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Bilde Künstler! Architectural History Embodied and Abstract

In February of 2024, I attended a lecture on Leon Battista Alberti at the university where I teach.[1] The lecturer began with the fact that of the two twentieth-century giants of Renaissance architectural history, Rudolf Wittkower and Erwin Panofsky, only the former had studied architectural design, if briefly. That brief engagement with design, the lecturer asserted, sufficed to imbue his history with empathy and spatial emphasis. He showed several drawings Wittkower had made in 1953, hand sketches of façade elements and columns (fig. 1) that the lecturer described with the words “exquisite drawings, measured drawings […] they show the architect’s eye.”[2] His words reflected a fond hope about the underlying methods of architectural history: that there is a value, quantitative and qualitative, in the assessments offered by those with first-hand experience in the process through which architecture is generated, from design to realization. Wittkower abandoned his architectural studies in a matter of weeks; and yet, the lecturer implied, the sketched and measured façade drawings, like the roughly-drawn acanthus leaves curling across the capital of a column, spoke to a kind of visual acuity that might only come from the hand of someone accustomed to form-giving.

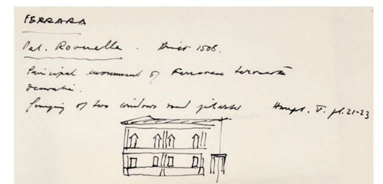

Fig. 1 Rudolf Wittkower, Sketch of Palazzo Rovella, Ferrara, ca. 1953–1956.

Drawing upon substantial archival and textual research, the lecture was rich in image and information, its arguments extrapolating from particular to general, offering new and unforeseen insights, some of them predicated the effable capacity he attributed to the architect’s eye. It was the kind of virtuoso performance, both close reading and interpolation to the universal, to which I’d been taught to aspire when I was still an architecture student with a keen interest in the discipline’s literature. Offered within an endowed speaker series run by current doctoral students in the Department of Art History, the talk was delivered by a former adjunct faculty member at the university’s School of Architecture. In attendance were many of his erstwhile colleagues, few of whom I’d seen at other lectures in this series. Some of them had been my professors during my studies in the late 1980s; others, my colleagues when I taught briefly as an adjunct in architectural design, in the early 2000s. The Department of Art History, the School of Architecture: in that era, these had represented different poles, the former careful, archival and scholarly, the latter spectacular, new and invested in the theory to which hipper sectors of

1 Collins/Kaufmann Forum: Daniel Sherer ‘Panofsky and Wittkower on Alberti: Divergent Receptions of De Re Aedificatoria I, 10. (with An Excursus on the “Alberti Revival” in Modern Architecture)’ [Collins Kaufmann Forum, 6 February 2024].

2 I take this wording from a recorded version of this same lecture presented at the Warburg Institute on June 5, 2023. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlmEHj3up7w, at the 22:40-44 time stamp. [Accessed 31 August 2024].

architectural production liked to refer. Oddly, in those days, it was the historians who were closer to the material objects of study, while abstract theory was the preferred modality of those likely more intimate with the physical manipulation of materials that architectural production demands.

Despite the obvious effects of the twenty-years past, the whole event had a time-machine quality. This was as true of the audience make-up as it was of the arguments rehearsed and objections elicited at the end of the talk. What precisely was this so-called architect's eye? How exactly did it allow for a new interpretation of Alberti, whose eye, the lecturer had also implied, was less than fully architectural? I sat at the perimeter of the room, amidst a row of three befriended doctoral students whose initial response was shared incredulity, then mirth as the post-lecture discussion unfolded. I didn't ask the three giggling students what they found funny but I can try to imagine it. They might have felt embarrassment at the routine jousting to which the discussion devolved. But more serious things might have been at stake. For their generation, bound to reconsider architecture in ways that address the egregious blind spots of racism, gender bias, ecological exploitation and presumptive personhood, it might have seemed silly to resurrect old methodological debates between the suppositional and the documentarian, between the architect's eye and the art historian's. Ultimately, before the end of Q and A, I decided to leave. The history/theory divide need not be relitigated. What remains unresolved is how knowledge of the production of buildings relates to methods of history writing.

No less unresolved is the inverse: to what extent is architectural history beholden to the practice of architecture and to what extent is it a pursuit of knowledge free from any use or applicability? What methods might be brought to bear on it by the professional slog of making buildings, by the intuitions of this hypothetical 'eye'? Who arbitrates such questions? Moreover, what are the consequences to addressing such questions when both practice and history are challenged to reconsider the principles that govern them – chronology, periodization, teleology, genius, masterwork, guiding narratives, selective memory? Is not the very concept of an "eye" invested with assumptions and hegemonic privilege? Finally, what utility might the distinction between *a history* and *a theory* have for those of us who come to both from practice, keenly aware of the way distributed authorship, resource deployment, temporal pressure and empirical knowledge easily elude scholarly attention?

In her wonderful 1983 article 'Interpretation without Representation' on Diego Velásquez's 'Las Meniñas', written at the onset of the Postmodern drift that culminated in the debates I witnessed in the late 1990s and early aughts, Svetlana Alpers refers to the "emplotment" of art history, its need to presume a depth model. "Why should art history find itself in this fix?" she asks. "The answer lies, paradoxically, in a great strength of the discipline [...]. Its great achievement was to demonstrate that representational pictures are not intended solely for perception, but can be read as having a secondary or deeper level of meaning. What then do we make of the pictorial surface itself?"[3] Al-

3 Alpers 1983: 34.

though architectural history emplots differently, its imaginaries both exogenous—what constitutes a cultural or symbolic reference—and endogenous—how best to parse design decisions made by a singular architect—to the works it considers, it can also find itself at loose ends in dealing with its own version of a "sensory surface" at which production and reception meet. Both imaginaries are near-impossible to reconstruct, dependent on specific sensibilities and selves no longer directly accessible. The architecture history/theory divide might claim in different measure the tangible and the conceptual; but both history and theory struggle methodologically with both forms of embodied knowledge and what might be learned through practice.

This is not new. Writing in 1953, German architect and theoretician Rudolf Schwarz came to the same conclusion. He borrowed a phrase from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 'Bilde Künstler Rede Nicht'—roughly translated as 'Make, artist, don't speak'—to characterize the problem. Most of his peers, he opined, "apparently cannot imagine that someone can write so well and nevertheless still be an architect who knows how to build as clearly and cleanly as he can write [...] they seem to assert a division of labor in the discipline of building [...]. Ill-meaning people misinterpret Goethe's words and rewrite them as 'mess around artist, don't think.'"[4] Theory and history, taken together, should be able to help navigate the divide between practice and reflection, between physical artifact and the ideas it might come to embody over time. Instead, it often seems, they prefer to remain distant from the messiness of their subject. There is no certainty that the expanded understanding of architectural histories, one intended to redress the wrongs of structural prejudice and anthropocentrism, will provide greater reciprocity between the thinking and the making that is endemic to architecture.

4 Rudolf Schwarz in Conrads et al. 1994: 38–39. I have written at length about this article in Widder 2022: 129–150.

I began studying architecture during the apotheosis of what architects I admired most liked to call the phenomenological turn. In school, our history and our studio professors both asked us to choose between a neo-rationalist reading of the architectural monuments that constituted our disciplinary history—one that emphasized affinities across criteria of typology or urban form—and a reading that described the bodily experience of spatial sequences. Think Aldo Rossi or Anthony Vidler on the one hand, Juhani Pallasmaa or Christian Norberg-Schulz on the other. On the one hand, we were taught the Enlightenment handiwork of typologies, if filtered through the critical apparati of German Idealism[5] and the Frankfurt School, interests of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies in the 1970s.[6] On the other, we were all enrolled in a mandatory 'Introduction to Architecture' course that told us to imagine the poetic frame of mind in which Alvar Aalto found form in the Finish landscape; or showed us sequential photos of Hans Scharoun's Philharmonie, likely from the professor's own trip there, meant to evoke a visceral response to space, compressed and expansive in alternation, a kind of sensual peristalsis by inference, snapshot as empathetic method.

5 Rossi 1981: 3.

6 On the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, see Belmont Freeman, "'The Moment for Something to Happen.' On the Heyday, the Demise and the Legacy of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies, 1967–1984." Places Journal, January 2014. https://placesjournal.org/article/the-moment-for-something-to-happen/, the IAUS journal, was the first to publish a translation of Theodor Adorno's only published text on architecture, 'Functionalism Today' (1965), which appeared in June 1979 in Oppositions 17.

My first job was for an architect who kept paperbound copies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein on a shelf in his bathroom. That his

work was predicated on reading philosophy was a fiction I happily accepted, at that point totally ill-equipped to offer much more than enthusiasm. I began my summer internship ignominiously, by gluing a foam core model together with rubber cement. The model collapsed overnight. I ended the summer much more competently, able to make perfect, sharp corners wherever two .15mm Rapidograph lines met on the paper. Drafting was then a saleable skill. It gave me a first indication that I might participate in the architectural profession. It was also visceral: the friction produced by inscribing lines on velum made me feel as though I were participating in the physical labor through which architecture might be realized. I found real affinity for phenomenology as it expressed in the work I was drawing and modeling that summer. It was an interpretation of philosophy through narratively-rich, materially-complex details, moments meant to draw the user's attention to a "being-in-the-world."[7] I was convinced.

I returned to school that fall to author a kindergarten studio project organized around a copy of Diderot's encyclopedia, as if the inclusion in my drawings of that book constituted a gesture adequate to both intellectual and spatial mandates. I wrote a paper on the Acropolis that relied almost entirely on Vincent Scully's *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods*,[8] thrilled to have found an author who spoke about history in terms I recognized from studio crits. I quoted a long passage that described in speculative, sensorial terms the ceremonial path to the Parthenon; and next to the passage, in the margin of my paper, my professor, senior faculty in the Department of Archeology and Art History and grounded in rigorous practice, wrote, "sounds like Scully guff." In retrospect, I understand his verdict: Scully's seemingly embodied descriptions were predicated on anachronistic and highly personal perceptual assumptions, not at all on the careful archeological method my professor emphasized. But to my understanding at the time, it was Scully, the architectural historian, who felt most relevant to architectural practice,[9] in no small part because his history seemed to be in service to a modern and generative sensibility, one whose spatial perception was, to offer a few descriptors, self-reflexive, sensual and dynamic. The desire for an alignment between a reading of history and a practice of architecture was not unique to Scully's allure; but it is quite different from Schwarz's mandate. If Scully represents an architectural history predestined to suit the architectural practitioner, then Schwarz instead imagined an architectural practitioner equally versed in both history and philosophy, an all-encompassing intellect untainted by simple instrumentalism.

From the perspective of practice, it is easy to criticize both history and theory as too attentive to the arcane or too infatuated with the stunning and unexpected, as though all those who came before had missed the point. Practice is not romantic. It consists largely, if not exclusively, in the grind of sitting at a computer, an activity which describes not only the architectural, but pretty much every other twenty-first-century profession. The rest of architectural practice runs up and down chains of command to access and mobilize capital, labor and materials. It is difficult for the profession to operate critically, or with

7 Heidegger was not on the bathroom shelf but 'Dwelling, Building, Thinking' was almost inescapable in the late 1980s. See on "Dasein" in Heidegger 1993: 352–3.

8 Scully 1962.

9 See, for example, Russell 1982: 1.

historical consciousness in its purest sense, within that cascade of action and reaction. Given the limitations on reflective latitude, depending on locale and commission, it is impossible to generalize about the extent to which the insights offered by the expanded field of history-and-theory are actionable. But if those insights are not actionable at all, then how limited the scope of redress and how unsatisfying. The condescension towards making against which Schwarz bridled – Bilde Künster! – is redoubled by capitulation to the gap between architecture as intellectual and as professional practices. It is worth seeking out other modalities on the side of history-writing that might help.

Imagine that embodied knowledge might be permitted to act as mediator between history and theory. I once attended a conference organized by the Theoretical Archeology Group.[10] Among the presenters was a young scholar who had learned traditional kayak techniques through difficult traditional apprenticeship in a Yupik community. Thereafter, he found himself better able to represent to us, a distanced academic audience, a world view, a mythology and a way of life held together in the bodily experience of rolling a sealskin boat in icy ocean water. He never pretended to represent in abstracted form the experience of all Yupik culture. Instead, he explained how that experience might better be understood by comparison to his own, which he could confidently describe. It's a methodological example, embodied and first-person, I have never forgotten. Since then, I am suspicious of third-person descriptions that attempt to convey the perceptual or experiential qualities of any work of architecture. I think instead of that young scholar describing his own experience, then comparing it to the descriptions made by Yupik in narrative and object forms so that we, his academic audience, might better understand.

10 Theoretical Archeology Group (TAG) 2012 at SUNY-Buffalo.

The practice of embedding is integral to anthropology. Without it, how might anyone from the outside accede to the right to describe the cultural moment that they seek to uplift? I read Philippe Bourgois and Jeffrey Schonberg's *Righteous Dopefiend* as others might read a thriller.[11] After spending twelve years living among substance dependent communities that lived outside formal housing in San Francisco, Bourgois chose the word "righteous" to describe them, a word that captured the moral economy constructed and inhabited by the habitués of the encampments in which he embedded. The book, and the photos by Bourgois's collaborator Jeffrey Schonberg, detail intact social networks, thoughtfully practiced routines, and instances of care and husbandry. It foregoes characterizations, whether romanticized or pitying, to which prejudice might revert (fig. 2). The insight that abjection is not synonymous with pathos in the case of Bourgois's dopefiends, is a realization which would have been foreclosed to a researcher unwilling to invest physically.

11 Bourgeois and Schonberg 2009.

Fig. 2 Three heroin injectors in their self-built shelter. Jeff Schonberg, from *Righteous Dopefiend*.

Embedding, like the moral economy described, is inherently a spatial practice. It was in spaces injectors defined for themselves that Bourgois and Schonberg met them. The book traverses other spaces, too, such as hospital rooms or city sidewalks, but much of it focuses on longer-term encampments. Any moral economy depends upon interpersonal practices, but without proximity, born of enclosure, settlement and construction, the foundational act

of sharing would be far less consistent and established. Like the young researcher in his kayak, Bourgois and Schonberg, by virtue of shared bodily experience over time, could outline an ethically defensible framework through which to understand an otherwise inaccessible lifeworld.

Historian Pamela H. Smith's 2004 book *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* appeals to embodiment in understanding the history of science, an approach that Smith's 'Making and Knowing Project' has expanded since the book appeared.[12] As Smith notes, a remarkable number of early Renaissance artisans, including Ghiberti and Filarete, used words to convey what they knew, standing "at the intersection of courtly and commercial forces"[13] in a way that might presage the life of a successful contemporary architect. Others, though, articulated what they knew in what Smith calls a "new naturalistic representation of nature."[14] In this confluence of technique and empirical study lay the limits of knowledge as representation. Smith extends her study well beyond the translation of the visible world into two-dimension representation, including in the compass of her work the reciprocities between casting techniques used for representation and how the bodies of animals represented could therefore be conceived.

Likewise, architectural historian Robin Evans grounded his study of stereotomy in similar care for craft, treating a system of representation as one measure of conceptual and material capacity alike.[15] To see in solid stone a series of regularized geometric trajectories is, at least in part, predicated on the systems invented to represent those trajectories. By engaging deeply and precisely with an obsolete knowledge base that was indispensable to architecture still relevant even after that knowledge disappeared, Evans opens a framework for understanding, a kind of cultural anthropology of lines in stone. This way to understand architecture as embodied knowledge could not be more different from the apparent embodiment I thought I'd found in Scully's writing, the former focused on the maker and the latter, on a fictive and historically-untethered perceiving eye. How then, might contemporary architects connect their discipline's material and intellectual histories to daily practices?

One answer may lie in the profession's influence over the material facts of the construction sector. To frame the contribution to greenhouse gases and solid waste that comes from the building as a percentage or ratio may downplay its absolute magnitude. In France, for example, a country that has prioritized circular economy and waste reduction, 3.4 metric tons of demolition waste alone is produced annually for each inhabitant of the country.[16] That does not include the tonnage extracted, processed and transported for new construction and for maintenance, or the material cost of operating France's 38 million buildings.[17] Through the use of software such as Tally, which works from BIM models, architects can estimate the embodied energy of any new building; the suite of programs that model building operating energy relative to both thermal and lighting demands is too large to list. And yet the full scope of what existing buildings embody remains understudied. Kiel Moe, in *Unless*, his 2021 book about Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building,

12 Smith 2004. Also see Columbia University's Heyman Center for Science and Society, Research Cluster: The Making and Knowing Project. https://scienceandsociety.columbia.edu/content/research-cluster-making-and-knowing-project [Accessed 8 August 2024].

13 Smith 2004: 31–2.

14 Ibid, 32.

15 Evans 1995, chapter 5: Drawn Stone.

16 Diemer, et. al. 2022: 2.

17 https://www.statista.com/statistics/767493/number-housing-france/ [Accessed 9 August 2024].

describes the situation thus: "The eco-systemic mapping and accounting of material and energy exchanges associated with building, it turns out, is a robust basis for a parallel sociological and political description of building as embedded in *world-systems* that help articulate the social implications of planetary material-energy organization."[18]

The intertwined social and ecological implications of building forms the basis for older history writing, too. William Cronen's spectacular *Nature's Metropolis*, for example, describes the way resources were extracted within what were understood to be virgin landscapes. Midwestern forests of old-growth lumber were sawn and hauled over icy landscapes by off-season farmers, then floated across the Great Lakes to the resource-hungry cities to the East.[19] A similar concern surfaces in Sigfried Giedion's seminal *Mechanization Takes Command* about the transformative resource deployment he found in North America. The opportunism and hybridization of means Giedion finds is, in some ways, a repudiation of the monographic approach to the materials of modern architecture with which he began his career in Europe, with an insistence on material purism that still burdens architects. I drew heavily on Cronon's book when working with a colleague specialized in life cycle assessment (LCA) on a comparative project: our process determined, surprisingly, that the environmental and carbon footprint of a nineteenth-century window sourced, manufactured and installed without any fossil fuel-based power, was substantially higher than that of a contemporary German-manufactured window of the same size that used materials harvested in Africa to be installed in the United States. The difference derived from how LCA methodology calculated the carbon released by felling old growth trees without plantation forestry. Values may not be what they appear.

Another means to reconceive the relationship between architectural production and architectural history might be to focus on its interaction with labor. The term "distributed authorship," a term initially inspired by Roland Barthes' *La Plissure du Texte*,[20] describes a condition endemic to architecture. "In the process of making a building, authorship passes through many hands. It includes the more general—products specified, details mandated, building codes maintained—as well as the singular and particular—the worker in the field, the worker at a desk, the inhabitant of what results from their labors," as I have written elsewhere.[21] Several years ago, I had the fortunate opportunity to discuss my writing on postwar West German construction with an historian colleague who had written an important book about postwar migration to Britain and its significance for labor practices, practices that overflowed in specific social relations and structures (fig. 3).[22] We contemplated a collaboration, sadly never realized, which might match the capacity to interpolate the particular provenance of a laborer's skills from construction documentation with the kind of history writing that could match that provenance to the movements of people across postwar Europe. The capacity to read construction documents as communication amongst different cultures, capacities and classes may have untapped potentials.

18 Moe 2021: 20.

19 See Cronon 1991. For a sense of how such research can be applied to quantifying the embodied resources via a life cycle assessment, see Lynnette Widder and Christoph Meinrenken, "Three Windows: Accounting for Embodied Resources and Cultural Value," in Azari 2023.

20 Credit goes to the British artist Roy Ascott who used the term to describe the writing of a networked, remotely composed textual project. Ascott 2005.

21 Widder 2022: 287.

22 Wills 2018.

Fig. 3 Golden Lane Housing Estate under construction. Harry Kerr, from Clair Wills, Strangers and Lovers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain.

To an architect, the way a building is detailed, its resources marshalled, and, finally, its construction (and deconstruction) actualized is transparent not to a singular architect or draftsperson's vision but instead, to the entire system of skilled labor within which it was made possible. Mies van der Rohe, whose well-known pickiness about construction detailing resulted in the hyperactivation of the material largess, if not excess, that Moe tracked, has offered architectural history multiple object lessons in the triangulation of labor, technology and architecture. Attentiveness to what appears in drawings and how it translated into actions on site narrates different stories than the ones told by Mies himself, or by the many advocates for his architecture who have turned his work to the advantage of their own agendas. In an essay that documents Mies's interest in relating the spaces within his buildings to those outside, including constituent plant life, Barry Bergdoll notes the discrepancy between Mies's work in fact and the drawings included in the International Style show at the Museum of Modern Art. "In 1932," Bergdoll writes, "in the pages of Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson's book *The International Style*, Mies's Tugendhat House, Brno, and German Pavilion, Barcelona, were sheared of their gardens. Only a few lines were erased in the neatly redrawn floor plans but the omissions were enough to have a radical effect on perceptions of Mies's work [...]. Clearing the trees from the plans of both Barcelona and Brno [...] documented an autonomous, universal space, internalized and reproducible anywhere."[23] That erasure gave rise to what ultimately would become the dominant reading, and, after his emigration to the USA, the suppositional reality of Mies's architecture.

23 Bergdoll 2002.

But erasures were also endemic to Mies's work even without the assistance of curators, art historians or journalists; they were inherent to his detailing practice, which often belied his words. In the spirit of the times, a precedent for books such as Giedion's *Bauen in Frankreich. Eisen. Eisenbeton.* of 1928, resonant with polemic calls for truth in materials, Mies designed and published a series of speculative projects named for the materials they purportedly celebrated: a concrete country house and office building (1923), a brick country house (1924). Projects realized shortly thereafter, the Wolf House in Gubin (1925–27) or Esters and Lange Houses in Krefeld (1927–30), might be taken as the built epitomes of material determinism. Eighty years later, however, the set of logical questions these buildings posed, questions that a detailing architect might rightfully ask, were answered differently. By carefully correlating forensic research, Leslie van Duzer and Kent Kleinmann demonstrated the extent to which the spatial principles of Mies's brick architecture could only have been realized by using steel sections concealed within the brick wythes.[24]

24 Kleinmann, Van Duzer 2005.

Considering not only architectural expression but also construction procedure, Michael Cadwell's *Strange Details* (2007) likewise uncovers not only the erasure of material fact but the series of progressively eradicated steps that give rise to the barely-there juncture between horizontal and vertical sections upon which Mies's Farnsworth House (1946–51) sits, or floats. "With one exception," Cadwell wrote, "all the exposed steel connections at the Farns-

worth House are plug welds. Plug welding is an elaborate process: steel erectors first drill the columns with holes at the beam connection and fit the columns with erection seats; they then place the perimeter beam on these seats, shim the beam level and clamp it secure; next, welders plug the vacant column holes, fusing the column to the beam; and finally, finishers remove the erection seats and sand all surfaces smooth [...] each operation disappears with the next."[25] Architecture assumes steel, like wood, to be inherently trabeated and therefore additive.[26] In the process Cadwell lays out (fig. 4), the principle of addition is not synonymous with legibility of construction process or even of the building's components. The Farnsworth frame may appear trabeated, but in Mies's hands, trabeation becomes a disappearing act. It is impressive to remember that Cadwell's book emerged from a series of seminars he taught for design students at Ohio State University.[27] To have worked through this material within an architectural design program was to answer a need for different kinds of research questions. Few buildings those one-time students will by now have built, I imagine, feature plug welds. However, each of them entered their professional lives aware of the rules enforced by—or in Mies's case, upon—the facts of distributed authorship. They will understand, as a method of history writing, how making and history connect. Without the ability to speak, through drawing, across class, experience, and capacity, there is little an architect can achieve. History writing that resides at the nexus between the ideation and the production of buildings can resonate with the translational moment, as a work moves from its representation to its materialization.

25 Cadwell 2007: 113.

26 It's no coincidence that in the structures curricula at many schools of architecture, wood and steel are taught together, as trabeated structures; whereas concrete and masonry are grouped together as 'solid' construction. A similar approach surfaces in Andreas Deplazes's excellent *Constructing Architecture: Materials Processes Structures. A Handbook* (Deplazes 2005).

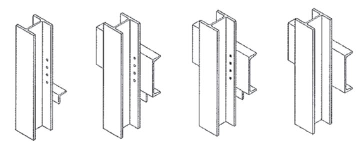

Fig. 4 Farnsworth House plug welds, from Michael Cadwell, Strange Details.

27 Mike Cadwell in conversation with the author, December 3, 2019.

Cadwell's book offers a precedent not only for the significance of construction knowledge but also for the way empathy, one architect to another, might work across time. His Mies chapter begins with an anecdote recounted in a memoir by Edward A. Duckett, one of Mies's many acolytes. In it, Mies has encountered a possum clinging to a branch while visiting the Farnsworth House. "Isn't nature wonderful," Mies says, then proceeds to consider the animal intently in all its textural and behavioral aspects.[28] Cadwell uses this seemingly oblique, if not trivial, vignette to argue persuasively that what is at stake in the Farnsworth House is not its abstract qualities but instead a state of "immersion."[29] The rest of the chapter models immersion as method, shifting the discourse of an architecture—Mies's—most often described in near-transcendental terms and investing it instead with all the embodiment and material complexity that the close reading of its conditions of production demand. The text is written in both singular and collective first person, allowing Cadwell to take the reader along with him—I, we—as he explains what he has learned. It is rare that architectural history is written in a way that holds up to writerly criteria: voice, point of view, interiority. Inevitably architecture is embodied: we, I. How can its writing do this fact justice? Too often it remains abstract or, as recompense, so intently based on the author's own perception as to become trivializing or worse, exclusionary: if you experience things differently, then you are missing the point.

28 Cadwell 2007: 93.

29 Ibid, 94.

Another possibility, tested in recent works of architecture writing, conjoins the writing of history to the lifeworld of an author in a manner not unlike the contemporary subgenre of auto-fiction, often associated with authors such as Rachel Cusk or Karl Ove Knausgård. In literary auto-fiction, allegiance devolves neither to the facts of the world—as in non-fiction—nor to the invention of an alternate—as in fiction. Justin Beal's *Sand Futures*, one such example, intertwines an account of Beal's life in New York after the 9/11 attack with his interest in the architect of the two buildings that were its target. His concerns as a young sculptor and the travails of his then-girlfriend as a gallery owner are braided with his research, supported by his design degree in architecture, into Minoru Yamasaki's professional and personal life. Art critic Kirsty Bell's book *The Undercurrents: A Story of Berlin* was delimited by what she could see from her Kreuzberg kitchen window. The choice guides her research in unexpected and startling ways, explaining the city from its early expansion through the fraught politics of its many twentieth-century permutations and the pre-pandemic party city of the twenty-first. Her kitchen view was a fortunate one, allowing her to include in the book literary, philosophical, popular, and political figures of moment, particularly undercelebrated women; it is grounded, however, in Berlin's building traditions, material resource flows, infrastructure planning and real estate development. Neither of these books are impressionistic memoir or personal essay but instead contributions to architectural knowledge in which their authors' lives play a role. Both represent something new: a chronicle of just how inextricable historic fact and personal experience are within the built environment.

On my first New York City job site, I was amazed to see construction, a process I had only known as contentious, transformed into a convener: there was the tile layer from St. Lucia, the cabinet makers from Japan and Austria, the stone masons from Ecuador, the Jamaican electrician, the Taiwanese general contractor, the Irishmen who laid and finished the maple floorboards. Of course, this is a commonplace. Much later in my career, I worked with another general contractor who was beloved of his employees and completely reliable in his promises. He also made no secret of his Republican politics. He told me that he had been asked to bid a project in Chappaqua, and arrived to find secret service men on site. Nothing against the Clintons, he said, their money is as good as anyone's. But when the on-site contact told him that for security reasons, he would have to provide official IDs for all of his workers, he refused. I wouldn't ask my people to lie, he explained, then added what he had said to the site contact: who do you think holds a shovel in this country? At a moment when the writing of history demands inclusion, a construction site may be as good a place as any to begin.

To be clear: embodiment as method is no talisman. Specific to the writer or researcher's experience, it is by its nature exclusionary in the way it gathers information; but in the way it lays bare its own limitations and attempts to interpolate across them, it can offer its audience a framework through which to understand things across space, time, and culture. As may already

be obvious, I come from a demographic that cannot claim underrepresentation. Still, by virtue of clarity about who I am inasmuch as it is relevant to my topic, I believe I can act in a way that comports with equity. I would hope that, in drawing upon what I learned working on site when I write about architecture, I enrich rather than foreclose opportunities. We cannot, as the writer Garth Greenwell said recently, insist on our own innocence:[30] when we write history, we inevitably enact some harm of omission or neglect. The architects' eye, such as it is, may be myopic; but by training it on the value of labor and material, by uplifting the facts of a job site, it might yet contribute to new versions of making and thinking, *Bilden and Reden*.

30 Garth Greenwell, Bread Loaf Writers' Conference public lecture, August 23, 2024.

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Literature

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Figures

Fig. 1 Columbia University Libraries, Rudolf and Margaret Wittkower Papers, Box 12, "Renaissance: Architecture MS and Catalogue of Buildings."

Fig. 2 Bourgeois and Schonberg 2009: 245. Courtesy of Authors.

Fig. 3 Wills 2018: 169. Courtesy of Author.

Fig. 4 Cadwell 2007: 114. MIT Press.

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