

The Epistemological Location of Karsten Harries' "Research Programme"

Karsten Harries' 'Research Programme' Revisited

Karsten Harries' contribution to the philosophy of architecture has been considerably wide. His claim that "architecture today faces a philosophical problem"¹ influenced a lot of architects and inspired a serious re-thinking of established educational and epistemological hierarchies related to the design of space. Harries' pioneering book *The Ethical Function of Architecture* opened up a whole new range of interesting problems and discussions that have to do with the cultural interactions between space and ethics. This work actually instigated a group of scholars and professors working and teaching in Greece to think anew how the various levels of the articulation of space imply meaningful social behavior, with moral and ethical dimensions and overtones. The result was the collective volume titled *Intersections of Space and Ethos*, edited by Kyriaki Tsoukala, Charikleia Pantelidou and myself (2015). Karsten Harries' excellent contribution to that volume solidified my belief that there are at least two philosophically oriented books that every architect or student of architecture should try to read: the above mentioned study *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997) and *Infinity and Perspective* (2001), also written by Harries.

¹ Harries 1997, p. 11.

In the present paper I advance the argument that Karsten Harries' philosophy of architecture can be likened to an emerging 'research programme'. I will try to draw the basic insights the epistemological location, the core ideas, or, if you like, the central lineaments of this programme, as far as the relation between ethics and space is concerned. I will then try to extend, expound or apply some of those ideas to the dichotomy between Modernity and Post-modernity, examining the Postmodern strategies through which the dominant 'aesthetic paradigm' was consolidated. Finally, I will briefly investigate the conceptual transpositions needed to transcend it, getting back to some propositions advanced by Harries in his published essays.

Imre Lakatos' Idea of a 'Research Programme' Applied to Harries' Thinking

Imre Lakatos, in his groundbreaking, extended essay *Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, claimed that a 'sophisticated methodological falsificationism' needs to re-think the history of science through the lens of an empirically progressive problemshift, using as a vehicle the idea of a 'series of theories'². He writes: "falsification is not simply a relation between a theory and the empirical basis, but a multiple relation between competing theories, the original 'empirical basis', and the empirical growth resulting from the competition"³. He names such a series of theories a 'research programme'. In that sense, history of science becomes a history of 'conceptual frameworks'⁴ embedded in various research programmes. According to Lakatos, every research programme consists of methodological rules or metaphysical principles: a *hard core* and a *protective belt*, where a positive heuristic advances auxiliary hypotheses, forming an 'order of research'⁵.

I claim that Karsten Harries' investigation concerning the relation between ethics and space constitutes a Lakatosian 'research programme' within the history, theory and philosophy of architecture. I also claim that its hard core was formulated in September 1975, when Harries published a 'brief programmatic essay'⁶ titled *The Ethical Function of Architecture* in the *Journal of Architectural Education*. In that text, Harries ascertains a relation between technological advancement and homelessness in the Modern age: technology and science create 'displacement'⁷. He writes: "Instead of genuine proximity we are offered increasingly only its perverted analogue: [...] the homogeneity and indifference of place"⁸. The destruction of boundaries creates a terror of space. Harries' criticism of the unhomeliness of Modern spaces is related to a deeper philosophical change: the transformation of man from an embodied self to a pure thinking subject during Modernity. A pure thinking subject is related to the objectivity of science and "objectivity demands homogeneity of place"⁹.

Thus we arrive at the *hard core* of Harries' 'research programme', formulated as a new request: "We demand heterogeneity and boundaries, periods and regions, sacred events and central places which can gather a manifold into a meaningful whole"¹⁰. This is where architecture enters Harries' argument, forming the *protective belt* around the above hard core. After all, architecture *creates* the environment which gives *shape* to man's activities. Could architecture help the fight against the homogeneity of Modern scientific and technological space? Can philosophy win architecture over to its cause? Probably yes. Harries claims that: "from the very beginning architecture has had an ethical function, helping to articulate and even to establish man's ethos"¹¹. Ethos means a dwelling place. Karsten Harries' research programme has acquired its basic lineaments: in order to transcend the homelessness of Modernity, we need architecture. Philosophy needs architecture as a vehicle to re-establish a lost ethos: a genuine dwelling articulated around *places*¹² and not technological, homogeneous space.

2 Lakatos 1970, p. 118.

3 Lakatos 1970, p. 120.

4 Lakatos 1970, p. 132 n.1.

5 Lakatos 1970, p. 132–135.

6 Harries 1997, p. xii.

7 Harries 1996, p. 394–395.

8 Ibid.

9 Harries 1996, p. 395.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Harries 1996, p. 396.

However, there appears to be a serious problem, an obstacle, an anomaly which prevents such a re-establishment. Architecture itself is wounded by Modernity's bad conscience. From this moment on, the philosophical argument starts building a drama: Harries thinks that the above ethical function of architecture is *lost* during the past two hundred years: "since the Enlightenment, we have found it difficult to take seriously the ethical function of architecture"¹³. Why is that so? Until now, the hard core of Harries' research programme makes clear in what sense his philosophical project (urgently) needs architecture, as a protective belt, in order to realize itself. To answer the above question, however, Harries will need to develop further auxiliary hypotheses of his research programme: those advancements of an empirically progressive problemshift will result in a book titled, again, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997). I claim that this book, published twenty years after the short essay bearing the same title, can be considered as an elaboration of the initial research programme I have just sketched.

13 Harries 1996, p. 396.

From the very beginning of the book, Harries reiterates his core claim: "I shall speak of the ethical function of architecture. 'Ethical' derives from 'ethos'. 'Ethos' here names the way human beings exist in the world: their way of dwelling. By the ethical function of architecture I mean its task to help articulate a common ethos"¹⁴. The book is dense and cannot be summarized here. However, I find within it an auxiliary hypothesis belonging to the protective belt of Harries' research programme that tries to answer the pressing question: what happened to architecture since the Enlightenment? What made architecture incapable of becoming a symbol of a community's moral values? What force distracts architecture from articulating a common, collective life?¹⁵ Harries is now ready to answer: the 'aesthetic approach' of architecture. Namely, a conception of architecture that ascribes to the 'art of building' the superficial role of the aesthetic decoration of an edifice¹⁶. That is a very important and apposite observation indeed, and, according to my opinion, one of the strongest arguments of the book: the ethical function of architecture is obscured by the 'aesthetic approach'. Harries asks: "Should architecture be concerned with creating important *aesthetic* events?"¹⁷. This auxiliary hypothesis proves the productivity of Harries' research programme. In the main body of the essay I will follow this hypothesis, expounding and building upon it, in order to see where it can lead us.

14 Harries 1997, p. 4.

15 Harries 1997, p. 362–364.

16 Harries 1996, p. 395–396; Harries 1997, p. 4.

17 Harries 1997: 6–7.

The Current Dominance of an Aesthetic 'Paradigm' in Architectural Discourse and Production

Harries is basically correct. I, too, argue that the political, social, environmental and *moral* implications of spatial design still do not receive enough attention in the current professional and educational debates, obscured as they are by the shadow of production and the speed of global information flows. The reasons for this conceptual and methodological regression are many. A first cause is the lack of established theoretical traditions and refined conceptual tools for the description, critique and evaluation of the built environment. A

second cause is the want of an ability to argue consistently and develop solid conceptual frameworks, because of the prevailing design empiricism. This empiricism is connected to a third cause: a deep ideological structure which does not allow for sustained consideration of the relationship between ethics and architecture in contemporary times. I would like to describe this structure as ‘the dominance of a persistent aesthetic “paradigm”’ in the history of art, the discourse on architecture and contemporary architectural production.

Here, of course, I understand the term ‘paradigm’ as defined by T.S. Kuhn in his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn terms as ‘paradigms’ those characteristic achievements of a scientific practice which “include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together—(and) provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research”¹⁸. If it is legitimate to transfer Kuhn’s terminology into architectural thought and praxis, then the dominant aesthetic paradigm refers to the discourse on architecture and its modes of production which indicate its importance exclusively on the basis of morphological terms and sensible criteria, visual rules and shape-grammar applications. The dubious principles of this aesthetic paradigm have not eluded the attention of scholars. Karsten Harries describes the ‘aesthetic approach’ to the art of building as a conception which regards the role of architecture as being that of a morphological decoration of a functional edifice¹⁹. The emergence of the aesthetic approach is related to the old, but still influential, dogma of “art for art’s sake”²⁰. Harries characterizes this emergence as the “transformation of the work of art from a world-shaping power, from work having an ethical function, into an aesthetic object”²¹.

18 Kuhn 1996, p. 10.

19 Harries 1997, p. 2–4, 10–13, 23–26.

20 Harries 1997, p. 16–18.

21 Harries 1997, p. 164.

The Postmodern Critique of the Ethics and Ideology of the Modern Movement

I would like to argue that the consolidation of the ‘aesthetic paradigm’ in architecture was realized mainly within the framework of the Postmodern era. The sweeping criticism by Postmodernism of *what it itself understood* as the ‘ethics’ of Modernism led to the general scepticism of theorists and critics regarding the moralization of architectural praxis. The most characteristic representative of this critique is Robert Venturi, who essentially inaugurated Postmodern rhetoric. In his emblematic work *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, published in 1966, Venturi articulates the commonplaces of Postmodern theoretical suspicion of the ethical character of the Modern Movement. He writes: “Architects can no longer afford to be intimidated by the puritanically moral language of orthodox Modern architecture [...]. More is not less [...] less is a bore”²². With this direct attack on Mies van der Rohe (‘less is more’), Venturi also discloses the new Postmodern values: *complexity* and *contradiction*.

22 Harries with Venturi 1966, p. 16–17.

Charles Jencks, a critical adversary of the Modern Movement and advocate of Postmodernism during the 1970s and 1980s, writes, in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, “The modern movement of architecture, conceived in the 1850s as a call to morality, and in the 1920s (in its Heroic Period) as a call to social transformation, found itself unwittingly compromised,

first by practice and then by acceptance”²³. Here Jencks formulates, without further analysis, another commonplace of Postmodern discourse: the direct correlation of the social, reformatory programmes of the Modern Movement with a ‘puritanical’ morality originating from the nineteenth century. A few years later, the same critic draws analogies between the Modern Movement of the twentieth century and a fundamentalist religion, a Protestant orthodoxy which imposed taboos and moral inhibitions on young architects. In this unprecedented and immoderate assault, the Modern Movement is presented as a reactionary and oppressive authority, a fanatical and conservative ideology²⁴.

23 Jencks 1984, p. 26.

This vehement critique brought to light the deeper moral relativism and subjectivism of Postmodernism itself. The Postmodern disdain of the ethical problem is connected with a broader dismissal of objective principles and valid laws of architectural creation, namely, an attitude which Jencks and Silver call ‘Adhocism’. As they write: “We live in a pluralist world confronted by competing philosophies, and knowledge is in an ad hoc, fragmented state prior to some possible synthesis”²⁵. The recognition of this Postmodern pluralistic condition leads to ethical scepticism to such a degree that none of the antagonistic philosophies which Jencks and Silver mention can claim exclusive truth and absolute validity.

24 Jencks 1989, p. 7–29.

The demotion of the ethical horizon of architecture as an objective measure of design decisions is paradigmatically reflected in the philosophy of Philip Johnson. This representative par excellence of Postmodern opportunism professes unequivocally his ethical amorality, of which he seems to feel proud. He writes:

25 Jencks and Silver 2006, p. 49.

“I am of the opinion that we have no faiths. I have none...Philosophically, it seems to me we today are anarchistic, nihilistic, solipsistic, certainly relativist [...] cynical. Vive la difference, we live in a pluralistic society. I can only talk about me”²⁶.

26 Jencks with Johnson 2006b, p. 246.

Postmodern nihilism acquired its natural outcome and expression from what was called ‘deconstructivist’ architecture. It is no accident that Johnson curated a particular exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1988. In the text which accompanied that exhibition he reminded us that the development of Deconstruction in architecture entertains “none of the messianic fervor of the modern movement, none of the exclusivity of that catholic and Calvinist cause. Deconstructivist architecture represents no movement; it is not a creed”²⁷.

27 Johnson 2000, p. 677.

The obvious aversion of Postmodern thought to any ethical commitment or value which is reminiscent of the Modern Movement is striking. It constitutes a negative position which holds together the Postmodern rhetoric. Nevertheless, is this ethical apathy of the Postmodernists well founded? Leonidas Koutsoumpos would disagree: he claims the ethical dimension is located in the internal core of architectural praxis as a design process²⁸. Consequently, what legitimizes Postmodern architecture to ignore this evident ethical dimension of architecture?

28 Koutsoumpos 2010, p. 16–27.

David Watkin: The Ambiguous Interrelation between Modernism and Moralizing

The problematic nature of Postmodern theory is exposed not only by its moral relativism and nihilism but also by the historical assessments it makes. One of the dominant conceptions of Postmodern historiography associates Modernism with the ‘Puritanical’ moralizing of the nineteenth century (Pugin, Ruskin, Arts & Crafts). A characteristic example of this perception is voiced by John Wilton-Ely in “The Rise of the Professional Architect in England,” where he writes about A.W.N. Pugin:

If we set aside Pugin’s fervent belief in the Gothic as the only valid form of expression, the criteria laid down in the *Contrasts* and in his later work, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture* of 1841, also anticipated much of the concern for functional planning, structural expression, and the nature of materials at the heart of Modern Movement theory.²⁹

29 Wilton-Ely 1977, p. 195.

The postmodern rhetorical argumentation which dismisses Modern ethics is founded on such a genealogy, consolidated by the historian David Watkin in *Morality and Architecture. The Development of a Theme in Architectural History and Theory from the Gothic Revival to the Modern Movement* (1977). The subtitle defines Watkin’s historiographical undertaking: to fabricate a cohesive and continuous narration which unveils the ‘theme’ of the relationship between morality and architecture from the Gothic Revival of the nineteenth century to the Modern Movement of the twentieth century.

Watkin argues with reference to such different writers as A.W.N. Pugin, John Ruskin, E.-E. Viollet-le-Duc, W.R. Lethaby, Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Nikolaus Pevsner, Sigfried Giedion, and Furneaux Jordan, analysing works and texts with very diverse starting-points and intentions³⁰. Consequently, although his professed critical target is the ‘Whig’ conception of history and historicism, as determined by Herbert Butterfield and Karl Popper—namely the predisposition to construct unified, holistic narrations as the unfolding of a ‘spirit of the age’³¹—he himself commits exactly the same error. The genealogy constructed in this extremely problematic work is full of reductions, logical jumps, simplifications and omissions³². This happens because the writer does not confine himself to ‘objective’ history but launches an extreme polemical assault against Modernism as a whole³³.

30 Wilton-Ely with Watkin 1977, p. 1–111.

31 Watkin 1977, pp: vii–viii, 6–7, 113–115; Watkin 2001, p. xv–xxxiii.

32 Watkin 1977, p. 38–39.

33 Watkin 1977, p. 8–14; 2001: vii–xiii.

One of the principal Postmodern historians who forged the connection between the ethics of Modernism and the puritanical moralizing of the nineteenth century is a scholar whom Jencks and Kropf deliberately assign to ‘traditionalism’ or the conservative wing of Postmodern thought³⁴. The rhetorical-genealogical construction by Watkin reveals the empiricism underlying his scepticism and conservatism³⁵. Watkin’s extreme empiricism is supported by an absolute individualism, a fanatical faith in tradition and a restrictive understanding of architecture mainly as a process of ‘image-making’ and ‘style’ without any social, philosophical, ethical and political content³⁶.

34 Jencks & Kropf 2006, p. 174–175.

35 Watkin 1977, p. 14.

36 Watkin 1977: 10–12, 115.

Postmodern Reactions to the Ethics Embedded in Basic Design Principles of the Modern Movement

Apart from the Postmodern assault on a caricature of the Modern Movement on the level of general theory and ideology and on the level of the history of ideas, Postmodernism reacted against the ethics of Modernism on the level of design principles as well. This reaction related both to the ethics of the absence of ornament and to the ethics of the truth of construction. The reaction to the absence of ornament constitutes an important aspect of Postmodern thinking. Joseph Rykwert reinstates the discussion about ornament as a problem of meaning³⁷ which Modern rationalism was not able to answer: he thinks that ‘non-figurative’ architecture has reached its end because it has failed to communicate with the ‘common man’ through form³⁸.

37 Rykwert 2006, p. 65.

38 Rykwert 2008, p. 375–377.

Modern design ethics called for the absence of ornament. Postmodern thinkers seem to retrogress to the Pre-Modern ethics of decorative expressiveness. The most characteristic example of this regression is voiced by Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi with the notable idea of the ‘decorated shed’ as an answer to the élitist autonomy of the Modernist purist language. We should not be surprised by the fact that their preoccupation with the mass culture of advertisement and ‘pop’ architecture invokes for its justification the eclecticism and the picturesque of the styles of the nineteenth century. They write that the conventional, commercial architecture of Postmodernism “may lead us to reevaluate Ruskin’s horrifying statement ‘architecture is the decoration of structure’”³⁹.

39 Scott Brown & Venturi 2008, p. 391.

Confirming the interrelation between Postmodern formalism and historicist architecture, the ‘Radical Eclecticism’ which Charles Jencks proposed⁴⁰ seems to relate directly to the stylistic eclecticism of the later nineteenth century, which Modernism attempted to transgress. The revival of eclecticism in the context of Postmodernism laid the foundations for the emergence (or the resurgence) of what I call, following Karsten Harries, the ‘aesthetic paradigm’; namely, an approach to architectural design which is primarily interested in the aesthetic and ‘communicational’ attributes of the work’s form⁴¹, neglecting its ethical consequences.

40 Jencks 2006a, p. 86–87.

41 Jencks 2006b, p. 131.

Another aspect of Postmodern rhetoric reacted against a second constitutional principle of Modern design ethics, namely the idea of the purity and the truth of construction. As far back as 1954, Philip Johnson, in an ironic lecture at Yale University titled ‘The Seven Crutches of Modern Architecture’ renounced the crutch of ‘clear structure’, which he characterized as the most ‘troublesome’ and ‘dangerous’ of all the ideas for the control of form which the ethics of Modernism had bequeathed⁴².

42 Johnson 2006a, p. 209–210.

Forty years later, the idea of a stable structure as the core of architecture (Wagner) was called into question by the ‘phenomenalism’ of Toyo Ito. Ito laid emphasis on the transient dimension of social events and elevated the swirling and flowing texture of natural and cultural information as necessary for the confutation of architectural duration. According to Ito, architecture in the Postmodern era is necessarily precarious, unstable, without permanent

foundation, without a 'structure' and an order, reflecting the dynamic world of Postmodern mobility. Architecture as a phenomenon, as a changing image, as information on an event, is contrasted with architecture as an invariable structure, as a solid and material reality⁴³.

43 Ito 2008, p. 539–541.

Cecil Balmond performed an equally stringent critique of the Modern idea of rigid 'structure' which he interprets as a static, Cartesian order that does not allow movement and change, complexity and ambiguity, hybridity and juxtaposition. His counter-proposal is what he calls 'the informal', namely a new dynamic approach to the concept of construction as a relationship between events. Balmond's irrational concept of emergence led to a renewed emphasis on an inspiration of form, on sensible surface and texture. It is no accident that Balmond invokes again a new Gothic style, a neo-Romanticism in the digital age⁴⁴. The Postmodern conception of structure as trace and episode dismisses the ethics of rationalism, hierarchical logical coherence and linear sequence which supported the Modern Movement: it advocates the concepts of chaos, intuition, instinct and impulse⁴⁵. The emphasis on transformational events, singularities and topological interactions gave rise, during the 1990s, to what John Hendrix calls 'bioconstructivism'⁴⁶. Essentially a kind of computer-generated organicism, a neo-Romantic bio-mimesis of the digital era, 'bioconstructivism' explores moments of structural instability or catastrophe.

44 Balmond 2008, p. 556–558.

45 Balmond 2008, p. 556–557.

46 Hendrix 2013, p. 193–196.

According to Gevork Hartoonian, in the context of the Postmodern dismissal of the ethics of the stability and purity of structure, we have witnessed a demystification of the classical discourse about construction⁴⁷. I should add that the hierarchical differentiation between the deep level of the core, of the structure as 'essence,' and the surface level of form is equally deconstructed. In the Postmodern era, a hierarchized idea of the whole does not exist: rather, a conception of 'composition' prevails, seen as a summation of contingent juxtapositions between fragments which do not retain any logical and representational relation to a presupposed cohesive totality. This logic of *montage* restores, in the foreground, the independent morphological value of the fragment, the dressing, the decorative shape, at the expense of a structure in force: it renders Gottfried Semper's thought dominant again. Thus, the resuscitation of the thinking of the German theorist by researchers into new digital technologies of design such as Bernard Cache is not symptomatic. The Postmodern rejection of the Modern ethics of the structure and the new emphasis on the decorative role of the superficial morphology of buildings make Semper's 'dressing principle'⁴⁸ increasingly timely⁴⁹.

47 Hartoonian 2008, p. 549–550.

48 Semper 2004, p. 248–250.

49 Cache 2008, p. 560–561.

Postmodern reactions to the ethics of the absence of ornament and to the ethical lucidity and truth of construction have usually resulted in a relativistic individualism of 'anything goes,' a manneristic aestheticism of 'styles' conceived as personal signatures. The architectural structure lost its ethical content, which sprang from its universal reference to a common social reality. At the same time, it could no longer constitute the firm and shared nucleus for the control of form, as happened during Modernism. The 'form' of

the Postmoderns does not have any deeper structure to refer to and to correlate with. It moves in a superficial neutrality of a 'Semperian' coating. Modern space derived the possibility of its signification through a common, social reference of the form to the 'structure'. This social reference was founded on an ethics of the 'structure' which was articulated on a deeper conceptual level, and that 'structure' assembled the common values of culture as a collective order of space.

The Postmodern 'solution' of the design problem led architectural praxis into a sum of individualistic gesticulations of the narcissistic star architects and an unprecedented dwindling of the ethical engagements of space. Simultaneously, the architect as a subject was 'liberated' from any moral inhibitions and responsibilities towards the social body. She/he administered the forms of architectural work as arbitrary masks of a problematic social organization, as dressings and images which refer to the rationale of fashion and the mass culture of advertisements. Consequently, most large-scale, contemporary architectural products constitute astounding and impressive technological achievements, coupled with a certain lack of humanistic content and values: they constitute mechanical feats with a serious problem with regard to meaning. This 'new pragmatism', fostered by novel digital technologies and technocracy, has led to a situation which Mallgrave and Contandriopoulos term "The End of Theory"⁵⁰.

50 Mallgrave Contandriopoulos 2008, p. 562–563.

Towards a New Ethos of Place

Given all this, I would argue that aesthetic persistence in the concept of 'form' and sensible surface which characterizes a large part of Postmodern, Deconstructivist and contemporary architectural production has probably come to a dead end regarding the possibility of architecture articulating a world of meaning. Moreover, the dominant formalism of the so-called star architects is unable to respond to new environmental, social and human demands of the everyday life-world. A 'paradigm change' from formal aesthetics to spatial ethics would perhaps be a more appropriate framework for meeting those urgent demands. Kuhn wrote: "when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them"⁵¹. A change of world view can only be effected as a set of conceptual transpositions. I shall now propose, very briefly, that we should transcend the concept of 'form' in favour of the concept of 'space' as place.

51 Kuhn 1996, p. 111.

'Space' is one of the core concepts which architects often use to make claims about design intentions (Boudon 1971). A historical construction, 'space' essentially emerged during the seventeenth century, as an organic part of the nascent natural sciences and the Scientific Revolution (Jammer 1993). Architecture was late in adopting it: in fact, August Schmarsow's inaugural address at Leipzig, delivered in 1893, was probably one of the first instances where the concept of 'space' was organically incorporated within architectural discourse. He wrote: "Our sense of space and spatial imagination press toward spatial creation; they seek their satisfaction in art. We call this art architecture; in plain words, it is the creatress of space"⁵². Van de Ven's (almost

52 Schmarsow 1994, p. 287.

forgotten) study traced the repercussions of those ideas during the Modern Movement in the first decades of the twentieth century (Van de Ven 1987).

‘Space’ is a Modern, dynamic concept that could help us override formalism, since it encompasses many levels of the articulation of the human environment: use, function, scale, appropriation, modification and habits. However, there are two prerequisites: first, that our focus should be on the creation of spaces *as places*, trying to read the ‘personhood of place’⁵³ or the ‘genius loci’⁵⁴ and the history of each territory; second, that we should distinguish very carefully between morality and ethos. *Morality* usually means a set of established rules for the governing of human conduct. Either these norms are externally imposed by a dominant class and a ruling power or they simply express a subjective aggregate of utilitarian strategies for the advancement of individual self-interest. Conversely, “ethos [...] names the way human beings exist in the world: their way of dwelling”⁵⁵. Karsten Harries makes the following claim: “Time and space must be shaped in such a way that man is assigned a dwelling place, an *ethos*”⁵⁶. Ethos therefore has to do with the way man dwells in his everyday existence.

‘Ethos’ is a common world of moral imperatives that concern the collective way of life in our everyday existence together. A spatial ethos is what we are after: a lived space scaled to the everyday life-world. Ethos is place. Perhaps G.W.F. Hegel’s concept of *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life) better explains what ethos really stands for. Hegel, in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, expounds the dialectical development of objective Spirit. The first two phases or moments in this development are *abstract right* (*das Recht*) and *morality* (*Moralität*). Since they are one-sided concepts, they have to be unified on a higher level. In particular, ‘morality,’ covering only the formal and subjective aspect of ethics, that is, the interior of the moral will which recognizes only itself, has to turn to the idea of organized society: to the concept of ‘concrete ethical life,’ *Sittlichkeit*. “Concrete ethics is for Hegel social ethics”⁵⁷.

Sittlichkeit is ‘the ethical substance,’ the union of moral subjectivity and objectivity, the unity of the universal and the particular: in other words, the social, political and institutional conditions for freedom. According to Terry Pinkard, Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit* captures “the concrete mores and ethos of a culture”, where “the self posits itself as a co-member, as it were, of the moral world”⁵⁸. ‘Ethical life’ constitutes a higher unity of multiple people who share a concrete, common world, an ethos, a common good: what Hegel calls ‘the ethical’ (*das Sittliche*) or ‘the ethical realm’. He writes:

The ethical [*Das Sittliche*] [...] appears as custom [*Sitte*]; and the habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all-pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence. It is spirit living and present as a world, and only thus does the substance of spirit begin to exist as spirit.⁵⁹

53 Caicco 2007.

54 Norberg-Schulz 1980.

55 Harries 1997, p. 4.

56 Harries 1996: 395.

57 Copleston 2003, p. 209.

58 Pinkard 1986, p. 214, 220.

59 Hegel 1991, p. 195.

We should understand ‘the ethical’ or the ‘ethical life’ as an intersubjective, public, shared set of background principles and duties which constitute necessary types of concrete ethical relationships. Hegel writes: “The ethical substance [...] is the actual spirit of a family and a people. The ethical is not abstract like the good, but it is intensely actual”⁶⁰.

60 Hegel 1991, p. 197.

My belief is that architecture should express this common ethos, the concrete moral spirit, the Hegelian *Sittlichkeit*, through space. Architecture should be conceived as public art par excellence which embodies and crystallizes the poetry of ethos or *Sittlichkeit* in actual places. Moving away from ‘form’ as an expression of individual tastes and self-interests, *Sittlichkeit* as shared space could help us rethink architecture’s possible contribution to the articulation of a common, collective way of life: Karsten Harries’ *ethos*.

Hypermodernity and Ethos: Dilemmas and Orientations

The obvious objection to such arguments would be: but can we still think and conceive a ‘common ethos’ in our hypermodern times of extreme individualism? After all, globalization has created what has been called a ‘meta-moral’ society. Instead of a normative ethics of duty and free will, beyond individual differences or particularities, do we not live according to a new ethics of desire, pleasure and personal interests?⁶¹ Kyriaki Tsoukala writes: “In the post-modern age [...] the ethic of propriety was replaced by the ethic of happiness... an ethic that places the personal good before the social, catholic good”⁶². Can we still advance the vision of an ‘ethos of a social body’⁶³ in a post-humanist age where subjects have become singularities and any subordination of the individual to universal norms seems conservative and outdated? Moreover, Harries’ call for an authentic dwelling, modulated by ethos, can seem nostalgic: his indictment against rationalism and technology may sound retrograde, in an age characterized by digital interactions, mobility and nomadic subjectivities. What is the value of ‘home’ in a ‘global village’ where interconnectivity uproots human beings, leaving behind no ‘sense of place’?

61 Tsoukala 2011, p. 225–226.

62 Tsoukala 2011, p. 226.

63 Tsoukala 2011, p. 228.

Karsten Harries is well aware of all those possible objections. And he has provided us with a recently developed auxiliary hypothesis, in order to save the hard core of his research programme, and our argument too. In his extended essay titled “On the Ethical Significance of Space and Shaping Space,” he elaborates on the need to recognize ethos as a necessary dimension of everyday life. However, he re-inscribes that demand within a more developed, wider understanding of the human existential condition in Modernity. Hannah Arendt, in her classic study, revealed the tensions that permeate the human condition in general⁶⁴. Extending Arendt’s argument, Harries maintains that Modernity’s existential condition is characterized by the legitimate claims of two opposite psychic tendencies: the dialectical tension between *freedom* and *place*, between *Fernweh*, a longing for distant spaces and adventure, and *Heimweh*, a nostalgic longing for home and stability. He writes: “Freedom and home call us in opposite directions”⁶⁵.

64 Arendt 1998, p. 17–21.

65 Harries 1998.

Therefore, to claim an ethical function of architecture or an ethical paradigm in the creation of places does not mean that technology, mobility and freedom are neglected or ignored. It means simply recognizing that “freedom must be bound”⁶⁶. Technological space and place seem to be engaged in a constant strife. That we cannot avoid: “Centrifugal and centripetal tendencies war and compete in us human beings”⁶⁷. However, we can articulate an ethos capable of balancing between them, when technology seems to override the sense of place, uprooting our dwelling habits. Architecture can again become helpful in this balancing act, because, as Harries claims: “More immediately and more fully than any other art, architecture [...] re-presents the essential strife between spirit and matter [...] architecture is needed to recall the human being to the whole self”⁶⁸.

Karsten Harries’ research programme is not a nostalgic call to a lost authenticity: “what matters is not to return home, but to long for home” (1998). It simply suggests a new direction for architectural thinking, a new orientation: against technological deterritorialization and disembodied, digital dematerialization, Harries wants to turn thoughtfully *towards the earth*: “In the wake of astronautics, astronautics invites an altogether new post-post-modern geocentrism”⁶⁹. “Needed is a new geocentrism. That should guide the way we build”⁷⁰.

66 Harries 1998.

67 Ibid.

68 Harries 1997, p. 361–362.

69 Harries 2001, p. 331.

70 Harries 2015, p. 137.

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