STEPHEN CAIRNS JANE M. JACOBS

BUILDINGS MUST DIE

A PERVERSE VIEW OF ARCHITECTURE

CONTENTS

4

TOWARD A GENERAL ECONOMY OF ARCHITECTURE

[T]he Life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being.

G. W. F. HEGEL (1977, 19)

What tools of thinking might enable architecture to knowingly coexist with the inevitability of deterioration and destruction? How might we reconstruct the creative economy of architecture such that it is shaped, not by simplistic metaphors of life, but by an ethic that recognizes its inevitable horizon of deterioration and death? This chapter traces relevant strands of social theory and philosophy that offer a roadmap for navigating the implications for architecture of conditions of building deterioration, wasting, and death. We draw concepts and key vocabularies from a range of sources relevant to a critical appraisal of architecture's natalist self-image, as well as its practices of design and creativity, and fantasies of permanence. The chapter necessarily extends our discussion of the concepts of architectural value (mattering) and form (matter) in chapter 3, for these twin concepts are important reference points for architecture as a creative discipline.

We begin our meditation on the first of these concepts, architectural value, by examining how the work of architecture (design, conception, and craft) and its created output (the building) are inextricably linked to the concept of utility. We inquire into the principles that frame architecture as something creative, useful, and valuable. We wonder why the principles of creativity and usefulness have had sustained critical reflection in architecture, while the question of value is framed in relatively conventional ways.[1] We look more closely at the concept of value in architecture by studying its flip side: deterioration, waste, and destruction. This inverted perspective helps to expose some of the central contradictions within received principles of architecture's creative worth. Such a vantage point allows us to better grasp, for instance, how architecture embodies what Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1988, 125) referred to as a "double discourse of value." Architecture sustains itself, on the one hand, within a sanctified and aestheticized cultural sphere of value (understood as inspiration, creation, taste, test of time, intrinsic and transcendental value) and, on the other, within an economic sphere of value (calculation, references, costs, benefits, prices, and utility). The contradiction of

this double discourse comes into sharp focus in capitalism's logic of creative destruction. As we shall see, the viability of architectural creativity has depended in part on its incorporation into this self-perpetuating logic. We end this meditation on architectural value by drawing on Bataille's suggestive concept of "general economy," with its emphasis on unproductive excess, death and decay.

In thinking about the second of these concepts, form, we wish to draw attention to the ways in which processes of deterioration, waste, and death are necessarily confrontational, heralding various states of deformation. We usually think of deformation as meaning disfigurement or defacement—a notion which implies there was once something properly and fully formed that has, through some deviant agency, been altered for the worse. But we would propose that it is possible to think about deformation in less woeful (and judgmental) terms—to separate out deformation from devaluation and degradation. The final part of this chapter touches upon some theoretical concepts that appear to fatally challenge form and stability, but which really open the way toward a more dynamic and emergent understanding of architecture's project. In this final section we traverse a number of related thinkers who reorder even seemingly obdurate formations like architecture as fluid and contingent events. In this section we push the idea of a general economy of architecture to its very limits, entering into the realm of nonlinearity, open systems, relational ontologies, and the vitality of matter.

Rarely do the theorists and philosophers we draw upon speak centrally about architecture. At times they might use an architectural example, or speak through architectural metaphors. When that is the case it is useful, and we have taken advantage. But for the most part we are reading askance, picking across an epistemological ground where architecture features incidentally or as an elaborative aside. Furthermore, we draw on theory that for many years has stood at the sideline of, and even challenged, the project of development or progress in which architecture has played its part. Our starting point is the Enlightenment. It was then that architecture was harnessed to a specific notion of creating value. Architectural theorists like Anthony Vidler have usefully provided counterintuitive readings of architecture in the Age of Reason. But we wish to return to some of the central Enlightenment assumptions around how architecture functioned in the world as a way of accessing foundational thinking around the relationship between architecture and value, and by extension nonvalue or waste.

ARCHITECTURE AGAINST WASTE

The garbage philosopher John Scanlan argues that while the Enlightenment is commonly regarded as the Age of Reason, it could be usefully viewed otherwise—as an age of "rejecting waste." If the march of progress defines the Enlightenment, then the perspective of waste draws our attention to what lies in progress's wake. If reason takes the shape of a "sound building" or "good design," then what is the character of the "dead ends and back alleys" that lie behind these structures? None of the certainty of the Age of Reason could be projected, Scanlan argues, "without the creation of the rubble and excess of unnecessary parts" (2005, 63). It is a point that resonates, of course, with Walter Benjamin's figure of the Angel of History: being blown reluctantly toward progress to which his back is turned, helplessly surveying the destruction trailing in his wake.

The Enlightenment project, according to Scanlan (2005, 63), relied upon "removing some of the rubbish that lies on the way to knowledge." It was "a clear-out and clean-up of the lumber house of the human mind" which was "condemned as dark, dilapidated and dangerous ... unfit for habitation" (Porter 1990, 53). These metaphors of sound building and good design, of house and habitation, express architecture's role in the Enlightenment project of expunging waste and wasting. Architecture is implicated centrally in the distancing of order from disorder, of life from death, and of purity from danger. The Enlightenment emphasis on what Scanlan (2005, 60) refers to as a "cosmetics of order" complemented architecture and its ambition to realize itself as orderly form—built or idealized—that leaves behind any of the mess of designing and building, and denies future states of decay.[2] Such ordering was itself "a kind of alienation from the life and death of matter" (2005, 116). In the new order of the Age of Reason it mattered how light (and its optical sister, transparency) were accommodated and arranged. Michel Foucault has noted that light was emerging as a valued quality, as elaborated in his famous interview on space and power/knowledge, "[a] fear haunted the latter half of the eighteenth century: the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truths." All aspects of scholarly, artistic, and political effort were directed to "break up the patches of darkness," to "eliminate the shadowy areas of society," and to "demolish the unlit chambers where arbitrary political acts, monarchical caprice, religious superstition, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented" (Foucault 1980, 153). The architectural management of light and transparency entered, among other things, into novel technologies of power, the most famous of which was Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon.

Architecture in the Age of Reason functioned as evidence of rationality, symbolically and materially. Along with cartography and surveying, it operated as a "partitioning art" (Serres 1995, 53) serving moral and economic imperatives to "enclose" the earth and dominate nature. In Old and Middle English the term "waste" referred to land not suited to human habitation. Waste, so defined, implicated nature generally, but more particularly those places and things that were "outside of an economy of human values," because they either could not be or

had not yet been used for the benefit of humankind. Waste thought of in this sense reminds us of the very specific role architecture has played, and continues to play, in transforming wasteland. The seventeenth-century Lockean notion held that land "left wholly to nature, that hath no improvement" was waste (Locke [1690] 2002, 19). Furthermore, given that rational thought emerged in accord with Protestant Christianity, it was understood to be a human responsibility to God, that "wise Architect," to appropriate such waste land and improve it through human labor. As Locke ([1689] 1996, 97) put it: "[God] having endued man with those faculties of knowing ... having given him reason, hands and materials, he should build him bridges, or houses." Waste, in this vision of productivity, is a category that is placed over common resources as a precursive gesture to legitimate enclosure and privatization, processes in which architecture has played a central territorial and symbolic role.

The material expression of this philosophical tendency often took the form of vast, ambitious architectural and infrastructural projects: the draining of swamps, the opening up of new land for agricultural production, the construction of new irrigation canals, rationally laid out town plans supported by infrastructures for improved transportation and sanitation.[3]

Architecture, then, has played its part as a technique for, and expression of, the appropriation of wasteland. It has both facilitated, and operated as a materialization of, the "proper" use of God-given natural resources and human ability. We can see clearly architecture's significance in this respect through a negative example: the British appropriation of the territories that came to be called Australia. Although the original inhabitants of this continent built various kinds of temporary and permanent structures, none of them aligned with what the European settlers saw to be "architecture" or "settlement." This in turn acted as proof that such land was unimproved wasteland (*terra nullius*) and available for appropriation. Architecture in this model of property rights is not simply something that comes after property, but operates in the name of enclosure as proof of rights sanctioned by Godly contract. Architecture's presence proves creative productivity and the refashioning of an indeterminate nature toward purpose. An absence of architecture is proof of idleness, itself a sign of squandering. The European Enlightenment consolidated the link between reason, value, and order. Architectural design functioned to order, to give form to the formless, to bring utility to the seemingly useless and value to the worthless. Indeed, in the Age of Reason architecture, with its mix of utility, beauty, and permanence, operated as the cosmetic of territorial order *par excellence*.

The link between ordering arts and the production of value is deeply embedded in modern thought and practice. For example, a twentieth-century variant was articulated by Thorstein Veblen who, in his 1898 essay "Why Is Economics Not an Evolutionary Science?," commented specifically on the transformative power of all the "industrial arts" to turn waste into "land."

> [A]ll land values and land productivity, including the "original and indestructible powers of the soil," are a function of the "state of the industrial art." It is only within the given technological situation, the current scheme of ways and means, that any parcel of land has such productive powers as it has. It is, in other words, only because, insofar, and in such a manner, as men have earned to make use of it. This is what brings it into the category of "land," economically speaking. (Veblen 1990, 337–338)

The "industrial art" of architecture is both an art of *creating* shelter and a technology of partition, enclosure, and appropriation. Other philosophers of the twentieth century closely scrutinized this intellectual legacy, worrying away at its irrationalities and darkened corners. We have noted Foucault's diagnosis of the dark side of "architectures of light." Martin Heidegger, too, reflected on this kind of contradiction. In his meditation on space (*Raum*) he notes that its root, *räumen*, means the act of making room in a constructive and productive sense. It also denotes a shadow meaning, that of clearing, removing obstacles, or evacuating.[4] Architecture, then, is both a creative art and a powerful technology of enclosure and improvement that consolidates and expresses other registers of value. As powerful as its role has been in the production of value, that role means it is always vulnerable to the vagaries of valuation, and certainly so within the frame of capitalism.

CREATIVE DESTRUCTION

As we saw in chapter 2, Zygmunt Bauman (1992) lamented the nineteenth-century medicalization of death and its inauguration of a modern, Western repression of death in life. In his history of the political economy of death, Jean Baudrillard reminds us that this modern conception of death came into being alongside the "appearances of processes of accumulation" (1993, 145). For Baudrillard, the separation of death *from* life, and the repression of death *in* life, is unavoidably linked to accumulation or the spirit of capitalism. Under such conditions society is invested in the irreversibility of quantitative growth: what Baudrillard describes as an "aesthetic vertigo of productivity" (1993, 186) accompanied by "spiraling hoarding" (1993, 147). Time is, he argues, absorbed into value, and the ultimate challenge to value—death—is denied. The calculations of exchange value and the assessments of value equivalences rely on a repression of the endings that time delivers. As Baudrillard puts it: "Our whole culture is just one huge effort to dissociate life and death, to ward off the ambivalence of death in the interests of life as value, and time as the general equivalent" (1993, 147). Nowhere are the contradictions of this effort more blatantly revealed than in capitalism's logic of creative destruction.

Under capitalism, architecture's productive attributes—as creative expression and material form—are at the same time commodities. Architecture's creative and material value is, to use Marx's words, "resolved into" exchange value and subsumed into a market as "price." David Harvey, for example, sees the "built environment" as "a reservoir of fixed and immobile capital assets to be used in all phases of commodity production and in final consumption" (Harvey 1975, 120). When architecture enters into the artless category of "built environment," and is subsumed by the explanatory framework of political economy, then architects are stripped of any higher moral or artistic motivations, and become merely wage laborers. Emplaced within capitalism, and rendered by the restricted framing of its systems of value, architecture's creative worth is, ironically, both desanctified and given sustenance. It is *in* the market and *for* the market, and always subject to the vicissitudes of that market, unless another competing value (perhaps historic or aesthetic value) offers some salvation. Market valuation estranges architects from the product of their labor, as it does for all workers. Their building-commodity travels on into the world without them, at best carrying the brand value of their name, although, as we see later in this book, not even that can guard against the power of the market's vagaries. In large part, under capitalism it is the vicissitudes of competition and the fluctuations of the market, rather than any presence or absence of intrinsic value, that will determine the fate of buildings.[5]

While this may well be bad news for an individual building, it is entirely good news for the business of architectural creativity. Architects are one of that special class of intellectual or creator who are, Marshall Berman noted, "beneficiaries of ... the demand for perpetual innovation" (Berman 1982, 117). This demand not only expands the market for their products and skills, it also often plays its part in stimulating "creative audacity and imagination" (Berman 1982, 118). Architectural creativity comes to depend on the market not only for its realization but also for its moral sustenance, even though the market is an ambiguous and unreliable source in this respect. As we have suggested, architecture's investment in a simplistic metaphor of life, and its commitment to the progenitive purpose of design, can blunt an appreciation of this wider economic truth. It is as fantastic as it is utopian to imagine that architecture might position itself outside of this Faustian tragedy in which honorable creative visions, while determined to transform waste into value, are haunted by the specters of want and need.

Architecture in capitalist contexts is foundationally bound to destruction. Furthermore, capitalism's need to expand and create new markets (be it by territorial expansion, investing in change, or forcing obsolescence) is generative of architecture. Berman, drawing on Marx's concept of "all that is solid melts into air," masterfully captures this contradictory dynamic:

> The bourgeois claim to be the "Party of Order" [and the] ... immense amounts of money and energy put into building, and the self-consciously monumental character of so much of this building ... testify to the sincerity and seriousness of this claim. And yet, the truth of the matter ... is that everything that bourgeois society builds is built to be torn down ... all these are made to be broken tomorrow, smashed or shredded or pulverized or dissolved, so they can be recycled or replaced next week, and the whole process can go on again and again, hopefully forever, in ever more profitable forms. (Berman 1982, 99)

As Berman concludes, architecture's apparent material solidity "actually count[s] for nothing and carr[ies] no weight at all." Monuments "are blown away like frail reeds." Even the most beautiful and impressive buildings—Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, or Gothic cathedrals—are closer in their social function to fragile "tents and encampments" (Berman 1982, 99). Architecture is pulled into what David Harvey dubbed capitalism's "perpetual perishing," wherein "capital builds a physical landscape appropriate to its own condition at a particular moment in time, only to have to destroy it, usually in the course of a crisis, at a subsequent point in time" (Harvey 1975, 124). Baudrillard suggests that this cycle of consumption and destruction is a kind of "mirror logic" that entails a "perpetual calculated suicide of mass objects" (1998, 46–47). For Harvey, as we shall see below, accepting that perpetual perishing is central to capitalism is an important first step in shaping a rigorous ecological attitude to, among other things, architecture.

The political economist would have us see the cyclical logic of creative destruction as belonging to an acquisitive and expansionist capitalism. The economist Joseph Schumpeter, to whom the phrase "creative destruction" is often misattributed,[6] elaborated this logic through a consideration of technology. Industrial and technological mutation, he argued, "revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one" (Schumpeter 1975, 83). The dialectic between technological destruction and creation that Schumpeter describes has explicit implications for built environments and how they accommodate, inhibit, or enable economic activities over time. For example, if the use or function of a vicinity changes, its buildings may become unusable or unneeded. At other times, building technologies themselves become outdated or obsolete with respect to contemporary tastes or standards.

Michael Thompson's (1979) book *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value* is an oft-cited source for the contemporary revival of interest in value and waste. It is less often mentioned that two of Thompson's key empirical cases were architectural: housing in North London, and an English country "mansion" named "The Grange." His meditation on these cases reminds us that,

relative to other fabricated things, architecture is usually designed and built to last. Many of the regulations and rules that guide architectural design and construction deliver a stability that other objects do not enjoy or require. We expect architecture to last, and we invest creative energy, material, labor, law, money, and emotion in architecture on the assumption that it will. This is translated into economic measures of value. Even relatively modest buildings such as houses are considered in economic systems to have relatively high and stable value because of their durability.

Houses, like most buildings, cannot be regarded as durable in any unqualified sense. Without maintenance and investment they will decay, and may eventually disappear. Indeed, as Steven Groák (1992) notes, buildings are only ever sustained as coherent and permanent artifacts because of the incessant microrenewals—a mending here, a replacement there—that their inhabitants or proprietors perform on them. In economics it is well understood that buildings have a life span. But that life was conventionally assumed to flow in one direction: toward reduced value and, eventually, no value. As Thompson suggests, a conventional view of the nature of housing "would be that, when new, a house had a certain expected life-span and a certain, quite high, value. As time went by the expected life-span would decrease, and so would its economic value. When it reached its allotted span its value would be virtually zero, it would be demolished, and the process would start again" (Thompson 1979, 35). Thompson is at pains to note that the economist often mistakenly interprets that life cycle to be a consequence of some intrinsic quality of architecture. This view mistakenly assumes that the "lastingness of bricks and mortar, tiles and plaster, timber and glass" in a building and "its career (its gradual physical and social decline) [are] the natural outcome of fair wear and tear, of continual use and the ravages of the weather." While the physical stability of a building might on occasions be "slightly modified" by a "fall in public esteem ... deriving from the effects of obsolescence and the vagaries of fashion," in the view of the economist, architecture's "physical properties" determine its value as a "consumer durable" (Thompson 1979, 36).

Thompson shows how the value of objects is socially produced, contingent, and malleable. Object value can mutate from that of a durable to that of rubbish, and back again, sometimes regardless of material quality or integrity. The first of the two architectural cases he uses to make his point is a now-familiar story: the gentrification of inner-city housing. For Thompson, the all-too-evident cycles of devaluation and revaluation of North London housing in the 1970s offered a "ready-made laboratory" for the study of socially produced value (Thompson 1979, 35).[7]

Gentrification with respect to housing entails a process whereby working-class areas (originally often inner-city areas) deemed to be valueless "slums," worthy only of demolition, undergo revaluation and rejuvenation by others who judge those areas, and their building stock, to have potential value. The precondition for gentrification is the decline in an area's value because of disinvestment. That disinvestment might be a consequence of the deteriorated physical state of the building stock, the inadequacy of the supporting urban infrastructure, the stigmatized image of the neighborhood, or the outmoded style of building stock that it contains. The buildings in such areas of disinvestment pass into the category of waste or "rubbish." They are, in effect, in place but out of time. In the second stage of gentrification, that very same architectural "rubbish" is seen by others as potentially valuable in economic and cultural terms. Buildings that are in place once again, thanks to changing circumstances, perceptions, or both, reenter time. The potential value (what in economic terms is called the rent gap) is realized by the investment of economic and cultural capital. Instead of demolition or modernization, the architectural object is lovingly restored, redecorated, and refurbished, sometimes with little more than the sweat and cultural equity of the gentrifier. The story of gentrification is so familiar to us now, and so fully absorbed into accounts of contemporary urban change, that it is hard to recapture how buildings so usefully served Thompson's then quite novel argument.[8] Thompson's architectural examples very effectively illustrated his wider argument about the socially and economically contingent value of things. They did so because buildings offer an evident irony: they are obdurate things that seem value-durable, yet they can switch from one value category to another and back again. If this can happen for the seemingly inflexible built object, then it is surely the case for all kinds of other artifacts. By looking at buildings, Thompson could convincingly argue that object value was not intrinsically related to material qualities, not even to claimed durability.

Thompson's second architectural example was "The Grange," a country house in Hampshire, England, that in 1804 was renovated into the style of a Greek temple by the architect and antiquary William Wilkins. The Grange was a useful example for Thompson because it generated conflicting cultural valuations that were passionately articulated in the late 1960s, when its owner served a notice of the intention to demolish. One commentator regarded The Grange as "a sadly misused durable," whose architectural qualities were "breath-taking," "irreplaceable," and "the epitome of Neo-Classicism" (Inskip cited in Thompson 1979, 96–97). Another saw it as "a transient" that had overstayed its welcome; a "phoney," an "eyesore," and "a multi-legged prehistoric monster" (Toone cited in Thompson 1979, 96–97). As Thompson so succinctly concludes: "One man's rubbish can be another man's desirable object." Thompson's meditation

on architectural value recalibrates an economic logic of valuation by way of the cultural sphere of taste. His is part of a broader scholarship that has attended to the mutable and divergent logics of cultural valuations of the built environment. As Thompson (1979, 102) notes, speaking against the systems thinking of equilibrium economics, the malleable value that the architectural object enjoys is "neither arbitrary, nor natural, nor homeostatic," it is fully social. Architecture's relative durability does not exempt it from the principle of mutable value, but it does ensure that architecture generally "circulates"—via processes of reinvestment, restoration, and revaluation—more slowly through its ebb and flow. As a consequence, buildings are regularly out of time—unused, unloved, unappreciated, devalued—but still very much in place (Hommels 2008). As we shall see in chapter 6, on obsolescence, it is one thing for a building to be deemed waste, and quite another for it to be materially broken up as waste. Unlike other waste objects, which can be managed or rendered invisible by being pushed into a garbage bin, stored in the attic, compacted in a landfill, or biodegraded, buildings often, resolutely and publicly, stay in view and in place regardless of their economic and public evaluations.

Thompson's work, as with much subsequent scholarship on gentrification, drew into view the role of taste in pushing and pulling architecture into and out of value. This is possible because architecture as a commodity is subject to what Thorstein Veblen described as "conspicuous consumption." Conspicuous consumption is the term Veblen used to explain the utilization of human resources not for need but for pecuniary display and competition. Because such consumption is excess to need, Veblen also saw it as a kind of squandering or, as he put it, "conspicuous *waste*." He detected in the logics of conspicuous consumption practices that were not rational in terms of current economic models. In explicating conspicuous consumption, Veblen specifically notes how it manifests in and through architecture and its "selective adaptation of designs." In his typically opaque style, Veblen deems unnecessary architectural ornament to be "ugly waste":

> It would be extremely difficult to find a modern civilized residence or public building which can claim anything better than relative inoffensiveness in the eyes of anyone who will dissociate the elements of beauty from those of honorific waste. The endless variety of fronts presented by the better class of tenements and apartment houses in our cities is an endless variety of architectural distress and of suggestions of expensive discomfort. Considered as objects of beauty, the dead walls of the sides and backs of these structures, left untouched by the hands of the artist, are commonly the best feature of the building. (Veblen [1899] 1965, 93)

Veblen reveals his own modernist predilections here, and in so doing echoes Le Corbusier's view that "trash is always abundantly decorated" ([1925] 2008, 179). The presence and absence of architectural ornament in the "better class of tenements and apartment houses" serves Veblen well. It allows him to distinguish between a consumption driven by human need and one accredited by canons of fashion, taste, and style. The latter, Veblen argues, leads only to excess, and "hold[s] the consumer [including the architectural consumer] up to a standard of expensiveness and wastefulness" (Veblen 1965, 70). For Veblen, the very capacity for such excessive consumption is the sign of superproductivity. Writing almost a century later, Manuel De Landa (2006, 98) makes a similar point in his assemblage analysis of buildings, noting that when slow-paced, conservative tradition was replaced with fashion as an architectural force, buildings became increasingly mutable and impermanent.

The phrase "creative destruction" is nowadays routinely linked to Schumpeter's analysis of capitalism's cyclical logics of development and progress. Recent scholarship, however, has suggested that the term entered into European thought of the time by way of an altogether more rounded value system. Schumpeter was notorious for not attributing sources, and it has even been said that his theory was merely a translation for a North American audience of ideas already circulating in continental economic theory. One such source was the German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart. Sombart was influenced by the Nietzschean idea that creation was inseparable from destruction, as articulated in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. And that variant of the idea of creative destruction is understood, in turn, to have derived from the Hindu model of three supreme godheads—Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer—a model of being in the world which opens to, rather than withdraws from, the cycle of life and death.[9] By drawing attention to this we are not suggesting yet another orientalist pathway of redemption for architecture. We are not offering up Hinduism as an alternative, essentialized cultural model of world-making. But we are suggesting that another logic of value, a different ordering of life and death, may already be inside the modern, Western concept of creative destruction. Might contemporary architecture redeem something of this forgotten meaning? What virtualities, cyclabilities, and deformations might architecture embrace in doing so?

AN ECONOMY OF DILAPIDATION

Pairing production and consumption is only one way to theorize the economy of wasting. David Harvey gestures toward this with his sense that "permanences—no matter how solid they may seem—" (and here we are drawn immediately to the permanence that is claimed by built architecture) "are not eternal but always

subject to time as 'perpetual perishing.' They are contingent on processes of creation, sustenance and dissolution" (Harvey 1996, 261). Although the theories of value we have encountered thus far remind us of its vagaries (and what this might mean for architecture), they are all contained within a rather narrow conceptualization of economy. We must push further into the interplay between form (matter) and value (mattering) to equip architecture with a "sacrificial" sensibility suited to our times. We are guided on this path by the thinking of Georges Bataille.

Bataille was once dubbed, by an enraged André Breton, the "excremental philosopher" for his obsession with degradation and decay, and his interest in the reciprocity of life and death (Kendell 2007, 81). Breton was right. Bataille, by his own admission, sought to develop a "scatology" or "science of filth." In this sense, Bataille might just be what an architecture of the negative needs. Architecture has had its flirtations with Bataille's thinking already, and the news did not appear to be good. It certainly lowered the tone. Denis Hollier (1989) titled his account of the writings of Bataille *Against Architecture*. Among other things, Hollier returned to Bataille's explicit statements on architecture which appeared in the Critical Dictionary and were later published as a series of entries in *Documents* across 1929 and 1930.[10] Bataille, as Hollier (1989, ix) notes, wrote against architecture, which he saw as expressing and embodying a masterful authority, "orders and interdictions," ideal states, and powers of subjection. The form and formalisms of architecture aspire to durability; they presume to "cast time to the outside," and to oppose "all disturbing elements." Architecture's principle is that of "repetition": it is "the ideal and immobilizing harmony, guaranteeing that motifs, whose essence is the canceling of time, will last" (Bataille cited in Hollier 1989, 46). For Bataille it is the prison that is the Ur-form of this authoritarian architecture. Bataille thoroughly challenges the anthropomorphic, natalist, and utilitarian fantasies that give architecture unity of purpose, as well as form. He does this by way of his radical rethink of the nature of economy, which is of course necessarily a rethink of the theory of value.

Bataille's *Accursed Share* argued against an understanding of economy as necessarily cumulative and productive: "I am of those who destine men," he said, "to things other than the incessant growth of production." Bataille sought to challenge the Western civilizational fantasy that "the entirety of the world and of human experience can be made useful" (Kendell, 2007, 96). He did this by focusing on consumption. Bataille distinguished two kinds of consumption: one in which resources are consumed to meet basic needs (which he positioned as essentially part of the production process), and another in which resources are squandered. He pushed the idea of economy toward what he called the "sacred horror" of productivity's other: loss, sacrifice, expenditure, waste, death. He

positioned expenditure as the "motivating and terminal goal" of productive activity (Smith 1988, 139). His rereading of economy by way of this theory of *dépense* put "restrictive economy" accounts, with all their emphasis on productive activity, into play with the inevitable expenditures associated with "living matter in general." This Bataille dubbed "general economy" or "energy economy" (Bataille 1988, 12). The energy central to Bataille's rethinking of economy was not evident within standard economic concepts such as *Homo economicus*, utility, accumulation, or conservation, nor even something like Veblen's wastefulness of conspicuous consumption. Bataille understood that the "wealth" of the world (which for him was energy) could be used for growth, accumulation, and productive consumption, but he also insisted that it was radiated, absorbed, and lost without profit, in glorious and catastrophic incidences of unproductive expenditure. As he put it: "We cannot ignore or forget that the ground we live on is little other than a field of multiple destructions" (Bataille 1988, 23). Such destructions—death among them—Bataille saw as the "ultimate luxury," for they bore no return.

We might imagine that architecture, because of its creative aspirations and aesthetic attributes, is already other to, or more than, productivity in the narrow sense. Architecture's product cannot be reduced to utility, and garners its selfhood from balancing necessary purpose with a complementary artistic supplement (Hollier 1989, 31). Certainly, Bataille's perspective chimes with older debates on a modern system of the arts (as we saw in chapter 2) and places "architectural construction" among the arts that had real expenditures (labor, materials, and so on) as well as "symbolic expenditures" (Bataille 1985, 120). But for the most part the debates about the luxurious excesses of architecture's symbolic expenditures (such as ornament) compared to its utility are conducted inside the frame of architecture's agreed productive worth, as we saw with Veblen's meditation on value. Architecture's symbolic luxuries, although variably received, are generally delivered in a manner that is supplementary to utility and serves the expression of order. In a recent reading of Bataille through architecture, Elizabeth Grosz proposes that architecture should escape from its "straitjacket" by attending to "its own excesses, its bestial monstrosity, its alliances with forces, affects, energies, experiments, rather than with ordinances, rules, function or form." She understands, as Bataille did, that architecture is "far more than measured, calculated economy" (Grosz 2001, 154–155).[11]

The complex relationship between nonutilitarian architectural add-ons and utility is well demonstrated by the Gothic style, and certainly architect's expert on the Gothic, Ruskin, was attuned to the peculiar link between ornamental excesses and utility. Jessica Maynard (2005) has pointed out the synergies between Ruskin's account of the Gothic style and Bataille's notion of expenditure.

The Gothic for Ruskin, as he stated in *The Stones of Venice*, was "a magnificent enthusiasm, which feels as if it could never do enough to reach the fullness of its ideal: an unselfishness of sacrifice, which would rather cast fruitless labor before the altar than stand idle in the market" (cited in Maynard 2005, 139). It was an architectural style, as Ruskin noted in *Bible of Amiens*, that served "the purpose of enclosing or producing no manner of profitable work whatsoever" (cited in Maynard 2005, 138). Furthermore, Maynard's reading of Ruskin (by way of Bataille) captures the imperfection and incompleteness of the Gothic architectural project, which in Ruskin's view was endlessly in the making: a busy-ness captured by the term "fretwork," which evokes not only filigree, but also the worry and wearing away that can defer a project from completion.

Bataille's general economy of architecture speaks to aesthetic flourishes not simply because they are in excess to utility—luxurious—but because they capture logics of incompleteness and wasting. Bataille offers us a way of thinking about architecture not simply as purified ideal expressions, but as expressions connected to their base matter. He orients architecture toward "a movement of dilapidation" (Bataille 1988, 38). This is why he discussed at length the pyramids of the Aztecs, and the flamboyant ceremonies of human sacrifice that were staged upon them. These monuments were designed not to hide or replace death but to showcase an economy the center of which was the display of sacrifice. For Bataille, this display was anti-productive and anti-reproductive. And this is why he was fascinated by the excesses of human expenditure needed to construct sumptuary monuments like pyramids: "The worker who labors at the construction of a pyramid destroys [the surplus resources it has at its disposal] uselessly: From the standpoint of profit the pyramid is a monumental mistake; one might just as well dig an enormous hole, then refill and pack the ground ... the pyramids ... have the advantage of consuming without return—without a profit—the resources that they use" (Bataille 1988, 119). The pyramid, from Bataille's perspective on value, is "pure and simple dissipation" (Bataille 1988, 25). We might contrast this interpretation of the relationship between waste and pyramid to that of Le Corbusier. When walking through the slagheaps of Flanders, Le Corbusier is reported to have experienced a sublime moment, and dreamt that he was among the Pyramids of Giza. As Jeremy Till notes, in this dream "two states of matter, slagheap and eternal pyramid, are kept apart by only the most fragile defenses—an appeal to the notion of intent"; the pyramids are designed to be architecture, the slagheaps appear as if they were architecture (Till 2009, 69). It is Le Corbusier's formalistic architectural vision that sees the shape of the slagheap against a twilight sky as equivalent to a pyramid. But for Bataille it is their *very intent* that enters pyramids into the category of waste, as surely as the slagheap.

This is why, for Bataille, the demolition of buildings often serves a productive role in explicating his theory of general economy—be it American Northwest native peoples deliberately squandering resources by burning down their own houses (Bataille 1988, 76); the collapse of a factory chimney that marked the "stinking earth" of industry and acted as an "oracle of all that is most violent" (Bataille et al. 1995, 51), or the collapsing wall of a prison designed to teach philosophers about the "loutish, scallywag and non-continuous behavior of space" (Bataille et al. 1995, 75). It is not surprising that Bataille has been branded as the thinker who is against architecture. But he was only against an architecture that stood for or assumed a certain calculative logic and presumption of permanence. In elaborating the reverse logics of expenditure, Bataille famously drew on the "primitive economic institution" of the potlatch, derived via Marcel Mauss, wherein social status is acquired through the giving away and squandering of property. This example reminds us that Bataille may well be tarrying with loss and expenditure, but he is still invested in understanding how they operate productively. Bataille may also offer ways for architecture to reconstitute itself in relation to the nonproductive expenditure that necessarily accompanies its purifying idealizations, formalisms, and formations. By taking our vision away from architecture as the solid output of creativity, acquisition, utility, and conservation, he reconnects architecture to its base materialism. Only then might we think about an architecture that understands its necessary and inevitable squanderings, be they good or bad, productive or unproductive. As Bataille noted, the "squandering of energy ... enters into consideration only once it has entered into the order of things" (Bataille 1988, 193). Bataille offers a vision that helps to disturb the value of architecture because it tarries with architecture's ends: not only the matter of *to what end* (purpose and utility) but also the questions of *when to end* (nihilism).

DEFORMATION

Edward Hollis begins his book *The Secret Lives of Buildings* (2009) with reference to a painting by the émigré artist Thomas Cole (who founded the Hudson River School), *The Architect's Dream*. A well-known image for architects and art historians, it shows a view of an array of differently lit buildings in varying architectural styles: Egyptian, Moorish, Gothic, Grecian. The buildings of ancient Greece and Egypt are washed in light, identifying them as instances of architectural perfection. Other, "rude" styles, notably the Gothic, are set in shadow, symbolizing their lesser architectural worth according to Cole. It is hard to know if this set piece is an architect's dream or a nightmare. For Cole, the slow march of architecture away from the ancients is nightmarish, as his color coding indicates. From another point of view, however, this composition of the co-presence

of architectural styles may well illustrate an architectural dream come true: all buildings from all ages standing for all time. This is the dream of durability. Hollis (2009, 6) goes on to note how this dream "haunts" most classic works on architecture wherein great buildings are "described as if the last piece of scaffolding has just been taken away ... as if history had never happened." This is a variant on natalist architecture—architecture that is forever young. As he says, we expect great architecture to be "timeless," and so designated as having a right to permanence or, at the very least, the right to reiteration.

Architectural history, Hollis observes, is written around the monuments that were built to last, as opposed to the housing that has been lost. There is, he argues, an assumption that for architecture to remain beautiful it must not change; buildings must aspire to be durable: "All architects hope that the buildings they have designed will memorialize their genius, and so they dare to hope that their building will last forever, unaltered" (Hollis 2009, 7). But in truth this is not so: buildings decay, their parts get used in other buildings, some of their bits become souvenirs, others get inappropriately restored, buildings burn and get buried. The architectural dream is really a "nightmare" comprising "a noisy, dirty entrepôt of multitudinous architectures in the process of constant change" (Hollis 2009, 8). Hollis's own book is about the rich and strange "lives that buildings lead," what he refers to as their "secret lives." These stories of lives led, Hollis argues, have been either overlooked or willfully ignored (Hollis 2009, 9). Architects design architecture to be durable, but that is always a relative attribute. Given a long enough time frame or a violent enough context, even the most durable buildings will disappear. Durability is not an intrinsic attribute of architecture, it is an attribute of how the social world approaches architecture.

Architecturally speaking, staying around for a long time—approaching permanence—is possible only if malleability and relationality are admitted. Long-standing buildings often outlive their original use, the original intentions of their maker, the original aesthetics that determined their form, and the technologies of their making. When they do so, in Hollis's anthropomorphic language, "they are free to do as they will." "[T]hey suffer numberless subtractions, additions, divisions and multiplications," resulting in, among other things, form and function "having little to do with one another." This protean secret life of buildings, Hollis argues, undermines the "confident dicta of architectural theory" (2009, 9). Hollis is making a case for what he calls the "biography" of a building. His is both a "history of the alteration of buildings and a manifesto for the same" (2009, 10). As Hollis notes, it is "shapeshifting" and "incremental change" that have constituted the "paradoxical mechanism" (2009, 14) of architectural durability. It is a similar observation about building reuse that led the sociologist Michael Guggenheim (2009) to invert one of Latour's central ideas, and dub renovated and reprogrammed buildings "mutable immobiles."

David Harvey offers a useful way of moving forward here. He thinks of place formation, in which architecture clearly plays its part, as a process of carving out "permanences" from the flow of processes creating spaces. But he also admits that these "permanences," no matter how solid they may seem, are not eternal: "they are always subject to time as 'perpetual perishing' ... contingent on the processes that create, sustain and dissolve them" (Harvey 1996, 261). We have already seen how Harvey attributes some of this perpetual perishing to the creative destruction of capitalism, but he also acknowledges a more diverse array of agents: physical, social, cultural, and biological, as well as economic. For Harvey, "permanences" are but moments in the "overall spatio-temporal dynamics of ecological processes" (Harvey 1996, 294). Here Harvey's sense of a perpetually mutable built environment intersects with a range of other thinkers who operate with a newly ecological sensibility.[12] Connecting this ecological sensibility to architecture effects two important transformations. First, it further challenges the organismic assumptions that lay within the biographical and natalist fantasies of architecture. For example, De Landa (2006) has shown that organismic thinking is part of a wider tradition of social theory that overemphasizes coherent totalities, or what he calls "relations of interiority." Thought about in architectural terms, this would consist of seeing the building as a coherent whole, to be understood as a relatively autonomous and essential thing (an idea held very succinctly in the architectural idea of "the completed building"). De Landa replaces this with a Deleuzean-inspired sensibility of "relations of exteriority." Architecture, so understood, is an expressive and materialized assemblage, part of a wider relational field and, like other matter, enjoys morphogenetic capacities. Second, the ecological sensibility challenges architecture's temporal assumptions and aspirations. Architecture as assemblage is always part of matter-energy flow, such that our perception of it as durable and permanent is possible only if this flow is denied or actively worked against. This kind of temporality also places architecture into a more horizontal positioning with respect to the earth, part of what Serres (1995) calls the "natural contract." Biographical time is replaced with evolutionary time (Bennett 2010, 11).

Such a boundless architecture must understand that destruction is not simply of the short term and building of the long term (Serres 1995, 30). "Death" is in life, or—to put it in terms more aligned to the project of this book—it is part of the vitality of architecture. Deleuze offers us a useful way of thinking about such radical temporality and extensiveness through his concept of the event. This is quite different to an event thought of as a distinct happening, such as "a man has been run over," or even perhaps, to recall Tschumi's event architecture, a person being pushed through a window. When Deleuze answers the question

"what is an event?" he calls upon us to comprehend a far more ubiquitous, less human-centered sense of eventfulness.

In contrast to the dramatic event of a man being run over, Deleuze offers an example of the Great Pyramid. The pyramid is a useful example, for it is routinely used to stand for architecture at its most permanent and powerful. For example, as an aside in his "junkspace" essay, Koolhaas himself observes that modern-day architecture no longer "leave[s] pyramids." The Great Pyramid can signify what Deleuze means by event because it demonstrates two things. First, it is a seemingly eternal object that remains the same over the succession of moments: thousands of years, "a period of one hour, thirty minutes, five minutes" (1992, 86). Secondly, it shows also "the passage of Nature or a flux: it is constantly gaining and losing molecules" (1992, 90). This image of the pyramid helps Deleuze to explain something about the eventfulness of the world: a seemingly permanent and "eternal object," like the Great Pyramid, realizes that permanence in a condition of flux.

Social theorist Jane Bennett extends this kind of thinking in relation to matter and materials of all kinds by way of her concept of vital materialism. For Bennett, things we apprehend as stable objects (such as buildings) are merely "matter in variation" or matter in movement: what she elsewhere refers to as matter as emergent gathering. She puts it like this:

> The stones, tables, technologies, words, and edibles that confront us as fixed are mobile, internally heterogeneous materials whose rate of speed and pace of change are slow compared to the duration and velocity of the human bodies participating and perceiving them. (Bennett 2010, 57–58)

For Deleuze, the event is ubiquitous and has specific implications for thinking about formed things—or, as he and Guattari called them, "expressive units": bodies, buildings, cities, and so on.[13] To think of an expressive unit such as a building as a coherent and stable form is merely a false abstraction from the real eventful flux of being. All such representable states of affairs are, as Deleuze puts it, "impure events."

A variant of the Deleuzean event has been proposed by Latourean scholars, working through the frame of science and technology studies. Latour offers a usefully empirical way of thinking about large technological systems like buildings, as well as the practices of their design and making. He sees such systems as comprising human and nonhuman elements in heterogeneous and contingent associations that propagate "*transformations*." For Latour, large technological systems of any kind are like "a never-ending building-site in some great metropolis," where there is "no overall architect ... no design" and no stability. In an explicit statement on building technologies, Latour, working with Yaneva (2008),

conceives of a building as a "moving project." For them, architecture is not only designed relationally but, once built, continuously re-forms in relation to the passage of time, as well as the planned and unplanned renovations wrought by the human and nonhuman agents it coexists with. Seen in this way, a building is flow, not form; it is creative, not merely a creation.

BUILDINGS MUST DIE

A PERVERSE VIEW OF ARCHITECTURE

architecture

STEPHEN CAIRNS
JANE M. JACOBS

Buildings, though inanimate, are often assumed to have "life." And the architect, through the act of design, is assumed to be their conceiver and creator. But what of the "death" of buildings? What of the decay, deterioration, and destruction to which they are inevitably subject? And what might such endings mean for architecture's sense of itself? In *Buildings Must Die*, Stephen Cairns and Jane Jacobs look awry at core architectural concerns. They examine spalling concrete and creeping rust, contemplate ruins old and new, and pick through the rubble of earthquake-shattered churches, imploded housing projects, and demolished brutalist office buildings. Their investigation of the death of buildings reorders architectural notions of creativity, reshapes architecture's preoccupation with good form, loosens its vanities of durability, and expands its sense of value. It does so not to kill off architecture as we know it, but to rethink its agency and its capacity to make worlds differently.

Cairns and Jacobs offer an original contemplation of architecture that draws on theories of waste and value. Their richly illustrated case studies of building "deaths" include the planned and the unintended, the lamented and the celebrated. They take us from Moline to Christchurch, from London to Bangkok, from Tokyo to Paris. And they feature the work of such architects as Eero Saarinen, Carlo Scarpa, Cedric Price, Arata Isozaki, Rem Koolhaas, and François Roche. *Buildings Must Die* is both a memento mori for architecture and a call to reimagine the design values that lie at the heart of its creative purpose.

Stephen Cairns is Scientific Director of the Future Cities Laboratory at the Singapore-ETH Centre. Jane M. Jacobs is Professor of Urban Studies at Yale-NUS College, Singapore.

"*Buildings Must Die* is indeed a perverse work on architecture, architecture at its most raw and elemental, at the point of its decay and destruction, sometimes quickly, with spectacular effect, and sometimes slowly. Architecture is never fully living, and is always passing out of existence; as it makes, so what it makes is inevitably unmade. This book is a fascinating, articulate exploration of this movement of creative destruction that haunts the very project of architecture."
Elizabeth Grosz, author of *Architecture from the Outside*

"Buildings rot. Buildings decay. Buildings die. But this sense of buildings' mortality can be a positive force, as Cairns and Jacobs illustrate so well. Out of the rubble, they have created a book of immense significance not just for the practitioners and theorists of architecture but for anyone who is interested in the ecology of habitation."
Nigel Thrift, Vice-Chancellor, University of Warwick

"*Buildings Must Die* offers case studies and meditations upon architectural ends in the tradition of Neil Harris's *Building Lives* and Karsten Harries's *The Ethical Function of Architecture*. Yet *Buildings Must Die* is also uniquely life-affirming, showing practitioners how 'death and waste can play their parts in architectural creativity.'"
Daniel M. Abramson, Associate Professor, Tufts University, and author of *Building the Bank of England: Money, Architecture, Society, 1694–1942*

"Of all the versions of the body-building analogy—from Vitruvius to Alberti, Le Corbusier, Aldo van Eyck, and architects today—few, if any, have invoked mortality as the term of comparison, as Stephen Cairns and Jane Jacobs do in *Buildings Must Die*. New conceptions of architectural order result from this approach: deformation is not devaluation, permanence involves perpetual perishing, and duration depends on alteration. Historically significant themes such as ruin and weathering are discussed, also topics that are particularly relevant today: disaster, demolition, and waste. A fuller understanding of endings emerges, which in turn leads to a profound reconsideration of beginnings, and thus of architecture itself."
David Leatherbarrow, Professor of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania, and author of *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology, and Topography*

978-0-262-02693-2

Printed and bound in Canada

THE MIT PRESS
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02142
HTTP://MITPRESS.MIT.EDU