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ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURE

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Are We So Sure It's Not Architecture? Tim Gough

ABSTRACT This essay deals with the question as to whether architecture pre-exists its representations. The tension between architecture and what Marshal McLuhan shows is the dominant framework of Western thought – the pervasiveness of a linear, typographic way of thinking – is explicated, and the position of the architectural book, its avant-garde possibilities and the relation to the new “electric” spaces of information is discussed. The conclusion is drawn that if we are fully to take into account the coolness (in McLuhan’s terms) of architecture, then this requires an overturning of the notion of representation within architectural discourse.

Two chapters in Kester Rattenbury’s *This is Not Architecture: Media Constructions* (2002) leave the reader in no doubt as to the status of architecture vis-à-vis the book.¹ Alan Powers writes: “The printed book was used to communicate architecture as soon as it became available in the late fifteenth century, and is still being used today.”² The key underlying assumption of Powers’ text – the frame or background theory³ within which he securely works – is clearly displayed in this first sentence: architecture is distinct from the printed book, and pre-exists it. The purpose of the book is to *communicate* – to get across a *content* that already exists. The exact status of the pre-existence of architecture varies. In some cases the architectural book will display for the reader works that are already built, ones which exist in the physical world. In other

cases, the architectural book will display “drawn,” “theoretical,” “utopian,” or otherwise non-physically present constructions; the pre-existence of these items occurs not as built objects but as creations in the mind of the relevant architect. But pre-exist they do. Powers’ analysis runs from late fifteenth-century treatises through to the Architectural Association (AA) Folios of the 1980s and OMA, Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau’s *S, M, L, XL* (1995).⁴ Powers notes that Daniel Libeskind’s *Theatrum Mundi* (1985), was the first of the folios;⁵ other important examples include *La Case Vide* by Bernard Tschumi (Figure 1) and *Fin d’ou t hou s* by Peter Eisenman (Figure 2). These were also published in 1985;⁶ the following year saw perhaps the most beautiful of all the AA boxes, Eisenman’s *Moving arrows eros and other errors (sic)* (1986), the exquisite presentation of his Verona Romeo and Juliette project in a Perspex box printed on transparent sheets (Figure 3).⁷ All the examples of architectural books are placed by Powers within the conceptual frame – which is also a temporal and logical frame – mentioned above. With an art historian’s scrupulousness, the dramatic change in typographical habits – for instance, the fact that OMA *et al.*’s book is designed, by Bruce Mau, more like a magazine (as Powers puts it) – is mentioned, although no speculation as to either the reasons or the implications of this is permitted to occur. The extraordinary designs of the AA Folios – some of which, such as *Light Box* by Daniel Weil, resemble tool boxes more than a book or a boxed LP, and all of which very deliberately undermine the conventional idea of “the book” – are only hinted at.⁸ Omitted is the question (or answer): *why* these dramatic developments in design and typography?

Charles Jencks’ chapter follows Powers’ and is equally sure of the status of architecture:

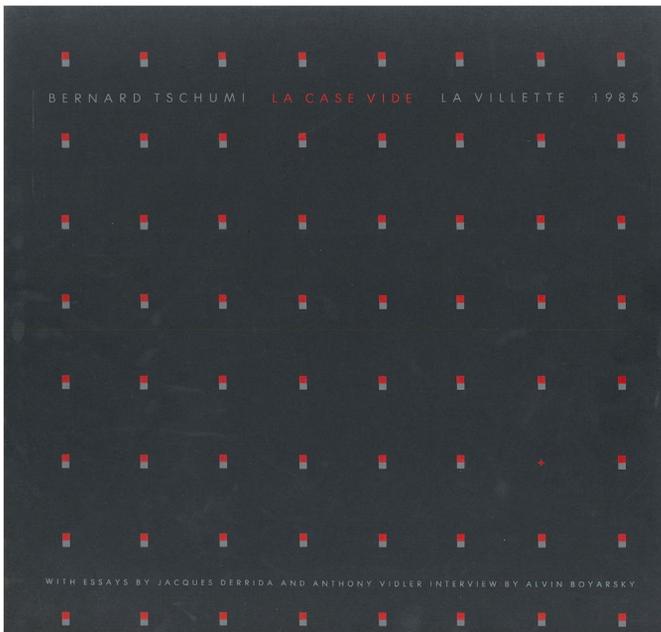


Figure 1
Outer box cover of Bernard
Tschumi’s *La Case Vide*
(1985). © Architectural
Association Publications,
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School.



Figure 2
Outer box cover of Peter Eisenman's *Fin d'ou t hous* (1985). © Architectural Association Publications, Architectural Association School.

Architecture as a sign system is ambiguous, as Umberto Eco pointed out, and in order to be understood its message has to be supplemented by other signs. Indeed, as semiotics (the theory of signs) began to show in the 1960s, all media of communication are subservient to words. Architecture stays in one place, while



Figure 3
Front cover of Peter Eisenman's *Moving Arrow Eros and Other Errors* (1986). The image is of the first twelve pages; the pages are printed on transparent acetate and so all are visible at once. Pages four to nine are text, which provides the black background to the title, which is spread over the first three pages. © Architectural Association Publications, Architectural Association School.

its meaning travels between the covers of books. Magazines may spread the word faster, but it is confirmed by the book. The medium that McLuhanites predicted for obsolescence also stamps in the electronic message, gives it authority and permanence.⁹

Jencks does not display an art historian's scrupulousness in this essay; rather, his is an ideological plea not so much for postmodernism as for the whole conceptual framework within which architectural postmodernism (although not necessarily other forms of postmodernism) operated. Nonetheless the underlying frame remains the same: a work of architecture "stays in one place" because it pre-exists the medium of the book through which it is communicated and given full meaning. The ambiguity of architecture in semiotic terms which Eco notes leads Jencks to propose, or suppose, that the interpretation of its meaning needs to be aided by the use of other signs such as those between the pages of a book.¹⁰ This is a supposition that Eco himself does not make; for him, semiotics cannot wholly explain something like architecture, precisely because semiotics is a "science studying all cultural phenomena *as if* they were systems of signs."¹¹ The emphasis here is Eco's. Architecture is "challenging" (as he says) for semiotics precisely because it is not amenable to total explanation via a notion of the sign; and semiotics is a *regional* science (as in fact are all sciences, concerned as they are with specific parts of reality and never with reality as a whole).

Notable in this context is Jencks' position in relation to Marshall McLuhan: avowedly anti, and in two ways. Firstly, and patently, Jencks does not agree with McLuhan's position regards the medium of the book. Secondly, and less obvious at first glance, is that McLuhan's position as regards the printed book is subtly misrepresented. The key question for McLuhan, as outlined in *Understanding Media* (1964) is *not* the predicted obsolescence of the book, but the implications of the immense changes which printing, allied with the "unique technology" of the visual code of the linear phonetic alphabet, had brought about in the culture of the West.¹² For McLuhan, this change in medium from an earlier more aural-based and simultaneous set of possibilities to the linearity of printing was nothing less than catastrophic – taken in both a positive and a negative sense. What McLuhan wanted to point out above all else was the manner in which the *medium* – that which we commonly think of as neutral, as a mere *means of communication* of some pre-existing thing (such as architecture) – is absolutely central to our ways of looking at the world. This is putting it too mildly, for "ways of looking at the world" implies that there would be some easy choice in the matter whereby we might "look" in a different manner. The science of neuroplasticity, which is now becoming mainstream, had already been taken into account by McLuhan fifty years ago; he cites experiments from the 1950s and 1960s showing the effects of neuroplasticity, and in *The Laws of Media*

(co-written with Eric McLuhan, 1988) he quotes an extraordinary book by Jacques Lusseyran where the author meditates on his experience of losing his sight as a child and finding that he could “see” via the intense soundscapes that became apparent once his eyes no longer functioned.¹³ The power of the medium was precisely, for McLuhan, its *neuroplastic* power – that is, its ability to reshape (or “rewire,” as the current somewhat reductionist terminology has it) the way the human brain and mind works so that the possibilities for thinking become totally different. In this sense, McLuhan’s project was a hermeneutics of Western culture – that is, an investigation of the commonly overlooked presuppositions and prejudices of thought and culture.¹⁴

McLuhan did not state that the book, or more particularly the printed linear text, was becoming obsolescent – he was not in the business of making predictions about the popularity of particular things in the world – instead he showed that the printed linear text had created a revolution in thought and in the very possibilities for thought, and in that sense was central to any understanding of Western culture and its global hegemony – a hegemony even clearer today than in the 1960s.¹⁵ Why, for McLuhan, is the medium the message? Because for him (and rightly so, I say) the message, or content, of the medium is relatively unimportant compared with the impact of the medium itself. McLuhan was here overturning the common form(at)/content hierarchy. On the whole, *content* is regarded as the message, as the thing to be paid attention to, and the format or medium is nothing other than a means to an end, a means that has a high level of neutrality relative to the content and which, in principle, could equally well be substituted with another medium, since the *content* would remain the same. That is, in the manner we noted above, the *content* is deemed to *pre-exist* the medium through which it is communicated. This is the common-or-garden way of viewing things evident in, and forming the conceptual frame for, Powers’s and Jencks’s texts. In contrast to this, McLuhan says that the medium is *never* neutral, and we should pay more attention to the medium than we do to the content. Therefore, the medium “becomes” the content, that is, it is raised for us (if we accept the argument) to what had heretofore been the importance of content.

The issue is essentially *typographic*: “The typographic principles of uniformity, continuity, and lineality had overlaid the complexities of ancient feudal and oral society.”¹⁶ The essence of the (conventional) typographic medium is its sequential and uniform quality, and this quality of the medium acts to destroy the preceding oral and aural modes of communication and thought – modes which were more complex because they did not reduce things to discrete sequences, nor to the visual, but instead maintained a taste for things happening at the same time. For my taste, McLuhan gets close to a dubious nostalgia here – he gets close to the depreciation of our current position relative to some prelapsarian state. The question of a value judgment on the

age of Gutenberg should be set aside; there should be no mourning for a supposedly superior past prior to the fifteenth-century inauguration of print. But McLuhan was pointing primarily to the *ontological* consequences of the new medium, and also to the then current and future implications of new “electronic” or “electric” (as he called it) media. Electronic media are not typographic *in their operation*. The underlying objective linearity of electronic media – which McLuhan himself does not mention – could be said to be linearly typographic, if we consider either the linearity of the transmission of current or the essential linearity of the digital computer code (multithreading is predicated on and an attempt to overcome the limitations of the linear sequence of the binary computer code). But the materiality of the media is not what is critical for McLuhan: we must look to its phenomenological effects – that is its operation *with* and *on* us and society. And this operation, he shows, has the effect of undermining typographical principles and in some ways returning us to another possibility of thought that had been eclipsed by the printing press. This “return” McLuhan sees as a positive possibility:

The immediate prospect for literate, fragmented Western man encountering the electric implosion within his own culture is his steady and rapid transformation into a complex and depth-structured person emotionally aware of his total interdependence with the rest of human society.¹⁷

It is this optimism that marks McLuhan out, and which is worth paying attention to; there are any number of theorists and prophets of a current or future ennui brought on by the supposedly flattening effects of digital media; McLuhan's plotting of the possibility of an awareness of total interdependence is refreshing and prescient.

Cool Architecture

The implications of this interdependence for architecture can be assayed via a reading of his notion of hot and cool media. What is hot? Hot is conventional printed linear text, hot are all signs systems that tend towards clarity of communication, hot are all media that tell us something unambiguously. As we saw above, Jencks has it that Eco has it that architecture is in semiotic terms *ambiguous*. Jencks, reliant on the notion of “meaning” – reliant that is on what McLuhan would say was an entirely outdated (even in 1964) Gutenberg approach to culture, implies that this is a defect to be corrected – he states that it is only via the use of other signs (including the architectural book) that the full meaning of architecture can be established. What McLuhan does is to say no to this: he refuses to interpret media (including architecture – he talks a lot about the city, about the house etc.) via the lens of the one medium of print.¹⁸ Instead, he thinks at a higher level of abstraction and places the various media within a more abstract conceptual schema of “hot” and “cool”; he recasts, as it were, the conceptual table or structure or

background theory, which previously had been reliant on phonetic writing as its basis. Instead, media are judged according to their *possibilities for interaction*. The hot medium is like the printed text, it is like conventional typography in the sense that it lacks ambiguity and therefore prevents a high degree of interaction with those who come to read it. This is in contrast to the earlier oral traditions of thought (says McLuhan) whose dependence on the ambiguity of sound allowed for a cooler situation and therefore more possibilities of interpretative interplay.

The lack of ambiguity of the conventional linear printed text is allied with the importance of the linearity of the text to the issue of science and its founding concept of cause and effect. For McLuhan, the power of the media of print is such that the whole of modern Western science, and the scientific outlook (or, we could say, scientific outlook, if we would wish to imply the hegemonic pretensions of science), is dependent on it. This is because cause and effect is an essentially linear proposition and habit of thought, exemplified now we could say by linear computer programming code but having an immense impact not only on science but also on all modes of thought. The medium of linear typography is in this regard the message we should pay attention to, says McLuhan, because it is a pervasive habit of thought that enables and encourages the development of science and at the same time reinforces the authority of the hegemony of the linear phonetic text. We see here how, when a structure of thought creates possibilities for future thinking, the realization of those new thoughts then retroactively reinforces the original structure in a mutually interdependent manner.

There is nothing cool about cause and effect. The whole point about cause and effect is that it *leaves no space for ambiguity*. The linearity of the process, the movement through time from that which pre-exists to that which is affected and effected by that which pre-exists, allows no space for the non-determinate. The linearity of reading a phonetic alphabetical text occurs through time thought as a sequence of past–present–future, and this occurrence through time is translated into the way the whole physical world is “read.”¹⁹ This is the basis of Cartesian dualism; the lack of ambiguity, the lack of coolness of the new physical sciences called for the positing of another realm (of the mind) which escaped determinism. That science and culture on the whole ignored other modes of thought – for instance, the anti-Cartesianism of Baruch Spinoza for whom the mind and the body are literally one – was not happenstance but rather the result of the fact that Spinoza was *fighting the medium* whereas René Descartes – at least the common interpretation of his work – was working with it. That Spinoza is now being read again, that his work is beginning to be taken seriously (via Gilles Deleuze) within architectural theory is a symptom of the paradigm shift McLuhan posits/sees; meanwhile, within science itself, the hegemonic structures of cause and effect have been groaning from the strain of theory and evidence that will simply not fit there. Indeed we could say that the latest theories of neuroplasticity, which allow that

the mind (that is, non-physical mental action) influences – no, *creates* – the physical brain, is a clear illustration of the end of Cartesianism and the beginning of a Spinoza-like ontology of thought that holds that *the mind and the body are the same thing* (seen under different aspects).²⁰ Quantum theory is a century old, but its undermining of cause and effect is resisted wherever possible, and its wide implications beyond theoretical physics is only just beginning to be mapped out.²¹

In contrast to the hot medium of linear print, or the heat of cause and effect, architecture is an avowedly *cool* medium, in McLuhan's terms. It allows an ambiguity, it refuses to allow itself to be interpreted or given a meaning in the way that the printed text has a meaning, and as such it gives place for a high degree of interplay with those who come to exist with it. McLuhan says “[a]ny hot medium allows of less participation than a cool one.”²² And he notes that it is the “new electric structuring and configuring of life” that is allowing cool media to begin to return to the fore. Electric and electronic media, the new spaces of information, allow and encourage a different way of thought which, in contrast to aesthetics that emphasized the disinterestedness of the relation to art – leaving architecture as an anomaly within the philosophical discussions of the arts – can relate to the cool nature of architecture in a whole-hearted manner.²³

There is an avant-garde of art and architecture practice that responded directly to McLuhan's “cool” information space. It seems clear, for instance, that the interest in the architectural book evident in the AA in the 1980s and referred to by Powers above is a direct and avant-garde response to the working through of the implications of the coolness or heat of media, in that these works undermine the linearity of their texts and introduce a deliberate ambiguity into their reading. McLuhan theorized this too: for him, it is the artist engaged in avant-garde practice who can cope with the intensity of the change in media, and who can act to play the new medium off against the old. As he says, “only the dedicated artist seems to have the power for encountering the present actuality,” because “the artist is the man [*sic*] in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time.”²⁴ The format, or medium, of both the AA Folios of 1985 and *S,M,L,XL* of the same year is precisely doing what McLuhan says the artist does: the new medium of the space of information is being played off against the old Gutenberg medium of the book. Hence the folio format that invites one to undermine the linearity of the conventional book and which can be *used* variously as book, poster, artwork, academic text, tool kit, object of art. Hence the drama of *S,M,L,XL*, which as Powers points out is both small (in folio size) and large (in thickness) at the same time, and each section of which has a different layout tending in each case to undermine completely the notion of the medium as neutral conduit for a pre-existing meaning. The medium, here, is the message. It is not what these books *say*, primarily, it is what they *do* that gives the key to their functioning. I say their

functioning rather than their meaning, because, of course, the ambiguity of the typographic layouts – messing up our notions of sequence and medium – transforms the book from something hot into something relatively cool, something more participatory.

This transformation, or undermining, of the conventional book layout is something that had been ongoing elsewhere, and which architectural theory, architectural practice, and the intermediating form of the architectural book picked up on. The two obvious exemplars here are Jacques Derrida and Deleuze, both of whom in very different ways respond to the issue of the message of the medium. Tschumi's AA Folio *La Case Vide*, mentioned above, is of course about Parc de la Villette and incorporates Derrida's essay *Point de folie – maintenant l'architecture* (1985), which, with its serial structure and incorporated logos of Tschumi's red follies, itself foregrounds the question of medium (Figure 4).²⁵ Derrida's work played constantly with the notion of the book, and undermined it by way of form or format on many occasions: the aim was often to have many things happening on the page at the same time, so with books like his *Glas* (1986) or *Cinders* (1987) there are many strands of text facing each other on a single page and which cannot be read simultaneously (Figures 5 and 6).²⁶ This is a method of non-linear reading that OMA *et al.* utilized in *S,M,L,XL* where the main text is often juxtaposed on the page with a series of comments (a so-called "Dictionary" of word definitions) running down the left hand side.²⁷ In some ways this was a return to earlier means of presenting thought; for instance, Derrida's multiple texts are a clear reference to the format of the Talmud, where each page takes the shape of a constellation of different texts which each propose a slightly different interpretation of the central text on the page (Figure 7). But also the hot form of the book is pushed here towards the cool form of architecture; the reading of the page can never be sequential, it always has to consider what McLuhan calls the "total field of consciousness," that is, a series of things that are occurring in parallel with matters happening out of the corner of one's eye. Is there not some way in which architecture is always happening out of the corner of one's eye, outside the point of focus? Is the sense of enclosure not intimately related to what is going on with peripheral vision, or peripheral sense? In some way you can never focus on the sense of enclosure. Derrida puts it this way at the beginning of *Dissemination*: "This (therefore) will not have been a book."²⁸ Deleuze is not interested in typographic games; what he does is to effect the transformation of the book – he turns the book into something else entirely which, while still written in linear format, is far from the mode of thought dominated by the print medium:

A book has neither object nor subject; it is made up of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters, and the exteriority of their relations. It is to fabricate

the *emiza* of Francisco de Quevedo, his sonnets “To Vesuvius,” and “I am cinder that darkens in the flame / nothing that remains to consume the fire / that in amorous conflagration is dispersed,” that “will be cinder, but will remain sentient / will be dust, but amorous dust.”

– I hear well, I hear it, for I still have an ear for the flame even if a cinder is silent, as if he burned paper at a distance, with a lens, a concentration of light as a result of seeing in order not to see, writing in the passion of non-knowledge rather than of the secret. I would say, for the protection and illustration of its own sentence, “I” the cinder would say that his writing is not interested in knowledge. The raw cinder that is more to his taste; and the initial consonant matters very little; every word seems to finish with () cinder, whether it’s a common or proper noun, or even a verb, even a noun that we make into a verb – “tinder,” “to tinder” – for the cinder makes every word “tinder.” “What does he do with DER? I wonder: (scin-, [pre]scin-, [re]scin-, DER). I leave it to you to find examples.

– And with this lack that is *la rendre*, these *laci(k)s*, this *laci(k)s* – when he gets all entangled with telepathy, there */li/* also *LA Cinder* is there.

– No, you treat his phrase like the accumulation of surplus-value, as if he speculated on some cinder

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niza de Francisco de Quevedo, ses sonnets *Al Vesubio*, et “Yo soy ceniza que subió a la llama; / nada dejó por consumir el fuego / que en amoroso incendio se dispersa . . . se dispersa; et ‘will be ceniza, mas tendrá sentido; / polvo será, mas polvo enamorado.”

– J’entends bien, je l’entends, car l’oreille de l’oreille pour la flamme si une cendre est silencieuse, comme s’il brûlait du papier à distance, avec une loupe, concentration de lumière à force de voir pour ne pas voir, écrit dans la passion du non-savoir plutôt que du secret. Je dirais, pour la défense et illustration de sa propre phrase, moi la cendre, que le savoir n’intéresse pas son écriture. La cendre crue, voilà son goût; et la consonne initiale important peu, tout moi finissant par () cendre, ou () rendre, verbe, non propre ou commun, et même un verbe quand il devient attribut – le rendre. Que fait-il avec DER, je me le demande (sans, sans, sang, cent DER). Je vous laisse chercher les exemples.

– Et avec ce lac, ces lacs, ce laci – quand il y engage toute la télépathie, là aussi il y a LA Cendre.

– Non, vous traitez sa phrase comme l’accumulation d’une plus-value, comme s’il spéculait sur quelque

XI

“Before my death I would give orders. If you aren’t there, my body is to be pulled out of the lake [lac] and burned, my ashes are to be sent to you, the sun well protected (‘fragile’) but not registered, in order to tempt fate. This would be an envoi off from me (un envoi de moi) which no longer would come from me (or an envoi sent by me, who would have ordered it, but no longer an envoi of me, as you like). And then you would enjoy mistaking my cinders

XI

“Avant ma mort je donnerais des ordres. Si tu n’es pas là, on retire mon corps du lac, on le brûle et on t’envoie mes cendres, une bien protégée (‘fragile’) mais non recommandée, pour tenter la chance. Ce serait un envoi de moi qui ne viendrait plus de moi (ou un envoi venu de moi qui l’aurait ordonné mais plus un envoi de moi, comme tu préfères). Alors tu aimerais mêler

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TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

himself with the transfer of ownership. For all practical purposes the tithes are ownerless until they are physically delivered into the possession of their lawful recipients. At that point they are acquired by the regular methods used to acquire ownerless objects — meshikhah ("pulling") or courtyard-acquisition. Meshikhah is out of the question here. Hence the correct interpretation of the Mishnah in Ma'aser Sheni must be that suggested by Rabbi Abba, namely, that Rabban Gamliel's tithes were delivered through courtyard-acquisition, even though Rabbi Yehoshua and Rabbi Akiva, who had leased the field, were on the ship at the time of the acquisition and not standing near the field.

But the Gemara now rejects the argument advanced by Rava: This is not so. Rava's argument is incorrect. It was based on two false assumptions: (1) Rabban Gamliel could equally well have transferred ownership in the tithes by means of halifin. (2) The fact that he did not do so shows that a transfer of ownership did not take place. In fact, says the Gemara, discretionary power may be the equivalent of true ownership, and it may be possible to sell it by the normal modes of sale. But in the case of tithes this would not be proper, since the word "giving" is stated in the Biblical text with regard to the gifts of priesthood. The Torah states (Deuteronomy 26:12) that tithes must be given, not sold, to their recipients, and since halifin is a form of sale, it is improper to transfer tithes to their recipients by this method. On the other hand, the transfer of movable property along with land is a most powerful method of "giving," and hence tithes are permitted to be given in this way. The Gemara has now demonstrated that Rabban Gamliel was unable to use the method of halifin in distributing his tithes, but he may well have used the method of transferring them along with land, as suggested above. Thus no objection to Ulla can be raised from the Mishnah in Ma'aser Sheni.

Rav Pappa now returns to the original interpretation of the Mishnah in Ma'aser Sheni, according to which Rabban Gamliel distributed the tithes on board ship by means of courtyard-acquisition. He said that even if Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehoshua acquired the tithes from Rabban Gamliel through courtyard-acquisition, the Mishnah would still not pose any difficulty to Ulla, who claimed that ownerless property can be acquired by means of a courtyard only if the owner of the courtyard is standing nearby. For where the ownership of property is transferred by the willing consent of the original owner to the new owner, the law is different. The Halakhah differentiates between (a) the acquisition of ownerless property by means of the finder's courtyard, and (b) the use of a courtyard in the acquisition of property which is actively transferred from one party to another (e.g., a gift, like the tithes in our case).

LITERAL TRANSLATION

[considered] money to be acquired from [a person] along with land.

But this is not so. [The word] "giving" is stated with regard to the gifts of priesthood. Halifin is a form of buying and selling. [The transfer of] movable property along with land is a most powerful [method of] giving. Rav Pappa said: The will of another party transferring ownership of them is different.

RASHI

ולא היא — מהאי, דכי לא היה להן סודר — לאו רחיה היא למילף מינה דלין טונת הנאה נקיים בחליפין, ועל גבי קרקע, דשפיר איכא למימר מטלטלין אגב קרקעי הקנה להן. ודקשיא לך לקינהו בחליפין. מתנות — של כהונה וזויה ומועשר עני. ונתינת בחיבה בהו — כדכתיב (דברים כו) "ומתתה ללוי" — זה מעשר ראשון, לגבי ליחוס ולא למנהיג — זה מעשר שני. לפיכך אסור להקנותו בסודר, דדרך מקח הוא, שזה נותן לו כליו מחמיהו, ונראה זה כמוכרין לו. ונתינתה אלוטמתא — מותר להקנות ממנות כהונה על גבי קרקע. רב פפא אמר — לעולם בתורת חזר קנאו, ואפילו הכי לא מקשי לעולם. דהא דלא נענין הכא עומד בלד השדה — משום דדעת אחרת מקנה אותן, שרבו גמליאל הקנה להן מטלטלין שהיו לו בחזר שלהן, ולא מהספקירא קני, ונראה ממנה זו לקנות, ואף על גב דלין עומד בלד השדה.

לקנות על גבי קרקע.
א' ולא היא. מתנות כהונה.
ב' חליפין.
ג' נתינתה בחיבה.
ד' וממכר הוא.
ה' דרך מקח.
ו' מטלטלין אגב מקרקע נתינתה.
ז' אלימתא היא.
ח' רב פפא אמר: דעת אחרת.
ט' מקנה אותן שאני.

לקנות על גבי קרקע ודקשיא לך לקינהו בחליפין. מתנות בחיבה בהו — כדכתיב (דברים כו) "ומתתה ללוי" — זה מעשר ראשון, לגבי ליחוס ולא למנהיג — זה מעשר שני. לפיכך אסור להקנותו בסודר, דדרך מקח הוא, שזה נותן לו כליו מחמיהו, ונראה זה כמוכרין לו. ונתינתה אלוטמתא — מותר להקנות ממנות כהונה על גבי קרקע. רב פפא אמר — לעולם בתורת חזר קנאו, ואפילו הכי לא מקשי לעולם. דהא דלא נענין הכא עומד בלד השדה — משום דדעת אחרת מקנה אותן, שרבו גמליאל הקנה להן מטלטלין שהיו לו בחזר שלהן, ולא מהספקירא קני, ונראה ממנה זו לקנות, ואף על גב דלין עומד בלד השדה.

CONCEPTS

Kinyan aggav. A mode of acquisition inferred from the Bible (II Chronicles 21:3), this is one way of transferring ownership of many movable items without resorting to the physical action of pulling them. According to the Halakhah, when a person transfers land to someone else, he can transfer movable goods together with it (אגב = lit., "on its back"), wherever they may be. Since the transfer of property can take place even if the parties to the transaction are not present at the property (such as through a deed or the transfer of money), this means of transfer may also be used for many possessions for which there is no simple method of transfer.

SAGES

Rav Pappa. One of the leading Babylonian Amoraim of the fifth generation, Rav Pappa was a student of Abaye and of Rava, and was a colleague of Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehoshua. After Rav's death his yeshivah was divided: part went to Pumbedita with Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak, and the other part went to Nereseth with Rav Pappa. Rav Pappa's yeshivah was famous and had many students, and among his disciples were Rav Ashi and Ravina. He served as head of his yeshivah for nineteen years.

NOTES

several places in Talmudic literature. Shittah Mekubbetzet points out, however, that even according to the opinion that, in general, the market value of discretionary power is a true monetary interest in the object itself, our case may be somewhat different, since the degree of true money value involved is not sufficient to enable the object to be transferred through halifin and other symbolic acts of acquisition.

The transfer of movable property along with land is a most powerful method of giving. Once Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yehoshua acquired Rabban Gamliel's land by paying him the rental fee, they acquired the tithes automatically along with the land by kinyan aggav. Thus, even though the land was leased to them in exchange for money, the tithes themselves were given to them as a gift (Ritva).

Figure 7

The Talmud – The Steinsaltz Edition, Volume I, Tractate Bava Metzia, Part 1, commentary by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, translated and edited by Rabbi Israel V. Berman (1989), 131. © The Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications/The Aleph Society.

a beneficent God to explain geological movements. In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. [...] All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an *assemblage*.²⁹

This series of introductory sentences to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, co-written with Félix Guattari) virtually sums up Deleuze's late philosophy, and it is interesting to note that it does so in the context of the reframing of the question of the book. That this should be seen as at least partly inspired by McLuhan's work in the early 1960s, has been argued by Donald Theall and Peter Zhang.³⁰ Deleuze, however, for all his engagement with McLuhanish topics such as the interplay between the stirrup, the horse, the knight and feudal society, subjects McLuhan to an important transformation which means that he hardly ever cites him directly; this is that unlike McLuhan he *never* regards technological change as primary; it is always a question of an assemblage which is necessarily social at the same time as being technical. Zhang regards this as a minor difference between the two thinkers; on the contrary, this difference is an important one and is what marks Deleuze out as a philosopher – that he refuses the reduction to a single source and always keeps the assemblages and relations of thought in play.³¹

The Matter of Space

There is a continuing practice of architecture responding to these questions; the section curated by Jane Rendell titled "Architecture-writing" in *Critical Architecture* (2007) is a key source for such practices, including the work of Laura Ruggeri and Rendell herself.³² In relation to McLuhan, these writers/practitioners of architecture explicitly keep their work and their background theories cool; architecture is always a question of the interrelation of a set of more or less open possibilities. As Ruggeri states, "The border between self and city becomes fluid in the metaphor of the 'abstract tourist'."³³ Rendell's work is, in Deleuzian terms, avowedly minoritarian, concerned with that which escapes and resists the dominant discourse, and does so in terms of an "enigmatic message" which in maintaining ambiguity allows place for the cool operations of "the interrelations between location, identity and knowledge."³⁴ Rendell makes reference to thinkers of Situated Knowledge and Standpoint Theory; again, what is notable about these particular feminist theorists is the coolness of their position. As Jane Flax notes in clarifying this issue:

Some feminists argue that ethical discourse and the elimination of gender based domination require uniform concepts of gender and subjectivity. [...] These claims regarding subjectivity, "woman," agency, and justice are mistaken. The felt need for a solid "identity" as the ground of political action and warrant for

its legitimacy is a consequence of enmeshment in liberalism, the dominant political discourse of contemporary Western states. The realization of the emancipatory potentials of feminism requires the destabilization, even the refusal of its originary subject, “woman,” as a definable category and identity.³⁵

The refusal of the originary subject and the definable identity is the opening up to the coolness of a participatory situation, and the possibility of an architecture which would resist liberalism and globalized capitalism, is entwined with an acceptance of architecture as cool, as allowing ambiguity and participation in McLuhan’s terms. In Deleuze’s terms, this would be to read the nature of architecture as essentially an *assemblage*, or a Body without Organs. What therefore is the materiality of this assembled space, this space that respects the *Standpoint* or the *Situation*? I think we can best theorize this by means of Deleuze’s distinction between *matter* and *material*. In the above quote from *A Thousand Plateaus*, he characterizes the book as being made up of “variously formed matters.”³⁶ This is Deleuze’s materialism in play, but importantly the words “matter” and materialism for Deleuze do *not* refer to any form of physical “reality.” When we say “matter,” we must think, for Deleuze, not of material but of things like matters of concern, issues, matters understood in a wide sense: “For he used the term *matter* to describe the plane of consistency or Body without Organs. In other words: the unformed, unorganized, non-stratified or destratified body and all its flows [...] particles, pure intensities, prevital and prephysical free singularities.”³⁷ The Plane of Consistency or the Body without Organs is the matter within which (is allowed to) occur the assemblages and the cool interplaying of architecture. The Plane of Consistency is a space where the relations between elements take precedent – where *the relations are prior to their terms*. It is within such a space, such a materiality of space, that the discipline of architecture and the medium of the spaces of information can interrelate. I would like to conclude by using the example of Marian Macken’s practice and research to explicate exactly how this might be seen to happen.

Macken’s work consists of a series of immaculate representations of architecture (including Ludwig Mies van der Rohe’s houses) in the form of a book, often using laser-cut paper to represent plans or to create paper models (Figures 8 and 9). She characterizes her practice as follows:

The result of the book, with *post factum* content, operating as a complementary, architectural representation is to shift the building as the endpoint of the design process. The representational lineage does not end with the built project, but rather is elongated. Representation as process is foregrounded and the book revises the territory of *post factum* documentation.³⁸

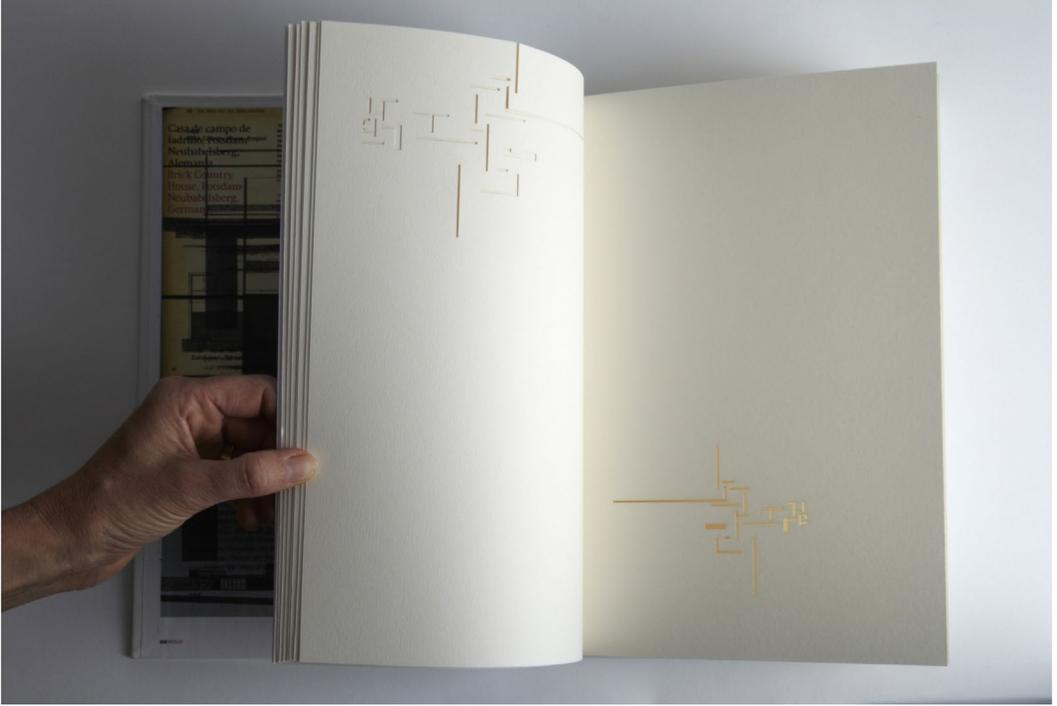


Figure 8

Marian Macken, *Mies van der Rohe: Brick Country House 1924* (2011). Photo: © Joshua Morris.

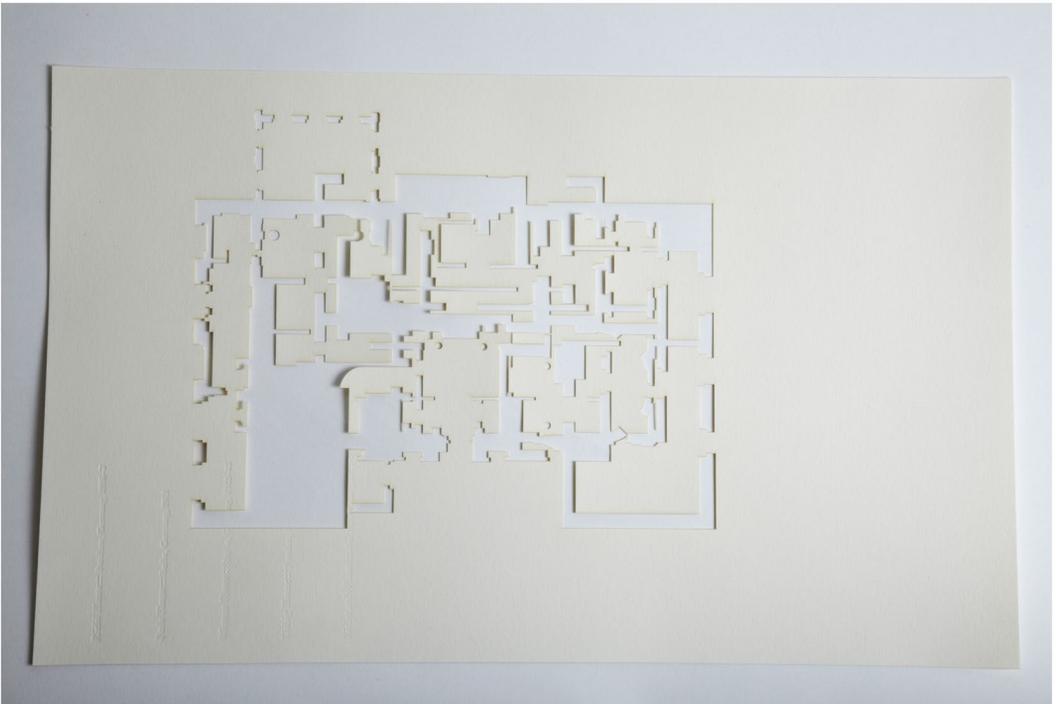


Figure 9

Marian Macken, *Mies van der Rohe: Built Houses* (2009), 5. Photo: © Joshua Morris.

Macken sees the book as *post factum* because it is “after the fact” of architecture. In this regard, we return, in one sense, to where we began with Powers’ and Jencks’ conceptual frameworks. For them, it was clear what architecture was, that it pre-existed the book, and that the task of the book was to represent what was *already in existence*: namely, the edifice itself. In Flax’s terms, this is a “uniform concept” of architecture, a concept sure of the identity of what is being represented. This is the conventional space of representation.

However, in another sense, Macken leaves this conventional space of representation behind, or effects upon it a transformation. The space of representation, for her, does not end with the building as the fulfillment of its various representations (the plan, the section etc.) once it is constructed. The endpoint of architecture now comes, for Macken, beyond the point at which it has conventionally been created – it has an ongoing life. This ongoing territory of architecture is a space in which the architectural book comes to interplay with the work in a critical manner, rather as Rendell speaks of a “reconfiguring [of] the relationship between criticism and practice.”³⁹

But I think we can frame Macken’s work in a different manner, a manner that instead of transforming our concept of representation jettisons it entirely. In Deleuze’s terms, representation is always suspect. It is suspect because it is not so easy to escape its *post factum* structure, its temporality of past–present–future within which that which is represented clearly pre-exists the medium through which it is presented. The extent to which this pre-existence of architecture to its medium occurs is a precise gauge of its level of cool: the extent to which the putative existence of architecture is prior to its medium is precisely the extent to which the full implications of the new, total field of the space of information is *not* taken into account. These implications do not only lie, as we have seen, in the possibilities for new avant-garde works that operate beyond the materiality of the book, but as importantly they lie in a reframing of the conceptual frame, a recasting of the background theory of architecture, the creation of a new set or table of possibilities, and a new reworking of the neuroplasticity of the brain or mind in relation to architecture. In this regard, *it does not matter that Macken’s work works with the conventional material of paper and the artist’s book*, rather than within a more ephemeral space of information. What is important is not the materiality of the work, but rather the *ontological* implications we can draw from it and from Macken’s reflective observations.

What happens when the whole problematic of representation in architecture is dropped – following Deleuze – is that the pre-existence of architecture to the interplay within which it occurs disappears. Here, architecture does not so much *exist* as *happen* as the cool event of, in this case, its relation to and occurrence with and through Macken’s work. *Mies’ Brick Country House*⁴⁰ – an architecture that was never built and which only exists in ambiguous representations never fully resolved –

subsists *now*, in the moment of the work, as the relation that obtains all at once, as heccaeity, between it, the work, the author(s) and those of us who come, anticipated but undetermined, to the work.

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Notes

- 1 Kester Rattenbury, ed., *This is Not Architecture: Media Constructions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).
- 2 Alan Powers, “The Architecture Book Image and Accident,” in Rattenbury, *This is Not Architecture*, 157–73 (157).
- 3 There are various ways of thinking about this frame. The term “background theory” comes from W. V. Quine, “Ontological Relativity,” in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1969), 26–68. Alternatively, one could theorize it as the hermeneutic or phenomenological horizon of thought.
- 4 OMA, Rem Koolhaas, and Bruce Mau, *S,M,L,XL* (New York, NY: Monacelli, and Rotterdam: 010, 1995). Regrettably, it was not possible to obtain copyright approval to include images of this book in this article.
- 5 Daniel Libeskind, *Theatrum Mundi* (London: Architectural Association, 1985).
- 6 Bernard Tschumi, *La Case Vide* (London: Architectural Association, 1985); Peter Eisenman, *Fin d’ou t hous* (London: Architectural Association, 1985).
- 7 Peter Eisenman, *Moving arrows eros and other errors* (London: Architectural Association, 1986).
- 8 Daniel Weil, *Light Box* (London: Architectural Association, 1985). In fact, there were two series of AA publications at the time: the Folios, of which the Libeskind was the first, and Boxes, of which Weil’s was numbered Box 1.
- 9 Charles Jencks, “Post-Modernism and the Revenge of the Book,” in Rattenbury, *This is Not Architecture*, 174–97 (175–6).
- 10 For example, Umberto Eco, “Functionalism and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture,” in *The City and The Sign*, ed. M. Gottdiener and A. Lagopoulos (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986), 56–85; collected in Neil Leach, ed., *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1997), 173–93.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 173 (original emphasis).
- 12 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Abingdon: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 90. (Quotations are taken from the Routledge Classics reprint, Abingdon, 2001.) McLuhan makes the point that although other cultures – such as in China and Korea – already used printing, the combination with a linear phonetic alphabet was uniquely new to the West.
- 13 Regards neuroplasticity, see, for instance, Norman Doidge, *The Brian that Changes Itself – Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain*

- Science* (London: Penguin, 2007); and idem, *The Brain's Way of Healing: Remarkable Discoveries and Recoveries from the Frontiers of Neuroplasticity* (London: Viking, 2015). Lusseyran is quoted in Marshal McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *The Laws of Media – The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). Lusseyran's book is: Jacques Lusseyran, *And There Was Light: The Autobiography of a Blind Hero in the French Resistance*, trans. Elizabeth R. Cameron (Edinburgh: Floris, 1985). Notable is the fact that McLuhan quotes Lusseyran in the form of a sort of concrete poetry, using the form of the words on the page in this section of *The Laws of Media*; and that Lusseyran's experiences of neuroplasticity have been confirmed recently in a series of experiments with blind people, who had the sense of beginning to see once the visual field is translated into sound. See, amongst many articles, A. Amedi, W. Stern, J. A. Camprodon, F. Bempohl, L. Merabet, S. Rotman, C. Hemond, P. Meijer, and A. Pascual-Leone, "Shape Conveyed by Visual-to-Auditory Sensory Substitution Activates the Lateral Occipital Complex," *Nature Neuroscience*, 10, no. 6 (2007): 687–9. It is becoming clear that the mind/brain will interpret certain *mobile structures* of sensory input as "visual" even if the input is not coming from the eye.
- 14 There is a section in *The Laws of Media* entitled "hermeneutics"; McLuhan and McLuhan, *Laws of Media*, 140.
 - 15 We could use a Heideggerian *topos* here: McLuhan is less interested in the *ontic* question of whether or not the printed text will disappear or become less important in the world, and more interested in the *ontological* question as to the effect of the linearity of thought on the ways in which things are, their mode of existence, their way of being.
 - 16 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 15.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, 56.
 - 18 Regarding the house in McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, see, for instance, "Chapter 13: Housing: New Look and New Outlook," 133–41. References to the city come through the first part of the same book.
 - 19 Heidegger calls this notion of time the "vulgar concept of time."
 - 20 Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), III, Proposition 2, Scholium, 105. On the mind influencing the brain, see again the work of Norman Diodge.
 - 21 For example, Jim Al-Khalili and Johnjoe McFadden, *Life on the Edge, the Coming of Age of Quantum Biology* (London: Bantam, 2014).
 - 22 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 25.
 - 23 This movement from an aesthetics of disinterestedness – which tends to deprecate architecture – to a thought of interplay and situation that places architecture in the foreground was first outlined by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (London: Sheed & Ward, 1979).
 - 24 McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 77, 72. For a discussion about the status and definition of the *avant-garde* in architecture, see Lina Stergiou, "The Concept of the Avant-Garde in Twentieth Century Architecture," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Kingston University, 2014. Stergiou identifies two instances of the *avant-garde*: Russian Revolutionary architecture and Italian Rationalism. Both have an intimate relation with the politics of their time (communism and fascism); we could say that they *grasp their current actuality*. More recent architectural *avant-gardes* have an intimate relation with the paradigm shift that McLuhan identifies.
 - 25 Jacques Derrida, *Point de folie – maintenant l'architecture* (London: Architectural Association, 1985).
 - 26 Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986); Jacques Derrida, *Cinders*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987). The design of the latter seems to pick up on the AA Folios.
 - 27 OMA *et al.*, *S,M,L,XL*, 958–71. The "Dictionary" towards the end of the book is displaced elsewhere on the page.
 - 28 Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), 1.
 - 29 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3–4; orig. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Capitalisme*

- et schizophrénie – mille plateaux* (Paris: De Minuit, 1980).
- 30 Donald F. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Peter Zhang, "Deleuze's Relay and Extension of McLuhan: An Ethical Exploration," in *Explorations in Media Ecology* 10: 3–4 (2011), 207–24.
- 31 Zhang, "Deleuze's Relay and Extension of McLuhan," 218.
- 32 Jane Rendell, Jonathan Hill, Murray Fraser, and Mark Dorian, *Critical Architecture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007). The section edited by Jane Rendell is on pages 85–162. Another reading, outside the scope of this essay, would take a train of thought leading from Derrida's thought of archi-writing and "grammatology as a positive science," in *Of Grammatology*, to explicate similar themes of architectural writing via a difference route. For, contrary to some interpretations, the thrust of Derrida's work would be *not* to reduce architecture to the Gutenberg notion of writing as phonetic linearity, but rather to stay true to McLuhan by overturning the Gutenberg notion of writing in the name of the "total field" opened by the space of electronic information and submitting *writing to architecture*. Archi-writing means architecture-writing (amongst other things); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
- 33 Laura Ruggeri, "The Poetics of Urban Inscription," in Rendell *et al.*, *Critical Architecture*, 103–11 (107).
- 34 Jane Rendell, "Site-Writing," in Rendell *et al.*, *Critical Architecture*, 150–62 (151).
- 35 Jane Flax, "Displacing Woman – Towards an Ethics of Multiplicity," in *Daring to be Good – Essays in Feminist Ethico-Politics*, ed. Bat-Ami Bar On and Ann Ferguson (London: Routledge, 1998), 143–55 (143).
- 36 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 3.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 43.
- 38 Marian Macken, "The Book as Site: Alternative Modes of Representing and Documenting Architecture," Ph.D. thesis, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney, 2012, n.p. (taken from the conclusion).
- 39 Rendell, "Site-Writing," 160.
- 40 Marian Macken, *Mies van der Rohe: Brick Country House 1924* (2011).

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