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Rediscovering the 'Space of Place' in the Era of the 'Space of Flows'

Karsten Harries' Timely Philosophy of Architecture

The work of the American philosopher Karsten Harries across a spectrum of thematic fields in the course of a long and creative philosophical career that started around the 1960s and still continues today, has been exemplary, nowhere more so than in the philosophy of architecture. It is no exaggeration to claim that he has established himself as an authority in this field, and his book, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997)—whose oxymoronic title already implicitly indexes his critique of functionalism—could perhaps be regarded as exemplary in this respect. What I would like to do here is to argue that one of the many accomplishments of the book concerns Harries' recuperation of the ethical value of architecture which instantiates what Manuel Castells calls the "space of place(s)", and that in doing so, he has fleshed out an important bulwark against the contemporary onslaught against this inalienably human (and humanising) spatial mode. To be able to grasp the significance of this claim, a detour is called for.

Castells on the 'Space of Flows'

We live in the time of what Manuel Castells[1] has described as the "space of flows", the newly dominant mode of space which he distinguishes from the previously dominant spatial mode, the "space of places". Although the currently hegemonic 'space of flows' has its roots in historical phenomena such as the network of roads constructed under the aegis of the Roman Empire and, centuries later, the railroad system in Europe, America and other parts of the world—during which time the 'space of places' remained the dominant mode—more recently (since the late 20th century) it has been thrust to dominance by the technological revolution in electronic communications, which comprises the basis of its operation throughout what Castells calls the "network society" of today. The hegemonic role of the 'space of flows' manifests itself, among other phenomena, in the frequency with which individuals use their electronic communications devices such as mobile phones, tablets, lap-

1 Castells 2010, p. 407–459.

tops and desktop computers, which mediate their 'entry' into 'virtual-' or 'cyberspace'. Just as the latter is an instantiation of 'the space of flows', so too are the departure halls and elite lounges at airports and train stations—in short, all those spaces that are connected to the 'flows' that drive the fast-paced economic and related social activities characteristic of the early 21st century. Castells describes the "space of flows" as follows[2]:

> our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols. Flows are not just one element of the social organization: they are the expression of processes *dominating* our economic, political, and symbolic life. If such is the case, the material support of the dominant processes in our societies will be the ensemble of elements supporting such flows, and making materially possible their articulation in simultaneous time. Thus, I propose the idea that there is a new spatial form characteristic of social practices that dominate and shape the network society: the space of flows. *The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows*. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society. Dominant social practices are those which are embedded in dominant social structures. By dominant structures I understand those arrangements of organizations and institutions whose internal logic plays a strategic role in shaping social practices and social consciousness for society at large.

Given its pre-eminence, the space of flows has transformed societies and cities globally, so that, in the place of the modern city, with its city centre and surrounding residential suburbs, one has witnessed the emergence of mega-cities and de-centred metropolitan regions[3] with multifunctional nodal differentiation regarding financial, manufacturing, communication and other economic activities. Put simply, the space of flows has incrementally reorganised urban spaces across the globe for the optimal functioning of economic activities made possible by the advent of advanced electronic communications, of which the internet is the paradigmatic embodiment.

Castells[4] reminds one, however, that people still experience the "space of places" (the majority of people worldwide still *live* in these place-spaces)—in their homes, most obviously—but insists that these spaces are incrementally subordinated to the hegemonic space of flows, as may be seen in a city like Irvine, California, where it has encroached so far that it is only really the spaces within homes that still escape its reach[5]. However, in other cities, like Paris for example, one still encounters urban areas that successfully resist the space of flows, of which Bellevue, Paris, and Las Ramblas in Barcelona, Spain, are paradigmatic instances[6] that continue to provide the oppor-

2 Castells 2010, p. 442.

3 Castells 2010, p. xxxiii, 434–439.

4 Castells 2010, p. 453.

5 Castells 2010, p. 457–458.

6 Castells 2010, p. 453–456.

tunity for people to live meaningful lives of variegated social interaction in an identifiable place. Contrasting with the space of flows (but in cognate terms), Castells[7] defines a "place" as follows: A place is a locale whose form, function, and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity.

7 Castells 2010, p. 453.

In other words, "physical contiguity" makes 'time-sharing' social interaction possible in spaces of place. In contrast, what is novel about the 'space of flows' of contemporary society is the fact that it makes such time-sharing social interaction possible in the *absence* of the physical contiguity of social actors—on a daily basis one experiences communication with others on the opposite side of the globe in so-called 'real time' by virtue of the communicational flows made possible by the internet. This is one instance that illustrates the fundamental role of electronic communication networks in the dominance of the space of flows; another is the quasi-instantaneous financial transactions that are continually performed in the space of flows—'virtual' transactions that have very concrete effects in people's lives. As we shall see below, although compatible with Harries' conception of place-space, Castells' notion of 'place' differs from it insofar as its formulation enables Castells to differentiate it from the 'space of flows', while Harries does not face such a requirement and can therefore explore other dimensions of the 'space of place(s)', augmenting Castells' perspicacious sociological circumspection with his own philosophical-phenomenological acuity.

A paradigmatic cinematic instance of what it is like to inhabit the space of flows on a virtually continuous basis (and of the ultimately deleterious effects of this on human beings) is afforded by Jason Reitman's film *Up in the Air* (2009), whose protagonist, Ryan Bingham (George Clooney), virtually 'lives' in the space of flows. Bingham is a professional consultant who specialises in 'terminating' the services of company employees, and to this (rather unpleasant) end he travels from one American city to the other, informing unfortunate staff members of their economic fate. Bingham owns an apartment, which he hardly uses because of his sustained peregrinations. On one of his trips, he meets a professional businesswoman, Alex Goran (Vera Farmiga), who has a comparably hectic travel schedule, and a casual affair develops between them, made possible by the number of times that their paths cross in the 'space of flows' comprising air travel and standard chain-hotel accommodation. Bingham reaches a point where he feels the need to strengthen their tenuous acquaintance, and arrives on Alex's doorstep with the intention of surprising her, only to find out that she is married, with a family. When a furious Alex confronts him, making it clear that (paradoxically, given the hegemony of the 'space of flows') her family represents her 'real' life, effectively relegating their affair to insignificance, Ryan is struck by the rootlessness of his own life, and his subsequent actions may be seen as an attempt to compensate for this paralysing realisation. The film therefore represents a significant fictional exploration of the ultimate price one pays for relinquishing the 'space of places' in favour of becoming a denizen of the 'space of flows'. In so doing, it draws attention to the residual human need for the space of places, even on the part of someone who, for all practical purposes, has made the

flux of flow-space their 'habitat'. As I shall argue below, the work of Karsten Harries—much of which resonates with my claim that *Up in the Air* instantiates the 'existential' consequences of living an entirely 'rootless' (or homeless) life—can be understood as an exploration of (among other things) the indispensable role of a sense of 'place' in the human experience of space, even at a time when technology has freed human beings from what Harries[8] refers to as the "tyranny of place" of yesteryear.

8 Harries 1997, p. 152–168.

It is no accident that Castells[9] regards postmodernist architecture as the embodiment of the space of flows insofar as its ahistorical, 'floating' character demonstrates its lack of rootedness in a specific region or cultural domain. According to him postmodernist architecture has severed its ties with the historical cultural context in which such buildings are found—which one might, paradoxically, regard as being their historically defining feature. In his words[10]:

9 Castells 2010, p. 447–450.

10 Castells 2010, p. 449.

> what most postmodernism does is to express, in almost direct terms, the new dominant ideology: the end of history and the supersession of places in the space of flows. Because only if we are at the end of history can we now mix up everything we knew before [...] Because we do not belong any longer to any place, to any culture, the extreme version of postmodernism imposes its codified code-breaking logic anywhere something is built. The liberation from cultural codes hides in fact the escape from historically rooted societies. In this perspective, postmodernism could be considered the architecture of the space of flows.

Castells' assessment of postmodernist architecture resonates with that of Karsten Harries, who highlighted its new 'aestheticism' in a paper that appeared as early as the 1980s. Reflecting on "post-modernism's ambiguous failure" in the light of Huxtable's accusation, that it was repeating the supposed "sin" of modernists, to allow their buildings to be "boring", Harries[11] arrives at the conclusion that the terms "post-modern" and "post-modernism" mark the "bad conscience" or "self-doubt" of modernity—its "shadow". In the light of Castells' work, there is good reason for modernity to have a bad conscience. After all, the deleterious effects of the space of flows highlighted by Castells are the consequences of a process of (particularly technological) modernisation, of which Harries has been equally critical in terms that resonate with Castells'[12], and which may finally be seen as endangering the very planetary eco-system on which humans and other life-forms depend[13/14]. Moreover, Harries perceives a telling clue in Robert Venturi's characterisation of postmodernist architecture with the phrase, "less is a bore"—a reversal, by one of the champions of postmodernist architecture, of Mies van der Rohe's minimalist modernist slogan, "less is more"[15]:

11 Harries 1985, p. 53–54.

12 Harries 1997, p. 12.

13 Castells 2010, p. 494–499.

14 Olivier 2013, p. 20–39, and Olivier 2014, p. 122–155.

15 Harries 1985, p. 54.

> This suggests that post-modernism represents not so much a humanistic or ethical as an aesthetic response to modernism, more precisely, a quite specific aesthetic response: the pursuit of the interesting.

It is not difficult to grasp the link between an architecture in pursuit of the "interesting" (which, as Harries reminds one, presupposes a knowledge of established conventions) and what Castells, with the benefit of hindsight, could label the characteristic "liberation from cultural codes" by postmodernist architecture. What Harries and Castells are talking about is the same architectural phenomenon, and both respond to it in a manner that clearly reflects their concern in the face of something that is symptomatic of what one might call a certain 'alienation' from historically oriented societies (Castells) and from the ethical (Harries), which suggests a "sense of place" or "ethos"[16]. I would like to argue that Harries' text, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997), can be understood against this backdrop, even if the importance of Harries' contribution to the philosophy of architecture cannot be reduced to this[17].

16 Harries 1997, p. 4.

17 Olivier 1998.

Harries and the Recuperation of the 'Space of Place(s)'

In the chapter "Space and Place"[18] Harries addresses the consequences of what he terms the "attack on distance", brought about by the rapid technological progress, discussed above. In confirmation of Castells' claims regarding the dominance of 'the space of flows' and the concomitant erosion of the 'space of places' he refers to the "diminished power of place" and observes[19]:

18 Harries 1997, p. 168–178.

19 Harries 1997, p. 172.

> The full consequences of this attack on distance remain uncertain. It seems difficult not to welcome the way it has helped free human beings from what I have called the accident of location: no longer is place destiny. Such liberation, however, is attended by its frightening shadow: the attack on distance also threatens us with a homelessness never before known.

Arguably, Castells' sociological investigation into the structural dynamics of his eponymous 'network society' is a reasonably accurate indication of these consequences in social and economic terms, particularly considering that Castells' book first appeared in 1996 (a year before Harries'). Nevertheless, in the second edition's new Preface[20] Castells intimates that what he wrote in the first edition is still valid, and developments during the intervening years have confirmed the accuracy of his social diagnosis. Harries' assessment echoes that of Castells—note how his allusion to the "homelessness" that is inseparable from the technological overcoming of distance chimes with Castells' insight, that the technologically induced space of flows brings with it "rootlessness". But because Harries approaches this state of affairs from a philosophical-architectural perspective, he is able to foreground different manifestations of the decline in the importance of place, as opposed to space, and, moreover, offer reasons why humanity still needs an architecture of 'place', despite the ostensible technological liberation from the "tyranny of place" that preceded the advent of the modern world.

20 Castells 2010, p. xliv.

It may not be easy to argue in favour of such an architecture, considering that modern living goes hand in hand with a diminution in the importance of place. As Harries[21] points out, today, human beings are all, in a specific

21 Harries 1997, p. 172.

sense, “displaced persons,” given the readiness with which people relocate to different houses, to other cities or even countries, depending on where they find work. Today, people no longer ‘dwell’ in the sense that Heidegger insisted one should[22], to be able to live an authentically human life, where all the fundamental human activities are integrated within the context of a house as ‘dwelling’; instead, people tend to ‘reside’. Recall the fictional example of Ryan Bingham in the film *Up in the Air* as paradigmatic in this regard. The question is whether capitulating to the (predominantly economic) demands of contemporary life would not be too high a price to pay; would it not mean (or as Castells would say, is it not already the case) that one has to relinquish experiences which are indispensable for a recognisably human existence? Harries[23] singles out the spurious promise of electronic communication regarding proximity to someone else (even talking to a loved one over Skype is no substitute for genuine, tactile closeness), and related to this, the loss of intimacy brought about by the collapse of personal distance—curiously, distance turns out to be a prerequisite for intimacy.

22 Harries 1997, p. 152–154.

23 Harries 1997, p. 172.

Unlike Castells, who construes the transformation of space and time in contemporary society as the consequence of a technological revolution that culminated in the invention of the internet, Harries[24], delving deeper, reminds one that such technological ‘progress’ is the actualisation of “the commitment to objectivity” that underpins both technology and its historical (if not ontological) precursor, modern science—a commitment that goes back to even before Descartes’ famous *Cogito* argument, which frees thinking from the perspective-bound body, to Nicholas of Cusa’s thought-experiment that demonstrated the relativity of perspective and, correlatively, the infinity of centre-less space. Despite the exhilaration on the part of some, in the face of such spatial infinity, its flipside was terror and an awareness—articulated by Nietzsche, among others—of its nihilistic consequences[25]. What Harries terms “the terror of space”, related to these developments, has been exacerbated by contemporary technology:

24 Harries 1997, p. 173–174.

25 Harries 1997, p. 174.

> The more technology carries the attack on place into our everyday life, the more we can expect that life to be tinged by a sense of being on the road, of not belonging, of being denied the possibility of really dwelling somewhere.

Again the exemplary traveller-protagonist of *Up in the Air* comes to mind, who reaches a point in his traversing of the ‘space of flows’ where he registers the need for something more comforting than his anchorless existence. For Harries, architecture originates from precisely the need to transform such inhospitable space into ‘place’, to overcome alienation and find a way to ‘dwell’. The problem is, however, that having examined Heidegger’s exploration of a Black Forest farmhouse—which, for Heidegger, embodies the “fourfold” of earth, sky, mortals and divinities, the unity of which allows for genuine “dwelling”—Harries[26] concludes that it belongs to a bygone era, when ‘place’

26 Harries 1997, p. 152–166.

was “destiny”. The modern world has, through the dislocating power of technology, defeated the “tyranny of place”, with the ambiguous consequence of more freedom, accompanied by alienation. He does grant Heidegger the validity of his claim, however, that “mortals”' (human beings) “still must learn to dwell”—a task that will never be completed once and for all[27]. Can architecture still, today, contribute meaningfully to this never-ending quest, even if it seems to be confronted by an insurmountable task in the face of the hegemonic rule of the ‘space of flows’?

27 Harries 1997, p. 166.

Instead of Heidegger’s “fourfold,” Harries[28] appeals to the ‘twofold’ of the human body and spirit (which arguably find their counterparts in Heidegger’s “earth” and “sky”), both of which have to be accommodated in any human enterprise or practice. In the absence of recognising the body, nihilism results because the body functions as the repository of desire, needs and, ultimately, value. Should the body be prioritised to the exclusion of spirit, freedom suffers and one’s humanity is truncated, again, although in a different manner. This draws one’s attention to the fact that, the scientific and technological achievements of modern culture notwithstanding, in an important, even primary sense, people do not ‘live’ in displaced geometrical or astronomical space but in a world where they are ‘engaged’ with the places of their sojourn, where quantitative dimensions (of distance, for instance) are not the rule, but familiarity, closeness and involvement. In this human ‘life-world’, to use Edmund Husserl’s term, “the sun rises and goes down again”[29]. In a passage that resonates with Castells’ findings regarding the crucial restructuring of the contemporary world by advanced technology, Harries[30] writes:

28 Harries 1997, p. 175.

29 Harries 1997, p. 177.

30 Harries 1997, p. 178.

> We must not forget that the objective understanding of space presupposes a much richer experience, is the product of a reflective transformation of space, and that in the course of this transformation gain is balanced by loss. What is gained is greater objectivity and with it truth; what is lost is precisely the dimension of meaning. Space ceases to speak, but only to those who have lost touch with their own being. To be sure, we live in a technological world, a world shaped by science and its pursuit of objectivity, but not all the dimensions of the world we live in are circumscribed by technology. Technology must be affirmed and put in its place. That means to recognize its liberating potential as well as the threat it poses. To recognize the latter is to perceive also how important it is to recover what has been lost: a sense of place. We still need architecture, we moderns especially.

The first thing that strikes me as decisively important here is Harries’ distinction between truth and meaning, two concepts that are all too often conflated in the belief that what is meaningful to a person, immersed in his or her own interests and preoccupations (whether it is model trains, religion or taking ‘selfies’ with their smartphones), is synonymous with truth. It is *not*, even if, in a manner of speaking, people are wont to say something like “This

is my truth," when it should really be "This makes my life meaningful." The second important point is that, while technology depends upon the 'truth' related to scientific objectivity, and precisely because of its increasingly pervasive functioning in social spaces, the limitations to its 'liberating' role have to be recognised, as it has been recognised by Harries, but also, pre-eminently, by Castells (2010), as well as by Heidegger (1977) and other figures such as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1991) and Bernard Stiegler (2011; 2015). The significance of Harries' own contribution in this regard is his carefully sensitive exploration of the persistent human receptivity to, and need of, a sense of 'place.' Castells is obviously also keenly aware of this—hence his distinction between the dominant, technology-related 'space of flows' and the 'space of places' threatened by it—but Harries explores the meaning of place in a different and thoroughgoing manner, specifically by focusing on the role of the human body in the recuperation of 'place'. To illustrate, Castells elaborates on the space of places in social terms as follows[31]:

31 Castells 2010, p. xxxi.

> If we look at space as a social form and a social practice, throughout history space has been the material support of simultaneity in social practice. That is, space defines the time frame of social relationships. This is why cities were born from the concentration of the functions of command and control, of coordination, of exchange of goods and services, of diverse and interactive social life. In fact, cities are, from their onset, communication systems, increasing the chances of communication through physical contiguity. I call space of places the *space of contiguity*.

Architecture and the Human Body

Although Harries also focuses on space as having been transformed into *place*, his approach is, as the preceding discussion has already shown, richly philosophical, informed particularly by Heidegger's appropriation of phenomenology for the understanding of human existence. Accordingly, in the chapter, "The Voices of Space", he fleshes out the unique "natural language of space"[32] by considering some of the meanings of "commonsense space" that must be presupposed by the design-work of architects. What his interpretive analyses demonstrate is the mediating role of the organically structured body in the way that humans experience space. This will be immediately apparent in the following passage, which appeals to me as a mountaineer[33]:

32 Harries 1997, p. 180.

33 Harries 1997, p. 192.

> The different meanings of up and down are revealed to us in experiences of ascending and descending. Think of the step or steps leading up to the front door, or of the way steps are used in sacred architecture—for example, in churches: a few steps may lead to the portal, a few more steps separate the nave from the more sacred space of the choir. In a traditional church the way east is also a way up. Holy stairs and holy mountains figure in religions the world over—Sinai, Olympus, Golgatha; Meru, Haraberazaiti, Garizim. How much of this remains alive

> in us today when we climb a mountain? When we reach a cross on the top of some Alpine peak, this of course refers back to that mountain on which Christ died [...] The meaning of cross and mountain are here tied to a particular religious tradition. But the sacredness of neither is limited to the Christian tradition, which could be said to have appropriated the natural symbolism of mountains, inseparable from the symbolism of up and down.

It is by insisting that it is untenable, in the final analysis, to elevate the demands of reason, in the guise of the universal, above those of contingent desires—which are inseparable from humans being spatio-temporal, embodied creatures—that Harries is able to render a critique of Hegel's famous dictum, that the time is past for art (and architecture) "in its highest vocation"[34] (see also Olivier 1998a). In a nutshell, Hegel's pronouncement, which is not easily refuted (as shown by the fact that, as Harries points out, Heidegger returns to its challenge in the Epilogue of his essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art" [1975]), amounts to claiming that art is but an historical stage in the unfolding of Spirit, which has to make way for, first, religion, and then philosophy. The reason for this is simply that, measured by the criterion of reason, the sensuous character of art cannot reveal Spirit in its purity, and has to make way for religion, which takes it a step closer to the final reconciliation of Spirit with itself in philosophy (and science). The "highest vocation" of art is therefore the extent to which it can advance the interests of Spirit despite its inalienable sensuousness, but as Harries pointedly observes, this valorisation of reason cannot do justice to an embodied being who is, as the Greeks would have it, *animal rationale*—a telling, and oft-overlooked oxymoron which suggests that the understanding of human beings exclusively in terms of reason or spirit cannot (as pointed out earlier) do justice to their ambivalent nature. This, for Harries[35], explains Heidegger's insistence that the work of art is forever caught in the tension-field of *world* (the sphere of interpretability) and *earth* (which is that in the artwork which shows itself as defying any further interpretation, that is, as withdrawing from reason and language's penetrating, but also violating grasp). This, then, is Heidegger's answer to Hegel: for as long as reason is taken as being the sole arbiter regarding art and architecture, with their characteristic claims on human affects and desires, one cannot do justice to what art and architecture are[36]. The body, with its contingent desires, asserts its right to acknowledgement in the fact that art and architecture unavoidably address it, as Harries has amply demonstrated in the chapters leading up to this point, too powerfully to be ignored.

34 Harries 1997, p. 352-362.

35 Harries 1997, p. 360–362.

36 Harries 1997, p. 361–362.

Here is the best defence against what Castells describes as the hegemony of the 'space of flows': for as long as architecture, or perhaps rather architects, would orient their architectural practice according to the inalienable demands of the human body—or as Harries might say, by listening to the "voices of space"—the homogenising rule of the 'space of flows' can never be absolute. From what was said earlier, it is clear that there are various strat-

egies open to architects to resist the deleterious effects of the space of flows. Harries[37] refers to Frank Lloyd Wright's work insofar as it embodies and exploits the meaning of horizontals, which establish a firm tie between a building and the earth, and to Le Corbusier's Chapelle de Notre-Dame du Haut at Ronchamp as a paradigmatic instance of an architect's sensitivity to the "natural language of light and dark"[38]. Neither of these can be thought in separation from the way in which the experiences in question are registered on the bodies of human beings. At the same time, these experiences are crucial for a sense of place, because they connect individuals to the particular place-spaces where such experiences occur. When my partner and I explore mountains—whether it is in South Africa, Greece (where we have climbed some of the peaks of Mount Olympus), Japan, or South Korea (which has some of the most beautiful mountains in the world), we are invariably receptive to the moment of transition from being in a mountain *space*, such as under an overhanging rock, to sojourning in a natural *place* where we eat, rest or sleep. In such spaces, the 'natural language' of heaviness and lightness, up and down, light and dark, in and out—which Harries elucidates so perspicaciously—is almost impossible to ignore, and mediates the experience of these spaces as distinctive places. Whenever we go back to South Korea, we look forward to visiting the natural place-spaces that we have come to appreciate and recognise, particularly those in the mountain spaces of Seoraksan.

Castells[39] himself also alludes to some architectural strategies that resist the normalising influence of the space of flows:

> paradoxically, the architecture that seems most charged with meaning in societies shaped by the logic of the space of flows is what I call 'the architecture of nudity'. That is, the architecture whose forms are so neutral, so pure, so diaphanous, that they do not pretend to say anything. And by not saying anything they confront the experience with the solitude of the space of flows. Its message is the silence.

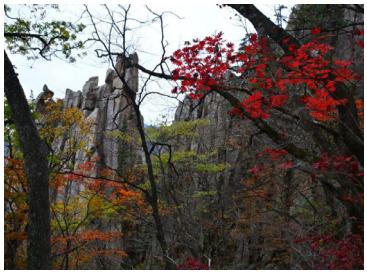
It is clear from Castells' description, as well as the examples he chooses to illustrate what he means, that what he has in mind is architecture that is capable of eliciting a strong feeling of dislocation on the part of those who experience it. In a manner that resonates with Harries' emphasis on the body (although he does not make this explicit) he discusses Richard Bofill's new Barcelona airport and Rafael Moneo's AVE (high-speed train) station in Madrid[40]. Castells draws attention to the fact that it is no accident that both of these buildings instantiate major (spatial) communications nodes—the principal sphere where the space of flows 'materialises', however fleetingly. In the first instance, Bofill's design is materially minimalist, with no anaesthetising marketing distractions of the usual sort, in this way avoiding anything that might divert passengers' attention from their entry into the relentless domain of the space of flows—something that throws them back upon their finitude,

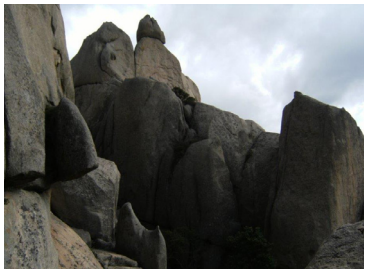
37 Harries 1997, p. 180–182.

38 Harries 1997, p. 190–191.

39 Castells 2010, p. 450.

40 Castells 2010, p. 450–452.





Figs. 1–4 Mountain spaces of Seoraksan in South Korea

as it were. Moneo's train station achieves this dislocating effect differently, by presenting the spaces of a beautifully refurbished old train station, now an "indoor palm-tree park" where birds fly around, in which passengers can relax and enjoy the trees and birdsong, before entering the qualitatively different, 'real' high-speed train station. Needless to say, this contrasts starkly with the elegance and restful atmosphere of the 'place-space' they have just left. Castells shows, therefore, that confronting people with the 'solitude' that is inseparable from the space of flows is one way that architecture has addressed the issue, and undoubtedly this is registered on their bodies as anxiety or uneasiness. Again the paradigmatic status of Reitman's *Up in the Air* becomes evident regarding this pervasive "solitude"[41] that is inseparable from the space of flows.

41 Castells 2010, p. 450.

Architecture, Community, Place and Ecology

The 'solitude' that is inescapable in the space of flows, which tends to 'standardise' what would otherwise be experienced as heterogeneous spaces of the kind evocatively explored by Michel de Certeau in terms of the relationship between "spatial practices" and "otherness"[42], raises another pertinent question, which does not diminish that of the 'place-making' role of the human body, but cannot be reduced to it either. It is a question that is intimately connected to that of an *ethos*, and therefore to architecture's ethical function, and it is of such importance for Harries that, near the end of the book, he remarks[43]:

42 de Certeau 1984, p. 108–109.

43 Harries 1997, p. 363.

> we must acknowledge that to live a meaningful life, to dwell in this sense, we must recognize ourselves as parts of a larger ongoing community. Such community in turn depends on certain shared values; and the inevitably precarious and changing authority of such humanly established values must be supported by our evolving and often warring desires and affects, as mediated and structured by society and reason. This [...] calls for an architecture responsive to our essential incompleteness, our need for others, for genuine, concrete community; it must be responsive also to a reason that demands the universal. Such architecture would present inevitably precarious interpretations of our ethos, of our place in a larger order.

Harries[44] readily concedes that granting community such fundamental importance will be met with criticism and doubt from many quarters, not least because it conjures up spectres of Nazi valorisation of communal priority over the individual. Nevertheless, he insists that neither the individual's rights and duties, nor the indispensable role of community should be neglected when it comes to an understanding of architecture's role in contemporary society, even if a tension inevitably obtains between these two poles. His interpretation of the Biblical myth of the Fall—as just one significant discursive instance among others—is a convincing affirmation of human beings' primordial uncertainty and insecurity, as well as their need for another, as represented here by the mythical Adam's need for Eve.

44 Harries 1997, p. 364.

There is another aspect of Harries's argument without which his claim, that architecture's distinctive function is ethical, would be less convincing, although it is probably also the most questionable in an era where 'multiculturalism,' cultural differences, and conflicts are conducive to the growth of relativism[45]. Under these circumstances most people no longer have an inkling of the meaning of 'transcendence,' and yet I believe Harries[46] to be profoundly right when he insists that architecture cannot fulfill its ethical vocation unless it has "its measure in and be an interpretation of an order that is glimpsed rather than created—in this sense a transcendent order". Although one might therefore no longer be able to agree with church architect Rudolf Schwarz's (Christian socialist) claim that architecture must be founded on the transcendent order of the "eternal", before which the community has to "reenact" a Baroque cathedral "spiritually"[47], this much one has to grant him: without an awareness of some kind of 'transcendence' (and the scare quotes are important here), architecture's capacity to let people experience an *ethos* of some kind through its distinctive use of 'the voices of space' in relation to the human body, for example, would falter. In the absence of a compelling vision of a universally transcendent order, Harries[48] appears to turn to the way that "festal places" provide an opportunity to experience an intimation of such transcendence, albeit always in a mediated fashion:

> even if they [humans] cannot and should not try to force their way back into some dreamed-of paradise, they can and must keep themselves open to the always-mediated claim of a reason and a reality that they have not created, keep themselves open especially to the claims of the other, to the claims of the community, to the claims of coming generations.
>
> There is a continuing need for the creation of festal places on the ground of everyday dwellings, places where individuals come together and affirm themselves as members of the community, as they join in public reenactments of the essential: celebrations of those central aspects of our life that maintain and give meaning to existence. The highest function of architecture remains what it has always been: to invite such festivals.

The last statement in this citation raises the question, how architecture is to continue performing this "highest function", which used to belong to sacred architecture. Having examined theatre and monument as its possible successors, Harries[49] adds others, such as museums, shopping malls, and landscape parks, and detects in the latter "great promise", given its orientation to the future. In the school, too, he discerns "a building task that allows the community to give architectural expression to its commitment to coming generations". Interestingly, Harries counsels that, today, the potential for "festal places" exists particularly in public spaces that are "modest, often ephemeral structures"[50], and he provides Giencke's Red Stage in Graz as a telling example. I find his concluding emphasis on the relevance of 'transcendence,'

45 Žižek 2010, p. 43–53.

46 Harries 1997, p. 364.

47 Harries 1997, p. 362.

48 Harries 1997, p. 365.

49 Harries 1997, p. 367.

50 Ibid.

community, the future and ephemerality regarding the ethical function of architecture highly suggestive, particularly because there is something important, in my estimation, that (surprisingly) is not explicitly thematised in Harries' otherwise exemplary philosophy of architecture, although it is implied by all of these considerations, especially those of 'transcendence' and the future. What I am alluding to is an architectural expression of concern for the planetary ecosystem.

Ecological integrity is implicated in one, possibly two, of Heidegger's "fourfold", of course—dealt with at length by Harries earlier in the book[51]—namely "earth" and possibly "divinities", if one considers the chthonic dimension of the earth as being sacred, the way that ancient peoples did. Insofar as "earth", for Heidegger[52] is that in the artwork which always shows itself, paradoxically, as withdrawing from humankind's interpretive scrutiny, it also resonates with 'transcendence', or with what Jacques Lacan[53] calls the "real" as that which surpasses all attempts at symbolisation in language. My point is that, at a time when one can no longer ignore indications, confirmed by most natural scientists in the world, that human beings have compromised the natural environment egregiously through their short-sighted economic activities[54], the element of 'transcendence' that (for Harries) has to be affirmed, lest architecture fall prey to arbitrariness, relates to the earth and to 'nature' in all her inscrutability. Given that nature is unavoidably mediated by cultural or linguistic (including scientific) understanding, one such mediation is architectural. Hence, architects face the (now urgent) challenge, to incorporate a renewed awareness of the inescapable claims of nature, or 'earth' (always seen in conjunction with the other members of the 'fourfold', namely 'sky,' 'mortals', and 'divinities') into their designs. Someone who has done this successfully seems to me to be the Japanese architect, Tadao Ando[55].

51 Harries 1997, p. 152–166.

52 Heidegger 1975, p. 45–46.

53 Lacan 1981, p. 52–64.

54 Kovel 2002; Foster et al 2010; Klein 2007, 2014; Olivier 2005.

55 See, for example, his Church on the Water, 1988.

Castells, on the other hand, is quite aware of the unprecedented threat that environmental degradation poses today. He frames this as a portentous conflict between the 'space of flows' (which is really the newly dominant spatial mode of contemporary capitalist production), the 'space of places' and the geological conception of space and time which underpins the work of the global environmentalist movement, namely 'glacial time'. Hence we witness[56]:

> the contrasting logic between timelessness, structured by the space of flows, and multiple, subordinate temporalities, associated with the space of places. On the other hand, the contradictory dynamics of society opposes the search for human eternity, through the annihilation of time in life, to the realization of cosmological eternity, through the respect of glacial time. Between subdued temporalities and evolutionary nature the network society rises on the edge of forever.

56 Castells 2010, p. 498–499.

And echoing Harries' concern for the future, Castells[57] observes: "Timeless time spreads as a mantle of meaninglessness as global environmental consciousness rises in defense of glacial time as a shared practice with our grandchildren."

57 Castells 2010, p. xliv.

Reading Harries and Castells together, one is afforded, on the one hand, a penetrating investigation into the conditions of the possibility of an architecture that not only remains relevant, but is indispensable for humanity today, at a time when traditional justifications of its ethical function are no longer convincing. In the place of these, however, Harries persuasively posits a more modest vindication of this function, particularly regarding place, the human body, 'transcendence', community and the future. Although Castells' social-theoretical investigation of different modes of space (including place-spaces), on the other hand, cannot match the philosophical depth and rigour of Harries', it yields a panoramic vision of a changed society dominated by the 'space of flows', with potentially dire consequences for humanity in relation to a rapidly deteriorating natural environment. Both of these thinkers should be taken very seriously.

Author

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Figures

Fig. 1–4 Photographs by Mariana van Rooyen.

Recommended Citation

Olivier, Bert (2017): “Rediscovering the ‘Space of Place’ in the Era of the Space of Flows’. Karsten Harries’ Timely Philosophy of Architecture. In: Eduard Führ (eds.): “Ethics in Architecture Festschrift for Karsten Harries” Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, International Journal of Architectural Theory, vol. 22, no. 36, www.cloud-cuckoo.net/fileadmin/issues_en/issue_36/article_olivier.pdf (enquiry date): 127–143.