A Bridge to Somewhere:
Andrew Cole and Julian Rose on Equity in Architecture

Julian Rose: The relationship between architecture and language is something that we've been discussing for several years now, and it's been our way of distinguishing between architectural theory and practice and in turn asking larger questions having to do with equity in everything from design to construction. Why do some architectural practices, or indeed some architects, count more than others? Who gets to decide whose labor has value? And then—maybe most importantly—who's "producing knowledge" and who's just "doing work"? For us, this last question has an importance that goes way beyond the study of architecture as such, because many fields are structured along invisible fault lines that determine what knowledge is valuable, or even what counts as knowledge in the first place. I believe it's fair to say that we both see this particular fault line, where language and architecture scrape up against each other, as a paradigmatic split between theory and practice—a primordial divergence between two very different ways of thinking about the world and of being in it.

But we're approaching this fault line from opposite sides. You're a scholar of philosophy and literature, I'm an architect. Of course it's actually a bit more complicated than that, because we both cross over. I began writing criticism before I started practicing architecture, and I know you have a longstanding interest in carpentry and construction— you built your own house—and you participate in local causes devoted to sane and sustainable development. A lot of my own criticism is motivated by the conviction that architectural practice itself has tremendous heuristic value—I believe you don't need to import phrases or theories from other fields to talk about architecture in an interesting way. You're also teaching graduate seminars cross-listed in architecture and working on a book called *The Dialectic of Space*, which—if you'll forgive the gross simplification— is a really fundamental effort to shift philosophy away from its linguistic and temporal foundations and rethink it in spatial and material terms. But I'm getting ahead of myself here, because I want to go back to the beginning. How did you get interested in the problem of language and architecture in the first place?

Andrew Cole: First, thank you so much, Julian. My own trajectory, if I could add, involved leaping right over that fault line you mentioned. I took two years of engineering curriculum at a community college, old school drafting courses, Fortran, diffy-qs, and all that, before moving into literature and philosophy as a transfer student at a four-year institution. But that initial education influences me to this day.

I come to the problem of language and architecture through thinking about cities. If I had to pick one word to define what cities are, I'd say they are totalities in the sense meant by Fredric Jameson, one of the most important Marxist theorists of the twentieth and twenty-first century whose writings have influenced generations of intellectuals. He describes global capitalism as a totality too big to grasp, a space too expansive and complex to

know completely. He was my teacher, so naturally I develop some of his ideas. I use this term "totality" to define cities to say that we can only ever partially experience or know cities, because they are haphazard accumulations of praxes and immense complexes of material forces drawn into a mass whose shape and dynamics no one can completely know in advance—even planned cities exceed their plan in this respect, and of course what's now known as "world cities" are so extensive and unbounded as to escape comprehension and visualization.

I'd call any built environment a totality, but especially cities. That's because cities, like all big dense things, put words, language, and representation under immense strain. You can see this problem of representation in most all of the great "city novels" starting with, say, Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (*Mysteries of Paris*) and extending to Haruki Murakami's *1Q84*—which are typically a thousand pages long, or more, and yet still come up short in the portrayal of urban space, only able to depict the city metonymically and serially, by parts like the rooftops, the noise, the street, and so forth. It's not for nothing that the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, in his *Arcades Project*, said that "the city is a linguistic cosmos," and it's no surprise that there's a great irony to this work called in German the *Passagenwerk*. That is, it's about both the celebrated shopping arcades known as the *passages couverts*, and literally a collection of "passages," hundreds of quotations, to thematize these new iron and glass constructions from the 1820s on. Benjamin's is an unfinished work and, like our city novels, it's very long.

JR: That's something I've always wondered about. Why do you think so many novelists or philosophers wanted to write about architecture and urbanism in the first place? Granted, it can be fascinating to explore the limits of any field, but in a way it feels like you're describing a bunch of very smart people running head first into a wall—on purpose!

AC: Right, what prompts these authors to wrap so much language around so much space is modernity and modernization, here realized not as a movement, slogan, or naughty taboo, épater le bourgeois and all that, but as an actuality, like, what's in front of your face as you walk down the street. Depending on where you are in the mid- to late nineteenth century on into the twentieth century, you'll find that your surroundings would have drastically changed over the few decades of your own life—widened city streets, ever taller buildings, experimental designs, bevies of horse-drawn carriages replaced by cars and trucks. You cannot *not* react to these transformations. You talk to your family or neighbors about them. If you have access to the means of representation, you write about them. It's good to be careful when distinguishing between historical periods, but it's certainly the case that in premodernity people could be shocked by new architecture but only in marvels, in dreams about celestial cities or travel narratives about so called exotic places. Sure, there is Abbot Suger's well-known enthusiasm for the renovation of St. Denis in the twelfth century, and yes pilgrims were awed by giant cathedrals back then, as are people today, but those buildings didn't appear overnight, and most weren't even completed in a single lifetime. The premodern experience of transformations in the built environment was nothing like, for example, the sudden development of New York and

Chicago once steel I-beam construction took off in the late nineteenth century. That difference is what made modernization a "shock" in the first place.

But by the time you get to Murakami, all of these modern shocks of urban innovation are compiled and rattled off almost too casually. Here's a passage: "The din of the city enveloped her: car engines, blaring horns, the scream of an automobile burglar alarm, an old war song echoing from a right-wing sound truck, a sledgehammer cracking concrete. Riding on the wind, the noise pressed in on her from all directions." This sentence contains everything you'd expect in a description of a city, but that's the problem—it's not a description of a city so much as a catalogue of noise and really an allusion to complex historical processes. I mean, press on each item listed in this passage and up pops whole histories of technology, equipment, transportation, histories of politics, war, infrastructure, materials science even, and—as the common denominator—capitalist development. Yet in this breezy novelistic sentence everything just hangs together so matter-of-factly, by some necessity not named, whereas in history these developments happened by accident, by fits and starts, in ways no single person could witness, no single sentence could capture, much less a single word like "city" or "din" could convey. If centuries of historicism taught us anything, it's that writing and history, sentences and events, are never a perfect match, and city novels intensify this problem of representation, because they are sites for a language practice that is thoroughly conventional yet rather unbelievable when you really start to reflect on all that needs to happen in time, in history, in place, for a simple sentence like this to be imagined and then legible. The passage in Murakami, in other words, gets at what I mean by accumulations and sometimes subtractions or erasures of praxes, all these accidents of history and human habitation adding up to a sum greater than the individual parts.

This motif, and this general problem of representation of a building or a city, has led me to wonder or query really the common idea that architecture or, more abstractly, space can be accessed through language, whether architecture is indeed a kind of language, or that buildings are texts to be read—in short, that something can be called "language" without being linguistic. On the one hand, architectural critics and historians since at least Benjamin's time have argued for the language of architecture. And on the other hand, from the earliest antiquity buildings across the globe have been inscribed with writings, prayers, stories, names, and the like. We say today that a building is so tall, has so many "stories," because in the Middle Ages you'd find texts, "stories," carved or painted on the exterior right where the first floor meets the second. But I'm thinking more practically here about how we talk about buildings. Sit in on an architect's presentation to a client, or a developer's presentation to a local planning board—sit in on too many of these, I mean—and you'll hear the same thing over and over again. The architect explains that this *textured* material is conducive to the play of light, this hallway encourages the flow of bodies spilling into a place to mingle and congregate for coffee, this nook is for quiet reflection, this design rhymes with the surrounding structures or natural features, and so on. Come on, haven't you heard this song and dance a million times? Talk about the limits of language in describing just one building that's not even constructed, let alone an extant city!

I only want to make the simple and maybe upsetting point that baldly commercial architectural discourse that speaks to power—clients or commissioners—can be found in lovely poetry, great novels, deeply philosophical works, really everywhere. This is a capitalist language, to be sure, or rather a language of capitalism and commodities. And not to pick on anyone in particular, but it's because the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor wrote such a pithy and poetic book, *Thinking Architecture* (1998), that he produced an excellent example of architectural or, again, commercial clichés sublimated into profound reflection, even where Zumthor—curiously enough—rejects the idea that architecture bears a "message."

JR: Zumthor is an interesting test case, because he's not someone who's typically associated with conversations about language and architecture. Today these conversations tend to revolve around the postmodern architecture of the 1970s and '80s, when many architects embraced the idea of architecture as language as a way of getting back into symbolism and representation after the abstraction of modernism. There was a lot of talk at the time about how important signs and symbols and historical references are to architecture, but it was a populist—and very commercial—move. This needs to be said because even now I think the architecture of this period is romanticized by a lot of people who don't like modern architecture and see it as an alternative. I'm not here to defend modernism, but it's important to recognize that this pop architectural "language" embraced the status quo. The American architect Robert Venturi was probably the most famous postmodern architect in the world. The book that made him famous was *Learning from Las Vegas*, and he did a parallel project called "Learning from Levittown" about a subdivision outside of Philadelphia—so urban sprawl and suburbia were his two models. Like most American suburbs, Levittown was shaped by redlining and racial covenants, and in the summer of 1957 it was on the national news because riots broke out after a Black couple moved in. It's not a model for anything, except maybe the kind of ugly history that architects should be paying more attention to because it continues to shape our world today—according to the latest census Levittown is *still* 87% white.

Of course, when Zumthor rejects messaging, he is trying to rise above all this. He's positioning himself in a more highbrow fashion, putting himself in a long line of architects who celebrated their field's autonomy—the architectural version of art for art's sake. I remember one of the basic directives in *Thinking Architecture* is that architecture must be about only the things that are "inherently its own," or that "belong to its essence." And yes, Zumthor is famous for the sensitive ways he uses natural materials like stone or wood and for the elegant simplicity of his solutions to age-old structural problems like holding a roof up or joining two walls. But Zumthor *also* tells his readers that architecture needs to "speak its own language." What fascinates me is that even someone like this feels compelled to talk about architecture as a language. Why would you need language at all if everything you're dealing with is "purely architectural"?

I think it's because the analogy to language is used as an exclusionary tool. It's a way of carving Architecture, with a capital A, out of the built environment at large. And, frankly, it's a way of disregarding building practices that are seen as not deserving of recognition, or as not sufficiently sophisticated, or for that matter as not worth talking

about. Anyone can make a building, but only an *architect* can speak the language of architecture.

I remember learning in architecture school that architects only design about 2% of the houses built in America. The truly insane thing is that this statistic was presented to me, as an architecture student, in a kind of congratulatory way: "welcome to this elite club, young man–you're one of the 2%." But what that statistic actually shows is that architects have completely lost touch with the built environment. I didn't go to architecture school because I was trying to disengage from the world! I don't mean this as a blanket condemnation of architects. There are a lot of people in the profession doing important work that is engaged with complex social and political issues and much else that is not "purely architectural." But at the top end of the field Zumthor's attitude is widespread. In fact there was a famous kerfuffle some years ago when Frank Gehry went on record in a press conference saying: "98% of everything that is built and designed today is pure shit…. They are damn buildings and that's it." And of course, if you read any architecture critic or even most architectural historians on Gehry, the first thing they'll praise him for is "inventing his own architectural language."

AC: That's great. So, a new way of building is said instantly to be a new architectural language, when it's just a new way of building. Well, a lot hangs on "just" I realize but wouldn't you say that this move to call a new design a new language reflects "just" another way to canonize the architect as someone special, someone who can even found a language? What determines whose building practices are purportedly worthy enough to be called a language and whose aren't?

JR: Well, here I'd mention that some of the most powerful new forms of building practice are by people who *don't* call themselves architects. I'm thinking of Rick Lowe, for example, the artist who founded Project Row Houses in Houston. In the 1990s, working with a small group of artists, he took a block and a half of abandoned shotgun houses along a street in Houston's Third Ward and began rehabing them as spaces to exhibit art but also for community engagement, and over the years the complex has evolved to include everything from youth tutoring to farmer's markets. I first encountered Project Row Houses when I was an architecture student, and it has had a big impact on me as an incredible example of a building practice that is also a social practice. The irony was that as an architecture student I was also learning that the kind of physical construction such social practice entails—usually stuff like retrofits, renovations, repairs—is precisely the kind of work architects tend to look down on. For many architects, a project doesn't really "count" unless it's a ground-up building.

But Lowe is especially relevant to your question, because he characterizes his shift into spatial practice specifically as a matter of language, or rather as his response to recognizing its limits. I saw him give a talk about Project Row Houses recently, and he described moving to Houston in the '80s and realizing that there was no existing vocabulary to describe the transformations he was witnessing in the city—platitudes like "urban decay" or "gentrification" fall hopelessly short of the complex and multifarious processes that they supposedly define. As Lowe put it, "we don't have the language to be

able to talk about what it means when space transforms." And his work shows us that moving to a physical, spatial engagement with the site, moving beyond language, enables a material engagement with history, too. Not only is the Third Ward a historically Black neighborhood, but the shotgun house itself is a building type that was brought to America from West Africa by enslaved people. Project Rowe Houses is working with and through that history in a way that a typical urban renewal project—one based on clearing and rebuilding—absolutely would not.

Lowe is also quick to point out that he was very aware when he started his project that this was precisely the kind of place where developers would have wanted to tear down and start over. And when they did, I guarantee you that they would use the language of architecture to cover up that erasure. I did a fair amount of copywriting for architects when I was younger, and I can't begin to tell you how many times I was asked to write that a given project was "woven into the urban fabric," or "in dialogue with its context."

AC: And it's no accident that "weaving" and "fabric" have a long ancient history as metaphors for textual activities and building practices all at once, after the Latin "textus." The language of architecture is already, in a way, the language of texts. And as you're saying, it's rarely about what lies outside it, or who lives around it. It rather writes everything into its own narrative or, worse, writes you out, writes you off.

JR: Exactly, this language of architecture tries to suggest a continuity with the surroundings that almost never exists in reality. And the problem isn't just that this renders phrases like that meaningless. It's worse. I'm veering into your territory now, but it seems to me like this is language as ideology. Language is hiding uncomfortable truths.

AC: Language is a cover, for sure, which is why it's important to describe its operations as ideological, and—I'd say—pernicious and violent. What you're getting at is the problem of how architecture puts people in their place, how it programs their perceptions of the built environment, how it silences people, robs them of voice and life. Take "colonial architecture," for example, which is now just another style among styles, be it in a US subdivision like Levittown or a UNESCO site somewhere. But the colonial style really should be called the architecture of terror, especially the historic examples so many tourists visit in such places as Salvador City in Bahia, Brazil with its colorful administrative buildings. (My colleague João Biehl drew my attention to this city in his book *Will to Live*). Maybe this is really a matter of optics, but indigenous people didn't and don't look at these nice quaint seeming buildings in the same way tourists do now. And we need to get those optics back. Not to speak for anyone, but these buildings are impositions, military installations imposed by force—by artillery, disease, or law—on native people and their land. True, these buildings could have assumed any style if settlers other than the Portuguese landed on the coast, but they'd still be "colonial." It just so happened that this particular colonial style is a hybrid classical or renaissance style mostly, that—no matter how much you love it—monumentalizes violence.

Pull up the UNESCO website and read how it celebrates Salvador City "as the colonial city *par excellence* in the Brazilian northeast," an "eminent example" of colonial "Renaissance architecture." There's that word, "colonial," here said to reflect the "theme of world exploration," preaching history as if we're in fifth grade in the 1970s or in Texas schools today. The website even describes a "multicultural past" (honestly!) rather than plainly stating that this is, that this *looks like*, a site of enslavement, suffering, murder, conquest, and disease. I get that everyone wants to be happy on vacation and not dwell on horrors, but they should then realize or be told that they are looking at architecture the wrong way. There's always a sense in such language that architecture like this belongs right where it is, as if there's something natural or "organic" about it. Remember, the entire complex of the "big house," slave quarters, and farm fields in all the Americas are called plantations, after "plant." Plants just are. They don't explain themselves. They grow, expand, by right of nature—by analogy, a declared natural order of racial superiority.

Heuristically, what I'm saying is this, and it applies not only to colonial architecture but to the entire built environment everywhere, every style. To interpret the built environment requires intense acts of "unseeing." We should regard the built environment not as a seamless infrastructure that you negotiate unthinkingly as you drive on an elevated highway unaware of what's below, or what's in your peripheral vision as you move through space. No, we should defamiliarize the built environment and look on it as a series of "impositions," where everything seems out of place, where nothing belongs, where something has sure as day been imposed on someone else, and where sites of violence are under foot or tire.

JR: This may sound paradoxical, but your last point actually makes me feel slightly hopeful, because it suggests that if language helps us see, it might also help us resee, in order to undo or resist some of the ideological linguistic moves you've already described. This kind of language could also be a way of helping people engage with their surroundings, of democratizing expertise, in a sense—and that takes us right back to equity in the sense of who gets to participate in these conversations about the built environment, who gets a seat at the table.

AC: Language can have a role in defamiliarization and unseeing, but I don't think the reseeing has to end in "language." Otherwise, we just end in talking and theorizing for the sake of it. In fact, re-seeing is first. Re-seeing can lead to language or to revolution, or spending your money elsewhere, or walking a different way home, or tagging something or even outright vandalizing it, or building something new. Who runs home to crap out more language? And what kind of language do we even mean here? Is it necessarily "linguistic"? If it's not, is "language" really the term we need?

The thing is, I had been studying the work of Renee Gladman, a celebrated novelist and poet whose 2017 book *Prose Architectures* is neither a novel or a book of poems but rather a title that emerges in that zone where writing and drawing, even architectural drawing, meet. Open the book and you discover doodles, something like seismographs. (See her "Prose Architectures 206.") What we have here is figurative expression, spatial

representation—something like a fluid axonometric or schematic drawing that's cursive and flowy, writing and not writing, drawings but drawings of what? Almost invariably cities! Her images remind me of the early steps in design when the architect is suddenly inspired, maybe lights a cigarette, and playfully "sketches" out wild shapes on a pad. For me, Gladman is intriguing as a philosopher of architecture and language, in the way her spatialized "sentences" express a thought process of being in the world, being in the city, that old ordinary sentences can only describe after the fact. As I take it, there's a gap between thinking and language, and this is productive because thought is expressed through figures, too, not only words, through material practices rather than essays or architecture critiques. Perfect for what I'd been trying to conceptualize and seek out.

But then came Evie Shockley whose reading of Gladman's *Prose Architectures* is inspiring. Evie—I knew her in grad school—is a renowned poet and a scholar who is now working on visuality in African American arts and letters. She sets Gladman alongside June Jordan, the Black feminist poet from the 1960s (Shockley, "On Seeing and Reading the 'Nothing': Poetry and Blackness Visualized," *New Literary History* 50 [2019]: 499–528). Ok so Jordan collaborated with architect R. Buckminster Fuller to redesign Harlem with a visionary plan originally called "Skyrise for Harlem" for *Esquire* magazine. Read Shockley on this, I won't spoil it, but she ups and imagines Gladman's figures to be drawings of Jordan's writings about "Skyrise for Harlem." The project never happened, of course, but this connection between language arts and visual arts gets me going. There's a language practice here, but it knows that language, even if it's everything, is never enough precisely for that reason. You need other modes, other media. Language doesn't get a break just because it's language and you like it. If poets know this fact, then maybe the rest of us can play catch up.

JR: Those are two powerful examples of language practices that exceed language, that start to spread out from language into other modes, other spaces. But for me you're also raising thorny question of architecture's agency. I think that in addition to all the problems we've elucidated, pushing spatial practice toward language also tends to turn it into a representation, a symbol or a symptom. Certainly that's true when other fields, like history or philosophy, take up architecture as a subject. You mentioned Benjamin and Jameson, and they're both paradigmatic. For the former, the iron and glass architecture of the arcade is the essential embodiment of modernity. For the latter, postmodern architecture is the ultimate reification of the cultural logic of late capitalism. But what if architecture wasn't just a symptom, but a treatment? Maybe I'm reading too much into some of your comments earlier, but when you speak so evocatively about the accumulations of praxis in the city, or the dialectic of forces operating in urban space, I feel like there's a latent agency there. Some sort of transformative power in the built environment, if only the right kind of practices could start to engage it.

AC: Oh gosh definitely. There is a moment in the early '60s when two brilliant thinkers, Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon, were exploring the problem of inertia in the built environment, or what you say here, latent agency. In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (*Critique de la raison dialectique* [1960]), Sartre speaks of the "practico-inert," by which he means the sedimented praxes of our surroundings that we confront in our daily

routines and which constrain our activities. You have to wait in line for the bus this way, you have to walk down the alley that way, why is this wall here, and so forth. So the existentialist framework applies not only to people in the moment getting in your face and interfering with your own "project," as Sartre calls it, but people in the past doing so as well by the structures they build and leave behind for you to negotiate.

Yet this idea of the "practico-inert"—and it would be neat to explore who influenced whom on this topic—has special meaning in Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre* [1961]). Fanon speaks of sedimented praxes as colonial violence materialized in apartheid, in the way there is, in Manichean fashion, a district for the colonizer and another for the colonized, and that everything from the hot concrete on up is *based* on that built exclusion, even the "muscular tension" he describes so powerfully in those pages as the feeling of being-in-place, kept in place, in a police state. Three pages into the book and Fanon is teaching us that you cannot talk about the colony or decolonization without talking about land, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and development all the way up to what he calls "major public works projects" and "nation building." What does it take to build a bridge, a real bridge but also the bridge to somewhere out of colonization? You have to acknowledge what he calls the "dialectical truth of the nation," which means facing the facts on the ground. Let me read out this passage:

> If the building of a bridge does not enrich the consciousness of those working on it, then don't build the bridge, and let the citizens continue to swim across the river or use a ferry. The bridge must not be pitchforked or foisted upon the social landscape by a deus ex machina, but, on the contrary, must be the product of the citizens' brains and muscles. And there is no doubt architects and engineers, foreigners for the most part, will probably be needed, but the local party leaders must see to it that the techniques seep into the desert of the citizen's brain so that the bridge in its entirety and in every detail can be integrated, redesigned, and reappropriated. The citizen must appropriate the bridge.

Everything is here. You have the idea of an imposition on the land that must be avoided because that's exactly what colonial architecture already does—with style, I might add. You have the role of architects and engineers who aren't highfalutin professionals swooping down on everyone to dictate what's what. Rather, they are constrained by local leaders to plan and design not only in the interests of the citizens but with their help, their gladly given labor. Who's really designing? Who's really building? And to what end?

We can clearly see how the theory/practice split dissolves in this example—or better, that it is hard to say which is which, because there are relays back and forth between both. That dynamic is the beauty of Fanon. And for this I hold him to be a preeminent philosopher of the spatial dialectic.

JR: Hearing you describe decolonization as *both* an intellectual/ideological project *and* a physical process reveals a real irony in the way architecture as a discipline often relates to theory in general. What I mean is that architects import theoretical models from outside their own field, which implicitly reinforces the idea that building practice can't be intellectual or ideological on its own. And so any time a philosopher comes along with an idea that sounds even remotely spatial or material, architects can't seem to resist

helping themselves to it! For example, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction had a tremendous influence on the architecture of the 1980s and '90s, to the point where arguably "deconstructivist architecture" is one of the last coherent styles of the 20th century. But Derrida's deconstruction describes an explicitly textual phenomenon, so to "apply" it to anything misses the point, doubly so to a non-textual practice like architecture. And deconstructivist architecture was itself a kind of simulacrum, dressed up in a visual language of fragmentation—jagged shapes, a lot of dramatic diagonals, and so on—but of course it was constructed just as solidly as any other kind of architecture—it had to be, or it wouldn't have stood up. And then there was Gilles Deleuze, whose book, *The Fold* (*Le Pli* [1988]), was translated into English in 1993 right when a lot of "cutting-edge" American architects were starting to use design software to make curvy—and indeed sometimes folded—forms. Suddenly architecture was all about "the fold," as if Deleuze's tiny book amounted to little more than an endorsement of curved walls, on the one hand, or as if blob-y architecture had anything to contribute to philosophical discourse, on the other. These examples are a few decades old, but they've had an enormous influence on the direction of architecture right up to the present. More recently, of course, architects have dabbled in Object Oriented Ontology. You've dispatched that trend definitively in *Artforum* in 2015, and I'd only add that it's a continuation of many of the issues I've identified here, but we needn't deal with that now.

For the real problem is architects thinking they *have* to read philosophy because, without its support, their material practice can't stand on its own—they figure they need to borrow language from Derrida, Deleuze, or whomever to describe what they're doing in the world. This pretention reveals something insidious at the core of the discipline. It goes all the way back to the beginning of "modern" architecture in the Renaissance, when rhetoric was the most prestigious form of cultural production, and early treatises on architecture were modeled after literary books, and early theories of architecture were based on grammatical or linguistic analogies in terms of how they regulated things like proportion or ornament. All this was bound up with the paradigm shift from the medieval mason to the Renaissance architect. The former is essentially a craftsman, working on-site, to construct a building with his hands. The latter is a humanist and an intellectual, working remotely, theorizing abstractly—through reason and Euclidian calculation—whose authorship is mediated by modern technologies like printing. The architect was, and still is, someone who sends drawings to a building site to be executed by manual laborers. Consequently, architecture has gotten sort of stuck on the middle rung of the ladder of cultural production and intellectual prestige. It successfully raised itself up from manual labor (thereby ceding the vast majority of the world's construction, as I mentioned earlier) but it can't quite make a convincing case that it's as important or refined as art, or philosophy, or literature. So architects will be forever trying to convince themselves and whoever will listen among their dwindling audience—after all, it's hard to stay culturally relevant with such a limited involvement in the built environment—that any philosophy that seems even vaguely spatial is the new foundation of their work.

When I learned about the birth of modern architecture in school, it was presented in a similar way to the 2% statistic: "Congratulations, you're an intellectual!" Recently architectural historians like Irene Cheng, Charles Davis, Mabel Wilson have been looking

at this foundational shift in a broader context. Their edited volume, *Race and Modern Architecture*, makes an incontrovertible case that the birth of the architect was part of the broader birth of the (western) humanist subject, coinciding with the rise of settler colonialism, the beginnings of industrial capitalism, and the Atlantic slave trade.

AC: That book is absolutely groundbreaking. Just as architecture is forming as a modern discipline, it distances itself from physical labor, exactly when such labor took on an entirely new, racialized dimension in chattel slavery. Architecture is, with geography, very much a signal discipline of nascent racial capitalism. And it's not shook off this legacy either.

JR: Exactly, and that legacy is why it's so important for architects to be joining into conversations about equity. I'd like to believe that architecture can not only become a more equitable field, but could become a field that helps to create equity—through physical transformations of the world, as in that powerful passage you read from Fanon, but also through developing new ways to think and talk about space, new relationships to language, new understandings of how theory relates to practice.

AC: Can I return to something? You had mentioned the former internet craze about objects. There was also, as you know, a fascination with "new" materialism in the art world and to some extent architecture, as well as many disciplines in the literary humanities. Again, a new theory! This is where the problem isn't only with architects, who need to be deeper readers of theory and philosophy, but many humanists today. My point is that you'd expect this materialism to motivate a distinct spatial turn in these disciplines, but it didn't. Why not? Remember, for millennia all philosophical materialism was also a theory of space, of place, of volumes and extensions, and so forth—which is what Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, and Marx knew. Spinoza understood this, too. You can't talk matter without talking space, or place, as Hegel reminds us. We have to keep the spatial problematic in focus and take advantage of philosophies that already do this.

Again, take Hegel. In his lectures on aesthetics, he names architecture as the first of the arts whose spatial problematic remains in all subsequent iterations of art, even in music by way of negation, only to return again to poetry to peter out at the "end of art." I'd add that some of his coolest insights into the complexity of spatial thinking and understanding transpire while he's moseying around the cathedral in Cologne contemplating the infinity of space.

Matter of fact, one of my favorite quotes by Hegel is when he says in the *Science of Logic* that creating a new philosophical system is like remodeling an ancient city that is still inhabited, well-built, and much loved by everyone in it. Ha, where even to begin? This last example is typical, however, and gets to the point. Philosophy carries within it a language that is curiously architectural. Kant, for instance, audaciously proclaimed his *Critique of Pure Reason* to be a Copernican revolution in philosophy but in a more down to earth manner said that his system was an "architectonic" built from the ruined edifices of older philosophical systems. More generally, in philosophy you find the problem of

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"grounds" or "foundations," which always refer to first principles, or initial conditions that make philosophy possible—a kind of thinking worth, well, thinking. It's as if such architectural phrasing gives the reader a sense of what's prior, of what's "fundamental," about this activity, indeed that it's an activity at all. Even in high-minded discourse, in other words, you find so much allusion to what we as animals already feel in our bones about the necessity of shelter. This kind of wording is casual but deeply significant and worth further reflection.

I'd extend this thought about what's prior. The matter of space, the problem of place, of being-in-place and being-in-space, is where all disciplines overlap—architecture, engineering, philosophy, poetry, mathematics, and so on. To call "architecture" prior is one thing, and I would still do that, but to speak of the priority of these spatial problems is quite another, and perhaps a greater thing that architecture, as "purely architectural," cannot possibly address alone, because these issues concern everybody, whether or not they work in an academic or professional discipline, whether they have the so-called right or agency to design and build and be recognized for their accomplishments, their poieses.

You know, this tricky question of theory and practice—it goes back to Aristotle, at least, who said that on the one hand there is poiesis or "making" or creating for the sake of it, and on the other hand there is praxis or "acting" towards an end, sometimes a noble end or a greater good. But it's not so tricky when you realize that he is often unsure which is which across his *Ethics* and *Metaphysics.* Subsequent philosophers have wondered whether the distinction is at all real. Those medieval masons at the birth of architecture had a practice that was clearly theory. And Fanon pretty much sets theory and practice in a dialectical relation, one constantly informing the other. We might design and build, labor and learn, think and work, with his lessons in mind. Poiesis for the people. That's praxis.