

PARAPOETICS AND THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAP

Autor: Steve McCaffery¹

Filiación: SUNY at Buffalo, Buffalo, Estados Unidos.

E-mail: stevemcc@buffalo.edu

ABSTRACT

This paper is divided into three uneven sections. The first offers a “soft” manifesto-like exposition of parapoetics; the second discusses a related matter: the paralogicality of the frame; and the final section comprises a partial mapping of and a few suggestions toward areas of potential parapoetic investigation. Judged on the normative criteria for academic papers it is premature, partial at best and thoroughly inconclusive. Seen as attempting to realize a parapoetics intervention it will be judged to be an utterly abortive attempt –and quite correctly so. However, as the speculative and tentative tenor of the first part indicates, the third part is a probe into uncertainties and unknowns. Notably absent is any lengthy discussion of the important architectural contributions of the Situationists. That discussion can be found in my article on the radical labyrinths of Constant, and Arakawa and Gins.

Keywords: parapoetics, contemporary poetics, poetry and architecture, deconstruction.

I

Parapoetics

The death God, the end of Man, the end of theory, the death of the subject, the death of art (courtesy of Hegel), the death of man courtesy of Foucault, the death of Marxism courtesy of North American Departments of English, the end of narrative courtesy my friend with a smile like those horses in Picasso’s Guernica. Having survived a tedious catena of such mortifications and eschatologies I’ll not add to the list the death of the poem (first announced in North American Academic circles in the 1970s when poetry was misunderstood as being entirely lyrical expression) but I will pose for provocation the following question. Where does poetics go when poetry is no longer considered important? Crisis is a notion frequently complicit with endings and I sense no crisis in poetics but do note complacency in matters of potentiality and scale. Accordingly I want to consider a shift into a purposefully fuzzy and still virtual discipline I call parapoetics. Similar to David Carroll’s notion of the paraesthetic, the term denotes a critical responsibility to approach poetry through its relation to extra-poetic domains and discourses. To borrow Carroll’s own description, it’s figured as “something like [a poetics] turned against itself . . . a faulty, irregular, disordered, improper [poetics]—one not content to remain within the area defined by the [poetic]” (Carroll xiv). Celan believed that naming occurs in the depth of Language and yet to accord to naming a

definitional power is to end a being as becoming. Dr. Johnson warns that to “circumscribe poetry by definition will only show the narrowness of the definer” (331), a sentiment endorsed by Schlegel in his oxymoronic definition of romantic poetry as poetry that can’t be defined. Similarly, I want to avoid a specific predetermination of what constitutes parapoetics and leave it suspended as a non-determined concept, thereby allowing critical desire to put mastery at risk. Abandoning the pursuit of theoretical dogmatism it will require that a negative capability be applied within the pernicious doublet Foucault concatenates as power–knowledge.

The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* offers numerous meanings for the prefix para: 1. beside. 2. beyond. 3. a modification. 4. a diametrically opposite relation. 5. a form of protection or warding off. The larger OED adds further variations to these seemingly contradictory senses that strike me as particularly attractive to poetic practice:

In composition it has the same senses, with such cognate adverbial ones as “to one side, aside, amiss, faulty, irregular, disordered, improper, wrong”: also expressing subsidiary relation, alteration, perversion, simulation, etc.

What’s appealing in “para” is its evasion of the janiformity of a post- whose consequences Derrida avers involve “a surrender to the historicist urge”³. Among other things, para provokes a shift from temporal to spatial conceptualization and positioning. Moreover the lateral adjacency of “beside” offers a multiplicity of satellitic invocations: the friend, neighbor, relative, lover, guide, witness and judge. Beside also is between, interstitial and intervalic, as well as extra, outside. Accordingly I’ll be speaking more about the place of parapoetics than its ontology, on where it is and can be, than on what it is. Purposefully left undefined, the important step is to inscribe and activate its forces. Redirecting Derrida’s call to architecture I write, “Let us never forget there is a poetics of poetics” and that poetics is beside poetics. (Cf. Derrida 326). Heuristic rather than foundational, parapoetic desire does not seek to adumbrate upon the specificity of a discipline but rather to probe the fungibility and centrifuge always latent within the ontologically or intellectually discrete. As such it takes its place within the anti-Kantian lineage that denies the specificity of art and also offers a counter-move within the current new “anxiety” of specialization rather than influence. Operating as a probe into uncertainties and as a force of disruption among stability, it aims to transform a total unity into multiplicity. Foucault and Blanchot encourage the “thinking of the outside” as a critical practice of transgression, one that refuses the stability of alterity while at the same time avoiding the incorporating move to totality. Parapoetics demands that singular disciplines or practices remove themselves in order to achieve a self-comprehension in a manner that avoids a transcendental installation of the theoretical attitude, and submit to a voluntary disability. Assuming the burden of this kind of thinking, parapoetics works against promulgating any discursive formation as a complete and closed system and seeks to go beyond the discretion of Deleuze’s “fabulation of a discipline to come”.

Free from a fixed definition it’s also emancipated from a predetermined destination, and able to install itself within the dialectical tensions and determinants of any number of target fields. Rather than serving as the critical mode of poetics, a species of self-policing and of external probing, parapoetics signals a shift in critical desire away from the poem as such toward other disciplines and discourses. Working between the seams and cracks consequent to the inevitable play between discourses, upon and without the hyphenated space of power-

knowledge, parapoetics adopts more a contaminatory than a combative stance, marbling the smooth and certain propositional plane of discourse and ideas. It does not support disciplinary cross-dressing and is not to be deposited in other disciplines as some governing metatheory. Deracinated and detached from poetics proper, and maintaining its distance from any discourse that seeks to master or explain, it can be likened to a hesitation within a caesura. With explorations beyond affinities and analogies, parapoetics will situate interstitially, the way punctuation falls *between* meaning. Circumscribed within the broad thematics of disciplines and movings, parapoetics focusus on the interval where contamination, paralogicality, uncertainty, and misprision precipitate discovery, unforeseen collaboration and contestation. As regards specific dynamics, in parapoetic logic, an entrance is the continuation of an exit by other means. For these reasons parapoetics will always be both considerably more and a little less than poetics proper. And, who knows, perhaps poetics after the post-modern is a parapoetics inside it.

II

THE FRAME-UP

All movements have direction. But why just one direction and not several? Movements can produce breakouts and new connections.
Yago Conde (*Architecture of the Indeterminacy* 251)

Ronald Aronson encourages us to think of theory as a tool not a framework (227) and much of Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* explores the philosophical intricacies of working and engaging the frame. Frames both individuate and recontextualize and their ultimate power is cartographic. We see the acute stakes of framing in our current geopolitical and sexual climates. On one hand the melting of national boundaries and proactive deframings under the pressure of economic ideologies in Europe and North America (NAFTA and the EU), and on the other a Balkanization of Europe and Africa from political and ethnic pressures to maximize territorial coding. The struggle toward legal ratification of same-sex marriages is a debate fought out in a judicial theatre that hinges on the right to install a frame within an existing frame.

Framing, of course, is the prime culprit in transforming *objects as such* into objects of theory, thereby guaranteeing a pacification of the chosen object field and the impossibility of the latter to modify the theoretic domain. For this reason theoretical endeavor remains antipathetic to empiricism whose method runs counter to such framing, an implication that Gerald Bruns specifies when asserting that "What we take poetry to be cannot be exhausted by examples, because examples are always in excess of our experience and understanding" (*Material* 5). "Despite theory-frames being designed to ensure a unilateral flow of power sufficient to preserve the integrity of its method, the logic of the frame moves against settled internal preservation. Frames are caught up in a contradictory logic in so much as the boundaries they set out to demarcate are constantly threatened by external elements and forces. Rather than preservers of integrity frames are conduits facilitating a promiscuous transit of forces from inside out and from outside in; they organize a contradictory yet mutual relation of an exterior to an interior that, like Foucauldian thresholds, construct an untenable divide between incompatible forces struggling for dominance. French architect Bernard Cache suggests that "the structure of the modern frame offers a certain amount of play. . . . The rigid parts of the frame still retain a certain geometry, but their articulation is mobile and

their equilibrium results from the play of tensions that run through the system as a whole” (108-09). Derrida only pragmatizes this observation in his suggestion to “work the frame” as both boundary and conduit. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the omniprobability of the frame reversing its function and serving to deframe in a process by which what is preserved internally finds a relationship to something external in a way that opens it up to the outside. (Cf. Deleuze and Guattari 187).

The paralogicality of the frame bears comparison to the nature of dissipative structures, defined and investigated in the field of nonlinear thermodynamics by Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers. Dissipative structures are “forms of supermolecular organization requiring the continuous dissipation of energy and matter) through the increase of small random fluctuations” (Fernández-Galiano 114). The theory of dissipative structures is emerging as a formative notion in numerous disciplines, provoking Fernández-Galiano to consider it “the new scientific paradigm of the age” (ibid.). Both buildings and the city can be conceived as open thermodynamic systems dependent for their existence on nutritional elements and energy flows. As Prigogine and Stengers observe in a cell or a city alike, we find “that these systems are not only open but live on their openness, nourishing themselves with the flows of matter and energy reaching them from the outside world . . . [T]he city and the cell quickly die when separated from their mediums, for they are part of the worlds that nourish them and constitute a sort of local and unique incarnation of the flows that never cease to transform” (in Fernández-Galiano 79). Likewise, both cell and city require the constant dissipation of energy be it in the form of waste produce or the movement of populous, in a constant spreading beyond frames and boundaries. In sharp contrast to the practice of comparative poetics outlined by Earl Miner, parapoetics does not work to constitute and defend the discrete frame of the poem, but rather explore how the frame can be challenged to open up a poetics without borders.

III THE ARCHITECTURAL LEAP

*The language revising its own architectures
is the cloud palace and drift of your desire.*
(Robert Duncan, *Notebook 31*)

Stein’s call to “act as if there was no use in a center” is cannily prophetic of contemporary cultural desires, and in current poetics the ideas of rupture and multiplicity seem more attractive than the one of continuity. Derrida leaves “what is writing” an open question and the same is required of poetics. Feeling that contemporary poetics has reached an impasse in *exclusively* poetic territories, I wish to propose a leap or “becoming” toward both urban texture and architectural theory as initial parapoetic domains. An exclusive focus on the poem-as-such severely curtails the potential critical range of poetics, and for the latter to maintain a vital critical function then a radical readjustment of its trajectories seems required; a move Arakawa and Madeline Gins refer to as the “poetic leap”. The purpose of this leap isn’t simply to obtain knowledge or display it in a different discipline, nor to plunder a terrain for concepts and ideas useful to one’s own practice. The architectural jump involves *the knowledge of how and when to delay knowing*; how to be active in a state of suspended certainty. As Koestler puts it “The act of creation is forgetting, at the proper moment, what we know”. Via the poetic leap one is no longer beside but elsewhere. In the spirit of Bataille’s

oxymoronic formulation (that to love poetry one must hate poetry) the initial poetic leap will be a turn against its traditional object field and detach poetics from poematics.

Disciplines, like structures and language, are simultaneously closed and open, containing heterogeneity within a frame of the homogenous. To insist on the specificity of both the poetic and the architectural is to seriously limit both research and the critico-creative enterprise inside, between, and across the two. “[W]hy should “literature” [or architecture] still designate that which already breaks away from literature—away from what has always been conceived and signified under that name—or that which, not merely escaping literature, [or architecture,] implacably destroys it?” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 3). To repeat a well-known claim of Derrida’s: “A writing that refers back only to itself carries us at the same time, indefinitely and systematically, to some other writing” (*Double Session* 202). Beyond a critical engagement with this heterogeneity within the so-called homogenous is an urgent need to shift not the mode but the target of poetics’ transitivity.

Aaron Betsky has emerged as the popular theorist of that decentralization condition and dissolution known as sprawl. Sprawl shatters the tense logic of the frame. Not only is it an architectural and urban condition, sprawl is the condition of modernity. Pollution is sprawl, contemporary knowledge is sprawl. Sprawl is the authentic landscape of the contemporary but enters painting as early as Turner. Sprawl is the given condition not the cursed share of architecture. Betsky insists that “The issue is not how to stop sprawl but how to use its composition, its nodes and its leaky spaces to create a kind of architecture”⁴. As a blotting or formless spreading out from strategic nodes –malls, airports, etc.– sprawl constitutes both the dematerialization of physical structures and modernity’s urban given. It registers the contemporary city’s inclination to heterology and centrifuge whose resonant inclination is to deframe. Betsky’s name for this formless dystopia is exurbia “where human forms meld into the remains of nature and where order becomes so thin that we recognize its most basic components”. For Betsky urban sprawl may even provide a redemptive dimension that takes us “away from the high-rise tendencies of the city [and putting] us back on earth where we confront the realities of ground and weather”. While declining the temptation to dangle such redemptive carrots I would insist however, that in maintaining parapoetics as a deliberately non-determined concept, we advocate a certain conceptual and creative sprawl.

Why the leap into architecture? From “stanza” to the “prison-house of language” architecture is figures dominant within the very formulation of the linguistic. Architectural metaphors haunt writing to a degree sufficient to cause us to question a merely benign metaphoric presence. One of Heidegger’s lasting insight is into how both language and architecture ground us in the world. In architecture, as in language, man dwells (poetically or not) whether in open mobility or confinement. “We appear to ourselves only through an experience of spacing which is already marked by architecture” (Derrida, *Point de Folie* 324). Heidegger and Derrida alike suggest that prior to becoming social subjects we are all architectural bodies⁵. However, to Derrida’s grammatological conception of architecture as “a writing of space, a mode of spacing which makes a place for events” (ibid) the qualification needs to be annexed that architecture too is the materialized conception of dwelling and that dwelling is fundamentally a relation of ontology to spaces. In that sense it serves to return being to its problems by way of *oikos* rather than *poesis*. And if Bachelard is correct when claiming that all inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home, then the link between reading and dwelling appears to be far from a strained analogy.

The myth of Babel implicates the two distinct phenomena of architecture and human speech, from which has developed an enduring complicity. The metaphoric saturation of architectural terms in other discourses (including both philosophy and literature) is well known: the Prison House of Language, deconstruction, the poem's fabric, foundation, etc. Derrida claims the architectural metaphor of ground to be the core of philosophy (*Chora L* 105). But beyond a metaphoric presence, architecture has consistently offered writing a constructive model and, though hardly sister arts, architecture's intimate relation to the literary is historically tangible, even down to its grammatological contours⁶. Architecture provides the formal model for Saint Teresa's *Interior Castle*, Jeremy Taylor's *Rules and Exercises for Holy Dying* (figured in the Preface as a tour through the rooms of a charnel-house), George Herbert's *The Temple* and Christopher Harvey's *The Synagogue*. The arguments of Donne's magnificent sermon "Death's Duel" are built around the three prime architectural supports of foundation, buttress and contignation. "The foundations suffer them not to sink, the buttresses suffer them not to swerve, and the contignations and knitting suffers them not to cleave" (Donne 165). In his 1850 Advertisement to *The Prelude* Wordsworth recalls his conception in 1814 of the relation of his two earlier poems, *The Excursion* and *The Recluse*, in architectural terms that recall Herbert. "[T]he two works have that relation to each other . . . as the Antechapel has to the body of a Gothic Church" (IV, 4). Even his minor pieces when collected and "properly arranged, will be found by the attentive reader to have such connection with the main work as may give them claim to be likened to the little cells, oratories and sepulchral recesses, ordinarily included in those edifices" (ibid). More recently, Ronald Johnson's long poem *ARK* adopts as its formal model "a kind of naif architecture on the lines of the Facteur Cheval's Ideal Palace, Simon Rodia's Watts Towers, or Ramond Isidore's mosaic house in the shade of Chartres" (Johnson 56) with Johnson's earlier poem, *Radi Os*, a selected textual deletion of *Paradise Lost*, envisaged as the final and one hundredth book of *ARK* and "conceived as a kind of Dymaxion Dome over the whole" (*ARK* 50, 56). Mark Scroggins elaborates on *ARK*'s architectonic features: "[Johnson] calls his poem a 'model for a monument.' And its three major divisions reflect this spatial metaphor: 33 sections of 'Foundations,' 3 of 'Spires,' and 33 of 'Ramparts.' *ARK*, in turn, was to have been a 'dome' over the whole, a crowning and covering shell like that over Monticello, the U.S. Capitol, or the Roman Pantheon. The poem, then, is conceived of as in some sense a literal object, a literal architecture" (Scroggins 295). Dante, in *De vulgari eloquentia* II. 9 offers a distinction between stanza (literally "room") and canzone that illustrates the presidential status of architectural thinking:

And here one must know that this term (stanza) has been chosen for technical reasons exclusively, so that what contains the entire art of the canzone should be called stanza, that is a capacious dwelling or receptacle for the entire craft. For just as the canzone is the container (literally lap or womb) of the entire thought, so the stanza enfolds its entire technique [...] (Quoted in Agamben, [vii].)

The interrogative crux structuring the entirety of Augustine's *Confessions* (a book that frequently addresses the infinite as a locus) is a *temporal* problem articulated as an architectural issue of impossible housing. I call on you, Lord, to you the Infinite to come and inhabit me, I who am but finite. Mark Z. Danielewski takes up this same impossibility in his recent novel *House of Leaves* where the house on Ash Tree Lane is bigger on the inside than it is on the outside.

For its part, the materiality of language has provided an abundance of architectural possibilities. The dramatic and decorative possibilities of the letter shape as an interior space functions as the basic premise of the Medieval “inhabitated” initial, but Johann David Steingruber brings about a more complex fusion of function and the fantastic in his *Architectural Alphabet* of 1773. The thirty-three plates reveal formidable achievement and show patently feasible functional designs. Steingruber’s quintessentially Baroque wit is retained as a trace element in Steven Holl’s investigation into the intimate congruence of certain letterforms and architectural design in relation to context and urban syntax⁷.

Offering an attractive alternative to Bloom’s formulation, Viktor Shklovsky argues for a deflection rather than an anxiety of influence. Put simply, the theory advances that artistic or disciplinary influence is transmitted not in an immediate and direct line within the same discipline, but in an entirely different domain. The transmission of artistic and cultural influence travels like the knight’s move in chess, not from fathers to sons but from uncles and aunts to nieces and nephews (Cf Conde 195). A recent example is Language Writing’s influence on musicology seen in Brian Ferneyhough’s embrace of disjunction in his *New Complexionism*. Rather than literary continuity via canon and hierarchy why not a deflectional move to geography, ecology or architecture? (It’s the trail of the transmission out of its current site that is important). So in the virtual interrelations between poetics and architecture along a Shklovskian model, we might adopt an architectural configuration and rethink the concept of a poetic movement, and poetic practice in general, as the construction of a project in relation to a chosen program, itself relating to an actual preexisting site. Additionally, the programmatic ideology of architecture facilitates rethinking that socio-ontological problematic complex named “community” through the architectural notion of “site”. Site as locus and topos has a fecund, aristocratic history stretching far back beyond Olson through the *genius locus* to Aristotle’s claim that “place is something, but it also has a certain power” (*Physics* 4.1.2086. Quoted in Didi-Huberman 18). Bernard Cache’s Deleuzean-informed architecture lets poetics abandon the otiose binary of form and content and take up the triplet of frame, vector and inflection. Cache’s complex theorizing on the status of the image warrants careful scrutiny and perhaps, additionally, a bold application in *poesis*. Similarly, it might be asked: how would catachresis find an architectural realization, or equally, an axonometric method a poetic one?

Perhaps then we can learn more about the discourse of the poem by examining it from architecture’s alterior position, and through a purposeful displacement of poetics into architecture. The dialogue between these two practices occurs as much within, as between, each other, and the integrity of both practices should be risked. Parapoetic strategy seeks out not what is confluent but also conflictual in these two practices, as well as what each is displacing and becoming. Contemporary architecture shows a cartographic caution around establishing boundaries and domains. Indeed, it is coming to understand that discrete disciplinary issues can’t all be raised in architecture itself, (involving, among other things, the broader philosophic issues of ontology, presence, history, topos, memory and mimesis); there are additionally the wider socio-political issues of urbanism, the city, and context, and perhaps most paramount, a relation to human bodies, as well as the broader matters of coordination, material, and scale, and the relation of interiority and exteriority.

Bernard Tschumi is not alone in stressing the conceptual nature of architecture as its paramount purpose. Tschumi compares it to Lacanian psychoanalysis whose goal is not

curative and the patient's recovery occurring as a felicitous indirect effect: "To make buildings that work and make people happy is not to [sic] goal of architecture but, of course, a welcome side effect" (267 n. 8). I currently concur, however, with Robin Evans in seeing architecture as the construction of the preconditions that govern the way bodies occupy and negotiate space—a credo not far removed from Yago Conde's claim that "The habitual exclusion of the body and its experiences of [sic from?] any discourse on the logic of form would be instances of the lack of any intertextual impulse" (197)⁸. Architecture is a form of action centering on users and the key question of architectural form is a question of architecture's relation to the scale and matter of human freedom.

However, having said that I have to admit that the question of what "is" architecture has become much more difficult to answer in recent times. Traditionally, architects are subject to the same constraints as a Poet Laureate. Forced into a species contextual bricolage as a compromise formation, their profitable work is commissioned construction within predetermined spaces and for the most part within fixed, urban, and spatial exigencies. Owing to the governin ission the vast majority of architectural projects remain conceptual. With the rise of paper and information architecture in the 1960s and subsequently virtual architecture, the practice was suddenly liberated from the binding functionalist mandates and found itself free to investigate numerous theoretical issues. As a consequence, contemporary architectural theorizing emerges not as a self-certain or consensual discourse but as a vibrant metamorphic terrain of dispute. In Solà-Morales's estimate "At the present time, [architectural] criticism resembles hand-to-hand combat: a contest between information seeking public recognition and the power of collective sanction vested in those supposedly able to bestow it" (138). The impact of philosophy on recent architectural thinking has been consequential, precipitating both attempts at application and actual collaborations⁹. As early as 1970 Robin Evans envisioned an *anarchitecture* conceived to function as the tectonic of non-control (Evans 11-33) and in 1973 architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri proclaimed "from now on form is not sought outside of chaos; it is sought within it" (Tafuri 96)¹⁰. Much contemporary architecture, like performance, seems to challenge its seemingly inescapable parousial condition by attempts to destabilize presence and orientation. Solà-Morales contrasts effectively the traditional locus of stability, durability and memory with the contemporary locus of event:

The places of present-day architecture cannot repeat the permanences produced by the force of the Vitruvian *firmitas*. The effects of duration, stability, and defiance of time's passing are now irrelevant. The idea of place as the cultivation and maintenance of the essential and the profound, of a genius loci, is no longer credible . . . From a thousand different sites the production of place continues to be possible. Not as the revelation of something existing in permanence, but as the production of an event. (103-04)

Sentiments echoed in Cache's tenet that "if the expression 'genius loci' [sic] has a meaning, it lies in the capacity of this 'genius' to be smart enough to allow for the transformation or transit from one identity to another" (15). The works and proposals of Peter Eisenman, Koop Himmelblau, Nigel Coates, and Bernard Tschumi appear extremely provocative in this area. Architecture's traditional investment in functionality include, as its central desiderata, safety, stability, permanence, control, anesthesia, consumption, and comfort. All are called into question as requisite elements by the diverse works of Archigram, Daniel Libeskin, the late John Hejduk, and Zaha Hadid¹¹. Indeed, early in 2001, the radical procedural architects Gins

and Arakawa abandoned architecture for their newly formed practice of *Bioscleaveconfiguration*. As well as a common belief that there can be a positive quality to disequilibrium and contradictions, what unites these architectural thinkers is the trenchant, uncompromising repudiation of architectural modernism's functional ethic and its attendant emphasis on problem solving over problem production.

Even though German Romanticism is known to have avoided the linguistic in the simple complicity sought between architecture and music, and despite Victor Hugo's famous warning that "the book will kill the edifice"—(a prediction at the heart of this problematic relation between poetics and architectural theory)—current architectural thinking, via Derrida's impetus, is being redirected to the architectonic possibilities of language, textuality and writing¹². Preeminent is Peter Eisenman's advocacy of discursive rather than figurative architecture, opening up to the mirrored possibility of how writing can be inscribed in architecture and equally architecture in writing¹³. One aspect in his work readily lending itself to a parapoetic scrutiny is the virtuality of a diagrammatic model for writing. Eisenman himself believes (perhaps over ambitiously) that such a writing-as-diagram is possible and will provide "a means of potentially overreaching the question of origin (speech) as well as the metaphysics of presence" (*Diagram* 213). Eisenman stresses the diagram's deconstructive potential as the following the following vertiginous and typical sentence suggests: "The diagram helps to displace presence by inserting a not-presence as a written trace—a sign of the not-presence of the column—into the physical column. This trace is something that cannot be explained either through function or meaning" (213). However, the axonometric nature of the diagrams offers a more parapoetic potential. The chief feature of axonometric diagrams is parallel projection which effectively collapses the governing dualism of vertical and horizontal planes, freeing up the possibility of thrusting the observer into decentralized disequilibrium¹⁴. Axonometric presentation maximizes presentational possibilities, showing more sides than it is ever possible to view. For Eisenman "The diagram is a tactic within a critical strategy—it attempts to situate a theoretical object within a physical object [and is capable of producing] spatial characteristics that both blur iconic forms and produce interstitial spatial possibilities" (*Diagram* 206, 202). There are clear intimations that poetics is already exploring at least the effects of axonometry. The disjunctive poetics that emerged in the late 1970s produced texts by Bruce Andrews and Susan Howe whose immediate effects are decenteredness and readerly disequilibrium. Ron Silliman's *New Sentence* (due to its paratactic emphasis and rule of non-integration sentences), constructs precisely those interstitial spatial possibilities that Eisenman speaks of¹⁵. The white hiatus between letters, words, and sentences, what Silliman calls the twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet and marking the virtual space of non-integration, makes reader intervention possible on the level of semantic construction and connotative tracking. A similar quality of axonometric distortion occurs in much of Clark Coolidge's poetry and in the systematic-chance-generated texts of Jackson MacLow. In his recent book *Alien Tatters*, Coolidge retains the sentence as the minimal unit of composition, with grammar and syntax functioning in a superficially normative way.

Monkey come down from that roof with my mother's
dowry. These baleful scenes can be made to explain. It was
just that dare of a day. Expediency Beranger they called for.
A collided ice to the vitamin point.

Mondo Pianissimo of the bulky Colorado. This is not as silly as might be turned to in times of expectancy, clearing right out. Pencil-thin silhouette just down the barrel from all aim. The cow made smaller by the light. (41)

Although the two most characteristic features of the new-sentence –parataxis and non-integration– stylistically dominate in the passage, catachresis and grammatical transgressions help attain an intense quality of disequilibrium. Considered axonometrically, not as a text but an architectonic, we can say that the grammar and syntax function as the vertical and horizontal elements in an “angled” axonometric structure through which “diagonal” elements (in the form of catachresis and undecidability) provide informational and semiological distortions¹⁶.

Eisenman too, is attracted to text and trace as ways of denying architecture both originality and expression. He seeks a radical incorporation of alterity in which a work is defined in terms of another author, a process involving “a search for the signs of absence within the necessary presence of architecture” (*Chora L Works*, 132). This incorporation of otherness in sameness is precisely the method of Tom Phillips in *A Humument*, Ronald Johnson’s *Radi Os*, and John Cage’s various “writings through”. All three employ a practice of treating a source text, using methods of written readings through which a latent text is exhumed and the source texts partly deleted. Johnson’s source is *Paradise Lost*, Cage’s include *Finnegans Wake*, *Walden*, and Thoreau’s *Notebooks*. To give one example: In *A Humument*, a text, excavated from W.H. Mallock’s forgotten 1892 novel *A Human Document*, Phillips paints over vast areas of the pages, creating efficacious rivulets of text that open up a latent content. Each page of Mallock’s novel offers Phillips a reservoir of paragrammatic possibilities and a tactical opportunity for local improvisations within constraint. The exhumed text releases a difference in sameness, the result being a stunning intermedia work: part text, part pictorial transformation in pen, ink and acrylic gouache. But beyond its visual impact *A Humument* raises the proprietary question as to whose words are these? The Victorian Mallock’s certainly, and reproduced in the exact same place on each line as he planned. Yet they serve to deliver, a new text, a text out of a text, Phillips’ text as the text by Mallock that Mallock never wrote.

Parapoetics might also address how applicable to poetics are the three deconstructive questions that Eisenman sees evoked by the diagrammatic. 1) Can the metaphysics of presence be opened up or displaced? Is there another way to think presence other than through fullness? 2) Is there a way to rethink the relationship between the sign and the signified as other than a motivated relationship? 3) Is there a way to rethink the subject as other than a subject motivated by a desire to have architecture communicate a sense of place and ground? (*Diagram* 212).

Let me digress briefly on a parallel but variant history of reception, specifically the deconstructive and the folding turn in architecture and literature. Marc Wigley claims that architecture (circa the mid-80s) was “the last discourse to invoke the name of Derrida” (*Folding* 6). Without doubt the strategic introduction of instability into stable structures and relations remains Deconstruction’s theoretical contribution to architecture. The architectural demands of deconstruction are clearly stated by Jeffrey Kipnis: “The architect must find methods to simultaneously embody more complex organizations of multiple and contradictory meanings while at the same time meeting the responsibility to shelter, function

and stand” (*Chora L Works* 138). By 1993 however the interest in deconstructive architecture had significantly waned with interest shifting to the architectural implications of Deleuze’s concept of the fold. Greg Lynn suggests that folding offers an alternative and preferable fluid and connective logic to the deconstructionist impasse of conflict and contradiction. Where deconstruction inspired architecture of brutal diagonals, plication encouraged curvilinear, folded, heterogeneous forms. “If there is a single effect” Lynn notes, “produced in architecture by folding, it will be the ability to integrate unrelated elements within a new continuous mixture” (Lynn 8). Deleuzian curvilinear logic facilitates dissipative structures with porous movements of external forces into interior domains, and the concomitant inclusion of non-colliding discontinuities. This proclivity to generative theory is generally absent in the literary field where deconstruction and plication, (despite Rodolphe Gasché’s warning that general textuality is irreducible to the properties of specific literary texts), have largely fostered a critical apparatus to be laminated over texts for interpretative purposes and has had a comparatively weak impact on the production of primary texts. This linked but uneven development is not to be lamented but rather noted for opening the possibility of cross-disciplinary intercourse.

Shifting focus from predominantly theoretical matters, I want now to suggest that the most fruitful target for parapoetic attention is the city. Wittgenstein, a practicing architect himself, compares language to “an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses” (8e) while Sherwood Anderson writes of a post-melancholic, neglected city of words rebuilt and recast by Gertrude Stein:

There is a city of English and American words and it has been a neglected city. Strong broad shouldered words, that should be marching across open fields under the blue sky, are clerking in little dusty dry goods stores, young virgin words are being allowed to consort with whores, learned words have been put to the digger’s trade. Only yesterday I saw a word that once called a whole nation to arms serving in the mean capacity of advertising laundry soap. For me the work of Gertrude Stein consists in a rebuilding, an entire new recasting of life, in the city of words. (7-8)

Architectural theories and debate, however, provide more complex notions of the city than Wittgenstein’s and Anderson’s simple metaphoric rendition, civic theories that might modify literary encounters with the city. Architecture tells us how it frames light in space, and is committed to creating photic and thermal, as well as human circulation, and that the interior of its products marks its living history. In this way architecture emerges as a form of action. Buildings and their complex articulations onto, and relations to, towns and cities, are characterized like language by defeasibility and lability; they assume and evolve through numerous functions independent of both architectural form and original purpose. This feature specifies the paragrammatic force of dwelling; the occupied house or building as a dissipative structure.

This specification, however, does not eliminate a certain perdurability of form. Reflecting on the Palazzo della Ragione in Padua, Aldo Rossi notes how “one is struck by the multiplicity of functions that a building of this type can contain over time and how these functions are entirely independent of the form. At the same time, it is precisely the form that impresses us, we live it and experience it, and in turn it structures the city” (29). Rossi’s pragmatic observation allows us to return to Wittgenstein’s description of language in a non-metaphorical way. There is no city just as there is no language only linguistic utterances,

and architectural usage and events. The growing displacement of structural and general linguistics by pragmatics is symptomatic of a shift in interest from form to usage and to a sense of language as both a changing dwelling and a lived experience. In the light of this shift, Barthes' highly competent semiological readings of the city appear less relevant to living than to obey Lebbeus Woods' call to "build our buildings and then discover how to live and work in them" (80)¹⁷.

British architect Nigel Coates, founder of NATO (Narrative Architecture Today, a.k.a "Nigel and the Others") emerged out of the Thatcherian design-boom of the 1980s with an ebullient theory of the architecture of the city that combines filmic handling of space with collage and surprise. There is something flaneuristic about Coates' methodological approach to city architecture: "It's about getting under the skin of the city, about going with the flow, seeing where it takes you, and then responding in appropriate ways. A healthy city, or a city you want to be in, is always changing; it's an organism, not a machine running on fixed lines. This sense of a city being alive informs both our response to the city as architects, and the individual buildings we design" (Glancey 14). Notwithstanding this laudable declaration of commitment, Coates' projects so far (apart from the proposed redesign of the sleazy environs of King's Cross) do not reflect a particularly positive response to the prevalent social predicament of poverty, the need for shelter, low-income domiciles etc. According to Glancey, Coates approaches the city "as a vibrant organism rather than a grid of geometric lines. It's about living, about meeting people, about accidental encounters, changes, risk-taking, sex" (ibid). Such sentiments would not be out of place in any number of Situationist texts on unitary urbanism¹⁸. However, notably absent in Coates' notion of the organic, vital city and his neo-liberal soft planning is a critical awareness of ideological or economic governing forces so apparent to Constant and Jorn. The myopic range of Coates' vision becomes apparent when measured against the ominous backdrop of co-optation and global economic controls outlined succinctly by Richard Rogers:

Despite all our new wealth — material and intellectual — most of the world's inhabitants are denied the opportunity to lead decent lives. The swollen stomachs and shriveled faces of Third World children, the cold and squalor that our pensioners have to endure, the increasing number of people who live lives in boxes and doorways stand as an indictment of a society which has the capacity to eradicate poverty but prefers to turn its back. And beyond the exploitation and injustice which is so central a feature of our civilization looms the prospect of ecological disaster. . . . The predicament in which we find ourselves has a direct bearing on our appreciation of architecture. For in architecture, as in other areas, an exciting surge of creativity, discovery and invention has been frustrated by the same selfish interests that now sustain global poverty and threaten the environment. . . . The despoliation of our built environment is only a small part of a broader pattern—a pattern in which new advances in ideas and technology are harnessed not to public values but to private interests. (7-9)

We must remain alert to architecture's ominous expansion in the hyperrealism of the neo-liberal dream, alert to the colonizing force in which architecture is mobilized by a compound telos of planning-for-profit. It is an alarming fact that this link of architecture and building to property, ownership and profit is not a recent discovery. In early medieval times we find Hildebert of Lavardin placing architecture in the category of "*ultra privatum pecuniae modum fortunae*" i.e. "mercenary" things and financial gain (quoted in Lefavre 200).

“Cities are in reality great camps of the living and the dead where many elements remain like signals, symbols, cautions. When the holiday is over, what remains of the architecture is scarred, and the sand consumes the street again” (Rossi 10). Rossi’s meditation on temporality and decay here, marked as they are by the philosopher’s distance, and transmitted from the transcendental position of the theoretical attitude, seem most akin to Gibbon’s musing in the ruins of the Capitol Rome that sparked in him the idea to write the *Decline and Fall*¹⁹. Yet elsewhere, Rossi realizes that cities are first and foremost a composite of artifacts, and to ignore (as urban studies do) “those aspects of reality that are most individual, particular, irregular, and also most interesting” leads to useless, artificial theories (21). Juvenal emerged as the critical conscience of Rome, starting a legacy of poetic scrutinization of the city as the dysfunctional hospice of incurables. Gay, Johnson, the Shelley of *Peter Bell the Third*, Baudelaire, Aragon, and Eliot: all fascinated and repelled by the inoperability of the metropolis. From Diocet to Wagadu the dream of civic construction haunts Pound’s *Cantos* as a thematic counter stress to the lure of fragments and floating signifiers²⁰.

Despite the digital information highway and the extended community brought about by electronic communication, Georg Simmel’s 1903 reflections on the metropolis and mental life seem more pertinent than ever. What distinguishes the metropolitan inhabitant is a blasé attitude to life brought on by the collision of constant extra-sensory bombardment with internal stimuli. Part product of, part defense against, metropolitan overload, the blasé subject struggles for an autonomy and circulation homologous to the flow of currency and commodities²¹. The fascinating power of the city can be specified in an economic, ideological irony: that the people who use the city are simultaneously and for the most part unconsciously used by it. Tafuri isolates and elaborates the Capitalist nature of the western city: “Objectively, structured like a machine for the extraction of surplus value, in its own conditioning mechanisms the city reproduces the reality” of the modes of production (81). The soft city, transparent city, the wired city, the digital city. Which ever you choose, cities still need to be experienced as used and as the sites of consumption and production. Yet to resuscitate Le Corbusier’s vision of architecture as the supreme mediator between realism and utopia seems as arrogant as it is ill advised.

In conclusion let me suggest that you receive these rambling thoughts as a caveat against the fruit of that marriage of practical reason and the Kantian faculties we baptized some time ago as specialization. The current ideology governing graduate studies does not encourage attacks on thetic dogmatism. Rather it supports the trenchant ideology of the frame. Doubtless an argument can be made that specialization safeguards the heterogeneity of discourses from domination by a single master narrative. However, the adverse consequences of the frame and the frame’s governing contradictory logic have already been outlined. Aaron Betsky calls for an anchoring inside the amorphous vertigo of sprawl by means of slow space. Decelerate the speed of today and make the world stand still²². Against this moot tactic of survival I would suggest a becoming *through* agencies of difference: and so towards a spiral poetics, a clinamen architecture, a poetics of folding so as to construct free spaces that can only function as ephemeral interstices.

Hölderlin insists that the highest poetry is that in which the non-poetic element . . . also becomes poetic²³. I wonder if the call in this clam to added negativity is pertinent to research. Let’s attempt to problematize our specialist knowledge by placing it in a broader cartography;

map antithetical and intersecting zones as a preliminary to nomadic practices; deframe and rethink research along spatial not chronological lines akin to Jed Rasula's notion of accidental research in which conceptual agility replaces a focussed detailism. Experience at least the "internal drifts" of disciplines and even contemplate the possibility of random access research. According to Marcus Novak "Our understanding of territory is undergoing rapid and fundamental changes: with the scope of pragmatic experience both space and community are rapidly becoming non-local". Random Access is emerging as the most powerful virtual tool in epistemological capital. Novak believes it's becoming "a way of life characterized by precise and instantaneous affiliation [and] Disembodied proximity implies the extension of random access to progressively larger parts of our experience" (ibid). I would extend the applicability of Novak's claim to the disciplines of knowledge. Novak further suggests that "The virtual and cyber worlds form a continuum There is something of what we call cyberspace in virtuality and something of what we call virtual reality in cyberspace. . . . Cyberspace is always the 'exterior' of virtual reality, because it always reserves the additional space of possibility, in contrast to actuality. Possibility is the fundamental characteristic of everything that is 'other,' since possibility always contains the unknown" (ibid). Derrida's essay on Tschumi's *Point de Folie* introduces the term *maintenant*. Now. A temporal indicator marking the time, the only time, when both endings and beginnings occur in the protracted space of a becoming.

That said as I'm ending Now. But perhaps as a poet, as the poet in me, I should add a coda:

The poem may well be dead, but as the architect said one is never finished with the poem.

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1 Steve McCaffery is the David Gray Chair of Poetry and Letters and Director of the Poetics program at SUNY at Buffalo. His critical essays have been included in *Prior to Meaning: The Protosemantic and Poetics* and *North of Intention*. An important selection of his poetry was collected in *Seven Pages Missing: Selected Texts 1969-2000*. He was also part of the sound-poetry group The Four Horsemen.

2 This paper will be included in the author's next book of criticism: *The Darkness of the Present: Poetics, Anachronism and the Anomaly* (University of Alabama Press).

3 "The post-s and posters which proliferate today (poststructuralism, postmodernism, etc.) still surrender to the historicist urge. Everything marks an era, even the decentering of the subject: post humanism. It is as if one again wished to put a linear succession in order, to periodize, to distinguish before and after, to limit the risks of reversibility or repetition, transformation or permutation: an ideology of progress" (Derrida 324).

4 Like many fashionable architectural publications caught between competing desires of text and image Betsky's book is irritatingly unpaginated.

5 The concept of architectural body has been proposed recently by the procedural architects Arakawa and Madeline Gins in an unpublished manuscript: *Architectural Body*.

6 B. L. Ullman draws attention to a canny congruity between Gothic architecture and its corresponding scripts. Developing out of the earlier Carolingian form and embracing especially the "picket fence" effect of Merovingian, the main features of Gothic script are angularity and broken lines (fraktura); the replacement of circular stress by a polygrammic one; extreme condensation and letter-fusions (called textura); standard heavy shading becomes; a marked increase in abbreviations and embellishments increase e.g. hooks, hair lines and marginal pen flourishes (118-25).

7 See Holl who provides several examples of "E, H, O, B, L, U, T, X" and "H" shaped buildings and grid blocks. Of particularly note are Albert Kahn's 1921. General Motors Building, Detroit, designed as three interlocking and partly superimposed "H" types, and Benjamin Marshall's "X" shaped Edgewater Beach Apartments in Chicago. Exploration into the analogical possibilities of letter-forms and their composition out of a multitude of different beings and objects has a lengthy historical precedent. See for instance the rich gatherings contained in Demeude, and Massin.

8 See the important essay "Towards Anarchitecture" in Evans 11-33.

9 Derrida's perdurable challenge to architectural practice is to have introduced the impossible into architectural practice via an insinuating philosopheme: the Platonic Chora. His architectural collaboration with Peter Eisenman on the Parc la Villette starts with a lengthy reflection by Derrida on chora, an intractable concept found in Plato's *Timaeus*. Although chora "figures the place of inscription of all that is marked on the world", it is a pre-originary "place without space, before space and time" (Eisenmann 22, 91). The whole direction of the project moves far beyond the paradoxical origins that Harbison senses in Louis Kahn's Unitarian Church in Rochester, where the architecture gives the sense of "reaching back to early forms which precede anything known to us" (Harbison 11). Working to problematize the clear distinction between sensible and intelligible chora is a situational space beyond all normative notions of place, and responsible for situating the variant logics of exclusion and inclusion, while remaining beyond the laws its situates. Despite "giving place" chora (being neither a donor-subject nor a support or origin) does not give place in the manner of an es gibt. Derrida calls chora a paralogical and metalogical super-oscillation (Eisenman 15) operating between

and above the oscillations of a double exclusion (neither-nor) and of the participational (both this and that). With the sum of its negative features (non-ontological, neither a void nor an interval, nor a determined place, a something which is not a thing, a reference without a referent, without a self-identity, and incapable of representation other than negatively), it is not surprising that chora does not provide the security of architectural ground or a base. It is not that chora is absence or the presence of absence, as Eisenman at one point seems to believe, but rather that chora remains conceptually intractable and unsayable. Despite Derrida's avowal "that non-representable space could [give?] the receiver, the visitor, the possibility of thinking about architecture" (Eisenmann 35), one is still prompted to ask what factor or factors rendered the Parc de la Villette a collaborative failure? The inability to translate deconstruction into architectural thinking and practice? An initially, ill conceived philosophemic contribution on Derrida's part? The patent failure of his collaboration with Eisenman on this project, a project characterized by Derrida's reticence and Eisenman's consistent misprisions, misapplications and refusals to allow the philosopher's contribution to affect the architect's designs, stands as both a warning and a challenge to paracritical thinking. The entire collaboration can be found in Eisenman 1997. Both Cache and Solà-Morales demonstrate the impact of Deleuze's thinking on architecture.

10 Inflecting a related sentiment architect Nigel Coates refers to the "richly stimulating chaos" brought on by the emergent forms of techno-media and communications (Glancey 16).

11 Archigram chronicles the work of this late 1960s British collective as told by its members. A cross section of Libeskind's theoretical writings and architectural projects, including the Berlin Museum Extension with the Jewish Museum, can be found in his monograph Countersign. Hejduk's ephemeral, traveling architecture (termed "vagabond" by Antony Vidler) is briefly discussed in Vidler 207-14. The trilogy, Mask of Medusa, Vladivostok, and Soundings offer a chrestomathy of his architectural projects and theories. Hadid's work is readily available in The Complete Work. Her important architectural statement "Another Beginning" appears in Noever.

12 As well as his famous proclamation that "architecture is in general frozen music", Schelling also cites the architecturally relevant myth of Amphion whose music causes stones to inhere and formulate the walls around Thebes (Schelling 177). This confluence of musical and the architectural is echoed in Goethe's later description of architecture as "petrified music" (a description he later modified to "silent music" verstummte Tonkunst). See Vidler 231 fn 30.

13 The most cogent critique of Eisenman's approach is Robin Evans, "Not to be Used for Wrapping Purposes: A Review of the Exhibition of Peter Eisenman's Fin d'Ou T Hou S" in Evans 119-51.

14 An axonometric drawing consists of a plan which a set up truly but turned to a convenient angle. The verticals are then drawn on this and to scale. By these means, all the horizontal and all the vertical elements of the building are represented correctly and so to the same scale. Anything which is neither truly vertical nor horizontal becomes distorted; but an axonometric drawing, once one has learnt to disregard the distortions, can teach a very great deal about structure" (Murray 237 n. 5 emphases added). Axonometric effects, of course, are not novel; they are central to the logic of the paragram and to analytic cubism. Like axonometry, the latter applies a structural logic chiasmatically across the normative rules of figuration and design. Within early-20th century literature the most effective axonometric poetry is Gertrude Stein's Tender Buttons. Parapoetics, of course, would investigate the benefits of including distortion within a study of the structural elements.

15 "See Ron Silliman, "The New Sentence" in The New Sentence, New York: Roof Books, 1987, pp. 63-93.

16 The above interpretative analysis merely laminates a theory onto texts whose disjunctive qualities suggest an analogy to axonometric diagramming. The question of how axonometry can be consciously employed as a creative method find a read answer in the realm of computer-constructed texts and visual poems, where on-screen deployment and display promises most effective results. The poetic possibilities of axonometric syntax, display and semantics are not addressed in an otherwise excellent collection of articles investigating the format and political possibilities of computers and the Internet gathered by Wershler-Henry.

17 See, for example, "Semiology and the Urban" in Leach 166-72, first presented as a lecture in May 1967, under the sponsorship of the Institut Français, and the Institute of the History of Architecture at the University of Naples.

18 As well as Knabb's excellent collection of Situationist texts and reports of specifically architectural interest are Wigley 1998 and Sadler.

19 "It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing midst the ruins of the Capitol while the barefooted fryars were singing Vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind" (305).

20 Pound's own view of the fragment might be deduced from his own Confucian beliefs that structure the relation of parts to whole. "The metaphysic of the Confucian Chung Yung or Unwobbling Pivot" comments Peter Makin, ". . . is that things are not heaps of contingent dust-drift, but have essential principles, which are durable; which are part of an overarching tendency or Principle in the universe and which, being a shaping and therefore good principle operative in man as in other things, a man may come to understand. This metaphysic is all about the relation between wholes and fragments. The mosaic is not its little glass and gold-leafed fragments; the Virgin shines down from the apse at

Torcello when, or if, half of the fragments that make her have fallen . . ." (235-36). The architectural pertinence of Makin's observations is obvious.

21 See George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in Leach, 69-79.

22 It may please Betsky to know of support for his theoretical position is growing. The Italian Città Lente or "Slow Cities" Movement, inaugurated by Paolo Saturnini, was implemented in 2000 in small towns and cities. An offshoot of Carlo Patrini's Slow Food movement, founded a decade ago to counter the proliferation of homogenous fast food outlets, Città Lente is committed to a preservationist policy of traditional architecture and gastronomy. As reporter Megan Williams explains Saturnini, the Mayor of Greve-in-Chianti, "is carefully constructing barricades to keep at bay the tide of homogeneity that globalization has washed into similar-sized communities around the world. From fast-food chains to cell-phone antennas to car alarms. The Small [sic] Cities people have said 'No thanks' to many of the trappings of modernity".

23 "Reflection" in *Sämtliche Werke* 4:1, 234-35.