

Trans-architecture

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Abstract

Starting from the intense experience of the gay club, this paper asks whether that experience or event can be acknowledged by architectural theory. Via a reading of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and Jacques Derrida's *Before the Law*, it posits that the transing of gender can be a clue as to the transing of architecture away from essentialising ontologies. It then uses Deleuze and Guattari's idea of an assemblage to show how this can be done, making reference to the assemblage of the gay seduction scene in Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* and the image of the interplay of orchid and wasp that is inspired by it. The paper concludes by showing how this ontology relates to a specific instance of transing architecture in the gay and SM clubs of Vauxhall, South London.

Keywords

Derrida, Deleuze, transing, architecture, assemblage

In the introduction to *Queer Space*, Aaron Betsky invokes his visits to New York's Studio 54 club:

Passing through the barricades, you would enter into a long hallway, the music and lights already echoing through the space ... Nearly nude males would wrap themselves up in shadows, adoring themselves in motion. Upstairs, on the balcony, voyeurs would watch, or would engage in their own, more intimate dances, discovering their bodies in others ... This was the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that New York produced in the 1980s ... It was a spectacle that brought to life a vision of a liberated, joyous, and sensual existence ... a new world was born, but it would have no issue, it would make no difference, it would save nothing.[1]

This striking experience prompts Betsky to write *Queer Space*, but the rest of the book makes no reference back to that experience, nor does it attempt to place it theoretically in relation to the question of architecture in general or queer space in particular. John Paul Ricco, in the preface to *The Logic of the Lure*, writes in similar terms when he traverses the upper floor of Manhattan's Limelight club and finds:

a small, rather quiet, dark, and nearly stifling hot room packed full of men and boys, pants around their ankles, hands groping crotches, t-shirts pulled behind necks, kissing, sucking, jacking, licking. I instantly realized that I had entered a space of erotic, ethical, and perhaps political potential unlike any other, in its refusal of so many codes, protocols, laws, and imperatives. That night I experienced, as if for the first time, the pure pleasure of the force of the existential in all of its singular multiplicity.[2]

Ricco has a different conceptual apparatus to that of Betsky, who retains a conventional representational mode of analysis, hinted at by his references to the 'spectacle' and the idea that *this* queer space can make no difference, that it has 'no issue'. Ricco's interest in pornography avoids subsuming it under specularity or representation or, importantly, under a logic of use or fertility (or lack thereof). Nonetheless, his evocation of the architecture of the Limelight club remains, as with Betsky, *sui generis*. He proposes no general architectural theory or philosophy that would at the same time respect the specificity of this experience of the gay club. It is significant that these scenes are included in the *introduction* or the *preface*. Somehow, they get the writing going, they act as a stimulus to action, but remain outside the scope of the main part of the text which they prompt.

In this essay, I want to ask whether, and how, we can make a connection between the intensity of Ricco's and Betsky's experience of these spaces and happenings, and the spaces that architects and others more generally work with, create, theorise, inhabit and experience. In other words, is there an exceptionalism of the gay club, of the freedom it allows, of the acts that it contains and encourages, or is it possible for this architecture to have an issue, to make a difference, to carry its logic through to, on the one hand, the undermining of everyday minor fascisms – in particular, the spatial ones – and on the other hand to a general theory of architecture?

In this question, feminist-, queer- and trans-studies can guide us as to how architecture might be rethought.^[3] But more than this: the continuing investment in cis-normative modes of thinking on the part of much architectural theory means that, looking from where we stand now, a transgender or queer way of thought and being has in fact been the only location where such rethinking has occurred. The aim here is not simply to take into account within architecture the theoretical, philosophical and political advances that these other 'disciplines' have made, nor to make connections between the two (instructive though this is), but rather to

call into question and reframe the very ontology and, as we shall see, epistemology of architecture. The queering, or transing of gender will lead to a transing of architecture, of its very mode of being. This will then lead us back to Betsy's and Ricco's experiences in the gay club, not to make these exemplary of architecture, since there is no necessary equivalence between their (experience of) architecture and that of the indefinite series of others (feminists, lesbians, female to male trans, male to female trans, intersex, interracial...), but rather to call into question the exemplary as the founding trope of what architecture is.

This is seen already in the 1998 'Transgender' issue of the *Journal of Gender Studies*, edited by trans academic and trans activist Stephen Whittle, who highlights that this special issue

is a first because it is queer/feminist writings, not one nor the other, it trans'es that border, by which I mean something specific. Trans'ing is not just 'crossing over', not just 'blurring boundaries', not just 'blending categories', but it fully queers the pitch by highlighting, clarifying, deconstructing and then blowing apart the border between queer and feminist theory, just as in 'real' life it highlights, clarifies, deconstructs and then blows apart all the things we know about sex, genders and sexualities.[4]

What transing does is to put into effective and political play Jacques Derrida's quasi-philosophical act of deconstruction, not as a change in how we think about things, but as an intervention in the real itself (which is why it *is* quasi-philosophical). Essentialist notions of sex and gender are deconstructed. As Whittle says, this is *not* just a question of the blurring of boundaries between categories; rather it involves the deconstruction of the hegemony of categorical thought itself. A similar point is made by Jasbir K. Puar, whose essay 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages' draws a distinction between intersectionality and the Deleuzian question

of the assemblage (which we will come to below) and suggests that we need to move on from the one to the other.[5] In the preface to the second edition of *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler contends that gender – as a *performative* issue – is not simply an appeal to the notion of the event, of acts of (repeated, iterated) performance that engender gender. Rather, she highlights the deconstructive tone of the word by citing Jacques Derrida’s text *Before the Law*. Derrida’s deconstruction is always primarily a deconstruction of identity. Identity can be deconstructed, precisely because it has been constructed in the first place. But that construction is shown never to be straightforward for the reason that that which is constructed presents itself instead as foundational, or essential. This means, the constructed quality of identity is elided. The aim of deconstruction is thus to unmask that constructedness: ‘Neither identity nor non-identity is natural, but rather the effect of a juridical performative.’[6] In his analysis of Franz Kafka’s short story *Before the Law*, Derrida displays this text’s deconstructive quality by showing how the law is an effect of an expectation and a co-performance between the one who seeks the law and the gatekeeper of ‘it’. The result of deconstruction is that the ‘it’ has to be put into scare quotes, since there is no identity of the law, there is no law, prior to something like the performance that these two characters iterate through the story. There is no law prior to the interplay between them, and access to the law itself is endlessly delayed, by virtue of ‘an endless *différance*’;[7] but nonetheless the law remains effective. Butler translates this deconstructive and *différencial* trope to the question of gender (something Derrida also does[8]). She wonders, ‘whether we do not labor under a similar expectation concerning gender, that it operates as an interior essence that might be disclosed, an expectation that ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates.’[9]

Architecture, too, is just such a (non)thing. Just as gender-, feminist-, queer-, and trans-studies have called into question essentialised notions of gender, the preceding discussion makes clear that this supposedly ontological question – the question about what architecture

is, is also an epistemological question; one intricately intertwined with the discourse of and on architecture. It matters what is said, and what is written, to the extent that the possible discourses about architecture determine, in exactly the performative manner of which Butler and Derrida speak, what architecture 'is', or is assumed to be. This then has real effects, in the sense that architecture is constructed (and by this I mean both specific instances of what we like to call architecture, and further discourse within the discipline) in the light of these assumptions. We can point to the prevalent cis-normative architectural ontologies equivalent to the categories of gender that transing deconstructs, and outline the categories, or strata (to use Gilles Deleuze's terminology) into which architecture gets forced.

These include the concept of architecture as *exemplary* in relation to the aesthetic. What distinguishes architecture, properly speaking, is said to be that which stands out from the everyday as an object of aesthetic discourse. More generally, architecture is therefore framed within the binary distinction between building and architecture, and the associated binary distinction between the everyday and the exemplary and also between subject (us) and object (building). As exemplary, architecture is conceptualised as a *formal* discipline of design, taking a lead from Kant: 'In ... architecture ..., design is what is essential; in design the basis for any involvement of taste is not what gratifies us in sensation, but merely what we like *because of its form*.' [10] But at the same time, architecture is often given meaning, be that a phenomenological or an iconographic one, and is therefore framed within the binary distinction between *form* and *meaning*.

Architecture is caught within these normative categories; it is made to fit within what Deleuze calls the 'binary machine' of categorisation or the strata of thought. This binary machine operates by splitting every question and every ontology into a radical (i.e. root-like) question, a question of roots and branches, a tree-like structure composed of a series or sieve

of binary distinctions into which the matter at hand – here, architecture, there gender – is forced.[11]

The transing task, then, is to queer this binary machine, to make of architecture not something sieved through the categories, but mixed across them. Thereby it trances these categories themselves in such a manner that they become an after-effect of the mixture, and not a representation of ontologically pre-existing things. (Pre-existing *things*, because pre-existing *categories*: ontology and epistemology intertwined.) Therein trans-bodies radically differ from ‘hybrid’ others that leave these categories fully intact, perhaps even reinforcing them. And it is indeed in queer studies of architecture that we can find how this *différance* of architecture can be thought more precisely. In a 2010 paper entitled ‘Faceless sex: glory holes and sexual assemblages’, David Holmes, Patrick O’Byrne and Stuart J. Murray give a very precise definition of Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of an assemblage in relation to the use of glory holes in queer meeting places. For them, and in this they are consistent with Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term in *A Thousand Plateaus* and elsewhere,[12] an assemblage is made up neither only of the bath-houses within which the use of glory-holes occurs (as a heterotopic space); nor the two persons using the glory-hole (by having anonymous oral and anal sex through a small hole). The assemblage is rather *the intermixture of these things*:

At the bathhouse, bodies ... form connections with each other. These preliminary connections, which may operate initially through the gaze, create intensities that lie at the core of desire – a result of it as well as its cause. Further connections between bodies, through touch, oral sex, etc. – or even between parts of bodies or inanimate things – create connections that can be multiple and intense. Suffice to say here that assemblages between persons–persons, persons–things, and things–things are legion

and constitute important aspects of our daily existence (hand-spoon at breakfast, toothbrush-teeth, etc.).[13]

The assemblage, for Holmes *et al.* as for Deleuze and Guattari, is a transing. It occurs in the transverse movements and connections that occur in the interplay of things that are usually regarded as entirely diverse. Not least amongst these diverse things are the categories of subject and object, which get entirely undone and deconstructed here. It is not a question of a pre-formed subject and pre-formed object coming into conjunction in the assemblage. Rather, as they make clear, the assemblage is primary, since ‘for Deleuze and Guattari the fixed identity of the Modern subject is nothing more than the particular way in which bodies have been mapped or stratified (cartographié)’. [14] In other words the subject is nothing more than the result of the workings of the binary machine we looked at above.

If cis-normative architectural theory has co-opted the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari from the early 1990s onwards, we would be hard-pressed to find any such transing use of the concept of assemblage within that entire co-option. But in this queer, transing concept of the assemblage – i.e. as an essentially social/material/spatial mixture or individuality, or individuation (as Deleuze and Guattari name it [15]) – we find nothing other than architecture ‘itself’, or architecture thought and experienced (as literature was for Derrida) beyond the binary machine. Architecture does not have the quality of an object (that, we can call building). It is not something to do with a subjective aesthetic response, nor with form deployed in design; nor is it inherently meaningful. And it is no co-incidence that this concept of assemblage is perhaps first most aptly applied to mixtures (that include spatial configurations and which are therefore inherently architectural) within queer studies.

The notion of assemblage within Deleuze and Guattari is itself decidedly queer, in that it produces a shared deterritorialisation. One of the key examples of an assemblage given by

Deleuze and Guattari – one that they come back to on many occasions – is that of the wasp and the orchid. There is a symbiotic relation between these two creatures. One might see the relation between them as essentially imitative or representational: the orchid *imitates* the wasp in order to attract it. But, Deleuze and Guattari say, this is to conceptualise the relation between the two within the grid or sieve of pre-existing categories ('on the level of strata' [16]). Imitation is *not* what happens: rather, it is the 'aparallel evolution of two beings that have absolutely nothing to do with each other' occurring here. [17] In this 'symbiogenesis', both mutually become different with another. [18] The wasp and the orchid, in other words, form an assemblage in the same way that cock-mouth-glory hole occurs in the bathhouse. This linking of the wasp and the orchid to the gay bathhouse is authorised by one of the sources of Deleuze and Guattari's example – the scene of the seductive encounter of the tailor Jupien with Baron de Charlus in the opening pages of Marcel Proust's *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*. This encounter starts with, and is portrayed by the narrator as the mutual lure between bee and orchid. The narrator watches the mutual seduction of the tailor and the aristocrat from a hidden vantage point, where he had originally been looking at 'the precious plant, exposed in the courtyard with that assertiveness with which mothers "bring out" their marriageable offspring ... asking myself whether the unlikely insect would come, by a providential hazard, to visit the offered and neglected pistil.' [19] The insect and the plant remain un-named at this point, and for their unfulfilled interplay is substituted that of the two men, the elderly Charlus and the younger Jupien, who approach each other across the courtyard of the *hôtel* where the narrator lives and where Jupien has his tailor's shop. The exact species of plant and insect are only revealed as the seduction occurs, as if it is the relation of bee and the orchid which are to be compared to the former rather than *vice versa*:

Meanwhile, Jupien, shedding at once the humble, kindly expression which I had always associated with him, had – in perfect symmetry with the Baron – thrown back his head, given at becoming tilt to his body, placed his hand with grotesque effrontery on his hip, stuck out his behind, struck poses with the coquetry that the orchid might have adopted on the providential arrival of the bee. [20]

What Proust is describing here is precisely an architectural assemblage – that is, a mixture of the event of seduction, the courtyard space which enables it, the voice and position of the narrator, the actions of the two men who carry out the dance of an aparallel evolution in front of the hidden narrator's eyes. If Deleuze and Guattari's notion of an assemblage is to be the means of transing architecture, of de-essentialising it, of doing to it what queer studies have done for gender, then it is notable that one source of this concept is the queer situation of the baron and the tailor in Proust's courtyard. It is indeed this situation that gives us a clue to deconstructing architectural theory.

Later, there is an even more intense queer architectural assemblage between these two characters, in Proust's *Le temps retrouvé*, Jupien has procured a gay brothel where Charlus's extreme masochism can be indulged; the narrator witnesses him, chained to a bed, being whipped to shreds by young male prostitutes. There is here a precise description of masochism as an experience of *intensity*, an intensity linked to its architectural 'setting' and to other things supposedly remote from the usual definitions of masochism, such as humour. The scene where Charlus, having been beaten, chats with his torturers, in the hope that they are real murderers (he wishes to be truly threatened by them), and is disappointed when they let slip that they've never committed a crime in their lives, is surely one of the funniest in twentieth century literature. Here again, we find a link to Deleuze. His 1967 book on masochism [21] points to the *humour* of the masochist situation (as opposed to the platonic, we may say cis-normative *irony*

of the sadist). It stresses the role of the masochist as educator, the one who has to educate their partner(s) into the parallel evolution between masochist and their tormentor – just as the prostitutes have to be taught to pretend to be real murderers. As Susan Stryker implies in *Dungeon Intimacies*, we can see Deleuze, as so often, taking a particular queer situation and generalising it into a broad positive possibility. As Stryker says, he ‘deromanticizes love and eroticizes the world’.[22] Or in Deleuze’s words, Masoch ‘has a way of “desexualising” love and at the same time sexualising the entire history of humanity’.[23] In this light, with everything else (‘the entire history of humanity’), architecture too becomes something *sexual*, since an assemblage is nothing other than the sexualising of ontology: an ontology of generative relations. Think of how Deleuze entertained countless such relations with other philosophers. It is therefore not surprising that the bathhouse and the glory-hole is the place where the full architectural import of the assemblage is best revealed. Nor surprising that cis-normative discourses seem unable to fathom the assemblage’s architectural ontological import; either that, or they actively intend to suppress it. But the exemplary quality of the glory-hole then needs to be generalised and understood as being a specific instance of the play of the entire world (or cosmos, as Deleuze would say) and the play of architecture.

This ontology of architecture is concerned primarily with difference and relations, and not with the *terms* of relations. It is an ontology that operates outside or before categories, and in that sense, it does not ask what architecture is, but rather asks *how* it is or *what it does*. This is an ontology that respects the *différance* of architecture, its ‘essentially’ differential character, or its hyper-relationality. Yet, cis-normative notions of essentialism, formalism, typology, and the various architectures of identity all concern themselves with the *terms* of relations, i.e. with what is held to be substantial, material, capable of being formed. It is by this means that the sieve of categories is utilised to define what architecture is. But a transing ontology of architecture as assemblage sees architecture as inherently a question of differences, of

differences between a multiplicity of 'things' that generates, as an after-effect, what subsequently becomes solidified into terms of the relationships that those differences create. For us, architecture therefore becomes (is seen and understood as) the event of those differences, the constant movement of the multiplicity, and the task of the transing architect is to respect this anti-essentialism/anti-formalism/anti-typology and return therefore to a location where differences play a more productive role, where they make a difference. Deleuze and Guattari name this location the *plane of consistency*.

Deleuze's book on masochism was published just before his two books on Spinoza, and one can already see in the earlier book the influence (if unacknowledged) of the seventeenth century anti-Cartesian philosopher. Other well-known Deleuzian themes, picked up in his later work with Guattari, include the phenomena (if not the name itself) of the machine;^[24] the depreciation of representation and the valorisation of symbiosis (do not describe the world, but find a counterpart, just as the masochist has to find their counterpart);^[25] the interest in the *umwelt* (von Uexküll's affective environment, again at that time unacknowledged);^[26] and the fascination (that he gets from Masoch) with the (architectural/spatial) interplay between the nomadic and the steppe.^[27] In this Deleuze, as always, is an empiricist in that he starts from the particular instance and then explains the *common notions* (to use Spinoza's terminology) that he finds therein, rather than starting out from the concept. Here again, the *queer*, the *transgender* (Charlus is often presented by Proust as a woman) and the trans in general, are particular instances in which Deleuze finds his resources. If Deleuze makes only a passing reference to Spinoza in his Masoch book, he utilises the clearly Spinozian notions of the 'essence' of perversion, contrasting this essence with the 'subject' or 'person' that by virtue of the perversion can be eluded.^[28] Thereby Deleuze implicitly addresses the whole Spinozist question of *what a body can do*.

For Susan Stryker, the intimacy of the transsexual masochistic dungeon is exemplary in its queer and transing display of what a body can do, and again one moves from the particular of the trans-situation to the generality of what this transing tells us about the world. 'Transsexual sadomasochism in dungeon spaces enacts a *poesis* (an act of artistic creation) that collapses the boundary between the embodied self, its world and others, allowing one to interpenetrate the others and thereby constitute a specific *place*.' [29] The use of the word 'place' indicates here that Stryker regards this *poesis* as the production of *architecture*, using the term 'architecture' in the way in which I have defined it above, that is, as assemblage. What is also on display here is the Spinozist destruction (or deconstruction) of the Cartesian dichotomy between subject and object, in the collapsing of the boundary between the self and its world. For Spinoza is the one, in the entire history of philosophy, who most clearly undermines this onto-theological and cis-normative split. He famously states that no one knows what the body can do, what it is capable of; [30] but this is only the corollary to the essential point that 'mind and body are one and the same thing', [31] are of one and the same substance. To return to this substance is, in Stryker's terms, to give the possibility of *poesis*, of creation; in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, it is to return to the plane of consistency, the location where all dichotomies are dispensed with, where *everything* – mind, body, history, thought, memory, the whole intertwined cosmos – exists on the same level without hierarchy and can therefore interplay, or *become*, or trans.

Lucas Crawford's seminal *Transgender Architectonics* sets out a blueprint for what this means, in what we might call five points for a new architecture: first, it 'does not entail a move from one gender or materiality to another' (which would leave us still caught in the cis-normative strata or categories) but instead means 'the very ubiquity of constant transformation for all'. [32] In Deleuzian terms, this is 'becoming'. Second, transing and trans-architecture does not happen to the 'sovereign subject' (which would maintain the illusions of

Cartesianism), but instead means ‘the acts and collaborations that happen across bodies, buildings and milieus’.[33] In my terms, these acts *are* architecture; *that* is its ontology. Third, it therefore ‘traverses and undoes the demarcation of a body’s inside and its outside’, being an act of folding and refolding; this makes reference to Deleuze’s book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* where, far from the fold being interpreted in formal architectural terms (the cis-normative interpretation), the fold folds to infinity, and those infinite folds *are* the real.[34] Fourth, Crawford emphasises that this is nothing to do with identities: these are ‘happenings or movements rather than objects or presences’;[35] here, the deconstruction of the metaphysics of presence is affirmed. Fifth, this is a question of the ‘surface’, and again the Deleuzian import of Crawford’s blueprint is clear, since from *The Logic of Sense* onwards, Deleuze was forever railing against depth in the name of what occurs across the surface.[36] As Crawford says, ‘transing shows the inherent instability and décor of even the most “foundational” or “inner” architectures (of the self)’.[37]

As in Deleuze’s use of the exemplary queer situation of the trans-masochist to come to a more general ontology, Crawford’s five points are brought to us via the exemplary architecture of the Blur Building, by diller scofidio + renfro (DS+R) at the Swiss expo 2002.[38] The book also analyses DS+R’s transgender washroom at the Brasserie restaurant in Mies van der Rohe’s Seagram building, showing how the architectural assemblage set up there gives an instance of ‘the explicit relationality of “trans-”’;[39] and shows how the same architects’ New York High Line Park was formerly ‘trans’ – in the sense of being the peripheral location for ‘slaughter houses and transsexuals’ – and is now ‘transitioned’.[40] What is interesting about these analyses is that they move from the explicit, (the case of the washroom, where it seems clear that the architects indeed intended to question binary gender specifics in the context of Mies’s cis-normative architecture) via the slightly more diffuse (the Blur Building, where the transing, or the happening, or the intrinsically eventful quality of the architecture becomes an

experience not specifically to do with gender) to further speculations (the High Line, where the connections Crawford draws regarding the trans quality of the architecture seem, at first sight, to be so liminal as to be forced). In the latter case Crawford states that ‘in addition to “preserving slow meandering experience through varied conditions”, DS+R also include a slow-going staircase, the spread-out steps and landings of which are meant to extend one’s transition time between city street and park.’ [41] This reader at least asked, initially, what is the real trans-architecture point being made here? Surely there are many other examples of slow staircases by ostensibly non-transing architects, and other architectural conditions where transition times are extended? My thoughts went, for instance, to the gentle, and gently varying, staircase up to the Memorial Grove by Erik Gunnar Asplund in the almost painfully affective landscape of the Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm. [Fig. 1] That staircase, with its varying risers and goings, was intended by the architect to encourage the mourners on their route up to a place of comfort where they could view the funeral catafalque from a distance. This seems, at first glance, very distant from Crawford’s concerns.

But that is to mistake the broad implications of the points being made in *Transgender Architectonics*, and in the ontological transformation I am attempting to effect here. The issue is not that trans-architecture is evinced solely by architectures such as that of DS+R, who explicitly address the question of transgender and the debates around transgender washrooms. That explicit address is vital work, but serves a more general purpose to force us to transform our overall ontology of architecture such that Asplund’s slow staircase becomes for us precisely that, a *becoming*, an *event*, which transes the distinction between subject and object, destroys the hegemony of the subject and presence, and shows us what bodies (and, therefore, minds) can do.

Asplund’s sublime staircase nonetheless remains exemplary, perhaps one of the most beautiful staircases ever made. What of *any* staircase *you* have *been*? To return to a point made

at the outset, architecture is so often defined and therefore caught in and sieved through the binary distinction between the everyday and the exemplary, made to sit squarely on the exemplary side of the distinction. If we instead propose an ontology of trans-architecture, if architecture is the becoming or the assemblage that occurs across the distinctions between subject and object (us and building, cock and glory hole, orchid and wasp...), then it will need to be shown what this does to architecture, and what this shows us, in the general milieu of the everyday as well as in the exemplary moments of normative architecture. If DS+R are successful in transing the cis-normative architecture of Mies's Seagram Building, then to what extent is all architecture, the entire city, queered? Also, to what extent is the whole of even Mies's oeuvre transed, since we begin to interpret it through another ontology, through another lens? (As noted above, when our epistemology of architecture changes, so does our ontology: architecture, even the most normative, can begin to trans itself since architecture, in Deleuzian manner, is always us-in-becoming.)

The districts of Vauxhall and Kennington, in South London, have for centuries – in common with the whole of the south bank of the river Thames – been associated with pleasure. This befits their peripheral position at the edge of the medieval and eighteenth century city of Westminster and the City of London proper; in Victorian times, as the city expanded, and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the area remained peripheral to the centre, a space of cheaper rents and cheaper land, more vulnerable to flooding from the Thames than the wealthier parts north of the river, notwithstanding the recent influx of bankers and other relatively high net worth individuals (pushed out of the centre by an associated influx of foreign money since the early 2000s). We could say, in Deleuzian terms, that Vauxhall and Kennington present a territory where the plane of consistency has more chance of holding sway. Deleuze, in fact, draws a distinction between *two* planes, two 'elements' in which things can happen.

The first – which is also the primary plane – is the plane of consistency, the place where transing occurs. It is an explicitly Spinozist space, having been originally defined by Deleuze in his second book on Spinoza (well before *A Thousand Plateaus*) For Spinoza, what is involved is ‘the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated. This [is the] plane of immanence or consistency’.[42] What a *body* can do, which in this anti-Cartesianism is the same as what a *mind* can do, is given its broadest possibility here on this plane. The ‘individuals’ that inhabit it are for Deleuze (and Spinoza) *not* subjects (or objects) but rather assemblages, things that can be assembled together according to relations of proximity and interplay, passion and affect, symbiosis and aparallel evolution. Examples of such individuals or assemblages include: orchid and wasp, seducer and seducee, seduction scene and courtyard, cock and hole, and therefore also trans-architecture as such. These are all answer’s to Deleuze’s question: ‘How do individuals enter into composition with one another in order to form a higher individual, *ad infinitum*?’[43]

The second, and secondary plane, is the *plane of organisation*, a contrary conception of the ‘plan’ (as Deleuze says)[44] linked to structure, development, genetics, the development of forms (architecture as commonly defined) and the formation of subjects (us a sieved through the binary machines of the strata). If the south bank of the Thames has a bias towards the plane of consistency, then we could say this is in contrast to the north bank, the place of wealth, of governance, of control (of floods, for instance), which has a definite bias towards the plane of organisation.

In the mid to late seventeenth century, the pleasure gardens of Vauxhall were established, and thrived through to the mid-nineteenth century.[45] Their location is difficult to ascertain within the grain of the current city, but there remains a rather ill-defined park in part of what was the pleasure gardens. Kennington, too, had its pleasure-gardens: indeed, my house in Kennington is located on the site of a nineteenth century botanical and pleasure

garden, remnants of whose trees can still be found in the urban gardens a kilometre or so south east of Vauxhall. These were trans-architectural spaces precisely by virtue of being places for pleasure and creativity. The pleasure gardens of Vauxhall played host to on the one hand the exquisite music of Handel and Mozart, but on the other, from the outset in the seventeenth century as the diarist John Evelyn records, was a place for assignation, romance, and prostitution. The gardens were the equivalent of our clubs of today. They opened at 5 or 6pm, and stayed open well into the early hours, until the crowds, sated from the music, the food (served largely *al fresco*), the landscape and the fireworks and festivities, finally left – initially by boat to the north bank; then, with the coming of Vauxhall bridge, by foot or carriage; finally by train when Vauxhall station opened in the mid-nineteenth century, having been located there specifically to serve the gardens.

A place for the trans-architecture of the plane of consistency, certainly; a place for creativity, for the creation of higher-level individuals in the couplings and transactions which occurred; but also, a place where the plane of organisation held some sway, as always with architecture or indeed any phenomena. For the development of forms, the formation of subjects, the organisation of happenings, the planning of events – all aspects, as Deleuze notes, of the plane of organisation – is an intrinsic and necessary part of this event of architecture: ‘There are two very different conceptions of the word “plan” ... even if these two conceptions blend into one another and we go from one to the other imperceptibly.’^[46] We pass constantly from the plane of consistency to the plane of organisation, but it is the plane of consistency which is primary, and on which the plane of organisation does its work. The question is not that of an absolute lack of organisation, but rather the extent to which in a given situation, in a given architecture, the plane of consistency can be respected and a trans-architecture allowed for or be created.

Today, we see the same tension in the architecture of Vauxhall and Kennington. Both are places known, in the late twentieth century and into this century, for their queer-friendly atmosphere. [47] Queers have long had a strong presence, again perhaps picking up on the peripheral status of the south bank and the relative cheapness of the housing. Vauxhall, perhaps following on from its pleasure-garden status, is famous for its gay and trans-scene; in particular the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, which sits cheek-by-jowl with the train station on the main road, has long been a venue for transgender and drag, ‘the beating heart of Vauxhall, the best in alternative entertainment – serving confirmed bachelors and friends since long before Kylie was born’, as its website joyfully proclaims. [Fig. 2] Clustered around the tavern are almost equally well-known examples of trans-architecture, established in the interplay between the planes of consistency and organisation, with the latter always being attacked and charged by the former. Just as the Tavern, in its outer aspect as a work of conventional architecture, appears to be nothing other than a standard late Victorian London pub, so the other venues almost all use the quotidian rhythmic spaces of the under-arches of the railway viaduct that ploughs across the site of the former pleasure gardens.

These under-arch spaces (no doubt similar to those of the High Line analysed by Crawford) have the virtue again of cheapness and a certain open quality to the architectural space: they can take anything, provide space for anything in their solidity as a left-over from nineteenth century engineering technology – that is, a left-over from the commercial plane of organisation of the private railway companies which dominated that part of the industrial revolution in the UK. There is the well-established Chariots sauna, taking up two of the arches. Next door on both sides are the smaller trans- or queer- venues of Brut and Union. [Fig. 3] These sit, incongruously one might think, next door to a motorcycle dealership, a bathroom shop and a kitchen shop; but this incongruity is nothing other than the juxtaposition of the city, the disjunctive synthesis typical of such places where the plane of consistency can give

opportunity to all sorts of ongoings. But the plane of organisation, in the form of some very well-formed architecture and institutions, is never far away: the headquarters of the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) lies directly across the road from these venues, a building designed in capitalist post-modern fashion by Terry Farrell – that most establishment of architects; and the residential towers of Nine Elms, built primarily for investment purposes and bereft of real residents, appear on the horizon. [Fig. 4]

Just down the road are the blank facades of the *Eagle*, another gay pub which, unlike the Royal Vauxhall, keeps itself very much to itself. And to the east was the *Hoist*, another under-arch venue which has now closed after 21 years, much to the sadness of the leather/masochist community which made much use of its eponymous hoisting equipment. I was particularly interested in the Hoist, or in its remnants. [Fig. 5] The closure of the venue was reported thus:

Hoist owner Guy Irwin has since confirmed the closure but assured fans of the club that it has not been a victim of gentrification, like other iconic queer clubs such as The Black Cap, Joiner's Arms, and Madame Jojo's... 'In all honesty, we opened the Hoist 21 years ago: it was going to originally be for just two years. That turned into seven years, and then 10, 12 and 15. Now, after 21 years, me and Kurt [his former partner] have simply had enough...I'm 56 next week and I live a quiet life in rural Norfolk with my husband and two dogs,' Guy said. 'We negotiated with Network Rail to get out of our lease. They've been a decent landlord.' [48]

Here, in microcosm, we have the story of the interplay between the plane of consistency and the plane of organisation in relation to the trans-architecture and the queer scene in London. It is not simply a question of opposition between the two planes, nor a pure valorisation of the plane of consistency. Rather, there is a tension for us between the desire for one and the desire for the other. It is now 50 years since gay sex (between men, in limited circumstances) was

made legal in the UK, an anniversary marked this year both by celebrations and a certain degree of wistfulness that perhaps the plane of consistency is being abandoned. Typical in the latter regard was an article by Philip Hensher, where he spoke nostalgically of the time when Gay Pride had not been commoditised, when you did not have to be 'registered' to a group in order to take part. Yes, the legalisation was welcome, the possibilities for marriage too, as was the gay commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, the sight of the military hierarchy defending the rights of trans-folk against a bigoted US president, or the news that Annie Leibovitz's portrait of Chelsea Manning is to feature in the September issue of *Vogue*. But Hensher missed the drunkenness, the lewd behaviour, the chants about the size of the Gay Police Association's truncheons. These are all symptoms of the plane of organisation drowning out the plane of consistency. Despite the advances within the state organisation (legality, marriage, etc.), the task remains to open up a space, to return to the plane of consistency, to not allow the forces of organisation to take over entirely. As Hensher states, 'The current situation feels as if an exasperated majority is telling us that we have been given a generous legal framework. We used to insist on your silence; these days, we've kindly ensured that there is no reason for you to speak up. That's an improvement, isn't it? Now go away.'^[49] The movement, he implies, has to stay suspicious of the plane of organisation – despite desiring the advantages it offers – and needs to remain wedded, in some way, to the plane of consistency. Otherwise, it loses its soul.

There is likewise such a tension within architecture, specifically the quotidian architecture of the Hoist, but a tension that in this case successfully persisted at least for a while. The owner claims that its closure was not the result of gentrification, as has been the case with trans-architecture of various sorts (artistic as well as queer) across London and in other metropolises (New York, Berlin...). The forces of organisation (Network Rail, a state body) had been exemplary landlords, it seems. What was the Hoist, after all? It was a conjunction of things, it was a higher-order 'individual' made up of a whole series of other

individuals, an assemblage of assemblages, and in that sense was a piece of trans-architecture made up of a complex of organisation and creativity (plane of consistency). The assemblages making it up included the following: The place 'itself', under the arches (relatively open to multiple uses, as we have already seen). The nondescript, industrial exterior which, with a few additions (vent outlets, security bars of just sufficient quirkiness to indicate something unusual was occurring within), signalling – but barely signalling – the presence on the street. The owners, setting up an interrelation with the landlord 22 years ago, ostensibly for a short period. But then the assemblage starts to function too well, and it continues, like a machine that the owners do not quite have control of, for much longer than they had anticipated. It seduces those who came to engage in the assemblage, who become in turn part of this instance of trans-architecture. Or rather they created, in their participation, this trans-architecture, this assemblage, meeting at a place of relative openness to the plane of consistency, openness to queer scenes and events similar to those essayed by Proust: the young man with a taste for the old man; the transvestite; the masochist whose positive desire is to be suspended in the hoist and beaten by strangers. What intensity! This, surely, in its interplay between the planes and its nurturing, for just a while, of the plane of consistency, is the real, is trans-architecture. That is, it is architecture *tout court*.

We return, therefore, to where we started, but seen in a different light. The scenes that Betsky and Riccio described, those intensities that set their discourses going, were nothing other than an instance of architecture, of the real of architecture. Far from having no issue, they serve to show that the 'force of the existential in all of its singular multiplicity' [50] is the reality of trans-architecture.

Notes

1. Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*, (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1997), 3–4.
2. John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), xxii.
3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, second edition with additional preface (London: Routledge, 1999).
4. Quoted in Stephen Whittle, 'Where did we go Wrong?', in Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), 202.
5. Jasbir K. Puar, 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', in *Social Text* 84–85, Vol. 23, Nos. 3–4, Fall–Winter 2005, 127–128.
6. Jacques Derrida, 'Before the Law', trans. Avital Ronell and Christine Roulston, in Derek Attridge (ed.), *Acts of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1992), 211–212.
7. Derrida, 'Before the Law', 211.
8. See, most obviously and amongst other places, Jacques Derrida, 'Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference', trans. Ruben Bevezdivin, in Peggy Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 378–401.
9. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv.
10. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), 71.
11. See for instance Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Continuum, 2006), 15–17.
12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
13. David Holmes, Patrick O'Byrne and Stuart J. Murray, 'Faceless sex: glory holes and sexual assemblages', *Nursing Philosophy* (2010), 11, 254.
14. Holmes *et al*, 'Faceless sex', 255.
15. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 253 (in the Plateau/Chapter '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal').
16. *Ibid.*, 10.
17. *Ibid.* They are here quoting Remy Chauvin from his *Entretiens sur la sexualité*, eds. Max Aron, Robert Courrier, & Etienne Wolff (Paris: Pion, 1969), 205.
18. For a recent development of Lynn Margulis's notion of 'symbiogenesis', see Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

19. Marcel Proust, *Cities of the Plain*, vol. 2 of *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), 623.
20. *Ibid.*, 626.
21. Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York: George Braziller, 1971)
22. Susan Stryker, 'Dungeon Intimacies: The Poetics of Transgender Sadomasochism,' *Parallax* (2008), no. 1: 43. I am grateful to Lucas Crawford for the reference to this paper.
23. Deleuze, *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, , 12.
24. *Ibid.*, 37.
25. *Ibid.*, 33.
26. *Ibid.*, 37.
27. *Ibid.*, 48.
28. *Ibid.*, 37 and 45. For Deleuze's take on the Spinoza's essence, see the entry of that name in Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1988), 64–67; and chapter 11 on essence in Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 191–199.
29. Stryker, 'Dungeon Intimacies', 39 (emphasis added).
30. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, Hackett: 1992), 105 (Part 3, Proposition 2, Scholium).
31. *Ibid.*, 104.
32. Lucas Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 14.
33. *Ibid.*
34. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 6.
35. Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*, 14.
36. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 82–93.
37. Crawford, *Transgender Architectonics*, 14.
38. *Ibid.*, 19–38.
39. *Ibid.*, 39–66.
40. *Ibid.*, 149–166.
41. *Ibid.*, 162.
42. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 122.

43. Ibid., 126.
44. Ibid., 128.
45. Penelope J. Corfield, *Vauxhall and the Invention of the Urban Pleasure Gardens* (Mitcham: History & Social Action Publications, 2008).
46. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, 128.
47. For a detailed analysis of this, see Johan Andersson, 'Vauxhall's Post-industrial Pleasure Gardens: 'Death Wish' and Hedonism in 21st-century London', *Urban Studies* 1 (2011), Vol.48(1), 85-100.
48. Josh Lee, 'One of London's longest-running fetish clubs is set to close', *Attitude*, 28 November 2016; attitude.co.uk/londons-longest-running-fetish-club-the-hoist-is-closing [accessed 5th August 2017].
49. Philip Hensher, 'How the straight majority still silences gay people,' *The Guardian*, 21st July 2017. www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/21/straight-majority-silences-gay-people-lesbians-pride [accessed 5th August 2017].
50. Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, xxii.

Biography

Tim Gough is Senior Lecturer at Kingston University School of Architecture and partner in Robertson Gough, an artist-architect collaborative based in London, working on large and small scale architectural projects and competitions. Published papers include 'Cura', an essay in *Curating Architecture and the City* (2009); 'Let us Take Architecture' (publication and symposium at the Wordsworth Trust with artist Lucy Gunning, May 2007); 'Non-origin of Species – Deleuze, Derrida, Darwin', essay in the journal *Culture and Organisation*, 4 (December 2006); and 'Defiguration of space', an essay in *Figuration-Defiguration*, edited by Atsuko Onuki and Thomas Pekar, published by Iudicum Verlag, Munich: 2006.

Images



Figure 1.

Erik Gunnar Asplund, staircase to the Memorial Grove, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, Sweden (c 1935). Photo: author.



Figure 2. Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Kennington Lane, Vauxhall, London. Photo: author.



Figure 3. Brut and Chariots gay club/sauna. Vauxhall, London. Photo: author.



Figure 4. Terry

Farrell (architect). British Secret Service (MI6) Building, Vauxhall, London. Photo: author.



Figure 5. Former premises of Hoist S&M club, Vauxhall, London. Photo: author.