noumena refer to the rest of reality which sensibility does not reach, they exist independently of our experience of it. Kant writes that ‘the concept of noumenon is merely a boundary concept … a concept setting limits to sensibility’.[76] This limit is crucial in Žižek’s appraisal of

Kant's transcendental system. Since reality is limited, incomplete, it must be supplemented by the perceiving subject's contribution with schemata, the transcendental products of imagination.[77] Only such an open reality allows the imagination to perform its transcendental, ontological function of completing reality with an artificial supplement.[78]

Manfredo Tafuri's critique of early twentieth-century avant-gardes, as expressed in *Architecture and Utopia*, is based precisely on the lack of openness that dominated high modernism, on the transference from ideology to the project, the project of utopia.[79] Ideologies were supposed to clear the way of old cultures and produce uncertainty for the future. Tafuri indicates that the moment ideology became 'ideology of the plan', utopia functioned against its own revolutionary spirit.[80] He argues that high modernism downgraded ideology from a sublime unapproachable object to an ordinary vulgar object. He objects to the physical presence and the mass production of architecture projects, that is to say, the lack of lack. As mentioned earlier, Lacan stresses that anxiety arises precisely when the usual structures of lack break down, confronting the subject with something too present, too real. Tafuri underscores that the Kantian sublime object was no longer at the level of the impossible, but it became excessively present.

However, Tafuri's anxiety and disappointment must be understood here in their full positivity: the failure of the modernist idea implied its potential. Similar to Hegel's idea that the French Revolution lacked a predetermined roadmap to freedom and that an initial period of terror was necessary to establish the conditions for post-revolutionary freedom, the actualisations of the modern movement can be understood as actions that actively generate the framework for their own refutation. Žižek, following Hegel, speculates that a choice always happens in two stages, an initial wrong choice is necessary, since it creates the conditions for the next step, its own overcoming.[81]

Tafuri described the self-destruction of modernism in architecture, not its defeat by and opposing of theory and architecture. Modernism, like other violent cuts in human history, is to be taken as the unconscious beginning or choice of a fundamental project in a similar sense to the way Aldo Rossi's irrational permanences function as the repressed forms of the rational city. Schelling implies that the rationality of our decisions is decided retroactively. A true beginning is based on a primordial deed which, if it were rational in the first place, would not have happened at all. 'If, in making a decision, somebody retains the right to re-examine his choice, he will never make a beginning at all.'[82]

As soon as the unconscious irrational turned into rational logos, when modernism was converted from an ideology into existent projects, anxiety and doubt emerged and opened up the conditions of modernism's appraisal. Therefore, appraisal does not necessarily refer to an external method applied to a group of theories in order to decide which is good for us while eliminating others. In Schelling, the primordial deed is a permanent deed, it is a permanent beginning which, after it occurs, functions as precedent, as 'the ground of the future actuality of another will'.[83] Appraisal, when seen as the perpetual retroactive formation of a theory, is understood to be immanent to theories, while leading to series of theories or long-lasting research programmes.[84]

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Biography

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