

THE ARCHITECTURE OF SURFACE

The Significance of Surficial Thought and Topological Metaphors of Design

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

The work presented in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original and my own work, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.



S. YAHYA ISLAMI

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¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 498

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ABSTRACT

In the early twentieth century, the modernists problematized ornament in their refashioning of architecture for the industrial age. Today, architects are formulating different responses to image and its (re)production in the information age. In both discourses of ornament and image, surfaces are often the perpetrators: visual boundaries that facilitate false appearances, imprisoning humanity in a shadowy cave of illusion. Such views follow a familiar metaphysical model characterized by the opposition between inside and outside and the opaque boundary that acts as a barrier. This model determines the traditional (Platonic) philosophical approach that follows a distinct hierarchical order and a perpendicular movement of thought that seeks to penetrate appearances in order to arrive at the essence of things.

This thesis deploys Gilles Deleuze's philosophy to advance a different understanding of surface, image and appearance in architecture. Using the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum as a catalyst, the thesis argues that many of the concepts with which commentators and critics analyse contemporary architecture follow models of thought that consider surfaces and their effects as secondary categories. Given the significance of visual (re)production and communication for contemporary society, the thesis proposes a different model based on surface as that which simultaneously produces, connects and separates image and reality. This non-hierarchical approach is inspired by *surficial philosophy*, which relates to Earth, to geology and topology, conjuring up a diversity of concepts from the thickness of the crust to the smooth fluidity of the seas. The result is an unfamiliar, polemical model of thought that does not define surface as a limit or barrier, rather a *medium*, a pliable space of smooth mixture. In this model, difference is not in the opposition between the two sides of a boundary line, rather it occurs upon and within the surficial landscape that consumes categories, promoting nomadic movements of thought that offer greater flexibility towards creativity and new possibilities.

In surficial thought, images and appearances are not artificial copies of an originary reality, rather they possess a unique reality of their own. This approach allows architectural imagery to be theorised as a positive *surfacing* of architecture beyond disciplinary lines and the locality of a specific time and place.

PREFACE

The motivation for this research can be traced back to thoughts, questions and ideas developed during six years of immersion in architectural design and theory at the University of Edinburgh, and also to the first hand experience of, and an embedded fascination with the intricately ornamented traditional architecture of Iran. One particular theme of interest was the poetic interpretation of art in Iranian culture, which manifests itself in architecture through the elaborate surfacing of sacred monuments with complex patterns and colourful motifs. This exhaustive ornamentation in traditional architecture became a source of intrigue for the author, particularly when in theories of modern architecture ornamentation was deplored as excessive, superficial or even associated with crime.

In many cultures and civilisations, the most significant architectural monuments are often distinguishable by their labour-intensive design and construction processes, necessitated by a greater attention to detail and a desire for the beautification of architecture. In the case of Iranian architecture, sacred buildings are particularly noticeable, not just because of their monumental scale, but also because of the exhaustive decoration that seems to embellish every surface of the building. In such architecture, surface ornamentation is responsible for conveying the building's significance, but more importantly, it often communicates a significant message, becoming both a reflection of the society's belief system and also a reinforcement of it through architectural surfaces.

In the case of Safavid² mosques for example, the complex geometrical patterns that adorn the building are in fact representations of paradise or the Garden of Eden.³ However, since no art can accurately represent the divine garden, such ornamental depictions become clear abstractions, expressing their difference clearly. Thus, the preference for geometric depiction instead of figurative representation becomes an indication of submission and acceptance:

² The Safavid Dynasty ruled Iran from 1501-1722 forming the greatest Iranian empire since the Islamic Conquest of Persia. They established Shia Islam as the main religion for their empire marking a significant turning point both for Iran and Islamic history in general.

³ See Nader Ardalan and Laleh Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1973, pp. 43-45.

submission to the might of God⁴ and acceptance of divine superiority. It is therefore possible to argue that the makers of such architecture saw their art as inherently different from what it alluded to, namely divine creation. For this reason, such art was not judged according to how closely it resembled what it represented, rather it was valued according to its own immanent system.

Much of the complex patterns of Islamic ornamentation are generated by the various arrangements of the circle as a symbol of the universe. The centre of the circle symbolises the divine creator, around which his creations rotate.⁵ This geometric abstraction of the universe shifts the emphasis from accuracy of representation to the creation of a symbolic system capable of generating infinite ornamental patterns, which are all connected in that they express the same concept.

For the author, such concepts hinted towards a different approach to appearance in architecture, one in which surface ornamentation was not a representation of reality, nor a secondary operation in architectural design. Instead ornamental surface effects constructed a different reality, a *virtual reality* that became a significant aspect of architectural creativity and delight. Such preoccupation with ornamentation might well represent artistic primitivity or innocence, but it evades the trappings of superficiality and questions of authenticity by an appreciation of all art as man-made creativity, which is originally different to divine creation.

Another theme that developed from thinking about traditional art and decoration in Iran, was the theme of horizontality. The nomadic carpets of central Asia are colourful expanses of woven textile, often with intricate symmetrical patterns that do not have a right side up nor can they be the wrong way round. If motifs of animals are used, they are abstracted, twisted and rotated to arrive at a geometrical symmetry that abolishes vertical hierarchy or directionality. For example, if one compares the carpet to the portrait painting, it is evident that the latter is to be hung vertically on the wall, because it has an "up" side and a "down"

⁴ The Arabic term "islam" means "submission" and itself comes from the term "aslama," which means "to surrender, resign oneself." A person who follows Islam is called a Muslim, and this means "one who surrenders to God." See Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Islam> accessed January 2009.

⁵ See Ardalan, and Bakhtiar, *The Sense of Unity: The Sufi Tradition in Persian Architecture*, pp. 23-26 and pp. 40-43. See also Keith Critchlow, *Islamic Patterns: An Analytical and Cosmological Approach*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1976, pp. 7-9

side.⁶ However, nomadic carpets can be laid down anywhere and viewed from any direction retaining their appropriate orientation from any angle.⁷

Such art emphasises surface not form, horizontality rather than vertical hierarchy, and an acceptance of art's originary difference from the reality or ideality that it depicts. In other words, art is not considered as an inferior imitation of reality (reproduction), but rather a creative and symbolic *re-production* that produces a unique reality of its own. For the author, the traditional carpet *simulates* a lush ground plane (inspired by oases and gardens) upon which people live and worship.⁸ When such woven textiles become enclosure (as in the case of the nomadic tent), or they are reinterpreted as ornamentation applied to the surfaces of buildings, the non-hierarchical simulative operation continues to affect in different mediums. Consequently, it is possible to argue that the wall becomes an extension of the ground: not a perpendicular barrier that opposes the ground, but a folded surface that is already connected to the surficial plane.

Thus, the author's interest in ornament and nomadic art implicated surface expression in different media. Yet, modernist architectural theory associated ornament with degeneration and backwardness, while surface is often corrupted by the term superficial. Therefore, to say that a building is ornamental can often be something of an insult, implying that the design is lacking sufficient importance or conceptual complexity. Moreover, the ornamental layer is often defined by thinness or temporariness, and lacking the permanence of structural materials. As a result, ornament is often considered as a superfluous and superficial layer that generates false appearances. It was such attitudes toward surface expression that motivated the author to investigate the possibility of a different approach to ornament and surface appearances in architecture.

⁶ One could argue that the carpet has a front side and a back side determined by knotting, but it must be noted that compared to a portrait painting, the front and back distinction in carpets is much more subtle. It must also be noted that in recent years the Iranian modern carpet industry is increasingly using non-symmetrical images (rather than patterns) for their designs.

⁷ I would like to thank Dr. Seyed Gholamreza Islami for his contributions to the development of these ideas.

⁸ It is interesting to note that relative to Christianity or Judaism, Islamic worship involves a closer relationship to the ground: the terrestrial plane that connects people together. Prayers, often involve prostration where hands, knees and the forehead come into contact with the ground plane. This is considered an abolishment of hierarchy, (coming down to the same level as everyone else) and also a reinforcement of the sense of community. Thus, the ground surface becomes a physical connection between prostrating worshippers across the world.



Figure I: Textile ground: horizontality through geometrical symmetry. Traditional Iranian carpet. Source: the author.

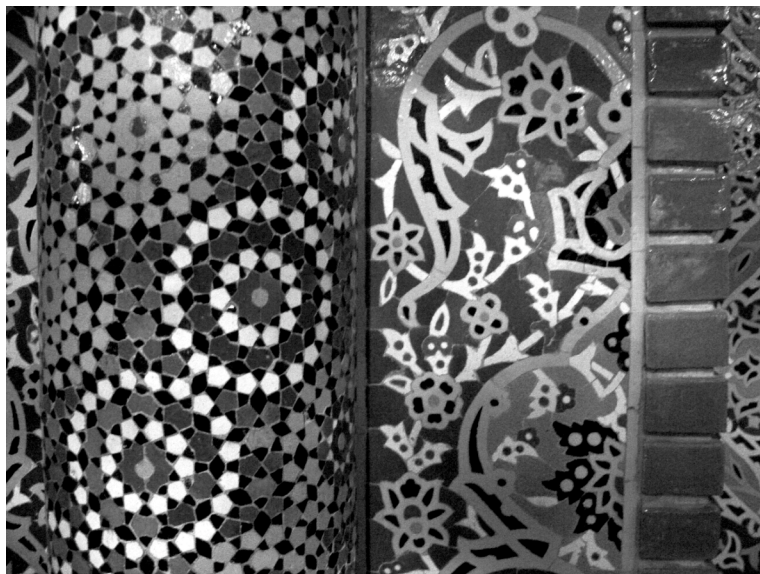


Figure II: Textile wall following textile ground: surface ornamentation in traditional Iranian architecture. Source: the author.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND SPECTACULAR IMAGERY

While in the pre-industrial age the creation of art and architecture was a relatively laborious task that was limited to one location, today the advent of new technologies has allowed faster production and reproductions of art in different media. Moreover, contemporary technology has allowed images to detach from the surfaces that carried them, enabling them to be transferred across digital networks. However, for many these moving images have lost their connection with reality, becoming illusory appearances conjured up by activated surfaces.

The rapid development of the computer, digital media and new technologies of mass reproduction has been an important issue for this thesis. During his architectural training, the author became aware of a subtle scepticism amongst practicing architects and academics, directed towards new digital technologies. This scepticism can be attributed to many factors amongst which impatience with the developmental stages of new tools is perhaps an important one. For many, the hand drawn line is still preferable to the computer one, perhaps because it is considered to be in direct contact with the body and therefore emotions of the artist.⁹ The computer image is considered a mediated effect, lacking the authenticity of hand drawing. In other words, if both pencil and the computer are tools, the former is often considered more natural and the other more artificial.¹⁰

Perhaps, the cynicism towards digital technologies can be attributed to the fact that in many digital “renderings” the image attempts to *simulate* the final design. This requires advanced training and familiarity with the complexity of software (and sometimes hardware), that is not always easy to master. Thus, the resultant imagery often fails in both fronts: it cannot reproduce reality accurately, while simultaneously failing to generate an evocative abstraction of the proposal. Even when digital images are produced effectively, they are often considered as visual spectacles that distract the viewer from the spatial qualities of the architectural proposal.¹¹ Therefore computer visualizations suffer from the

⁹ See J. Albrecht, “Mechanization Takes Command in Architecture” in *Domus*, vol. 708, no. 9, 1989, pp. 24-28.

¹⁰ See Evan H. Shu “Touch versus Tech: Hand-drawn or Computer-rendered Techniques” in *Architectural Record*, vol. 188, no. 12, 2000, pp. 170-3.

¹¹ See Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1999, pp. 80-81

hierarchical relationship between image and reality since in their attempt to simulate they either become inferior copies or spectacular masks that are at best distracting, or in the worst-case scenario destructive to the reality of things. However, despite these issues, the computer and other digital technologies have continued their evolution facilitating new possibilities for the designer, even though for some mastering this new tool remains challenging.

New modelling software programs allow designers to build a virtual model of their design, walk through it, adjust elements of it in real-time and generate architectural drawings at a click of a button. Moreover, the involvement of computers in the construction industry has allowed architects to realise their most primitive desires into buildings faster, easier and more economically. Some argue that this greater freedom leads to superficial and self-indulgent architecture that is not sensitive to its context.¹² However, it is equally possible to argue that new technologies are merely aiding the expression of the same primitive desires that led to ornamentation in traditional architecture. In other words, the desire for surface expression and embellishment remains the same, what changes is the tools with which such desires are actualised.

Today, many of the technologies that allow for the production and reproduction of art are dependent on surfaces: they either generate virtual surfaces (computer modelling, virtual reality environments), or they dis-colour surfaces (photography, printed magazines, advertising), or they project through activated surfaces (TVs, Screens, and so on). However, the proliferation of such new technologies in contemporary society has been accompanied by a heightened scepticism of surfaces, images and appearances, which is reflected in canonical texts of cultural theory. These opposing forces inspired the author to investigate the possibility of an alternative approach towards such visual phenomena and the technologies that enhance their operation.

ON SURFACE, SURFICIAL AND SURFACING

For most people, sight is their initial mode of interaction and surfaces the first place of contact with architecture. Surface is a boundary and a place of difference, change

¹² See Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, Verso, London; New York, 2003, p. 40

and transition. In architectural discourse, ornament usually refers to surface effects applied on the outside of buildings and is perceived to improve the image of architecture, embellishing it or making it beautiful. Often ornament is applied after a building is constructed, and as an embellishment it has been associated with the feminine, the seduction of make-up, or the rise and fall of fashion.¹³

Ornament implies surface since it is applied to the visible layers of an object. The Oxford English Dictionary defines “surface” as “the outermost part of a material body; the uppermost layer; esp. in art or manufacture, an exterior of a particular form or ‘finish’.”¹⁴ While surface implicates exteriority, its derivative, the “superficial” has much more negative undertones: “usually denoting that part or aspect of anything which presents itself to a slight or casual mental view, or which is perceived without examination; outward appearance”¹⁵

“Superficial” implies shallowness and insubstantiality, both physically and intellectually. This might be a reference to the geometric definition of surface: “A magnitude or continuous extent having only two dimensions (length and breadth, without thickness).”¹⁶ As an adjective, superficial betrays surface by associating it with thinness and masking. In most cases, “superficiality” is an undesirable characteristic: no one wants to be accused of being concerned with only the obvious characteristics of something, lacking thoroughness or attention to detail, or possessing a personality that fails to understand, feel or sympathize.

There is however, another adjective associated with surface, which is much more neutral. In the Oxford English Dictionary “Surficial” is defined as that which is “of or pertaining to the surface of the earth.”¹⁷ This thesis proposes surficial as an alternative to the superficial in order to encourage a different approach to surface and its effects. Surficial implies geology, materiality and stability. It implies thickness, and is connected with the ground upon which life occurs. As an adjective, surficial allows for a more stable understanding of surface, one which is not compromised by the depth that the term superficial lacks. Moreover, if superficial implies temporariness, the term surficial evokes the longevity and permanence of

¹³ See Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, Berg, Oxford, 2003, pp. 2-4. See also Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2001.

¹⁴ Oxford English Dictionary www.oed.com accessed Dec. 2008.

¹⁵ Oxford English Dictionary.

¹⁶ Oxford English Dictionary.

¹⁷ Oxford English Dictionary.

geological features. These concepts are elaborated later in the thesis in an attempt to formulate a different understanding of surfaces, images and appearances and their role in architectural design.

In general, surface as a noun suffers from thinness and insubstantiality and is accused of masking what lies behind it. Expressions like “it was not as it appeared on the surface” or “to scratch the surface of something” imply that true reality lies behind surfaces, which must be ruptured and penetrated. Surface as a verb on the other hand, has more positive connotations. To surface something is to bring it to full view, implying a movement from hidden potential to visible actualisation. It is also “to give a (particular kind of) surface, esp. a smooth or even surface; to smooth or polish the surface of”¹⁸ something. Surface as a verb also implies purification or discovery: “To mine near the surface; to wash the surface deposit or ‘dirt’ for gold or other valuable mineral.”¹⁹

Thus, as a noun, surface implies different notions of masking, but as a verb it suggests exposure. To surface something is to bring it to public notice, or to produce or expose a controversial issue or secret information. “Surfacing” is becoming “fully conscious or alert,”²⁰ after a period of oblivion or seclusion. This implies coming into public view from a state of obscurity. Surfacing also implies a fluid relationship with depth. Submarines surface from a deep dive, but the water that constitutes the surface and depth of the sea is in continuous flux, rising and falling in a continuous process of transformation.

“Surface effect” conjures up multiple meanings. Notions of “illusion” and “impression” are implied with “effect,”²¹ all of which refer to a problematic relationship between effects and reality. Surface effects are generally visible and constitute the appearance of objects. As a noun, “appearance” refers to the way something looks, the impression something or someone gives. As a verb however,

¹⁸ Oxford English Dictionary.

¹⁹ Oxford English Dictionary.

²⁰ Oxford English Dictionary.

²¹ “A visual or acoustic device used to convey atmosphere or the illusion of reality in the production of plays, films, or broadcasts” or “The impression produced on a beholder, hearer, or reader (formerly esp. by a work of art or literature); the impression produced by a picture, building, costume, etc., viewed as a whole; the look that a collection of features has. for effect: for the sake of creating a telling impression on the minds of spectators or hearers.” See OED.

appearance implies performance or participation in a public event. To appear is an act of becoming visible or noticeable, or a process of coming into existence or use.²²

“Appearance” conjures up notions of “image,” which in architecture can be the way buildings look from the outside or the inside. This conception of image can be related to a building’s architectural style, its role in culture and politics and its symbolic value. It is how a building fits into the extended visual culture. Another definition of image is the photograph or digital representation of a building reproduced on paper or disseminated through mass media. This notion of image has a more direct connection with material surfaces that display it: either the surfaces of paper or the surfaces of television or computer screens. A third conception of image is related to a mental impression, or an “image of thought” that forms in the mind. This conception of image is dependent on the individual their personal experience of architecture. In traditional models of thought, all three interpretations of image have a difficult relationship to reality: they are either a partial aspect of reality, an inferior copy of reality or mere illusory appearance.

The dictionary defines image as “an artificial imitation or representation of the external form of any object” or “an optical appearance or counterpart of an object, such as is produced by rays of light either reflected as from a mirror, refracted as through a lens, or falling on a surface after passing through a small aperture.”²³ The etymology of the word connects it to the Old French word *Imagene*, meaning “artificial representation” and to the Latin word *imaginem*, meaning “copy, statue, picture, idea, appearance,” from the stem of *imitari* “to copy, imitate.”²⁴ Image, is therefore seen as an imitation, a copy and mere appearance as difference from the real, authentic object.²⁵

So far, the list of terms began with “ornament,” and through “surface” and “superficial,” arrived at the “image” and “appearance,” which are considered as “copies” or “imitations” of an originary “reality.” Imitation is closely related to “simulation,” and for the same reason the “simulacrum” is a close relative of the

²² See OED.

²³ Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com accessed Dec. 2008.

²⁴ See Online Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com accessed Dec. 2008.

²⁵ The etymology of image can be traced back to 11th and 12th c. *imagene* = Provençal: *image*, *emage*, Italian: *im(m)agine*, Spanish: *imagen*, Latin: *imago*, *imagin-em* imitation, copy, likeness, statue, picture, phantom; conception, thought, idea; similitude, semblance, appearance, shadow; apparently containing the same root as *im-itari*: to imitate.” See OED etymology www.oed.com accessed Jan. 2009.

image. Etymologically, simulacrum can be traced back to Latin and French origins meaning "likeness, image, form, representation."²⁶ In the dictionary, simulacrum is considered as superficial appearance without authentic substance: "Something having merely the form or appearance of a certain thing, without possessing its substance or proper qualities."²⁷

The proliferation of new technologies of visual communication and reproduction has given a new emphasis to the aforementioned terms, whilst creating numerous challenges and opportunities for architectural design. In the past few decades, digital media have created vast image-scapes and simulated virtual environments that parallel architectural spaces or natural landscapes. In this technological context, architecture finds itself caught up between the virtuality of images (and information) and the physical materials with which buildings are constructed. Faced with the effects of the "digital era" architectural praxis has no choice but to participate with the economy of images, appearances and visual communication. However, architectural theory continues to grapple with the effects of traditional views that consider such phenomena as secondary, inauthentic or superficial representations of an originary reality.

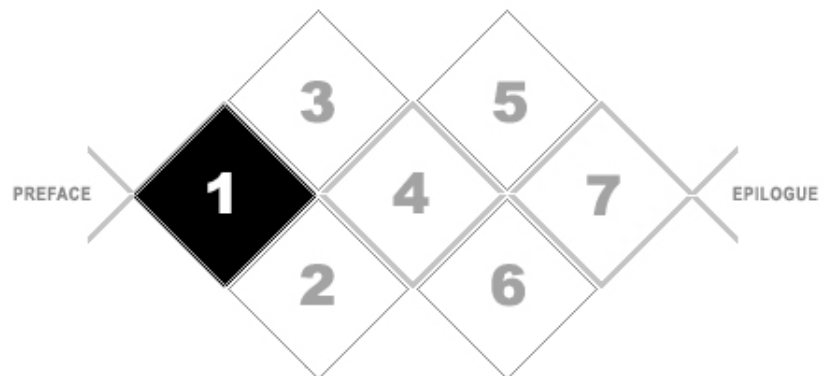
This dissertation proposes that the expansion of the artificial domain (i.e. man-made products, images and information), demands a reconsideration of traditional conceptions of artificiality, superficiality and authenticity. Though, in an age of rapid visual exchange, images and surface appearances are critical in the success or failure of a project, traditional models of thought continue to treat such phenomena as marginal categories deprived of authenticity. For this reason, the thesis attempts to utilise aspects of continental philosophy to develop a different approach to surface, image and appearance in architectural theory and praxis.

²⁶ This was dissimilated from *simulaclom*, from *simulare* "to make like". The word was borrowed earlier as *semulacre* (c.1375), via Old French *simulacre*. See Online Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com accessed Dec. 2008.

²⁷ OED online www.oed.com accessed Dec. 2008.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION



“The age of photography corresponds precisely to the irruption of the private into the public, or rather, to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private....”²⁸

Roland Barthes

“Sometimes the best way to hide something is in full sight.”²⁹

Beatriz Colomina

“A wall has always been the best place to publish your work.”³⁰

Banksy

“For the canny detective, surfaces harbour clues of depths that render seemingly senseless appearances surprisingly intelligible.”³¹

Mark C. Taylor

²⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Hill and Wang, New York, 1982, p. 98

²⁹ Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.: London, 1994 p. 11

³⁰ Banksy, *Banksy: Wall and Piece*, Century, 2006, p. 8

³¹ Mark C. Taylor, *Hiding*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, London, 1997, p. 15

1.1 CONTEXT, CASE, CONCEPTS

1.1.1 Context: Advanced Technology and Hyper-communication

The current condition is characterised by advanced technology, interactivity and increasing speeds of communication, where media networks and intensified visual production, exert a powerful influence on every aspect of human culture. The resultant dynamism is evident not only in technology but also in science, economy, politics and cultural identity.

The speed and breadth of communication has had numerous consequences with which we continue to grapple. Some of the more positive effects have been the promotion of exploration, “tolerance and inclusion.”³² The accessibility of information has led to a better understanding of distant cultures and other modes of thought, which in turn has encouraged nomadic movements across national, cultural and ideological borders. The current technological condition has encouraged a taste for heterogeneity, and it has also promoted a new understanding of minority rights, of “otherness” as a desirable category.³³ Faced with rapid cultural and technological transformations, architecture is also changing, by exploring themes of communication, borderline conditions and the potential of digital technologies for a new architecture that is both sensitive and responsive to the increasing complexity of postmodern living.

Arguably, contemporary architecture is in its postmodern phase, characterized by diverse interpretations of the postmodern agenda. According to Jencks, the postmodern movement in architecture can be traced back to the early 1960s and the writings of Jane Jacobs and Robert Venturi. As opposed to the modern planning theories that emphasised purity and functional separation, Jacobs’ notion of the city was one of complex emergent organisation.³⁴ In parallel, Venturi promoted a more holistic approach to architecture to combat the over-simplification and the functionalist ideals of Modernism.³⁵ Like many architects in the sixties,

³² Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* Wiley-Academy, London, 2007, p. 117

³³ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 117

³⁴ See Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Random House, New York. 1961

³⁵ See Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, The Museum of Modern Art Papers on Architecture, 1966

Venturi had become frustrated by the elitism and formal simplicity of the modernist manifesto. Sensing the increasing complexity of modern living, he and his colleagues called for a different architecture inspired by the “popular” the “ordinary,” and the signs and advertising surfaces of advanced capitalism.³⁶

Thus, as a reaction to the modernists manifesto of “form follows function”³⁷ and the deprecatory association of ornament with crime,³⁸ Venturi et al proposed the “decorated shed” concept which was an attempt to liberate surface expression from functional responsibilities and simultaneously free structure from the burden of communication and expression. This, they argued, would be a better alternative to “duck” architecture in which form follows and often represents function.³⁹

The decorated shed concept signalled a theoretical shift from the modernists’ notions of cladding and style to the postmodernist notions of screen and communication. This was an attempt to allow architecture to participate freely within the visual influx of signs, billboards and screens of mass media that were quickly replacing the machinic structures of the Industrial Revolution as symbols of capitalism. It was hoped that by returning to complex visual communication, and by acknowledging the importance of popular culture, the desire for clarity in the modernist manifesto would transform into a desire for “complexity and contradiction.”

The postmodern manifesto allowed architects to engage popular culture whilst maintaining a relationship with their professional ethos. This was the effect of “double coding”⁴⁰ facilitated partly by the decorated shed concept and partly by notions of irony as a complex form of communication. Consequently, much of postmodern architecture maintains a certain *schizophrenic* quality: at once

³⁶ See Robert Venturi, Dennis Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.: London, 1977

³⁷ The origins of this phrase can be traced to Louis Sullivan who wrote, “form ever follows function.” See Louis Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered” published Lippincott’s Magazine, vol. 57, March 1896, pp. 403-9. The electronic version can be accessed at <http://academics.triton.edu/faculty/fheitzman/tallofficebuilding.html> accessed 20th March 2008.

³⁸ See Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, XYZ Books, Los Angeles, 2002, pp. 29-36.

³⁹ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 87

⁴⁰ Charles Jencks writes: “Today I would still partly define Post-Modernism as I did in 1978 as *double coding: the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects.*” Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 51

acknowledging the intricacies of architectural theory and simultaneously trying to appeal to the demands of popular culture as presented through mass media.

Though the decorated shed concept allowed greater freedom of surface expression, it nevertheless exaggerated the disconnection between “ornament” and “structure” as problematized by the modernist metaphors of clothing and cladding. If the modernists deplored the excessive ornamentation of previous architectural styles and promoted the removal of ornament, some postmodernists adopted stylistic historicism in which decorative historical references were applied to structures that rarely ventured beyond the shed concept. Such reference to past styles was *pastiche* and superficial, demonstrating a reductive simplicity of communication or a regurgitation of old motifs. Charles Moore’s Piazza d’Italia (1978) and Michael Graves’ Portland Public Service Building (1982) are examples of this postmodern dilemma.

Others embraced theoretical criticality through double-coding and irony, where architectural communication attempted to acknowledge opposing points of view. In many cases this second approach resulted in the construction of monuments to a critical commentary on architecture’s established ways, which was often only understood by a few architects, theoreticians or historians who were familiar with the (double) coded language. This approach threatened a return to the elitism of modernism and/or a reduction of architectural experience in favour of intellectual or textual delight. James Stirling’s addition to the Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, (1983) or Peter Eisenman’s “House VI”, (1975) are examples of this second approach.

A third group of architects responded to Venturi’s embracing of popular culture, by designing “iconic” or “imagistic” buildings that communicated to a larger audience.⁴¹ Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum (1997), Rem Koolhaas’s CCTV building in Beijing (2008) or Arata Isozaki’s Disney Headquarters in Florida (1991) are different examples of this third approach. Much of this architecture was made possible by giant corporations hiring global architects to construct iconic buildings, both to represent their cause, but also to draw attention to it. Inevitably, much criticism of such architecture picks up on the inflated monumentality and the tendency for such architecture to approach the condition of

⁴¹ For the three approaches to postmodernism, see Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* pp. 57-60



Figure 1.1: Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia, New Orleans, USA. Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/ste_ph/3148475389



Figure 1.2: Peter Eisenman: House VI, Cornwall, CN, USA, 1975. Source: <http://www.eisenmanarchitects.com>



Figure 1.3: Frank O. Gehry: The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997. Source: the author.

an “icon,” described as a visual one-liner that reduces architecture to a mere image: a flat representation of something else. Such criticisms also highlight the contradiction within postmodernism in that despite its appeal to the masses and the promotion of diversity and freedom, it remains within the logic of capitalism where only a select few can truly appreciate its ideals.⁴²

Having such concepts in mind and with reference to the rapid technological re-production of visual data, this dissertation uses Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum as a point of departure in order to explore the possibility of a different approach to image-making or the creation of visual effects in architectural design. Of the different architectural examples, Gehry’s museum seems appropriate, not only because it is an iconic building that has managed to exploit the mass media to create the “Bilbao Effect,” but also because it raises important questions about the role of surface and its effects in contemporary architectural design and theory.

1.1.2 Case: The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum

Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim is a museum of contemporary art situated alongside the Nervión River in Bilbao, Spain. Since its opening to the public in 1997 the museum has attracted much international attention evidenced by the publication of numerous books, newspaper and magazine articles, or the creation of online webpages devoted to the building. Moreover, the building has catalysed further development for the city of Bilbao not only by attracting many tourists but also by catalysing further architectural projects by some of the most renowned architects in the world, including Norman Foster,⁴³ Arata Isozaki,⁴⁴ Zaha Hadid,⁴⁵ and Santiago Calatrava.⁴⁶

Gehry’s museum has become a cultural and socio-political icon generating much needed publicity for Bilbao and the Basque region while bringing success and fame for the architect too.⁴⁷ The museum has been accredited with “putting Bilbao

⁴² See Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 61

⁴³ Bilbao Metro by Norman Foster, 1990-1995.

⁴⁴ Isozaki Atea, or Isozaki Towers, 1999.

⁴⁵ See Zaha Hadid’s Zorrozaurre master plan for a 60-hectare peninsula in the Nervión river in the former port area of Bilbao, Spain, 2004.

⁴⁶ See Santiago Calatrava’s Zubizuri (White Bridge) which is a foot-bridge across the Nervión river in Bilbao.

⁴⁷ The building can be seen in the opening sequence of the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*.

on the map” and despite its formal complexity, it was built on time and on budget. Moreover, the BGM marks an important turning point in Gehry’s career, representing a refinement of his personal style to a distinct architectural brand, which allowed him to achieve celebrity status, becoming what is called a “starchitect.”⁴⁸ Many have celebrated the building and its subsequent reformulations (the Experience Music Project in Seattle, 2000, or the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, 2003), as sculptural works of a genius symbolizing freedom and democracy. The building has also been popular with fellow architects: Philip Johnson declared it as “the greatest building of our time”⁴⁹ while Sverre Fehn called it “fantastic.”⁵⁰

Gehry's museum can be summarised as a series of folded surfaces based around the broken ship concept inspired by Bilbao’s former ship-building industry. The building’s flowing forms offer a welcome relief from the rectilinear forms of the post-industrial city, generating a shimmering visual expression of fluidity and movement that can also be associated with the waves of the river or the Atlantic coast beyond. Yet, the BGM is not just a pretty sight. At the time of its conception, the museum represented a successful hybridisation of traditional and modern technologies and processes of design and construction. In order to transfer the complex curves from architectural models to a building, Gehry and his team had to learn from the aerospace industry. Since in the early 1990s most architectural modelling software were purely for visualisation purposes, Gehry’s team had to use CATIA⁵¹ in order to map out and formulate the museum’s surfaces precisely. It was the combination of digital modelling software and new construction technologies

⁴⁸ Since the Bilbao Gehry has appeared in Apple's black and white "Think Different" pictorial advertising campaign (2006) that associates offbeat but revered figures with Apple's design philosophy. He even once appeared as himself in the animated series *The Simpsons* ("The Seven-Beer Snitch" aired in 2005) where he parodies himself by suggesting that his ideas are derived by looking at a crumpled paper. He also voiced himself on the TV show *Arthur*, where he helped Arthur and his friends design a new treehouse (see "Castle in the Sky" first aired in Dec. 2004). Gehry has also starred in a documentary film about himself in collaboration with film director Sydney Pollack (a friend of Gehry's) entitled *Sketches of Frank Gehry* (distributed by Sony Pictures Classics, 2005). In this documentary some of Gehry's more prominent work is discussed with input from his friends and critics.

⁴⁹ Denny Lee "Bilbao, Ten Years Later" *The New York Times*, published on 23 Sept. 2007 at <http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/> accessed on 20/10/2008.

⁵⁰ Anna Maria Guasch, "Global Museums versus Local Artists: Paradoxes of Identity between Local and Global Understanding" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 195

⁵¹ CATIA - Computer Aided Three Dimensional Interactive Application - was developed by the French company Dassault Systemes.

that allowed Gehry and his team to construct the complex geometries of the building with efficiency and economy.

Thus, the BGM is not only a highly successful visual spectacle, but also an early exploration of alternative processes of design and construction. Moreover, Gehry's sculptural design challenges many of the established hierarchies that dominate architectural theory. Whilst it can be argued that the BGM provided Gehry with a stylistic formula that he has been mostly unable to escape from, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that the design and construction of the BGM has important implications for notions of superficiality, authenticity and architectural creativity in the current technological condition. Moreover, Gehry's museum raises important questions about transdisciplinary participation, the significance of surface in the design process, and the importance of image making for the contemporary context that is increasingly dominated by technological communication. By exploring some of the issues this thesis attempts to understand why Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum has been so popular and simultaneously so problematic for some critics and commentators.

1.1.3 Concepts: Developing Surface Thought

For some theorists like Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe the BGM's flowing curves, shimmering surfaces and spectacular imagery is more modernist than postmodern since it indicates a concern with the ornamental and the visually beautiful, rather than the postmodern preoccupation with ironic, double-coded communication.⁵² Others like Hal Foster argue that in the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Gehry collapses the dichotomy between the "duck" and "decorated shed"⁵³ and remains "tectonically obscure."⁵⁴ It is neither structure that follows the program nor one that symbolises

⁵² Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe writes: "Not only is it pretty, but it's modernist, rather than postmodern, in the sense in which those terms are used in the discourses surrounding the visual arts, while at the same time it is of course quite unmodernist in every crucial respect except for its preoccupation with visual effect self-assertive liveliness – which incidentally illustrates the bankruptcy of the way those terms are used. I see Gehry's work as caught inevitably but unfortunately in arguments to which it has a more subtle relationship than is perhaps normally described, but that are in any case not resolvable." See Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Frank Gehry is not Andy Warhol: A Choice between Life and Death" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 223.

⁵³ Hal Foster writes: "As Gehry has privileged neither structure nor ornament, he seemed to transcend this opposition, but it is more accurate to say that he collapsed it, and often combined the formal duck with the decorated shed." Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, Verso, 2003, p. 33

⁵⁴ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 37

the program, thus becoming a “decorated duck”⁵⁵ which embodies the “most problematic aspects of both modern and postmodern architectures: the wilful monumentality of the first and the *faux* populism of the second.”⁵⁶

In fact Foster remains the most consistent critic of Gehry’s architecture, associating his success and popularity with “spectacle-effects”⁵⁷ and the seduction of an imagistic architecture that is “self-indulgent” and “arbitrary.”⁵⁸ He argues that Gehry’s architecture “evokes an individuality that seems more exclusive than democratic”⁵⁹ and rather than instigating civic engagement, the BGM and Gehry’s other cultural centres “appear as sites of spectacular spectatorship, of touristic awe.”⁶⁰ Foster argues that such projects (the BGM being the most prominent) represent an elitist, self-indulgent and individualist artist who designs “out of the ‘cultural logic’ of advanced capitalism, in terms of its language of risk-taking and spectacle-effects.”⁶¹ For Foster the BGM is not only a spectacular image that symbolises the accumulation of capital, but it also represents “an image accumulated to the point where it becomes capital.”⁶²

That the BGM is successful at generating capital for the city is unquestionable and it is fair to assume that the building’s spectacular monumentality is an important factor. Yet, one wonders whether Foster’s essay carries an originary negativity towards surface appearances and a cutting criticality, which is in fact a reaction against the mass popularity of Gehry’s work. Thus, in an effort to show that Gehry is not the “Greatest Living Artist”⁶³ he punctures the shimmering surfaces and ruptures the skin, suggesting that the BGM has somehow managed to deceive us. This thesis attempts to argue that while Foster’s criticism assumes a perpendicular movement of thought that penetrates surfaces, images and appearances, a different movement of thought is possible, which floats across the expanse of visual expression and is more supportive of creative exploration. This parallel or non-perpendicular movement of thought is formulated using surface as a

⁵⁵ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 33

⁵⁶ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, pp. 33-4

⁵⁷ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁵⁸ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 40

⁵⁹ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁶⁰ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁶¹ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁶² Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁶³ This statement marks the very point from which Foster begins his critique of Gehry’s work.

philosophical concept, which in the case of Gehry and the Bilbao Museum, becomes the primary architectural element.

Foster compares the BGM with Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (a whitish building that can be called modernist) arguing that the former lacks "formal logic" or the "programmatic conceit" of the latter. Moreover, by comparing Gehry's work with sculpture (the Statue of Liberty) he argues that the BGM is in fact a "separate skin hung over a hidden armature" where the skin is allowed to "dominate" the structure.⁶⁴ The result, he believes, is disorientating spaces and an evident lack of sensitivity towards the context.

Foster's essay implies some important questions: is Gehry's work the result of a preoccupation with visual spectacle and superficial effects, with all the shallowness that these words can conjure up? Is the BGM tectonically obscure because the "skin" has been allowed to dominate the structure? Is the "Bilbao Effect" nothing more than the seduction of the superficial, the spectacular and the imagistic at the expense of formal logic, programmatic rigor and sensitivity to context? If so, how can Gehry get away with so much?

The thesis proposes that the answer lies upon the very surfaces with which Gehry designs, visualizes, constructs and re-produces his buildings. It finds it questionable whether the BGM should be divided into the structure/skin, function/form opposition so characteristic of modernist manifestoes. Perhaps the BGM's appeal lies in its invitation of the viewer to remain at the surface level, an ambition which considering the current technological context seems more profound than superficial. Thus, rather than designing for the penetration of surfaces and images in order to arrive at a hidden structure or reality, the building invites the viewer to float within and upon the surface, which forms the architectural place within which communication of ideas, expression of sense and transformation of established categories occurs.

Arguably this is a different approach to surface, which does not define it in opposition to a hidden depth. Moreover, the movement of thought that is encouraged is not one of vertical ascent towards the height of Ideas⁶⁵ nor is it a

⁶⁴ See Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 37

⁶⁵ Both Platonic Ideas and lofty ideals.



Figure 1.4: Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA, 1959.
Source: (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/vlastula/377139705/>)



Figure 1.5: Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997.
Source: the author.

descent towards the depths of meaning. Instead it is a non-hierarchical floatation, which suggests a more horizontal exploration of alternative sensations and unlikely realisations. Such a mode of communication seems to be primitive and postmodern, expressive and obscure.

The following chapters attempt to suggest a particular approach to architecture, through Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum as a suitable case study, and with reference to modernist concepts (clothing, cladding, clarity), the postmodernist equivalents (duck, decorated shed, complexity) and more general notions of aura, image, spectacle and simulation. It is argued that Gehry's BGM evokes and includes many of these concepts in a pliable whole, while maintaining an auratic complexity and a seductive expressivity. The proposed argument is that Gehry's museum communicates through a primitive, yet simultaneously unfamiliar mode of expression which includes intuition, illusion and simulation in the construction of what Jencks calls an "*enigmatic signifier*."⁶⁶ In such communication clarity is not the central goal, because the origin and the original do not form the focal point. Instead the emphasis lies on the *process*, those of expression, interpretation, and perhaps hallucination. In this form of communication, one enjoys the journey through the thickness of implicit propositions that create a phenomenal expression of sense, rather than literal (or ironic) communication of meaning or fact. This is argued to be primitive and in many ways at odds with the culture of critical commentary, yet simultaneously it is highly relevant and in tune with the postmodern logic of plurality as it manages to incorporate complexity and diversity within a series of seemingly simple gestures.

In a deprecatory tone, Foster declares that the primary site of Gehry's architecture is in media reproduction.⁶⁷ This thesis argues that such sentiments highlight a familiar theoretical position that defines the image as the inauthentic copy, the spectacle as seductive illusion and ornament as superficial excess. Given the proliferation of mass media and the impact of such new technology on contemporary thought, this thesis proposes that other approaches are possible that deal more sensitively with the *reality of virtualities* and the *significance of effects*. It suggests that a redefinition of parameters is required beginning with the surface,

⁶⁶ Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-Modernism Going?* John Wiley, London, 2007, p. 62

⁶⁷ See Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 38

both as a philosophical concept and the physical site upon which such phenomena take effect.

The research investigates traditional metaphors of design and established attitudes towards image, authenticity and reality, which seem to problematize and be problematized by emergent examples of creativity in the current postmodern condition. The aim is to explore some possible theories for the following related questions: What do we mean by the terms “surface” or “skin” in architecture? Do surface effects deceive the viewer, devalue architecture or diminish the “aura” of buildings? Is surface architecture necessarily superficial? Does the spectacle signal a degradation of reality? Are images or simulations shadowy copies of an original reality? What is the significance of mass media and new technologies for contemporary architecture?

It is argued that the negativity and shallowness associated with superficiality is closely related to the separation of “appearances” from the “real,” where the former is seen to be a deficient representation of the latter. In this familiar point of view, surfaces are the culprits: the thin outer elements that facilitate false appearances and mask the viewer from the true reality of things. This traditional approach is evident in the modernists’ formulation of ornament as a nonessential layer that hides the primary elements of architecture and signals superficiality and excess. In the contemporary condition, similar attitudes continue through scepticism towards imagery, virtual reality and the spectacle of architecture technologically reproduced across the surface-scape of mass media.⁶⁸

In the following chapters, this thesis will consider different philosophical models involving image and the simulacrum in order to arrive at a different approach to appearances in architecture. Whilst traditional philosophical models define images as misleading copies of an original reality, and while some contemporary theorists declare images as simulacra (without any reference to reality), this thesis argues that an alternative approach is possible which considers images as immanently different from their supposed models. From this point of view, images construct a unique reality that demands valuation according to its own rules. This in turn suggests that the images of architecture do not represent a depreciation of architectural experience or a superficial representation of original

⁶⁸ See Neil Leach, *The Anaesthetics of Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1999.

ideas. Instead, images expand architecture's field of influence and represent the surfacing of its potential beyond the locality of a specific time and place. Thus, in the current technological condition of mass imagery, a different approach to architecture is possible, one in which the "surfaces of architecture" transforms to "*surfacing architecture*" through different mediums.

The thesis argues that most metaphors used for describing ornament in the modernist discourse are based on the conceptual separation of the "outer layer," which is often considered secondary or superfluous. However, other metaphors are possible that imply a more integral relationship between surface appearances and the architectural object. The thesis proposes a different approach in which surfaces do not mask, instead they extend architecture's operational territory by engaging with the technological surface-scape of mass media. From this point of view there is nothing to hide since everything occurs upon the surface - the very site of architectural operation.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF CHAPTERS

Taking Foster's criticism of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum as a point of departure, the thesis attempts to expand some of the key concepts with which commentators and critics analyse contemporary architecture. If the BGM is considered "tectonically obscure" or a "decorated duck" in reference to Venturi's writings, it seems important to devote some time to the modernist doctrines that inspired such theories in the first place. This leads to a discussion of ornament and the issues of *out-siding* and *superficiality* in theories of ornament. The thesis proposes that in their theorisation of ornament, the modernists established a pervasive binary hierarchical system, which devalues surfaces and their effects as secondary or superfluous. This binary hierarchy was not only in tune with notions of efficiency, economy and mass production central to the cultural logic of capitalism in early twentieth century, but it was also harmonious with traditional models of thought that have persisted in Western philosophy. Thus the modernist condemnation of ornament is argued to be closely related to an established understanding of surface, image and appearance in traditional epistemology and philosophy.

In order to expand this proposition, the seven chapters of the thesis are divided into three parts. Part One, which consists of two chapters, traces the effects of traditional *transcendental hierarchy*⁶⁹ in influential theories of ornament and image. It is argued that such concepts are devalued since reality is considered to be beyond or behind surface appearances. Part Two of the thesis (also consisting of two chapters) proposes a different philosophical approach based on Gilles Deleuze's writings. In this part of the thesis, a theoretical approach to architecture is constructed based on surface as a model of thought, which is used to represent non-hierarchical valuation, smooth mixing of categories and the expansion of the in-between as a territory of exploration. Part Three of the thesis is a review of the proposition, which concludes the discussion.

The following chapter of the thesis (i.e. chapter two) is titled "**The Superficiality of Surface and the Inauthenticity of Its Effects.**" The chapter begins by analysing Adolf Loos's association of ornament with crime and his association of the ornamental layer with clothing. Key works by Mark Wigley and Beatriz Colomina are utilised to argue that the modernists' metaphor of *clothing the structure* followed and clarified a well established binary hierarchy, not only between the sexes, but also between the covering layer and the hidden structure. By considering "tattooing" as a primitive act, the pioneers of modernist theory offered "the suit," "the dress" or "the make up," as modern metaphors. However, it is argued that such conception of ornament considers surfaces and their effects as masking the "body" of architecture, suggesting a conceptual detachability that inevitably leads to a devaluation of surface design in architecture. The chapter proceeds to argue that Venturi's "decorated shed" concept continues this binary separation between visual expression and structural function. This segregation of ornament from the function of architecture is argued to be an inheritance from modernist theories. However, certain projects (like the BGM) collapse the hierarchy between form and function by infusing visual delight into every aspect of architectural design, from conception to construction.

⁶⁹ In this thesis "transcendental hierarchy" refers to a hierarchical model of thought based on transcendence, which is Latin for climbing or going beyond something. The term also refers to the belief that primary concepts (origin, essence or reality) are beyond secondary concepts (copy, image and appearance). Transcendental hierarchy is traced back to Plato's philosophy which is characterized by a desire to transcend the "visible realm" to arrive at the "intelligible realm." See section 3.1 of the thesis.

Chapter two also elaborates the concept of transparency, which was an important element of modernist thought. By deploying Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky's essay⁷⁰ the chapter explains how transparency does not necessitate the disappearance (or the puncturing) of surfaces, nor does it always signify tectonic or conceptual clarity. "Phenomenal transparency" for example, operates upon the logic of implication or the state of being clearly ambiguous. In this understanding of transparency, depth is a *surface effect*, expressed and implied through evocative arrangements of opaque surfaces.

Chapter two is also concerned with the transformation of attitudes towards originality, authenticity and technology in an age of digital mass reproduction. Rather than what Benjamin declares the "withering of aura" the thesis suggests that aura evolves through the operation of images and their reproductions. Gehry's museum for example, anticipates the reproduction of its image in the mass media, which work on both fronts: on the one hand they express the concepts, intentions or aspirations of the design to a wider audience, on the other hand, they attract and inspire more viewers to visit the "authentic" construction in situ. While the images of such architecture are arguably an extension of its architectural corpus, they simultaneously reinforce the appeal of what is generally referred to as the "original" building, from which such "reproductions" are deduced. Thus, Gehry utilises contemporary technologies of reproduction and communication in order to provide wider visual access to his architecture, while simultaneously reinforcing the "aura" of the physical building and its context. The large number of visitors to the Guggenheim Museum is a good illustration of this effect.

Chapter two discusses different concepts, which are all related to the themes of *superficiality* and *authenticity* in the postmodern context. The aim of this chapter is to provide a context for chapter three, which follows related themes in philosophy, arguing that much of the established hierarchies in architectural thought stem from a transcendental hierarchy that can be traced back to Plato's philosophy.

Chapter three is titled **From "Shadows" to "Simulacra:" The Degradation of Image and the Real**. This chapter is based on the proposition that the scepticism

⁷⁰ Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, "Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal," in *The Mathematics of Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.; London, 1976, pp. 159-185.

directed towards ornament, image and surface effects in architecture, is the result of the separation of “appearances” from the “real” where the former is considered a bad representations (or copy) of the latter. Moreover, surfaces are often considered as opaque outer elements that separate the viewer from reality by masking or generating false appearances.

In this chapter, the thesis traces the root of such thinking to Plato’s philosophy, particularly the “metaphor of the sun,”⁷¹ “analogy of the divided line”⁷² and the “allegory of the cave.”⁷³ It is argued that these metaphors and allegories theorise traditional attitudes towards surfaces as opaque visual barriers, and their effects as distorted representations of a hidden reality. Moreover, such metaphors imply that man-made effects are not to be trusted because they are artificial imitations that distract the viewer from their natural origins. Yet, the proliferation of man-made phenomena continues with greater speeds, assuming a large portion of everyday interaction. If suspicion towards man-made effects continues, the result can be a depreciation of creativity and a devaluation of human development. In order to arrive at an alternative approach, numerous philosophers have attempted to revise the traditional Platonic attitude towards origin and copy, authentic and artificial.

Chapter three traces the “closure”⁷⁴ of Platonism through the writings of Jacques Derrida. This leads to a discussion of the signifier and the concept of “trace.” This chapter also discusses Jean Baudrillard’s theories, which following Guy Debord’s writings⁷⁵ depict a world in which images have managed to destroy reality altogether, creating “the hyperreal.”⁷⁶ The thesis suggests that if Derrida’s theories indicate the “closure” or “deconstruction” of Platonism, Baudrillard’s hyperreality is what is left after the *destruction* of Platonism – a superficial world that induces “melancholic fascination.”⁷⁷ It is argued that such conceptions of the current media saturated condition are pessimistic and nihilistic, as they do not acknowledge the unique value of human creativity and visual expression.

⁷¹ See Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford University Press, London, (507b-509c)

⁷² Plato (509d-513e)

⁷³ Plato (514a-520a)

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, London, 1976, p. 14

⁷⁵ See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, Rebel Press, London, 2006.

⁷⁶ See Jean Baudrillard, 1994, *Simulacra and Simulation*, University of Michigan Press, p. 1

⁷⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1990, p. 160

This thesis proposes that Gilles Deleuze's philosophy can be utilised to formulate another approach that transforms traditional attitudes by shifting the emphasis from authenticity to creativity. In this approach the production of images is no longer the *reproduction* of an original reality, but instead the *production of a different reality*. In other words, images are considered to create their own reality, and since they are already different from their supposed model, they are valued according to their own immanent logic and affective potential. Relating such a view to architecture would mean that the design, projection or construction of image is a legitimate extension of architectural design, not a deceitful act, nor a mere "side effect" of the physical building. From this point of view, producing an architectural image (icon or brand) is in fact extending architecture's operational territory beyond the specificities of the site through an engagement with the interconnected surface-scape of mass media.

Following this proposition, chapter four explores the various definitions of "surface" in order to investigate the possibility of an alternative conception that escapes the shallowness and superficiality of traditional definitions. Chapter four is titled **What is Surface?** and utilises Avrum Stroll's work to explore the term in everyday language. Stroll's findings demonstrate that there are different conceptions of "surface," which can be divided into two general groups: abstract and physical conceptions.⁷⁸ Using Stroll's conceptions as a reference, this thesis argues that it is possible to define surface with an essential *thickness* or an integral depth. Moreover, both the ordinary person's point of view and the scientific conception includes foreign layers such as paint and patina as the surfaces of the object. This means that for most viewers what architects refer to as "cladding" or "skin" can easily be the *surfaces* of architecture. This usage of the term suggests a much more continuous relationship between surface effects and the architectural object. Thus, what some architects and commentators define as the "ornamental layer" "cladding," or "skin," (with an implied detachability and superficiality which arises from an enforced binary hierarchical relationship to "structure" or material "flesh" of buildings), can be defined as the "surfaces" of architecture, without which architecture would not be recognisable.

⁷⁸ See Avrum Stroll, *Surfaces*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, pp. 39-60

Semper argued that the origins of architecture are in the hanging carpet that represented individual creativity, cultural identity and festive spirit. Structure served to support this “textile wall.”⁷⁹ This thesis appropriates Semper’s theory to argue that buildings like Gehry’s BGM are built upon the same primitive formula, but more importantly, they suggest that architecture is in fact the creation of expressive, space-making surfaces, rather than the cladding or fashioning of space-making structures.

Stroll’s work demonstrates that there is no one definition for surface, indicating the flexibility and pliability of the term in everyday usage. Rather than seeing this as a case for “piecemeal realism,” this dissertation argues that in the context of creative production, this pliability is an opportunity for further theorisation and exploration of architectural surfaces. Having this in mind, and following the closure of Platonic thought discussed in chapter three, the thesis arrives at chapter five entitled **An Alternative Approach to Surface, Image and Appearance**. This chapter introduces Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy as a more appropriate alternative to the transcendental hierarchy⁸⁰ of Platonic thought. This chapter is based on the proposition that Deleuze uses topological and geological conceptions of surface in order to formulate a *surficial philosophy* that collapses hierarchy without abolishing difference.

Deleuze and Guattari develop numerous philosophical concepts in an attempt to formulate a complex philosophy that shifts the emphasis from *comparison to origin based on criteria of similitude, to exploration of processes of becoming based on an appreciation of originary difference*. This is argued to have important ramifications for refining attitudes towards images and appearance (in architecture). Moreover, surficial philosophy formulates an understanding of reality that *includes* imagination, illusion and effect. This thesis suggests that a surficial approach to architecture promotes a non-hierarchical and a non-perpendicular voyage of thought that is more in tune with surfaces, images and appearances. This is contrasted to the perpendicular, transcendent or penetrative movement of thought that is attributed to traditional approaches. The thesis argues that a surficial approach necessitates a “haptic eye” that offers a more affirmative and exploratory

⁷⁹ Gottfried Semper “The Four Elements of Architecture” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 74-130, p. 104

⁸⁰ Hierarchy based on transcendence as the belief that the (superficial) visible realm must be surpassed to arrive at (essential) origin or the intelligible realm.

attitude towards architectural design, criticism and education. This is because in surficial thought categories do not exist in rigid striation, but instead they are in constant transformation within a smooth mixture that constitutes complex reality.

With this in mind, this chapter introduces a number of philosophical concepts in order to express the smooth conceptual milieu of surficial thought. The purpose of this chapter is not an exhaustive exposition of the ramifications of each concept for architecture, instead to map out an unfamiliar theoretical approach that relies on such concepts to destabilise traditional models of thought and construct new alternatives.

Chapter six is titled **Surficial Architecture: The Case of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum**. In this chapter the thesis returns to architecture, specifically Gehry's museum from which many of the themes of the research began. This chapter deploys surficial thought to gain a new perspective on this particular architectural case that has not only been successful in responding to its brief, but it has also become an iconic monument to the significance of surface, images and appearances in contemporary architecture. This chapter attributes the popularity of Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum to a primitivism that is in fact highly postmodern, while it associates its unpopularity for some critics (like Hal Foster), to conceptual slipperiness, enigmatic ambiguity and the perpetual exteriority of such surface architecture.

This chapter questions whether the formal logic of Gehry's architecture lies in the tectonic relationship between "skin" and "armature," or instead its logic arises from a definition of architecture as *continuous skin*, or *folded surface*, which suggests a different relationship with the internal, external and the virtual environment that it creates. Gehry's design process can offer important clues. For example, it is significant that after sketching some preliminary thoughts on paper, Gehry continued to model the building with paper, a thin and pliable material that inspired the surfaces of the finished museum. Computer technology also has an important part to play, both in translating the models into final construction and also by modelling them in virtual reality, allowing more comprehensive interior views and the possibility of applying numerous modifications in real time.

This chapter follows the proposition that what transforms in Gehry's design process is the skin, or the *thick surface*, from its beginnings as paper to its

virtualisation in the computer and its construction in titanium. This process is based on the logic of surfaces and significance of their effects. Moreover, by trusting paper and its transformation through different media, Gehry creates a consistent architectural process. It is therefore not surprising that Thomas Krens declares that Gehry has “a greater faith in the process than any other architect,”⁸¹ a design process that Antonino Saggio calls “Skin in.”⁸²

If the BGM’s design logic problematizes the relationship between skin and structure, it is because despite tradition, it doesn’t define skin according to the order of construction, i.e. the *logic of structure*. In this sense, Gehry’s work invokes Semper’s theories, who saw the pliable textile wall as the primary site of architectural creativity. Like surface, the term “skin” is often used in opposition to bones or flesh and always with the human body in mind. Not only are there many skins that are alien,⁸³ with different priorities in relation to the body, but also skin has a more fundamental relationship to the body than a mere sack that interiorizes the organs. After all, what is a body without a skin? Can a skin-less body still be defined as one? Similarly, what is architecture without surfaces or visual effects?

This thesis argues that it is possible to think of Gehry’s BGM as continuous, folded skin, in which every element operates as an exteriority, which through folds and unfolds creates interiority. In other words, the BGM is likened to a Möbius strip, continuously connecting, producing and transforming different architectural categories. In Gehry’s museum steel girders follow the same logic of folding as the titanium surfaces, as there is nothing to hide because everything is “hides and skin.”⁸⁴

Foster blames the computer for facilitating a direct translation of the architect’s designs without resistance, resulting in individual self-indulgence or

⁸¹ Thomas Krens quoted in Bruce Lindsey, *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance / Digital Construction*, Birkhäuser, Basel, 2001, p. 42

⁸² See Antonino Saggio “Flying Carpets,” preface for *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance / Digital Construction*, pp. 5-9, p.8

⁸³ The diversity of skins in the animal kingdom is remarkable. Familiar examples of what can be called “alien” skins are the skin of chameleons or even squid that change colour both for camouflage and for communication.

⁸⁴ Mark C. Taylor’s quote is deliberately modified to omit implications of loss or nostalgia: “As Le Corbusier suggests, once surface is liberated, it quickly becomes all-consuming. If nothing separates inside from outside, skeleton and skin converge; there is no longer anything to hide because nothing remains but hides and skins.... When surface consumes depth, everything is turned inside out.” Taylor, Mark C., *Hiding*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago; London, 1997, p. 188

tectonic obscurity.⁸⁵ However, in chapter five, the thesis argues that superficial thought allows for an *affirmative critical point of view* that encourages exploratory experimentation by emphasising the immanent potential in new techniques and creative endeavours.⁸⁶ Whether Gehry's museum is a result of a continuously transforming design process or the inflated ego of a starchitect, it is nevertheless important to note that the success and popularity of the BGM supports the theory that architecture is an art of *surfacing*.

Chapter seven is titled **Conclusions: Exploring Surface as Medium**. This chapter summarises the arguments and marks the end of this study.

1.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

Contemplation on architecture can bring certain philosophical issues into relief, while simultaneously philosophical concepts can have important ramifications for architectural design. With this in mind, the thesis follows a line of enquiry based on the analysis and synthesis of different concepts that are extracted from philosophical texts or constructed through reflection on a particular architectural project.

The intention of this research is not to conduct a historical survey of texts. Instead, the thesis attempts to highlight an interrelated web of concepts that indicate a particular model of thought which is determined to go beyond surface appearances. Faced with the expansive complexity of the subject matter, the thesis ploughs established theories in order to germinate a new theoretical proposition that provokes them. Therefore, the research approach necessitates a shift of emphasis from clarification to problematization and it often adopts a rationale that seems unfamiliar or at odds with convention.

The study begins with the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum and uses it to highlight a series of concepts in architectural theory. In the next step, the roots of such concepts are traced back to classical thought followed by an elaboration of

⁸⁵ Foster, *Design and Crime: And Other Diatribes*, p. 40

⁸⁶ Today, new technologies allow for new design processes, while new materials and construction technologies inspire unforeseen ways of creating architecture. Contemporary design processes embrace chance while algorithmic processes allow the computer to inject controlled randomness into the design process. It is therefore possible to argue that such interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches can in fact suggest that the ego of the architect or his intention is becoming less dominant.

recent philosophical approaches that attempt to overcome such traditional models of thought. Utilizing these approaches, the thesis generates a particular theoretical attitude to architecture, which is then related to the particular architectural case from which the journey began.

The architectural case and its criticism bracket the concepts that are explicated throughout the research. Therefore, the thesis is not based on a *case study* in the traditional sense, which would involve a detailed empirical analysis of the building, but rather an “exemplifying case”⁸⁷ that acts as a catalyst for conceptual exploration and a binding agent that unites the various philosophical concepts. In this sense, the particular architectural project allows the different elements of the research to relate to each other.

The research picks up on themes of interest from the author’s previous projects including a dissertation entitled “*The Symbolic Surface: A Study of Cosmological Representation in the Islamic Architecture of Iran*” (2001)⁸⁸ and a thesis project entitled “*Morphed Topologies: Osthafen Film Studio, Berlin*” (2003).⁸⁹ The former was an investigation of the symbolic significance of ornament in traditional architecture of Iran; the latter was a proposed film studio for Berlin, which explored the transformation of the moving image into architectural form.⁹⁰

Combining elements from these previous research projects, the thesis adopts a strategy that places more emphasis on proposition than definition. This is

⁸⁷ According to Alan Bryman “Much case study takes place on what might be called the *exemplifying case*. Cases are often chosen not because they are extreme or unusual in some way but because they will provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered.” Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 51.

⁸⁸ Submitted for MA (Hons) in Architectural Design.

⁸⁹ Submitted for Masters of Architecture at the University of Edinburgh.

⁹⁰ This was a project based in Osthafen, Berlin, which proposed a film studio to supplement Berlin’s already established Babelsburg film studio. In this thesis project (which was a collaborative endeavour with Kamil Ariff Malek Shah) the author explored the themes of surface, skin and image in order to design an appropriate conceptual expression for the film studio. The end result was a series of architectural volumes with topological skins distorted by images taken from a video of Berlin, captured on the U-Bahn. Individual images of this film were selected and projected onto spatial “blocks” that were painted with photographic emulsion. Because of the projective process, the images were often distorted once they affected the surfaces of the blocks. However, this was seen as a welcome distortion and accepted as part of the transformation of the city to an architectural surface via the photographic image. Once the architectural blocks were “tattooed” with images of the city, the next step was to let the images “melt” the rigid surfaces. This was done manually and with a degree of interpretation. The final result was a series of architectural propositions based on a photo-cinematic design process.

argued to be more in tune with architectural design and creativity. The thesis contributes to existing knowledge by constructing a conceptual *bricolage* that draws on components from various sources. The contribution of the author is detectable in the selection of the constituting elements, the analysis and exegesis of the theoretical texts, and the composition of the disparate elements to develop an alternative theoretical attitude towards architecture (in general) and the architectural case (in particular).

The structure of the thesis is illustrated by the diagram below, which implies a flattening of the linear hierarchy of the text in order to indicate the interconnectedness of the different chapters and the themes discussed therein.

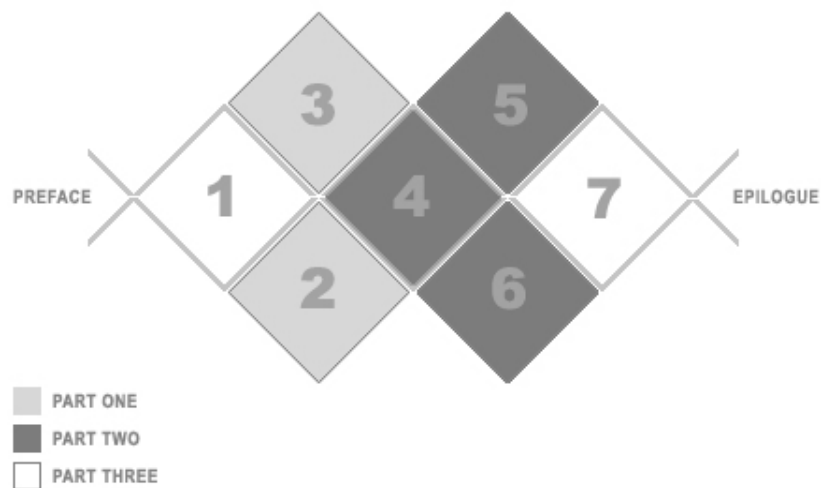


Figure 1.6: Structure of thesis diagram. Source: the author.

The thesis has been divided into three phases of operation. Part one can be broadly described as the analysis phase in which conceptual “problems” are defined with specific reference to existing theories in architecture and philosophy. Part two is the synthesis phase, which formulates the proposition using concepts borrowed from philosophy and architectural theory. Part three summarizes the propositions and introduces new concepts for further research opportunities.

The seven chapters are distributed asymmetrically in relation to the aforementioned parts. Chapter one operates in conjunction with the preface, both acting as a gateway into the research. Chapters 1, 4 and 7 regulate the movement of the hypothesis by introducing new concepts and concluding the discussion

inherited from previous sections. Chapters 2 and 6 elaborate on theories and concepts that can be directly related to architecture and its techno-cultural context. Chapters 3 and 5 are concerned with concepts and theories that relate to philosophy, and which are used by the thesis to formulate a different approach to architectural theory and praxis. Chapter seven and the epilogue conclude the thesis and relate it to other themes reserved for later research.

The diagram above is not intended to be an accurate representation of the structure of the idea, but rather an abstract illustration of how the research findings are presented through a series of chapters that can relate to each other in non-sequential ways. As the thesis progresses and the themes of research are elaborated, the number of interactions increases. For instance, chapter one can only relate to three other (two, three and four) while chapters two and three can relate to four other chapters. As the thesis progresses into the proposition phase, the number of relationships reaches its maximum with chapter four making contact with six other chapters.⁹¹ Though chapter four is not an extended piece, it nonetheless introduces surface as a material entity and a philosophical concept with variable definitions. After realising that a single accurate definition cannot be reached, the thesis uses the remaining chapters to explore the possibility of using geological and topological conceptions of surface to formulate an alternative theoretical approach to architectural design and criticism. As the thesis progresses towards its final chapters the various concepts are brought together in order to draw legible conclusions. Thus, the thesis begins with themes and questions arising from architecture which are then explored in architectural theory and philosophy before coming full circle to architecture, from which the journey started.

⁹¹ The adjacency of the squares is an indication of greater interaction, only if the chapters belong to the same part of the thesis.

PART ONE

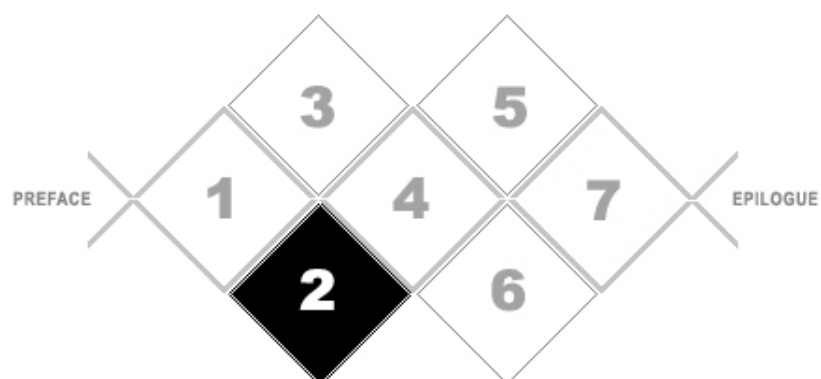
***TRANSCENDENTAL HIERARCHY IN THEORY AND
PHILOSOPHY: THE DEPRECIATION OF ORNAMENT,
IMAGE AND APPEARANCE***

***CHAPTER TWO: THE SUPERFICIALITY OF SURFACE AND THE
INAUTHENTICITY OF ITS EFFECTS***

***CHAPTER THREE: FROM SHADOW TO SIMULACRA: THE DEGRADATION OF
IMAGE AND THE REAL***

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUPERFICIALITY OF SURFACE AND THE INAUTHENTICITY OF ITS EFFECTS



For all the apparent futurism of the CATIA designs, these structures are akin to the Statue of Liberty, with a separate skin hung over a hidden armature, and with exterior surfaces that rarely match up with interior spaces. (This comparison might not be fair to the Statue of Liberty, for it involves an innovative interplay between structure and skin, whereas Gehry allows his skin to dominate his structure). Again, Gehry is frequently associated with Serra, but Serra exposes the construction of his sculptures for all to see, and Gehry is often tectonically obscure...media reproduction ...is the primary 'site' of such architecture...⁹²

Hal Foster

I have always thought that this building, in a shape resembling Gaudi's modernism and, going even further back in time, the Baroque tradition of Borromini, was merely a screen building, a decoration inscribed on splendid scenography; the Abandoibarra neighbourhood of Bilbao, next to a river, a (steel) bridge, and a valley and almost inventing a new genre of architectural sculpture or urban architecture: a 'landscape of image.' And all this was thought up closely in line with a spectacle-based society and cultural tourism.⁹³

Anna Maria Guasch

⁹² Hal Foster, "Master Builder", *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes*, Verso, 2003, pp. 37-8

⁹³ Anna Maria Guasch, "Global Museums versus Local Artists: Paradoxes of Identity Between Local and Global Understanding" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 195

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER TWO

Taking Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum as a point of departure, this chapter investigates some of the conceptual terminologies with which commentators and critics analyse contemporary architecture. If the BGM is accused of allowing the "skin" to dominate the "structure," or it is considered a "decorated duck" in reference to Venturi's metaphors, it is important to elaborate the theories that inspire such terminologies in the first place. Given the scope and diversity of the topic, a detailed history of the different manifestations of these concepts would be extraneous to the present project. This chapter is therefore not intended to be an exhaustive historical survey. Instead, it presents a constellation of themes, concepts and theories that would be relevant for understanding the established logic that undervalues surfaces, images and effects and favour of structure, reality or transparency. Thus, the chronological nature of this chapter is more an organisational device than an indication of method.

The intention in collecting and laying out a range of concepts is twofold. First by analysing their mode of operation, this thesis will define a critical position, which will be developed in later chapters. The second purpose of this chapter is to begin a conceptual groundwork for a philosophical exploration, which will be used to theorise an alternative approach to the aforementioned architectural concepts and the case study.

The chapter is structured into three sections. The first section of this chapter demonstrates the theoretical separation of ornament from structure and the modernist understanding of transparency. This section follows the themes of covering and uncovering that are implicated by the metaphor of clothing. The second section of this chapter shifts the discussion to notions of image and its technological reproduction, focusing on influential theories of image. This section follows the themes of reproduction and simulation implicated by image making.

2.1 MASKING SURFACES: “CLOTHED” STRUCTURE AND THE “DECORATED SHED”

The appearance of a building is highly important not only for the architect, but also for the client, the end-user, the general public, and sometimes for establishing cultural identity or national pride. Seeing a building (whether in situ or as an image) marks the first moment of interaction, interpretation and judgement and as a result every architect invests considerable effort to respond to certain standards of beauty and style. Precisely because making a good first impression is important, most radical shifts in architectural theory (modernism, postmodernism, and even deconstruction) involve a refashioning of visual effects or architectural style.

The appearance of a building is often discussed in opposition to the way it is constructed, which is often associated with “the reality of things.” Notions of “skin,” “cladding,” “ornament,” or “image,” are often contrasted to that which lies beneath or beyond: either the structure that allows appearances to exist or the originary model, of which appearances are mere copies. Furthermore, there is the general opposition between form and function, popularised by the modernist motto: *form (ever) follows function*. If the one opposition is based on reinforcing the hierarchy of construction, the other is preoccupied with determining the functional value of images and visual effects.

In architectural discourses, talk of appearances manifests itself in different debates. One of the most influential of these is the discussion of ornament and the metaphors of design that are related to it. Following this discourse leads to notions of cladding, dressing or clothing that were theorised by early modernists in their quest for a refashioning of ornament and style in architecture. On the one hand, such theories were responsible for popularising the image of architecture as a naked (structural) body that must be clothed. This resulted in the separation of visual expression (form) from the function of architecture, where surface effects were valued by the logic of structure or the order of construction. On the other hand such theories inspired the postmodern concepts of “duck” and “decorated shed” which continued the binary opposition evident in the modernist manifestos.

2.1.1 The Textile Wall and the Metaphor of Clothing

If Foster’s essay in *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes* (2005) warns against spectacle-effects and the reduction of architecture into image and capital, over a hundred years ago Adolf Loos’s essay “Ornament and Crime” (1908) warned against the degeneration of architecture through excessive ornamentation. Both essays rely on conceptions of ornament and spectacle that imply an act of covering: the modernist formulation of ornament as a layer of clothing or cladding,⁹⁴ dismisses interior surfaces, accusing ornament of covering something more authentic, while the conception of spectacle as an autonomous image implies an appearance that masks the viewer from authentic reality.⁹⁵

In the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb “clothing” is defined as “the action of covering or providing with clothes; dressing.”⁹⁶ The important element in this definition is *covering* which implies opacity and concealment. In normal use, clothing is a layer, which is not only detached from the body, but it is also of a different material and of a different nature. Clothing can easily be taken off and replaced with another layer. It is a temporary commodity associated with style, fashion, gender and social status.

The term “cladding” has a similar nature. According to the OED, cladding is “a coating or covering applied to the surface of an object, a building, etc.; the application of such a covering.” Like clothing, cladding implies detachability and covering. It is a layer that is applied afterwards and can be removed in order to expose the underlying, originary body. Both clothing and cladding are terms that denote the upper and outer layer, which is foreign and separate from the primary architectural elements. This thesis argues that such words shift the emphasis from surface expression to notions of masking, hiding or covering, which depreciates the significance of surfaces and their effects by associating them with obscurity and deceit. Moreover, the metaphor of clothing instigates a binary hierarchical system in which surfaces and surface effects become secondary to primary elements, like structure or natural materials.

⁹⁴ See www.oed.com accessed November 2008.

⁹⁵ This conception of the spectacle will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

⁹⁶ See www.oed.com accessed November 2008.

Although the conception of architecture as clothing can be traced back to Vitruvius or even earlier,⁹⁷ the point of departure for this discussion is Loos’s “Law of Dressing” (Gesetz der Bekleidung) which in turn is a direct reference to Gottfried Semper’s “Principle of Dressing” [Prinzip der Bekleidung] formulated in the mid-nineteenth century. Loos’s theorisation of ornament represented a shift of emphasis from Semper’s theories and became influential for the “modernist movement” in architecture. However, before elaborating Loos’s approach, it is important to devote some time to Semper’s theories, which were an important influence for his successors.

Semper (1803-1879) was an architect and a theoretician who formulated his ideas in nineteenth century Europe when developments in archaeology, ethnography and philology had revealed new facts about the art of the ancients. He was interested in the origins of architecture, which he thought was shared between different cultures and styles. Being poised between the traditional architecture of “poets” and the industrial architecture of the “polytechnicians,”⁹⁸ Semper sought to understand the essence of architecture in order to reconcile the differing viewpoints and practices with each other.

As an antithesis to Laugier’s illustration of the “Primitive Hut,” Semper associated the origins of architecture with the production of decorative textiles, rather than structural elements like walls or pillars.⁹⁹ According to Semper, architecture did not originate in the construction of a wooden shelter that is later supplemented by ornamental layers, “rather, it was with all the simplicity of its basic forms highly decorated and glittering from the start, since its childhood.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ See Bradley Quinn, *The Fashion of Architecture*, Berg Publishers, 2003, p. 2. See also Marcus Vitruvius Pollio, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. Morris H. Morgan, Kessinger Publishing, 2005, 5, p. 284

⁹⁸ In Rykwert’s words young artists in the nineteenth century were gradually moving away from their guilds and assembling in academies, but more importantly, in schools, the artists “shifted their attention from creating objects intended to edify, move or excite the spectator, and concentrated on an authentic expression of individual vision, in which the artist’s relation to the spectator through the object became increasingly less important...” Thus, architects separated into the two groups of the “poets” and the “Polytechnicians” who developed different understandings of beauty and decoration. Joseph Rykwert, “Ornament is no Crime” in *The Necessity of Artifice*, Academy Eds., London, 1982, pp. 92-101, p. 93

⁹⁹ See Marc-Antoine Laugier’s *Essay On Architecture 1755*, trans by Wolfgang and Anne Herrmann, Hennessey & Ingalls, Los Angeles, 1977

¹⁰⁰ Gottfried Semper, “Preliminary Remarks on Polychrome Architecture and Sculpture in Antiquity,” in Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 45-73, p. 52

Moreover, Semper argued that in early buildings, the colourful textile was the primary architectural element and the supporting structure had a secondary function in space-making:

Hanging carpets remained the true walls, the visible boundaries of space. The often solid walls behind them were necessary for reasons that had nothing to do with the creation of space; they were needed for security, for supporting a load, for their permanence, and so on. Wherever the need for these secondary functions did not arise, the carpets remained the original means of separating space. Even where building solid walls became necessary, the latter were only the inner, invisible structure hidden behind the true and legitimate representatives of the wall, the colourful woven carpets.¹⁰¹

Central to Semper’s arguments were the ethnographic data, which he used to demonstrate that the production of textile wall mats came *before* the development of clothing. This realisation liberated weaving from its traditional definition as a simple technique to cover the body, while simultaneously freeing the textile wall from subservience to the body, the binary hierarchy between genders and the dilemma of style, which all became pronounced in the metaphor of clothing.

By associating the beginning of architecture with textiles, Semper implied a close connection between architecture and clothing (or dressing).¹⁰² However, in his theories, architecture does not follow the logic of clothing, rather *it is clothing that follows the logic of architecture*. Semper argued that before the invention of clothing, the woven textile designated spatial boundaries, established the idea of family and the very first notion of social community. Moreover, as primitive dwellings took shape, the motifs and patterns on the textile surfaces began to communicate social, cultural and ideological identity.¹⁰³ Therefore, for Semper the production of the colourful woven surface marks the first instance of architectural production: “...the beginning of building coincides with the beginning of textiles.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Gottfried Semper “The Four Elements of Architecture” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 74-130, p. 104

¹⁰² Semper drew on the similarities of the German word for wall (Wand) and dress (Gewand) to arrive at his “Principle of Dressing” as the “true essence” of architecture. In a footnote he writes: “The German word *Wand* [wall], *paries*, acknowledges its origin. The terms *Wand* and *Gewand* [dress] derive from a single root. They indicate the woven material that formed the wall.” See Semper, “The Four Elements of Architecture” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 104

¹⁰³ See Gottfried Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, pp. 181-263, p. 254

¹⁰⁴ Gottfried Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 254

Semper’s primitive textile wall is different from a clothed wall because it is a unitary concept. In this conception, the textile wall is a double-sided architectural surface that is responsible for the demarcation of space and the visual expression of personal and cultural motifs. A clothed wall however, segregates the outer layer that either covers the body of architecture or creates a visual construct that is foreign to the primary architectural elements. Although Semper used terms like dressing or mask, he nonetheless emphasised creative surface expression and symbolic communication. For him the dissimulation of how appearances are constructed was a sign of “high artistic development:”

I think that the *dressing* and the *mask* are as old as human civilization, and the joy in both is identical with the joy in those things that drove men to be sculptors, painters, architects, poets, musicians, dramatists, in short, artists. Every artistic creation, every artistic pleasure presupposes a certain carnival spirit, or to express myself in a modern way – the haze of carnival candles is the true atmosphere of art. ...The untainted feeling led primitive man to the denial of reality in all early artistic endeavours; the great, true masters of art in every field returned to it – only these men in times of high artistic development also *masked the material of the mask*.¹⁰⁵

For Semper, the development of the wall as we know it today, was a response to the need for a warmer, more solid and durable support behind the textile surface. This had the effect of making the textile a dressing layer, which later transformed to “surrogate dressings,” such as stucco, wood and metal plaques, terra cotta facings, or granite panelling. However, for Semper such dressings are not secondary layers, but instead other manifestations of the original textile wall which was responsible for the demarcation of space and the expression of artistic creativity. The structure that supports such surfaces is “foreign to the original idea of spatial enclosure.”¹⁰⁶

In other words, from Semper’s point of view, the originary architectural act occurs upon surfaces and through surface effects. The denial of reality by dissimulating the material of the mask is not ignorance or disregard for materiality

¹⁰⁵ Semper “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 257

¹⁰⁶ In relation to modern construction materials, Semper writes: “The same is true for walls constructed out of unburnt bricks, stone, or any other building materials, all of which in their nature and use have absolutely no relation to the spatial concept. They were used for protection and defence, to secure permanence in the enclosure, or to serve as foundations and supports for the spatial enclosure above, for carrying stocks and other loads, in short, for reasons foreign to the original idea of spatial enclosure.” Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, pp.254-5

or construction.¹⁰⁷ On the contrary it is a “mastery” of materials, a detailed knowledge of construction through which materiality could be effaced. Consequently, architecture is the manipulation of surfaces, images and symbolic motifs, not just for the demarcation of space, but also for visualization, simulation and communication. Mark Wigley writes:

[For Semper] Architecture begins with ornament...Strictly speaking, it is only the decoration that is structural. There is no building without decoration. It is decoration that builds... Space, house, and social structure arrive with ornament. The interior is not defined by a continuous enclosure of walls but by the folds, twists, and turns in an often discontinuous ornamental surface.¹⁰⁸

Semper posited a radical theory that Greek polychromy found its historical genesis in the primal act of carpet making: the art of the “wall fitter.”¹⁰⁹ Thus, what the Neo-classicists called the “high” art of ancient Greek monuments in their pristine whiteness, were not only originally polychrome, but they were also inspired by what his contemporaries would call “low” decorative arts, such as those of weaving and carpet making. For Semper Greek art and architecture was the result of gradual process of learning and absorption from other ancient civilisations.¹¹⁰ In a direct statement against theories that declared the independence of Hellenic art, he wrote:

¹⁰⁷ Semper clarifies this by emphasising the necessary mastery of materials: “Masking does not help, however, when *behind* the mask the thing is false or the mask is no good. In order that the material, the indispensable (in the usual sense of the expression) be completely denied in the artistic creation, its complete mastery is the imperative precondition. Only by complete technical perfection, by judicious and proper treatment of the material according to its properties, and by taking these properties into consideration while creating form can the material be forgotten, can the artistic creation be completely freed from it, and can even a simple landscape painting be raised to a high work of art.” Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, pp. 257-8

¹⁰⁸ Mark Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2001, p. 11

¹⁰⁹ Thus, for Semper, the perfection of the wall as an element (idea or motive) of architecture, took place in ancient Assyria and Persia, cultures that were famed for their colourful tapestries. Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 258.

¹¹⁰ “The most significant result of these latest conquests in art history is the collapse of an outdated scholarly theory that has been impeding the understanding of the antique world to no end, according to which Hellenic art was considered a native growth of the soil of Greece – although it was simply the magnificent bloom, the culminating goal, the end result of an ancient formative principle whose roots, so to speak, were widespread and deeply planted in the soil of all lands that had been the seats of the social system in antiquity.” Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 247.

Yet critics call them barbaric and do not concede that the Greeks could have covered such delicately shaped profiles with paint. On the contrary, the monuments have become monochrome through barbarism. All periods of high artistic accomplishment agree in the disputed principle of polychromy. The Greeks, the Moors, the Normans, the Byzantines and pre-Goths, even the Gothic masters themselves practiced it. How harsh and unfair it is to reproach such times as barbaric because their views of art deviate from our own! It is really not possible that *we* could be in error? Would it not be fair to think of the possibility, at least, that what appears to us bizarre, glaring, gaudy, and glittering would no longer be so if we looked at it with less stupid eyes?¹¹¹

Semper elevated surface expression above structural necessity and associated the essence of monumental architecture with the stage apparatus “covered with decorations ... adorned with festoons and garlands, fluttering banners and trophies.”¹¹² This he argued is the “*motive* of the *permanent* monument which is intended to recount for coming generations the festive act and the event celebrated.”¹¹³ This was a theory in which ornament and surface expression was seen as defining architecture and forming an important aspect of human interaction, rather than a secondary act of frivolous superficiality.

Moreover, by associating weaving with architecture before the invention of clothing, Semper’s theory of the textile wall avoided the hierarchies of gender and the detachability of clothing. The textile wall allocated the essence of architecture to the visible surface, rather than a hidden depth. Thus, Mark Wigley writes “[In Semper’s theory] Everything is in the surface.... Occupying a space does not involve passing through some kind of opening in the surface, like a door, to find an interior. To occupy is to wrap yourself in the sensuous surface.”¹¹⁴

Semper’s theories became a source of inspiration for the architects that followed him. However, his textile wall was quickly replaced with *clothed structure*. If the woven wall was a double-sided surface, the clothed wall became one-sided, viewed mainly from the outside. This meant that ornament transformed from surface expression to a foreign layer that *covered* the primary elements of architecture. Thus, instead of thickening the visual surface to accommodate the

¹¹¹ Semper, “Preliminary Remarks on Polychrome Architecture” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 59.

¹¹² Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, pp. 255-6.

¹¹³ Semper, “Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts or Practical Aesthetics” in *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, p. 256

¹¹⁴ Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 25

necessity for solidity and warmth, ornamental surfaces were *thinned-out* as they were declared superficial layers that were detachable from the body of architecture.

Gradually, Semper’s celebratory approach towards colour, ornament and surface expression changed into the modernists’ quest for the standardization of fashion, the modernisation of clothing, and the clarification of gender hierarchy. Amongst those who were responsible for this shift, were Adolf Loos, and Le Corbusier whose writings on ornament, clothing and style became highly influential for the modernist movement.

2.1.1.1 A Modern Suit for Architecture

Both Loos and Le Corbusier were influenced by Semper’s “Principle of Dressing” and his theory of the textile origins of architecture.¹¹⁵ Loos admits that “[t]he covering is the oldest architectural detail”¹¹⁶ or “cladding is older even than structure.”¹¹⁷ However, he advocates a break from the past through the removal of excessive ornament from architecture. In the process Loos devalues surface ornamentation by regarding it as a primitive act and a sign of degradation. In “Ornament and Crime” (1908), he writes:

One can measure the culture of a country by the degree to which its lavatory walls are daubed. With children it is a natural phenomenon: their first artistic expression is to scrawl on the walls erotic symbols. But what is natural to the Papuan and the child is a symptom of degeneration in the modern man. I have made the following observation and have announced it to the world: *the evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from objects of daily use.*¹¹⁸

Unlike Semper who associates ornamentation with the origins of architecture, Loos associates ornament with the primitive, defined as an uncultured and a backward state. Words like “daubed” or “lavatory walls” indicate Loos’s conception of

¹¹⁵ Loos’s “Law of Dressing” is a direct reference to Semper’s “Principle of Dressing.” See Loos’s “Das Prinzip der Bekleidung,” *Neue Freie Presse*, September 4, 1898, translated as “The Principle of Cladding” by Jane O. Newman and John H. Smith in Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void: Collected Essays 1897-1900*, pp. 66-69, p. 67. *Bekleidung* is being translated here as “dressing” following Mallgrave and Herrmann’s translation rather than Newman and Smith’s translation as “cladding.” (For the notes on this issue, see Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, translated by Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 293 See also Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void*, p. 139.

¹¹⁶ Loos, “The Principle of Cladding” in *Spoken into the Void Collected Essays 1897-1900*, p. 66

¹¹⁷ Loos, “The Principle of Cladding” in *Spoken into the Void Collected Essays 1897-1900*, p. 67

¹¹⁸ Ludwig Müenz and Gustav Künstler. *Adolf Loos: Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1966, pp. 226-7

ornament as a repulsive, superficial layer that is applied well after the construction of the wall. If for Semper ornament represented the textile origins of architecture and the primary role of the wall as a symbolic, communicative and space-defining surface, for Loos, ornamentation was a sign of degeneration associated with a criminal’s tattoo or the immaturity of a child:

When man is born, his instincts are those of a new-born dog. His childhood runs through all the changes corresponding to the history of mankind. At the age of two he looks like a Papuan, at four like one of an ancient Germanic tribe, at six like Socrates, at eight like Voltaire...The child is amoral. To us the Papuan is also amoral....The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his rudder, his oars; in short, everything he can get his hands on. He is no criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate....The urge to decorate one’s face and everything in reach is the origin of the graphic arts....But what is natural for a Papuan and a child, is degenerate for modern man.¹¹⁹

What occurs in Loos’s theories (which influences modernist manifestos) is a formulation of an attitude towards ornament as excessive or superfluous. However, Loos was not in favour of the complete removal of this covering layer. Instead, he advocated a particular *style* that was efficient, modern, civilized, and dignified. In order to illustrate his concepts, Loos compared ornamentation with clothing, specifically men’s clothing, which he argued was more advanced than women’s:

The clothing of the woman is distinguished externally from that of the man by the preference for ornamental and colourful effects and by the long skirt that covers the legs completely. These two factors demonstrate to us that the woman has fallen behind sharply in her development in recent centuries.¹²⁰

If in Semper’s theory architecture was a woven unity, in Loos’s theory architecture becomes a clothed entity, the outer layer of which suffers from conceptual *outsiding, binary opposition and hierarchy*. Loos’s position on clothing clarifies his attitude towards ornament in architecture. However, unlike Semper’s textile wall, the metaphor of clothing implies a difference between the feminine and the masculine. The prejudices set up by Loos are clear: the long skirt of women’s clothing hinders function and the colourful ornamentations are mere “effects,” both indicating

¹¹⁹ Adolf Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, edited by Bernie Miller and Melony Ward, XYZ Books, Los Angeles, 2002, p. 29

¹²⁰ Adolf Loos, “Ladies’ Fashion,” *Neue Freie Presse*, Aug. 21, 1898, in *Adolf Loos: Spoken into the Void, Collected Essays. 1897-1900*, MIT Press Cambridge, Mass. 1982, p. 102.

primitivity and degeneration. Men’s clothing on the other hand is superior because it is modest and muted, not absent:

Primitive men had to differentiate themselves by various colours, modern man needs his clothes as a mask. His individuality is so strong that it can no longer be expressed in terms of items of clothing. The lack of ornament is a sign of intellectual power.¹²¹

Loos saw “good” clothing as a neutral, masking layer that must not be a disguise. He prohibited confusion by banning *simulation*. Dressing must not simulate the materials they cover, they should only “reveal clearly their own meaning as dressing for the wall surface,” identifying their separation from structure. Thus, “wood may be painted any colour except one – the colour of wood.”¹²² The key themes are honesty to materials, transparency of communication and a desire for authenticity, which prohibits simulation. The transparency of communication however, is not literal transparency or nakedness, it is rather truthfulness and clarity of expression. Loos believed that by dressing correctly and preserving his integrity, the modern man must adhere to the cultural essence of civilized society. His theories demonstrate an attempt to develop an architectural style that conforms to the aesthetic tastes of the dominant majority. This majority however is not a quantitative majority of numbers, but a qualitative majority determined by power or cultural superiority.

Many architects of early twentieth century were inspired by Loos’s theories. The white walls of the International Style¹²³ were not only a move towards notions of purity and clarity, but also an indication of the desire for a style of architecture that would have lasting appeal. Mark Wigley has demonstrated that despite common belief, the white walls of modernism that replaced the ornamental styles of nineteenth century were not naked, nor were they any different in their

¹²¹ Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, p. 36

¹²² Loos, “The Principle of Cladding” in *Spoken into the Void Collected Essays 1897-1900*, p. 67.

¹²³ The term “International style” usually refers to the architectural style of the formative decades of Modernism. The origins of the term can be traced back to Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson’s book written to record the International Exhibition of Modern Architecture held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1932 (which identified the common characteristics of modernist architecture). See also Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style*, W.W. Norton, Pennsylvania, USA, 1966.

ornamental operation.¹²⁴ According to Wigley, these thin layers of white paint, were in fact clothing architecture. Thus, “The modern building is only modern because it is like a modern outfit.”¹²⁵

The simplicity of the modernist outfit was not only a refashioning of an architectural style, but also a response to practical necessities. The greater need for mass housing after the world wars necessitated rapid construction in which ornamentation was regarded as costly and slow. If buildings were to be mass-produced on an industrial scale, they would need to have simpler surface effects. Thus, the lack of ornament indicated efficiency and economy:

The producer of ornament must work for twenty hours to obtain the same income of a modern labourer who works for eight hours... The lack of ornament results in reduced working hours and an increased wage.¹²⁶

The modernists promoted a new style for architecture represented by the “white suit” that was easily mass-produced and brought uniformity, the comfort of belonging and a sense of modernisation for the masses. Therefore, the advent of the modernist style and a combination of theoretical, technological and socio-political factors popularised the metaphor of clothing and established it as an enduring concept within architectural discourse.

2.1.1.2 *The Seductive Dress*

The metaphor of clothing implied notions of covering, but it simultaneously inspired its opposite: the concept of revealing. Both are necessary elements of the clothing metaphor. If most modern clothing hides certain aspects of the body, it is nonetheless designed in such a way that it reveals the presence of the body behind. It is for this reason that clothing is ordered and governed by the logic and the proportions of the human body.

¹²⁴ Mark Wigley writes: “Although everyone seems to be everywhere concerned with the beauty and purity of the naked body of industrialized structures, modern architecture is not naked. From the beginning, it is painted white. ... What cannot be seen is the obvious. No matter how thin the coat of paint is, it is still a coat. It is not simply inserted into the space vacated by clothing. It is itself a very particular form of clothing. And by sustaining a logic of clothing, modern architecture participates in many of the economies from which it so loudly announces its detachment.” Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. xviii

¹²⁵ Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 156

¹²⁶ Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, p. 33

Amongst those who promoted revealing in the metaphor of clothing was Le Corbusier. According to Beatriz Colomina, Le Corbusier’s architecture was characterized by a desire for *uncovering*, exposure and the dominance of the gaze.¹²⁷ Unlike Loos for whom, men’s fashion was a model of modernity, for Le Corbusier, female clothing became applaudable because it exposed the charms of the body:

Woman has preceded us. She has carried out the reform of her dress. She found herself at a dead end: to follow fashion and, then, give up the advantages of modern techniques, of modern life. ... So, woman cut her hair and her skirts and her sleeves. She goes out bareheaded, bear-armed, with her legs free. And she can dress in five minutes. And she is beautiful; she seduces us with the charm of her graces of which the designers have admitted taking advantage. The courage, the liveliness, the spirit of invention with which woman has revolutionized her dress are a miracle of modern times. Thank you!¹²⁸

For Le Corbusier, women’s clothing is modern not only because it allows the body to move freely, but also because there is less of it. Women can go out “bareheaded, bear-armed” and their fashion is laudable because it reveals the “charms” of the body. Much like Loos, Le Corbusier does not promote total nudity; the transparency he applauds is limited and carefully orchestrated. In other words, Le Corbusier does not theorise the complete removal of the clothing layer. What he proposes is a progression towards the *thinning out* of this layer, which marks the beginning of seduction. Wigley writes:

While Semper locates architecture in the supplementary layer, whitewash supposedly purifies architecture by eliminating the “superfluous” in favour of the “essential.” Le Corbusier’s infamous *Vers une Architecture* (Towards an architecture) of 1923 had already argued that the culture it promotes is one of “rejection, pruning, cleansing; the clear and naked emergence of the Essential.”¹²⁹ For civilization to progress from the sensual to the visual, the sensuality of clothes has to be removed to reveal the formal outline, the visual proportion, of the functional body. ... But the body cannot be completely naked as that would be to return to the very realm of the sensual that has been abandoned. There is a need for some kind of screen that remodels the body as formal proportion rather than sensual animal, a veil with neither the sensuality of decoration nor the sensuality of the body. The whitewash is inserted between two threats in order to translate body into form.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ See Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media*, pp. 306-334

¹²⁸ Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*, The MIT Press, Camb. Mass.; London, pp. 106-107

¹²⁹ Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* Translated by Frederick Etchells as *Towards a New Architecture*, John Rodker, London, 1931, p. 138

¹³⁰ Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, pp. 15-16

Loos saw seduction as a primitive and inferior act that produces unnatural effects.¹³¹ The repression of such seduction by dressing architecture in a masculine suit was for Loos, the task of the modern architect.¹³² Le Corbusier maintained the same clothing metaphor, but he expressed it differently. Instead of covering the erotic body using a formal suit, Le Corbusier exposed the seductive body through a *swimsuit*. Both architects theorised surface ornament as a secondary layer in relation to the primary architectural body and both followed the traditional hierarchy between the genders: Loos advocated men’s clothing as superior, and aimed to create a masculine outfit for architecture, while Le Corbusier exposed the feminized architectural body to the penetrative gaze of men.¹³³

Le Corbusier’s “Law of Ripolin,” suggested a stripping of outdated ornamentation to expose the smooth modern object.¹³⁴ But architecture was not left naked since the white paint remained as a thin “veil.”¹³⁵ The coat of white paint was in fact a tool of control: at once banishing colour as a visible symbol of the feminine, and simultaneously orchestrating the exposure of the “charms” of the feminized architectural body. Thus, much like a white swimsuit, the thin layer of paint shifted the attention from surface expression to the architectural body that revealed itself through the thinned-out clothing.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Loos writes: “Woman covered herself, she became a riddle to man, in order to implant in his heart the desire for the riddle’s solution....It is an unnatural love. If it were natural, the woman would be able to approach the man naked. But the naked woman is unattractive to the man. She may be able to arouse a man’s love, but not to keep it.” Adolf Loos, “Ladies’ Fashion,” *Neue Freie Presse*, Aug. 21, 1898, in *Adolf Loos: Spoken into the Void, Collected Essays, 1897-1900*, MIT Press Cambridge, Mass. 1982, pp. 98-103, p. 99

¹³² Loos considered surface ornamentation as a sign of eroticism and degeneration: “The first ornament that came into being, the cross, had an erotic origin. The first work of art, the first artistic action of the first artist daubing on the wall, was in order to rid himself of his natural excesses. A horizontal line: the reclining woman. A vertical line: the man who penetrates her. The man who created it felt the same urge as Beethoven, he experienced the same joy that Beethoven felt when he created the Ninth Symphony. But the man of our time who daubs the walls with erotic symbols to satisfy an inner urge is a criminal or a degenerate. It is obvious that his urge overcomes man: such symptoms of degeneration most forcefully express themselves in public conveniences.” Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, p. 29

¹³³ See Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity, Modern Architecture as Mass Media*

¹³⁴ Le Corbusier writes: “Imagine the results of the Law of Ripolin. Every citizen is required to replace his hangings, his damasks, his wall-papers, his stencils, with a plain coat of white ripolin.” Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, p. 188 quoted in Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 15

¹³⁵ Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 16

¹³⁶ “Flowers, sun, joy. Who is going to wear these beautiful bathing costumes created by our big stores? And how soon.” Illustration from *Le Corbusier, La Ville Radieuse, 1935* included in Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, p. 279.

Chapter Two: The Superficiality of Surface and the Inauthenticity of its Effects – Masking Surfaces: “Clothed” Structure and the “Decorated Shed”

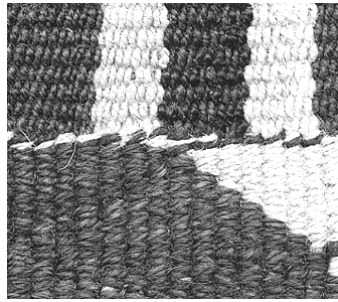


Figure 2.1: The textile and the textile wall. Nomadic tent, central Asia.
Source: the author.

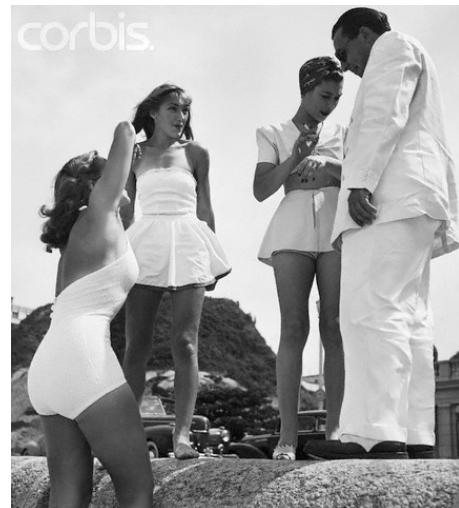


Figure 2.2: Clothing and clothed structure. Feminine and masculine suits.
Source: Genevieve Naylor
<http://pro.corbis.com/search/Enlargement.aspx?CID=isg&mediauid={199DC471-1186-4265-ABF4-120722C419BA}>

The modernists decried ornamentation by associating it with uncivilized culture, femininity and degeneration.¹³⁷ Whether promoting dignified covering or seductive exposure, modernists like Loos or Le Corbusier problematized the architectural surface through the metaphor of clothing and the binary hierarchies associated with it. Both approaches expressed a masculine drive for dominance: one wanting to control appearances, the other exploiting the power of the penetrative gaze.¹³⁸ In either scenarios surface ornament is defined as a clothing layer, foreign to the architectural body, yet bound and regulated by it.

Inspired by Semper’s “Principle of Dressing,” modernist theories revolved around the metaphor of clothing. However, if for Semper clothing followed architecture, for the modernists clothing inspired architecture. The promotion of white walls was not an abandonment of the ornamental clothing layer, rather its transformation into a standard tight fitting suit that exposed the contours of the architectural body. This meant that surface expression was reduced and controlled in favour of the structure that held it up. In Semper’s theory, architecture occurred upon the surfaces of the textile, the structure having a supportive role. In early modernist theories however, textiles turned into clothing, and structure became a body (with gender and proportion), which began to dictate the clothing layer. Thus, when *textiles walls* changed to *clothed structures*, the architectural surface was trapped in a binary hierarchical system in which oppositional forces compete for dominance, often coming second to other architectural elements.

2.1.2 Seeing Through Surfaces: “Literal and Phenomenal Transparency”

While the metaphor of clothing in modernist theory led to visual restraint and a thinning of surface ornament as the superficial layer that covered the body of

¹³⁷ Le Corbusier wrote: “Decoration is of a sensorial and elementary order, as is colour, and is suited to simple races, peasants and savages.... The peasant loves ornament and decorates his walls. The civilized man wears a well-cut suit and is the owner of easel pictures and books.” Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, p. 143

¹³⁸ For Le Corbusier the penetrative gaze is to be liberated, but only for men. The argument revolves around notion of comforts, yet the agenda is one of domination: “And What about us, men? A dismal state of affairs! In our dress clothes, we look like generals of the Grand Armee and we wear starched collars! We are uncomfortable....The English suit we wear had nevertheless succeeded in something important. It had *neutralized* us. It is useful to show a neutral appearance in the city. The dominant sign is no longer ostrich feathers in the hat, it is in the gaze. That’s enough.” Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning*, p. 107

architecture, the ideal of transparency inspired the penetration of such layers in order to reveal materiality, structural logic, architectural space or artistic intent. According to Anthony Vidler, Modernity has been haunted by “a myth of transparency...represented, if not constructed...by a universal transparency of building materials, spatial penetration, and the ubiquitous flow of air, light, and physical movement.”¹³⁹ If the white suit concept originated in a desire to theorise a *pure style for architecture*, (i.e. a fresh, new covering), the increasing use of glass in the International Style demonstrated a desire for a *pure architecture* without covering, which represented political openness, democracy, clarity and honesty.

However, the claim to transparency of the modernist movement came under careful scrutiny, demonstrating that transparency cannot be reduced to the simple use of glass in architecture, or that obscurity is not always signified by the presence of opaque surfaces. It was Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, whose insightful essay “Transparency: Literal, Phenomenal” (first published in 1963) highlighted an alternative conception of transparency in architecture. Rowe and Slutzky proposed “phenomenal transparency” as “a simultaneous perception of different spatial locations,” and “that which is clearly ambiguous”¹⁴⁰ They compared phenomenal transparency to the visual effects produced by Kandinsky’s “Dream Motion” where the overlapping of the geometric figures represented in two-dimensions make the relative spatial locations of these figures difficult to fathom.

Rowe and Slutzky demonstrated their conception of phenomenal transparency in architecture through a comparison of Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus building (as an example of literal transparency) with Le Corbusier’s villa at Garches (as an example of phenomenal transparency). The Bauhaus, they argued, relies on an over-dramatization of glass, with the assumption that literal transparency produces the same visual effect as Cubists paintings. However, since the Bauhaus building uses transparency literally, “the observer is...denied the possibility of experiencing the conflict between a space which is explicit and another which is implied.”¹⁴¹ Thus, the Bauhaus approach lacks “potential ambiguity” in that the

¹³⁹ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.: London, 1992, p. 217

¹⁴⁰ Colin Rowe and Robert Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal” in Colin Rowe, *The Mathematics of Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, The MIT Press, Cambridge Mass.: London, 1976, pp. 159-185, p. 161

¹⁴¹ Rowe and Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal” in *The Mathematics of Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, p. 171

viewer is “denied the possibility of penetrating a stratified space which is defined either by real planes or their imaginary projections.”¹⁴²

The villa at Garches however, is presented as a case of phenomenal transparency displaying a contradiction between the façade and internal spatial configuration. In this case glass is used more as a taut surface carefully framed and framing other elements in the façade, rather than simply used for literal transparency. Rowe and Slutzky argue that the façade of the villa allows for multiple interpretations, or *clearly ambiguous* readings.

Rowe and Slutzky’s essay highlights the seduction and the visual richness of phenomenal transparency in architecture, which is in fact an *effect* produced by the careful arrangement of surfaces. Literal transparency is solely based on the natural characteristics of the material glass, in which one can see beyond its surfaces. Phenomenal transparency however, is based on organizational complexity where opaque and transparent surfaces are arranged in such a way that they imply different interpretations. This latter approach to transparency includes an immanent ambiguity that offers the potential for multiple readings:

...there is a continuous dialectic between fact and implication. The reality of deep space is constantly opposed to the inference of shallow space; and by means of the resultant tension, reading after reading is enforced.¹⁴³

Phenomenal transparency demonstrates the visual richness of organizing surfaces in a manner that offers a multitude of interpretations. This shifts the emphasis from the penetration of surfaces for visual and conceptual clarity, to surface design, or surface expression to arrive at visual complexity and interpretive diversity. Moreover, such conceptions demonstrate that transparency does not necessitate the thinning-out, disappearance or puncturing of surfaces, nor an association with tectonic exposure or conceptual clarity.¹⁴⁴ In other words, it is possible to be transparent, without being clear and it is possible to be communicative without being literal. Phenomenal transparency highlights the richness of implication and

¹⁴² Rowe and Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal” in *The Mathematics of Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, p. 171

¹⁴³ Rowe and Slutzky, “Transparency: Literal and Phenomenal” in *The Mathematics of Ideal Villa and Other Essays*, p.170

¹⁴⁴ See Hal Foster’s criticism of Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum: “Gehry is frequently associated with Serra, but Serra exposes the construction of his sculptures for all to see, and Gehry is often tectonically obscure.” Foster, *Design and Crime and Other Diatribes*, p. 37



Figure 2.3: Literal and Phenomenal Transparency: Bauhaus Building (Walter Gropius) and Villa Garche (Le Corbusier). Rowe and Slutzky argue that most images of the Bauhaus are taken at an angle in order to demonstrate its three dimensionality. The same literal strategy is adopted for transparency, in that depth is exposed through large panes of glass. Images of Le Corbusier’s villa however, are often taken from the front view, because it is through the arrangement of the surfaces of the façade that notions of depth are expressed. The glass windows are treated as the surfaces of the façade that imply depth, not holes that expose the deep interior.

Source: http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/gropius.html

the significance of surface expression. It also demonstrates that allusions to depth can be compressed to the surfaces, a process that can be called *surfacing depth*. Further still, phenomenal transparency offers the possibility of seeing architectural openings (windows, doors, screens, and so on) as the continuation of the architectural surfaces, rather than visual holes in the wall.

The modernist ideal of transparency follows a binary hierarchical system that attempts to go beyond superficial effects in order to arrive at a comforting clarity. Rowe and Slutzky’s essay however, demonstrates an alternative approach that relishes the ambiguity of surfaces and the interpretation of their effects. Perhaps the modernists ideals operate in absolute binary oppositions (masking v transparent) while the concept of phenomenal transparency approaches surfaces through “fuzzy logic.”¹⁴⁵ This suggests the possibility of other modes of communication that cannot be reduced to literal transparency or opacity. This alternative approach to transparency suggests that concepts such as clear ambiguity, translucency, or phenomenal transparency offer a greater potential for diverse interpretations. Moreover, it is possible to imply notions of depth through the arrangement of opaque surfaces, or surface effects. This not only encourages a shift of emphasis from the simple use of materials to their expressive organization, but it also indicates a different movement of thought. In this alternative approach, the mind does not penetrate surfaces to arrive at a hidden depth, instead it floats across them, reading their effects to access *simulated* depths. Consequently, the pleasure of interpretation does not arise from clearly seeing the layers of construction, but rather from exploring the expansive complexity of surface expression.

Glass used literally to represent transparency is denied its surfaces and is often associated with the absence of masking. Such a strategy is considered to open up the body of architecture to inspection, symbolising a clarity of operation that continues to be regarded as the epitome of social morality. However, glass is not

¹⁴⁵ Fuzzy logic introduced in 1965 by Lotfali Asker Zadeh at the University of California, Berkeley, is a system of logic that attempts to define degrees of logic as being distinct to probabilities. Asker Zadeh writes: “The term *fuzzy logic* is used ... to describe an imprecise logical system, FL, in which the truth-values are fuzzy subsets of the unit interval with linguistic labels such as *true, false, not true, very true, quite true, not very true and not very false*, etc. ... As a consequence, the truth tables and the rules of inference in fuzzy logic are (i) inexact and (ii) dependent on the meaning associated with the primary truth-value *true* as well as the modifiers *very, quite, more or less*, etc.” See Lotfali Asker Zadeh, “Fuzzy Logic and Approximate Reasoning” in *Synthese*, 1975; vol. 30, numbers 3-4, Springer, Dordrecht, pp. 407–428, p. 407

completely transparent: it always has an opacity that renders it *translucent*. Glass has surfaces that can be dyed, painted, etched or sand blasted. In fact, in most cases glass is used in architecture because its surfaces are highly visible. It is the minute reflectivity, the slight tint, the glowing edges, or the waviness of the surface that separates glass from a mere hole in the wall and allows it to be considered as a visual symbol of modernity.

2.1.3 Postmodernity and the “Decorated Shed” Concept

“Postmodernism” began appearing in a variety of artistic fields in the 1960s and 1970s. In architecture, postmodernism involves a renunciation of the modernist preoccupation with stylistic purity, transparency, rationalism or aesthetic elitism.¹⁴⁶ Robert Venturi’s theories were particularly influential in a move away from the ideals of the International Style towards the diversity of styles that was later associated with the postmodern movement in architecture.

In 1966, Venturi established a series of principles that challenged the ideals of modernism and promoted “the difficult unity of inclusion” over the “easy unity of exclusion.”¹⁴⁷ The aim was the reappropriation of different styles (both past and present) that were forbidden by High Modernism. Venturi proposed “the seemingly chaotic juxtaposition” which would express “an intriguing kind of vitality and validity,” that would produce “an unexpected approach to unity as well.”¹⁴⁸ This was a call for a more complex approach to architecture, one that did not reveal its logic so easily: “In the validly complex building or cityscape, the eye does not want to be too easily or too quickly satisfied in its search for unity within a whole.”¹⁴⁹ Venturi celebrated continuity and diversity as a reaction to the modernist uniformity:

Inflection is a means of distinguishing diverse parts while implying continuity. It involves the art of the fragment... If inflection can occur at many scales – from detail of a building to a whole building – it can contain varying degrees of intensity as well. Moderate degrees of inflection have a kind of implied continuity that affirms the whole. Extreme inflection literally becomes continuity. Today we emphasize our opportunities to

¹⁴⁶ Postmodernists like Robert Venturi Philip Johnson, Christopher Jencks, Kenneth Frampton, or Michael Graves renounced the abstract formalism of the International Style and celebrated visual complexity, stylistic eclecticism and historicism.

¹⁴⁷ Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*. (2nd ed). Architectural Press, London, 1977, p. 16

¹⁴⁸ Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, p. 104

¹⁴⁹ Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, p. 104

express the literal continuities of structure and materials – such as the welded joint, skin structures, and reinforced concrete. Except for the flush joint of early Modern architecture, implied continuity is rare. The shadow joint of Mies’ vocabulary tends to exaggerate separation.¹⁵⁰

Venturi problematized the rigid hierarchies of modernism. What he aspired to was a complexity that would free architecture from the dogmas of modernist theory. This would not be a complete dissolution of boundaries and a state of meaningless chaos, rather a questioning of these boundaries that would make them the very place of architectural production.

Though *Complexity and Contradiction* (1966) laid out the theoretical aspiration for a move away from the uniformity of the International Style, it was *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) that provided a blue-print and a working metaphor for the postmodern turn in architecture. In it, Venturi and his colleagues celebrated the most recognizable forms of American commercial architecture, ranging from the Las Vegas Strip to billboards, neon lights, and parking lots. Moreover, they categorised architecture into two types: the “decorated shed,” “where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently,” and the “building-becoming-sculpture” or “the duck”, where “the architectural system of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form.”¹⁵¹ Whilst acknowledging that most architecture is a mix of the two, Venturi and his colleagues promoted the “decorated shed” concept as a replacement for the “duck” architecture of modernism, arguing that the modernist agenda either reduces the building to “dry expressionism, empty and boring – and in the end irresponsible” or, ironically, by rejecting “explicit symbolism and frivolous appliqué ornament,” it distorts “the whole building into one big ornament. In substituting ‘articulation’ for decoration, it ... become[s] a duck.”¹⁵²

Venturi implied that separating the ornamental layer from functional structure is in fact a more honest way of dealing with ornament.¹⁵³ Thus, the decorated shed model allowed a clear division of responsibility: surface ornament

¹⁵⁰ Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, pp. 88-98

¹⁵¹ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1977, p. 87

¹⁵² Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, pp. 101-103

¹⁵³ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 106

provided embellishment, symbolism and visual communication, whilst structure dealt with gravity and functional necessities without hindering stylistic play at the surface level. Venturi rejected the modernist abandonment of ornament in search for purist architecture represented by white walls or transparency. As a result, the decorated shed concept represented an attempt to explore the positive aspects of the metaphor of clothing, i.e. the diversity and complexity of styles and the playful variations that it implicated.

It is possible to argue that the decorated shed concept was the heightened celebration of the metaphor of clothing in architecture, which was closer to the Semperian textile than the gender driven clothing of Loos or Le Corbusier. This is because the decorated shed concept freed surface ornament from the laws of structure and allowed the symbolic surface to operate independently. In other words, unlike the white suits of modernity, Venturi’s concept was not bound by the rules (proportions or gender) of the architectural “body” and therefore allowed architectural surfaces to participate freely with the images, signs and screens of the electronic era.¹⁵⁴

Yet, Venturi’s model maintained and in fact exaggerated the modernist association of ornament with shallow superficiality. After all the decorated shed metaphor was an attempt to be more honest about the difference between surface play and structural function. Therefore, Venturi’s concept can be interpreted as a *clarification of roles* and a *disciplining of ornament* to its appropriate place in architecture. Thus, ornament was accepted as superficial signage but nothing more. One can see the traces of the modernist disdain for ornamentation in Venturi’s “postmodern” theory:

When Modern architects righteously abandoned ornament on buildings, they unconsciously designed buildings that *were* ornament. In promoting Space and Articulation over symbolism and ornament, they distorted the whole building into a duck. They substituted for the innocent and inexpensive practice of applied decoration on a conventional shed the rather cynical and expensive distortion of program and structure to promote a duck; minimegastructures are mostly ducks. It is now time to re-

¹⁵⁴ Venturi’s et al wrote: “If the Classical orders symbolized ‘rebirth of the Golden Age of Rome,’ modern I-beams represent ‘honest expression of modern technology as space’ – or something like that...however it was ‘modern’ technology of the Industrial Revolution that was symbolized by Mies, and this technology, not current electronic technology, is still the source for Modern architectural symbolism today.” Venturi, Scott Brown and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 115

evaluate the once-horrifying statement of John Ruskin that architecture is the decoration of construction, but we should append the warning of Pugin: It is all right to decorate construction but never construct decoration.¹⁵⁵

Venturi’s theory maintains a distinct anxiety about embellishment and ornamentation. If ornament is to return to architecture, it must be contained and segregated from the function of architecture. The decorated shed concept suggests a clear distinction between the ornamental layer and the underlying structure. Though the concept is an attempt to free surface communication, it nevertheless falls victim to the hierarchical order that it inherits from modernist theory and the metaphor of clothing. Semper saw the essence of architecture in the ornamental textile that was then supported by structure, however, Venturi’s decorated shed metaphor defines the ornamental layer as secondary cladding *applied* to primary structure. Thus, Venturi promoted surface communication and expression, but such activities remained secondary to the primary act of construction.

Because of this conceptual hierarchy, early postmodern architecture inspired by Venturi’s decorated shed limited embellishment to a superficial veneer of stylistic historicism (“pastiche”) while structural design rarely ventured beyond the shed concept. Michael Graves Portland Public Service Building, Piazza d’Italia by Charles Willard Moore, or the Horton Plaza by Jon Jerde are clear examples of the negative effects of the decorated shed concept.

This thesis proposes that although Venturi’s decorated shed concept succeeded in subverting the dominant dogmas of modernism, it could not escape the binary hierarchical system set up by them. This conceptual dependence is similar to Venturi’s counter-quote “less is a bore” which reverses Mies van der Rohe’s “less is more,” but mimics its operation. Consequently, much of early postmodern architecture was a reactionary gesture to the heroic stance of the International Style, and merely “mirrored” the principles of its predecessor. In the same way, the decorated shed metaphor continues the valuation of surface ornamentation according to the *order of construction*, even though it rejects the modernists’ purification of ornament. Therefore, much early postmodern architecture wore a *historicist suit*, or a *colourful costume* designed merely to subvert

¹⁵⁵ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 163

the dominant white suits of modernism, not challenge the hierarchy between ornament and structure that determines the former as secondary to the latter.

Nevertheless, the aspirations of Venturi and other postmodernists in dismantling the rigid laws laid down by the International Style were of great benefit to architecture. The decorated shed concept allowed greater freedom of surface expression, while the colourful signage of the Las Vegas Strip was appropriated to promote more sensitivity to the needs of ordinary people, the logic of popular culture, and the potential of rapidly evolving electronic technologies. Such theories argued that it is possible to create an architecture that includes complexity in a unified whole, while remaining sensitive to the needs of the ordinary user.¹⁵⁶ Such architecture would be more flexible and adaptable to its cultural milieu as it would not be controlled by rigid or predefined ideals.

2.2 QUESTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY IN AN AGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL IMAGERY: “AURA,” “SPECTACLE,” AND THE “SIMULACRUM”

The whitewash of modernism was the ornamental surface disciplined to a layer of white paint, the thinness of which was simultaneously an indication of its conceptual subservience to the architectural body beneath, and an effect of the seductive tension between complimentary processes of covering and revealing in the metaphor of clothing. Thus, in modernist theory, the surfaces of architecture were valued in relation to the structure beneath, which represented the primary elements of architecture.

The decorated shed metaphor freed ornament from the rigid laws of structure, however ornamentation remained a secondary operation relegated to the superficialities of buildings. Thus, it was “all right” to decorate construction

¹⁵⁶ Venturi and his colleagues attempted to *include* popular culture in architectural theory, with the hope that architects would become more sensitive to the needs of ordinary people: “...learning from popular culture does not remove the architect from his or her status in high status in high culture. But it may alter high culture to make it more sympathetic to current needs and issues. Because high culture and its cultists (last year’s variety) are powerful in urban renewal and other establishment circles, we feel that people’s architecture as the people want it (and not as some architect decides Man needs it) does not stand much chance against urban renewal until it hangs in the academy and therefore is acceptable to the decision makers.” Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, 1977, p. 161

“but never construct decoration.”¹⁵⁷ The primary task of architecture remained the construction of structure: the originary architectural body, which was later supplemented with ornament. The decorated shed arrangement was proposed as a more transparent expression of this hierarchical order.

Thus, the modernist and postmodernist theories that formulate ornament in architecture follow a persistent binary hierarchy that depreciates surface appearances by association with the superficial, the superfluous or the secondary. This thesis argues that this association is also a symptom of the separation of appearances from reality where the former is either a deficient representation of the latter, or a masking layer that (partially or completely) hides the originary elements.

The first section of this chapter has been concerned with the relationship between ornament and structure. The second part of this chapter however focuses on the notion of image following the proposition that the anxiety towards ornament in architecture parallels an embedded mistrust of images in wider culture. With this in mind, the remainder of this chapter explores three related concepts: aura, spectacle and the simulacrum that have developed in parallel with technological progress in twentieth century. These concepts are mentioned not only because they are influential for the theorisation of attitudes towards images and their technological reproduction in the twentieth century, but also because they are relevant to the architectural case used in this study, i.e. Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum.

2.2.1 The Reproduction of Image: Aura and Authenticity

Since the advent of “mass media”¹⁵⁸ writers and critics have been analysing the effects of new technologies on notions of authenticity, creativity and social change. One of the most influential essays on this theme is Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), in which he argues new technologies have caused the “withering of the aura” of works of art by making

¹⁵⁷ Venturi, Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 163

¹⁵⁸ The term “Mass Media” appeared in the 1920s to denote a section of the media that was designed for large audiences. The term was coined around the same time as the advent of nationwide radio networks, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines, even though books and manuscripts were available centuries before the term came into public use.

them accessible to the masses.¹⁵⁹ Benjamin defines “aura” as the false sense of awe and reverence that one might feel in front of an original work of art, which would have more to do with the “cult value” of the work than its true artistic merit. This cult value can be added cultural value, a sense of privilege or importance generated by limited accessibility, or even association with religious belief.¹⁶⁰

Benjamin argues that new technologies of reproduction emancipate the work of art from “its parasitical dependence on ritual.”¹⁶¹ This leads to a shift of emphasis from cult value, generated by reverence for authenticity to “exhibition value”¹⁶² which leads to a reversal of function: “Instead of being based on ritual, [the work of art] begins to be based on another practice - politics.”¹⁶³ For Benjamin, technological advancement has created a unique possibility to replace the false importance of a work of art with a valuable instrumentality that could be used to change people’s lives for the better:

To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose “sense of the universal equality of things” has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.¹⁶⁴

Thus, the mass reproduction of art has the beneficial effect of “reactivating” the object reproduced, leading to a new and fresh approach to cultural production:

One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced. These two

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin writes: “...that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.” Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, pp. 211-245 p. 221

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 224

¹⁶¹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 224

¹⁶² Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 224

¹⁶³ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 224

¹⁶⁴ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 225

processes lead to a tremendous shattering of tradition which is the obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind.¹⁶⁵

For Benjamin, film, newspapers, photography and other technologies of mass reproduction, are fundamental to a departure from traditional models of thought that focus on the auratic, the authentic or the original, which is wrapped in a shell of uniqueness: possessing “the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be.”¹⁶⁶ The removal of such distancing shells and the increased accessibility of the reproduced image, word or scene, allows the masses to be more involved in culture and politics.

For Benjamin auratic art possesses a shell that separates it from the masses. New technologies however, penetrate this shell, making art accessible. If traditional art operates by maintaining a natural distance from reality, technological art “penetrates deeply into its web.” Benjamin explains this using the following analogy, which is quoted at length:

How does the cameraman compare with the painter? To answer this we take recourse to an analogy with a surgical operation. The surgeon represents the polar opposite of the magician. The magician heals a sick person by the laying on of hands; the surgeon cuts into the patient’s body. The magician maintains the natural distance between the patient and himself; though he reduces it very slightly by the laying on of hands, he greatly increases it by virtue of his authority. The surgeon does exactly the reverse; he greatly diminishes the distance between himself and the patient by penetrating into the patient’s body, and increases it but little by the caution with which his hand moves among the organs. In short, in contrast to the magician - who is still hidden in the medical practitioner - the surgeon at the decisive moment abstains from facing the patient man to man; rather, it is through the operation that he penetrates into him. ...Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web.¹⁶⁷

In the case of the painter, the relationship between art and reality is mediated through the surfaces of the canvas and the painter’s creation offers a picture of reality that is evidently tainted by his equipment and judgment. Therefore, one might call his art clearly ambiguous or *phenomenally transparent*. The cameraman

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 221

¹⁶⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 222

¹⁶⁷ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 236

however, operates differently to the painter. His image of reality is an assemblage of multiple fragments that resemble reality more accurately, but which are “put together under a new law.”¹⁶⁸

Benjamin argues that this representation of reality is “more significant than that of the painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality, which is free of all equipment.”¹⁶⁹ However, it is questionable whether film or photography depicts reality “free of all equipment.” The cameraman’s image of reality is in fact tainted by the shape of the lens, the camera’s point of view, or the particular framing of the subject. Therefore, the cameraman’s operation is in fact “literal transparency” or more precisely *minimal translucency*, in that much like the lens through which he captures his subjects, his intervention is difficult to detect, but nonetheless present. In other words, aura is not absent, just more difficult to detect. The painter’s operation on the other hand, is *maximal translucent*, in that it is clearly tainted with his interventions.

Benjamin explains that the contemporary condition is characterized by “the desire of contemporary masses to bring things closer, spatially and humanly,” and their “bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction.”¹⁷⁰ He attributes both of these developments to the increasing participation of the masses in contemporary life and the gradual disappearance of aura. In this context, artistic productions based on new technologies of mass reproduction maintain a different relationship to authenticity, one that is not based on traditional platonic definitions:

To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the ‘authentic’ print makes no sense.¹⁷¹

Though Benjamin celebrated the effects of new technologies in providing participation and accessibility, he conceded that under capitalism, technology was

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 236

¹⁶⁹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 236

¹⁷⁰ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 223

¹⁷¹ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 224

not often used in a positive way and the potential of mass media to include the masses in politics might in fact never be fully utilized. The film industry he argued, was in fact “trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion promoting spectacles and dubious speculations.”¹⁷²

Such concern is later theorised by Guy Debord, for whom mass media disseminate false images that *overpower* authentic reality. The evolution of this distrust for images and their reproduction culminates in the theories of Jean Baudrillard for whom images become simulations, which *destroy* authentic reality. Thus, if in early twentieth century technology offers the possibility of progress through accessibility and the withering of false importance, a few decades later, the rapid development of technology catalyses nostalgic theories that consider the dissemination of images as the masking or even the destruction of reality. This thesis argues that such attitudes towards imagery and mass media follow a traditional Platonic model of thought that is based on the hierarchical separation of appearance from reality.

2.2.2 The Dominance of Image: The Spectacle and the Speculative

If in 1936 Benjamin celebrated the withering of aura, by 1967 Guy Debord and others began to highlight the misappropriation of mass media under capitalism. Debord saw the modern society as one in which lived life is quickly becoming a represented life by “an immense accumulation of *spectacles*.”¹⁷³ The current world, he argued, is characterized by the separation of image from reality, where the spectacle has become dominant over real life, and the production of the spectacle has become the ultimate goal of society.

Debord defines the spectacle as an “autonomous image” and the “concrete inversion of life.”¹⁷⁴ The spectacle is an “abuse of the world of vision” and “a product of the techniques of mass dissemination of images.”¹⁷⁵ The spectacle substitutes meaning and reality, where the false appears to be how the true should be: “In a world which *really is topsy-turvy*, the true is a moment of the false.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, p. 233

¹⁷³ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, Rebel Press, London, 2006, 1

¹⁷⁴ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 2,

¹⁷⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 5,

¹⁷⁶ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 9

Therefore, “the spectacle is *affirmation* of appearance and affirmation of all human life, namely social life, as mere appearance.”¹⁷⁷

Debord argues that in modern society, the spectacle becomes a barrier between human beings and the real world and the sense of vision takes precedence over the other senses. The sense of vision as “the most abstract and the most mystifiable sense” causes the “generalized abstraction of present-day society.”¹⁷⁸ In the resulting condition dominated by imagery, appearances present themselves as “enormously positive, indisputable and inaccessible”¹⁷⁹ and the spectacle dictates that whatever appears is good and whatever that is good must appear. Debord suggests that such powerful imagery develops an attitude of “passive acceptance”¹⁸⁰ in spectators who are faced with a “monopoly of appearances.”¹⁸¹ In other words, the spectacle does not create a dialogue, but in fact a *monologue* where the observer has no choice but to accept.

For Debord, the spectacle degrades “concrete life” into a “*speculative* universe.”¹⁸² This is a world in which reality is masked by appearances, where the spectacle removes power from the people by making them passive spectators, seduced and dominated by spectacular appearances. Separation becomes a key concept: separation of image from reality, or individual from society. This separation is seen to be accelerated by new technologies (TV, cinema, photography, virtual reality and other optical media) that split society into individual spectators and flatten reality into superficiality.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁷ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 10

¹⁷⁸ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 18

¹⁷⁹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 12

¹⁸⁰ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 14

¹⁸¹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 14

¹⁸² “The concrete life of everyone has been degraded into a *speculative* universe.” Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 19

¹⁸³ “The spectacle is the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself, its laudatory monologue. It is the self-portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence. The fetishistic, purely objective appearance of spectacular relations conceals the fact that they are relations among men and classes: a second nature with its fatal laws seems to dominate our environment. But the spectacle is not the necessary product of technical development seen as a natural development. The society of the spectacle is on the contrary the form which chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of “mass media” which are its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement. If the social needs of the epoch in which such techniques are developed can only be satisfied through their mediation, if the administration of this society and all contact among men can no longer take place except through the intermediary

Evidently, Debord’s conception of the spectacle is based on a traditional hierarchy that inspires transcendence: images are fraudulent copies of authentic reality and must be surpassed to arrive at what lies hidden behind or beyond. Therefore, images and appearances are not only secondary categories, but they are also screens that cause separation, imprisonment and illusion: “The spectator’s consciousness, imprisoned in a flattened universe, bound by the screen of the spectacle behind which his life as been deported.”¹⁸⁴ Although Debord blames the spectacle on “all the *weaknesses* of the Western philosophical project which undertook to comprehend activity in terms of the categories of *seeing*,”¹⁸⁵ this thesis argues that his approach in fact follows and continues the Plato’s philosophical models whose metaphors and analogies¹⁸⁶ established the very ocular nature of the Western philosophical project. It is therefore not surprising that Debord depicts humanity as imprisoned in the flattened universe of spectacular imagery while Plato considers humanity as imprisoned in the shadowy cave of false appearances.¹⁸⁷

Like Plato, Debord associates appearances with fraud while those who consume them are banished to the “margins of existence”:

The spectacle obliterates the boundaries between self and world by crushing the self besieged by the presence-absence of the world and it obliterates the boundaries between true and false by driving all lived truth below the *real presence* of fraud ensured by the organization of appearance. ...The acceptance and consumption of commodities are at the heart of this pseudo-response to a communication without response. ... In the terms applied by Gabel to a completely different pathological level, “the abnormal need for representation here compensates for a tortuous feeling of being on the margin of existence.”¹⁸⁸

of this power of instantaneous communication, it is because this “communication” is essentially unilateral. The concentration of “communication” is thus an accumulation, in the hands of the existing system’s administration, of the means which allow it to carry on this particular administration. The generalized cleavage of the spectacle is inseparable from the modern State, namely from the general form of cleavage within society, the product of the division of social labor and the organ of class domination.” Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 218

¹⁸⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 19

¹⁸⁶ See “metaphor of the sun,” “analogy of the divided line” and the “allegory of the cave” in Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield, (507b-509c), (509d-513e) and (514a-520a)

¹⁸⁷ See section 3.1 of the thesis. See also Plato, *Republic*, (514a-520a)

¹⁸⁸ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 219

For Debord, in a society of spectacle technology becomes a tool of domination, which operates by inducing isolation.¹⁸⁹ This is what Benjamin warned against: the misuse of technology in the hand of capitalism. The spectacle is therefore “capital to such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image,”¹⁹⁰ but this image separates humanity from reality, causing passivity, misery and isolation.

2.2.3 The Autonomy of Image: Simulation and “Hyperreality”

Debord’s concern for the negative effects of mass media continues in Jean Baudrillard’s theories who translates the society of the spectacle into a *society of the simulacrum*. In *Simulacra and Simulation* (1985) Baudrillard states that in modern society there has developed a condition of appearances without reference to any origin or reality and not merely a separation from the real. He calls this condition a state of hyperreality where truth and meaning is taken out of the equation and where images operate differently:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.¹⁹¹

The hyperreal is the effect of the fourth phase of the image as the “simulacrum.” The first phase of image is when it is “the reflection of a profound reality”. This is called good appearance where “representation is of the sacramental order.”¹⁹² The second phase is an image that masks or *denatures* reality. For Baudrillard, it is “an evil appearance”, where it is “of the order of malfeasance.”¹⁹³ Debord’s conception of the spectacle falls into this second category. The third phase of the image is characterized by the masking of the *absence* of a profound reality, in which case the image becomes “of the order of sorcery.”¹⁹⁴ This is where image exploits the desire for the existence of reality, but masks the absence of it. In this phase, image remains dependent on reality; albeit on the absence of reality. Finally in the fourth phase,

¹⁸⁹ “Technology is based on isolation, and the technical process isolates in turn. From the automobile to television, all the *goods selected* by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of ‘lonely crowds.’” Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 28

¹⁹⁰ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 34

¹⁹¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.1

¹⁹² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

¹⁹³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

¹⁹⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

image is no longer “of the order of appearance, but of simulation.”¹⁹⁵ In this case, image *simulates* the existence of reality and is considered autonomous or *independent* of true reality.¹⁹⁶

Baudrillard sees images as “murderers of the real,”¹⁹⁷ as perfect simulations with no reference to reality. For him simulation is opposed to representation since it is the “*the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.*”¹⁹⁸ In other words, simulation occurs when the sign destroys its relation to the signified (to the real), and exists independently. The consequence of simulacra for society is argued to be a sense of nostalgia.¹⁹⁹ Faced with a “plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality” one has to take refuge in the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared. For Baudrillard the dissemination of simulacra causes the real to become hallucination and the hyperrealism of simulation to dominate.²⁰⁰ The only way to escape this world of hallucinatory simulations is through negativity or criticism.²⁰¹ For Baudrillard, ideology cannot escape the simulacrum either, since ideology only corresponds to a “corruption of reality through signs”²⁰² and its attempts to restore the objective process, to restore the truth, is nothing but a failure since there is no truth to be found behind the simulacrum.

Baudrillard’s conception creates a model of the universe not as a circle but as a “pure inflexion or circular inflexion” without any “focal point” or “centre of periphery.”²⁰³ What remains is the flatland of superficial imagery that consumes

¹⁹⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

¹⁹⁶ According to Baudrillard, simulation can be explained by an example of someone who, instead of faking that he is ill, by merely staying in bed, manages to simulate an illness by producing in himself some of the symptoms. Thus with simulation, it is the very principle of reality which is problematized and not merely the presence or absence of it.

¹⁹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 5

¹⁹⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

¹⁹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

²⁰⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 23

²⁰¹ “Power floats like money, like language, like theory. Criticism and negativity alone still secrete a phantom of the reality of power....One must not resist this process by trying to confront the system and destroy it, because this system that is dying from being dispossessed of its death expects nothing but that from us: that we give the system back its death, that we revive it through the negative.” Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 24

²⁰² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 27

²⁰³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 29

reality. Appearances take over essence whilst subjects and focal points disappear giving way to simulacrum.²⁰⁴

Baudrillard goes beyond Debord’s theories by arguing that even mass media does not operate from a source of power and politics. Instead the media should be thought of as a “genetic code” residing on the surface and mutating the real into the hyperreal.²⁰⁵ Thus, the simulacrum marks “the end of perspectival and panoptic space” where true power is only a hypothesis, thus the “very abolition of the spectacular.”²⁰⁶

Baudrillard’s simulacrum as a concept is different from Debord’s spectacle because in simulation, there is no dialectic or the separation of the image from the real. Everything collapses onto the surface through an “implosion” of meaning and depth. Thus, in a catastrophic turn, surface replaces the radiating mode of causality suggested by the Platonic tradition²⁰⁷ and even the differential mode of determination as suggested by Leibniz’s Monadology.²⁰⁸

Although Baudrillard seems to offer a novel conception of image, surface and appearance in the contemporary condition, his theories contain a nihilistic and nostalgic undertone, which longs for the authentic reality that has become absent.²⁰⁹ For creative production, such nihilistic attitudes cause hypocrisy, deceit or even inhibition in the exploration of new technologies. Nonetheless, there is much to agree with in Baudrillard’s theory, without having to adopt a pessimistic attitude towards images and the technologies of their (re)production.

²⁰⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 29

²⁰⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 30

²⁰⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 30

²⁰⁷ See section 3.1 of this thesis.

²⁰⁸ See chapter 5 of the thesis. See also Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology*, trans. Robert Latta, Forgotten Books, 1968.

²⁰⁹ Baudrillard admits: “I am a nihilist.” Later he writes: “If it is nihilistic to be obsessed by the mode of disappearance, and no longer by the mode of production, then I am a nihilist.” See *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 160 and p. 162.

2.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has been concerned with the association of ornament with superficiality and image with inauthenticity. Both discourses of ornament and image are argued to reveal important clues about established attitudes towards surfaces and appearances in architecture. Theories of ornament are significant not only because they relate to surface effects, but also because the “modernist” and the “postmodernist” turn in architecture were theorised through a reformulation of ornament and decoration in architecture.

One of the most evident features of the modernist agenda was a radical break from the ornamental excesses of past styles, either by promoting “white walls” or by the widespread use of glass to achieve visual and conceptual transparency. This new approach was an exploration of new materials and construction techniques, but also a response to the capitalistic machine and the logic of industrial production, which demanded simplicity, uniformity, and standardisation for rapid and economical manufacturability.

The question of appearance (and visual communication) was also responsible for the genesis of the postmodern turn in architecture. Faced with new technologies, architects began to replace metaphors inspired by clothing with others based on signs, billboards and the electronic screens, which had begun to replace the industrial machines of early twentieth century as symbols of modernity. Venturi’s “decorated shed” concept was one such model that allowed the building facade to engage with visual communication, freed from the restraints of structure. Much like their predecessors, the postmodernists followed the logic of late-capitalism, in that they allowed for the easy customization of the industrial shed.

Inspired by Semper’s “textile wall” and the “principle of dressing,” early modernists used the metaphor of clothing to describe the role of ornament in architectural design. However, the metaphor implied that the ornamental layer was foreign to the rest of the building. Thus, as soon as surface ornament was likened to clothing, it became *artificial* and *detachable* from the primary elements of architecture. The metaphor of clothing established a familiar philosophical model that defined surface appearances as inauthentic artificialities that mask the observer from the natural reality beneath. Such conceptions of ornament followed the separation of

“image” from “reality,” whereby the former is considered as masking, hiding or denying access to the latter. Consequently, it is argued that both notions of ornament and image suffer from the effects of a hierarchical ordering that depreciates them as secondary, artificial, superficial or even deceitful.

As concepts such as “ornament,” “appearance” and “image” became fraudulent representations of reality the desire for *transcending* such illusionary effects began to dominate architectural creativity. This tendency for transcendence within the modernist theoretical discourse shifted the emphasis from surface creativity to notions of “transparency,” “clarity” and “authenticity” and the exposition of the relationship between surface and the reality that it masks. It is argued that this approach to architecture followed the traditional Platonic model (with its rigid hierarchy and its desire for transcendence), which preferred “structure,” “materiality” or “function” as primary categories, while it devalued “surface,” “ornament,” or “form” as secondary or subservient categories. Thus, one group became original and necessary, the other copy and superfluous.

By transforming Semper’s textile wall into a clothed wall, and by shifting the emphasis from surface expression to an appropriate clothing of structure, modernist theories defined the wall as a dichotomous entity, which became subjugated by binary power struggles. If Semper saw the essence of monumental architecture in surface expression (the colourful textile or its reincarnations in ornament) the modernists made surface expression subservient to the logic of structure. Therefore, ornament became associated with the “superficial,” and surface associated with the “ornamental,” both terms indicating shallowness, decadence, deceit or insubstantiality.

Though ornament was generally deplored in modernist theory,²¹⁰ the appeal of beautified appearances remained strong in architectural praxis. This necessitated a different solution which would not be associated with the styles of the past. Consequently, the white paint or the glimmering surfaces of glass (and metal)²¹¹ were substituted for ornamentation, not only representing purity, honesty

²¹⁰ Particularly in the writings of Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier and other pioneers of Modernism in architecture. See Wigley, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 2001.

²¹¹ Much of today’s architecture avoids applied ornamentation in the traditional sense of daubing walls or creating colourful patterns or sculptural motifs on the surfaces of buildings. However, alternative materials and construction technologies have facilitated a

and transparency, but also representing natural materiality as opposed to man-made effects.

In order to develop a better approach to ornament, the postmodernists followed the decorated shed model that allowed greater freedom of surface expression. The decorated shed concept was more in tune with Semper's theories as it gave more significance to surface effects. Venturi's theories allowed complexity through irony and double coding, whilst freeing up the architectural surface to engage with visual communication and new technologies that had become an influential aspect of people's lives.

Benjamin's aura, Debord's theory of the spectacle and Baudrillard's conception of the simulacrum demonstrate the transformation of attitudes towards image and its technological reproduction in mass media. If Benjamin highlighted the significance of technology in demystifying art, he also declared the irrelevance of authenticity in an age of reproduction. Thus with the "withering of aura" came the dissemination of images which according to Debord began to dominate real life. However, it is possible to argue that while technologies of mass reproduction worked against traditional notions of reality and authenticity, they also reinforced them in the process. In the case of Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum for example, media reproduction works on two fronts. On the one hand the reproduced images of the building express the aspirations of the design to a wider public audience. On the other hand, such imagery attracts more viewers to visit the physical building in situ. Thus, the images of such architecture can be considered as a continuation of its surface effects, which reinforce the appeal of what is generally referred to as the "original" building from which such "reproductions" are deduced. The large number of visitors to the BGM clearly illustrates this concept.

Yet, images are often considered as inferior copies rather than an extension of reality. Debord's "society of spectacle" and Baudrillard's "hyperreality" are descriptions of a world in which such images and appearances have dominated or destroyed reality. As mentioned previously, such negativity towards the image is

new approach to embellishment. For example in the case of Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, (and many of his later projects) the metallic surfaces (titanium, stainless steel, copper panels) are used for their glittering and reflective effect, which gives them an ornamental quality. This and the flowing forms generated by such surfaces create a spectacular architecture, which simultaneously causes widespread fascination and an equally prevalent unease with the authenticity and significance of such visual delight.

the result of the binary hierarchy between appearances and the real. In such established modes of thought, surfaces are the culprits: the thin outer elements that through their opacity mask and separate the viewer from the rest of the object, (i.e. the reality of the object). Moreover, surfaces facilitate the printing, projection or screening of images that are either bad representations or are illusory simulations with no reference to reality whatsoever. Therefore, surfaces are considered to evoke the shallowness of the superficial or the inauthenticity of the artificial.

This thesis proposes that such distrust of surfaces, images and appearances can be traced back to Plato's philosophy, particularly the "metaphor of the sun,"²¹² "analogy of the divided line"²¹³ and the "allegory of the cave."²¹⁴ Within these metaphors and allegories lay the seeds of established attitudes towards surfaces as visual barriers and effects as *shadowy* representations of a hidden reality. Such metaphors also imply that man-made effects are not to be trusted because they distract from the natural reality. Yet, the proliferation of man-made phenomena continues with greater speeds, where in the current technological world, more time is devoted to interaction with (and through) artificialities (and virtualities). In such a context, continued suspicion towards man-made effects can inhibit creative progress or cause nihilism or nostalgia. In order to arrive at an alternative approach, a reconsideration of traditional philosophical models is necessary beginning with notions of origin and copy.

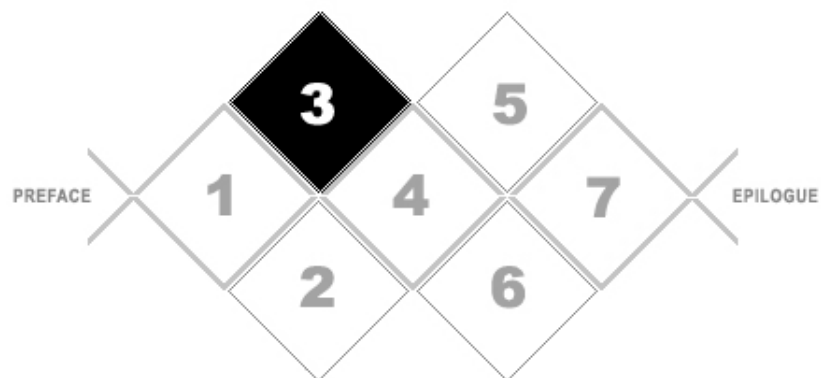
²¹² See Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield, (507b-509c)

²¹³ Plato, *Republic*, (509d-513e)

²¹⁴ Plato, *Republic*, (514a-520a)

CHAPTER THREE

FROM "SHADOWS" TO "SIMULACRA:" THE DEGRADATION OF IMAGE AND THE REAL



*Such would be the successive phases of the image: it is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.*²¹⁵

Jean Baudrillard

*And you should appreciate that there are four states of mind, one for each of the four sections. There's knowledge for the highest section and thought for the second one; and you'd better assign confidence to the third one and conjecture to the final one. You can make an orderly progression out of them, and you should regard them as possessing as much clarity as their objects possess truth.*²¹⁶

Plato

*There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place.*²¹⁷

Jacques Derrida

*When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity.*²¹⁸

Jean Baudrillard

²¹⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

²¹⁶ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Robin Waterfield, Oxford University Press, London, (511d -511e)

²¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, pp. 278-294, p. 286

²¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER THREE

The following chapter elaborates the proposition that the scepticism towards ornament, image and appearance in architecture, is an effect of a particular system of thought that was established by Plato (and his followers) and which in Richard Coyne's words: "has currency in popular culture today... though it arrives here through various transformations."²¹⁹ This traditional model of thought considers surfaces as visual barriers and images as shadowy representations of a hidden reality. Moreover, a reflection on Plato's metaphors and analogies suggests a distrusting, cynical attitude towards man-made effects (including art) since they are considered artificial copies of natural phenomena that are themselves imitation of universal "Ideas" (or ideals).

Following Plato's dialogues, there has been much philosophical debate on the nature of reality and the role of art in philosophy and epistemology. This inevitable process began with Plato's student and successor, Aristotle, who according to Coyne "challenged the authority of Plato's teaching" with a "concrete, 'empiricist' philosophy of matter and form" that is often considered in opposition to the "Platonic idealism."²²⁰ Jonathan Hale elaborates the philosophical opposition between Plato and Aristotle and the role of the artist in each system of thought:

Where Plato tried to show the emergence of the particular from the universal, Aristotle reversed this movement with his normative ideals. Similarly, in Plato, the artist seems trapped by the universals and restricted to the imitation of the forms found in nature. In Aristotle, however, the individual has some freedom to discover, like the scientist, new ideals in the world. The opposition set up here between the two views of the artist became part of a dichotomy between two systems of thought. From Plato's idealism and the dominance of the intellect came the Rationalist tradition of Descartes, Hegel and others. On the hand, from Aristotle came an emphasis on the senses and the empirical philosophies of Locke, Berkeley and Hume.²²¹

A third philosophical figure who was as an "early contributor to this field" is the Roman philosopher Plotinus, who "managed to resolve some of the contradictions

²¹⁹ Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1999, p. 51

²²⁰ Coyne, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, pp. 50-1

²²¹ Jonathan Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester; New York, 2000, pp. 52-3

between the two philosophies set out above²²² by constructing “a hierarchical system to explain the relationship between different levels of being.”²²³ Thus, Plotinus began “an influential aesthetic theory as a component of his neo-Platonism.”²²⁴

Hale provides an overview of aesthetics in philosophy through the works Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Deleuze, which covers many of the major philosophical movements: Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Romanticism, Phenomenology, Structuralism and Post-structuralism. The intention of this chapter is not pursue the intricacies of each philosophical school of thought, as that would be extraneous to the scope of this study. Instead, the thesis attempts to elaborate the Platonic roots of this aesthetic tradition and explore the problematization of this Platonic tradition through the works of recent philosophers such as Derrida and Deleuze who have provided a rich body of concepts for architects and designers in recent years. The particular philosophers chosen for this study are pertinent to the architectural case (The BGM) and a series of conceptual hypotheses related to surface, image and appearances that were inherited from previous research projects.

Thus, the following chapter begins by an exposition of the role of surfaces and their effects in Plato’s transcendental model of thought. It then proceeds to the “closure”²²⁵ of Platonism through Jacques Derrida’s theories, which leads to a

²²² Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester; New York, 2000, p. 53

²²³ Hale writes: “Beginning with Plato’s divine creator as the ultimate source of truth and beauty, Plotinus set up a hierarchical system to explain the relationship between different levels of being. These levels are described as emanations from the “One” – the “Absolute” source of the order of the world. From the One comes the divine mind, which Plotinus called Nous, and from this comes the Soul, both of the world and of individuals. The Soul, as for Plato, controls or pilots the body, which is part of the final emanation into the physical world of objects. All levels partake of the divine order of the One, and it is this order that the Soul comes to recognise in its contemplation of beauty. Individual beauty is therefore a symbol of an underlying cosmic harmony, which the Soul can perceive because of its relationship with the One. This high form of beauty is what the individual soul aspires to, and the artist therefore has this goal in mind. In nature this beauty is only imperfectly represented whereas the artist can discover it more directly from within. It is here that Plotinus parts company with Plato’s thinking, as the artist is given a privileged role in his system.” Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester; New York, 2000, p. 53

²²⁴ Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester; New York, 2000, p. 53

²²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore; London, 1976, p. 14

discussion of the signifier and the concept of “trace.” If Derrida’s theories operate by placing origins “under erasure,” (i.e. deconstruction) Baudrillard’s “hyperreal” is what is left after the *destruction* of the origin: a state of illusion and melancholic fascination. The thesis argues that such processes based on erasure and disappearance evoke the absence of a reality that is lost or impossible to define, which in turn catalyses pessimism and cynicism towards creativity in the contemporary context of mass imagery and media reproduction.

This thesis argues that if in Plato’s analogies surfaces are opaque and shadowy boundaries, in Derrida’s deconstruction they become mythic signifiers, while in Baudrillard’s theory of the hyperreal surfaces are associated with two-dimensionality and superficiality and the simulacra that *destroy* depth, meaning and reality. These different conceptions of surface in philosophical models of thought open up the discussion in chapter four, which uses Avrum Stroll’s work to investigate the definition of surface from the “common-sense point of view”²²⁶ and the possibility of a single conception that encompasses the various manifestations of the term in everyday language. The findings of this investigation are then related to chapter five, which elaborates the intricacies of a non-hierarchical model of thought based on a specific conception of surface. The thesis argues that this alternative approach is *surficial* not superficial and it is characterized by immanence rather than transcendence, which implies a shift of emphasis from the authenticity of origin to the creative potential of lines of flight.

²²⁶ Avrum Stroll, *Surfaces*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, pp. 11-12

3.1 THE BRILLIANT ORIGIN

In his most notable work, *The Republic*, Plato constructs his philosophy through Socrates' dialogues and different metaphors and analogies, of which three are of particular importance: the "analogy of the divided line" that breaks up the world into the realms of the physical and the abstract; "the metaphor of the sun," that attempts to explain notions of the "Good" as the generator of the visible world; and the "allegory of the cave," which is presented as symbolising the human condition. These three *images of thought* will be expanded in order to extract the Platonic approach towards surfaces, images and appearances.

Hale describes the Platonic model of thought as one in which "nature provides an 'image' of the underlying forms whereas art, as an image of nature, is even further removed from truth."²²⁷ For this reason, art is "merely the means to an intellectual end, which the philosopher must dispense with in the process of the search for truth."²²⁸ This approach to art is an effect of Plato's ontology characterized by a binary hierarchy that Coyne describes as the "division of the world into (a) the realm of shadows, the sensible world, the material, which mortals inhabit, ... against (b) the world beyond appearances...the realm of the ideas, universals and forms, the Intelligible world, ... *the real*, which deals with perfection."²²⁹

It is in the analogy of the divided line that Plato divides the world into the realm of the "visible" and the realm of the "intelligible" and compares them in terms of clarity and unclarity.²³⁰ According to Robin Waterfield, the analogy suggests a model that resembles figure 3.1. However, Plato demands "respect and admiration for"²³¹ sections of the line that are considered originary and superior. Thus, even though the analogy begins with a line, as one reads through Plato's text, it becomes apparent that the different sections of the line are not equal. (See figure 3.2)

Plato associates the visible realm (A and B together) with "belief," whilst the higher intelligible realm (C and D together) is associated with "knowledge."

²²⁷ Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, p. 51

²²⁸ Hale, *Building Ideas: An Introduction to Architectural Theory*, p. 51

²²⁹ Coyne, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, p. 50

²³⁰ Plato, *Republic*, (509d-510a) trans. by Robin Waterfield, 1993, p. 237

²³¹ Plato, *Republic*, (511a), p. 239

Within these two partitions, section A is described as visible “likenesses” associated with “conjecture” - for example “shadows, reflections (on the surface of water or on anything else which is inherently compact, smooth, and bright), and so on.”²³² Section B is described as the physical objects identified with “confidence” whose likeness is found in section A – for example “all the flora and fauna there are in the world, and every kind of artefact too.”²³³

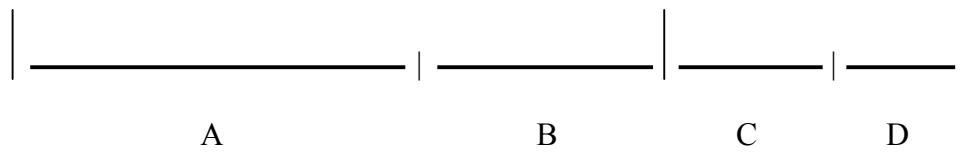


Figure 3.1: Plato’s analogy of the divided line. Source: the author after Robin Waterfield’s diagram in *Republic*, 1993.

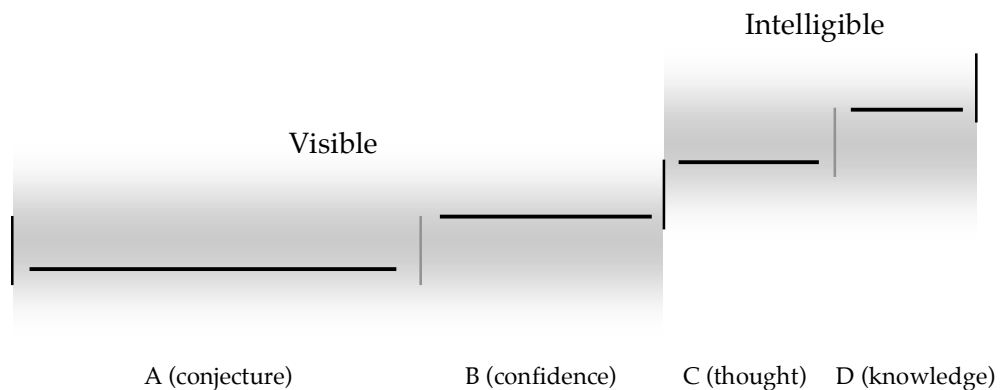


Figure 3.2: Plato’s analogy of the divided line with the hierarchy between each section of the line. Source: the author.

Therefore, B consists of originals while A consists of copies. Section C is the realm of ideas that are deduced from section B. Plato associates C with “thought”. Finally section D is also the realm of ideas, but ones that are constructed using those in C without any reference to the physical world of the “visible realm.” Therefore, while the “types” within section C are deduced using elements of B, the types in D are

²³² Plato, *Republic*, (510a), p. 237

²³³ Plato, *Republic*, (510a), p. 237

superior since they are generated by a philosophical "dialectic" about the elements of C:

And you should appreciate that there are four states of mind, one for each of the four sections. There's knowledge for the highest section and thought for the second one; and you'd better assign confidence to the third one and conjecture to the final one. You can make an orderly progression out of them, and you should regard them as possessing as much clarity as their objects possess truth.²³⁴

Evidently, the metaphor of the divided line is not horizontal, but vertically progressive, identified by an ascent towards originality and clarity. The hierarchical difference between the categories is clear: the abstract intelligible world (CD) is defined as superior to the physical and visible world that are inferior likenesses (AB), while physical objects (B) are superior to their images, shadows or reflections (A). This sequence of hierarchical relationships becomes clearer in the allegory of the cave, which follows the analogy of the divided line discussed above.

3.1.1 From Shadows of Surface to the Light of the Source

Plato's "allegory of the cave" is introduced in book seven (514a – 520a) and is the continuation of the "metaphor of the sun" and "analogy of the divided line." The metaphor of the sun considers the eye as a sensory organ fundamentally different to other organs in that it requires a medium. Light is that medium that allows one to see objects:

Even if a person's eyes are capable of sight, and he's trying to use it, and what he's trying to look at is coloured, the sight will see nothing and the colours will remain unseen, surely, unless there is also present an extra third thing which is made specifically for this purpose.' ... 'It's what we call light,....²³⁵

The sun represents goodness and is the source of light that makes seeing possible. For Plato, the role of goodness in the intelligible realm is comparable to the role of the sun in the visible world:

The sun is the child of goodness...It is a counterpart to its father, goodness. As goodness stands in the intelligible realm to intelligence and the things we know, so in the visible realm the sun stands to sight and the things we see.²³⁶

²³⁴ Plato, *Republic*, (511d -511e), p. 240

²³⁵ Plato, *Republic*. (507d-507e) p. 234

²³⁶ Plato, *Republic* (508b-508c), p. 235

The allegory of the cave continues the ocular theme through the story of a group of prisoners kept in a dark cave in such a way that they can only see shadows cast by objects moving in front of a firelight. The prisoners are deceived by these distorted shadows and they cannot see the reality of the cave or the world outside it:

Imagine people living in a cavernous cell down under the ground; at the far end of the cave, a long way off, there's an entrance open to the outside world. They've been there since childhood, with their legs and necks tied up in a way which keeps them in one place and allows them to look only straight ahead, but not to turn their heads. There's firelight burning a long way further up the cave behind them, and up the slope between the fire and the prisoners there's a road, beside which you should imagine a low wall has been built – like the partition which conjurers place between themselves and their audience and above which they show their tricks.'... 'Imagine also that there are people on the other side of this wall who are carrying all sorts of artefacts. These artefacts, human statuettes, and animal models carved in stone and wood and all kinds of materials stick out over the wall; and as you'd expect, some of the people talk as they carry these objects along, while others are silent.'²³⁷

The allegory suggests that the prisoners confuse shadows with reality and associate the sounds of the people carrying the objects with the effects on the wall. However, if one of these prisoners is freed and allowed to look around, he will realize the reality of things. The firelight would first hurt his eyes but he will soon begin to escape the illusory prison of his former existence. Furthermore, if the prisoner is dragged away from the cave and brought into the sunlit world of the outside, he will be in further pain and distress, but will eventually understand a greater truth, that of the existence of the sun as the generator of life on earth.²³⁸

Plato confesses that his hierarchical categorisation based on transcendence is just a theory, but maintains that "goodness" is the origin of the brilliant light in the visible world and truth and knowledge in the intelligible world:

The region which is accessible to sight should be equated with the prison cell, and the firelight there with the light of the sun. And if you think of the upward journey and the sight of things up on the surface of the earth as the

²³⁷ Plato, *Republic* (514a-515a), pp. 240-1

²³⁸ "He wouldn't be able to see things up on the surface of the earth, I suppose, until he'd got used to his situation. At first, it would be shadows that he could most easily make out, then he'd move on to the reflections of people and so on in water, and later he'd be able to see the actual things themselves. Next, he'd feast his eyes on the heavenly bodies and the heavens themselves, which would be easier at night: he'd look at the light of the stars and the moon, rather than at the sun and sunlight during the daytime.'... 'And at last, I imagine, he'd be able to discern and feast his eyes on the sun – not the displaced image of the sun in water or elsewhere, but the sun on its own, in its proper place.'" Plato, *Republic* (515-516), p. 242

mind’s ascent to the intelligible realm, you won’t be wrong – at least, I don’t think you’d be wrong, and it’s my impression that you want to hear. Only God knows if it’s actually true, however. Anyway, it’s my opinion that the last thing to be seen – and it isn’t easy to see either – in the realm of knowledge is goodness; and the sight of the character of goodness lead one to deduce that it is responsible for everything that is right and fine, whatever the circumstances, and that in the visible realm it is the progenitor of light and of the source of light, and in the intelligible realm it is the source and provider of truth and knowledge.²³⁹

Thus, in Plato’s metaphor, the cave represents the visible world, while the intelligible world is represented by the world outside the cave, lit up by the sun. The shadowy images in the cave are the result of objects blocking the firelight. The world outside represents the realm of Ideas (or Forms) that are types generated by thought as it ascends from the shadowy prison of the cave.

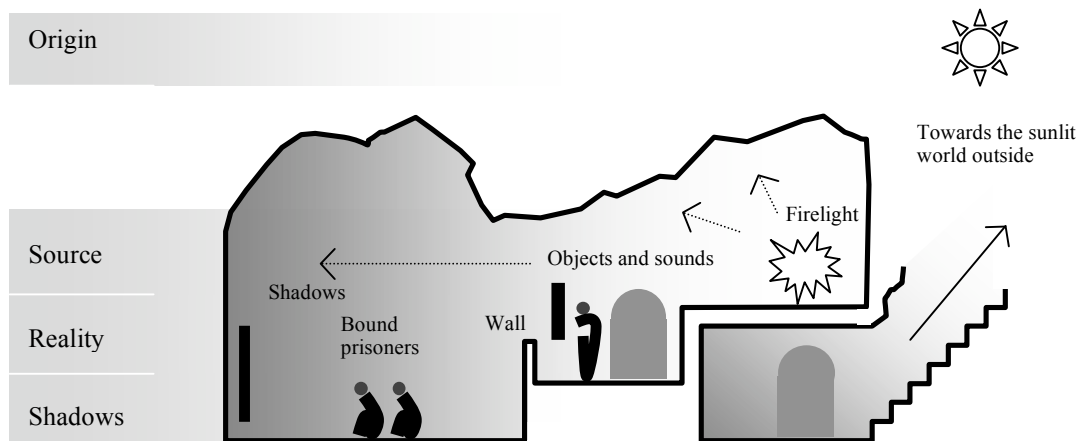


Figure 3.3: Section through Plato’s cave, showing the vertical arrangement of the cave and the hierarchy of concepts. Source: the author.

There are key elements of this metaphor that set up powerful connotations for the Platonic model of thought. Firstly, the cave is an interiority created by opaque surfaces that not only block light from the outside but also facilitate distorted shadows. Secondly, and as consequence of the first condition, the cave is a restrictive environment in which light is scarce. For this reason shadows are unwanted and sinister, being associated with the lack of “goodness,” “knowledge” or “truth.” In certain conditions where light is abundant, like a desert for example, shade is in fact appreciated as a place of relief and refuge from the glare and heat of

²³⁹ Plato, *Republic*, (517b – 517c), pp. 243-4

the sun. Nevertheless, in Plato's metaphor, shadows are undesirable and the world is compared to a theatre of trickery based on masking and oppression. The prisoners are unable to appreciate their environment not only because they are bound, but also because their necks are tied so they can only look in one direction. They cannot even see the shadows of the people holding up the objects in front of the firelight, because a strategically placed wall hides them from view. Thus, in the Platonic model, surfaces always block light, sight and thought, limiting knowledge and freedom through masking, covering and hiding.

The vertical dimension is another key factor in the operation of the metaphor. The fire is placed higher than the prisoners, which means that they cannot see their own shadows on the wall. Moreover, the prisoners are denied participation and cannot create their own shadows. In other words, the images in front of them do not acknowledge their existence and they cannot take part in the theatrical act. Plato does not discuss creativity nor does he elaborate on the characters holding up the objects. The main concern is the imprisonment of the "prisoners," their escape from the interiority created by opaque surfaces and their ascent to the higher realm of truth and reality.

Plato uses the cave as a metaphor for the human condition, but one in which surfaces are associated with masking and surface effects devalued as distorted copies of reality. In the cave (visible realm), the light source is a point (not a plane) objects are opaque (not transparent or translucent) and the shadows on the wall are inferior representations of objects. Outside the cave (intelligible realm), things are little better: the light source is brighter, higher and further away and there is more freedom of movement. Yet, the light source remains a singular point and therefore casts *projective* shadows and the natural world remains a likeness of the heavenly ideal beyond. Thus, in both worlds, images are distorted reproductions of ordinary reality and appearances fall short of the ideal Idea.

Plato's model can be compared to a hierarchical pyramid model, with goodness as the illuminating point at the top, types, ideas and objects of the natural world in the middle, and the diverse shadows, images and reflections occurring at the bottom, projected onto the surfaces of reality. Such a model is characterized by vertical hierarchy and by the distorted nature of surface effects. Thought is encouraged to travel upwards towards the original source (which symbolises truth,

knowledge and reality), away from shadowy surfaces and conjectural images that constitute the lower echelons of existence.

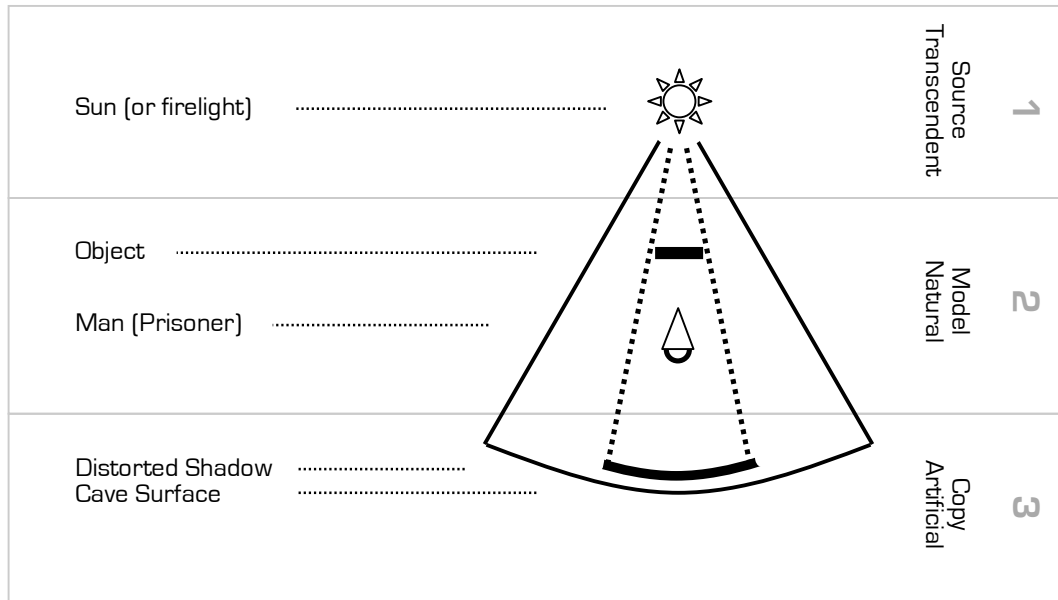


Figure 3.4: Plato’s allegory of cave as a cathode-ray-tube model, showing the hierarchical dependency of the three elements of (1) source, (2) model and (3) copy. Shadows need objects and objects need the source of light for their existence in realm of the visible. Moreover, surface effects are always projective and therefore distorted. Source: the author.

3.1.2 The Source of Transcendental Hierarchy

The centrality of the light source as the point of origin for the visible realm is significant in Plato’s metaphors and analogies.²⁴⁰ Combining the “allegory of the cave” with “the metaphor of the sun,” it is possible to argue that Plato’s ocular philosophy constructs a circular, or more accurately a spherical model of thought, in which the focal point is the illuminating and originary source, surrounded by the opaque surface upon which shadowy copies are projected. The volume between the centre and the periphery is natural reality while the images and appearances that

²⁴⁰ “The sun ... not only furnishes to visibles the power of visibility but it also provides for their generation and growth and nurture though it is not itself generation. ... In like manner, then ... the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power.” Plato, *Republic*, (509b), pp. 239-240

form on surfaces are peripheral and artificial categories that are associated with the “margins of existence.”

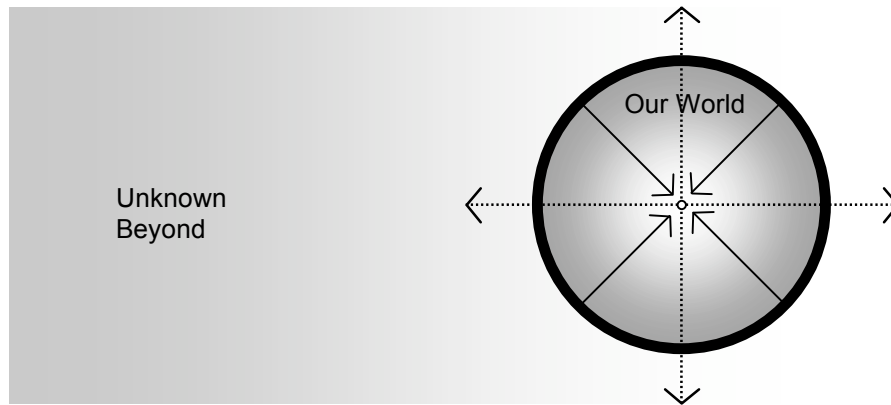


Figure 3.5: The Platonic mode of thought as a spherical model. Source: the author.

If light represents goodness, then in this model, surface marks the boundary between goodness and evil, or the unknown. Moreover, the curvature of the peripheral surface creates appearances that are in fact warped reproductions of reality. Thus, if the original point illuminates, the curved surface masks, distorts and deviates. In this model, transcendence becomes necessary which involves moving away from surface effects towards the goodness of the illuminating origin, which is in fact *surface-less*.

Translating this model for the contemporary condition would suggest that the mass media and its surface-driven technologies (paper, film, electronic screens) form the curved surface of the sphere, which is expanding rapidly. However, this technological boundary continues to produce warped reproductions of reality. Since the metaphorical surface and its effects are in infinite expansion, the best strategy is to leave the realm of fraudulent images and appearances for the central focal point that represents clarity and goodness.

Though Plato’s metaphors and analogies seem familiar and comprehensive, they nonetheless leave out a myriad of complexities. For example, Plato’s ocular system of thought is based on a separation of the light source from objects that always receive it or block it. Moreover, only light is considered as the

facilitator of sight, without any reference to the significance of surfaces and shadows in visual perception. If there were nothing but light, there would be nothing to see, which is why it can be argued that surfaces and their effects (shadows, reflections etc). are equally necessary for visibility.

The allegory of the cave is reliant on a seemingly sensible conception of surfaces as visual barriers that can only receive light. Yet, we now know that in the depths of the sea, where sunlight fades away, *bioluminescence* allows creatures to generate their own light that is then emitted through the surfaces of their skin.²⁴¹ This light and such surfaces do not have a place within the Platonic model, as it does not mention transparency, translucency, glow or even colour. Plato's monochrome allegory is a binary oppositional formulation in which one of the pair is perceived as original and the other as its subservient opposite. In this model of thought, shadows (images, appearances) are inferior reproductions of a real object, but more importantly they are the absence of light, and surfaces are responsible for it. Not only does this model *imprison* the complexity of the world into two categories, but it also sets up a powerful binary hierarchy, which continues to influence thought in the present day.

In the Platonic cave, creativity, communication and expression do not enter the discussion. The people holding up the objects make shadows unintentionally, whilst the prisoners are unable to make shadows because the firelight is placed higher than them. Here, vertical hierarchy denies creativity, and shadow making becomes an oppressive political act. It is only by *escaping* this realm of *artificiality* that the prisoners can access the natural reality on earth and the transcendent reality of the heavens. The movement of thought that is promoted here is one that goes beyond surfaces, images and appearances in order to acquire knowledge, freedom and truth.

The platonic model of thought is based on the sun as the source of light and life. The illuminating source acts as Form: the essence and the generating universal Idea. Shadows, images and reflections are mere appearances, which only *mimic* the

²⁴¹ Bioluminescence is the production of light by a living organism caused by a chemical reaction within their body during which light is generated. The term originating from the Greek *bios* for "living" and the Latin *lumen* meaning "light". Examples of bioluminescence can be found in deep-sea creatures such as "Anglerfish", "Flashlight fish" as well as other creatures such as "Fireflies" and "Glow worms". See <http://www.lifesci.ucsb.edu/~biolum/accessed> June 2009.

real Forms. Thus, in the Platonic model, when the observer views the world he attempts to understand the unity behind the multiplicity of appearances. This is because Form is an *archetype*, which is original and superior to its different manifestations.

There is evidence for this theory. For example, we appreciate the colour blue in its different shades, but we call the sky blue and the sea as blue, even though we are aware that the blue of the sky is different to the blue of the sea. The emphasis then is not on the differences that make each colour unique, rather the common ground that gives a unifying name to a particular section of the spectrum. Plato however, would argue that blueness is *originary* and the variations of colour are secondary imitations of the archetypal concept. Evidently, this model of thought is less interested in subtleties of difference and more concerned with the presence of a unifying idea.

One would imagine that following Plato's logic, one could arrive at the ultimate Form that is the generator of everything. The sun however is not it, since it is only a symbol, a child of that unity: "The sun is the child of goodness"²⁴² and "Only God knows if it's actually true..."²⁴³ In the absence of a singular unifying Form, Plato constructs a binary hierarchical system, in which one category comes before the other: heaven and earth; light and shadow; intelligible and visible. This bifurcation marks the very instance when the complexity of reality is reduced into a binary hierarchical system that disregards differences and the potential richness of multiplicity.

Since Plato's time, much has been added to our knowledge of the world. It has been demonstrated that like the height of the heavens, little is known about the depths of the oceans. Moreover, quantum physics has revealed the complexities of the subatomic realm. Unity, order and complexity exist in every level of the thick milieu to which we give the name Universe. Nevertheless the appeal of the high as associated with heavenly knowledge and the low as the realm of earthly conjecture continues to manifest itself in different forms.

Perhaps this has something to do with humanity's inability to rise above the surface of the earth to which it is biologically bound. Yet, it seems odd that even

²⁴² Plato, *Republic*, (508b), p. 235

²⁴³ Plato, *Republic*, (517b), p. 244

though almost every human activity occurs on this surface, it is often considered as inferior to the voluminous space of the heavens.²⁴⁴ The surface of the earth however is not two-dimensional or flat, nor is it a thin layer of existence. Indeed, it is through its deformational nature (the curvature and the rise and fall of topography) that the terrestrial surface defines a *thick zone of operation* that facilitates human existence.

The Platonic model of thought promotes a vertical movement, an *ascent* towards the purity of Forms. Rather than seeing knowledge in the depths of meaning, the Platonic philosopher searches for knowledge in the heights of Ideas. However, both processes, (ascent to height and descent into depth) implicate a perpendicular movement of thought against the surface that is caught in the middle. This thesis pursues the possibility of a philosophy that does not dig deep or fly high, but rather includes such actions within an encompassing *thickness*. It also questions whether a philosophical approach is possible that does not divide complexity into twos and then elevate one half over the other. Finally, the thesis explores the characteristics of a model of thought that is not just concerned with origins and definitions, but also with expressions, interpretations and future possibilities.

These questions shall be revisited in due course, especially with reference to architectural creativity, which forms an important theme of the thesis. But in order to arrive at an alternative philosophical approach, it is important to explore the recent “closure of Platonism” through the works of Jacques Derrida, whose theories have contributed to the development of an alternative model of thought that has been influential in contemporary architectural theory and praxis.

3.2 ORIGIN UNDER ERASURE

Since the time of its conception, Plato’s metaphysics has been subject to much careful scrutiny. However, the Platonic attitude towards surfaces and appearances has endured time, not only because of its potent simplicity but also because it has become an inseparable constituent of the Western philosophical tradition. In recent decades however, a certain philosophical shift has occurred which Jacques Derrida calls a “rupture” or an “event,” which refers to the “decentring” of metaphysics.

²⁴⁴ Space walks are still luxury rarities for the majority of human population.

Derrida's own work marks a radical development of such a decentring, but one that follows a series of contributions by philosophers such as Aristotle, Plotinus, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and so on.²⁴⁵

Derrida's work emerged at a time when the French intellectual scene was experiencing a clear divide between those who valued the genesis or origin of experience (phenomenologists) and others who believed that experience was a result of structure that is not experiential (structuralists). Derrida problematized the very notion of origin by adopting a strategy of questioning metaphysics without giving a (metaphysical) answer:

...to ask oneself about the meaning of the notions of structure or genesis *in general*, before the dissociations introduced by reduction, is to interrogate that which precedes the transcendental reduction. Now the latter is but the free act of the question, which frees itself from the totality of what precedes it in order to be able to gain access to this totality, particularly to its historicity and its past. The question of the possibility of the transcendental reduction cannot expect an answer.²⁴⁶

It was in 1966 that Derrida delivered a seminal lecture at Johns Hopkins University, entitled "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." In it he argued that the *original structure* and the *structural origin* are paradoxical concepts and are characterized by infinite substitutions, which is why "structure" and "genesis" are both polluted by *traces* of their opposite. In other words, decentring is already at work:

Thus it has always been thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside it*. The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Derrida sees his own work as a continuation of Nietzsche and "his critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concept of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth)"; Freud and his "critique of self-presence", consciousness of the subject and finally "the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of Being as presence." Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, pp. 278-294, p. 280

²⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, "'Genesis and Structure' and Phenomenology" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1979, pp. 154-168, p. 167

²⁴⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279

For Derrida the entire history of metaphysics could be characterized as "a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre"²⁴⁸ where various metaphors and metonymies have merely assumed the role of the centre. Furthermore, "It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence – *edos, arche, telos, energeia, ousia*, (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth."²⁴⁹ Thus, the notion of centre is not originary because it has been marked by a series of *substitutions* and also because historically, it has been exclusive since it has always been characterized by *presence*.

For Derrida "The *overabundance* of the signifier, its *supplementary* character, is ... the result of a finitude, that is to say, the result of a lack which must be *supplemented*."²⁵⁰ Thus, if origin is finite, lacking or not inclusive of all possibilities (presence *and* absence) then such origin is not a true origin but merely a *placing of the concept*. This indicates that origin is a conceptual construct, not a purely originary or central Idea. Derrida calls this the "absence" of a transcendental origin, which causes the decentring of metaphysics and the infinite play of signification:

This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely.²⁵¹

Derrida questions the originality of that which assumes the centre of the metaphysical circle, without substituting it with another finite concept. Refusing to be contaminated by metaphysics, he does not propose a metaphysical model, since any model that uses traditional concepts would inevitably be contaminated by their metaphysical operation. The desire to subvert metaphysics without practicing metaphysics leads to what Derrida calls the "*closure*" of metaphysics, through a

²⁴⁸ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279

²⁴⁹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 279

²⁵⁰ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 290

²⁵¹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 280

strategy of placing terms under erasure (*sous rature*). This leads to an ongoing process characterized by a strategy of re-reading philosophy to expose and exploit the *infinite play of the signifier*.

Derrida calls this strategy *deconstruction*, which is different from the Heideggerian "destruktion."²⁵² According to Derrida, a destructive discourse is impossible since there is no language or lexicon that is foreign to the history of metaphysics. For this reason, the destruction (destruktion) of metaphysical concepts would only be participation in producing further metaphysics.²⁵³ Derrida's deconstruction does not destroy the concept of centre; rather centre as a metaphysical concept. Deconstruction therefore demonstrates the limitations of metaphysics by exposing the limitations of signification, which is argued to be responsible for creating the very centre of metaphysical models.

For Derrida traditional metaphysics is not based on an absolute centre without lack but instead on a series of *central concepts* that merely *assume the position of the central origin*. It is for this reason that such origins must be placed under erasure, not only as a reminder of their finitude, but also to free the play of signifiers and to anticipate things yet to come. Thus, deconstruction highlights the *absence* of a true original centre, which then legitimates the continuous erasure or substitution of traditional origins.

Derrida likens deconstruction to a "pharmakon," a medicine-poison that threatens the philosophical tradition, but simultaneously helps it against annihilation. By placing the origin under erasure, deconstruction weakens traditional metaphysics, but also prolongs its life through instilling within it the seeds of its own destruction. Therefore deconstruction can operate like a vaccine or it can be a viral intrusion that destroys aspects if not all of established traditions:

²⁵² Heidegger often placed the term and its erased version side by side (Being, and ~~Being~~) implying that there is a notion of Being that exceeds our definitions of it. Derrida however, argues that our understanding of Being is always determined by our definitions and therefore Being must *always* be under erasure. For Heidegger's destruction of the ontological tradition, see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford, 1962, pp. 41-49.

²⁵³ "...all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. ...There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest." Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 280-281

This *pharmakon*, this "medicine", this philtre, which acts as both remedy and poison, already introduces itself into the body of the discourse with all its ambivalence. This charm, this spellbinding virtue, this power of fascination can be – alternately or simultaneously – beneficent or maleficent...Operating through seduction, the *pharmakon* makes one stray from one's general, natural, habitual paths and laws.²⁵⁴

3.2.1 Play, Différance and Writing

Derrida's "closure" of metaphysics begins with a closer look at signification. For him, the game of signification is a game of signs, and signs have always been split into the signifier and the signified, "even if, as Saussure argues, they are distinguished simply as the two faces of one and the same leaf."²⁵⁵ Derrida writes:

"The epoch of the logos thus debases writing considered as mediation of mediation and as a fall into the exteriority of meaning. To this epoch belongs the difference between signified and signifier, or at least the strange separation of their "parallelism," and the exteriority, however extenuated, of the one to the other. This appurtenance is organized and hierarchized in a history."²⁵⁶

Central to Derrida's closure of metaphysics is the argument that signifiers do not refer to a transcendental signified, but always to other signifiers. This highlights the *play* of language and the processes of *deferral* through which meaning is produced. Derrida theorises this through *différance*,²⁵⁷ which is not only a deliberate misspelling of difference,²⁵⁸ but also a play on the French word *différer*, which means both to "defer" and to "differ."

Différance contains a number of features that govern the production of meaning. The first feature that relates to deferral states that words and signs do not fully denote what they mean, but can only be defined through the *supplementation* of additional words, from which they differ. Thus, meaning is always *deferred* through an endless chain of signifiers that are different from each other. The second feature

²⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, Athlone, London, 1981, pp. 61-171, p. 70

²⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1998, p. 11

²⁵⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 13

²⁵⁷ Derrida first uses the term in his 1963 essay entitled "Cogito and the History of Madness": "The economy of this writing is a regulated relationship between that which exceeds and the exceeded totality: the *différance* of the absolute excess." Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of Madness" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1979, pp. 31-63, p. 62.

²⁵⁸ The "a" in *différance* is evident in writing but not heard in speech. This follows Derrida's quest to subvert the Platonic privileging of speech over writing as well as the distinction between the sensible and the intelligible.

(relating to difference) suggests the force that differentiates things from one another, generating the difference that underpins meaning itself. Différance suggests that there is no single interpretation of a text. Therefore, the re-reading of texts is not only possible, but also essential to writing and thought. In Roland Barthes' words, "a text's unity lies not in its origins," or its author, "but in its destination," or its audience.²⁵⁹

Derrida insists that différance itself is "neither a word, nor a concept,"²⁶⁰ which seems to suggest that it has a transcendental nature. This proposition finds support from Derrida's preference to call the term "quasi-transcendental."²⁶¹ Différance and deconstruction are concepts (or quasi-concepts) that attempt to explain the complex process of signification, which produces traditional notions of "meaning," "essence," or the "signified." By putting such notions under erasure, deconstruction weakens metaphysical hierarchy by questioning the legitimacy of its central origins. For example, Derrida challenges Plato's belief that writing is secondary to speech, which is secondary to an original Idea. Instead he argues that thinking is in fact already writing and the act of writing, as the externalisation of thought, is embedded in the production of meaning:

The exteriority of the signifier is the exteriority of writing in general, and ...there is no linguistic sign before writing. Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay.²⁶²

Through (quasi-)concepts such as "arch-writing," "trace," "supplement" and "différance" Derrida deconstructs the metaphysical tradition, in which meaning is thought to be either within the depths of something, or beyond it, emanating from a transcendental source. If in such traditions, surface, appearance, writing, or the manifestation of an Idea is considered as deformed, perverse or superficial, for Derrida such notions are already at work in the production of meaning, essence or the central origin.

²⁵⁹ See Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, Noonday Press, New York, 1977, pp. 142-148

²⁶⁰ Jacques Derrida, "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, pp. 1-28, p. 7

²⁶¹ For discussion of this, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 317 and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, pp. 267-283.

²⁶² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 14

Derrida proposes a model of thought based on the *exteriority of writing* and the continuous erasure and substitution of origin. This is because a pure signified is impossible, since every signified is a product of a series of signifiers. This deconstructive approach overcomes transcendental hierarchy by putting the origin and the original under erasure. However, erasure is never total and deconstruction is not destruction, because a common ground is needed to make communication possible. When the totality and purity of the Platonic Idea is deconstructed, thought and writing become free and the emphasis shifts from the brilliant source to the signifying surfaces of the metaphoric sphere.²⁶³ Thus, the finite interiority of an enclosed volume is unfolded onto the expansive surfaces of text:

The idea of the book is the idea of totality, finite or infinite, of the signifier; this totality of the signifier cannot be a totality, unless a totality constituted by the signified pre-exists it, supervises its inscriptions and its signs and is independent of it in its ideality....The idea of the book which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopaedic protection of theology and of logocentricism against the disruption of writing, against its aphoristic energy, and, as I shall specify later, against difference in general. If I distinguish the text from the book, I shall say that the destruction of the book, as it is now under way in all domains, demands the surface of the text.²⁶⁴

Derrida refers to language as a "field" which is "in effect that of *play*, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite".²⁶⁵ In this model of thought, meaning is no longer defined in relation to a transcendent above or below. Instead it occurs upon the surfaces of a field of play in which signifiers are the perpetual players. The infinite play of the signifiers and the exteriority of the field suggest that totalization is "sometimes defined as *useless*, and sometimes as *impossible*"²⁶⁶ since for Derrida, the nature of language excludes totalization.

This field of signification is characterized by *lack*: "there is something missing from it: a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions."²⁶⁷ However, if there is no rule to the game, then meaning becomes an artificial construct through which *any* signifier can pass through. In other words, substitution

²⁶³ See figure 3.5 in p. 102 of the thesis.

²⁶⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 17-18

²⁶⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 289

²⁶⁶ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 289

²⁶⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 289

cannot occur without restraint, because that would undermine the very notion of the signified, leading to a break down of communication. Therefore, an ordering centre must somehow remain to structure the field of language and the play of signifiers. What governs the Derridean field is the *trace* of origin or the *site of its absence*, which influences the passage and play of signifiers and structures the surfaces of textual production.

Thus, Derrida's game is in fact a careful one, since the consequences of the destruction of centre are unsatisfactory for meaning and linguistic production. Therefore, he proposes "sure play" which is limited to the substitution of *existing and present pieces*, but offers a strategic alternative to rigid dogma or pure play (absolute indetermination):

Turned towards the lost or impossible presence of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken immediacy is therefore the saddened, *negative*, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauistic side of the thinking of play whose other side would be the Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin which is offered to an active interpretation. *This affirmation then determines the non-centre otherwise than as loss of the centre.* And it plays without security. For there is a *sure play*: that which is limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces*. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to *genetic* indetermination, to the *seminal* adventure of the trace.²⁶⁸

Derrida abstains from creating new rules, because he limits his game to re-appropriation and substitution. Therefore, the play that he proposes remains within the fabric of traditional concepts, which do in fact exert an ordering force on the resultant deconstructions. In other words, the centre somehow remains but becomes subject to a play that allows it to side step any real destructive discourse. The placing of origins under erasure is therefore a strategy of exposing the substitutability of the centre and simultaneously exploiting it to catalyze further philosophical production. But, this strategy must apply decentring in small dosages otherwise the weakening of centre would lead to its destruction. That would be when the centre is defined as an artificial concept, leading to indeterminate play and the implosion of meaning.

²⁶⁸ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

Though Derrida argues that deconstruction does not destroy the philosophical tradition, from a certain perspective, it is in fact quite successful at doing just that. This is not because deconstruction substitutes the origin with another – in most cases the opposite – but because it pollutes the concept, or more accurately exposes its pollution. By de-crediting the origin (essence, substance, or the centre) with its own finitude, deconstruction eliminates faith in the "metaphysics of presence," by continuously highlighting the absence written within it. Thus, deconstruction never completely destroys the philosophical tradition, but it continuously undermines its operation through the tracking of "traces," "aporias" and shortcomings.

Derrida constructs many (quasi-)concepts, but he does not give a metaphysical totality. The resistance to define anything in terms of presence, the promotion of play and the presence of paradoxical quasi-concepts (developed from the erasure of metaphysical origins) exposes Derrida to accusations of rhetorical trickery, intentional obfuscation²⁶⁹ or even nihilism.²⁷⁰ However, Derrida argues that it is only through the deconstruction of old concepts that one can "designate the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed."²⁷¹

Yet, it is not surprising that Derrida is accused of nihilism, since his project against the "metaphysics of presence" contains numerous references to "absence",

²⁶⁹ John Searle writes "There is in deconstructive writing a constant straining of the prose to attain something that sounds profound by giving it the air of a paradox." Searle also cites Michel Foucault as "Michel Foucault once characterized Derrida's prose style to me as "obscurantisme terroriste." The text is written so obscurely that you can't figure out exactly what the thesis is (hence "obscurantisme") and then when one criticizes it, the author says, "Vous m'avez mal compris; vous êtes idiot" (hence "terroriste)." See John R. Searle, "The Word Turned Upside Down" in *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 16, October 27th 1983. (Also found at <http://free-expression.blogspot.com/2007/10/john-searle-on-derrida.html>, accessed May 2009).

²⁷⁰ Conor Cunningham accuses Derrida of nihilism: "Derrida carries the logic of nihilism to new extremes.... Derrida's philosophy is the combination of Plotinus and Spinoza, while carrying further the *provenance* of nihilism witnessed in Kant, Hegel and Heidegger.... Derrida rests his philosophy on the logic of the nothing being *as something*." Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, Routledge, London; New York, 2002, p. 150. Derrida mentions such accusations in his own writings: "And those who would like to consider "deconstruction" a symptom of modern or postmodern nihilism could indeed, if they wished, recognize in it the last testimony – not to say the martyrdom – of faith in the present *fin de siècle*." Jacques Derrida "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, SUNY Press, Albany, 1992, pp. 73-142, p. 77.

²⁷¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 14

"death", "closure," "mourning," and other terminology that evoke the negative. This is perhaps an inevitable consequence of decentring, or the battle against the risk of "falling back within what is being deconstructed"²⁷² which continuously threatens the very core of deconstructive philosophy.

3.2.2 The Disappearance of Origin

According to Derrida every discourse is "bricoleur" in the sense that it is a borrowing of concepts from the text of heritage, which is "more or less coherent or ruined."²⁷³ Therefore:

There is no unity or absolute source of the myth. The focus or the source of the myth are always shadows and virtualities which are elusive, unactualizable, and nonexistent in the first place.²⁷⁴

In this sense, there is no true creativity in the traditional sense of the word, which would imply the production of something from nothing or the imitation of a metaphysical origin. Instead, creativity is the re-arrangement of pre-existing elements that are not metaphysical entities but rather concepts that are "more or less coherent or ruined." For Derrida, true originality (and original truth) is not to be found in philosophizing, rather in reading philosophy in a different way. This would not be the destruction of originality, but the transformation of its definition to one that limits it to the boundaries of pre-existing elements.

Because Derrida's conception of creation is dependent on a pre-existent past, it inevitably leads to the following question: if philosophical production is reading philosophy differently, then there must be an originary philosophy from which all the subsequent readings of philosophy started from? Derrida's solution to this "chicken and egg" conundrum is that the true originary philosophy is in fact absent, and it was only the *trace* of this already absent origin that started the process.

To consider every origin as a myth would be a refusal to believe, even momentarily. In everyday scenarios however, there is no such high standards for notions of origin, original or creativity. The "common-sense" approach relies on a

²⁷² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 14

²⁷³ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 286

²⁷⁴ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 286

realisation that such perfectionism leads to an inescapable spiral towards an "absent origin" which cannot be found or defined. Because of this, it is more productive, if perhaps less accurate, to say that there are different kinds of originality: some that are dependent on the rearrangement of pre-existing elements (as in bricoleur constructs), and others that are accidental, incidental or even mad. In other words, rather than reducing creativity to "sure play" (i.e. the substitution of established elements), it is possible to explore a more risky approach based on random discovery or exploratory experimentation, with the hope of adding something altogether different to the existing elements.

Moreover, using concepts that have been put under erasure, without faith in their originary presence is much like considering everything as secondary in relation to an originary concept (quasi-concept or otherwise) that is absent or has *disappeared*. If this is not nihilistic, then it is extreme perfectionism that can have catastrophic ramifications for imagination and creativity. Perhaps, the antidote to this mode of thought can be found within Derrida's own logic in the form of a counter-myth that gives meaning to everything, but which is itself a myth. Derrida writes:

In this sense the engineer is a myth. A subject who supposedly would be the absolute origin of his own discourse and supposedly would construct it "out of nothing," "out of whole cloth," would be the creator of the verb, the verb itself. But if this is the case, if the difference between bricolage and originality is erased and if every discourse is considered bricolage, then the very meaning of bricolage would break down. Thus, the reflection of bricolage would be the myth of the engineer, which acts as its opposite which gives it its definition. Myth acts as counter-myth in order to give both myth and counter-myth meaning. And more importantly the process continues as other myths come to criticize the set up and establish new set ups.²⁷⁵

But are all these myths and textual bricolage the same? How can we judge the qualities of these myths? In Derrida's own words: "Does this mean the abandonment of meaning and the abandonment of critical thinking?"²⁷⁶ Derrida believes that we must not try to centre a discourse that is essentially acentric, and we must "renounce the *episteme* which absolutely requires, which is the absolute

²⁷⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 285

²⁷⁶ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 287

requirement that we go back to the source, to the centre, to the founding basis, to the principle, and so on."²⁷⁷

But if the quest for the centre is the very search for meaning, then what are we left to do? Derrida declares that the question "cannot be answered."²⁷⁸ It seems that if deconstruction is not an effective destruction of philosophy, it is an effective destruction of the empiricism that drives it forward. Yet the destruction of empiricism would also be the destruction of the attempt to arrive at a useful conclusion that helps with our being in the world. Deconstruction leaves us in an uncomfortable middle position between myths, counter-myths and deficient truths. What remains is a state of infinite questioning; the pondering of "*conception, formation, gestation, and labour*" of a question aimed at the non-definable and that which resists definition. In this context, argues Derrida, choice becomes trivial:

I do not believe that today there is any question of *choosing* –in the first place because here we are in a region (let us say, provisionally, a region of historicity) where the category of choice seems particularly trivial; and in the second, because we must first try to conceive of the common ground, and the *différance* of this irreducible difference.²⁷⁹

The deconstruction of metaphysics uses "*play*" and the "*trace*" where the former is "the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play, that is to say as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence"²⁸⁰ and the latter is "*is nothing*, it is not an entity, it exceeds the question *What is?* And contingently makes it possible."²⁸¹ Thus, Derrida's quest against the "metaphysics of presence" relies on *disappearance* as a concept that plays with presence and absence. This disappearance, which is evident in the trace, ensures a seductive presence-absence that allows complex quasi-concepts to act as centre or origin. Such quasi-origins assume a paradoxical existence that resists destruction and they operate like a double-coded pharmakon in that they prolong the survival of the philosophical tradition.

²⁷⁷ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 286

²⁷⁸ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 288

²⁷⁹ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 293

²⁸⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 50

²⁸¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 75

3.2.3 The Trace of Origin

In "Plato's Pharmacy," Derrida argues against the Platonic hierarchy that depicts writing as an "artificial exteriority," a "clothing for thought," or "a garment of perversion and debauchery."²⁸² Using the concept of "arch-writing" he attempts to complicate the traditional relationship between writing and speech:

It is not a simple analogy: writing, the letter, the sensible inscription, has always been considered by Western tradition as the body and matter external to the spirit, to breath, to speech and to the logos.²⁸³

According to Derrida, writing has traditionally implicated a loss of innocence and a deceit of *the written, graphic image*. As a result, it has often signified a forgetting of the origins of thought. Following a deconstruction of Plato's texts, Derrida proposes that "the violence of writing does not *befall* an innocent language, [rather] there is an originary violence of writing because language is first, in a sense ... writing."²⁸⁴ So language is the *surfacing of thought*, and writing is the very moment of its occurrence. Because of this originary involvement of writing with thought, hierarchies between writing, speech and thought must be reconsidered: "We are thus not blind to the visible, but blinded by the visible, dazzled by writing."²⁸⁵

This approach to writing is not limited to language, rather it is like a "vast field" that forms the very fabric of thought, in which language delineates its own area:

The immotivation of the trace ought now to be understood as an operation and not as a state, as an active movement, a demotivation, and not as a given structure. Science of the "arbitrariness of the sign," science of the immotivation of the trace, science of writing before speech and in speech, grammatology would thus cover a vast field within which linguistics would, by abstraction, delineate its own area, with the limits that Saussure prescribes to its internal system and which must be carefully re-examined in each speech/writing system in the world and history.²⁸⁶

Thus, writing is defined as a *topography* upon which thought occurs. "Arch-writing" is not writing in the traditional sense of the word, rather it is a new concept, that is associated with writing since in the traditional sense, writing is defined as that which threatens the dominance of speech:

²⁸² Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, p. 35

²⁸³ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, p. 35

²⁸⁴ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, p. 37

²⁸⁵ Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination*, p. 37

²⁸⁶ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 51

An arch-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing...If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because, within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closes proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning. And as we shall begin to see, difference cannot be thought with the *trace*.²⁸⁷

Derrida argues that writing doesn't signify the externalisation of thought, but thinking itself. This redefinition of the relationship between thought, speech and writing promotes thinking as a physical action (not a metaphysical concept) whose consequences leave traces upon surfaces that can outlast the presence of the thinker. The concept of writing therefore highlights the originary connectedness of intent and expression, prior to their division in the philosophical tradition. Derrida expresses this connectedness by placing thought and its "external" manifestation upon the same originary surface that unites them:

This arch-writing would be at work not only in the form and substance of graphic expression but also in those of non-graphic expression. It would constitute not only the pattern uniting form to all substance, graphic or otherwise, but the movement of the *sign-function* linking a content to an expression, whether it be graphic or not.²⁸⁸

However, arch-writing contains a *spectral presence*, which is caused by the erasure of origins. This trace of presence "... must leave a track in the text."²⁸⁹ Yet, Derrida insists that one must not, and cannot hold on to this presence, because the trace is not originary: "we know that that concept destroys its name and that, if all begins with the trace, there is above all no originary trace."

Yet, it is this trace that facilitates meaning in text as it provides the spectral presence of an origin, a signified or a meaning.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless Derrida is adamant that his philosophy is not based on presence:

²⁸⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp. 56-57

²⁸⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 60

²⁸⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 61

²⁹⁰ The concepts of "trace" and "spectre" in Derrida's philosophy refer to the same presence-absence that is non-definable. The trace is used in Derrida's earlier works, while the notion of spectre is introduced in his later works. Derrida defines both through negative theology i.e. through a description of how they cannot be defined or reduced to a definition. Like the trace, Derrida describes the spectre as "something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-

The trace is not only the disappearance of origin – within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by a non-origin....²⁹¹

Derrida's theory is seductive because it continues to describe a *quasi-metaphysical* origin through its traces, which never explain it in its original totality. His descriptions veil and unveil the origin in an infinite loop that makes meaning appear-disappear amongst its own many traces. The seduction of such a strategy arises from the *near-absence* of origin, or more accurately *it's flickering*, which is different from total absence or presence. Thus, Derrida suggests a seductive process of appearance-disappearance, characterized by the infinite speed of transition from one to the other, because "the value of the transcendental arch [*archie*] must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and that erasure."²⁹²

The Derridean philosophical agenda is characterized by a sure-play between metaphysical concepts, centred by the ghostly zone attributed to the origin. His strategy is reliant on the operation of trace which "does not exist"²⁹³ but which is "in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general."²⁹⁴ Thus, in Bennington's words, Derrida's method is a sort of "non-sense in the very simple sense of going against the very sense of sense."²⁹⁵ It is a strategy that never fails to be intriguing because it continuously shifts between dualities, simultaneously implying the possibility *and* the impossibility of meaning. Origin in Derrida's deconstruction is elusive, which is why it resists total criticism, and hence its own natural death. In this philosophical approach, concepts are always slippery, just out of reach.

Whilst deconstruction is an effective strategy for neutralising hierarchy in oppositional terms, it nonetheless demands a continuous back and forth movement determined by the logic of "neither, nor," "sure play" and "substitution." This is the inevitable position if one is to avoid yet another metaphysics of presence. If Plato's

present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge....One does not know if it is living or if it is dead." Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, p. 6

²⁹¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 61

²⁹² Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 61

²⁹³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 62

²⁹⁴ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 65

²⁹⁵ Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, p. 40

philosophy advocated transcendence towards the realm of Ideas, Derrida's philosophy displays traces of transcendence through negative theology.²⁹⁶ The conception of trace for example is a good example of Derrida's negative transcendence:

The concepts of *present*, *past*, and *future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them – the metaphysical concept of time in general – cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace.²⁹⁷

In negative theology one goes beyond affirmation to negation and eventually past both affirmation and negation to negative transcendence, where concepts become ineffable and incomparable, transcending all definitions. In Daniel W. Smith's words:

Derrida says, what is "proper" to God is to have no properties as such, or to "be" "nothing". The logical formula of transcendence is to say that something "is" neither *x* nor *not-x*, because it is beyond them both. Derrida, by his own admission, adopts this formula of transcendence in his analyses of *différance*.²⁹⁸

It is for this reason that the notion of *différance*, follows a similar conception to that of trace or arch-writing, as something that:

"is" neither this nor that, neither sensible nor intelligible, neither positive nor negative, neither superior nor inferior, neither active nor passive, neither present nor absent, not even neutral, not even subject to adialectic with a third moment, without any possible sublation (*Aufhebung*). Despite appearances, then, it [*différance*] is neither a concept nor even a name; it does *lend itself* to a series of names, but calls for another syntax, and exceeds even the order and the structure of predicative discourse. It "is" not and does not say what "is". It is written completely otherwise.²⁹⁹

A philosophy based on such impossible concepts becomes difficult to put to use in everyday situation and the refusal to provide a legible definition leads to accusations of deliberate obscurity and nihilism.³⁰⁰ In other words, deconstruction's affinity with "negative theology" makes it difficult for everyday function. In most

²⁹⁶ See *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, SUNY Press, Albany, 1992, in particular Jacques Derrida's "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials," pp. 73-142

²⁹⁷ Derrida, *Of Grammatology* p. 67

²⁹⁸ Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought" in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, edited by Paul Patton & John Protevi, Continuum, London, New York, 2003, pp. 46-66, p. 54

²⁹⁹ Jacques Derrida, "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials" in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay, SUNY Press, Albany, 1992, pp. 73-142, p. 74

³⁰⁰ See Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism: Philosophies of Nothing and the Difference of Theology*, p. 150 and p. 155

scenarios there is tolerance, where concepts are accepted with their deficiencies and used in their incompleteness. The everyday person is ultimately not interested in the precise mathematics of language, or the absolute origins of meaning, rather workable approximations that allow for creative expression and communication.

The agenda of deconstruction is defined as making insecure the foundations of traditional metaphysics by arguing that the depth of meaning is not originary to surfaces of representation. Instead there is always the *surface-depth of writing* (or arch-writing) which signifies the surfacing of thought. However, Derrida's refusal to define concepts in terms of presence leads to the *presence of a lack*, which underlies much of his arguments. This lack, which is present at the spectral origins of his philosophy, is created by the "absence" of a "non-origin" that is impossible to define. It is precisely because deconstruction relies on erasure and disappearance that it finds itself in a precarious position between falling back to what it deconstructs and falling victim to accusations of nihilism or negativity. This uncomfortable middle-position, between deficient truths and illusory myths, can only be sustained through denial, the logic of "neither, nor," or negative transcendence.

As evidenced by concepts such as trace, spectre, pharmakon and mourning, absence is an important force in Derrida's philosophy, which manifests itself through an anxious preoccupation with death, both as the demise of theories and as the end of lived life:

... to philosophize is to learn to die. I believe in this truth without being able to resign myself to it. And less and less so. I have never learned to accept it, to accept death, that is. We are all survivors who have been granted a temporary reprieve....³⁰¹

In his "closure of Platonism," Derrida expresses an "originary mourning" for metaphysics, which in turn taints deconstruction with a defensive anticipation of its own demise. However, the closure of metaphysics can also be formulated as an anticipation of regeneration, in hope of continuity and transformation. Derrida displays traces of such an attitude, but his choice of words betrays a philosophical approach that leans towards absence:

³⁰¹ Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault & Michael Naas, Mellville House Publishing, New Jersey, 2007, p. 24

I have always been interested in this theme of survival, the meaning of which is *not to be added on* to living and dying. It is originary: life *is* living on, life *is* survival [la vie est survie]. To survive in the usual sense of the term means to continue to live, but also to live *after* death. When it comes to translating such a notion, Benjamin emphasizes the distinction between *überleben*, on the one hand, surviving death, like a book that survives the death of its author, or a child the death of his or her parents, and on the other hand, *fortleben*, *living on*, continuing to live. All concepts that have helped me in my work, and notably that of the trace or of the spectral, were related to this "surviving" as a structural and rigorously originary dimension. It is not derived from either living or dying. No more than what I call "originary mourning" that is, a mourning that does not wait for the so called "actual" death.³⁰²

Derrida's approach is based on erasure: whether the erasure of origins or the erasure of life. The centrality of this erasure taints all other concepts such birth, rebirth, regeneration, sleep or other transformations. The resultant effect is a ghostly presence that seems at odds with lived life. Thus, Derrida admits: "I become appearing-disappearing, like that uneducable spectre who will have never learned how to live."³⁰³

Because of this approach to life, Derrida considers text as an important legacy that survives biological erasure.³⁰⁴ Consequently, the survival of the text must be guaranteed through the operation of theoretical pharmakons that protect it from total destruction. This thesis however, argues that the questioning of traditional philosophy need not result in mourning, disappearance, or absence, nor does it require a defensive strategy. Instead, *by focusing on the supplementarity of the supplement rather than the originary lack of the origin*, it is possible to appropriate Derrida's theories for a more positive approach that supplements erasure with creative re-production.

The evasiveness and complexity of Derrida's philosophy make his intentions unclear. This condition is illustrated by a caricature by Guy Billout,³⁰⁵ which depicts Derrida as a fuzzy, blurred character, gazing at his own reflection that seems clear (perhaps implying that Derrida is not as philosophically clear as he

³⁰² Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 226

³⁰³ Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 32

³⁰⁴ "The trace I leave signifies to me at once my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me." Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 32

³⁰⁵ This cartoon was included in the New York Times as part of Derrida's obituary dated 14 October 2004. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/14/opinion/14taylor.html>

would have use believe). Others highlight the difficulty of his writings. Bennington for example writes:

Derrida would be in the position of Moses, proposing an unintelligible liberation in so abstract and forced a rhetoric, a writing so artificial and full of ruses that one would say it was a foreign language (GL, 48a). This writing would be like the Jewish tabernacle, a construction of bands, empty inside, signifier without signified, containing nothing at the centre. (49a)³⁰⁶

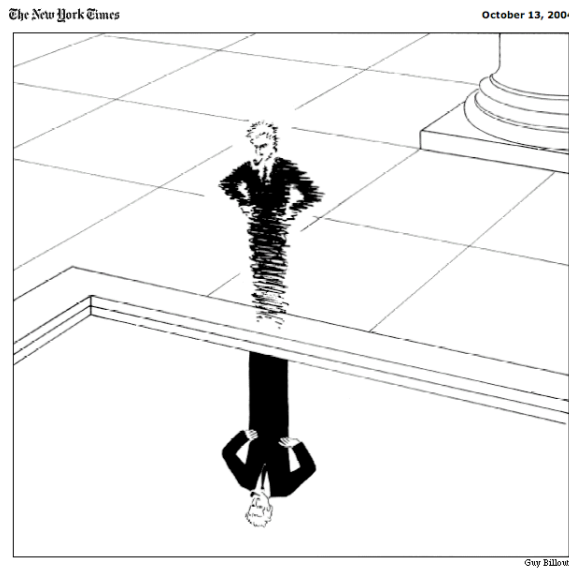


Figure 3.6: Guy Billout's depiction of Derrida. Source: www.nytimes.com

Though Derrida's deconstruction allows for a flattening of hierarchy in metaphysics, for some critics, it does not escape transcendence, which manifests itself in the negative.³⁰⁷ Deconstruction operates on the basis that every origin proposed so far is a finite concept while the impossible non-origin remains an infinite quasi-concept that cannot be defined. On the one hand, this encourages for a re-interpretations of the metaphysical tradition, but on the other hand it creates a messianic process that expects the impossible, forever demonstrating how things fall short of the impossible. As Caputo writes:

Deconstructing everything in the name of the undeconstructible is a lot like what religious people, especially Jews, would call the "critique of idols." Deconstruction, is not nihilism; it just has very high standards.

³⁰⁶ Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 297

³⁰⁷ See Martin C. Dillon, ed. *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1991, p. xxiii. See also Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, p. 54

Deconstruction is satisfied with nothing because it is waiting for the Messiah, which Derrida translated into the philosophical figure of the "to come" (à *venir*), the very figure of the future (*l'avenir*), of hope and expectation.³⁰⁸

The importation of deconstruction into architecture has had mixed results. On the positive front, a questioning of architectural traditions leads to a re-thinking of established patterns, which could open up a way for alternative strategies. On the negative side however, excessive deconstruction begins to oppose creativity by getting lost in the contradictions of signification, or it begins to turn architecture into an inferior reproduction of impossible ideas that are often inaccessible to the majority of people.³⁰⁹

For many, deconstruction is the only strategy for an age in which faith in metaphysics is diminishing. Since there is no way of doing without metaphysics, one must decentre metaphysics from within. This is achieved by exploiting the play of concepts in the history of philosophy, subjecting them to slippage and sliding in order to read them differently. Thus, in the deconstructive approach, creativity is in bricolage and the substitution of pre-existing elements.

This thesis argues that it is possible to devise another philosophical approach to metaphysics, one that does not put it under erasure. This philosophical approach that will be elaborated in chapter five, follows the proposition that the potential of metaphysics as a praxis has not yet been exhausted. In other words, there are many other (metaphysical) models of thought that are yet to be constructed. The thesis also suggests that deconstruction evokes erasure which inevitably creates a condition that inspires theorists like Jean Baudrillard to declare the absence of origin and the flattening of all reality into simulacra. Like Derrida, Baudrillard expresses a loss of faith in metaphysics, but his theories are more extreme as they replace "sure-play,"³¹⁰ with "criticism," "negativity"³¹¹ and "theoretical violence."³¹²

³⁰⁸ John. D Caputo, "Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)", *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, vol. 6, no. 1, The Whitestone Foundation, December 2004, pp. 6-9, p. 8

³⁰⁹ Some of Peter Eisenman's projects fall into this category.

³¹⁰ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

³¹¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 24

³¹² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 163

3.3 THE ABSENCE OF ORIGIN

The disappearance of authentic reality and the dominance of false imagery has been a common critique of the effects of contemporary mass media. As noted previously, Debord and others have declared that the proliferation of images has not only propagated superficiality, but also separated people from lived reality. Jean Baudrillard however, takes this stance further, arguing that in modern society there has developed a condition of appearances *without any reference to any origin or reality*, and not merely a separation from the real. He calls this condition a state of *hyperreality* where truth and meaning is taken out of the equation and image operates autonomously.³¹³ This indicates "*the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.*"³¹⁴ Therefore, for Baudrillard, mass imagery facilitated by new technologies has created a condition in which the sign destroys its relation to the signified and to the real.

As was elaborated previously, Derrida theorised the absence of an absolute signified. He argued that every signified is in fact a *signifier*, which is arrived at through a process of deferral. With such concepts Derrida put the metaphysical concept of origin under erasure, insisting that the structural centre (which could be concepts such as origin, reality, meaning, Idea, etc). is in fact a linguistic construct and our experience of the world is always through such artificial signifiers (myths and counter-myths) that must be deconstructed. Baudrillard adopts Derrida's model (which describes the relationship between signifier and signified) in order to explain the relationship between image and reality. However, he takes the erasure of origins to its limit by arguing that the current media saturated context signals the dissolution of dialectical thinking and the beginning of simulation in which images exist autonomously without any relationship with reality. Similar to Debord's conception of the spectacle, Baudrillard suggests that in the contemporary condition, images only refer to each other, thus, constructing a superficial "hyperreality" in which meaning implodes:

...nothing separates one pole from another anymore, the beginning from the end; there is a kind of contraction of one over the other, a fantastic telescoping, a collapse of the two traditional poles into each other: *implosion*

³¹³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 1

³¹⁴ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

– an absorption of the radiating mode of causality, of the differential mode of determination, with its positive and negative charge – an implosion of meaning. *That is where simulation begins.*³¹⁵

This hyperreality is a mutation of "the third phase of the image," where the image "masks the absence of a profound reality."³¹⁶ Baudrillard warns that once the deceit of signifiers is discovered, there is first despair and a desire to eliminate false images. But in time, despair gives way to acceptance and melancholic fascination. Finally we are consumed by *nostalgia* for a time when discovery was true:

When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity. Escalation of the true, of lived experience, resurrection of the figurative where the object and substance have disappeared.³¹⁷

With this view, Baudrillard sees images as "murderers of the real:"³¹⁸ *perfect signifiers that destroy reality*. For Baudrillard, simulation is not representation because the signifier (image) destroys its relation to the signified (reality). Everything collapses onto the surface, which replaces the radiating mode of causality and the transcendental system of hierarchy established by the Platonic tradition. This surface, however, is sinister and artificial, possessing all the negativity and shallowness of the term superficial.

Baudrillard warns that, in a world deprived of meaning what remains is the "*fascination*" of a "desert-like" indifference, which will eventually destroy us. He defines this fascination as a "nihilistic passion par excellence, ... the passion proper to the mode of disappearance."³¹⁹ Thus, in a disillusioned tone, Baudrillard gives in to nihilism: "If it is nihilistic to be obsessed by the mode of disappearance, and no longer by the mode of production, then I am a nihilist."³²⁰

For Baudrillard, the play of texts and images has already created a condition in which theories, images, and meaning all float by chance. Neither meaning can exist nor criticism, neither ideology nor nihilism. In this context,

³¹⁵ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 31

³¹⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

³¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 7

³¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 5

³¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 5

³²⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 162

authentic origin is subsumed by simulative imagery:

I observe, I accept, I assume, I analyze the second revolution, that of the twentieth century, that of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning.³²¹

Thus, Baudrillard becomes a *neo-nihilist*, concerned with the destruction of *non-ideology*, for in a world of floating theories, destruction by nihilism becomes impossible. Faced with such a condition, Baudrillard advocates *theoretical terrorism* born out of a sense of helplessness and a desire to revive meaning: "Theoretical violence, not truth, is the only resource left to us."³²²

3.3.1 Image, Sign, Seduction

Baudrillard's conception of seduction explains how he considers images and appearances to have enticed humanity into the catastrophic state of hyperreality. For him, images and signs engage the viewer in a superficial game, which exploits the seduction of appearances rather than the deliverance of meaning. Seduction thus becomes a "passion for deviation" and not a unilateral deliverance of truth:

These appearances are not in the least frivolous, but occasions for a game and its stakes, and a passion for deviation – the seduction of the signs themselves being more important than the emergence of any truth – which interpretation neglects and destroys in its search for hidden meanings. This is why interpretation is what, par excellence, is opposed to seduction, and why it is the least seductive of discourses.³²³

According to Baudrillard all meaningful discourse seeks to end appearances, which is an "impossible undertaking."³²⁴ Therefore, the unconscious motive of such discourses is a fascination with, or perhaps more accurately, an expectation of negation, because the goal of all such discourse is an impossibility. Thus, discourse is tempted by its own failure and "by the bracketing of its objectives, of its truth effects which become absorbed within a surface that swallows meaning."³²⁵ This absorption within the self and the lack of truth "in order to better fascinate" the other, becomes the "primitive seduction of language."³²⁶

³²¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 161

³²² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 163

³²³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 53

³²⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 53

³²⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 53

³²⁶ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 54

Baudrillard considers images and appearances as "hypnotic mechanisms,"³²⁷ that do not hide truth but the fact that there is no originary truth in the first place. Thus, images are seductive, precisely because they divert attention from the real truth: that there is none.

One need not want to dispel appearances (the seduction of images). But if one does, it is imperative that one not succeed lest the absence of the truth become manifest. Or the absence of God, or the Revolution.³²⁸

Baudrillard sees images as exploiting our fascination with "death, our vulnerability, and with the void that haunts us."³²⁹ Seduction is therefore the allure of death as life's final destiny, a condition in which "absence ... seduces presence."³³⁰ Baudrillard explains that Narcissus was not seduced by his reflection on the surface of the water as an absolute *other*, nor was he seduced by his reflection as an idealised self. Instead, Narcissus was seduced by the depthless surface, or the "superficial abyss,"³³¹ which drowned him and his image, the self and the other. In this model of thought, surface reduces the "distance between the real and its double" which inevitably leads to seductive catastrophe. The surface of the water is not one of transparency or reflection; it is rather a surface of *deadly absorption*.³³²

According to Baudrillard, seduction "is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion"³³³ which is an indication of two things: on the one hand a curiosity for death much like the "fascination with the void, as in the physical vertigo of a chasm, or the metaphorical vertigo of a door that opens onto the void,"³³⁴ and on the other hand the appeal of beautified appearances: "Above all, seduction supposes not a signified desire, but the beauty of an artifice."³³⁵ The desire

³²⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 85

³²⁸ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 59

³²⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 83

³³⁰ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 85

³³¹ "In the narcissistic *myth*, however, the mirror does not exist so that Narcissus can find within himself some living ideal. It is a matter of the mirror as an absence of depth, as a superficial abyss, which others find seductive and vertiginous only because they are each the first to be swallowed up in it." Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 68

³³² "Seduction cannot possibly be represented, because in seduction the distance between the real and its double, and the distortion between the Same and the Other, is abolished. Bending over a pool of water, Narcissus quenches his thirst. His image is no longer "other;" it is a surface that absorbs and seduces him, which he can approach but never pass beyond. For there is no beyond, just as there is no reflexive distance between him and his image. The mirror of water is not a surface of reflection, but of absorption." Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 67

³³³ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 69

³³⁴ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 75

³³⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 76

for death is defined as a "calculated weakness" or "an incalculable weakness." Unlike a "challenge," seduction does not draw the other into one's area of strength. On the contrary, in seduction one draws the other into one's area of weakness. But this is a calculated move because one's area of weakness is the other's too, i.e. fascination with *deadly appearances*:

We seduce with our death, our vulnerability, and with the void that haunts us. The secret is to know how to play with death in the absence of a gaze or gesture, in the absence of knowledge or meaning.³³⁶

Baudrillard's approach towards images, appearances and their seduction is clarified by his description of women's make-up. The application of make-up, he argues, is an erasure of the self and a transformation into a pure appearance denuded of meaning. The surface of make-up absorbs all expression and *becomes* the woman. But this becoming is not a creative act of production – a *re-production*. It is rather a calculated act of reproduction (replication, duplication) that flattens the woman to the thin surface of the make-up. Seduction therefore becomes the "artificial" perfection of the sign:

[Makeup] absorbs all expression within its own surface, without a trace of blood or meaning. ... There is no God behind the images, and the very nothingness they conceal must remain a secret. The seduction, fascination and "aesthetic" attraction of all the great imaginary processes lies here: in the effacing of every instance, be it the face and every substance, be it desire – in the artificial perfection of the sign.³³⁷

If modernists like Loos evoked gender in their discussion of ornament as the degenerate daubing of structure, Baudrillard uses gender to discuss image in postmodernity as the seductive eclipsing of power and reality. For Baudrillard, surface orchestrates a superficial game of appearances similar to a seductress for whom "the power of man's desire is a myth that she uses in order to both evoke and destroy it."³³⁸

In Baudrillard's hyperreality everything exists upon the seductive surface, which destroys reality by replacing it with illusory appearances. The only escape

³³⁶ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 83

³³⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 94

³³⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 85 See also Baudrillard's conception of seduction as the eclipsing of men's dominating power: "...women have been dispossessed of their bodies, their desires, happiness and rights. But they have always remained mistresses of this possibility of eclipse, of seductive disappearance and translucence, and so have always been capable of eclipsing the power of their masters." Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 88

from this world of seductive simulations is through negativity, criticism, theoretical violence and death, which would end the "*melancholic fascination* ... [that] grips us in the world of disappearance."³³⁹ Not even analysis can bring any depth, since "no matter how the analysis proceeds, it proceeds toward the freezing over of meaning, it assists in the precession of simulacra and of indifferent forms. The desert grows."³⁴⁰

In this fatalistic theory, the "originary mourning" of Derrida turns to a *desire for death*, which provides the only escape from the superficiality of simulacra and the melancholic fascination that accompanies them. Ideology cannot escape the simulacrum either, because it is defined as the "corruption of reality through signs."³⁴¹ Thus, the inevitable has already arrived: a simulated hyperreality, which destroys the original centre and allows the superficial artifice to subsume reality.

There is much to agree with in Baudrillard's theories if it were not for the persistent nihilistic lament that undermines his insight. One can sympathize with his concerns: the aim of such theoretical extremism is the exposition of the consequences of erasure as a strategy, in which the uninhibited play of signifier and the disappearances of the signified leads to a superficial game of appearances in which meaningful discourse may be lost. However, highlighting the excesses of seductive imagery is very different to declaring that there is no longer any meaning. Moreover, appearances are essential for any form of communication. Yet, Baudrillard's argues that discourse is "secretly tempted by ... failure, by the bracketing of its objectives, ...which become absorbed within a surface that swallows meaning."³⁴² This would be the "the primitive seduction of language."³⁴³ The seduction of language may be an archaic phenomenon, but to reduce it to the destruction of meaning is taking things too far. Derrida was careful not to take such a position, even though perhaps he catalyzed it.

In Baudrillard's theory of the hyperreal, Benjamin's withering of aura, Debord's domination of the spectacle and Derrida's erasure of origin are radicalised to the total destruction of the real. The simulacrum represents absolute opacity, total reflectivity, pure two-dimensionality and complete deferral. In this bold conception,

³³⁹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 160

³⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 161

³⁴¹ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 27

³⁴² Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 29

³⁴³ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 54

humanity is trapped within an artificial superficiality, which is all that there is. Like Plato's cave, Baudrillard's hyperreality depicts humanity as a prisoner of surfaces and their superficial effects.

3.4 CONCLUSIONS

The themes and concepts discussed in this chapter have followed the proposition that the subordination of ornament and image in theory are related to an established philosophical model of thought that can be traced back to Plato. It has been demonstrated that appearances suffer from a persistent transcendental hierarchy that not only separates them from reality but also categorises them as superficial imitations. This approach to images and appearances was traced back to Plato's metaphors and analogies in which the origins of the visible world is placed in the higher intelligible realm of Ideas - just as the source of shadows on the metaphoric cave were traced back to the firelight or the sun. In such transcendental conceptions, image (and ornament) is considered as superficial signifiers of an originary reality that is hidden beneath or beyond.

In order to find an alternative approach to this metaphysical model, Derrida's deconstructive philosophy was elaborated, not only because of its influence amongst contemporary architects, but also because it offers a way of subverting the dominant hierarchies of traditional thought. Deconstruction destabilises Platonic metaphysics by demonstrating that the central "origin," or authentic "reality" are in fact signifiers in a chain of different signifiers that continuously defer meaning. As a result, absolute origin is in fact absent and since every signifier is different, every discourse must be deconstructed to expose its "aporias."

Derrida argued that the deferral in language implies that origin must be put under erasure, since its originality has become questionable. Such a strategy for the overcoming of metaphysics through language is based on the absence of an absolute signified. This strategy has differing consequences. On the one hand, deconstruction allows further discoveries within the limits of the tradition, not by producing more metaphysical systems, but by unravelling the intricacies of what has been written before. This would be breaking up the established context in anticipation of emergence, which is achieved through re-reading of existing

works.³⁴⁴ On the other hand, deconstruction leads to negative perfectionism: which is deconstructing everything in the name of the undeconstructable, waiting for a true signified that will never come.³⁴⁵ In other words, in the absence of the impossible non-origin, the erasure of the signified leads to the play of the signifier, where the "death of the author" and the deferral of meaning catalyze superficiality and obfuscation. This leads to Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality in which the artificial sign *destroys* meaning and reality.

Plato's transcendental philosophy defined the origin in a different world, higher and brighter from the shadowy surfaces of the visible realm. While Derrida's philosophy subverts this hierarchy, it nonetheless maintains an "elective affinity" with negative theology.³⁴⁶ In other words, although Derrida promotes play, his philosophy is nonetheless *centred* by a series of quasi-concepts that are absent, contradictory and impossible.³⁴⁷ This negative theology can be described as the substitution of the Platonic Sun with a *Black Hole*,³⁴⁸ which creates endless speculations about its exact definition or mode of operation. The Platonic sun orders the ocular system of concepts based on goodness and presence. The Derridean black

³⁴⁴ As Derrida suggests "Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated." Derrida, "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 329

³⁴⁵ See Caputo, "Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)", *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, p. 8

³⁴⁶ See Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, p. 54

³⁴⁷ Derrida acknowledges the definition deconstruction as the experience of the (impossible) possibility of the impossible. He writes "far from being a methodical technique, a possible or necessary procedure, unrolling the law of a program and applying rules, that is unfolding possibilities, deconstruction has often been defined as the very experience of the (impossible) possibility of the impossible, of the most impossible, a condition that deconstruction shares with the gift, the "yes," the "come," decision, etc." See Jacques Derrida, "Post-scriptum: Aporias, Ways and Voices" trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. in *Derrida and Negative Theology*, 1992, pp. 283-324, p. 290

³⁴⁸ Black holes are regions of space with such strong gravitational fields that nothing, not even light can escape their pull, once they go past the "event horizon". The event horizon is an abstract surface that marks the point of no return. The absorption of visible light makes the centre of a black hole invisible. However, despite this invisible (impossible centre) a black hole makes its presence felt, through its interaction with matter orbiting its event horizon. Such orbiting matter (stars, debris, gases etc). is heated up to high temperatures, releasing radiation that is easily detectable. Therefore, the centre of a black hole, "the singularity," is impossible to see, however, its position is revealed through its peripheral effects. Thus, much like the sun, a black hole is a centre, a point of origin and a point of death and termination. For more information on the geometry and the physical properties of black holes, see Derek J. Raine and Edwin George Thomas, *Black Holes: An Introduction*, Imperial College Press, University of Leicester, 2005

hole on the other hand, deconstructs all presence to a chaotic vortex that is nonetheless governed by the non-definable absence at its centre.

This thesis argues that if Derrida's erasure of origin "demands the surface of the text,"³⁴⁹ Baudrillard's hyperreality flattens reality onto the superficial image in "an implosion of meaning."³⁵⁰ This is not only a highly nostalgic theorisation of contemporary condition, but one that continues to search for Platonic Ideas. In Baudrillard's conception of the simulacrum, the binary hierarchical divide between image and the real collapses onto the surface, but this is seen to be an undesirable event, in which reality is destroyed in the process.

As a way of summary, it is possible to argue that if the Platonic model preferred the brilliant source to shadowy surface effects, the closure of Platonism through the erasure of origin demanded the play of surfaces (of the signifier, text and writing). However, the erasure of origin necessitated an absent origin that could not be defined. The impossibility of such an origin and the free play of signifiers inevitably catalyzed nihilistic theories that declared the destruction of origin and the artificial perfection of the sign (Baudrillard). Therefore, hyperreality is defined as a hallucinatory condition, facilitated by modern media technologies, in which the withering of aura (Benjamin) and the dominance of spectacle (Debord) mutates into the flattening of the real onto the superficial image.

Such philosophical explorations inspire the question: what are the implications for architectural theory, and specifically, a study of Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum? Without going into details, (which shall be left for chapter six), it is important to highlight that when critics (like Hal Foster) question the dominance of skin over structure, they perform two simultaneous conceptual operations. Firstly, the architectural envelope is divided into ornamental skin and fundamental structure. This is then followed by a second conceptual turn in which the beautified surface is considered secondary in relation to functional structure, materiality, context or other concepts that are considered primary. This thesis argues that both of these conceptual operations are the effects of a transcendental hierarchical system of thought that continues to consider appearances as superficial reproductions of authentic reality. Thus, the primary task of architecture is either merely *represented* by architectural imagery (duck) or *covered* by imagery (decorated

³⁴⁹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18

³⁵⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 31

shed). In both scenarios a clear distinction is made between designing for the appearance of the building, and designing for its *originary function*.

Much criticism of Frank Gehry's Bilbao Museum revolves on the argument that the building is designed for the spectacular image, which is destined for media reproduction. The images of architecture reproduced across mass media are considered artificial in comparison to the authentic physical building situated in its context. In such conceptions, the surfaces of Gehry's architecture seduce, but this seduction is illusory fascination, evoking a Baudrillardian conception of seduction. Moreover, the images of Gehry's architecture are spectacular, but the spectacle is an image that masks and hides reality – implying a Debordean conception of the spectacle. Consequently, Gehry's architecture is either frivolous or inauthentic, because its appearances do not match its function, nor do they display a clear relationship to historical context, logical structure or structural logic. Such is the familiar approach towards appearances in which they are at best detached from originary reality, or in the worst-case scenario, they are hallucinatory images that have no relationship with reality whatsoever.

The deconstruction or closure of such approaches would challenge the definitions of "surface," "structure," "skin", "image" or "reality." It would also attempt to question what we mean by the function of architecture. In this way, this thesis is deconstructive arguing that appearances are in fact an important element of architecture: an *arch-imagery* that precedes architecture. However, the thesis also attempts to take the discussion beyond existing elements, by extending the definitions of surface. As shall be demonstrated in later chapters, this would be a Deleuzian approach of creative concept making in which deterritorialization of thought is always accompanied by reterritorialization.

With this in mind, the thesis attempts to consider Frank Gehry's museum through a *surficial philosophy* based on immanence rather than transcendence (whether positive or negative transcendence). This implicates a different understanding of surface (one that is not in opposition to depth) and a different conception of architecture: not skinned-structure, duck or decorated shed, but *surface architecture*. By appropriating surficial philosophy, this thesis argues that image making is not a secondary or a superficial task since images are not inferior copies of reality or murderers of the real. Instead images *produce more reality*, as they possess an immanent dissimilarity from their supposed models. Consequently, it is

possible to consider the spectacular nature of Gehry's BGM as successful participation in a different reality: a simulated reality that continues to be produced, reproduced and disseminated by contemporary technologies.

PART TWO

UNFOLDING SURFICIAL PHILOSOPHY

CHAPTER FOUR: WHAT IS SURFACE?

CHAPTER FIVE: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO SURFACE, IMAGE AND APPEARANCE

CHAPTER SIX: SURFICIAL ARCHITECTURE: THE CASE OF THE BILBAO GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

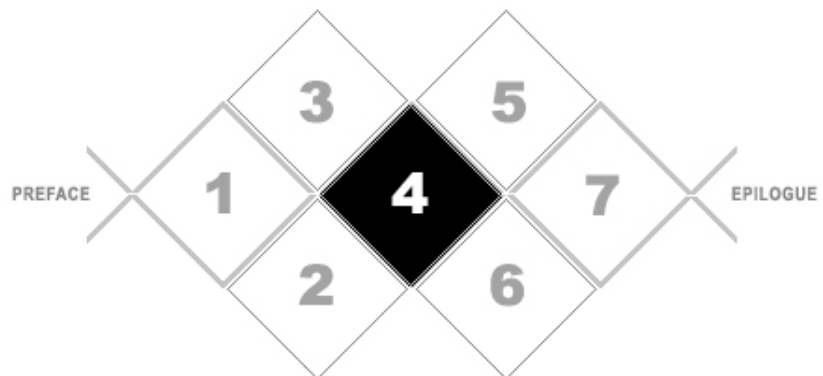
Foster's critique of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum implies some important questions: is Gehry's work the result of a preoccupation with visual spectacle and superficial effects, with all the shallowness that these words can conjure up? Is the BGM tectonically obscure because the "skin" has been allowed to dominate the structure? Is the "Bilbao Effect" nothing more than the seduction of the superficial, the spectacular and the imagistic at the expense of formal logic, programmatic rigor and sensitivity to the site? If so, how can Gehry get away with so much?

This dissertation argues that the answer lies upon the very surfaces with which Gehry designs, visualizes, constructs and reproduces his buildings. In other words, it is questionable whether Gehry's BGM is intended to be divided into the structure/skin, function/form opposition so characteristic of modernist manifestoes. Perhaps the BGM's appeal lies in its invitation of the viewer to remain at the surface level, an ambition which considering the technological state of current society seems more profound than superficial. This thesis proposes that rather than designing for the penetration of surfaces and images in order to arrive at a hidden reality, structure or logic, the BGM invites the viewer to float within and upon the *surface*, which forms the architectural place within which communication of ideas, expression of sense and transformation of established categories occurs.

Arguably this is a different approach to surface, which does not define it in opposition to a hidden depth. Moreover, it seems that the movement of thought that is being encouraged is not one of vertical ascent towards the height of Ideas nor is it a descent towards the depths of meaning. Instead it is a non-hierarchical floatation, which suggests a more horizontal exploration of alternative sensations and unlikely realisations. Such a mode of communication is argued to be primitive and postmodern, expressive and obscure.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT IS SURFACE?



It holds that depending on the contextual situation, it will be sensible (and sometimes true, sometimes not) to say that one who looks at, gazes at, stares at, etc., an object may be said to be seeing the object, to be seeing the whole object, to be seeing all of the object, to be seeing each and every part of the object, to be seeing the object itself; and (taking a breath) to object, all of the surface of the object, only the surface of the object, and part of the surface of the object; and (taking another breath) sometimes to be seeing the surface, all of the surface, the whole surface, etc., of the object, and at the same time, to be seeing the object, all of the object, the whole object, and so on; and (taking another) sometimes to be seeing each of these items directly and sometimes not. Each of these characterizations fits some situation in which human percipients find themselves and does not fit others. What piecemeal realism then adds is the assertion that none of them fits every situation in which human percipients find themselves.³⁵¹

Avrum Stroll

³⁵¹ Avrum Stroll, *Surfaces*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, p. 179

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER FOUR

This thesis proposes that it is possible to think of Gehry's museum as an *architecture of surface*. This implies a conceptual strategy without transcendental hierarchy in which architecture occurs upon the surface, not between skin and structure, or image and reality. To elaborate this conception of architecture, the thesis first deploys a *philosophy of surface* and later adopts a *surficial philosophy*.

A philosophy of surface investigates the nature of surfaces and their significance for interaction with the external world. In the current condition where images proliferate through mass media, surfaces have gained greater significance. This is not only because they facilitate the projection or the screening of images, but also because (communication) technologies are becoming ever thinner and smaller.³⁵²

In geometry, surface is a flat, two-dimensional entity that lacks materiality or depth. However, Avrum Stroll's "analytic deconstruction"³⁵³ of surface in everyday language demonstrates that different interpretations of the term are possible, each with its own unique qualities. Using Stroll's work as a reference, the following chapter demonstrates that both the "ordinary" and the "scientific" definitions of surface have an *essential thickness*, and an *embedded depth*, indicating that it is possible and highly popular to define surface as a thick boundary condition, i.e. a *milieu* or a *medium*.

This chapter also mentions four different theories of visual perception in order to determine the significance of surface in various epistemological models. This part progresses from theories that view surface as a barrier or mask that hide the rest of the object, to one that defines visual perception as an effect of "surface layout." Stroll demonstrates that there are different theories of surface in epistemology and no one definition of surface can embody the variety of its usage.

³⁵² An integrated circuit (also known as IC, microcircuit, microchip, silicon chip, or chip) is a miniature electronic circuit, which is manufactured on the surface of a semiconductor material such as silicone. An integrated circuit incorporate semiconductor devices such as the transistor and resistor. Integrated circuits are now in use in most electronic devices and have revolutionised contemporary technology. See http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/integrated_circuit.aspx, accessed April 2009.

³⁵³ See A. P. Martinich "Analytic Phenomenological Deconstruction" in *Certainty and Surface in Epistemology and Philosophical Method: Essays in Honour of Avrum Stroll* (Problems in Contemporary Philosophy), ed. A. P. Martinich and Michael White, Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, London, 1991, pp. 165-84.

This indicates the flexibility and pliability of the term in everyday use. However, rather than seeing this conclusion as a case for “piecemeal realism,” (which is Stroll’s preferred strategy) this thesis argues that in the context of creative production, the impossibility of defining surface *in general*, is an opportunity for further theorisation and exploration of (architectural) surfaces.

Following from this conclusion, later chapters will demonstrate that a topological and topographical conception of surface can be used to arrive at a *surficial philosophy* that gives more emphasis to creativity and productivity by overcoming the hierarchy and transcendence in traditional thought. Such a philosophical approach characterized by “univocity” and “immanence,”³⁵⁴ is argued to be more sympathetic to creative production, offering a more flexible attitude toward new technology and alternative processes of design.

4.1 DEFINITIONS OF SURFACE: “THEOREMS” FROM EVERYDAY LANGUAGE

The work of English philosopher, Avrum Stroll offers an intriguing insight into the usage of the word “surface” in the English language. Stroll investigates the definition of surface through what he calls the “geometry of ordinary speech,”³⁵⁵ which is used to arrive at a series of “theorems” based on a “common-sense point of view.”³⁵⁶ According to Stroll this informal geometry of speech is “deeper, more primitive, conceptually prior to, and indeed the basis for the refined and regimented mathematical and scientific treatments of geometric concepts,”³⁵⁷ of which one could mention the surface. Although the scientific language of geometry and the less formal language of ordinary speech can be quite different, it is hoped that by focusing on their similarities one can arrive at a better understanding of the term “surface.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ For an explanation of these concepts see section 5.1 of the thesis.

³⁵⁵ Avrum Stroll, *Surfaces*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988, p. 11

³⁵⁶ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 12

³⁵⁷ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 12

³⁵⁸ Stroll identifies the major difference between ordinary language and geometry as the former’s lack of axioms. While in geometry axioms and inference rules are used to derive theorems, very few of the sentences of English can be described as theorems. However, certain geometric axioms are shared between the two languages, for example “cube,” “triangle,” and “square” which are so familiar to ordinary speakers as frequently not to be thought of as technical words at all.

Stroll explains that “surface” resides in the “overlap” between everyday language and geometry. Other words include “line,” “point,” “edge,” “side,” “angle,” “corner,” “apex,” and “face.” The term “overlap” is used because certain technical words are not found in ordinary speech and conversely certain words are not part of the geometrical lexicon. “Brim,” “brink,” and “verge” would be examples of the latter.³⁵⁹ “Surface-talk” refers to that part of everyday language that describes surfaces and signifies their presence. In other words, the “common sense point of view” stipulates that if one can apply surface-talk to an object, then it must have surfaces. The nature of surface-talk depends on two important factors: firstly the *operations* performed on the surfaces, and the secondly the *properties* that the surfaces have inherent in them. Moreover, in surface-talk, the sense of vision and touch are most important since other senses like hearing, smell and taste “are mentioned rarely, if at all, in everyday speech in surface-talk about such objects.”³⁶⁰

4.1.1 Immateriality or Two-dimensionality of Abstract Conceptions

Through a rigorous analysis of surface-talk, Stroll concludes that there can be four different conceptions of surface, all of which consider surfaces as a boundary condition. The first conception (inspired by the writings of Leonardo da Vinci) is when surface is considered as an *interface*, a common boundary without divisible bulk that does not belong to either of the contiguous entities that are in contact.³⁶¹ In this scenario, surface is seen as an abstract entity that marks the theoretical distinction between two things, or a thing and nothingness. Surface is abstract but it is not like a “phenomenon.”³⁶² Therefore, surface remains the same regardless of the operations performed on either entity in contact. This is because surface is a theoretical construct; *it has no physical dimension*.

The second conception of surface as an abstraction (“DS model”) defines it as belonging to its corresponding entity. This definition is arrived at through “thinning out a *physical* surface until we are left with a kind of logical limit or

³⁵⁹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 201

³⁶⁰ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 24

³⁶¹ See Stroll, *Surfaces*, pp. 40-46

³⁶² By phenomenon, Stroll refers to images and shadows that do not have divisible bulk or physical properties. Described in this way, surface is like the “equator” in that it is an abstract boundary, which in this case, separates the northern and southern hemisphere of the earth.

conceptual limit to the object.”³⁶³ Under this abstract model, surface is *infinitely thin* and *impossibly shallow*. However, it is only associated with physical objects that have stable shapes and discernible boundaries.

Thus, the DS model “has something deeply to do with the *shape* of the object, and with the fact that its shape is readily discernible in ordinary circumstances.”³⁶⁴ Air, clouds, human beings, and other large³⁶⁵ living creatures do not fall into this category because:

the objects to which surfaces are ascribed must have a certain density or compactness, and reasonable determinate and stable boundaries; all of these features are connected with the *shape* of the object, a shape that ought to be determinate and stable enough so that we can easily recognize it under normal conditions of visibility.³⁶⁶

The necessary stability of the shape of the object in the DS conception is the reason why one cannot talk of the surfaces of a river, while it can be said that a lake has a surface. A river is animate water, in continuous movement between the bedrock and the air above, and therefore it is not considered to have surfaces. Unlike the first abstract conception of surface, the DS model possesses the characteristics of the object to which it belongs. Nevertheless, in this conception, surface is devoid of any physical thickness and as a result, it remains *two-dimensional*.

4.1.2 Minimal or Arbitrary Thicknesses of Physical Conceptions

In contrast to the abstract definitions of surface discussed above, Stroll proposes two other conceptions that treat surfaces as physical entities with properties that include depth or divisible bulk. The first of the physical conceptions of surface is taken from an ordinary person’s point of view (“OS model”), which defines surface as part of the object deep enough to become marked and scratched. In this conception, surface is a boundary that has a *thickness* upon (and within) which various physical operations can be performed. More importantly, this definition of surface also includes such “covering materials as paints, lacquers, glosses or resins – and sometimes even ... the patina that an object develops or acquires with time.”³⁶⁷ The OS conception is unique because it is characterized by the *thickness*, not the *thinness*

³⁶³ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 46

³⁶⁴ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 49

³⁶⁵ Since we are using the “geometry of ordinary speech” to deduce theorems, large here, means large enough to be visible by the naked eye.

³⁶⁶ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 49

³⁶⁷ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 53

of surface. However, the depth at which surface ceases and the rest of the object begins is often defined *arbitrarily*.

Stroll suggests another physical conception of surface based on the work of Gabor A. Samorjai.³⁶⁸ Much like the OS view, this “scientific conception” represents surface as a physical entity with properties of various kinds that can be subject to different physical operations. In this conception, surface is defined by the “progressive thinning out”³⁶⁹ of a material, moving from the centre to the boundary, the only difference being that the thinning process is stopped as one approaches the last layer of atoms belonging to the object. This is because “one can’t find anything ‘thinner’ than a last layer of atoms” and it is “the last layer that belongs to that object before one moves into a medium of a different sort.”³⁷⁰

The scientific view (SS) seems similar to the DS model in that it defines surface by thinning out the object. However, in the SS conception, surface is a fundamentally different concept, because it maintains *minimal thickness* that can only be viewed using advanced technologies.³⁷¹ In other words, if in the DS model, surface is a two-dimensional entity without any thickness, in the SS model surface becomes a three-dimensional phenomenon, even though its thickness is not visible to the naked eye.

Moreover, in the SS model, technological magnification allows for surface to assume different qualities. For example, an electron microscope photograph of a “clean” deposit-free surface reveals that it is in fact heterogeneous, not homogeneous. An extreme magnification of the scientific surface (surface that is one atom thick) shows that it contains a number of topographical features such as “terraces, steps, kinks, all of which one might well find in a hillside orchard.”³⁷² It is therefore through technological magnification that surface is transformed into a *complex topography, or a surficial system*, upon which different reactions, interactions, and operations occur.

³⁶⁸ Gabor A. Samorjai is a professor at the University of California, Berkely, and a leading researcher in the field of surface chemistry.

³⁶⁹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 54

³⁷⁰ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 54

³⁷¹ “The thinning-out process that would eventually lead to one’s thinking of a surface as an abstraction seems irresistible; yet Somorjai does resist it. He states categorically that the surface is a physical entity, or, as he calls it, a ‘system,’ which includes such features as adatoms, kinks, and the rest.” Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 57

³⁷² Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 57

The scientific conception allows every entity a surface, which can be studied and analyzed. For example, clouds, trees, persons, and animals are considered to have surfaces that mark them off from other entities in their environments. The OS view would agree that such entities have boundaries, but would reject the idea that such boundaries are surfaces. For example, the OS view would not consider skin to be a human’s surface, but for science, the last atoms of skin would be the surface of humans. Similar remarks can apply to certain phenomena such as clouds, fog, haze, and air. Therefore, a physicist can talk about the surface of the air and surface of water (air-water interface), but the ordinary speaker, would not agree: they do not say that the surface of the air is rough or smooth, even though they may speak this way about the surface of the sea.

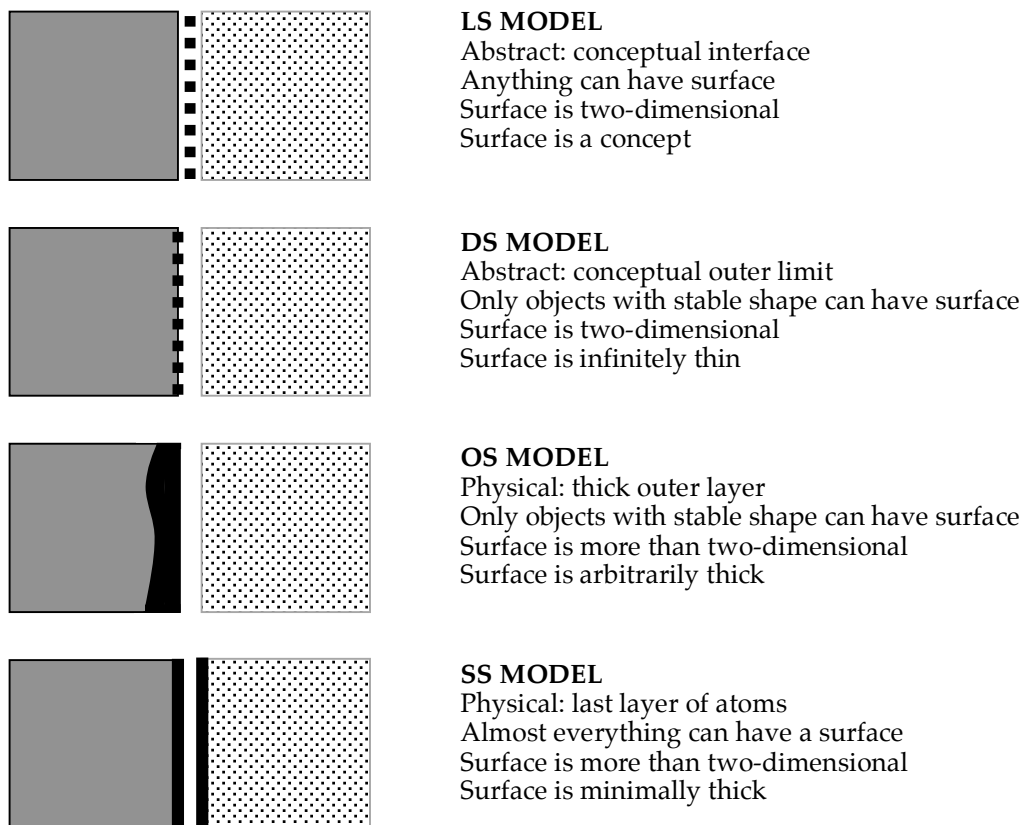


Figure 4.1: The Four Conceptions of Surface. Source: the author.

Despite these differences, both OS and SS definitions allow layers of paint or patina to be considered as the surface of the object, and they both give emphasis to the

operations that can be performed upon surfaces. This allows surface to be heterogeneous to the rest of the object without losing its *conceptual continuity* with the object, i.e. without being considered as a foreign layer. In such physical conceptions, surface is not only a thick milieu, but it is also a heterogeneous boundary condition in which the object and its appearance exist in a complex *surficial system*.

4.1.3 Exceptions: Surface-less Phenomena or Surface Phenomena?

It has been demonstrated that from the “common-sense point of view,” certain conceptions of surface are possible that do not define it in opposition to depth. These *thick surfaces* are conceptually continuous with the rest of the object, even if they are of different material make-up. However, the common-sense approach has its own limitations. For example, there are certain things to which surface-talk cannot be applied. Stroll groups such entities into two categories: certain phenomena (like shadows, rainbows, lightning), and certain objects (like clouds, dogs, plants, trees and persons).

However, it is possible to argue that most of such phenomena are dependent on surfaces for their existence and therefore, they can be called *surface phenomena*. For example, shadows are created when light is not cast on certain areas of a surface. In other words, without surface there would be no shadows, just as without light there would be no shadows either. This line of reasoning can be extended to argue that images are also surface phenomena. Arguably, without reflective surfaces (of mirrors), sensitised surfaces (of photographic film or paper) or the activated surfaces (of digital screens) there would be no mirror images, photographic images, or any virtual imagery.

For the case of animate objects (animals, human beings, etc). things are a little different. Stroll points out that from the common-sense point of view, it is possible to say that one touches someone’s “skin” or “hair” but one cannot be said to be touching their surface. Thus, skin can be said to have a surface but not the person and although surface-talk is sometimes applied to the “inanimate” parts of animate beings, it is hardly ever applied to the whole person or to the whole

animal.³⁷³ Therefore, from the common-sense point of view: “[t]he basic turf to which surface-talk applies is the world of the inanimate.”³⁷⁴

However scientific analysis and new technologies have demonstrated that seemingly stable, inanimate surfaces are in continuous movement (earth’s surface), while seemingly homogeneous surfaces are in fact heterogeneous layers (oxidised atoms, impurities, steppes and terrains) that change in time (e.g. patina). Therefore, it is possible to argue that new technologies have facilitated an altogether different understanding of surface and an ability to see that surfaces are in fact always *surfacing*.

4.2 SURFACE IN VISUAL PERCEPTION: THE POTENTIAL OF DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS

A common feature of epistemology has been characterized by questions about what it means to “see” something, and whether one can see the whole object, part of it or none of it at all. Naturally, notions of surface are an important factor in such epistemological pursuits. Stroll argues that in general, the epistemological tradition posits that “we don’t literally see all of an object from a given perspective and at a given moment, but at most a certain part of it” which in turn is taken to mean that “we see a certain part of its surface.”³⁷⁵ In such statements, surface is used as a singular term that forms only a part of the object and almost always hides the other parts through its opacity. In other words, our perception of the world is always partial and mediated through a surface, which sits between the observer and the whole reality of the object.

4.2.1 Surface as Barrier

Stroll explains that attitudes towards surfaces in traditional epistemology are based on three contrasting theoretical assumptions that can be refuted through particular examples. As was mentioned above, the first assumption is that the object discussed has only *one opaque surface* and we only see part of it. This theory

³⁷³ According to Stroll, “...from the fact that the skin has a surface, and is part of a human being, it does not follow that the human being has a surface. But this does follow with respect to the skin of an apple.” Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 35

³⁷⁴ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 27

³⁷⁵ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 89

can be exemplified by a steel marble which would be said to have one surface, only a certain part of which can be seen from any angle at any one time. In this conception, part of the surface masks the rest of the object. Theorists like Martin Lean³⁷⁶ and Roderick Chisholm,³⁷⁷ argue that even though the observer can only see part of the surface of the object at any given time, he is still said to be seeing the object. In such theories “to see a physical object just is (trivially) to see part of its surface.”³⁷⁸

The second assumption sees surface as different from the non-surface parts of the object. Here surface acts as a barrier in blocking the view towards the other parts of the object. According to G.E. Moore one can see part of the surface directly and the object itself *indirectly*.³⁷⁹ Moore refers to the part of the surface that is seen directly as “*sense-datum*.”³⁸⁰

The third theory is a combination of the two above, which suggests that surface is only a part of the object; therefore seeing it or part of it means that we do not see all of the object. This suggests that if one sees the surface of an object, one does not see the object, but just its surface. This final theory raises the important issue of the “part-whole” relationship, which is different to the “part-part relationship”³⁸¹ of the preceding cases. (See figure 4.2)

These three assumptions define the traditional perception of surfaces: “namely, that they are intermediaries, standing, as it were, between the observer and certain parts, aspects, or features of the object, or even standing between the observer and the whole object itself.”³⁸² But, there are exceptions for each of these contrasting assumptions. For example for the first theory, one can mention a dice that has six surfaces. From a common-sense point of view, one cannot talk about *the surface* of a dice and if the dice is made of glass, one can see through it and see all of

³⁷⁶ See Martin Lean, *Sense Perception and Matter: A Critical Analysis of C. D. Broad's Theory of Perception*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1953, pp. 68-69

³⁷⁷ See Roderick M. Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1957, pp. 153-156

³⁷⁸ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 99

³⁷⁹ See O. K. Bouwsma, “Moore's Theory of Sense-Data” in *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore*, ed. P. A. Schilpp, 3rd ed. La Salle, Illinois, 1968, pp. 201-222

³⁸⁰ See Stroll, *Surfaces*, pp. 101-2

³⁸¹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 95

³⁸² Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 95

it. Therefore, to state that seeing an object is seeing only part of its surface *directly* is a form of “naïve realism.”³⁸³

The second and third conceptions of visual perception are a little more complicated. In Moore’s theories, seeing an object is seeing “part of the surface of the object ... but never the whole object or the object itself.”³⁸⁴ For Clarke however, “in such circumstances we see the whole object, or the object itself, ...[but not] the surface of the object or any part thereof.”³⁸⁵ Moore’s position is more straightforward, but Clarke’s theory needs further elaboration.

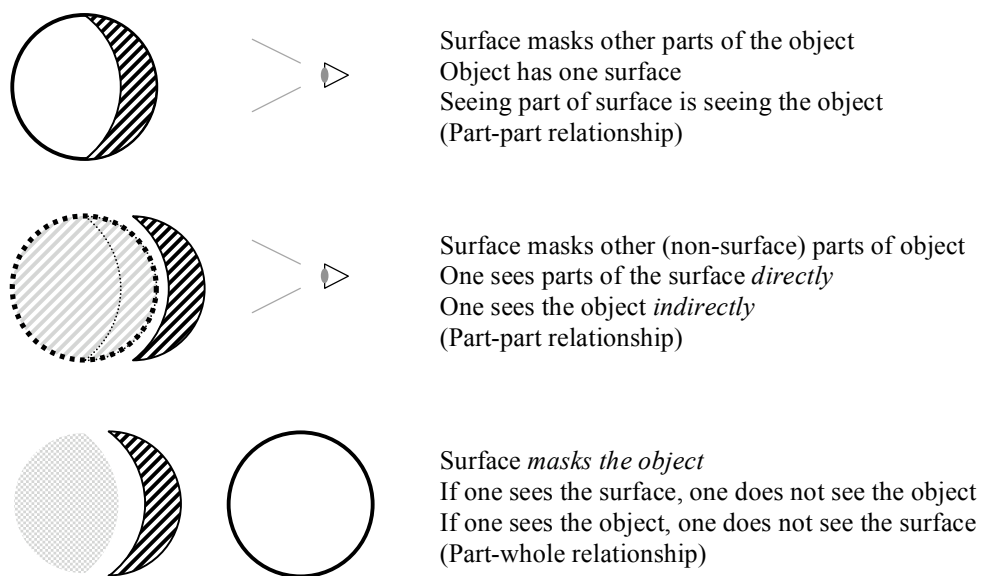


Figure 4.2: Surface as a barrier to seeing: the three epistemological assumptions. Source: the author after Thompson Clarke’s diagrams reprinted in Stroll, Avrum, 1988, *Surfaces*, p. 109

4.2.2 No Surface, Just Object

In Clarke’s conception, seeing an object is not seeing its surfaces because, if this were so, the observer would only be seeing a *part-object* that would be masking the object. Therefore, when X has seen a tomato, he has seen the object *without the*

³⁸³ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 102

³⁸⁴ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 104

³⁸⁵ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 104

interference of surfaces, which are intermediaries that hide other parts of the object.³⁸⁶ The question therefore is what we mean by “seeing” and whether one should go beyond a common-sense understanding of term to such a degree that it becomes alienated and foreign?

To further explain his theory of vision, Clarke proposes the concept of “nibbled at” to demonstrate how the preconception of an object determines its visual perception. Clarke argues that depending on the “units” that make up an object, surface-talk about the object differs. For example, if a tomato is seen to be made up of two parts, (i.e. surface and the rest, or simply divided into two parts) then when one part has been “nibbled at” it would be right to say that *half of the tomato* has been nibbled at. However, if the tomato is seen as a unit entity, then one can say that *the tomato* has been nibbled at. This distinction highlights that surface-talk depends entirely on how the object is pre-defined: whether as a unit concept or divided in two or more segments.³⁸⁷ Thus, “*seeing* functions analogously to *nibbling at*” which means that “when one sees a whole tomato, one is not seeing any subparts of it, such as a part of its surface.”³⁸⁸ In this way, in ordinary talk, seeing an object is defined as seeing all of it because the object has not been subdivided into different parts (of which one can mention the surface).

Relating this logic to architecture can produce significant results. For instance, if the architectural envelope is seen as one conceptual unit and not subdivided into an ornamental layer and an underlying structure, then seeing “ornament” or “cladding” would mean that one is, in fact, *seeing architecture* and not a partial or superficial element of it. If however, the building is categorised into conceptually segregated sub-units, then the question arises whether one is only seeing a part of architecture (ornament, cladding, skin) that is masking the rest, and if so, whether such elements have an appropriate relationship with what lies beneath? Thus, it is through conceptual segmentation that surface design becomes vulnerable to accusations of superficiality or deceit.

Clarke’s argument is based on the proposition that in normal talk of “seeing,” surfaces are not mentioned at all, because the object in discussion is not

³⁸⁶ See Thompson Clarke, “Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects” in *Philosophy in America*, ed. M. Black, Ithaca, Illinois, 1965, pp. 98-114, p. 108-9 discussed and elaborated in Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 109

³⁸⁷ Clarke, “Seeing Surfaces and Physical Objects,” *Philosophy in America*, p. 108-9

³⁸⁸ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 113

pre-divided into exact units. However, the complexity of everyday scenarios exceeds this argument. For example from the ordinary person's point of view, it is not always clear where surface ends and the rest of the object begins. Moreover, in many scenarios, one talks of mixtures and ambiguous amounts. For instance, when a tomato is not divided into two units, it is still possible to say that *a bit* of tomato has been nibbled at, or only some of it or a bit of the top layer. Such statements would contradict Clarke's position, which maintains that if the tomato is not subdivided, one would only say "*the tomato* has been nibbled at."

The limitation of Clarke's theory is especially apparent when we consider that the observer is often not in a position to confidently and precisely determine the exact subdivision of the object in view. To determine subdivisions would require a *cross-section* view through the object or a prior knowledge of the object's construction. In ordinary scenarios these factors are rare, which is why Clarke's reliance on prior knowledge of exact units of measurements makes his theory at odds with everyday scenarios.³⁸⁹

Seeing architecture as one conceptual unit does not necessitate thick wall construction, though it might strongly suggest such an arrangement. Even if the architectural envelope is made of distinctly different layers, it is still possible to consider these layers as operating within a *conceptual mixture*, i.e. without precise conceptual boundaries. With new technologies and materials of construction, the external layers of a building are now capable of performing structural duties, whilst structure is increasingly taking on ornamental characteristics. Such advancements in design and construction require their own theoretical approaches to facilitate new definitions and generate alternative approaches to traditional categories.³⁹⁰

4.2.3 Theory of Surface Layout

Before examining Stroll's conclusion about the epistemological significance of surfaces, it is important to mention James Jerome Gibson's work, which offers an alternative approach to traditional theories of visual perception. Questioning the established definitions of "seeing" in epistemology, Gibson argues that much like experimental psychology, the complexity of seeing is often reduced to "snapshot

³⁸⁹ See Stroll, *Surfaces*, pp. 115-120

³⁹⁰ As we shall explain later, an alternative conceptual approach based on Gilles Deleuze's philosophy has the potential to exploit such middle-conditions: the spectrum of transitions between traditional oppositional dualities.

vision” or “aperture vision” where only a partial element of reality is considered.³⁹¹ In such scenarios, the subject is limited to one perspective, given a short period of time and fixed in one place when looking at an object. It is for this reason that the subject can only see a segment of what would be seen in normal conditions, where movement around the object, or in some cases within the object itself, is possible. Therefore the observer in such a “test condition” is like the prisoner in the Platonic cave who is restricted to one point of view.

Gibson’s criticism is that natural vision is different to “laboratory cases,” as movement and time always play an important factor.³⁹² Thus, Gibson proposes a theory of surface derived from “ambient vision” and “ambulatory vision” which he argues to be closer to how people see objects in everyday conditions.³⁹³ In ambient vision, the head is allowed to rotate and scan the environment whilst ambulatory vision allows movement through the ecological environment as well as the rotational scanning of the head.³⁹⁴ It is argued that in the case of ambulatory vision, the observer is not apprehending a flat visual field composed of connected snapshots, rather a flowing array of visual cues that determine movement, direction, depth and so on.³⁹⁵ In other words, as the observer moves and scans the environment, the surfaces of objects emerge and recede, which together with an awareness of space and time, allows for a more comprehensive visual perception.

Gibson’s theory proposes that the perception of depth is not achieved by interpreting two-dimensional images *formed in the mind* (abstract), but rather through a direct experience of *surfaces in space and time* (physical). In this theory, objects are set against a surface background, rather than floating in empty space or air. Thus, depth, distance, shape and other attributes of objects are determined by analyzing surfaces in relationship to other surfaces that make up the visual field. The following passage from *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (1986), explains this concept:

³⁹¹ James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, Lawrence Erlbaum, London, 1986, pp. 1-3

³⁹² “The flow of optical stimulation is not a sequence of stimuli or a series of discrete snapshots. If it were, the sequence would have to be converted into a scene. The flow is sampled by the visual system. And the persistence of the environment together with the coexistence of its parts and the concurrence of its events are all perceived together.” Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, p. 222.

³⁹³ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, p. 1

³⁹⁴ See Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 222-3

³⁹⁵ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 121-126.

I suggested a new theory in a book on what I called the *visual world* [Gibson, *The Perception of the Visual World* (Boston, 1950)]. I considered “the possibility that there is literally no such thing as a perception of space without the perception of a continuous background surface” (p.6). I called this a *ground theory* of space perception to distinguish it from the *air theory* that seemed to underlie the old approach. The idea was that the world consisted of a basic surface with adjoining surfaces, not of bodies in empty air. The character of the visual world was given not by objects but by the background of the objects. Even the space of the airplane pilot, I said, was determined by the ground and the horizon of the earth, not by the air through which he flies. The notion of space of three dimensions with three axes for Cartesian coordinates was a great convenience for mathematics, I suggested, but an abstraction that had very little to do with actual perception.³⁹⁶

This theory is validated by pointing out that the perception of the size and distance of an object on the ground is often more difficult to judge than the size and distance of an object in the sky. This is because in the latter case the background surface displays more visual clues against which the object can be compared.³⁹⁷ Thus, Gibson’s unique theory proposes that depth or height is an *effect of surface layout*:

I would now describe the ground theory as a theory of the *layout* of surfaces. By *layout*, I mean the relations of surfaces to the ground and to one another, their arrangement. The layout includes both places and objects, together with other features. The theory asserts that the perception of surface layout is direct. This means that perception does not begin with two-dimensional form perception. Hence, there is no special kind of perception called depth perception, and the third dimension is not lost in the retinal image since it was never in the environment to begin with. It is a loose term. If *depth* means the dimension of an object that goes with height and width, there is nothing special about it. Height becomes depth when the object is seen from the top, and width becomes depth when the object is seen from the side. If depth means distance from *here*, then it involves self-perception and is continually changing as the observer moves about. The theory of depth perception is based on confusion and perpetuated by the fallacy of the retinal picture.

I now say that there is information in ambient light of the perception of the layout of surface, but not that there are cues or clues for the perception of depth. The traditional list of cues is worthless if perception does not begin with a flat picture...such is the hypothesis of the direct perception of surface layout.³⁹⁸

The theory of surface layout implies that the context, the background or the underlying surface upon which things are distinguished is as important as the

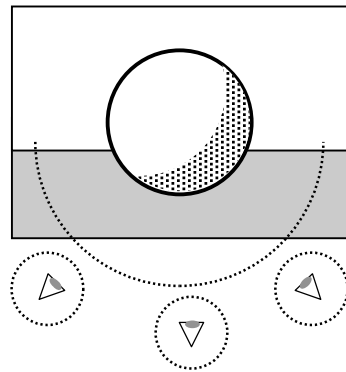
³⁹⁶ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 148

³⁹⁷ See Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 160-1

³⁹⁸ Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 147-49

surfaces of objects that are in view. One cannot exist without the other. In a natural context, the earth, the sky and the horizon help form a complex layout of visual surfaces that allows perceptions of depth, movement and objects' position in relationship to each other. In artificial environments other elements can form this system of surfaces, from which depth may be distinguished. Thus, depth is in fact a *surface effect*, perceived and experienced through the temporal exploration of surface layout. (See figure 4.3)

According to Gibson, there is a tendency in theories of vision to *thin out* the exterior slice of an object and call it surface. This surface is so thin that one cannot directly see the depth or shape of an object.³⁹⁹ In such a definition, surface would not show the depth or the roundness of the object. However, in normal conditions, the depth and roundness of the object is evident, because one can walk around the object and interpret the continuity of its surface as a sign of its roundness (ambulatory vision). Even when one stops, scanning the tomato allows for a direct perception of depth and roundness and not just a thin forward slice of it.



Surface makes the object and its context apparent
Surface reveals shape and depth
Seeing includes ambulatory and ambient vision
Seeing the surface of an object is seeing the object
(Surface-surface relationship)

Figure 4.3: Surface as the facilitator of vision, based on Gibson's theory of surface layout. See in conjunction with figure 4.2. Source: the author.

Gibson's theory of vision attempts to clarify that to see something is to see its surfaces in relation to other surfaces, which are all seen directly and without intermediaries. Gibson rejects Moore's idea that we do not directly see a whole tomato, for instance, but at most only part of its surface. As a result, *to see the surfaces of an object is to see the object itself*, which in turn implies that to see the object's

³⁹⁹ For a discussion of this see Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 135 and Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 58-62

surface characteristics (texture, colour, reflection, etc). is to speak of the qualities of the object itself. Moreover, not only does Gibson define depth as surface effect, but he also emphasises the importance of bodily awareness in space and time. For Gibson, “seeing” is a process that is not limited to the eye and the brain, but one that involves other organs of the body: neck, shoulders, legs, feet and so on.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS: SURFACE AS PLACE OF DIFFERENCE

Like any other theory, Gibson’s “Ecological Approach to Visual Perception,” is falsifiable and Stroll elaborates on some of the inconsistencies in his book. Faced with the impossibility of formulating an irrefutable theory that encompasses the different aspects of surface in visual perception, Stroll promotes “example-oriented realism,” in contrast to “holistic theories.” He calls this approach “piecemeal realism,” one that “denies that any *general* account of perception will explain all the possible ways that human beings see things, or all the features of the things that are there to be seen.”⁴⁰⁰

Through careful exposition of numerous examples, Stroll comes to the conclusion that the answer to the question “Do we ever see anything indirectly?” is “not a firm ‘yes’ or a firm ‘no’, but a firm ‘maybe.’”⁴⁰¹ One must be “happy to leave it at that.”⁴⁰² Such a strategy argues that neither “direct realism” or “representative realism” provide comprehensive theories of perception as they are both “philosophical interpretations of what is essentially a neutral set of facts.”⁴⁰³ Piecemeal realism, therefore, claims that the world “contains an indefinitely large number of irreducibly different kinds of things”⁴⁰⁴ which makes the declaration of one definition or theory an uncomfortably complex operation that, in fact, undermines the usefulness of such an attempt. Thus, if one were to anticipate the different conceptions of surface in visual perception, one would have to be content with a “piecemeal” theory similar to the following:

It holds that depending on the contextual situation, it will be sensible (and sometimes true, sometimes not) to say that one who looks at, gazes at,

⁴⁰⁰ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 171

⁴⁰¹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 166

⁴⁰² Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 166

⁴⁰³ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 151

⁴⁰⁴ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 144

stares at, etc., an object may be said to be seeing the object, to be seeing the whole object, to be seeing all of the object, to be seeing each and every part of the object, to be seeing the object itself; and (taking a breath) to object, all of the surface of the object, only the surface of the object, and part of the surface of the object; and (taking another breath) sometimes to be seeing the surface, all of the surface, the whole surface, etc., of the object, and *at the same time*, to be seeing the object, all of the object, the whole object, and so on; and (taking another) sometimes to be seeing each of these items directly and sometimes not. Each of these characterizations fits some situation in which human percipients find themselves and does not fit others. What piecemeal realism then adds is the assertion that none of them fits *every* situation in which human percipients find themselves.⁴⁰⁵

Stroll argues that there cannot be one answer to the question “What is surface?” as this definition would not be able to accommodate the different alternatives that have been delineated. This is because even though surface is a boundary term,

the conception of being a boundary is ambiguous in exactly the way that the conception of being surface is. So “boundary” cannot be used to explicate “surface” since “boundary” suffers from the same ambiguity as “surface” does.⁴⁰⁶

Stroll inevitably concludes that: “We shall have to live with this result.”⁴⁰⁷ Yet, if an inquiry into the nature of surface leads to a realisation that the term cannot be reduced to one theory or conception, it also means that surface can be thought of in different ways, each with its own unique ramifications. This is not to say that the term is so malleable that it is meaningless, rather that surface is a *potentially generative concept* with important implications for epistemology, scientific inquiry and the way we deal with the world on an everyday basis.

In the absence of one irrefutable conception of surface, or a complete theory of visual perception, an alternative approach towards theory becomes possible. Rather than expecting theories to define reality in perfect clarity, it is possible to view theories as (creative) constructs that catalyze further thought, exploration and analysis. From this point of view, falsifiability or refutability of theories is not an indication of their originary falsehood, but rather an indication of their finite temporal zone of operation within the evolution of thought, pushed forward by continuous testing and experimentation. Perhaps, the complexity of reality cannot be contained within any one theory, but theorisation is nevertheless a necessary

⁴⁰⁵ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 179

⁴⁰⁶ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 64

⁴⁰⁷ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 64

element of an active interaction with complex reality. Thus, in the case of surface, it is possible to shift the emphasis *from definition to proposition*, in order to arrive at alternative philosophical approaches towards seeing, perception and creative production.

Stroll's "analytic phenomenological deconstruction"⁴⁰⁸ of ordinary English language led to four different conceptions of surface, each with its own unique potential. The LS conception for example, defines surfaces as *interfaces*: an abstract boundary at which both separation and connection occur simultaneously. In contrast to the other conceptions, surface as an interface encourages notions of interaction and exchange. The DS conception of surface is also abstract, yet it assigns physical attributes to surfaces. This conception is dependent on the shape and the discernable compactness of an object. The DS model is closer to the common-sense view, even though surface is still a two-dimensional entity without thickness. As an abstract model, the DS conception of surface is the "logical limit or conceptual limit"⁴⁰⁹ of an object, and perhaps the likeliest reason for the "shallowness" and "insubstantiality" of the word "*superficial*."

The ordinary person's conception of surface (OS view) proposes a more substantial definition of surface as the outer layer that can be heterogeneous to the rest of the object, but an extension of the object and not a foreign layer. In this conception, surface does not oppose depth since it possesses a thickness that facilitates physical operations to be performed on it. The fact that the OS conception includes paints and patina as parts of the object means that from this point of view, surface appearances can be considered as part of the object's reality and not an artificial construct that masks or denatures the real object.

Finally, the scientific conception of surface (the SS view) suggests a *surficial* understanding of the term, where surfaces are viewed as complex topographical systems. In this conception every physical entity has a surface that can be analyzed and studied (even gases, and animate objects like humans), but more importantly, surface is treated as an expansive landscape, which can be explored through contemporary technologies. The scientific conception allows movement in scale,

⁴⁰⁸ See A. P. Martinich "Analytic Phenomenological Deconstruction" in *Certainty and Surface in Epistemology and Philosophical Method: Essays in Honour of Avrum Stroll* (Problems in Contemporary Philosophy), ed. A. P. Martinich and Michael White, Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, London, 1991, pp. 165-84.

⁴⁰⁹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 46

which offers explorations beyond what meets the naked eye. Although in this conception surface has *minimal thickness*, it is nonetheless a three dimensional entity and a substantial layer with physical properties upon which physical operations can be performed.

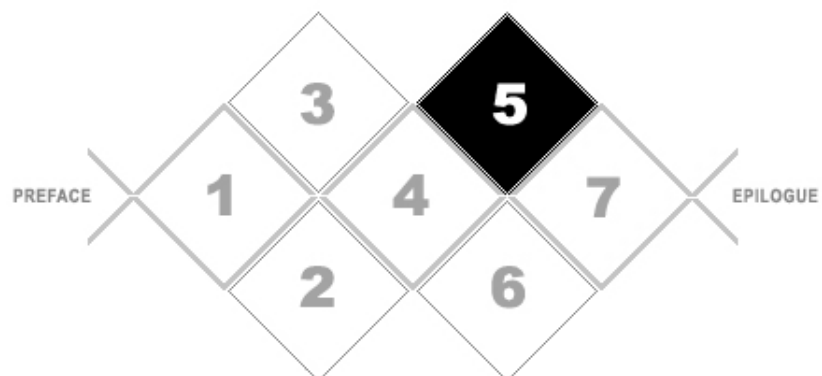
Thinking of surface in physical terms shifts the emphasis from the thinness of surface to its thickness, which accommodates visual *and* physical interaction with the object. Moreover, such conceptions, allow heterogeneous layers to be considered as the surfaces of the object. In fact for most viewers what architects refer to as “cladding” or “skin” can easily be the *surfaces* of architecture. This usage of the term suggests a much more continuous relationship between surface effects and the rest of the architectural object.

The modernists utilised metaphors of clothing to detach ornament from the materiality of construction. In such conceptions, ornament became associated with the *thinness* of surface, but more importantly, the ornamental layer became secondary to the object of architecture. Inevitably, the ornamental surface was considered a superficial mask that obscured the material reality of architectural construction. However, it has been demonstrated that surface can be defined as a thick and complex heterogeneous system that does not mask the object, but rather *facilitate its appearance*. Combining this conception with Gibson’s theory of surface layout suggests an alternative understanding of surface in visual perception in which, the traditional strategy of penetrating surfaces to uncover a deep and hidden reality transforms to a desire for surface exploration, where depth, meaning or reality become effects of surface layout. In this model of thought, *emphasis shifts from surface/depth opposition to surface/surface relationships*.

It is therefore possible to think of surfaces not as masking barriers (as depicted in the Platonic cave) but as the *facilitators of seeing*, that are not depthless superficialities (as in Baudrillard’s Hyperreality), rather thick surficial systems within which, diversity and difference proliferate. There are many conceptions of surface, but all define it as a boundary condition where *difference becomes apparent*. Moreover, if shadows and images are surface-less phenomena, they are nonetheless, *surface phenomena* in that they require surfaces for their existence. Therefore surfaces mark the thick boundary condition, the milieu in which “image” and “reality” intermix and become experientially apparent. It is for this very reason that surface is both a noun *and* a verb.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO SURFACE, IMAGE AND APPEARANCE



*“Projective thinking, in any kind of future project, takes a different talent than the analytical and critical, engages a different part of the personality and the brain. It takes different skills, those which are customarily called romantic, imaginative, chaotic, challenging, overcoming, progressive – in an old word, ‘modernist’.”*⁴¹⁰

Charles Jencks

*“Nothing is more distressing than a thought that escapes itself, than ideas that fly off, that disappear hardly formed, already eroded by forgetfulness or precipitated into others that we no longer master...We constantly lose our ideas. That is why we want to hang on to fixed opinions so much. We ask only that our ideas are linked together according to a minimum of constant rules. All that the association of ideas has ever meant is providing us with these protective rules – resemblance, contiguity, causality – which enable us to put some order into ideas, preventing our “fantasy” (delirium, madness) ...”*⁴¹¹

Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari

*“It is by following the border, by skirting the surface, that one passes from bodies to the incorporeal. Paul Valéry had a profound idea: what is most deep is the skin. This is a Stoic discovery, which presupposes a great deal of wisdom and entails an entire ethic.”*⁴¹²

Gilles Deleuze

*“There is a curious thickness about architecture’s thinness today. Even as they have grown ever thinner, building skins have developed an appetite for more: more performance, more sensuousness, more intelligence, more, more.”*⁴¹³

Ron Witte

⁴¹⁰ Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 182

⁴¹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Graham Birchill, Verso, London, 1994, p. 201

⁴¹² Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Athlone Press, London, 1990, p. 10

⁴¹³ Ron Witte, “Substance” in Tokisho Mori (ed.), *Immaterial/Ultramaterial: Architecture, Design and Materials*, George Brazillier inc., New York, 2002, p. 41

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER FIVE

The previous chapter was concerned with the nature of surface in language, epistemology and visual perception, constituting the beginnings of a philosophy of surface that strived for an accurate definition of the term. However, by shifting the emphasis from definition to proposition, the following chapter explores the characteristics of *surficial philosophy* that uses surface to propose an expansive model of thought, which escapes the circularity and the transcendental hierarchy of the metaphysical tradition. The thesis argues that “surficial” is a more appropriate word for such philosophy because it avoids the shallowness and insubstantiality of “superficial,” and also because it echoes the geological and topological conceptions of surface that inspire this philosophical approach.

The following chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the simulacrum is elaborated, which the thesis appropriates to develop a more positive approach towards images. It is argued that Deleuze’s strategy is based on *univocity of difference*, which shifts the emphasis from *comparison to origin based on a criteria of similitude*, to *exploration of processes of becoming based on an appreciation of originary difference*. The second section demonstrates how Deleuze uses surface to formulate a surficial philosophy that collapses the Platonic hierarchy between “image” and “reality,” “essence” and “effect” or “simulated” and the “real.” This collapse is not deconstructive or destructive, but instead *creative* as it considers difference as occurring upon a surficial complexity that demands a nomadic movement of thought. The final section of this chapter elaborates the characteristics of *smooth thought* expressed through different concepts that form a complex, rhizomatic network of propositions.

Thus, this chapter pursues a philosophical “line of flight” to develop an alternative approach to surface, image and appearance in architecture, with particular reference to Frank Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum.

5.1 FROM TRANSCENDENTAL HIERARCHY TO UNIVOCITY: SURFACE, DIFFERENCE AND THE REALITY OF APPEARANCE

In chapter three, Plato's metaphysics was discussed through three analogies from *The Republic*. It was demonstrated how the Platonic model elevated the "intelligible" realm over the realm of the "visible," associating the former with *originary* Ideas and the latter with visible *copies*. This binary hierarchy was followed by a description of the visible world as a dark prison in which surfaces mask the light of goodness and shadows (surface phenomena) deceive humanity by creating false appearances. Throughout his dialogues, Plato develops a strong hierarchy and desire for transcendence, which determine the relationship between the model (Idea, reality, essence) and its copies (shadows, images, appearances).

In the *Sophist*, Plato continues his method by differentiating between two forms of image making: "the art of making likenesses, and phantastic or the art of making appearances."⁴¹⁴ Plato defines "likenesses" as faithful copies of the original, while "appearances" are defined as intentional distortion of reality, either to beautify or gain power through manipulation of the spectator.⁴¹⁵ Thus, appearances are images as *phantasms* or deceitful constructs that deviate from reality, while likenesses on the other hand, are images that attempt to represent reality, but are often deficient in their representation.

Plato constructs these two conceptions of image in an attempt to "hunt" down the sophist, to define him accurately. He describes sophistry as the art of appearance making, which he associates with conjecture. Thus, the sophist is someone who only *appears* to be a wise man, having only a "conjectural or apparent knowledge ... which is not the truth."⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁴ See Plato, *Sophist*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Kissinger Publishing, Montana, 2006, p. 82

⁴¹⁵ For Plato an image is a good copy while appearance is malicious phantasm: "STRANGER And what shall we call those resemblances of the beautiful, which appear such owing to the unfavourable position of the spectator, whereas if a person had the power of getting a correct view of works of such magnitude, they would appear not even like that to which they profess to be like? May we not call these "appearances," since they appear only and are not really like? THEAETETUS Certainly. STR. There is a great deal of this kind of thing in painting, and in all imitation. THEAET. Of course. STR. And may we not fairly call the sort of art, which produces an appearance and not an image, phantastic art? THEAET. Most fairly." Plato, *Sophist*, p. 81

⁴¹⁶ "STR. Then the Sophist has been shown to have a sort of conjectural or apparent knowledge only of all things, which is not the truth? THEAET. Exactly; no better description of him could be given." Plato, *Sophist*, p. 77.

Plato's methodology is an attempt to create an ordered structure of reason that prevents the sophist or "any other creature" from *escaping* its logic.⁴¹⁷ By "capturing" the sophist in the system, Plato concludes that sophistry⁴¹⁸ is inferior to philosophy⁴¹⁹ because it is an art of *imitation*: an act of *image making*, of the *appearance making* kind, which is ultimately uninformed and insincere.

In Plato's metaphysics images are imitations and they are judged according to degrees of faithfulness to original models. While Plato saw two categories of image (faithful copies and distorted constructs) Baudrillard develops four: (1) image as a reflection of reality, (2) image as a perversion of reality; (3) image masking the absence of profound reality (4) image as simulacrum, which "has no relation to any reality whatsoever."⁴²⁰ According to Baudrillard, it is the mass dissemination of the fourth category of image that is responsible for "hyperreality": a condition in which depth and meaning is lost to superficiality.

However, despite having four conceptions of image, Baudrillard's categorisation follows the Platonic system of thought. This is because Baudrillard sees images as *copies* of reality and therefore in an inferior relationship to an originary concept that is reflected, denatured, masked or ultimately destroyed. Thus, this thesis argues that the cynicism towards surfaces, images and appearances evident in Baudrillard's theories is a legacy of a familiar transcendental hierarchy⁴²¹ inherited from the Platonic approach, which in the case of the third and fourth phases of the image evokes "melancholia" and "nostalgia" for a reality that is no longer in the image.

⁴¹⁷ The theme of bondage evident in the metaphor of the cave continues in the hunting and capturing of the sophist: "STR. Then, clearly, we ought as soon as possible to divide the image-making art, and go down into the net, and, if the Sophist does not run away from us, to seize him according to orders and deliver him over to reason, who is the lord of the hunt, and proclaim the capture of him; and if he creeps into the recesses of the imitative art, and secretes himself in one of them, to divide again and follow him up until in some sub-section of imitation he is caught. For our method of tackling each and all is one which neither he nor any other creature will ever escape in triumph." Plato, *Sophist*, p. 80

⁴¹⁸ Sophistry comes from the Greek word *sophos* meaning "wise man, clever." (<http://www.etymonline.com>) Sophists were therefore "wise men" who gradually became renowned and distrusted for their clever rhetoric.

⁴¹⁹ Philosophy has a similar definition to sophistry, but it implies a more modest attitude. While the sophist is the "wise man" the philosopher is the "lover of wisdom" coming from the Greek word *philosophos*: *philos* "loving" + *sophos* "wise, a sage." (<http://www.etymonline.com>, accessed April 2009)

⁴²⁰ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 6

⁴²¹ Transcendental hierarchy is used to describe a hierarchical system that *inspires* transcendence, i.e. going above or beyond appearance. It also refers to a hierarchical system *based on* transcendence, i.e. the philosophical belief that essence lies beyond appearances.

In the previous chapter it was explained how Jacques Derrida destabilises the Platonic system of thought using deconstruction. But deconstruction maintains *the trace of transcendence*, which is transcendence manifested in a different way. Derrida's deconstruction suggests that signifier (image) and signified (reality) are in fact both signifiers (images) that assume the position of the absolute signified or the originary model (reality). But if reality is an artificial effect of signifiers operating through the deferral of meaning, then the very notion of signification collapses. Moreover, there must have been an originary "signifier" that instigated this interconnected web of signifiers in the first place. Derrida's solution to this "chicken-egg conundrum" is the *trace*, a paradoxical and spectral concept, which theorises how an impossible non-origin that is absent can nevertheless generate the system of signifiers. The trace (like "arch-writing") is therefore a "quasi-transcendental concept"⁴²² that is defined through the negative, i.e. what it is not. Derrida's philosophical approach promotes the "closure" of Platonism, through "substitution" and "erasure," but his strategy is always in danger of "falling back within what is being deconstructed."⁴²³ This is because substitution is limited to predefined constructs, whilst erasure contains the trace, which continues the presence of the erased.

Derrida's theory gives significance to the play of images since each image (signifier) can become a model (signified) to other images that make up reality. However, since Derrida "maintains Plato's definition of the simulacrum (or writing, the *pharmakon*) as a copy of a copy,"⁴²⁴ images remain to be *artificial reproductions* of a quasi-origin that is not only absent but also impossible to fathom. Thus, the Derridean approach theorises a world of "myths and counter-myths"⁴²⁵ in which image and reality are both polluted (by the medicine-poison), which is why both (image and reality) must constantly be put under erasure. In this philosophical approach, negation and denial becomes a perpetual process.

⁴²² For discussion of this, see Rodolphe Gasché, *The Tain of The Mirror: Derrida and the Philosophy of Reflection*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1986, p. 317 and Geoffrey Bennington, *Jacques Derrida*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1993, pp. 267-283.

⁴²³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 14

⁴²⁴ Leonard Lawlore, "The Beginnings of Thought: The Fundamental Experience in Derrida and Deleuze" in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, ed. Paul Patton & John Protevi, Continuum, London, pp. 67-83, p. 69

⁴²⁵ Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 285

However, by utilising Gilles Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum, this thesis argues that an alternative approach is possible, one that does not define images as artificialities, but rather as *different realities*. In this approach images are not copies of a reality that is distorted, masked, erased or absent. Instead, they are recognised as different regions of reality, where difference because an immanent, not a transcendent concept. The elaboration of this idea necessitates an exposition of Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum and other concepts that express this particular philosophical approach.

In an essay entitled "Plato and the Simulacrum" (included in the Appendix of *The Logic of Sense*) Deleuze sets out to go beyond the transcendental hierarchy of the Platonic model of thought, which he describes as the following:

Platonism is the philosophical *Odyssey* and the Platonic dialectic is neither a dialectic of contradiction or of contrariety, but a dialectic of rivalry (*amphisbetesis*), a dialectic of rivals and suitors. The essence of division does not appear in its breadth, in the determination of the species of a genus, but in its depth, in the selection of the lineage. It is to screen the claims (*pretensions*) and to distinguish the true pretender from the false one.⁴²⁶

The Platonic division follows a hierarchical logic based on *degrees of similarity*, which pollutes every judgement and fuels the determination to distinguish essence from appearance, reality from image, original from copy, and model from simulacrum. In these binary hierarchical divisions, the secondary elements are not only judged by their similarity to original models, but they are also subordinated to the primary elements that are often beyond visual perception. This is the familiar logic that elevates the original category, accepts the copy (likenesses) as a true pretender and dismisses the simulacrum (appearances) as phantasm:

The distinction wavers between two sorts of images. *Copies* are secondary possessors. They are well-founded pretenders, guaranteed by resemblance; *simulacra* are like false pretenders, built upon a dissimilarity, implying an essential perversion or a deviation. It is in this sense that Plato divides in two the domain of images-idols: on one hand there are *copies-icons*, on the other there are *simulacra-phantasms*. [Sophist, 236b, 264c]⁴²⁷

This transcendental hierarchy that causes the devaluation of image, surface and appearances in much theoretical discourse, inspires a perpendicular movement of thought: either one of *uncovering* essence by penetrating surfaces, images and

⁴²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum" in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Athlone Press, London, 1990, pp. 253-266, p. 254

⁴²⁷ Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, p. 256

appearances, or one of discovering the originary Idea through ascent, distancing and distillation. This is because images are considered as imitations of reality, and as such they are distinct from it, already separated at inception. This understanding of images, combined with a definition of surface based on thinness (not thickness) determines the traditional epistemological position that considers surface and its effects (images and appearances) as *masking or denaturing* the reality of things. Thus, whether intentional or accidental, surfaces, images and appearances, deceive the observer, which is precisely why they must be transcended or surpassed.

In contrast to this familiar conception, Deleuze and Guattari propose another strategy, which maintains the distinction between image and reality, but abolishes their hierarchy by placing them side-by-side. Thus, the simulacrum "does not replace reality . . . but rather it appropriates reality in the operation of despotic overcoding."⁴²⁸ This is because simulation "carries the real beyond its principle to the point where it is effectively produced."⁴²⁹ In this conception, reality is not detached from the image or the simulacrum, but instead it is utilized for the creation of *more reality* - an alternative reality. In other words, both image and the model that it resembles are considered as part of an extended reality.

Deleuze's conception of the simulacrum is based on a non-hierarchical philosophy of immanence, which appreciates *originary difference*: "The simulacrum is built upon a disparity or upon a difference. It internalizes a dissimilarity."⁴³⁰ This conception of the simulacrum offers a different understanding of image. The traditional conception of image defines it as a reproduction.⁴³¹ It is a conception that is based on the resemblance of the image to an originary model. Image as a simulacrum however, bears only a deceptive resemblance to a supposed model, implicating a different mode of operation and a different process of production.⁴³² In this alternative conception, image becomes *re-production*⁴³³ since it is defined according to its inherent difference from its supposed model.

⁴²⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Mark Seem, Robert Hurley, Helen R. Lane, Athlone Press, London, 1984, p. 210

⁴²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 87

⁴³⁰ Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, p. 257-8

⁴³¹ Here, "reproduction" implies copy, duplication and imitation.

⁴³² Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 48-49

⁴³³ The word "re-production" is used to suggest creativity, further production and a productive process.

In other words, the difference between a copy and a simulacrum is that the former is made in order to stand in for its model, but the latter uses resemblance to take a life of its own.⁴³⁴ The aim of the simulacrum is not to become the model, but rather to use its appearance to create a new reality, a new space of operation. For this very reason, the simulacrum should be judged according to its unique mode of operation and its immanent dissimilarity. Because of this difference, the simulacrum does not fit the Platonic binary hierarchy of model over copy and therefore exists as an *other* condition. From this point of view image (as simulacrum) does not indicate the copying of reality, but instead the production of further reality:

The simulacrum is not a degraded copy. It harbours a positive power, which denies *the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*. At least two divergent series are internalized in the simulacrum – neither can be assigned as the original, neither as the copy.⁴³⁵

Thus, the resemblance of the simulacrum is “a means, not an end.”⁴³⁶ When an insect mimics a leaf, it does not reproduce the leaf and one cannot say that the insect is a bad copy of the leaf. This is because the insect’s visual mimicry is an active participation in a different reality: that of predation and camouflage. The same can be said of the images of architecture printed in magazines. In many instances, the intention is not to accurately reproduce the physical building on paper – i.e. to fool the spectator into thinking that he is looking at the real architectural object. Instead, such photographic re-productions represent an active participation in a different reality: that of global communication through mass media.

Deleuze’s theory of the simulacrum formulates a philosophical approach that gives significance to appearance making and the dissemination of images through contemporary technologies. Unlike Baudrillard’s nihilistic conception of hyperreality, (which is characterized by the “implosion” of meaning), Deleuze’s theory of simulacrum indicates *hypercreativity* as an “explosion” of new games, new rules and new realities that are very much real:

By rising to the surface, the simulacrum makes the Same and the Similar, the model and the copy, ... [and] the determination of their hierarchy impossible. It establishes the world of nomadic distributions and crowned anarchies. Far from being a new foundation, it engulfs all foundation, it

⁴³⁴ Pop Art is a good example of this.

⁴³⁵ Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *The Logic of Sense*, p. 262

⁴³⁶ Brian Massumi, “Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari,” *Copyright*, no. 1, 1987, pp. 90-97, p. 91

assures a universal breakdown (*effondrement*), but as a joyful and positive event, as an unf-founding (*effondement*): ‘behind each cave another that opens still more deeply, and beyond each surface a subterranean world yet more vast, more strange. Richer still ... and under all foundations, under every ground, a subsoil still more profound.’ [*Beyond Good and Evil*, section 289. English translation by R. J. Hollingdale.]⁴³⁷

Deleuze’s theory is based on *immanent difference not transcendental difference*. In the former, image is man-made reality, while in the latter image is a man-made imitation of reality, i.e. an instance of artificiality. According to Deleuze and Guattari, artificiality must be pushed to its limit in order to transform reproduction to what can be called creative re-production. They write:

The artificial and the simulacrum are not the same thing. They are even opposed to each other. The artificial is always a copy of a copy, which should be pushed *to the point where it changes its nature and is reversed into the simulacrum* (the moment of Pop Art).⁴³⁸

Deleuze subverts the dominant hierarchies of the Platonic tradition. However his strategy is different from Derrida’s “sure play,” which maintains a trace of transcendence. If Derrida’s “closure” of Platonism is accompanied by “mourning” and the necessity of “trace” as a quasi-transcendental concept, Deleuze’s approach celebrates the *transformation* of Platonism by unfolding the difference that is immanent within its origins.

Derrida’s sure play that presents itself in deconstruction, was a result of an anxiety about the destruction of metaphysics, and simultaneously a preventive measure against falling back into metaphysics.⁴³⁹ Deleuze on the other hand, does not set out to overcome metaphysics in general, but instead Plato’s metaphysics in particular. Thus, he can push “closure” to its limit by calling for a momentary destruction, which is different from a Heideggerean *destruktion*, or the Nietzschean one for that matter. The Deleuzian destruction of Platonism is creative in that it destroys only to reassemble:

⁴³⁷ Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *The Logic of Sense*, p. 263

⁴³⁸ Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum,” *The Logic of Sense*, p. 265

⁴³⁹ “...all these destructive discourses and all their analogues are trapped in a kind of circle. ...There is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest.” Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 280-281

... there is a vast difference between destroying in order to conserve and perpetuate the established order of representations, models, and copies, and destroying the models and copies in order to institute the chaos which creates, making the simulacra function and raising a phantasm – the most innocent of all destructions, the destruction of Platonism.⁴⁴⁰

Thus, in Daniel W. Smith's words: "if Derrida sets out to undo metaphysics, Deleuze sets out simply to *do* metaphysics"⁴⁴¹ because there are virtualities in metaphysics that have not yet been actualised. For Deleuze, metaphysics is in a process of transformation. It is not a unitary (homogenous) body that is dying, but instead a heterogeneous body that is in continuous transmutation.

Deleuze's ontology is one of univocity, which echoes Baruch Spinoza's theories.⁴⁴² However unlike Spinoza for whom univocity is a measure of similarity, for Deleuze univocity highlights the significance of ontological difference:

With univocity, however, it is not the differences which are and must be: it is being which is Difference, in the sense that it is said of difference. Moreover, it is not we who are univocal in a Being which is not; it is we and our individuality which remains equivocal in and for a univocal Being.⁴⁴³

This ontology of diversity within unity is summarised in the formula "PLURALISM = MONISM."⁴⁴⁴ Deleuze's ontology requires that "Difference ... be thought alongside unity, or not at all."⁴⁴⁵ Such univocity has a different agenda to that of John Duns Scotus⁴⁴⁶ or Spinoza's, since it highlights difference of Being, the

⁴⁴⁰ Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum," *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 265-6

⁴⁴¹ Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence" in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, p. 50

⁴⁴² Baruch Spinoza suggested that everything is a modification of one substance, "God or Nature" [Latin: *Deus sive Natura*]: "That eternal and infinite being we call God, or Nature, acts from the same necessity from which he exists." See Baruch Spinoza, "Ethics," in *The Collected Writings of Spinoza*, trans. Edwin Curley, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1985, propositions 1-15

⁴⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton, Continuum, New York, 2004, p. 48

⁴⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 20

⁴⁴⁵ Tod May, "Difference and Unity in Gilles Deleuze" in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, Dorothea Olkowski, Routledge, London, New York, 1994, pp. 33-50, p. 47

⁴⁴⁶ John Duns Scotus' "Univocity of Being" argues that "[t]he difference between God and creatures, at least with regard to God's possession of the pure perfections, is ultimately one of degree." In other words, what we ascribe to God is *the same* as what we ascribe to creatures and human beings. The only difference is that God possesses these attributes infinitely, but humans and other creatures possess them in a limited way. See Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 39

equivocal difference that remains within the univocity of Being. In Tod May's words:

What univocity implies is not that everything is the same or that there is a principle of the same underlying everything, but instead, precisely the opposite. With univocity comes difference, difference for the first time taken seriously in itself.⁴⁴⁷

For Deleuze, origin, metaphysics, reality or any other concept possesses an immanent difference (or an embedded potential for diversity) that unfolds to create a multiplicity of expressions. This unfolding is often achieved through binary constructs, which is not to be considered as sign of separation, transcendence or hierarchy. Instead, binary pairs are considered as philosophical tools, or "abstract machines"⁴⁴⁸ that aid thinking:

We employ a dualism of models only in order to arrive at a process that challenges all models. Each time, mental correctives are necessary to undo the dualism we had no wish to construct but through which we pass. Arrive at the magic formula we all seek – PLURALISM = MONISM – via all the dualisms that are the enemy, an entirely necessary enemy, the furniture we are forever rearranging.⁴⁴⁹

Deleuze's differentiation between the "virtual" and "actual" as different elements of reality, is an illustration of a philosophical technique that attempts to illustrate the difference within the "plane of immanence."⁴⁵⁰ For Deleuze, the "virtual" is "not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself."⁴⁵¹ Thus, the virtual "designates a pure multiplicity in the Idea,"⁴⁵² which once actualised creates a diversity of phenomena that sometimes seem similar, but are in fact always immanently different. In other words, the virtual is not a product of transcendental difference and therefore must not be confused with the "possible" as that which is "opposed to the real."⁴⁵³ The virtual "undergoes a process of actualisation" and must be contrasted to the "actual" as that part of reality that has become apparent.

⁴⁴⁷ Tod May, "Difference and Unity in Gilles Deleuze" in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theatre of Philosophy*, p. 43

⁴⁴⁸ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Athlone Press, London, 1988, pp. 50 -75

⁴⁴⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 20

⁴⁵⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson, Graham Birchill, Verso, London, 1994, p. 41

⁴⁵¹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 263

⁴⁵² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 264

⁴⁵³ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 263

The possible, on the other hand, “undergoes a process of realisation” and should therefore be contrasted to the real.

The subtle difference between the virtual and the possible is not a “verbal dispute” but a “question of existence”⁴⁵⁴ which highlights the significant difference between transcendence and immanence. For Deleuze, the *realisation of possibility* evokes a transcendental system of thought in which the creation of origin occurs as “a pure act or leap which always occurs behind our backs and is subject to a law of all or nothing.”⁴⁵⁵ “Realisation,” therefore, is a process that renders the “possible” as *a copy of the real*, and forces the real to the resemblance of the possible.⁴⁵⁶ Not only is the possible separated from reality, but it also changes our conception of reality. This according to Deleuze is the “defect” of the possible: “a defect which serves to condemn it as produced after the fact, as retroactively fabricated in the image of what resembles it.”⁴⁵⁷

Actualisation of virtuality on the other hand is “always a genuine creation”⁴⁵⁸ because the virtual is reality that is not yet actualised. In other words, if the “possible” (like the Platonic image) is a transcendental concept, a segregated entity that is detached from reality, the “virtual” is an immanent concept, inherent within reality. For this reason, the virtual and the actual refer to an altogether different understanding of reality, which evokes an altogether different approach towards the Platonic categorisation of image.

Appropriating Deleuze’s theories, it is possible to define image making as “genuine creativity” or the further production of reality, not imitation or copying (as in the relationship between the possible and the real). This would mean that in fact the images of a building reproduced through the mass media create a *different reality*, which parallels the physical and contextual reality of the architectural object. When the motives of such imagery is recognized as more than mere representation of physical objects, then they become extensions of (architectural) creativity as they allow the designer to participate in the global economy of image that is as real as

⁴⁵⁴ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 263

⁴⁵⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 263

⁴⁵⁶ “[T]o the extent that the possible is open to “realisation”, it is understood as an image of the real, while the real is suppose to resemble the possible. That is why it is difficult to understand what existence adds to the concept when all it does is double like with like.” Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 263

⁴⁵⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, pp. 263-4

⁴⁵⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 264

any physical object. Conceiving images in this way necessitates a shift from the familiar logic of transcendence based on similitude, to immanence based on difference:

The actualisation of the virtual, on the contrary, always takes place by difference, divergence or differentiation. Actual terms never resemble the singularities they incarnate. In this sense, actualisation or differentiation is always a genuine creation. It does not result from any limitation of a pre-existing possibilities.⁴⁵⁹

The virtual as reality evokes “virtual reality”⁴⁶⁰ which is a term commonly used for the computer simulation of reality, whether for gaming or for other purposes. In its common usage, virtual reality implies imitation and the copying of ordinary reality that is always more authentic. Deleuze’s conceptions of virtual and simulation however, implies a different interpretation of virtual reality. While the virtual is considered to have a reality of its own, simulation, is for Deleuze a process that is inherently different from reproduction or realisation. This is because the goal of simulation is not resemblance (realisation of the possible) but creation of a new reality (actualisation of the virtual/virtual reality), in short, re-production.

5.2 FROM THE SUPERFICIAL TO THE *SURFICIAL*: COMPLEXITY AND CREATIVITY

Deleuze’s univocity evokes a different model of thinking and a different movement of thought. By rejecting transcendence and highlighting immanent difference, Deleuze rejects the familiar Platonic verticality of thought and the ideal purity of its origins. This creates an interest in the “minoritarian” and horizontal (non-hierarchical) processes of “becoming” that take inspiration from unexpected sources. For example, Deleuze utilizes Lewis Carroll and Antonin Artaud’s writings for his own philosophical work, arguing that in the “madness” of their ideas there lays a profound logic of looking at things, which is not given a proper place within the Platonic tradition. This is because Platonism focuses on origins and the depths

⁴⁵⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 264

⁴⁶⁰ “Second Life” is an example of an Internet based virtual world, which enables users to interact with each other through avatars and create objects in the virtual environment. The word virtual has wider uses, in computing and information technology. For example, “virtual machine,” “virtual memory,” or “virtual disk,” are terms that describe software systems that act as if they were hardware systems. Other applications are “virtual community” or “virtual library.”

of things, by sacrificing surface and surface effects. With this in mind and taking inspiration from Stoic philosophy,⁴⁶¹ Deleuze proposes a model of thought based on the exteriority of surface:

*Everything now returns to the surface... The most concealed becomes the most manifest. All the old paradoxes of becoming must again take shape in a new youthfulness – transmutation.*⁴⁶²

*It is by following the border, by skirting the surface, that one passes from bodies to the incorporeal...what is most deep is the skin. This is a Stoic discovery, which presupposes a great deal of wisdom and entails an entire ethic.*⁴⁶³

The Deleuzian surface represents the non-hierarchical plane of immanence that battles against the *transcendence* of Platonic height or Nietzschean depth. In this model of thought surface *includes* the height (of Ideas) or the depth (of meaning). When the incorporeal is included in the corporeal surface, the superficial assumes a *thicker dimension* and a greater significance. No longer defined as a two-dimensional abstraction associated with shallowness or insubstantiality, superficial becomes *surficial*⁴⁶⁴ evoking the geographical milieu associated with the complexity of terrestrial life:

It is no longer a question of Dionysus down below, or of Apollo up above, but of Hercules of the surface, in his dual battle against both depth and height: reorientation of the entire thought and a new geography.⁴⁶⁵

Thus, Deleuze's univocity creates a *surficial philosophy* in which surface possesses an *essential thickness*, while height or depth become surface effects, just as the terrestrial surface produces the height of the mountains and the depth of the seas:

*There is no longer depth or height. ... It is always a matter of unseating the ideas, of showing that the incorporeal is no high above (*en hauteur*), but is rather at the surface, that it is not the highest cause but the superficial effect par excellence, and that it is not Essence but event.*⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶¹ Stoic philosophy was a Hellenistic philosophy founded in Athens by Zeno of Citium. The Stoics provided a unified account of the world, consisting of formal logic, non-dualistic physics and naturalistic ethics. See Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Routledge, London, New York, 2004, pp. 241-257

⁴⁶² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 7-8

⁴⁶³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 10

⁴⁶⁴ Surficial is a geological term defined as "of or relating to the Earth's surface." See Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com

⁴⁶⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 132

⁴⁶⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 130

In contrast to the Platonic philosopher of heights and the Nietzschean philosopher of depths, Deleuze proposes a third image of the philosopher, one that takes inspiration from the expanse of surface. Such a philosopher expects things laterally, from an immanent event not a transcendent ideal - in other words, from *the dawn of the day, not from the Platonic Sun*.

Nietzsche was able to rediscover depth only after conquering the surfaces. But he did not remain at the surface, for the surface struck him as that which had to be assessed from the renewed perspective of an eye peering out from the depths. Nietzsche takes little interest in what happened after Plato, maintaining that it was necessarily the continuation of a long decadence. We have the impression, however, that there arises, in conformity to this method, a third image of philosophers. In relation to them, Nietzsche's pronouncement is particularly apt: how profound these Greeks were as a consequence of their being superficial! These third Greeks are no longer entirely Greek. They no longer expect salvation from the depths of the earth or from autochthony, any more than they expect it from heavens or from the Idea. Rather, they expect it laterally, from the event, from the East – where, as Carroll says, "all that is good..., ris(es) with the dawn of the Day!"⁴⁶⁷

The practitioner of surficial philosophy escapes the popular image of the philosopher as a "being of ascents... with his head in the clouds..."⁴⁶⁸ He does not think vertically, distancing himself in order to gain ideal height, nor does he think perpendicularly to penetrate appearances and discover hidden reality. Instead, the surficial philosopher floats across the surface, engaging with events and expressions and processes of transformation. Moreover, such a philosopher does not leave the Platonic cave; "on the contrary, he thinks that we are not involved enough or sufficiently engulfed therein."⁴⁶⁹

Surficial philosophy is based on an alternative thought process. For Deleuze, reason is always "traversed" by the chaotic and irrational complexity of reality.⁴⁷⁰ Since "underneath all reason lies delirium" leaving the safety of tradition for the chaos of irrationality can in fact be beneficial, because madness "need not be

⁴⁶⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 129

⁴⁶⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 127

⁴⁶⁹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 128

⁴⁷⁰ "All this, however, presupposes codes or axioms which do not result by chance, but which do not have an intrinsic rationality either. ... Reason is always a region carved out of the irrational -- not sheltered from the irrational at all, but traversed by it and only defined by a particular kind of relationship among irrational factors. Underneath all reason lies delirium, and drift." Deleuze, Gilles and David Lapoujade, *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1953-1974)*, trans. Mike Taormina, Semiotext(e), New York, 2003, p. 262

all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough.”⁴⁷¹ Thus, the goal of the philosopher is not to calibrate reality⁴⁷² nor is it to discover truth, as in the case of traditional epistemology. Instead he attempts to achieve *consistency* within the chaos of reality, which is defined...

... not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes. It is a void that is not a nothingness but a *virtual*, containing all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence.⁴⁷³

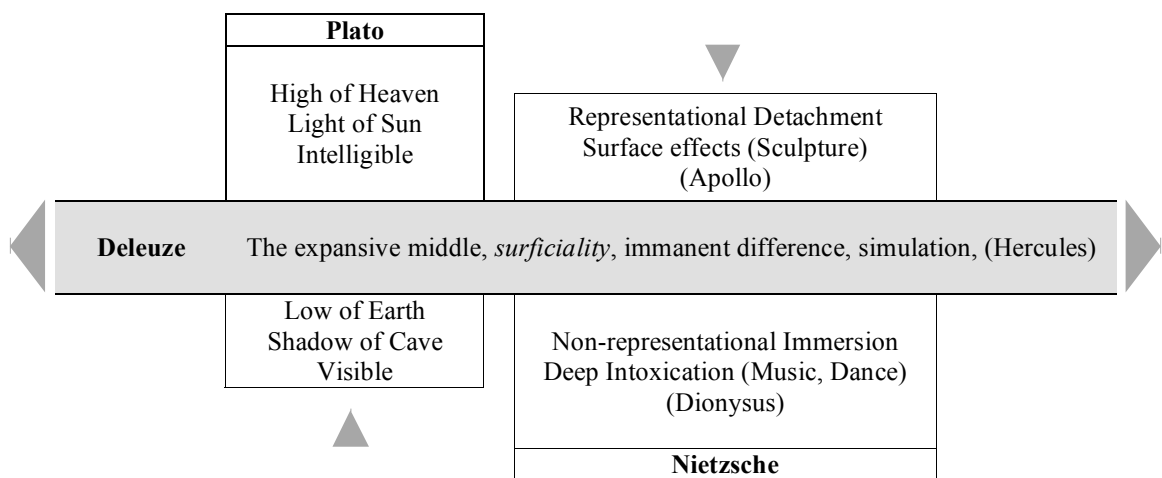


Figure 5.1: The Middle-out Nature of Deleuzian Thought. Source: the author.

Using D.H. Lawrence’s metaphor, Deleuze and Guattari describe knowledge as putting up an “umbrella” in order to shelter from the “un-decidability” of reality. Poets and artists however, battle with such sheltering canvases: they “make a slit in

⁴⁷¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 131

⁴⁷² Deleuze differentiates between philosophy and science, one maintaining the infinite complexity of reality through concepts, the other calibrates reality using functions. Deleuze writes: “By retaining the infinite, philosophy gives consistency to the virtual through concepts; by relinquishing the infinite, science gives a reference to the virtual, which actualizes it through functions. Philosophy proceeds with a plane of immanence or consistency; science with a plane of reference. ... Science is haunted not by its own unity but by the plane of reference constituted by all the limits or borders through which it confronts chaos.” Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Pp. 118-9

between science and philosophy: philosophy creates concepts on a plane of immanence while science creates functions on a plane of reference. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁴⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 118

the umbrella, they tear open the firmament itself, to let in a bit of free and windy chaos and to frame in a sudden light a vision that appears through...."⁴⁷⁴ However, poets and artists must also battle against established clichés and categories that clog both their minds and their canvases:

The painter does not paint on an empty canvas, and neither does the writer write on a blank page; but the page or canvas is already so covered with pre-existing, pre-established clichés that it is first necessary to erase, to clean, to flatten, even to shred, so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision.⁴⁷⁵

This epistemology is different from the classical tradition. For Deleuze and Guattari, the chaos of reality is the ungraspable infinite that has three daughters: art, science and philosophy.⁴⁷⁶ Creativity is not chaos, but "a chaosmos, a composed chaos – neither foreseen nor preconceived."⁴⁷⁷ To read a philosopher (an artist, or writer for that matter) is no longer to find a single, correct interpretation by penetrating the superficialities of his thoughts or arguments. Instead, to read a philosopher or an artist is to *explore* his work by examining the virtuality that lies across it, which is often not yet actualized.⁴⁷⁸ Moreover, from Deleuze's perspective, concepts are not solutions to problems, but constructions that define a range of thinking.⁴⁷⁹ This is a philosophical approach that celebrates chaotic complexity, affirms the rupture of pre-established categories and anticipates future theories by encouraging creativity liberated from predetermined judgment:

⁴⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* pp. 203-204

⁴⁷⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 204

⁴⁷⁶ "Chaos has three daughters, depending on the place that cuts through it: these are the *Chaoids* – art, science, and philosophy – as forms of thought and creation. We call *Chaoids* the realities produced on the plane that cut through the chaos in different ways." Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 208

⁴⁷⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 118

⁴⁷⁸ "Philosophers introduce new concepts, they explain them, but they don't tell us, not completely anyway, the problems to which those concepts are a response. [...] The history of philosophy, rather than repeating what a philosopher says, has to say what he must have taken for granted, what he didn't say but is nonetheless present in what he did say." Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. by Martin Joughin, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, p. 136

⁴⁷⁹ In fact, philosophy as the making of concepts can be traced back to Plato, even though such a position would contradict the very notion of the Platonic Idea. Charles Griswold writes: "The [Platonic] tripartite schema of Idea, artifact, and imitator is as much about making as it is about imitation. Making is a continual thread through all three levels of the schema. The Ideas too are said to be made, even though that is entirely inconsistent with the doctrine of Ideas as eternal expressed earlier in the Republic itself (and in all the other Platonic dialogues)." Charles Griswold, "Plato on Rhetoric and Poetry" in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 22 Dec. 2003, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-rhetoric/>, accessed Jan 2009.

Herein, perhaps, lies the secret: to bring into existence and not to judge. If it is so disgusting to judge, it is not because everything is of equal value, but on the contrary because what has value can be made or distinguished only by defying judgment. What expert judgment, in art, could ever bear on the work to come?⁴⁸⁰

By shifting the emphasis from pre-established (transcendental) values to immanent virtuality (embedded potentiality), surficial philosophy gives prominence to further production through exploration, rather than subversion (of established hierarchies) through substitution. Moreover, unorthodox processes such as dreams and esoteric experiences are considered as an important aspect of philosophy, since philosophy “cannot be content to be understood only philosophically or conceptually, but is addressed essentially to nonphilosophers as well.”⁴⁸¹ This would be the “nonphilosophical” as that which is “closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself.”⁴⁸² Deleuze and Guattari write:

Precisely because the plane of immanence is prephilosophical and does not immediately take effect with concepts, it implies a sort of groping experimentation and its layout resorts to measures that are not very respectable, rational, or reasonable. These measures belong to the order of dreams, of pathological processes, esoteric experiences, drunkenness, and excess.⁴⁸³

Thus, by promoting “groping experimentation” and “irrational processes” Deleuze and Guattari catalyze the rupturing of established philosophical “umbrellas” that protect us from the chaos of reality, which creates, changes and transforms. In this approach, philosophy becomes the creation of concepts that are defined as intensive multiplicities that are inscribed on a plane of immanence.

The “plane of immanence,” represents “pure immanence” and is given numerous descriptions: “neither surface nor volume, always fractal”;⁴⁸⁴ “like a desert that concept populate but never dividing up”;⁴⁸⁵ “like a section of chaos and acts like a sieve”;⁴⁸⁶ with “variable *curves* that retain the infinite movements that turn back on themselves in incessant exchange.”⁴⁸⁷ Ultimately, for Deleuze and

⁴⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Michael A. Greco, Verso, London, 1998, p. 135

⁴⁸¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁴⁸² Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁴⁸³ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁴⁸⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 36

⁴⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 36

⁴⁸⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 42

⁴⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 42

Guattari, the plane of immanence is “the absolute ground of philosophy, its earth or deterritorialization, the foundation on which it creates its concepts.”⁴⁸⁸

Deleuze and Guattari describe an alternative metaphysics inspired by the exteriority of the surface. They abolish transcendental hierarchy by flattening multiplicities to the same “plane of consistency” which possesses a complex fluidity that allows multiplicities to form non-hierarchical interconnections. Even though the plane of consistency is flat (i.e. non-hierarchical), it is not two-dimensional, as it possesses a fractal thickness that increases with the number of interactions that occur upon it:

We do not have units (*unités*) of measure, only multiplicities or varieties of measurement. ...All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions: we will therefore speak of a *plane of consistency* of multiplicities, even though the dimensions of this “plane” increase with the number of connections that are made on it. Multiplicities are defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities...The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet: lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations. ...are opposed in every way to the classical or romantic book constituted by the interiority of a substance or subject.⁴⁸⁹

The plane of immanence may be reminiscent of Edwin A. Abbott’s “Flatland.”⁴⁹⁰ But the philosopher of this plane does not dream of visiting the one-dimensional world of “Lineland,” nor does he aspire to go to “Spaceland:” the three-dimensional world of the powerful (but nameless) sphere. Instead, the philosopher of the plane of immanence believes that he is not sufficiently engaged with the complexities of his own expansive dimension. In other words, the surficial philosopher does not gaze at the infinite volume of the heavens, instead he participates in the dynamic forces of the surface of the earth.

Abbott’s novella is a tale of hierarchy, both transcendental and immanent. The three dimensional Spaceland is unavailable but desirable to the occupants of the two dimensional Flatland, who are submitted to strict social rules.⁴⁹¹ Deleuze and

⁴⁸⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁴⁸⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 8-9

⁴⁹⁰ See Edwin A. Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1987.

⁴⁹¹ In Abbott’s novella, men are portrayed as polygons whose social class is directly proportional to the number of sides they have. For example, triangles are at the bottom of the social ladder and are considered generally unintelligent, while the Priests as multi-sided

Guattari's plane of consistency however, is non-hierarchical, promoting multiplicity and continuous processes of becoming. While in this purest form, immanence is a *fractal plane* that denies transcendence, Deleuze and Guattari develop the plane by association with concepts such as surface, the earth, strata, desert or the sea.⁴⁹² Such *surficial models* are inspired by the adventures of "the Hercules of the surface ...[and the] reorientation of the entire thought and a new geography."⁴⁹³ Deleuze and Guattari argue that the abstract purity of the ideal is lost in human philosophy. But, this is seen as a positive event that indicates new realities and future possibilities:

Philosophy and science (like art itself with its third side) include an *I do not know* that has become positive and creative, the condition of creation itself, and that consists in determining *by* what one does not know – as Galois said, 'indicating the course of calculations and anticipating the results without ever being able to bring them about.'⁴⁹⁴

Thus, surficial philosophy is based on creativity, which extends itself through its inevitable end. Since there is no anxiety about the demise of concepts or theories, death is not accelerated in anticipation of rebirth (Baudrillardian theoretical violence)⁴⁹⁵ nor is it delayed through theoretical "pharmakons" (Derridean deconstruction). Instead it is considered as a necessary element of a continuous process of becoming that is already at work in every production. Destruction like any other aspect of reality, (like the fold of a Möbius strip) exists within the continuum and not at the end of things, because there is no beginning or end, but always a progressing middle, which consists of a mixture of "birth[s] and disappearance."⁴⁹⁶

By deploying terms such as "surface," "plane," "plateau," "Earth," "desert" and the "sea," Deleuze and Guattari construct an alternative philosophy

polygons (whose shapes approximate a circle), are considered to be the "perfect" shape. Women on the other hand are lines, which when viewed from the side appear as points. They are required by law to sway back and forth and announce their arrival, because numerous men have been stabbed by oncoming women!

⁴⁹² Deleuze and Guattari refer to such concepts in most of their writings. But notions of Earth, strata, layers and belts are elaborated in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, while in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the notion of the earth as a Body without Organs is expanded. The earth continues to remain a strong conceptual force in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy.

⁴⁹³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 132

⁴⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 128

⁴⁹⁵ "Theoretical violence, not truth, is the only resource left to us." Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 163

⁴⁹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 118



Figure 5.2: The flow of the surficial plane of immanence. Source: the author

that does not *judge essence* according to preconceived transcendental categories, but instead *values events* according to their immanent potential.⁴⁹⁷ This is because judgement is “the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed.”⁴⁹⁸ The result is a univocal philosophical approach in which surface is the thick border between traditional binary oppositions and the middle which is “by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed.”⁴⁹⁹

5.3 THE “SMOOTH” SPACE OF SURFICIAL THOUGHT

Surface as the expansive space of the middle (between high and deep) represents immanence, the place of difference, and an alternative mode of thought. Deleuze and Guattari construct a complex and interconnected “rhizome” of concepts that *express* this non-hierarchical philosophical approach. In contrast to the traditional Platonic logic which is “arborescent,” rising above the surface of the ground with each branch fathering small branches, Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic method grows within the thickness of the terrestrial surface in a complex interconnected system of concepts that spans out in every direction. This alternative system of thought forms horizontal and trans-species connections, while the arborescent model works with vertical and linear connections.

As a philosophical concept, the “rhizome” is not just a complex system of subterranean roots, but also a metaphor for a non-hierarchical interconnection of concepts.⁵⁰⁰ Thus, “There are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines.”⁵⁰¹ The rhizome represents a number of principles: “connections,” “heterogeneity,” “multiplicity,” the “principle of asignifying rupture”, and the “principle of cartography and decalcomania.” The “principle of asignifying rupture” for example, indicates that the rhizomatic system “may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines.”⁵⁰² This suggests that a rhizomatic system of concepts is less vulnerable to deconstruction (much like the world wide web) because it is not

⁴⁹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 22

⁴⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 10

⁴⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 25

⁵⁰⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 7-25

⁵⁰¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 8

⁵⁰² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 9

dependent on one source, root or origin. Instead, its growth is *genetic* and *emergent* since the generative code is immanent to the entirety of the network.

If terms such as “surface,” “Earth,” “plateau” and “ground” invoke a surficial understanding of immanence as the basis of an alternative philosophical approach, concepts such as “Body without Organs”⁵⁰³ and “Smooth Space” evoke the *fluidity* and *pliability* of a thought process in which concepts are never hammered down into a final form, but rather always becoming different. Thus, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “The Body without Organs,” introduces a new strategy that has an “extraordinary fluidity” characterized by shifting “from one code to the other.”⁵⁰⁴ Moreover, “The Earth, is a body without organs...permeated by unformed, unstable matters, by flows in all directions, by free intensities or nomadic singularities, by mad or transitory particles.”⁵⁰⁵

Deleuze and Guattari go against the common perception of the earth as a solid and stable body by associating it with *flows* that move at various speeds. In fact, one can argue that rocks and mountains are very slow-moving flows; living things are flows of genetic material; and language can be considered as the flow of information, words, and so on. Therefore the earth as a BwO is “fluid and slippery” and refuses to be striated by the rigidity of traditional philosophical categories.⁵⁰⁶

The concept of “Smooth space” continues the fluidity expressed in the BwO, evoking a liquid conception of the terrestrial surface that is in constant movement and transformation. Notions of complexity and mixture are also introduced in “smooth space” as a space of becoming where forces and vectors transverse categories, definitions and units of measurement. For Deleuze and Guattari, thought is voyage (across seas, deserts, steppes) that can be smooth or

⁵⁰³ Deleuze and Guattari borrow the term from Antonin Artaud’s radio play (1947): “When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.” Antonin Artaud. “To Have Done with the Judgment of God, a radio play (1974)” in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1976, pp. 555-574, p. 571

⁵⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15

⁵⁰⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 40

⁵⁰⁶ “Although the organ-machines attach themselves to the body without organs, the latter continues nonetheless to be without organs and does not become an organism in the ordinary sense of the word. It remains fluid and slippery.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15

striated.⁵⁰⁷ Smooth thought resists striated lines in favour of exploring a more primitive, nomadic voyage that is more in tune with the flows of the Earth. In other words, smooth thought encourages following lines of flight not to arrive at points (of origin) but to “distribute” oneself across the surface of immanence:

The smooth and the striated are distinguished first of all by an inverse relation between the point and the line (in the case of the striated, the line is between two points, while in the smooth, the point is between two lines); and second, by the nature of the line (smooth-directional, open intervals; dimensional-striated, closed intervals). Finally, there is a third difference, concerning the surface or space. In striated space, one closes off a surface and “allocates” it according to determinate intervals, assigned breaks; in the smooth, one “distributes” oneself in an opens space, according to frequencies and in the course of one’s crossings (*logos* and *nomos*).⁵⁰⁸

In a surficial model of thought, emphasis shifts from gravitational points of origin that pull everything inwards to vectors and lines of flight that shoot out in different directions. In this approach, the question of origin is not solved by making origin abstract, or absent, or making the absence of origin the origin. Instead, the solution lies in thinking laterally, horizontally and expansively by embracing becoming as the continual process that *transforms* any originary concept.⁵⁰⁹ Thus, Deleuze and Guattari offer an alternative system that explores the potential of creative thought:

The line-system (or block-system) of becoming is opposed to the point-system of memory. Becoming is the movement by which the line frees itself from the point, and renders points indiscernible: the rhizome, the opposite of arborescence; break away from arborescence. *Becoming is antimemory*.⁵¹⁰

This philosophy of the surface encourages short-term memory as that which includes “forgetting as a process” in order to escape a paralyzing state of stasis brought about from centuries of meditation upon the origin:

⁵⁰⁷ “To think is to voyage...Voyage smoothly or in striation, and think the same way” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 482

⁵⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 480-1

⁵⁰⁹ “A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it... A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination; to speak of the absence of an origin, to make the absence of an origin the origin, is a bad play on words. A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 293

⁵¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 294

...short-term memory is of the rhizome or diagram type, and long-term memory is arborescent and centralized (imprint, engram, tracing, or photograph). ...Short-term memory includes forgetting as a process; it merges not with the instant but instead with the nervous, temporal, and collective rhizome. Long-term memory (family, race, society, or civilization) traces and translates, but what it translates continues to act in it, from a distance, off beat, in an “untimely” way, not instantaneously.⁵¹¹

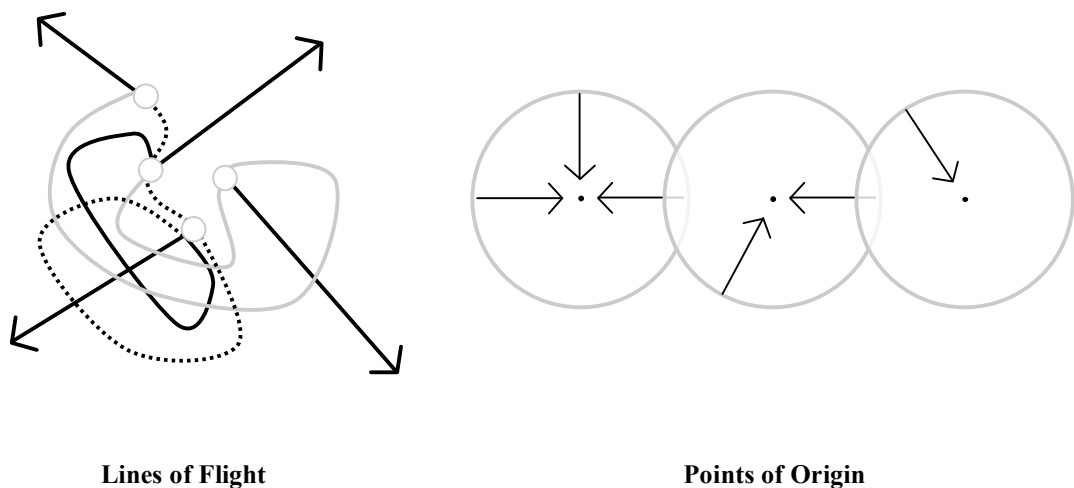


Figure 5.3: From a philosophy based on gravitational points of origin to a philosophy based on exploratory lines of flight.

Surficial thought is also characterized by an interest in the minor, the secondary and the absurd, that offer a variety of unfamiliar conditions that do not fit into the majoritarian category. This interest in the minoritarian is a desire for discovery, which instigates a forward-looking process that requires a momentary *forgetting* of tradition in preparation for future actualisation of potential:

Where psychoanalysis says, ‘Stop, find your self again,’ we should say instead, ‘Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled our self.’ Substitute forgetting for anamnesis, experimentation for interpretation.⁵¹²

The interest in the “minoritarian” is also indicative of a pliable mode of thought that is receptive to other cultures, thoughts and processes of production. The minoritarian is different from minority because the latter is an aggregate

⁵¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 16

⁵¹² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 151

determined by quantity. Thus, according to Deleuze and Guattari, it does not matter that there are more insects than men on the planet, because the term “man” “constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority... In this sense women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian.”⁵¹³ Surficial thought encourages the *becoming-other* of the white-man (adult male) that constitutes the majoritarian in Western culture. But this becoming is not limited to becoming-woman, since it also includes becoming-African, becoming-Asian, becoming-animal, becoming-plant, becoming-molecular and so on. For Deleuze and Guattari “becomings are minoritarian; all becoming is a becoming-minoritarian.”⁵¹⁴

Juxtaposing these different concepts together, it is possible to argue that smooth thought encourages flexibility, fluidity and processes of transformation. Moreover, the space of smooth thought is not homogenous, but amorphous.⁵¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari offer the sea as a good example of such amorphous space.⁵¹⁶ Before longitude lines, the sea represented smooth space, experienced through “a complex and empirical nomadic system of navigation based on the wind and noise, the colours and sounds of the seas.”⁵¹⁷ However, the striation of the seas (through lines of longitude and latitude), substituted the complex and empirical nomadic system of navigation with a more rigid system that divides the sea into different territories. The consequences of this striation are the subordination of *directionality* to *dimensionality*, and the *substitution of vectors (lines of flight) with points and coordinates*. However, even though striation is now everywhere, smooth space does not disappear and is in fact used to control striation, because smooth space has a “greater power of deterritorialization than the striated.”⁵¹⁸

5.3.1 From Surface to Surfacing: Events, Propositions and the Expression of Sense

For Deleuze “The surface and that which takes place at the surface is what ‘renders possible’.”⁵¹⁹ Surface is therefore a verb, not just a noun. Thus, in surficial

⁵¹³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 291

⁵¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 291

⁵¹⁵ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 477

⁵¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 479

⁵¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 480

⁵¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p.480

⁵¹⁹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 186

philosophy essence is found in events and emphasis shifts from truth to proposition, which is complemented by “sense” as “*both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition.*”⁵²⁰ The concept of “sense” encourages an understanding of words beyond their denotation and promotes the activation of words as expressive verbs.⁵²¹ The term “surface” for example, is no longer treated as a name or a term of stasis, but rather a powerful intensity with expressive potential. In this philosophical approach, surface is not only surficial (i.e. more than superficial) but it is also *surfacing*: expressing the actualization of the virtual, the liquid flows of “smooth space,” and the complexities of the terrestrial plane.

Perhaps a brief explanation of the concept of “sense” would clarify the shift of emphasis that occurs in surficial thinking. According to Deleuze, the traditional conception of proposition involves three distinct relations: *denotation*, *manifestation* and *signification*. The first “functions through the association of the words themselves with *particular images which ought to ‘represent’ the state of affairs.*”⁵²² The second relation concerns the person who speaks and expresses himself and is “presented as a statement of desires and beliefs which correspond to the proposition.”⁵²³ Finally, the third relation (signification) is concerned with the “relation of the word to *universal or general* concepts, and of syntactic connections to the implications of the concept.”⁵²⁴

According to Deleuze, the logical value of signification is not truth, but “*the condition of truth*, the aggregate of conditions under which the proposition ‘would be’ true.”⁵²⁵ Consequently, “signification does not establish the truth without also establishing the possibility of error” and it is precisely for this reason that “the condition of truth is not opposed to the false, but to the absurd: that which is without signification or that which may be neither true nor false.”⁵²⁶ Sense, on the other hand, is “*the expressed of the proposition*, [it] is an incorporeal, complex, and irreducible entity, at the surface of things, a pure event which inheres or subsists in

⁵²⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 22

⁵²¹ Deleuze write: “The duality in the proposition is not between two sorts of names, names of stasis and names of becoming; rather, it is between two dimensions of the proposition, that is, between denotation and expression, or between the denotation of things and the expression of sense.” Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 25

⁵²² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 12

⁵²³ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 13

⁵²⁴ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 14

⁵²⁵ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 14

⁵²⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 14-15

the proposition.”⁵²⁷ Deleuze describes sense as the fourth dimension that complements the circularity of denotation, implication and signification, by *unfolding* the traditional model of proposition into a complex topological surface:

It is only by breaking open the circle, as in the case of the Möbius strip, by unfolding and untwisting it, that the dimension of sense appears for itself, in its irreducibility, and also in its genetic power as it animates an a priori internal model of the proposition.⁵²⁸

If the traditional model of proposition is based on the Platonic circle (that creates the interiority of essence and obeys the centrality of the origin), the Deleuzean model *unfolds essence unto the surface* that has no interiority (or exteriority in the traditional definition of the word, which places it in opposition to interiority).⁵²⁹ As a topological geometry, the Möbius strip is a surface *with only one side* that creates many sides. It is also a folding geometry that actualizes the univocal formula “Pluralism = Monism.”⁵³⁰ Deleuze uses the Möbius strip to explain the effect of “sense” on proposition. But this non-orientable model also demonstrates that in surficial thought there is no surface that masks the essence of the proposition, only *surface that surfaces essence*.

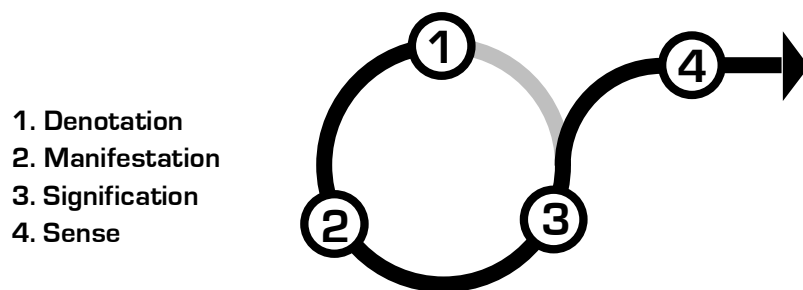


Figure 5.4: Breaking the circularity of proposition: the significance of sense.
Source: the author

In this alternative model of thought, the generating principle is not a transcendent point of origin, but rather an immanent surface phenomenon (much like the fold or the gentle curvature of the Möbius strip) that generates the effect of inside, outside,

⁵²⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 19

⁵²⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 20

⁵²⁹ In Andrew Ballantyne’s words “Deleuze and Guattari draw attention to a spatial contrast – a move from confinement to expansiveness...” Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*, ed. Adam Sharr, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 62

⁵³⁰ See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 20

top, bottom and so on. The Möbius strip is a complex geometry, but it is not abstract or imaginary.⁵³¹ Such a topological model offers an alternative to familiar Euclidean geometries that have inspired traditional models of thought for centuries. The circle (or the sphere) for example, forms an impassable boundary (a double sided surface) that masks and separates the inside from the outside. The Möbius strip on the other hand, is the boundary condition that facilitates a smooth transition from one category to the other. In this model of thought, surface is not a barrier or a limit, rather a single-sided topology that generates human categories.

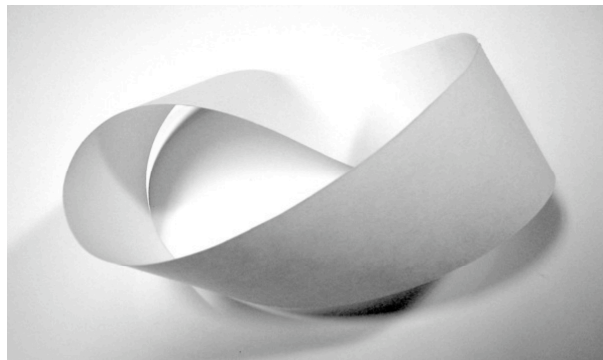


Figure 5.5: The Fold that makes the Möbius Strip as an example of topological space and a surface model of thought that creates difference within continuity and replaces absolute separation with smooth transition.

Aware of the play of the signifier and the circularity of traditional models of thought, Deleuze proposes a game. But, this game is unlike Derrida’s “sure play” which is “limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces.*”⁵³² Instead, he promotes *creative re-production* that takes inspiration from unexpected and unfamiliar sources. This is because madness, “dreams,” “pathological processes,” “esoteric experiences,”⁵³³ “need not be all breakdown ... [they] may also be breakthrough.”⁵³⁴ Deleuze’s game is not what Derrida calls “the affirmation of a

⁵³¹ The Möbius strip can be constructed using a piece of paper or its instances can be found in nature. The Cyclotide (cyclic protein) Kalata B1, active substance of the plant *Oldenlandia affinis*, contains Möbius topology for its peptide backbone. Möbius strips are also common in the manufacture of fabric computer printer and typewriter ribbons, as they allow the ribbon to be twice as wide as the print head whilst using both half-edges evenly.

⁵³² Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁵³³ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

⁵³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 131

world of signs without fault, without truth, and without origin”⁵³⁵ because it considers signs as possessing a reality of their own. Such a game calls for an active and creative participation in univocity and necessitates an appreciation of the *difference immanent to origin*, an affirmation of chance, creativity and simulation:

This game is reserved then for thought and art. In it there is nothing but victories for those who know how to play, that is, how to affirm and ramify chance, instead of dividing it *in order to* dominate it, *in order to* wager, *in order to* win. This game, which can only exist in thought and which has no other result than the work of art, is also that by which thought and art are real and disturbing reality, morality, and the economy of the world.⁵³⁶

Deleuze’s game is one which promotes a “great deal of movement,”⁵³⁷ “invents its own rules; it bears upon its own rule,”⁵³⁸ but remains comprehensible through the expression of sense. It is a game that affirms chance and endlessly ramifies it.⁵³⁹ What does this aesthetic game have to offer that the Derridaean “sure play” doesn’t? It renders thought free from pre-existing categories, which as Derrida concedes, limit his game to “substitution.”⁵⁴⁰ The Deleuzian game encourages new rules just as promotes the undoing of existing ones. Such a game does not represent the end of metaphysics, rather the end of Plato’s metaphysics, which is replaced with other models of thought (metaphysical or otherwise). In this philosophical approach, creative production becomes an essential element of a (machinic) process, which is particularly useful for “thought and art.” Thus, the overcoming of Platonism does not signal the implosion of meaning, but the explosion of sense across the surfaces of immanence:

It is thus pleasing that there resounds today the news that sense is never a principle or an origin, but that it is produced. It is not something to discover, to restore, and to re-employ; it is something to produce by a new machinery. It belongs to no height or depth, but rather to a surface effect, being inseparable from the surface which is its proper dimension. It is not that sense lacks depth or height, but rather that height and depth lack

⁵³⁵ See Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁵³⁶ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 60

⁵³⁷ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 59

⁵³⁸ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 59

⁵³⁹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 59

⁵⁴⁰ Derrida, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 289

surface, that they lack sense, or have it only by virtue of an “effect” which presupposes sense.⁵⁴¹

5.3.2 From Lack to Act: “Desiring Machines” and Smooth Processes of Production

As mentioned previously, Deleuze and Guattari deploy a rhizomatic network of concepts to develop a philosophy that pursues *univocity based on difference* as an alternative to transcendental hierarchy based on the logic of similitude. In this philosophy surface represents the exteriority of expression, the space in-between (the height of heaven and the depth of essence), and the fractal dimension that resists stasis through flows, trajectories and processes of becoming. A philosophy inspired by this surficial plane of immanence promotes active participation and affirms the uniqueness of human creativity, shifting the emphasis from eternal truth to momentary creativity:

God and actor are opposed in their readings of time. What men grasp as past and future, God lives it in its eternal present. The God is Chronos: the divine present is the circle in its entirety, whereas past and future are dimensions relative to a particular segment of the circle which leaves the rest outside. The actor’s present, on the contrary, is the most narrow, the most contracted, the most instantaneous, and the most punctual. It is the point on a straight line which divides the line endlessly, and is itself divided into past-future. The actor belongs to the present....The actor actualizes the event, but in a way which is entirely different from the actualization of the event in the depth of things. Or rather, the actor redoubles this cosmic, or physical actualization, in his own way, which is singularly superficial – but because of it more distinct, trenchant and pure.⁵⁴²

The proposed surficial philosophy is characterized by a desire to surface. But desire *is not defined as a lack*, nor is it governed by acquisition. It is instead defined as a process of production:

...when the theoretician reduces desiring-production to a production of fantasy, he is content to exploit to the fullest the idealist principle that defines desire as a lack, rather than a process of production, of ‘industrial’ production... If desire produces, its product is real. ...Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object.⁵⁴³

⁵⁴¹ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 72

⁵⁴² Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 150

⁵⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 26

In surficial thought the desire to surface is desire to produce. Thus, processes of production are “desiring machines” that continuously produce the real. Such machines are theatrical but are not machines of fantasy, and must not be defined that way. Thus, the traditional model of origin is redefined comprehensively. Lack does not instigate desire, action or production; it is rather the machinic production that produces lack as a counter-product within the real that desire produces.⁵⁴⁴ If one accepts that desiring machines continuously produce the real across the plane of immanence, then reality is no longer *uncovered* by penetrating surfaces, images and appearances, but rather it is *extended, amended and re-produced*.⁵⁴⁵ Since desiring machines are not based on lack, their operation is not predetermined by a search for an originary entity that is hidden or absent. Thus, it is no longer the question: “What does it mean?” but rather ‘*How does it work?*’ How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work – yours and mine?”⁵⁴⁶

This philosophical approach is radically different from traditional models of thought that judge surface, image and appearances according to a transcendental reality that is either masked or absent. Baudrillard follows such a model of thought when he defines the seduction of images as the allure of absence or death, where a fascination with the “void that haunts us”⁵⁴⁷ permits the proliferation of artificial and superficial images that have no relationship with reality. The result becomes a despondent conclusion that depicts humanity as imprisoned in a flattened hyperreality where the “implosion of meaning”⁵⁴⁸ has effected the degradation of lived life into a “*speculative universe*.”⁵⁴⁹

Deleuze and Guattari however, formulate a different approach to surfaces, images and appearances. For them it is not seduction as the fascination with lack, absence or death that catalyzes the proliferation of images, but instead the desire for the *production of a different reality* that determines the significance of image making. Thus, images are not the “concrete inversion of life”⁵⁵⁰ but instead the flow of life: its

⁵⁴⁴ “Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are counter-products within the real that desire produces.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 27

⁵⁴⁵ “Re-produced” is used here to imply further production in contrast to “reproduced” which evokes copying or imitation.

⁵⁴⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 109

⁵⁴⁷ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 83

⁵⁴⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 31

⁵⁴⁹ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 19

⁵⁵⁰ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 2

transformation, and re-production in different mediums. For Deleuze and Guattari, desire, (seduction) and simulation do not represent lack or absence of reality, but instead *the production of more real*.

For Deleuze and Guattari “everything is production, even consumption.”⁵⁵¹ Everything *affects* and exists upon the same immanent plane where “production as process overtakes all idealistic categories.”⁵⁵² This immanent condition is characterized by liquidity and flow where “Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows.”⁵⁵³ This model of fluidity inspires *trans-disciplinary* operations and the *liquefaction of rigid boundaries* in a smooth state of being that can be called a “body without organs.”⁵⁵⁴

The smooth space of immanence necessitates smooth processes of production. Deleuze and Guattari offer the “felt” and “patchwork” as “technological models” of such smooth production, which are contrasted to the making of fabrics. The fabric represents striated space because:

First, it is constituted by two kinds of parallel elements; in the simplest case, there are vertical and horizontal elements, and the two intertwine, intersect perpendicularly. Second, the two kinds of elements have different functions; one is fixed, the other mobile, passing above and beneath the fixed. ...Third, a striated space of this kind is necessarily delimited, closed on at least one side: the fabric can be infinite in length but not in width, which is determined by the frame of the warp; the necessity of a aback and forth motion implies a closed space (circular or cylindrical figures are themselves closed). Finally, a space of this kind seems necessarily to have atop and a bottom; even when the warp yarn and woof yarn are exactly the same in nature, number, and density, weaving reconstitutes a bottom by placing the knots on one side.⁵⁵⁵

Felt is introduced as an “anti-fabric,” a nomadic material that is “in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor

⁵⁵¹ Deleuze and Guattari write: “everything is production, even consumption, *production of productions*, of actions and of passions; *productions of recording processes*, of distributions and of coordinates that serve as points of reference; *productions of consumptions*, of sensual pleasures, of anxieties, and of pain.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 4

⁵⁵² “Man and nature are not like two opposite terms confronting each other...rather, they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product. Production as process overtakes all idealistic categories and constitutes a cycle whose relationship to desire is that of an immanent principle.” Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 4-5

⁵⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 5

⁵⁵⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15

⁵⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 475

centre; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation.”⁵⁵⁶ Felt is produced by “*fulling*,” which is in fact a process of *folding* by rolling the block of fibres back and forth. The intricate entanglement of fibres in felt parallel the complex interconnectivity of the rhizome. Moreover, felt is produced using processes of production that can extend in any direction, the micro-fibres being “abstract lines”⁵⁵⁷ that hold the “chaosmos” together. Deleuze and Guattari associate felt with the earth, with nomadic movement and the exteriority of the terrestrial surface. For them, the production of felt represents the *unfolding of monadic life*⁵⁵⁸ onto a nomadic life:

For among sedentaries, clothes-fabric and tapestry-fabric tend to annex the body and exterior space, respectively, to the immobile house: fabric integrates the body and the outside into a closed space. On the other hand, the weaving of the nomad indexes clothing and the house itself to the space of the outside, to the open smooth space in which the body moves.⁵⁵⁹

If felt describes a nomadic *chaosmos*, patchwork demonstrates that the smoothening of striated space does not necessitate homogeneity, rather “an *amorphous*, nonformal space prefiguring op art.”⁵⁶⁰ In other words, if, the weaving of fabric is contained by the vertical and horizontal elements, patchwork creates a smooth space characterized by heterogeneous elements that can extend in different directions:

Patchwork, in conformity with migration, whose degree of affinity with nomadism it shares, is not only named after trajectories, but ‘represents’

⁵⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 475-6

⁵⁵⁷ “A line that delimits nothing, that describes no contour, that no longer goes from one point to another but instead passes between points, that is always declining from the horizontal and the vertical and deviating from the diagonal, that is constantly changing direction, a mutant line of this kind that is without outside or inside, form or background, beginning or end and that is as alive as a continuous variation – such a line is truly an abstract line, and describes a smooth space.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 498

⁵⁵⁸ In his book *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Deleuze reconstructs Gottfried W. Leibniz’s *Monadology*. For Leibniz monads are “the real atoms of nature” and “the elements of things.” However, Deleuze argues that Monads “resembles a sacristy more than an atom: a room with neither doors nor windows, where all activity takes place on the inside.” Thus for Deleuze a monadic life is one of pure interiority while a nomadic life is one of pure exteriority. See Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *The Monadology*, trans. Robert Latta, Forgotten Books, 1968. See also Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Athlone Press, London, 1993. Leibniz’s Monads and Deleuze interpretation of them are discussed in the following pages of this thesis as part of an exposition of the concept of the fold.

⁵⁵⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 476

⁵⁶⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 477

trajectories, becomes inseparable from speed or movement in an open space.⁵⁶¹

Felt and patchwork as “technological models,” suggest a more fluid, complex and interdisciplinary approach towards architectural production. In recent years, the advancement of contemporary digital tools has allowed a smoothening of traditional (architectural) categories a heightened sense of collaboration between different disciplines. The increasing sophistication of new technologies and their widespread availability has provided a fertile ground for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary mutation, where designers borrow ideas from unexpected sources in an effort to explore the “becoming-other” of architecture.⁵⁶²

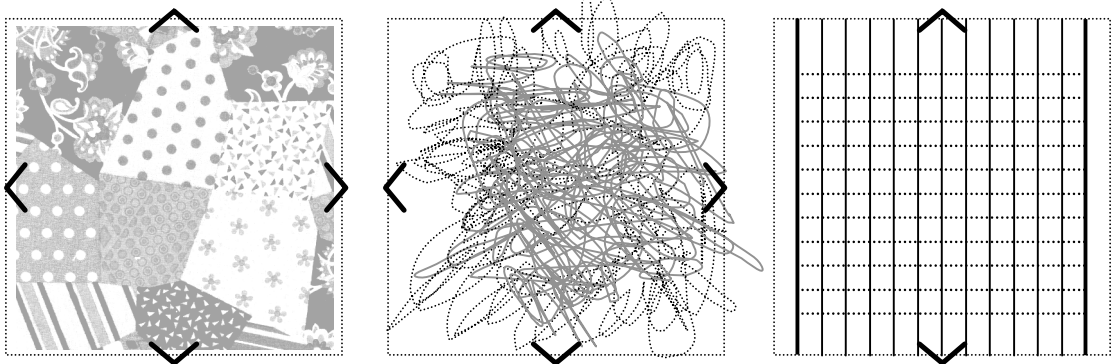


Figure 5.6: Different approaches to the design process: the smooth, space of felt and patchwork compared to the striated space of fabric. Felt and patchwork suggest complexity and an explorative and interdisciplinary approach to the design process which can extend in all possible directions. Fabric on the other hand is more restricted in its expansion. Source: the author.

However, it must be noted that the concepts discussed above are not to be considered as liberatory solutions that must be adopted at the expense of other modes of operation. Instead, they are conceptual approaches that confront established modes of thought with “new obstacles” in anticipation of new “passages or combinations” and other “forces” that might develop from such interaction.⁵⁶³

⁵⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 477

⁵⁶² Many contemporary architects are engaged in amorphous design processes in which the digital animator, software engineers or other experts contribute to the design of a building. Aegis Hyposurface, Greg Lynn’s Embryological House, or the recent work of Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid or NOX are early prototypes of such *transmutational* architecture.

⁵⁶³ Thus Deleuze and Guattari warn: “Never believe that a smooth space will suffice to save us.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 500

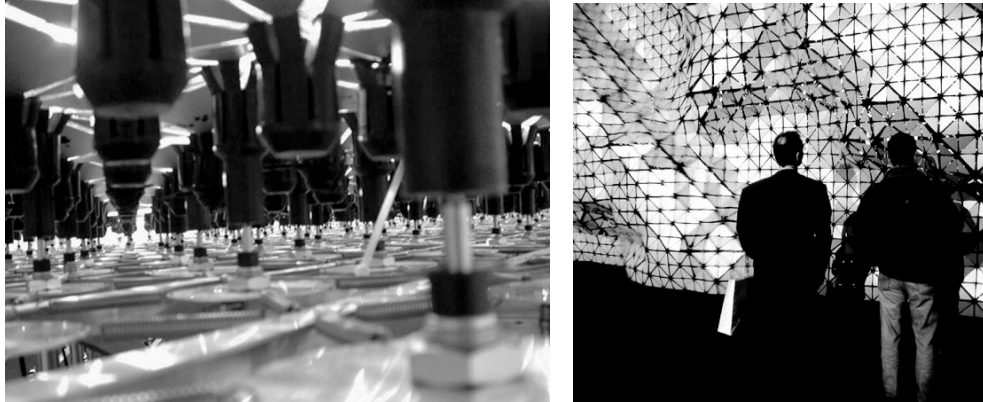


Figure 5.7: Aegis Hyposurface (1999) dECOi Architects. According to Mark Goulthorpe, Aegis is an activated surface that responds to stimuli captured from the environment. This is effected by arrays of pneumatic pistons operating in real time, which are controlled by a computer system that processes information from various sensors. The surface is therefore not designed in the traditional sense of the word, it is rather *continuously designed*, generated from an endless sampling of electronic sensory-input.

Source: <http://www.mediaarchitecture.org/2006/06>

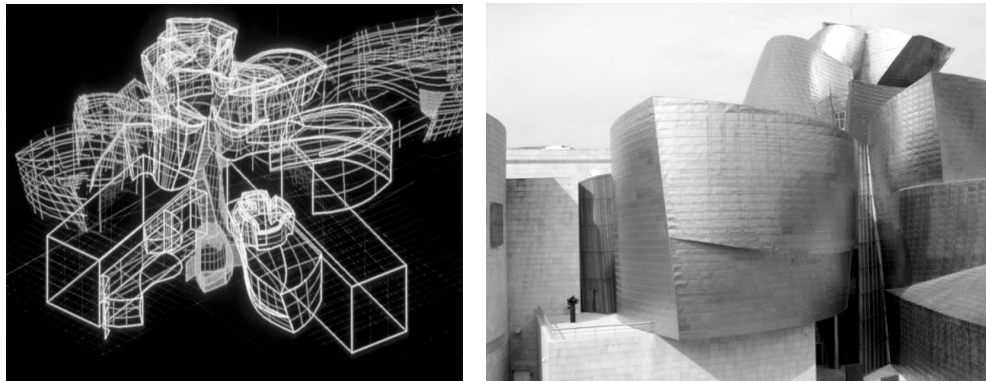


Figure 5.8: The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum (1997) Frank Gehry. In order to construct the complex forms, Gehry had to collaborate with experts from the aerospace industry who were familiar with CATIA, a computer modelling software that was particular useful for mapping out the folded surfaces of the design. Source: Coosje Van Bruggen, *Frank O. Gehry Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 1997.

5.3.3 From Representation to Expression: “Haptic Space” and “Close-range Vision”

In a philosophical approach where everything is production, thought assumes a different movement. Instead of cutting through rigid layers, *surficial thought* floats within the smooth space of becoming. In this movement of thought, the eye assumes a “non-optical function,” since smooth space is in fact “haptic space” as distinguished from the optical space of the tradition.⁵⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari prefer the term “haptic” to tactile because they argue the former “does not establish an opposition between two sense organs but rather invites the assumption that the eye itself may fulfil this nonoptical function.”⁵⁶⁵

The concept of “close-range vision” suggests a more sympathetic engagement with art, one that limits (pre-) judgement from distance. Such proximity of vision and thought implies the *viewer-artist* as one who not only occupies the same dimension as the work of art, but also helps produce it from the same thickness.⁵⁶⁶ In other words, the close-range interaction facilitates by this “groping” vision, creates a non-hierarchical mixture from which the work of art, the artist and the observers emerge as altered entities.

In this “the haptic, smooth space of close vision...orientations are not constant but change according to temporary vegetation, occupations, and precipitation.”⁵⁶⁷ This implies a *nomadic* approach to art, in which, lines of flight move in different trajectories, exploring new territories beyond points of reference. This is because “there is no visual model for points of reference” which would define stylistic rules. If there are points of reference, they are “tied to any number of observers, who may be qualified as ‘monads’ but are instead *nomads* entertaining tactile relations among themselves.”⁵⁶⁸ It is through such an “aesthetic model” that Deleuze and Guattari transform Leibniz’s Monads into expressive *nomads* that explore the surficial plane of immanence.

⁵⁶⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 492

⁵⁶⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

⁵⁶⁶ “The law of the painting is that it be done at close range, even if it is viewed from relatively far away...Similarly, it is said that composers do not hear: they have close-range hearing, whereas listeners hear from a distance. Even writers write with short-term memory, whereas readers are assumed to be endowed with long-term memory.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 493

⁵⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

⁵⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

Deleuze and Guattari define *nomad art* as one in which the eye senses the surface of immanence which it belongs to. In other words, the viewer does not stand back (or above) a work of art, since “there is no intermediary distance, or all distance is intermediary.”⁵⁶⁹ From this point of view, seeing a work of art necessitates a mixing with its texture, a process of dissolution within its thickness. Thus, the eye assumes:

a haptic, non-optical function: no line separates earth from sky, which are of the same substance; there is neither horizon nor background nor perspective nor limit nor outline or form nor centre.⁵⁷⁰

“Close-range” and “haptic vision,” offer a different approach to art, one in which judgement based on pre-established points of origin gives way to valuation inspired by potential lines of flight. This approach encourages a shift of emphasis from disciplined representations to free, exploratory expression.

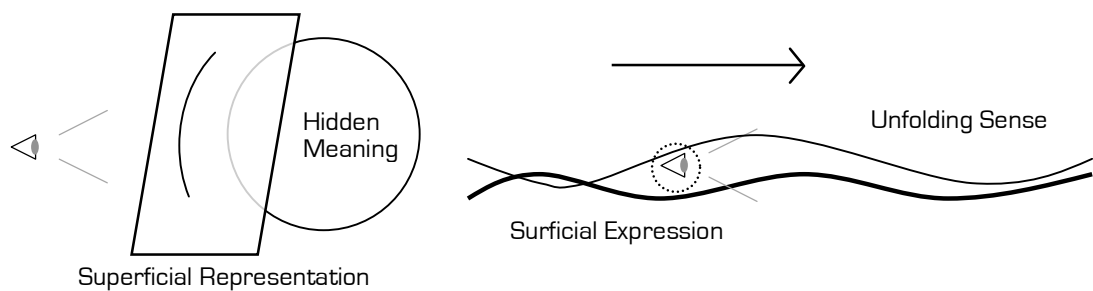


Figure 5.9: Two different approaches to seeing (in architecture): detachment and perpendicularity of seeing in traditional models of thought compared to the haptic voyage of the eye in surficial thought. Source: the author.

Deleuze and Guattari’s aesthetic model follows other “models” that rely on the introduction of new concepts, which are fed into abstract machines of comparison that once animated in time, push thought forwards into unknown territories:

Indeed, it is through symmetry that rectilinear systems limit repetition, preventing infinite progression and maintaining the *organic* domination of a central point with radiating lines, as in reflected or star-shaped figures. It is free action, however, which by its essence unleashes the power of

⁵⁶⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

⁵⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

repetition as a *machinic* force that multiplies its effect and pursues an infinite movement.⁵⁷¹

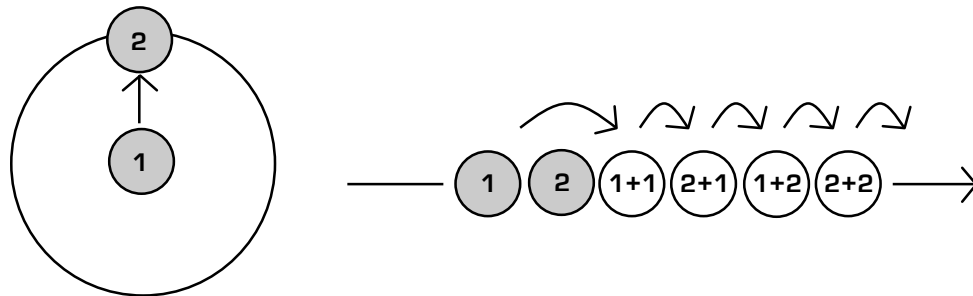


Figure 5.10: Abstract thought and abstract machine of thought: circularity of transcendental hierarchy compared to dynamics of surficial approach based on difference, repetition and transformation. For architectural design, the latter strategy suggests a continuous redefinition of established categories and the relationship between them. Source: the author.

If the first two machinic constructs were activated by haptic vision and close-range vision, (operating in conjunction with optical vision and distant vision), the third machinic concept is the nomadic “abstract line” which is compared to the “concrete line” of representational art. The “abstract line” is a nomadic line that has not yet been “downgraded” to a concrete or a figurative line.⁵⁷² What marks the downfall of nomadic abstract lines is the development of text, which “takes charge of abstraction” and communication leaving the artistic line to representation or figuration:

In effect, the line is all the more abstract when writing is absent, either because it has yet to develop or only exists outside or alongside. When writing takes charge of abstraction, as it does in empires, the line, already downgraded, necessarily tends to become concrete, even figurative. Children forget how to draw.⁵⁷³

Deleuze and Guattari’s abstract line cannot be reduced to any “organic line” which depicts humans or animals. The nomadic line is more *enigmatic*, belonging to the liquid flows of haptic vision and smooth space. Such a line follows momentary

⁵⁷¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 498

⁵⁷² The nomadic line “is no less at the ‘beginning,’ inasmuch as it is a pole always presupposed by any line capable of constituting another pole.” Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 497

⁵⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 497

desires and avoids any pre-established rules of symmetry or striation. A nomadic line is primitive, seductive and creative and it demands haptic vision. In other words, the nomadic line is not one of representation or reproduction but of expression and re-production.

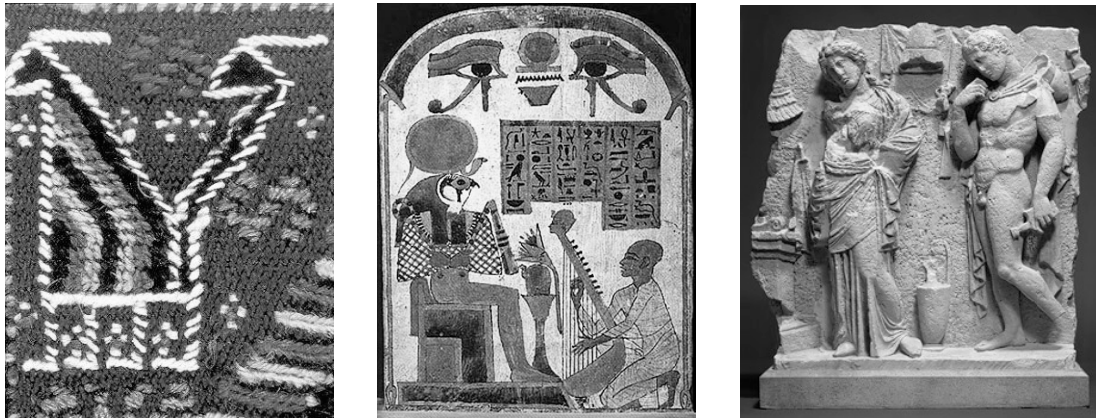


Figure 5.11: From expression to representation: nomadic abstract line, Egyptian geometric line, Greek organic line. In nomadic abstract line emphasis is on expression and a haptic relationship with the medium. In Egyptian and Greek art, the line becomes increasingly figurative, *representing* the subject through laws of proportion and perspective. Both the Greek line and the Egyptian line belong to striated space, even though the Greek organic line “subordinates volume and spatiality” whilst the Egyptian geometrical line “reduced them [volume and spatiality] to the plane.”⁵⁷⁴

Sources: <http://www.rugreview.com/122a1.htm>,
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Ra-harphist.jpg>,
http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/h2/h2_29.54.jpg

For Deleuze and Guattari the depiction of the organic body in Greek art marks the transformation of smooth space into striated space as “The organic body is prolonged by straight lines that attach it to what lies in the distance. Hence the primacy of human beings, or of the face.”⁵⁷⁵ What distinguishes the smooth space of abstract lines is the flow of expression and the tactility of vision unrestricted by “rectilinear coordinates of striated space.” This suggests that if in striated space the eye looks for depth of meaning past surfaces of representation, in smooth space, the eye feels immanent sense across surfaces of expression. (See figure 5.9)

⁵⁷⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 498

⁵⁷⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 498

5.3.4 From “Monads” to Nomads: Fold, Architecture and Surfaces of Expression

In Deleuze and Guattari’s aesthetic model, Monads become nomadic entities in continuous movement and transformation. Such *nomadic Monads* offer a model for individual creativity without losing ties with a greater holistic continuity. This model of thought also offers an alternative approach to art and creativity. Deleuze and Guattari write:

These questions of orientation, location, and linkage enter into play in the most famous works of nomad art: the twisted animals have no land beneath them; the ground constantly changes direction, as in aerial acrobatics; the paws point in the opposite direction from the head, the hind part of the body is turned upside down; the “monadological” points of view can be interlinked only on a nomad space, the whole and the parts give the eye that beholds them a function that is haptic rather than optical. This is an animality that can be seen only by touching it with one’s mind, but without the mind becoming a finger, not even by way of the eye.⁵⁷⁶

Leibniz’s *Monadology* is based on an account of a Monad as “the real atoms of nature” and “the elements of things,”⁵⁷⁷ which have perception.⁵⁷⁸ Monads that possess feeling are defined as *souls*, where perception “is more distinct, and is accompanied by memory.”⁵⁷⁹ A mind is defined as a soul with the “knowledge of necessary and eternal truths”. This is the key to reason and the sciences “raising us to the knowledge of ourselves and of God.”⁵⁸⁰

The *body* of a Monad however, is something quite different. It belongs to matter and operates according to a different set of rules. The body exists in a plenum where all matter is connected together so “every motion has an effect upon distant bodies in proportion to their distance”. All bodies are in a perpetual flux

⁵⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 494

⁵⁷⁷ Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 3

⁵⁷⁸ Leibniz makes a clear distinction between perception and consciousness as he dismisses the Cartesian argument that “minds [esprits] alone are Monads, and that there are no souls of animals nor other Entelechies.” Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 14. Thus, Leibniz disagrees with *souls* being entirely separate from bodies, yet also dismisses that souls are mortals.

Therefore, the essence of a Monad is perception and this can only be found in the simplest of things, the atoms of the universe, which are indivisible

⁵⁷⁹ Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 19. For Leibniz, the soul is something more than a bare Monad. So animals can have souls because animals have perception and memory. In these cases memory resembles *reason*, but the actions are only a result of comparison to past experience which is very different to intelligence or rationality. An example is a dog that runs away from a stick when it was been beaten by it before. The dog merely remembers the pain from the past and deduces that it will cause him pain again.

⁵⁸⁰ Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 29

“like rivers” where parts enter and pass through each other continuously. Thus, the *space of matter is thick and full* and there is no void within it.⁵⁸¹

Leibniz defines the body of the Monad as a “divine machine” which is fundamentally different to any man-made creation, because it is not made of simple parts, but of machines *ad infinitum*.⁵⁸² Defined this way, the relationship between the body and the soul becomes complex: “bodies act as if (to suppose the impossible) there were no souls, and souls act as if there were no bodies, and both act as if each influenced the other.”⁵⁸³ Thus, while distinguishing the soul from the body, Leibniz theorises them as existing in *a complex harmony and continuity with each other* “since they are all representations of one and the same universe.”⁵⁸⁴ It is for this “impossible” relationship that Deleuze proposes the fold, as a concept that explains the *connected difference* that characterizes Leibniz’s metaphysical distinction between the monadic soul and body.

After reconstructing Leibniz’s conception of “soul” and “perception,”⁵⁸⁵ Deleuze transforms the monadic “body” into an *architectural façade*, which he defines as “an outside without an inside.”⁵⁸⁶ Deleuze argues that this façade belongs to the material world and it deals with matter, the flowing plenum outside of the Monad. This façade “can have doors and windows – it is riddled with holes – although there may be *no void*, a hole being only the site of a more rarefied

⁵⁸¹ “Though the earth and the air which are between the plants of the garden, or the water which is between the fish of the pond, be neither plant nor fish; yet they also contain plants and fishes, but mostly so minute as to be imperceptible to us.” Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 68

⁵⁸² “The machines of nature, namely living bodies, are still machines in their smallest parts *ad infinitum*. It is this that constitutes the difference between nature and art, that is to say, between the divine art and ours. (Theod. 134, 146, 194, 403).”⁵⁸² “God alone is completely without body. (Theod. 90, 124).” Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 74

⁵⁸³ Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 81

⁵⁸⁴ Leibniz, *The Monadology*, 78

⁵⁸⁵ Deleuze reconstructs Leibniz’s theories of perception in the Monad. While arguing that the Monad resembles a cell, Deleuze explains that the Monad possesses conscious and unconscious perceptions. Unconscious perceptions are inconspicuous or minute, while conscious perceptions are deductions from such minute unconscious perceptions within the monad. Deleuze argues that there are two different kinds of conscious perception: universal and individual. The universal perception is common to all Monads since the same world is included in all existing Monads. Thus, all Monads perceive the same colour of green, the same musical note and the same object is actualised in them. Individual perception on the other hand, favours certain differential relations that result in exclusive perceptions, therefore, two monads would never perceive the same green in the same degree of chiaroscuro. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley, Athlone Press, London, 1993, p. 90

⁵⁸⁶ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

matter.”⁵⁸⁷ In this conception, openings are not a disruption of the façade (a rupture) but rather a different manifestation of the same surface. Thus, the monadic facade operates much like a Möbius strip: opening “from the outside and onto the outside.”⁵⁸⁸ Deleuze’s radical transformation of Leibniz’s metaphysical theory is complete when he describes the monadic “sacristy” as having two floors.⁵⁸⁹ The lower level is assigned to the facade, which belongs to the exteriority of matter. It has four windows and a door, which represent the five senses, making the room “an infinite room for reception or receptivity.”⁵⁹⁰ The upper level is assigned to the the soul or the mind. It is pure inside without an outside. The upper floor is “blind and closed but on the other hand resonating as if it were a musical salon translating the visible movements below into sounds up above.”⁵⁹¹

Thus, Deleuze takes Leibniz’s ideas and applies them to a Baroque house. By doing this, he uses architecture to explore philosophy and simultaneously offers a way of exploring architecture through philosophy. In the Baroque sacristy that represents the Monad, the fold facilitates the connection between the two floors: the physical world as the bright lower floor and the metaphysical world represented by the dark upper floor. Leibniz’s impossible connection between these two worlds is made possible by the *fold*, not just as an architectural feature of the Baroque, *but also as a philosophical concept and process*. The fold not only connects binary oppositional categories but it also explains their originary connectedness. A fold of paper for example, separates one side from the other, but the two sides are not two different pieces of paper, but in fact, one continuous piece that is polarized by the operation of the fold. The fold is therefore a surface phenomenon that creates difference within the continuity of the same paper. The fold simultaneously separates and connects the high and the low, the interior and the exterior. Although these worlds seem separate and opposed, they endlessly relate to each other through the fold: “that echoes itself from the two sides according to a different order.”⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁷ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁵⁸⁸ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁵⁸⁹ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁵⁹⁰ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁵⁹¹ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 4

⁵⁹² Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 29

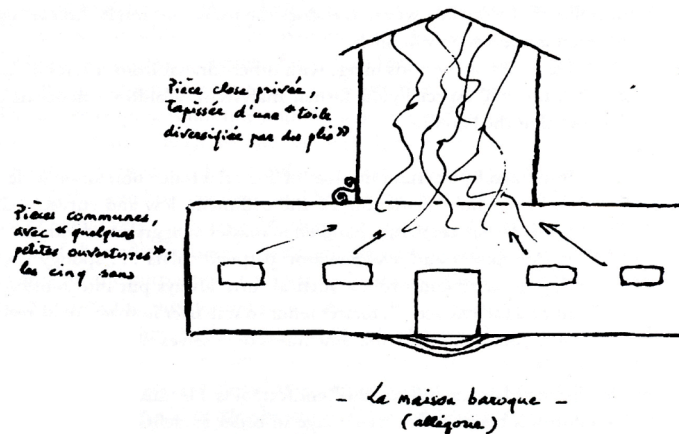


Figure 5.12: Deleuze’s sketch of the baroque house depicting the folds that connect the high with the low. The upper chamber is closed in on itself, without window or opening. It contains the Leibnizian screen/curtain/membrane that reverberate according to the senses, expressing a haptic connection between the incorporeal and the physical. These curtains are folded, yet tense and elastic. There is another fold between the two floors, symbolized by an abstract baroque motif at the joint between the upper and the lower floors. This latter fold is dependent on the mannerist style of a work of art, which simultaneously connects and separates the high with the low. Source: Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, 1993.

The fold is “an infinite work or process,” that describes the smooth harmony between “essence” and “appearance.” It is a creative process comparable to chiaroscuro.⁵⁹³ Much like the terrestrial surface that describes the middle condition between the height of Ideas and the depth of essence, the fold describes an in-between space, where the two worlds of soul and body merge. Folds are not abstract entities, rather manners of matter.⁵⁹⁴ Thus, if the Platonic tradition introduced the stairway, and the Neo-Platonic tradition suggested the stairwell to

⁵⁹³ Inspired by Leibniz’s Monadology, Deleuze likens the fold to chiaroscuro: the style of pictorial art in which only light and shade are represented. The image is the product of light, emanating from the Monad who receives it from God. The light cannot come from outside because the Monad is a pure interior and therefore is a metaphysical entity. The exterior world of matter is an infinitely dark or holey façade, where the holes are not voids in the sense of absence, but more rarefied matter. As light approaches this dark surface of matter, the infinitely holey façade, “the white is progressively shade, giving way to obscurity, to a thicker and thicker shadow.” (Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 32) This is the basis of how Leibniz’s Monads express themselves and as the very essence of the fold. From this perspective, language, art, architecture, poetry and philosophy all become chiaroscuros through the fold: the smooth fusion of the light of the soul with the dark façade of matter.

⁵⁹⁴ “We go from matter to manner; from earth and ground to habitats and salons, from the *Texturologie* to the *Logologie*.” Deleuze, Gilles, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 35

connect the physical and the metaphysical realms, then the fold, as an allegorical connection, is the contribution of the Baroque.

However, if the fold is the Baroque expression of a smooth connection, the “unfold” is the expression of the same paradigm in other styles and cultures. In other words, unfold is not contrary to the fold, but a different manifestation of the same principle. For Deleuze, the emphasis must be placed in the translation of the paradigm into a physical expression, which will change according to the choice of materials and methodologies used. Thus, different cultures have developed different manifestations of the paradigm of the fold, releasing the forces of the soul from the prison of the infinite.

However, Deleuze criticises the Greek Platonic tradition, not on their ideas or forces, but on what he calls the failure of these forces to be in harmony with the physical world. For Deleuze, Baroque architecture is triumphant because “The paradigm becomes ‘mannerist,’ and proceeds to a formal deduction of the fold.”⁵⁹⁵ Therefore, the power of the fold and the unfold, lies in the mannerist expression that releases the soul from the immateriality of the infinite and *surfaces* it in the material world of façades. This mannerism is not copying or representing the metaphysical realm, but rather expressing or re-producing it in the physical forms.⁵⁹⁶ However, if for Leibniz and the Baroque it is the fold that surfaces the virtuality of the soul upon the exteriority of matter, in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, *it is the surficial (not superficial) surface that actualizes the virtualities of the plane of immanence.*

Leibniz’s philosophy is based on a certain optimism that emerges in his conception of Monads and their relationship to God.⁵⁹⁷ Deleuze’s theories borrow some of this optimism, which becomes evident in his affirmation of creativity, exploratory experimentation and processes of becoming. For some critics such optimism threatens moral or critical judgment or promotes uninhibited mannerism

⁵⁹⁵ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 38

⁵⁹⁶ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 96

⁵⁹⁷ Leibniz writes: “Since all possible things have a claim to existence in God’s understanding in proportion to their perfections, the result of all these claims must be the most perfect actual world which is possible.” G. W. Leibniz, “The Principles of Nature and of Grace, based on Reason 1714,” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd Edition, ed. and trans. L. E. Loemker, Kluwer, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, 1989, pp. 636-643, p. 639. This theory is later parodied by Voltaire who writes “Terrified, confounded, thoroughly distraught, all bleeding and trembling, Candide reflected to himself: ‘If this is the best of all possible worlds, then what must the others be like?’” Voltaire, *Candide and Other Stories*, trans. Roger Pearson, Edition 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006, p. 15.

or expression. In the context of architectural design, such affirmative theories can also be accused of reducing architecture to a superficial play of forms and surfaces that do not contribute much to the social and political needs of the society. Deleuze and Guattari however, would argue that for progress to occur the umbrella of established rules and categories must be ruptured and its risks accepted, only to allow a little bit of windy chaos to transform outdated concepts and practices.

Inspired by such theories, many contemporary architects have appropriated some of Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts, which have led to significant changes in how buildings are designed in relation to the environment. Alicia Imperiale writes:

Deleuzian thought has promoted smoother transitions and interactive exchanges across surfaces of buildings and sites. The fold is ambiguous, being figure and non-figure, organization and non-organization. As a formal metaphor, the fold has appealed to architects who seek to move past highly figured and readily identified form to an architecture that is rather formless.⁵⁹⁸

Contemporary architecture is increasingly reliant on computer technology to aid processes of design and construction. Most of such technologies rely on activated surfaces that interact with “users” through images and other visual effects. The presence of activated surfaces and digital images in the different stages of design and construction has led to new architectural projects that explore the ability of the computer to model and construct complex surfaces that are not just ornamental and expressive, but they also perform structural roles as well.

During the past few decades, new technologies have allowed surfaces to be flatter and thinner, performing simultaneous operations with less materials and effort. The “cladding” of buildings are no longer inert, protective shells that only keep out wind and rain. They have become sensitised surfaces that perform structural duties, monitor the building immediate environment (both inside and outside), regulate the passage of vital resources and energies to and from the building, and finally express an architectural style through form, colour and texture. All these capabilities have become compacted into the architectural surface which

⁵⁹⁸ Alicia Imperiale, “Digital Skins: The Architecture of Surface” in *Skin: Surface, Substance + Design*, eds. Ellen Lupton and Jennifer Tobias, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2002, pp. 54-63, p. 62

fluctuates from thick to thin, twists and turns from concave to convex and folds and unfolds to create new spaces.

Considering the recent technological advancements, it is possible to argue that *surface* in the contemporary condition is increasingly expressive of the principle of *unfold* as it marks the space of transition between virtual and physical realities. With the aid of new technologies, architectural surfaces form the smooth space of transformation between imagination and its many different manifestations in the world of “facades.” It therefore important that architectural theory attempts to go beyond traditional conceptions of surface as a shallow and masking layer that hides reality, towards alternative conceptions that consider surfaces as the monadic *body* of cultural (and architectural) production.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS: SURFICIAL PHILOSOPHY: IMMANENCE, CREATIVITY AND THE PRODUCTION OF MORE REAL

Throughout this chapter, the thesis has elaborated the proposition that Deleuze (and Guattari) develop different concepts in order to formulate a *surficial philosophy* that collapses the Platonic transcendental hierarchy between image and reality, without abolishing their difference. By examining these philosophical concepts, the thesis has demonstrated the complexity of such non-hierarchical philosophy, which shifts the emphasis from *comparison to origin based on the criteria of similitude to explorations of processes of becoming based on an appreciation of originary difference*. It has been argued that if traditional thought assumes a perpendicular movement against surfaces, images and appearances (either gaining distance to reach lofty Ideas or penetrating appearances to uncover hidden reality), surficial philosophy encourages a non-perpendicular, nomadic movement of thought that explores virtual multiplicities across the expanse of the plane of immanence.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest a flattening of familiar hierarchies established by Plato, which have continued to govern theories of ornament and image. However, this flattening is not considered a destructive act (i.e. making things superficial as Baudrillard would have us believe) but rather a creative *surfacing* that produces a different philosophical model. Surficial philosophy may be unfamiliar, requiring new concepts, images of thought and continuous elaboration. Yet, it constructs a complex model that generates a more *pliable* approach towards a

rapidly transforming era. Perhaps the following aeronautical metaphor can describe the advantages of this alternative approach. If traditional models of thought are aerodynamically stable (having become familiar to the philosophical tradition), a non-hierarchical philosophy based on immanence can be compared to certain contemporary jets that are aerodynamically unstable. However, this seemingly irrational design is in fact highly deliberate as it is aimed at exploiting new possibilities (“fly-by-wire” technologies) that allow it to perform manoeuvres that are impossible by traditional, (aerodynamically) stable models of thought. By shifting the emphasis from the determination of points of origin to the activation of lines of flight, surficial philosophy includes chaos, dreams, imagination and illusions as a necessary element of creative production, whether in art, science or philosophy. This alternative approach includes unfamiliar processes and affirms experimentation and transformations in order to arrive at unforeseen territories.

Surficial philosophy is based on *immanent difference*, which is radically different to transcendental difference (Plato) or (quasi)transcendental *différance* (Derrida). The shift from transcendence to immanence is evident in a new approach to the simulacrum, which does not define it as a copy of a copy of reality, but instead as image that produces further reality, i.e. a different kind of reality. In this conception image is appreciated in a different way as it is recognised for having a different purpose than merely representing its supposed model.

Such a conception of image is made possible by refusing to define reality as a homogenous concept, but rather a smooth, heterogeneous mixture in which different elements exist in a fluid complexity. This model shifts the emphasis from clear boundaries and rigid hierarchies to continuous processes of transformation that highlight the middle: the fold between the soul and the body, the terrestrial surface between ideal height and profound depth, or other unfolds. From this point of view, surface is no longer an outer layer, but instead the progressing middle and the smooth space of becoming that facilitates the actualisation of virtualities. This conception of surface necessitates close-range vision and a haptic eye that explores the topography of immanence.

In this alternative philosophical approach, the criterion is more creative and less juridical, being more concerned with pushing forces to the limits of their potential, rather than capturing them within a pre-established logical system. Moreover, images and appearances are re-production, not reproductions of

different reality, which does not indicate the implosion of meaning caused by superficial effects, but rather the explosion of sense across the surfaces of expression. From this surficial point of view, it is surface that generates “image” and “reality”; “virtuality” and “actuality.” Thus, reality is not to be found beyond opaque visual barriers, by thinning out the outer layer or making it literally transparent. Instead, one senses reality by studying surface layout, surface effects and the rich ambiguities of phenomenal transparency. In this process, the seduction of false appearances is replaced by the desire to produce, the desire to surface.

Relating the principles of surficial philosophy to architectural theory has significant consequences. Firstly, the notion of becoming minoritarian inspires a renewed interest in ornament and the ornamental, surface and the superficial, and other concepts that have been subordinated to “primary” architectural categories. This becoming process inspires inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary interaction as architecture attempts to mutate beyond its familiar definitions. This can include architecture becoming-skin, becoming-surface, becoming-smooth and so on. Aided by new technological possibilities, a surficial approach to architecture is affirmative of unfamiliar desiring machines of production that operate along new lines of flight. The points of memory, tradition and the established architectural canon are encountered and surpassed as the process cannot be limited to the stasis of the “punctual system.” This is because

creations are like mutant abstract lines that have detached themselves from the task of representing a world, precisely because they assemble a new type of reality that history can only recontain or relocate in punctual systems.”⁵⁹⁹

Moreover, a non-hierarchical philosophy changes the process through which things are judged. Rather than comparing creative production against values set within long-term memory, judgement is carried out according to values acquired from short-term memory. This means that art is valued according to its own micro-histories and lines of development, not against a transcendent time-line that resides in the distant past or in the distant future. If everything is a production of a desiring machine, then valuation occurs according to immanent timelines. This way, the value of an object is determined through a sensitised process that is more in tune with the entity’s immanent potential.

⁵⁹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 296

Finally, a philosophy of surfacing flattens hierarchy in favour of a more pliable approach that exploits unexpected opportunities. This means that concepts are not contrasted in order to determine an order of superiority based on pre-established notions of originality. Instead, all concepts are compared in order to expand horizons and to offer alternatives. In other words, oppositional relationships are set up momentarily with the knowledge that there are many other such set-ups that can be proposed at any one time. Oppositional pairs rise and fall as abstract machines break free from the circularity of traditional thought. The consequences for architectural theory are a liberation of creativity from established hierarchies and a more positive attitude towards experimental endeavours, whilst simultaneously remaining open towards criticism, negation and death as an important element of development.

Perhaps, such an approach to thought is particularly useful for architectural education where students are burdened with fewer responsibilities. Whether the university environment should be one of learning established techniques in preparation for work in the industry, or one of experimentation and conceptual creativity in order to inspire positive change in the industry is a discussion that is best left to other research opportunities. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that surficial philosophy encourages creativity and experimentation as an expansive process that does not find equilibrium, rather consistency. To put this in another way would be to say that surficial philosophy does not become static, poised in the absolute middle. Instead, it flows from the middle-out, continuously moving in-between things, whilst simultaneously creating new entities and categories.

Throughout this chapter, it has been argued that rather than erasing the origin and placing it in the past as an impossible quasi-concept, it is possible to place the essential origin within and among the thickness of reality as a complex but immanent concept.⁶⁰⁰ This suggests a surficial approach based on a philosophical conception of surface as the smooth space of immanence. The thesis arrived at this theory with the aid of Stroll's exhaustive analysis of the term "surface" from the "common-sense" point of view, and Gibson's theory of surface layout, which

⁶⁰⁰ This complex immanence was extracted from Deleuze and Guattari's different philosophical concepts such as the simulacrum, the smooth (space, thought), the rhizome, the Möbius strip, expression of sense, plane of immanence, virtuality and so on.

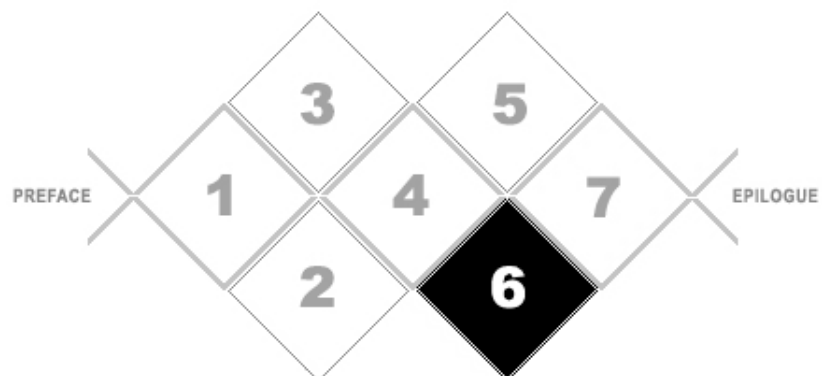
demonstrated that it is possible and in fact popular to define surface by its thickness, i.e. as a concept that *includes* depth. Moreover, in normal conditions of seeing depth perception is in fact an interpretation of surface layout. These two theoretical positions, combined with an understanding of images as *surface phenomena* offer an alternative understanding of surfaces as the facilitators of seeing, not barriers opposed to seeing, where essence is not separated from appearance, but rather created by it.

Following these concepts, it was argued that Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical approach allows for a more positive and affirmative attitude towards images as expressive actualities that are as real any supposed origin or model. From this point of view, image making is not "imitation art" belonging to an act of copying (reproduction of an originary reality) but instead, production or *re-production* that creates more reality. Thus, it is possible to argue that the images of architecture re-produced in magazines and mass media are not merely spectacular manipulation, but also participation in an alternative reality produced by images and the technologies that disseminate them. This in turn suggests that the production of the architectural image (whether through ornament, skin, or surface design) is not a secondary task in comparison to the primary task of designing the structure (function or materiality) of architecture, but rather as Semper implied, an immanent element of architectural design.

An architecture that is sensitive to such intricacies would be one that does not refrain from the important task of participation within production of images (of thought, of architecture, of future possibilities) but rather one that positively engages with it. Such architecture might imply a primitive approach, as it will be accessible to the everyday person, but primitivity need not be interpreted as naivety or backwardness. Instead, such primitivity is not only highly postmodern (and therefore relevant to the agenda of opening up architecture to the public and removing it from its pedestal as high art) but it is also sympathetic and affirmative of the rapidly transforming socio-technological condition with all the possibilities that it offers. Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum displays such nomadic primitivity, a surface art of the yurt in which surfaces are not barriers to seeing and skin is not secondary to structure. Instead, seeing is haptic, skin *is* architecture and it is sense (not meaning) that is expressed.

CHAPTER SIX

SURFICIAL ARCHITECTURE: THE CASE OF THE BILBAO GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM



“Creativity entails the momentary relaxation of the critical in order to go beyond the present impasse, the customary categories.”⁶⁰¹

Charles Jencks

“A fall into the surface is a leap of potentiality ... [it] is not exclusively a falling down, it is an opening out into the readiness of change, into a sensitivity to potentiality. This is ... fallibility; an admittance of errant ways. Fallibility becomes an imperative of ‘willingness.’”⁶⁰²

Pia Ednie-Brown

“I think that what makes it look good contributes to its unpopularity...I see Gehry’s work as caught inevitably but unfortunately in arguments to which it has a more subtle relationship than is perhaps normally described, but that are in any case not resolvable.”⁶⁰³

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf

“To advertise perfection is beneath Gehry’s love of imperfect humanity.”⁶⁰⁴

Peter Schjeldahl

“Great architecture is not just a question of pure genius per se; it’s a function of opportunity.”⁶⁰⁵

Thomas Krens

⁶⁰¹ Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* John Wiley and Sons, London, 2007, p. 182

⁶⁰² Pia Ednie-Brown, "Falling into the Surface: Towards a Materiality of Affect," *Architectural Design*, vol. 69, no. 9/10, 1999, pp. 8-11, pp. 7-9

⁶⁰³ Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremy, "Frank Gehry is Not Andy Warhol: A Choice between Life and Death" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 223

⁶⁰⁴ Peter Schjeldahl, "Silver Dream Machine" *Frieze*, Nov/Dec 1997, p. 51

⁶⁰⁵ Thomas Krens quoted in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, ed. by Mildred S. Friedman, Thames and Hudson, London, 2003, p. 22

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTER SIX

The following chapter returns to architecture, specifically Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, from which many of the themes of this research began. The museum is not treated as a traditional case study, which would involve a "detailed and intensive analysis"⁶⁰⁶ of the building itself. Instead, Gehry's seminal work is used to bring into discussion his particular design approach, which by following the specificities of a particular zoomorphic sign, manages to challenge traditional models of thought by resisting easy classification. In this sense, the BGM acts as an architectural exemplar that binds together the different concepts that have been developed in previous chapters.

In this chapter, the thesis attempts to relate Gehry's design approach to surficial philosophy, arguing that it is the folded surfaces of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum that constitute the very site of Gehry's architecture - not hidden structure, or even the relationship between external skin and internal skeleton. Moreover, as Gehry's most successful building, the BGM represents a pliable "nomad art" characterized by "lines of flight," "haptic vision" and a primitive expression that manages to achieve a complexity that is in tune with the current postmodern condition.

This chapter questions whether the formal logic of Gehry's architecture lies in the tectonic relationship between "skin" and "armature," or whether it arises from a definition of architecture as *continuous skin, or folded surface*. Gehry's design process and his particular approach towards media images, zoomorphic symbolism and architectural theory are explored in order to investigate this proposition. This thesis argues that the pliability of paper (that Gehry uses to model his initial ideas for a project), is indicative of a smooth architectural approach that is also evident in the adoption of the fish as a personal totem, or Gehry's preoccupation with the becoming-other of architecture, which in the case of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, results in the construction of what Charles Jencks calls an "enigmatic signifier."⁶⁰⁷

⁶⁰⁶ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁷ See Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* John Wiley and Sons, London, 2007, p. 62

The thesis proposes that Gehry's BGM resists easy classification, not only because it generates an ambiguous image, but also because it expresses a superficial approach to architecture, which challenges established hierarchies and traditional categories. Such an approach is argued to indicate the *evolution* of postmodern "double-coding," into *smooth multiplicity*. This implies that rather than reversing modernist hierarchies or merely exaggerating the difference between established categories, the BGM achieves a complex, pliable hybridity in which difference is utilised for the production of new and unfamiliar categories.

This thesis argues that the BGM necessitates superficial thinking in which boundary is no longer a *line of separation*, but rather an *expansive surface of exploration* and a *non-hierarchical space of transformation*. To engage with this new space is to explore difference without hierarchy and to exploit media that transverse disciplines, countries, cultures, and politics.

Gehry's BGM deploys new technologies to achieve a becoming-other of architecture: becoming-sculpture, becoming-image, becoming-fish, becoming-virtual and so on. The resultant architecture requires a shift of emphasis and an alternative movement of thought that does not define surfaces as thin visual barriers, but rather expansive topologies that act as rich mediums. In this alternative approach, questions of style, ornament, image and appearance gain a new significance, where surface becomes the very site of architectural production.

6.1 THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT: NEW TECHNOLOGY AND HYPER-COMMUNICATION

According to Charles Jencks, the current postmodern condition is characterised by advanced technology, increasing speeds of communication, "hybridisation of national cultures", the "blurring of social classes," the rise of "transnational institutions" and other "fundamental transformations."⁶⁰⁸ For Jencks, such changes are underway towards a "more hybrid, integrated world ... in constant and instantaneous communication across its boundaries."⁶⁰⁹

Much of these transformations are facilitated and accelerated by new technologies that make knowledge more readily accessible. The Internet for

⁶⁰⁸ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* pp. 7-8

⁶⁰⁹ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 8

example, has become a powerful network through which users produce and share information, while TV, radio, newspapers, magazines and other broadcasting technologies have helped distribute such information across traditional boundaries. Aided by the mass production (of hardware and software), images, sounds and texts can now be transmitted across the globe. This unprecedented capacity to share information has accelerated cross-boundary transaction and interdisciplinary interaction, which is evident in sciences, economics, politics and cultural and national identity.

In this context of media networks and intensified visual production, virtualities have a powerful impact on every aspect of human culture. Time magazines selection of YouTube.com as the best invention of 2006 clearly demonstrates the shift from the values of the “Industrial Age” to those of the new “Information Age.” The success of Google⁶¹⁰ or Facebook⁶¹¹ have demonstrated the economic potential of virtual “sites,” the power of new media and the significance of the various activated surfaces that display them. Moreover, virtual reality environments (like Second Life) or online multiplayer games have demonstrated the popularity of such alternative realities and their significance for the production of new economies.

The so-called “information age” would not have been possible without advancements in screen technologies and techniques of image reproduction. From the earliest stages of lithography to the invention of photography, film, television and now the computer, the development of culture and civilisation has been linked to the ability to transfer knowledge using printed or activated surfaces. In recent times however, developments of technologies has been much more rapid: if progress from the earliest woodblock printing⁶¹² to photography⁶¹³ took over sixteen

⁶¹⁰ Google.com is an online search engine that generates almost all of its revenue through advertising related to Internet search, e-mail, online mapping, social networking, and video sharing services.

⁶¹¹ Facebook.com is a free-access social networking website that currently has more than 175 million active users worldwide. Like Google, Facebook generates revenue from advertising. See Facebook statistics <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics> accessed January 17th 2009.

⁶¹² Woodblock printing is a technique for printing text, images or patterns. It originated in China in antiquity as a method of printing on textiles and paper. As a method of printing on cloth, the earliest surviving examples from China date back to Han dynasty (before AD 220). See Wikipedia Encyclopaedia. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woodblock_printing

centuries, the emergence of new media has been condensed to a few decades. This has not only encouraged greater visual production and re-production, but it has also led to increased interaction with images and the surfaces that produce them.⁶¹⁴

The speed and breadth of communication has had numerous consequences, which we continue to grapple with. Some of the more positive effects have been the promotion of exploration, tolerance and inclusion. The accessibility of information has led to a better understanding of distant cultures and other modes of thought, which in turn has encouraged nomadic movements across national, cultural and ideological borders. According to Charles Jencks, the postmodern condition has encouraged a taste for heterogeneity and promoted a new understanding of minority rights, leading to “‘otherness’ as a desirable category.”⁶¹⁵ The recent nomination of a black man as the president of the United States is a clear example of this development.

Jencks argues that if the postmodern world is shifting towards “pluralism and cultural eclecticism” this shift is “mostly the by-product of communication and global capitalism.”⁶¹⁶ This is because the world has been united by current technologies into “an instantaneous, twenty four hour information world, the post-industrial successor to the modern world of industrialisation.”⁶¹⁷ These developments do not indicate the absence of mass production, but rather its transformation into a more advanced stage of *mass customization*.⁶¹⁸ In other words, if the pre-industrial era was characterized by the production of small volumes with high costs, and the industrial age afforded high volumes with low unit costs, the post-industrial age can be recognized by the production of diverse products in high volumes and low costs.⁶¹⁹ Thus, the new capabilities offered by the computer and

⁶¹³ In 1826, Nicéphore Niépce takes the first permanent photograph, a landscape that required an eight hour exposure. See Wikipedia Encyclopaedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_photography

⁶¹⁴ Touch-phones or interactive screens such as “Microsoft Surface” are indicative of the importance of virtual images for contemporary culture and the significance of surfaces in providing access to and interaction with such alternative realities.

⁶¹⁵ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 117

⁶¹⁶ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 96

⁶¹⁷ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 96

⁶¹⁸ The concept was first conceived by Stan Davis and later developed by Joseph Pine. See Stan Davis, *Future Perfect*, 10th anniversary edition, Addison-Wesley Pub Co, Harlow, England, 1996 and Joseph Pine, *Mass Customization: The New Frontier in Business Competition*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Mass., 1993.

⁶¹⁹ An example of this is Levi’s “Personal Pair” program for women’s jeans (1995). Personal pair customers participated in a fitting session at any of 56 Levi stores across North America.

other digital technologies facilitate mass customization, which achieves the benefits of mass production without falling victim to its standardization. Such processes are only befitting an interconnected world in which new technologies have not only allowed new forms of creativity, but they have also allowed individuals to communicate their individuality over (virtual and actual) boundaries.

The combined effect of the aforementioned developments has been a blurring of traditional boundaries, not only between different professional disciplines, but also societal classes, ethnic groups, ideologies and so on. However, in this context of dissolution, fuzziness and blurring,⁶²⁰ architecture is still expected to create boundaries, since by definition it implies the demarcation of space. It is for this very paradoxical situation that theorists have attempted to offer alternative approaches to architecture's boundaries, which could be institutional, theoretical and programmatic boundaries or physical boundaries (like the surface, façade, skin, shell, envelope and so on).

Thus, whether programmatically or visually, contemporary architecture continues to respond to recent cultural and technological transformations by exploring boundary conditions, hyper-communication and new technologies in order to develop an architecture that is more sensitive and responsive to the increasing complexity of postmodern living.

6.1.1 Thee Different Postmodern Approaches in Architecture

Arguably, in much of the developed world, contemporary architecture is in its "postmodern" phase. As elaborated in chapter three, the postmodern movement in architecture can be traced back to the early 1960s, where Venturi and others promoted a more holistic approach to architecture to combat the purist idealism of Modernism.⁶²¹ Inspired by new technologies, and frustrated by the elitist doctrines of modernist manifestos, the postmodernists called for an architecture of communication, that promoted the "popular" and the "ordinary."⁶²²

The results were transmitted electronically to the company factory where they were matched against more than 10,000 stored designs to select the best fit; the jeans then were produced individually from the selected pattern.

⁶²⁰ See Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 100

⁶²¹ See Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 1966

⁶²² See Venturi, and Scott Brown, and Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, 1977

Moreover, as a reaction to the modernists manifesto of “form follows function” and the depreciatory associations of ornament with crime, Venturi et al, (1977) proposed the “decorated shed” concept which was an attempt to liberate architectural expression from functional restrictions and simultaneously free structure from the burden of communication. This, they argued, would be a better alternative to “duck” architecture in which form follows, and often represents function.

The decorated shed metaphor signalled a move from modernists’ conceptions of “cladding” and “style” to postmodernist notions of “screen” and “communication” in an attempt to allow architecture to participate freely in the visual flux of signs, billboards and screens that were quickly replacing the machinic structures of the industrial revolution. It was hoped that by returning to complex visual communication, and by acknowledging the importance of popular culture, the modernist desire for visual and conceptual clarity would transform into a desire for “complexity and contradiction.”⁶²³

The postmodern manifesto allowed architects to engage popular culture whilst maintaining a relationship with their professional ethos. This was the effect of “double coding”⁶²⁴ facilitated partly by the decorated shed metaphor and partly by notions of irony as a complex form of communication. Consequently, much of postmodern architecture maintains a certain *schizophrenic* quality: at once acknowledging the intricacies of architectural theory and simultaneously trying to appeal to the demands of popular culture as presented through mass media.

Over the years, architects have developed different interpretations of the postmodern agenda in architecture. However, Jencks identifies three general approaches that seem to encompass much of the architectural projects of recent decades.⁶²⁵ The first approach is characterized by architects who turned to stylistic historicism, which was applied to structures that rarely ventured beyond the shed

⁶²³ See Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction*, 1966

⁶²⁴ Charles Jencks writes: “Today I would still partly define Post-Modernism as I did in 1978 as double coding: the combination of Modern techniques with something else (usually traditional building) in order for architecture to communicate with the public and a concerned minority, usually other architects.” Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 51

⁶²⁵ For the three approaches to postmodernism, see Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* pp. 57-60

concept.⁶²⁶ The second approach is based on theoretical criticality, expressed through double-coding and irony, where architectural communication attempts to acknowledge two opposing points of view. In many cases this second approach results in the construction of monuments to a critical commentary on architecture's established ways, which is often only understood by a few architects, theoreticians or historicists who are familiar with the (double) coded language.⁶²⁷ The third approach is exemplified by architects who responded to Venturi's embracing of popular culture, by designing "iconic" or "imagistic" buildings that communicated to a larger audience. Frank Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum (1997), Rem Koolhaas's CCTV building in Beijing (2008) or Arata Isozaki's Disney Headquarters in Florida (1991) are different examples of this third approach.

Much of the projects that fall into this third approach to postmodern architecture are made possible by giant corporations hiring global architects to construct iconic buildings, both to represent their cause, but also to draw attention to it. Consequently, the criticism of such architecture picks up on the inflated monumentality and accuses the resultant building of approaching the condition of an "icon": a visual one-liner that reduces architecture to a mere "image," i.e. a superficial representation of something else.

It is at this very juncture that this thesis attempts to open an unfashionably positive and polemical discussion relating to image and the architecture that exploits it. With reference to the current age of electronic reproduction, the thesis argues that the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum offers an alternative approach to the postmodern agenda, *one that is closer to complexity than contradiction*. In other words, Gehry's building represents a supple and smooth architectural strategy that is thicker than the superficiality of pastiche, richer than the (cynical) irony of double-coded semiotics, and phenomenally transparent in comparison to the literal transparency of other iconic buildings. It is argued that Gehry's BGM manages to

⁶²⁶ Such reference to past styles is often referred to as "pastiche" and superficial, demonstrating a reductive simplicity of communication or a regurgitation of old motifs. Charles Moore's Piazza d'Italia (1978) and Michael Graves' Portland Public Service Building (1982) are examples of this.

⁶²⁷ This approach threatens a return to the elitism of modernism and/or a reduction of architectural experience in favour of intellectual or textual delight. James Stirling's addition to the Neue Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart, (1983) or Peter Eisenman's "House VI", (1975) are examples of this approach.

include multiple concepts without being irreducible to any, hinting towards a complex ambiguity that is more *evocative* than obscure.

The BGM is not only successful in exploiting the potential of mass media to create the “Bilbao Effect,” but it also raises important questions about established attitudes towards appearance in architectural theory. This thesis argues that in many ways, Gehry’s museum demands a rethinking of the binary hierarchical relationship between ornament and structure – arguably the most influential oppositional pair for both modernist and postmodernist manifestos. Such architecture not only demands an alternative mode of thought, but it also anticipates future explorations in architectural design and construction.

6.1.2 Frank Gehry: The Evolution of Projects

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum marks an important moment in Gehry’s long architectural career. Although the museum is the most popular of Gehry’s endeavours, it nonetheless follows a persistent design ethos that can be seen in his earlier buildings. This is not to say that this continuous design approach produces similar buildings, but rather that Gehry’s design strategy achieves *consistency* in maintaining flexibility, seeking diversity and exploring new techniques. This has not only allowed greater adaptability to a rapidly changing techno-cultural context, but more importantly, it has allowed Gehry to be able to reflect such developments in his architectural projects.

Although Gehry often adopts a self-effacing style when asked about his own work, he is in fact one of the most prolific architects to date. Jencks calls him the “number two architect in the world (the first place being permanently unoccupied).”⁶²⁸ With over 250 projects to his name, Gehry has had the opportunity to develop his ideas in practice.⁶²⁹ The Studio-Residence for Lou Danziger, (Hollywood, California, 1964) for example, represents Gehry’s modernist phase, where he practiced restraint in geometry, materials and colour. His own house in Santa Monica (Gehry House, Santa Monica, California, 1978), anticipates the criticality of Deconstructivist architecture, while bordering on a literal destruction of

⁶²⁸ Charles Jencks “Frank O. Gehry: Creating Another Way” in *Frank O. Gehry: Individual Imagination and Cultural Conservatism*, Academy Editions, London, 1995, p. 6

⁶²⁹ In his book entitled *Frank O. Gehry: The Complete Works* published in 1998, 255 projects were mentioned in the bibliography. See Francesco Dal Co, Frank O. Gehry, Kurt Walter Forster, Hadley Soutter Arnold, *Frank O. Gehry: The Complete Works*, Monacelli Press, New York, 1998

the original bungalow. In “trying to build a lot of ideas,”⁶³⁰ Gehry pierces the surfaces of the original house, constructs rotating glass covers and windows, and employs “gritty” materials like chain link fencing, unfinished plywood, corrugated metal and wire-mesh glass. Hal Foster celebrates “the unfinished look”⁶³¹ which he considers appropriate to LA and its “restless transformations”⁶³² arguing that it almost achieves what Kenneth Frampton calls “critical regionalism.”⁶³³

If Gehry’s earlier work was inspired by the LA vernacular, the “urban junkyard”⁶³⁴ of disparate styles, his fame during the 1980s and 1990s allowed him to engage with the “myth and mystery of Hollywood.”⁶³⁵ Thus, as Gehry’s horizons expanded, he not only became aware of references outside of LA, but he also went “upscale in materials, techniques, clients and projects.”⁶³⁶ The Vitra museum (Weil am Rhein, Germany, 1989) is Gehry’s first white building,⁶³⁷ which clearly demonstrates his transformation from grunge architect to a more mature, formalistic phase. The building seems to take inspiration from Le Corbusier and his Chapel of Notre-Dame du Haut (Ronchamp, France, 1951-55) and perhaps even Frank Lloyd Wright and his Guggenheim Museum (New York, USA, 1959). Nevertheless, Gehry maintains an uneasy relationship with canonical architects, being simultaneously inspired and intimidated by their work.⁶³⁸

Following the successes of his first museum, there came a new phase and a new decade (1990s) characterized by more lavish projects such as Frederick Weisman Museum of Art (Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, 1993) and the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Thus, Gehry’s stylistic transformations can be summarised

⁶³⁰ Frank Gehry, quoted in Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford, *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1985, p. 134

⁶³¹ Hal Foster, *Design and Crime: and other Diatribes*, Verso, 2003, p. 29

⁶³² Foster, *Design and Crime: and other Diatribes*, p. 29

⁶³³ See Foster *Design and Crime: and other Diatribes*, p. 30 and Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance” in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Pluto Press, London, 1983, pp. 16-30.

⁶³⁴ Mildred S. Friedman, “The Reluctant Master” *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2003, pp. 11-26, p. 12

⁶³⁵ Friedman, “The Reluctant Master” in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 13

⁶³⁶ Foster, *Design and Crime: and other Diatribes*, p. 30

⁶³⁷ Martin Filler “Veni, Vidi, Vitra: The International Architecture of Frank Gehry” in *Vitra Design Museum*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, pp. 10-23, p. 19

⁶³⁸ In numerous conversations Gehry discusses how he used to be anti-Le Corbusier, or that Frank Lloyd Wright would not approve his own work. Not only do these statements highlight the influence of such architects on Gehry’s work, but they also illuminate Gehry’s attempt to grapple with the comparisons of his own work with his predecessors. See *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 41 and p. 140



Figure 6.1: Phase one: deconstructive juxtaposition. Gehry House, Santa Monica, California, 1978. Source: <http://weburbanist.com>



Figure 6.2: Phase two: formalistic composition. The Vitra Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany, 1989. Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/smartvital/424566854>



Figure 6.3: Phase three: surface exploration. The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, 1997. Source: the author.

into three different phases: the early experimentation with LA vernacular, the imagistic phase inspired by Pop Art and early Postmodernism⁶³⁹ and finally the “gestural aesthetic” of his more recent projects.

Hal Foster celebrates Gehry’s earlier work, condemns his Pop work and problematizes his later work. For Foster the difference lies between the renewal of exhausted architectural habits and imagistic ingratiating:

What is at stake here is the difference between a vernacular use of chain link in a house, or of cardboard in a chair, and a Pop use of giant binoculars as an entrance, or of a fighter jet attached to a façade (as in his Aerospace Hall, 1982-84, in LA). Equally at stake is the difference between a material rethinking of form and space, which may or may not be sculptural (here Gehry is influenced by Richard Serra), and a symbolic use of readymade image or commodity object (here again he is influenced by Oldenburg). The first option can bring elite design in touch with common culture, and renew stale architectural forms with fresh social expressions. The second tends to ingratiate architecture, on the model of the advertisement, to a public project as a mass consumer.⁶⁴⁰

While Foster’s argument is persuasive, this thesis offers an alternative evaluation based on a proposition that Gehry’s seemingly unashamed appeal to the popular has in fact been beneficial for a rethinking of architecture’s “stale” traditions, whether in theory or in practice. The Pop symbolism of the giant binoculars of the Chiat/Day Building for example, is not only a more committed collaboration between architecture and art, but it is also a more rigorous questioning of architecture’s classical forms. According to Martin Filler “the acknowledgement of architecture as an art form” has been “one of the major preoccupations” of eighties’ postmodernism.⁶⁴¹ But unlike his contemporaries who reduce artistic collaboration to superficial decoration, Gehry achieves a more non-hierarchical relationship in which both architecture and art undergo rigorous testing.

The binoculars are one example within a long evolutionary process in which Gehry experiments with the *becoming-other* of architecture (becoming-image, becoming-art, becoming-sculpture, becoming-shell) while simultaneously refining his postmodernist agenda of redefining architecture’s relationship to popular media

⁶³⁹ Of which one can mention his Chiat/Day Building in LA, California, 1985-1991. The building has three different styles used in the main facade, particularly the giant sculpture of binoculars that function as both a car and pedestrian entrance. The conception of the binoculars was a collaboration between Gehry, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen.

⁶⁴⁰ Foster, *Design and Crime: and other Diatribes*, p. 32

⁶⁴¹ Filler “Veni, Vidi, Vitra: The International Architecture of Frank Gehry” in *Vitra Design Museum*, p. 10

and technologies of mass communication. Whether these architectural investigations qualify as what Foster calls “elite design” seems less important in relation to Gehry’s strategy, which through numerous explorations (whether successful or not) attempts to question the “function” of architecture. In many ways, Gehry’s different architectural follies (e.g. jet, binoculars, fish, horse’s head)⁶⁴² problematize the canonical primacy of spatial or structural concerns in architecture, which also dominate conceptions of image, appearance, visual communication, engagement with mass media and so on. As was discussed earlier, this hierarchical relationship that inspires the definition of architecture as “clothed structure” or “decorated shed,” continues to relegate matters of image and appearance to superficial subservience, even if in the current postmodern condition, such concepts are being rigorously promoted and therefore becoming an important feature of societal operation.

The jet, binoculars, fish, or horse’s head represent a rebellious imagistic tendency that never disappears from Gehry’s work. But such experiments with the limits of architecture are what Deleuze calls “slits” in the umbrella of establishment that “let in a bit of free and windy chaos”⁶⁴³ to combat “the pre-existing, pre-established clichés” and bring us the “vision.”⁶⁴⁴ Thus, despite differing styles, Gehry’s agenda in challenging architecture’s established ways remains the same.

Gehry is like a chameleon, simulating different styles in order to create or engage with different realities. It can therefore be argued that his architecture is less imagistic and more *simulative*, in the Deleuzian definition,⁶⁴⁵ since it produces new (architectural) realities and spaces of operation. Much like a camouflaging animal, Gehry’s architecture requires “ambient” and “ambulatory vision,”⁶⁴⁶ not only to grasp the immanent difference that characterizes the simulacrum before the eyes,

⁶⁴² Gehry’s imagistic, or perhaps *imaginistic* investigation of the becoming-other of architecture begins with the fighter jet of the Aerospace Hall (early 1980s) and undergoes different transformations through different projects: the binoculars of the Chiat/Day Building in LA, California, the Fish Dance restaurant in Kobe, Japan (late 1980s) the Barcelona Fish of the Olympic Village (early 1990s) or the “horses head” of the DZ Bank, Berlin, Germany in 2001.

⁶⁴³ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 203

⁶⁴⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 204

⁶⁴⁵ See section “5.1 From Transcendental Hierarchy to Univocity: Surface, Difference and the Reality of Appearance” in chapter five of this thesis. Also see Gilles Deleuze, “Plato and the Simulacrum” in *The Logic of Sense*, pp. 253-266

⁶⁴⁶ See section “4.2.3 Theory of Surface Layout” in chapter four of this thesis. See also Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, pp. 222-3



Figure 6.4: Binoculars: Chiat/Day Building, Venice, California, USA (1985-1991)
Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/annwarren/106124504>



Figure 6.5: The Fish: Sculpture for Olympic Village, Barcelona, 1992.
Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/your_teacher/280015634



Figure 6.6: The Horse's Head: DZ Bank, Berlin, Germany, 2000.
Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/roryrory/2442892558>

but also less metaphorically, to observe the complex, non-symmetrical arrangement of his buildings. Peter Arnell compares Gehry's work with Cubism, which:

...in questioning the presumption of fixed position from which one sees, it brought into question the very nature of perception, proposing the indisputable fact that the eye moves constantly, that perception is based on a composite of "takes" on an object garnered as one moves around it."⁶⁴⁷

Arguably, what Arnell and Bickford recognised in 1985 applies to the much of Gehry's later work, including the BGM, which involves "an ongoing collaboration in which each viewer brings their own sensibilities and experiences," into an unusual communication that is never "straight forward."⁶⁴⁸

6.2 THE BILBAO GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum marks an important turning point in Gehry's career, representing a refinement of his personal style to a distinct architectural "brand," which has subsequently allowed him to achieve celebrity status, becoming a "starchitect."⁶⁴⁹ Many have celebrated the building and its subsequent reformulations (the Experience Music Project in Seattle, 2000, or the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, 2003) as sculptural works of a genius symbolizing freedom and democracy.

The BGM is a modern and contemporary art museum situated alongside the Nervión River in Bilbao, Spain. Since its opening to the public in 1997 the museum has attracted much international attention, evidenced by the publication of books, newspaper and magazine articles, the creation of online websites and also in terms of tourist visitors to the city of Bilbao. By 2007, the museum attracted over 9 million visitors, with an average of 800,000 non-Basque visitors a year, compared to

⁶⁴⁷ Arnell and Bickford, *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XIII

⁶⁴⁸ Arnell and Bickford, *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XIII

⁶⁴⁹ Since the Bilbao Gehry has appeared in Apple's black and white "Think Different" pictorial advertising campaign that associates offbeat but revered figures with Apple's design philosophy. He even once appeared as himself in the animated series *The Simpsons* where he parodies himself by suggesting that his ideas are derived by looking at a crumpled paper. He also voiced himself on the TV show *Arthur*, where he helped Arthur and his friends design a new treehouse. Gehry has also starred in a documentary film about himself in collaboration with film director Sydney Pollack (a friend of Gehry's) entitled *Sketches of Frank Gehry*. In this documentary some of Gehry's more prominent work is discussed with input from his friends, architectural theoreticians and critics, of which Hal Foster remains the more consistent skeptic about Gehry's work. See Sydney Pollack's film entitled *The Sketches of Frank Gehry*, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005.

less than 100,000 before the opening of the museum.⁶⁵⁰ It is therefore not surprising that the public authorities that invested in the Guggenheim recovered their investment “within the first six years of the museum’s operation!”⁶⁵¹ According to Beatriz Plaza (Economic Professor at the University of Basque Country, Bilbao) “the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao was a very risky project, but it is on the right track to being worth the huge risk and investment.”⁶⁵²

The museum has been accredited to “putting Bilbao on the map” and despite its formal complexity, it was built on time and on budget.⁶⁵³ Moreover, the building has catalysed further development for the city, attracting architectural projects by some of the most renowned architects in the world: Norman Foster, Arata Isozaki, Zaha Hadid, and Santiago Calatrava.⁶⁵⁴ Thus, the BGM has become a cultural and socio-political icon generating much needed publicity for Bilbao and the Basque region, and bringing unprecedented success and fame for the architect too.⁶⁵⁵

The BGM can be summarised as a series of folded surfaces based around the broken ship concept inspired by Bilbao’s former ship-building industry. The building’s flowing form offer a welcome relief from the rectilinear forms of the post-industrial city, generating a shimmering visual expression of fluidity and movement

⁶⁵⁰ Despite attempts to emulate such success elsewhere, very few museums or galleries outside capital cities have managed to achieve BGM’s popularity. For example, the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield, England, opened in 1999, predicted 400,000 visitors a year. However, only seven months after its opening, just over 100,000 people visited. The museum was doomed to bankruptcy in the same year it opened. See Beatriz Plaza, “The Bilbao Effect (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao) in *Museum News*, vol. 86, No. 5, Sep. 2007, p. 13. Also available at http://www.scholars-on-bilbao.info/fichas/MUSEUM_NEWS_The_Bilbao_Effect.pdf

⁶⁵¹ Plaza, “The Bilbao Effect (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao)” in *Museum News*, vol. 86, No. 5, Sep. 2007, p. 13

⁶⁵² Plaza, “The Bilbao Effect (Guggenheim Museum Bilbao)” in *Museum News*, p. 13

⁶⁵³ In an interview with *Harvard Magazine*, Gehry explains how he did this. First he made sure that “the organization of the artist” was maintained during construction to prevent business or political agendas from interfering from the original vision. Second, he made sure that careful and detailed cost projections were carried out before construction. Finally, he used the computer software CATIA in close collaboration with individual building trades to control costs during construction. See Bent Flyvbjerg “Design by Deception: The Politics of Megaproject Approval,” *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 22, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 50-59.

⁶⁵⁴ See Bilbao Metro by Norman Foster, 1990-1995, Isozaki Atea, or Isozaki Towers, 1999, Zaha Hadid’s Zorrozaurre master plan for a 60-hectare peninsula in the Nervión river in the former port area of Bilbao, Spain, 2004, and Santiago Calatrava’s Zubizuri (White Bridge) which is a foot-bridge across the Nervión river in Bilbao.

⁶⁵⁵ The building can be seen in the opening sequence of the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*, directed by Michael Apted (distributed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), 1999.

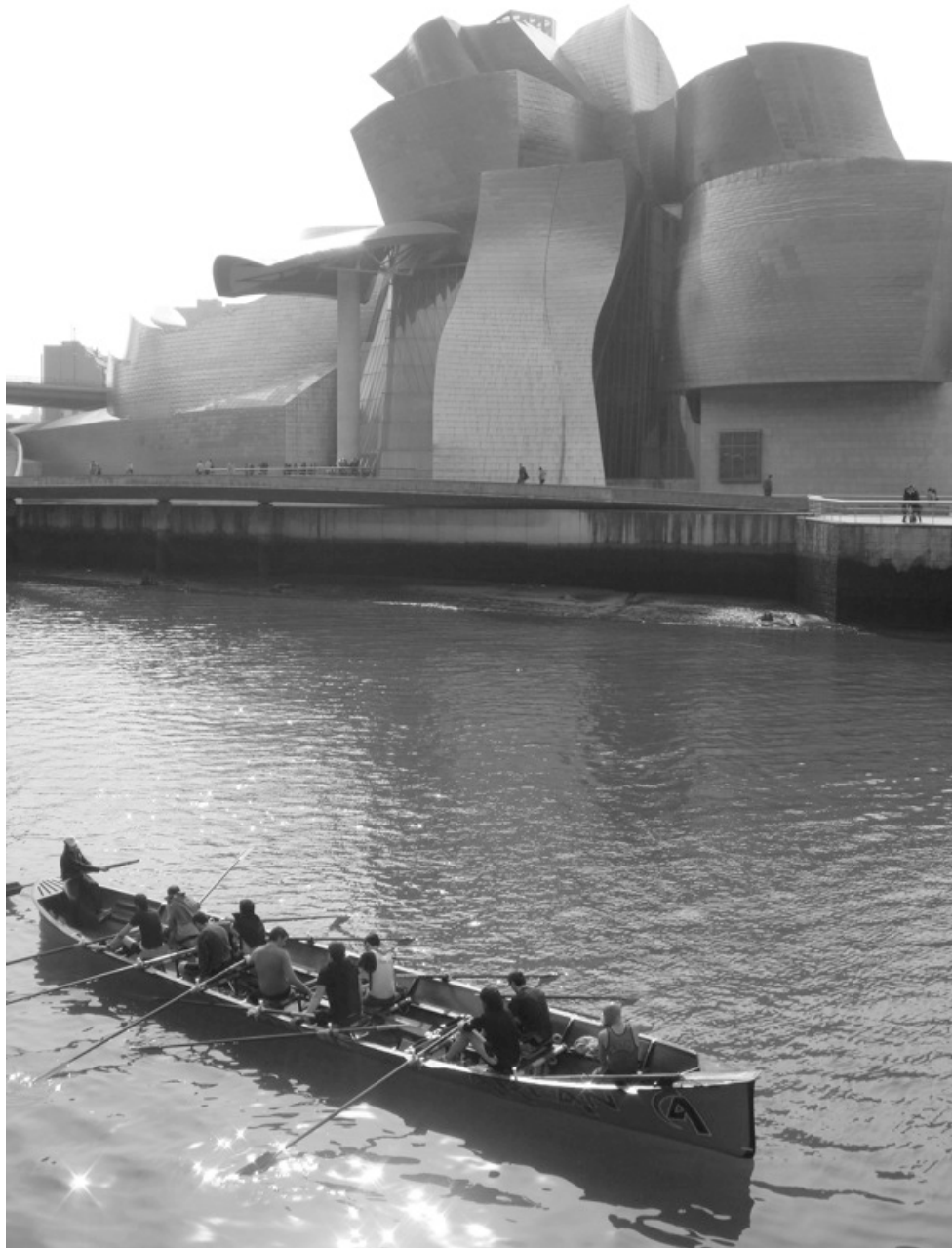


Figure 6.7: The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Source: the author.

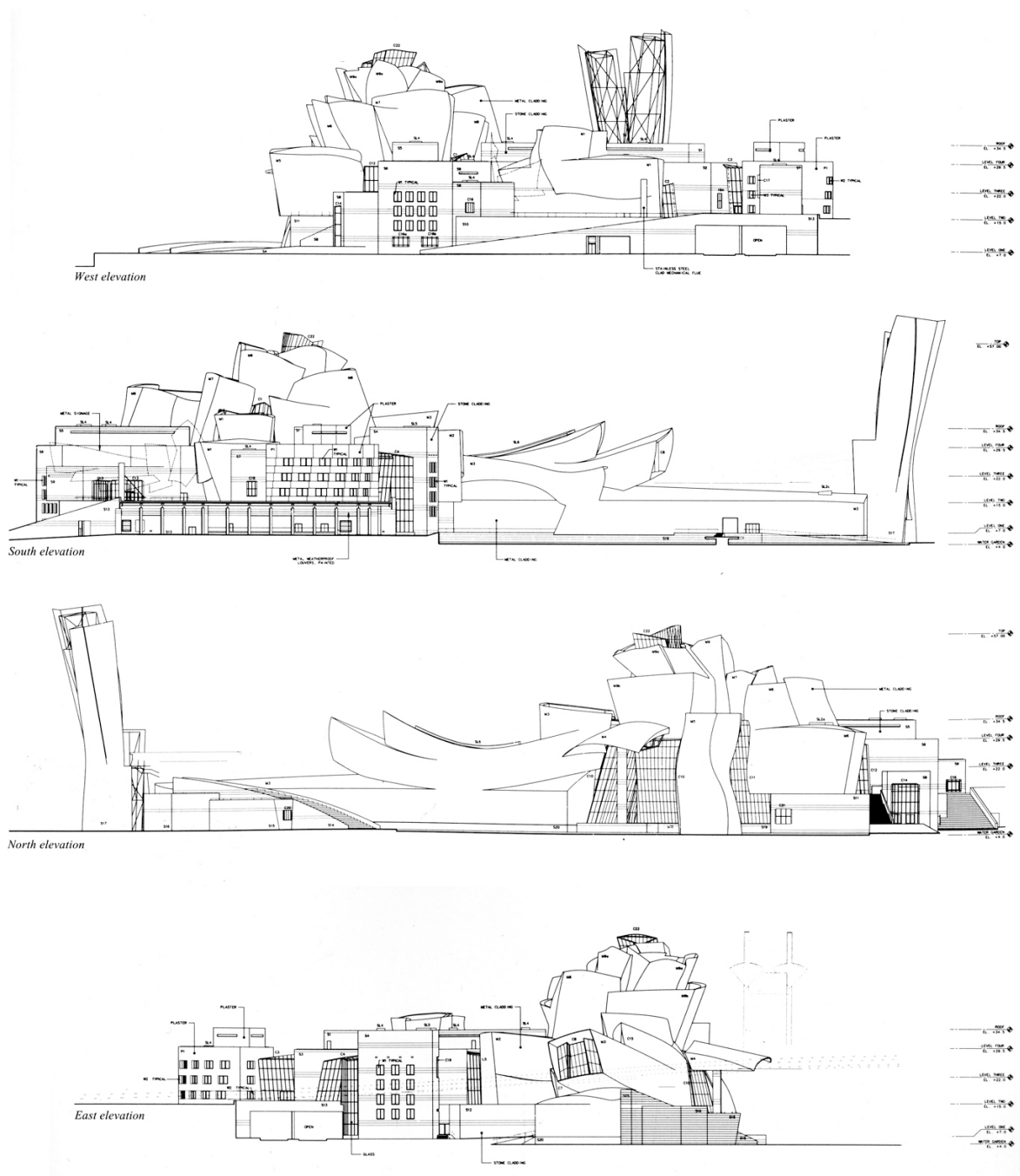


Figure 6.8: Elevation drawings of the BGM. Source: Yukio Futagawa, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa*, Frank O. Gehry, GA Document, vol. 54, ADA Edita, Tokyo, 1998, p. 17

which can also be associated with the waves of the river or the Atlantic coast beyond. Like “an object from outer space” that landed a century ago, the museum is an alluring alien object that has become an inseparable part of its context.⁶⁵⁶

At the time of its conception, the museum represented a successful hybridisation of traditional and modern technologies and processes of design and construction. In order to transfer the complex curves from architectural models to architectural reality, Gehry and his team had to learn from the aerospace industry. Since in the early 1990s most architectural modelling software were purely for visualisation purposes, CATIA⁶⁵⁷ was utilised in order to precisely map out and formulate the museum’s complex forms. The *surface-driven* modelling software, together with new construction technologies allowed Gehry and his team to construct the complex non-Euclidean geometries of the building on time and on budget.

Although the sculptural forms of the exterior are its most well known features, the BGM is also notable for its unusual interior. The main entrance to the museum involves a large central atrium where a series of bridges, elevators and stair towers connects the exhibition galleries on three different levels. The gallery spaces are adaptable to a wide range of art and are a response to the Guggenheim Foundation’s requirement for spaces to exhibit a permanent collection, a temporary collection, and a collection of selected living artists.⁶⁵⁸ The galleries for the exhibition of the permanent collection are rectilinear spaces and relatively familiar in design.⁶⁵⁹ The temporary collection is housed in the largest space of the museum, which

⁶⁵⁶ This image of thought is taken from Juan Ignacio Vidarte (director of the BGM) who in the documentary *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, quotes a British journalist: “I think it was a British Journalist... he said that this [the BGM] looks like as it was an object from outer space which had landed here a century ago, so it is foreign in the sense that it has nothing to do with any of the buildings which are around, but at the same time there is a certain; there is a quality of it which makes it belong to its place, ...I mean you take this out from here and no one would understand the city now.” See *Sketches of Frank Gehry*, directed by Sydney Pollack, Sony Pictures Classics, 2005.

⁶⁵⁷ Computer Aided Three Dimensional Interactive Application (CATIA) is a modelling software developed by the French company Dassault Systemes that was used for the modelling and construction of Mirage Fighters. It is particularly good for modelling complex surface structures.

⁶⁵⁸ According to Thomas Krens himself: “The idea was that the museum had to be able to accommodate the biggest and the heaviest of any existing contemporary sculpture on the one hand, and a Picasso drawing on the other hand.” See Coosje Van Bruggen, “Towards a Unity of Opposites: A Mere Building Versus Sculptural Architecture” in *Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, New York, 1997, pp. 95-134, P. 115

⁶⁵⁹ There are a total of six galleries devoted to the permanent collection, which are stacked in two sets of three square galleries on the second and third levels of the museum.

extends to the east. This space passes under the Puente de la Salve Bridge, terminating in the tower on its far side.⁶⁶⁰ Since the interior of this space is column-free, it allows for large-scale art installations to be exhibited comfortably. The exhibition of the work of selected living artists is housed in a series of eleven distinct galleries, each with its own unique spatial qualities.

The dramatic central atrium is the space from which the circulation to the galleries originates and to which it returns. Though Gehry had intended to adopt a more conservative approach towards the interior, Thomas Krens and others persuaded him to make a more expressive contribution. Coosje van Bruggen writes:

In a discussion with the conceptual artist Daniel Buren Gehry stated: “My typical stance has been that the museum should be laid-back and a simple box, in which the artist can come and do anything,” expecting that, because he was deferential to the arts, he would be approved of as “a nice, polite architect.” To Gehry’s surprise, Buren reacted differently. “In case you involve yourself in such a thing one day...make the best building you can do. I think to try to make simple, neutral space would be the worst way. For what?”⁶⁶¹

According to van Bruggen Gehry had suggested that the atrium space should allow the visitors to experience “the informality of a crowded, rough-textured sculptor’s studio” which Gehry perceived as a prototype for urbanistic design:

[Gehry] perceives such an organically evolved environment of ideal forms in chance relationships as a prototype for urbanistic design: “[Brancusi’s studio] looked like a whole city...the idealistic city, though I don’t think he intended that.”⁶⁶²

Whilst it can be argued that the BGM provided Gehry with a stylistic “formula” that he has been mostly unable to escape from, the design, construction and “effects” of BGM continue to have important implications for our conception of superficiality, authenticity and architectural creativity in late-capitalistic societies. Gehry’s

⁶⁶⁰ Gehry had contemplated designing the tower as an open mesh form like the Barcelona fish; a glass tower; a combination of a limestone-and-metal with a restaurant and terrace at the top, but Thomas Krens rejected these ideas. Gehry offered to put a gallery space in it, but that was also turned down. Finally, a breakthrough came in fall 1994, when the tower became an autonomic sculptural element. See Van Bruggen, “Towards a Unity of Opposites: A Mere Building Versus Sculptural Architecture,” p. 121.

⁶⁶¹ Van Bruggen, “Towards a Unity of Opposites: A Mere Building Versus Sculptural Architecture” in *Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, pp. 95-134, P. 115

⁶⁶² See Van Bruggen, “Towards a Unity of Opposites: A Mere Building Versus Sculptural Architecture,” p. 121



Figure 6.9: The central atrium, Constantin Brancusi's Paris Studio, and interior views of BGM's galleries. For the design of interior spaces, Gehry seemed to have been inspired by a sculptor's studio where one can come across a variety of unexpected forms, materials and spatial relationships. Sources (clockwise): Joshua White, *Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, New York, 1997, 120-1, and Yukio Futagawa, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa, Frank O. Gehry, GA Document 54*, p. 78 & 73.



Figure 6.10: First and second level plans of Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Source: Yukio Futagawa, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa*, Frank O. Gehry, GA Document, vol. 54, ADA Edita, Tokyo, 1998, p. 40

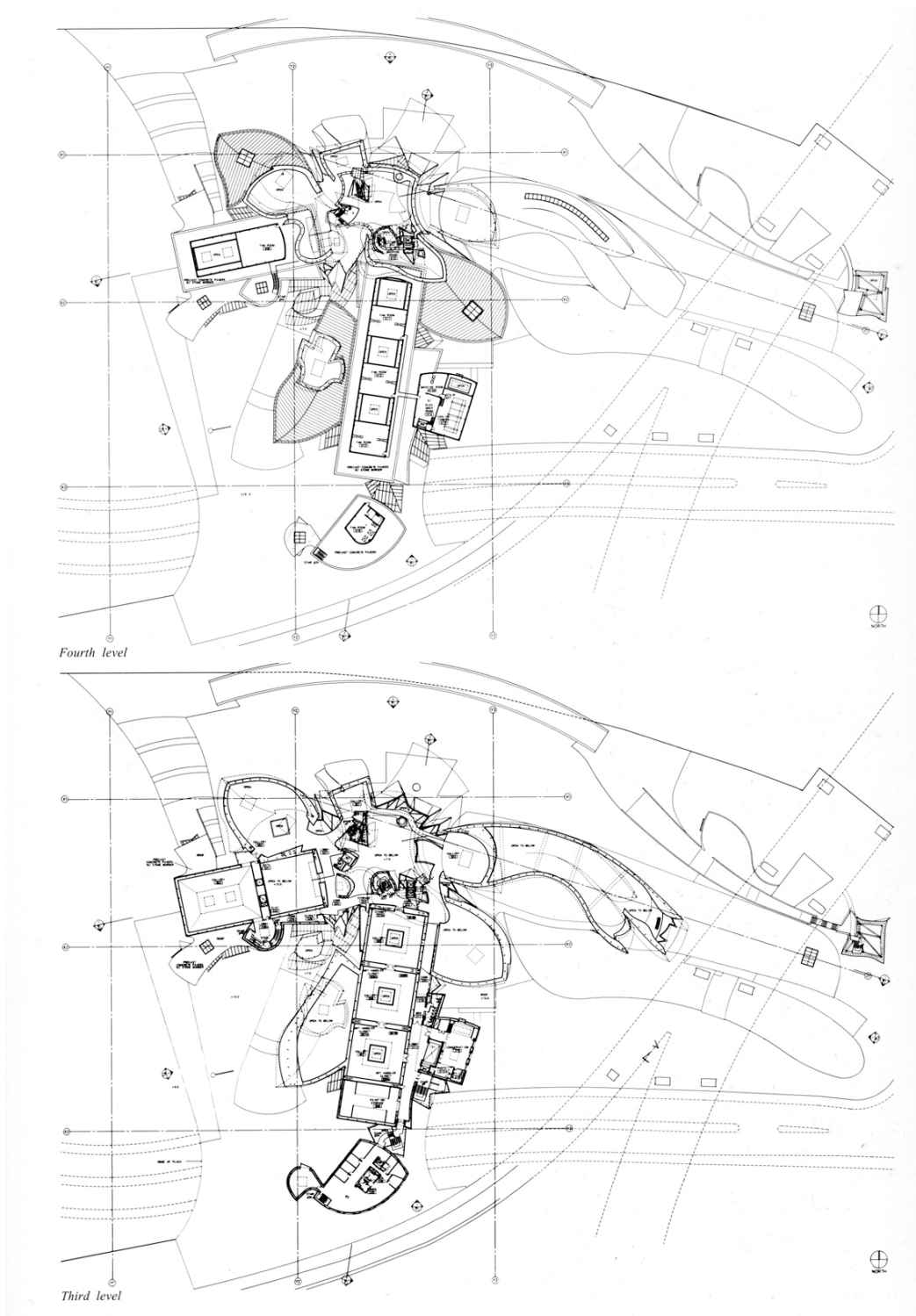


Figure 6.11: Third and fourth level plans of Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Source: Yukio Futagawa, *Guggenheim Bilbao Museoa*, Frank O. Gehry, GA Document, vol. 54, ADA Edita, Tokyo, 1998, p. 41

building is a smooth mixture of different ideas accumulated over a long period of architectural experimentation. Its ambiguous complexity opens up questions about transdisciplinary collaboration, the notion of surface and its effects in architectural production and the importance of architectural imagery in an age of technological re-production and communication. This thesis argues that it is precisely this conceptual smoothness, simulative complexity and non-hierarchical (surficial) enfolding of architectural categories that makes the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum so popular and simultaneously so problematic for critics and commentators.

6.2.1 Phenomenal Exteriority: an Architecture of Surface and Skin

For some theorists like Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, what makes the building “look good contributes to its unpopularity” and the “controversy that surrounds his work.”⁶⁶³ The building’s preoccupation with flowing curves, shimmering surfaces and spectacular imagery is more modernist than postmodern since it is concerned with the ornamental and the visually beautiful, rather than the postmodern preoccupation with ironic, double-coded subversion.⁶⁶⁴ At the same time, the museum expresses a self-assertive liveliness that can be attributed to the modernist ambitions of a radical break from the visual traditions of architecture.

In fact, Gehry admits of being “a strict modernist in the sense of believing in purity, that you shouldn’t decorate.”⁶⁶⁵ However, this statement is complicated by being supplemented it with another: “And yet buildings need decoration, ...they need human scale, ... they can’t just be faceless things. That’s how some modernism failed.”⁶⁶⁶ The BGM demonstrates an inclusive approach to concepts (modernist or postmodernist), that are dissolved together in a smooth mixture. In his early projects, (like the Gehry House) the different ideas are clearly demarcated, because they have not undergone a process of dissolution. The boundaries of difference are

⁶⁶³ See Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe “Frank Gehry is not Andy Warhol: A Choice between Life and Death” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, ed. Ana María Guasch, Joseba Zulaika, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 223

⁶⁶⁴ Gilbert-Rolfe writes: “Not only is it pretty, but it’s modernist, rather than postmodern, in the sense in which those terms are used in the discourses surrounding the visual arts, while at the same time it is of course quite unmodernist in every crucial respect except for its preoccupation with visual effect self-assertive liveliness – which incidentally illustrates the bankruptcy of the way those terms are used. I see Gehry’s work as caught inevitably but unfortunately in arguments to which it has a more subtle relationship than is perhaps normally described, but that are in any case not resolvable.” See “Frank Gehry is not Andy Warhol: A Choice between Life and Death” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 223

⁶⁶⁵ Frank Gehry, “Commentaries” in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 47

⁶⁶⁶ Frank Gehry, “Commentaries” in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, pp. 47-8

clear: one knows where and how Gehry has intervened with the “old dumb house.” In his later work however, difference begins to dissolve into a smooth liquidity, which brings both success and controversy. Therefore, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum displays a more “subtle relationship” to a wider range of concepts that it absorbs within itself.

The titanium skin of the BGM is comparable to the white walls of the International Style, in that it generates an *image* of a modern, contemporary style. Just as the colour white evoked images of purity, clarity and transparency, titanium conjures associations with the aerospace industry, with lightness and endurance of new technology. However, Gehry’s use of titanium in the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum cannot be reduced to modernism. In the BGM the modernist sensibility evolves. If the white of the International Style was representative of ornamental purity, it was also an exposure of architecture’s primary elements: the wall, the structure, “the machine for living in.”⁶⁶⁷ Put in another way, the white paint was a *tight swimsuit*, exposing the contours of the architectural body. The titanium skin of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum however, is not a tight suit. It is positively different.

Hal Foster compares the museum with the Statue of Liberty arguing that “for all the apparent futurism of CATIA designs” the BGM is comprised of a “separate skin hung over a hidden armature.”⁶⁶⁸ This is seen as a “regressive” arrangement since “Gehry allows his skin to dominate his structure.”⁶⁶⁹ At first, Foster’s evaluation is convincing, remaining faithful to architecture’s established categories and the hierarchies that govern them. In other words, following the modernists’ conception of architecture as clothed structure, or the postmodernists’ decorated structure, Foster’s argument implies that the BGM is *skinned structure*. This model suggests a seemingly instinctive hierarchical order based on constructional sequence: since structure and structural concepts come first, they cannot be dominated by skin, surface or other *superficial* categories. This is the traditional hierarchical logic that persists in much of architectural theory, relegating surface, image and appearance to a subservient secondariness. It is also the very

⁶⁶⁷ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, translated as *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells, The Architectural Press, London, 1987, p. 100

⁶⁶⁸ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 37

⁶⁶⁹ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 37

reason why later in his essay, Foster has to defend his argument: “Mine is not a plea for a modernist transparency of structure.”⁶⁷⁰

However, this thesis argues that the formal logic of Gehry’s architecture is not in the tectonic relationship between “skin” and “armature,” but instead in the surficial relationship between skins and folded surfaces that generate a variety of internal, external and virtual spaces of operation. It is therefore significant that after sketching some preliminary thoughts on paper, Gehry continued to model the building with paper, a thin and pliable material that inspires the surfaces of the finished museum. Computer technology also had an important part to play, as it facilitated the accurate modelling and construction of the complex surfaces of the design.



Figure 6.12: Left: unfolding the skins of an onion. Right: an image of Gehry’s model parts. Just like the onion, the BGM is an architecture of skin. Source: the author + Joshua White, *Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, Guggenheim Publications, NY, 1997, p. 94.

If Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera House was inspired by the peeling of an orange, it is possible to say that Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim Museum implies the unfolding of an onion. In the first analogy, skin covers body as something radically different. In the second analogy however, body is composed of layer upon layer of skin. Therefore, rather than hiding a primary body or structure, the titanium skin is in fact another manifestation of the same generative surface that creates the *internal facades*. In Gehry’s design process, it is the skin or the *thick surface* that evolves, from its beginnings as paper to its virtualisation in the computer and finally to its

⁶⁷⁰ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 38

construction in different materials. Here is a process that appreciates the logic of surfaces and their effects. By trusting paper and its transformation through different media (including the computer), Gehry creates a consistent architectural process that includes new digital technologies. It is therefore not surprising that Thomas Krens declares that Gehry has “a greater faith in process than any other architect,”⁶⁷¹ a design process which Antonino Saggio calls “Skin in.”⁶⁷²

If the BGM’s design logic problematizes the relationship between skin and structure, it is because it doesn’t define skin according to the order of construction, i.e. the *logic of structure*. In this sense, Gehry’s work invokes Gottfried Semper’s theories, which defined the pliable surface as the site of architectural creativity, incorporating a “festive spirit” which was expressive of individual creativity, cultural identity or religious ideology.

In Gehry’s BGM, the skin *actualises* architecture. It is not an inert layer whose function is simply the shielding of the interior from the exterior, but a complex architectural element with latent forces that create significant effects. This would be a conception of skin that is not in opposition to flesh and bones, nor is it a detachable layer secondary to the architectural body. After all, what is a body without a skin? Can a skin-less body still be defined as one? What is architecture without surfaces or their effects? Can it still be defined as architecture?

This thesis argues that the BGM is constituted by one generative element: the folding skin that simulates a diversity of experiences. In such architecture everything follows the *logic of surface* where exteriority folds and unfolds to *simulate* interiority. Thus, the building operates like a Möbius strip, in which “exterior” or “interior,” “skin” and “structure” are continuations of the same generative surface. This is not say that the titanium skin continues on the inside or that one does not know when one enters the building. That would be a literal translation of the Möbius strip concept. Instead, the BGM offers *phenomenal exteriority* by continuing the logic of the generative surface to the *interior facades* of the building. Thus, in

⁶⁷¹ Quoted in Bruce Lindsey, *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance/Digital Construction*, Birkhäuser, Basel, Boston, 2001, p. 42

⁶⁷² Antonino Saggio “Flying Carpets” preface to *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance/Digital Construction*, pp. 5-9, p.8

Jeremy Gilbert-Rolf's words, Gehry's architecture offers "the outside of the inside and the final outside provided by the skin."⁶⁷³

Gehry's museum demands *surficial thought* since it is not based on a relationship between skin that *covers* the structure. The titanium layer cannot be reduced to a detachable skin-suit draped over the structure, because it forms the building's *plane of immanence*. Without it, the building becomes a *skinned body* that is "less a body even than a skeleton, which we find it easier to re-clothe in flesh (there are plenty of dancing skeletons in story and ritual, but very few skinned bodies)."⁶⁷⁴

Thus, the titanium skin is not "hung over" the body of architecture (as Foster describes it), rather it *is* the body of architecture. Without it, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum would cease to be. This is not a verbal dispute but a significant difference between two models of thought and two different approaches to architecture. Foster's argument relies on traditional transcendental hierarchy, determined to go beyond surfaces and appearances. The alternative approach proposed here is based on a non-hierarchical model of immanence that *explores* surfaces and appearances. From this alternative theoretical point of view, removing the titanium skin would be removing the building's architectural body, "the face of its bodiliness."⁶⁷⁵

Gehry draws surfaces, models surfaces, and constructs surfaces. In such architecture, surface is the Deleuzian fold that describes the prior connectedness of form and function. There is no hierarchy, only *difference within continuous exteriority*. In such architecture, the folding surface creates "inside" and "outside"⁶⁷⁶ since it operates like the Deleuzian façade (or the monadic body) opening "from the

⁶⁷³ Gilbert-Rolfe, Jeremy, "Frank Gehry is Not Andy Warhol: A Choice between Life and Death" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, University of Nevada Press, 2005, p. 228

⁶⁷⁴ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2003, p. 29

⁶⁷⁵ Connor, *The Book of Skin*, p. 29

⁶⁷⁶ Skin gives the body surface; *it surfaces the body*. As the surfer of the body, it lacks definitive boundaries, flowing continuously from the exposed areas of the body to its internal cavities. In other words, skin is not a bag with holes, but a continuous topology, much like a Klein Bottle. In Ellen Lupton's words "Where does the lip end and the mouth begin? Is a navel an "outie" or an "innie"? The ambiguous transition between inside and out is as plain as the nose on your face: skin is continuous over and into the nose, differentiating into nose-specific cells at some dark inner point (a transition almost more anatomical than biological)." Ellen Lupton, *Skin: Surface, Substance + Design*, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2002, p. 45

outside ... onto the outside.”⁶⁷⁷ In this sense, familiar categories occur upon the same surficial plane of immanence.

Foster’s criticism however, maintains a traditional transcendental approach, arguing that structure is “hidden” and that exterior surfaces “rarely match up with interior spaces.”⁶⁷⁸ This thesis argues that in the BGM there is no interiority in the traditional sense of the word, i.e. a hidden space in contrasts to apparent exteriority. The exterior and the interior need not match each other, since each is a plane of exteriority operating according to its own immanent rules.

Moreover, external appearance is not made secondary in relation to interior space or structure. This theory can be supported by the fact that Richard Serra, whose monumental works of sheet metal are usually set within the landscape, brings his sculpture “inside” the museum. This is not just a consequence of large “internal” spaces, but also the effect of the building’s implied continuity from “outside” to “inside.” The BGM’s surfaces do not hide, nor are they concerned with privacy. The spaces they create are those of *performance* and *expression*, creating an architecture of “an outside without an inside.”⁶⁷⁹ This architecture of facades, appearances and imagistic expressions is perhaps appropriate for public buildings of this kind that are often required to promote not just visual art but also the aspiration of a particular society.⁶⁸⁰ This equivocal exteriority without interiority is also the very reason why Foster complains of disorientation.⁶⁸¹

Yet, it must be clarified that the proposed argument here is not that the BGM is literally made of one continuous surface. If this were the case, the titanium exterior would seamlessly continue inside and the visitors would be able to enter the building without noticing a threshold or a boundary. Instead, the thesis argues

⁶⁷⁷ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁶⁷⁸ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 37

⁶⁷⁹ Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, p. 28

⁶⁸⁰ A precedent for such architecture is Jørn Utzon’s Sydney Opera House, in Sydney, Australia, 1973. In 2003 Utzon received the Pritzker Prize, architecture’s highest honour, with this citation: “There is no doubt that the Sydney Opera House is ... one of the great iconic buildings of the 20th century, an image of great beauty that has become known throughout the world – a symbol for not only a city, but a whole country and continent.” See Sydney Opera House 2008 Corporate Media Release http://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/08CorporateMediaRelease_JornUtzon.aspx accessed on 20 Feb. 2009.

⁶⁸¹ “The disconnection between skin and structure ... can lead to spaces that are not surprising (as in the early houses) so much as mystifying (as in Bilbao or Seattle) – a strained disorientation that is frequently mistaken for Architectural Sublime.” Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 38

that the BGM represents a particular architectural approach based on *surface-surface relationships* rather than *surface/depth opposition*. This suggests a different model of thought in which exaggerating difference based on transcendental hierarchy is replaced by a non-hierarchical exploration of immanent difference.

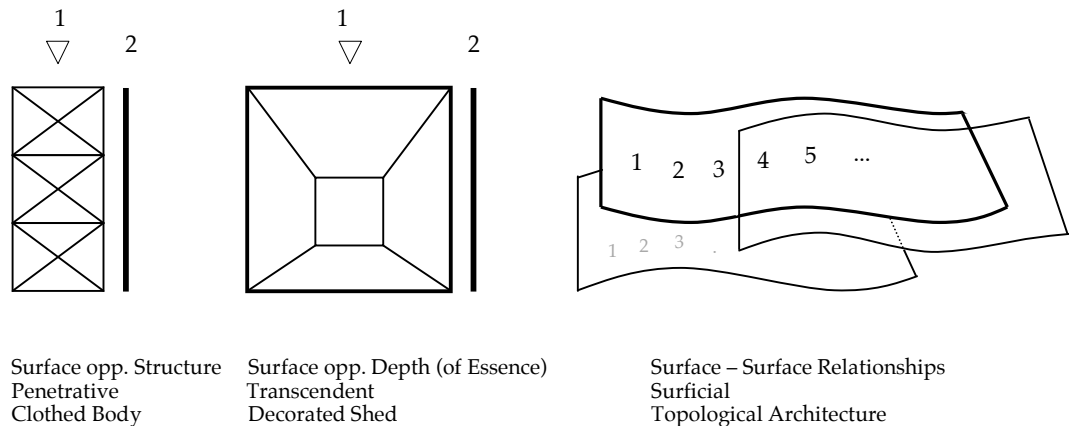


Figure 6.13: The role of surface in different architectural models of thought.
Source: the author.

The BGM expresses a surficial movement of thought in a phenomenally transparent manner, the final construction being a mixture of different ideas with different degrees of resolution. For example, the main entrance to the galleries is through a set of familiar doors that clearly defines the separation of inside from outside. Yet, the entrance is lowered down and the door frames blend in with the structural grid, thus giving minimal expression to penetration of surfaces. Inside, the white surfaces of the galleries contrast with the reflective surfaces of the exterior, but the flowing forms and the monumental scale continue to express the ambitions of the exterior, which culminate in the gallery devoted to Richard Serra’s sculptures. (See figure 6.15) Thus, if white walls are an attempt to provide a neutral space for artwork, the flying buttresses and the smooth surfaces of the largest gallery positively compete with Serra’s sculptures.

The BGM evokes different images of thought, from the scales of the fish to the waves of the sea, or the fuselages of the aerospace industry. The building display a surficial logic in which architectural expression is found upon the surface as it flows from one material to the next, from one virtual image to another. In this architecture of surface, structure is neither hidden nor exposed. It is rather a case of



Figure 6.14: The BGM's glazed surfaces are not holes in the wall in that they are not there to reveal the interior. Instead, they represent a different material expression of the same architectural surface. Following the same logic, the entrance receives minimal expression disguising the inevitable penetration of the facade. Source: the author.



Figure 6.15: Views of the largest gallery space. Gehry's *interior facades* complement and compete with the artwork. They are a continuation of the same performative logic that governs exterior facades. This is why Richard Serra's sculptures (that are often displayed outside) do not seem out of place. Source: the author.

phenomenal becoming where surface becomes “structure.” The glazed facade of the entrance lobby is a clear example, where structural elements and sheets of glass follow a folded contour similar to that of the titanium skin. The resultant mesh-like structure is reminiscent of CATIA wireframe models of the building’s surfaces prior to their actualisation in different materials. Thus, the glazed entrance lobby is not an exposure of structure or internal space. It is rather another expression of the same generative surface.

In the BGM surface is not treated as a visual barrier that separates, but rather a topological space of operation. Such a conception demands a surficial movement of thought that does not penetrate surfaces and appearances in order to uncover the original or the originary, but instead, explores surface effects in search of immanent difference. The titanium surfaces of the BGM assume a significant thickness that distinguishes them from the white coat of paint proposed by the International Style. They suggest an architecture in which the visual layer that is not *applied to a pre-existing structure* and therefore it is not considered secondary to a primary category. Instead, the BGM suggests a fundamentally different approach where minoritarian categories such as “skin,” “surface,” “image” and “appearance” constitute an architecture of exteriority, which is not literal exteriority (like Serra’s sculptures), but rather *phenomenal exteriority*. In this way, the BGM fully exploits the concept of *pli* (fold), which according to Andrew Ballantyne “is in action in such words as *imply*, *implicit*, *multiply*, *duplicate*, *replicate* ... [as] they are all ‘folding’ words.”⁶⁸²

6.2.2 Smooth Surfaces and Slippery Images

Being an “enigmatic signifier,” the BGM is difficult to pin down; it has a fluid expression that is inclusive of many implicit metaphors. Imagistically, the museum has been compared to a fish, a mermaid, a boat, a bouquet of flowers, a duck (a swan with its head in its wings),⁶⁸³ or even Marilyn Monroe.⁶⁸⁴ The building’s shimmering surfaces imply an amorphous movement like the waves of the sea. The

⁶⁸² Andrew Ballantyne, *Deleuze and Guattari for Architects*, Thinkers for Architects, ed. Adam Sharr, Routledge, London, 2007, p. 92

⁶⁸³ See Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where Post-modernism Going?* p. 67

⁶⁸⁴ In an article in *The New York Sunday Times Magazine*, critic Herbert Muschamp compared the Bilbao Guggenheim to Marilyn Monroe. See *The New York Times Magazine*, September 7, 1997, pp. 54-59, 72, 82, or *The New York Times*, September 7, New York Edition, section 6, p. 54

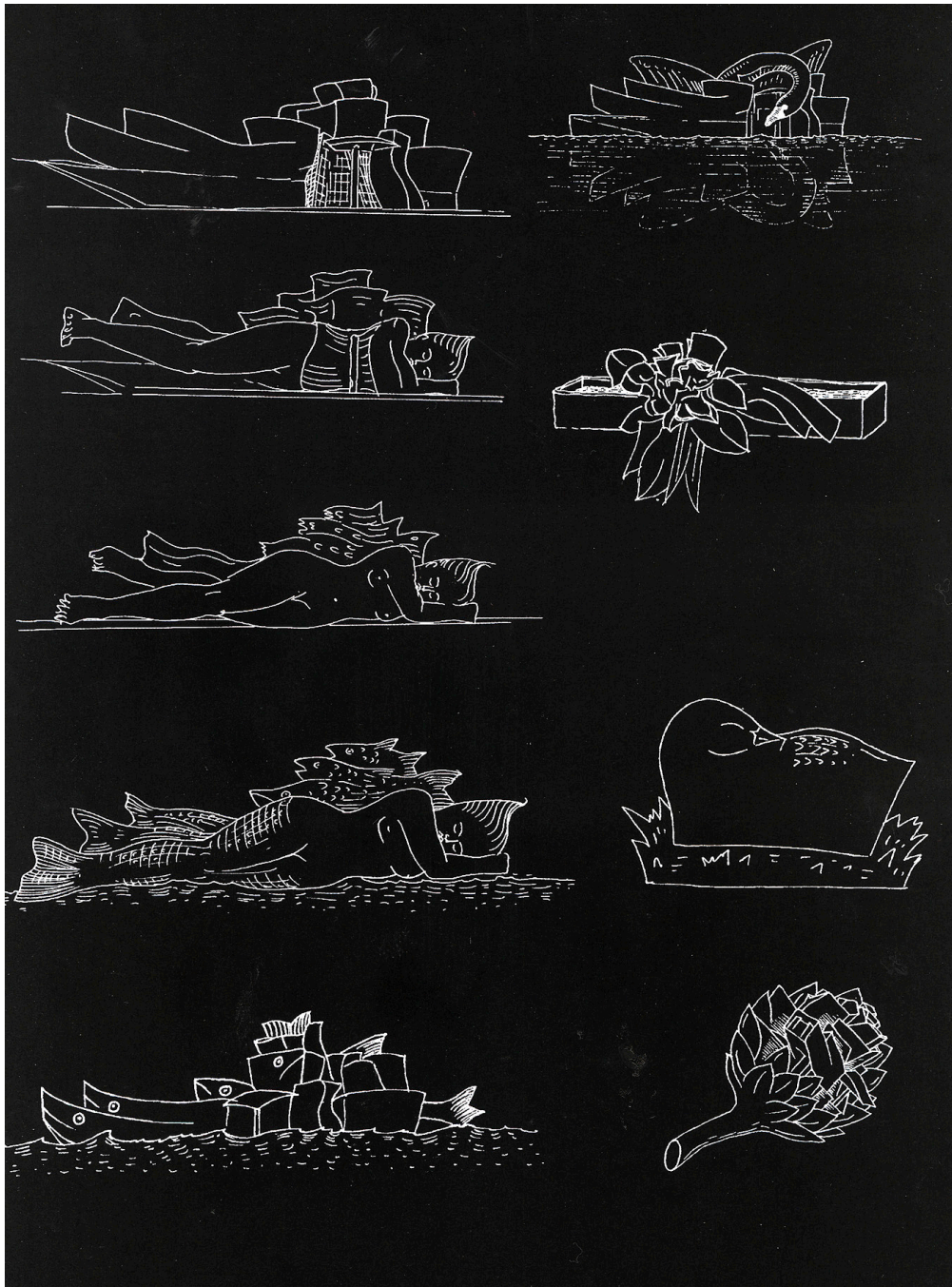


Figure 6.16: The BGM as “enigmatic signifier.” Source: Charles Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 67

metallic shape echoes Bilbao's former ship-building industry and the shells of the boats in the harbour, while the careful arrangement of titanium panels evokes the scales of the fish, or the glimmering surface of the sea under the sun. The question whether all these connotations are intentional, intuitional or accidental, is in many ways part of the BGM's popular appeal.

Gehry has had a fascination with water and the fish, so much so that the latter has become his personal totem.⁶⁸⁵ When asked about the significance of the fish, his response is multi-faceted making the slippery emblem even more difficult to grasp.⁶⁸⁶ Sometimes the fish is described as a sign of frustration with postmodern pastiche,⁶⁸⁷ while in other cases Gehry describes it as a consequence of subversive participation in the postmodern game:

Why did I draw the fish in the first place? I did it because of the postmodern game. I said, "Okay, if you're going to go back, fish are three hundred thousand years before man, so why don't you go back to fish? ... I looked at fish in ponds – the sense of movement fascinated me. The Greeks did it, and Rodin did it."⁶⁸⁸

However, "The fish is more complicated than that"⁶⁸⁹ and "there are other factors."⁶⁹⁰ The first incarnations of the fish can be traced back to sketches submitted to the "Chicago Tribune Competition Revisited,"⁶⁹¹ the project for the Smith House (1981)⁶⁹² and later to "Connections," a collaborative project with Richard Serra.⁶⁹³ In

⁶⁸⁵ Gehry has constructed lamps, jewellery, sculptures, and even buildings based on the fish motif. See Gehry's "Fish Lamps" (1984), "Standing Glass Fish" (1986), the Kobe "Fishdance" Restaurant (1987) and "Frank Gehry Jewellery Collection" in collaboration with Tiffany & Co. (2006).

⁶⁸⁶ In an interview with Peter Arnell, dated 24th February 1984, Gehry explains: "I can tell you how the fish came about, I can trace the steps, and you can read into it whatever you want." Frank Gehry, "No, I'm an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation," in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, ed. Peter Arnell and Ted Bickford, Rizzoli, New York, 1985, p. XVI

⁶⁸⁷ "I was so furious that people were drawing Greek temples, regurgitating the past, abandoning the present..." Frank Gehry, as quoted in "Call That a Fish Frank?" by Janet Abrams, *Blueprint*, September 1988, p.54

⁶⁸⁸ Gehry, "Commentaries" in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 47

⁶⁸⁹ Gehry, "No, I'm an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation," in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVI

⁶⁹⁰ Gehry, "No, I'm an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation," in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

⁶⁹¹ The 1980 Chicago Tribune Competition Revisited, was a re-run of a 1922 competition for the design of the company's headquarters. Gehry's design was a solid concrete metamorphosing into an eagle at the top.

⁶⁹² For this proposal, Gehry designed an entrance colonnade made of sculptures of animal forms. In the colonnade, the eagle reappeared adjacent to an upright fish.

the first project, Gehry explains, he wanted to sketch an eagle to represent the “power of the press in America”⁶⁹⁴ but he “began thinking about the fish” and “realized how beautiful it was.”⁶⁹⁵ As power was replaced with beauty, the fish for Gehry became a “symbol of perfection.”⁶⁹⁶

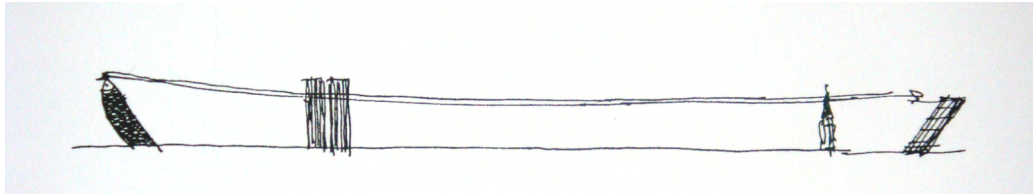


Figure 6.17: Between Frank Gehry (left) and Richard Serra (right). Sketch for a bridge design for “Connections” at the Architectural League of New York, 1981. Source: Frank O. Gehry Associates, printed in *Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, Guggenheim Museum Publications, New York, 1997, p. 43

Gehry links the fish to his childhood memories, playing with the carp that his grandmother bought from the market. In many ways, the fish represents Gehry’s own slippery persona that takes inspiration from the amorphous fluidity of its aquatic world. Gehry explains:

If you believe in astrology, since I was born February 28th that makes me a Pisces. If there’s anything in that then that’s – the fish is – I don’t really believe in that, but ... I’m a good swimmer too. My favourite sport is swimming. I’m a sailor, I’m a water person.”⁶⁹⁷

Pisces in astrology is associated with pliability of character, intuition, sensitivity, illusion and dreams.⁶⁹⁸ Whether influenced by such descriptions or not, Gehry

⁶⁹³ In this 1981 competition, Gehry’s giant fish together with Serra’s steel pylon held up the Manhattan suspension bridge. See figure 6.11

⁶⁹⁴ Gehry, “No, I’m an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation,” in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVI

⁶⁹⁵ Gehry, “No, I’m an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation,” in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

⁶⁹⁶ Gehry writes: “The fish evolved further: I kept drawing it and sketching it and it started to become for me like a symbol for a certain kind of perfection that I couldn’t achieve with my buildings. Eventually whenever I’d draw something and I couldn’t finish the design, I’d draw the fish as a notation.... For me it’s a symbol of perfection.” Gehry, “No, I’m an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation,” in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

⁶⁹⁷ Gehry, “No, I’m an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation,” in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

⁶⁹⁸ “Pisces: February 19 - March 20. Pisces is the twelfth Sign of the Zodiac, and it is also the final Sign in the Zodiacal cycle ... Many people associate Pisceans with dreams and secrets... Pisceans are fluid and easy-going, in keeping with the Mutable Quality assigned to this Sign ... Pisceans alternate between reality and non-reality in keeping with their introspective

nonetheless characterizes himself as a “fish person” or “water person,” and expresses an enigmatic malleability that is not only evident in his architecture, but also affects his design process.⁶⁹⁹ According to Olivier Boissière, “The fish is used for what it is: a reservoir of extended and compact forms, of texture and iridescent colours.”⁷⁰⁰ However, it is safe to say that the fish is also part of an intuitive expression, a Deleuzian “desiring machine”⁷⁰¹ that relies on primitive “zoomorphic yearnings.”⁷⁰² As such, the fish expresses movement and flow, but it also evokes an evasive slipperiness that wriggles out of any predetermined definition. In many ways, the fish is Gehry’s “Body without Organs,” a virtual body characterized by an “extraordinary fluidity” that introduces a strategy of shifting “from one code to the other.”⁷⁰³ Although interpretative categories attach themselves to the body without organs, “the latter continues nonetheless to be without organs and does not become an organism in the ordinary sense of the word. It remains fluid and slippery.”⁷⁰⁴

The evasiveness of Gehry’s architecture evokes the “trickster” in mythology.⁷⁰⁵ According to Lewis Hyde, tricksters are “the lords of in-between,” the “boundary-crosser” who also “creates a boundary, or brings to the surface a distinction previously hidden from sight.”⁷⁰⁶ For Hyde “the best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found – sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms.”⁷⁰⁷ In mythology, the trickster is a

natures; their voyage between consciousness and an unconscious dream state says much about their intuitive, almost psychic natures. ... The Fish are happy to be considered hazy, since there's a certain sense of safety in that self-proclaimed netherworld.” See <http://www.astrology.com/allaboutyou/sunsigns/pisces.html> accessed 20 Jan. 2009.

⁶⁹⁹ Gehry attributes many of his architectural ideas to his clients. For example for the BGM, he argues that the decision to have two gallery types, (one for living artists and the other for dead artists) was Thomas Kren’s idea. See Frank Gehry, *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 143

⁷⁰⁰ Olivier Boissière, “Manufacturing the Sublime” in *Frank Gehry Vitra Design Museum*, ed. Martin Filler, Olivier Boissière, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, pp. 24-34, p. 31

⁷⁰¹ See section “5.3.2 From Lack to Act: “Desiring Machines” and Smooth Processes of Production” in chapter five of this thesis.

⁷⁰² Gehry, “No, I’m an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation,” in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

⁷⁰³ See section “5.3 The “Smooth” Space of Surficial thought” in chapter five of this thesis. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15

⁷⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15

⁷⁰⁵ Different trickster characters are found in old stories: Hermes in Greece, the Raven or Coyote in North America, Eshu in West Africa, Krishna in India and many others.

⁷⁰⁶ Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, North Point Press, New York, 1998, p. 7

⁷⁰⁷ Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, pp. 7-8

playful, deceitful character motivated by hunger, ego or desire, whose actions are characterized by ambivalence, lack of respect, cunning and amorality.⁷⁰⁸ His method is one of conscious subterfuge.

In many instances, Gehry's architecture possesses characteristics that define it as the work of a trickster. However, the slipperiness of the fish is indicative of a different side, a more unconscious but complex ambiguity that operates in a different way in comparison to the duplicitous techniques of the trickster. According to Hyde the trickster is a "predator" who "is the mythic embodiment of ... doubleness and duplicity, contradiction and paradox."⁷⁰⁹ The fish on the other hand is the *prey* that "is tricky, if it has the wit to slip the trap, it will do so by finding a breach in the wickerwork, a rip in the net, an escape hatch its enemy has not noticed."⁷¹⁰ Gehry's fish therefore is a character whose natural instinct is to escape entrapment, even those set up by the trickster.⁷¹¹

The fish "solidified" Gehry's "understanding of how to make architecture move"⁷¹² allowing him to express some of the qualities that he appreciates in architecture. However, the evolution of the fish (from sketch to sculpture, then to architecture) is not merely the refining of an architectural image or brand, but also the emergence of an architect: the *surfacing of the virtual self through a zoomorphic sign*. It is for this reason that Gehry's architecture has been accused of "self-indulgence,"⁷¹³ since the many incarnations of the fish (of which one can perhaps include the BGM), seem to represent the inflation of an ego to such a degree, that it becomes (monumental) architecture.

Arguably, however, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum is a "full Body without Organs," healthy and productive, while Gehry's replications of the "Bilbao Effect" in later projects (the Experience Music Project, Seattle, 2000, or Walt Disney Concert Hall, LA, 2003) are "cancerous BwOs," caught in a pattern of self-same

⁷⁰⁸ See Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, p. 10

⁷⁰⁹ Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, p. 7

⁷¹⁰ Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, p. 46

⁷¹¹ "The fish swims through its expansive, watery world and suddenly trickster blocks its passage, makes its world less expansive, less fluid." Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth and Art*, p. 46

⁷¹² Gehry, "Commentaries" in *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 42

⁷¹³ See Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 40



Figure 6.18: Eagle, snake and fish: Gehry's experimentation with different zoomorphic signs to develop an architectural language. Clockwise: proposal for Charles Jencks' porch, fish lamps (source: Francesco Dal Co. and Kurt W. Forster, *Frank O. Gehry, The Complete Works*, The Monacelli Press, New York, 1998) Kobe Fishdance restaurant (source: *Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, 1997), the (fish) tower of the BGM (source: the author).

reproduction.⁷¹⁴ This is because the BGM, represents genuine creativity, i.e. a reproduction, or an evolution of the (Barcelona) fish as a BwO, while later replications of the Bilbao formula lose their immanent character, becoming reproductions, or mere *copies* of an original model. Deleuze and Guattari would parallel Gehry's later projects with addiction (drug usage as a habit), which they define as a cancerous BwO and an act that is no longer motivated by actual desire.⁷¹⁵

There is no doubt that Gehry is familiar with Deleuze and Guattari's work.⁷¹⁶ Much like their "lobster"⁷¹⁷ Gehry's "fish" is a marine creature that can be traced back to ancient seas: smooth spaces that resist striation.⁷¹⁸ The sea and the fish within it form a non-hierarchical plenum characterized by directionality rather than dimensionality, lines of flight rather than points or coordinates, fluidity and processes of transformation, rather than rigid boundaries and categories. These are concepts that are both pre-historic and contemporary.⁷¹⁹

If the Santa Monica house was emblematic of Gehry's earlier phase (perhaps more aligned with the trickster concept) the Barcelona Fish (1992)⁷²⁰ inspires Gehry's later work and the very first use of computer technologies in his design process. The project combines formal duck and decorated shed "almost literally" being a "combination of Serra and Oldenberg, ...both all structure and all surface, with no functional interior."⁷²¹ However, being a *hybrid* of sculpture and

⁷¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 162-163

⁷¹⁵ See Deleuze and Guattari, "November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 149-166

⁷¹⁶ Jencks writes "I once came upon him surreptitiously reading Deleuze's book." Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 63

⁷¹⁷ See Deleuze and Guattari, "10,000 BC: The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think it is?) in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 39-40

⁷¹⁸ See section "5.3 The "Smooth" Space of Surficial Thought" of chapter five.

⁷¹⁹ In fact many advanced automobiles, aircrafts, trains, submarines and even buildings are now inspired by the streamline fish, whose shape and surface texture allows it to flow through water with least resistance. Moreover, the scales of the fish evoke the metals with which many of these advanced machines are constructed.

⁷²⁰ From 1989-1992 Frank Gehry undertook a project for the Olympic Village in Barcelona as part of a residential and commercial masterplan designed by Bruce Graham of Skidmore Owings and Merrill (SOM). The most striking element of Gehry's design was a 54m long and 35m high fish-shaped canopy that drew attention to the rest of the commercial development.

⁷²¹ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 34



Figure 6.19: The slippery fish and the smooth sea (Gehry's BGM and the Nervión River). Source: the author.

architecture, structure and surface, the Barcelona fish clearly demonstrates Gehry's desire to transform architecture through a slow evolutionary process.⁷²²

Foster applauds Serra for exposing the construction of his sculpture for all to see and accuses Gehry of tectonic obscurity. This is not surprising, because Serra explores the becoming-architecture of sculpture by transforming the structural wall (the most recognisable architectural element) into spatial "snakes." Thus, Serra's work is more compatible with architecture's established hierarchies, the primacy of the structural wall being clearly recognisable in the final object. Gehry on the other hand explores the *becoming-sculpture of architecture* by inhabiting sculptural emblems like the fish. Both approaches share a common dedication to transformation. However, in Gehry's architecture becoming produces more unsettling results since the final architectural object is a difficult mixture of different ideas (some half formed, others more resolved) suggesting that the process of becoming is still in progress.

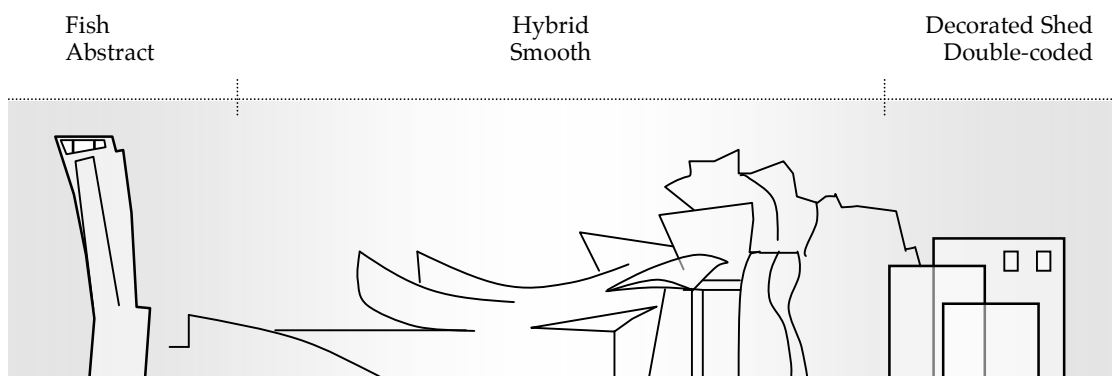


Figure 6.20: From the apparent ambiguity of the fish to the conceptual clarity of the decorated shed. The BGM attempts to include a multitude of architectural strategies. Source: the author.

Much like his serpentine emblem, Serra's sculptures achieve "intensity" and "directness"⁷²³ which effect visual and conceptual clarity. However, Gehry's

⁷²² In Gehry's own words: "My working process is an evolution, like watching paint dry. This is where I get in trouble with misconceptions about how I work." Frank Gehry, *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 195

⁷²³ Gehry writes: "I am excited by the intensity and the directness and the economy of moves in someone like Richard Serra; the intensity is very inspiring to me." The forms of the Vitra Museum can be compared to a coiled snake inspired by Serra's work. Frank Gehry, "No, I'm an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation," in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

architecture follows the fish, creating slippery signifiers whose complexity is *hidden in full sight*. One can argue that Serra is literally transparent in his conceptual operation, but Gehry is *phenomenally transparent*. If Serra's sculptures seem timeless (or frozen in time) Gehry's architecture are momentary steps in an evolutionary process that is latent with virtual lines of flight and further processes of becoming.

Gehry repeatedly challenges his boundaries in search of his personal approach to architectural design. He achieves this by selecting a design process, keeping faith with its mode of operation and by letting it lead the way. According to Thomas Krens, Gehry has "a greater faith in process than any other architect."⁷²⁴ This exploratory attitude allows Gehry to come to terms with the computer, even though he doesn't quite know how to use it:

The process has led me to the craziest thing I have ever been involved with, and that is the computer...I am computer-illiterate: I do not know how to turn it on, I am scared of the thing.⁷²⁵

The BGM (like the Barcelona Fish) was designed with the aid of CATIA (computer-aided-three-dimensional interactive application) and Gehry benefited greatly from collaboration with French aerospace engineers. The theme of collaboration (with the client and with experts of other disciplines), which continues to reoccur in Gehry's long career, is an indication of his smooth, malleable approach to architectural production.

Collaboration brings complexity, diversity and hybridity to the design process. While Gehry's numerous collaborations with artists are well known, in many of his projects the client is a powerful force in the design process.⁷²⁶ Gehry offers the client a significant role⁷²⁷ and in many instances he even goes as far as admitting that some of the important ideas were the client's.⁷²⁸ Although there is some truth in such statements, Gehry's self-effacing style often backfires,

⁷²⁴ Thomas Krens quoted in Bruce Lindsey *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance/Digital Construction*, p. 42

⁷²⁵ Gehry makes this remark in 1995, during the design of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. See Frank O. Gehry: *Individual Imagination and Cultural Conservatism*, p. 41

⁷²⁶ When asked where he gets his ideas from, Gehry admits: "we talk to the client, a lot." Gehry quoted in *Digital Gehry: Material Resistance/Digital Construction*, p. 21

⁷²⁷ "I show them all the models from the last project. I say, 'You look at it, you do it, you listen.'" Gehry, *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 195

⁷²⁸ In reference to the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, Gehry writes: "It was Tom Krens's idea to have galleries for living artists different from galleries for dead artists. In the end it was a pretty good strategy." Gehry, *Gehry Talks: Architecture + Process*, p. 143

undermining the significance of his pliable strategy in determining the design outcome.⁷²⁹

Collaboration with the aerospace industry provides Gehry with the titanium skin, which provides an image of modernity and high technology, as well as CATIA that allows him to manipulate complex surface geometries. Gehry's receptivity to collaboration is indicative of his liberal, non-hierarchical thought, but also a shrewd evasiveness that lessens the burdens of the architect:

The work that interests me now is to do with collaboration, about developing relationships with other talents and surviving with one's ego intact; with speaking one's own language and having one's own firm beliefs and ideas within the context of a collaboration. ... If I were to push anything that is what I would work towards. I have tried to do it with other architects, sometimes successfully, and sometimes not, but in the years I have left, that is what I want to do. I want to work with groups of people developing building complexes, developing not a unilateral decision about what they city should be – I do not trust my own judgement in such a context – but how to survive and how to make identifiable pieces of the buildings which are coherent with others, creating a democratic (whatever that is) model for our world. I do not like the responsibility of having the world put upon my shoulders – to solve everything in one building. I cannot accept that position, I am not capable of doing it.⁷³⁰

Gehry speaks of being democratic,⁷³¹ but his democracy is driven by opportunism and a strong desire to transform: "I have an intense need somehow to change things and to transform them."⁷³² A good example of this can be found in an episode of "The Simpsons" cartoon series, "The Seven-Beer Snitch" aired in 2005, in which, Gehry is depicted as crumpling a letter and throwing it, only to discover that it is the perfect building design. The joke implies that his architecture is arbitrary, something that Foster also proposes in his essay. However, rather than taking the joke as a threat, Gehry uses it as an opportunity to participate within the medium, within the operation of the simulacrum, which is the cartoon caricature. Thus, not only does he become the first architect to appear in a popular television series, but also through an affirmation of the joke, he transforms its criticality into an

⁷²⁹ Beatriz Colomina implies that Gehry's involvement with the Bilbao Effect can be reduced to "just" designing the building: "Krens is understood as a designer, the architect of the "Bilbao Effect." Frank Gehry is just the architect of the building." Beatriz Colomina, "Media Architect" in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, pp. 259-272, p. 259

⁷³⁰ Gehry, *Frank O. Gehry: Individual Imagination and Cultural Conservatism*, pp. 33-36

⁷³¹ "Since I'm so Democratic I accept Conformists." Gehry, *Frank O. Gehry: Individual Imagination and Cultural Conservatism*, p. 39

⁷³² Gehry, "No, I'm an Architect - Frank Gehry and Peter Arnell: A Conversation," in *Frank Gehry: Buildings and Projects*, p. XVII

expression of self-assurance and a tool of self-promotion. In other words, by participating in the joke Gehry manages to transform it for his own ends. Undoubtedly this strategy is not always successful. However, what is significant about Gehry's approach is the opportunistic pliability effected by an appreciation of immanent difference that allows him to participate and exploit alternative realities. This is precisely the reason why Gehry is a good "media architect."⁷³³

Gehry's strategy allows him to adapt to the different scenarios. His exploration of computer technologies have allowed him to design, model and manipulate complex surfaces that can be constructed within time and budget. This is of particular importance in an age of rapid technological transformations, which have offered alternative avenues for architectural production. The computer and other digital technologies are now capable of performing highly sophisticated operations that are impossible for humans. But more importantly, such technologies (mediated by activated surfaces) have created alternative realities that transgress established boundaries. The success of the BGM clearly demonstrates the significance of this reality and the urgent necessity of theorising an alternative approach towards surfaces, images and appearances that are fundamental components of such alternative reality.

The BGM exploits *media re-production*, which is not copying of reality or masking it through deceptive spectacles. In other words, the project uses different media to simulate: i.e. produce and engage with different realities. According to Beatriz Colomina, Gehry is a "media artist ... expert in the construction of his own aura."⁷³⁴ Evidently, media re-production need not signal the withering of aura in architecture, but instead its evolution to a phenomenon that extends across the surface-scape of mass media. As a media artist, Gehry has many faces, slipping from one to the other in order to create a smooth mixture of virtual implications that make him enigmatic. Thus, even Jencks who is the "master of categorisations in architecture"⁷³⁵ is unable to pin him down:

Just call me Daniel Boone, Frank Gehry said to me after I had called him that and everything else I thought appropriate: the Industrial Adhocist, the father of the Botched Joint, the son of Bruce Goff, the Noble Savage of Santa Monica, the Leonardo of Galvanised Sheet-metal, the Malevich of Lighting

⁷³³ Colomina "Media Architect," in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 259

⁷³⁴ Colomina "Media Architect," in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 259

⁷³⁵ Colomina "Media Architect," in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 260

and Rodchenko of the Non-Sequitur...the Charlie Chaplin of Chain Link, the Over-Psychoanalysed Jewish Master Builder, the Zen Priest of the Unfinished Finish, the Martin Escher of Reverse Perspective and Impossible Space, the first Deconstructionist Architect, and so on. The problem with Frank ... is that many labels work. He is almost unclassifiable.⁷³⁶

There is no doubt that Gehry wants us to see many things, in a deliberately ambiguous expression that relies on “an attractive range of precooked readings that target every possible respondent, providing many enticing narratives, one appropriate for every occasion.”⁷³⁷ He is therefore the architect of the multiple responses that he gets from critics, both positive and negative. However, Gehry’s narratives are appealing because they are not presented as theories based on the established hierarchies of the architectural canon. Instead, they are a hybrid of intellectual savvy and performative “folksy stories” folded into a *conceptual felt* through which his architecture is “seen and not seen at the same time.”⁷³⁸ Arguably, such smooth narratives are part of a *surficial architectural strategy* that is “so far out of normal expectations that it defies traditional criticism.”⁷³⁹

6.3 CONCLUSION: SURFICIAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF SURFACE

The Bilbao Guggenheim Museum has achieved popular success, not only with the general public, but also amongst fellow architects.⁷⁴⁰ Moreover, much ink has been spilt in describing the role of tourism, brand culture, corporate investment and local and global politics that made the “Bilbao Effect” possible. While, there has been much hype and adoration for the project, there are also those who have taken a more critical approach towards Gehry’s exploitation of monumentality, spectacle

⁷³⁶ Charles Jencks, “Frank Gehry – The Deconstructionist,” *Art and Design*, vol. 4, no. 4, May 1985, p. 14

⁷³⁷ Colomina “Media Architect,” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 261

⁷³⁸ Colomina “Media Architect,” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 261

⁷³⁹ Philip Johnson, interview by Stanley Tigerman in “Building of the Quarter: The Gehry House, Per Voco,” *Archtype*, vol. 2, Spring 1979, p. 23, quoted in Colomina, “Media Architect” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, p. 260

⁷⁴⁰ Philip Johnson declared it as “the greatest building of our time.” Sverre Fehn, winner of the 1997 Pritzker Architecture Prize, called the building “fantastic.” See Lee, Denny, “Bilbao, Ten Years Later” *The New York Times*, published on 23 Sept. 2007 at <http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/> accessed on October 2008. Also See Guasch, Anna Maria, “Global Museums versus Local Artists: Paradoxes of Identity between Local and Global Understanding” in *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim*, pp. 185-202, p. 195

effects and the mass media. Amongst the critics, Foster remains the most consistent whose discontent with Gehry's museum covers a wide range of issues.

In comparing the BGM with Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum (a whitish building that can be called modernist) Foster argues that Gehry's design lacks "formal logic" or the "programmatic conceit" of Wright's creation. Moreover, the BGM collapses the dichotomy between the "duck" and "decorated shed"⁷⁴¹ and remains "tectonically obscure."⁷⁴² It is neither structure that follows the program nor one that symbolises the program, thus becoming a "decorated duck" which embodies the "most problematic aspects of both modern and postmodern architectures: the wilful monumentality of the first and the *faux* populism of the second."⁷⁴³ Foster associates Gehry's success and popularity with "spectacle-effects" and the seduction of an imagistic architecture that is "self-indulgent" and "arbitrary." He argues that Gehry's architecture "evokes an individuality that seems more exclusive than democratic"⁷⁴⁴ and rather than instigating civic engagement, the BGM and Gehry's other cultural centres "appear as sites of spectacular spectatorship, of touristic awe."⁷⁴⁵ Thus, Gehry's projects represent an elitist, self-indulgent and individualist artist who designs "out of the 'cultural logic' of advanced capitalism, in terms of its language of risk-taking and spectacle-effects."⁷⁴⁶ According to Foster the BGM not only represents an image, a seductive one-liner that symbolises the accumulation of capital, but it also represents "'an image accumulated to the point where it becomes a capital."⁷⁴⁷

That the BGM is successful at generating capital for the city is unquestionable and it is fair to assume that the building's spectacular monumentality is an important factor. The argument that Gehry's work after Bilbao represents a "detached," or "arbitrary" approach to "artistic expression" is also convincing. It seems after the success of BGM, Gehry has been unable to resist the

⁷⁴¹ Hal Foster writes: "As Gehry has privileged neither structure nor ornament, he seemed to transcend this opposition, but it is more accurate to say that he collapsed it, and often combined the formal duck with the decorated shed." Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 33

⁷⁴² Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, pp. 37

⁷⁴³ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, pp. 33-4

⁷⁴⁴ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁷⁴⁵ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁷⁴⁶ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 41

⁷⁴⁷ Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 41

pressures of clients and the industry, resulting in an indifferent replication of the Bilbao formula in other projects that have not been as successful.⁷⁴⁸

Furthermore, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum seems to possess characteristics that are at odds with each other. For example, some of the gallery spaces inside are rectilinear rooms that have none of the smooth qualities of the exterior. This is also evident outside in the disparity between the boxy forms of the southern elevation facing the city and the flowing titanium forms that face the river. These contrasting elements seem to suggest that the BGM is a cautious and a self-conscious attempt at breaking new ground that continuously refers back to the familiar.⁷⁴⁹ In this sense, the building is not perfectly smooth. (See figure 6.21)

Yet, smoothness does not necessitate homogeneity. As Deleuze and Guattari suggested, smooth space can be found in both felt and patchwork, the latter expressing the heterogeneous manifestation of the concept.⁷⁵⁰ Though the titanium surfaces of the BGM operate like felt (being an intricate entanglement of abstract lines of thought into a smooth and pliable surface), the project in its entirety operates like patchwork by stitching together heterogeneous concepts that extend in different trajectories. The BGM represents a design ethos that resists entrapment by established frameworks such as “duck” or “decorated shed.” It therefore follows a strategy that goes beyond familiar processes of production (the making of fabric) that are characterized by well-defined, oppositional lines of thought (vertical vs. horizontal) and the constraint of extending in only one direction.

Critics of the museum often highlight the disparity between the exterior and the interior, or in other words, the spectacular appearance of the building from the outside and its internal function as a museum of art. Foster defined this as a lack of programmatic conceit, which is echoed by Lee H. Skolnick who argues that the

⁷⁴⁸ In fact much of Gehry’s recent work has caused protests by local residents or legal retaliation by clients. See the Atlantic Yards project in New York City, which is currently in progress, in which there is much opposition to Gehry’s contributions. Also, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has recently filed a negligence suit against Gehry, for design flaws in Stata Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which have resulted in leaks, masonry cracks, mould, and drainage overflow, soon after the building’s unveiling. See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7082678.stm> accessed on 21 Feb. 2009.

⁷⁴⁹ Gehry recollected in a November 1996 interview: “I always go back to a base of rectangles and boxes and the simplest idea, look at it, and then distort again from it.” Coosje Van Bruggen, “Towards a Unity of Opposites: A Mere Building Versus Sculptural Architecture” in *Frank O. Gehry, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao*, pp. 95-134, P. 115

⁷⁵⁰ See chapter five of the thesis, especially “5.3.2 From Lack to Act: “Desiring Machines” and Smooth Processes of Production” and figure 5.6.

expressive power of the exterior forms does not qualify them, or the interior spaces they enclose as “the most beneficial spaces to display art.”⁷⁵¹ To illustrate this point, Skolnick presents Utzon’s Sydney Opera House as an example of an iconic building whose forms “manage to refer to both the sails of the harbour and to the theme of music, while having the added advantages of clearly delineating the concert halls and offering them notably euphonic acoustics.”⁷⁵² Skolnick goes on to present Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin (2001) as an example of an iconic museum whose conceptual exploration affects both exterior forms and interior spaces.⁷⁵³

Wright’s Guggenheim, Utzon’s Opera House and Liebeskind’s Jewish Museum follow unique concepts (architectural promenade, acoustic shell, traumatic void) that affect every aspect of the building, thus achieving a conceptual directness that is evident in their iconic exteriors and their distinctive interior spaces.⁷⁵⁴ Gehry’s BGM on the other hand seems to include three different ideas in a building whose conceptual genesis seems slippery. The diversity of architectural approaches is not only evident in the external forms (box, wave, fish) but also in the different surface materials (render, titanium, sandstone) and even the gallery spaces (permanent, temporary, resident). It is at the central atrium that these different ideas, surfaces and spaces come together in a dynamic juxtaposition (reminiscent of a sculptor’s studio), which indicates that the process of design has not reached a comforting equilibrium.

⁷⁵¹ Lee H. Skolnick writes: “In Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, the light, curvilinear forms of walls and roofs have been said to evoke sailing ships on the water, and are themselves sculpturally expressive. Further, they refer to Bilbao’s geographical position and historical role as a port city. This does not necessarily qualify them, or the interior spaces they enclose, as the most beneficial places to display art.” Lee H. Skolnick, “Towards a New Museum Architecture: Narrative and Representation” in *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibition*, edited by Suzanne McLeod, Routledge, New York, 2005, pp. 118-133, p. 121

⁷⁵² Skolnick, “Towards a New Museum Architecture: Narrative and Representation,” p. 121

⁷⁵³ Skolnick writes: “Although not universally revered, its jagged, slashing design is unquestionably successful at evoking the wrenching, irrational and disorienting chaos of the Holocaust on the most visceral and experiential level. Though it has gained the perhaps ignominious distinction of either obviating the need for actual exhibitions, or at least making them notoriously difficult to mount in its highly architecturally specific spaces, at least these spaces are interpretive of the subject hand rather than something completely unrelated.” Skolnick, “Towards a New Museum Architecture: Narrative and Representation,” p. 124

⁷⁵⁴ In the first project, it is a spiral atrium that offers a theatrical architectural promenade through which the artwork is experienced. In the second project, the concrete shells manage the internal acoustics of the concert hall, while in the final project (Libeskind’s museum) disorienting spaces and lonely voids offer an experience of the horrors of the museum subject: the Holocaust.

Chapter Six: Surficial Architecture: The Case of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum – Conclusions: Surficial Philosophy and the Architecture of Surface

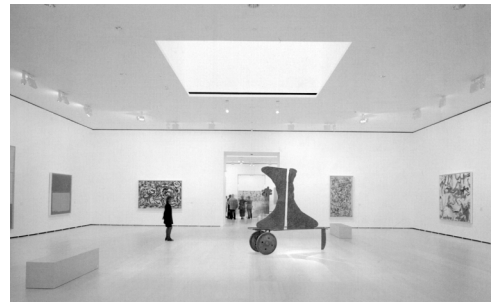
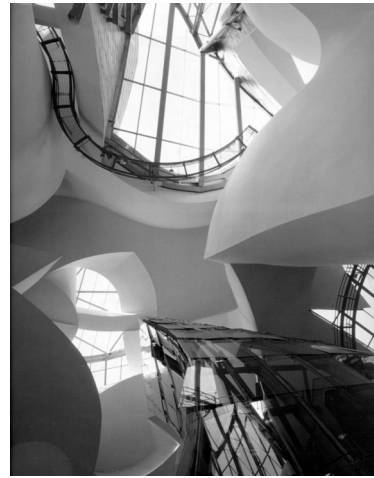


Figure 6.21: The three different architectural strategies juxtaposed together in the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Sources: the author.

Critics associate this with a lack of formal logic, programmatic conceit or tectonic clarity. However, this thesis argues that the uneasy juxtaposition of ideas in the BGM is indicative of a smooth approach to architectural design and collaboration, which allows for a multitude of different interpretations. The flowing forms of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum have been described as an expression of movement in architecture. Just like the fish that needs to be in constant movement to pass water over its gills and to survive (or even the aircrafts that need movement to stay airborne) Gehry's architecture necessitates movement. But this movement is not limited to formal expression since Gehry's design approach is one of movement between concepts and ideas, in a restless, slippery manner that never settles in one place.

Gehry's strategy requires a different movement of thought, one that does not look for clarity of expression, but rather the potential for different interpretations. It is true that not all of the museum's interior spaces offer a new way of experiencing art. But perhaps the BGM may outlast its current function and become a place of architectural pilgrimage, part of the great series of art works we preserve in our histories of architecture. Therefore, one can argue that the building is less about the relationship between form and function and more about the expression, communication and projection of (architectural) ideas, concepts and images of thought. It is the ambiguity of Gehry's architecture of surface exteriority that has caused the BGM to be a popular medium for image-ination and simultaneously a problematic project for critics who define it as tectonically and conceptually obscure.

The purpose of this study is neither to celebrate Gehry as the greatest living architect nor is it to prove that the BGM is one smooth architectural strategy. Instead, the thesis uses Gehry's building and various elements of his design strategy to problematize the established hierarchies that have dominated architectural thought.⁷⁵⁵ For example, in an effort to show that Gehry is not the "Greatest Living Artist"⁷⁵⁶ Foster punctures the surfaces and ruptures the skin, suggesting that the BGM has somehow managed to deceive us. Such evaluations indicate a familiar model of thought based on Platonic transcendence, in which image is an imitation,

⁷⁵⁵ Here, architectural thought also refers to architectural theory, praxis and criticism.

⁷⁵⁶ This statement marks the very point from which Foster begins his analysis or critic of Gehry's work.

spectacle is a mere effect and skin hides structure. In these models of thought the pronounced bifurcation between categories is followed by a rigid hierarchy that determines the value of things.

Throughout the preceding chapters, this thesis has attempted to offer a more affirmative criticality based on a non-perpendicular movement of thought that is argued to be more in tune with creative exploration. This alternative approach was given the name of *surficial thought* and was theorised by deploying alternative conceptions of surface, image and appearance as philosophical (and conceptual) tools, which in the case of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, become the primary elements of Gehry's architecture.

In the BGM, Gehry manages to collapse the dichotomy between "duck" and "decorated shed" and in so doing problematizes the very foundations of architectural theory. As was discussed earlier, even though the modernists were evidently preoccupied with style, they nonetheless reinforced the canonical hierarchical order that privileges natural materials, structure and space to ornament, surface and appearance. Frustrated by modernism's dogmas, the postmodernists followed the logic of "substitution,"⁷⁵⁷ expressed through the "decorated shed" concept that demanded more emphasis on visual communication. This was a Derridean "sure-play,"⁷⁵⁸ within the boundaries of tradition, which was "limited to the *substitution* of *given* and *existing*, *present*, pieces"⁷⁵⁹ and which refrained from unsettling architecture's established categories. Thus, many postmodernists (including Gehry) resorted to a reactionary approach, an *edgy* strategy that highlighted boundaries in order to exaggerate oppositional categories.⁷⁶⁰ In the case of the "decorated shed" concept, this dramatised difference is best exemplified by Herzog & de Meuron's Eberswalde Technical School Library (Germany, 1999) in which the "shed" is the simplest architectural box, while the "decoration" is the most superficial image repeated endlessly, neither having any effect on each other.

⁷⁵⁷ See Derrida's game: "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁷⁵⁸ Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁷⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁷⁶⁰ Foster argues that in comparison to his earlier "LA vernacular" style (exemplified by The Gehry House), Gehry's later work like the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum, "began to lose its edge." See Foster, *Design and Crime: and Other Diatribes*, p. 30.

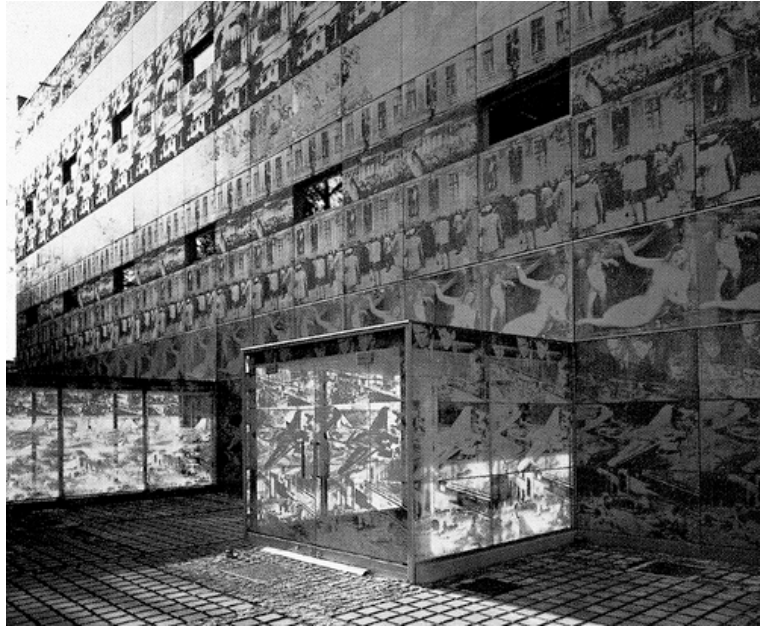


Figure 6.22: Eberswalde Technical School Library, Germany by Herzog & de Meuron (above) and Bilbao Guggenheim Museum by Frank Gehry. The former is the decorated shed par excellence, while the latter evolves the concept. In the Eberswalde library, image is superficial and it does not affect structure. In the BGM however, image is *surficial* since it becomes architecture affecting “structure” and the spaces inside.

Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/21158327@N05/2162926386>

In certain aspects of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum however, difference exists within a smooth mixture, which evokes Deleuze and Guattari's approach to the unsettling of established traditions. There are no longer clear boundaries between categories, only expansive spaces of becoming. If in the Eberswalde Library image does not affect structure, and structure is unhampered by image, in the BGM image *becomes* architecture affecting and deforming structure and the spaces inside. While the Eberswalde Library, expresses difference between two autonomous categories (ornament vs structure) the BGM expresses difference in hybridity, where the observer is faced with a multiplicity of images and categories that are latent within the surfaces of the building. This thesis argues that Gehry's museum evokes and includes the modernist metaphors of design (clothing, cladding, clarity), the postmodernist equivalents (duck, decorated shed, complexity) and more general notions of aura, image, spectacle and simulation in a pliable whole that creates an auratic complexity and a seductive expressivity. It is the phenomenal transparency of this supple approach to architecture that causes unease amongst critics who equate it with obscurity.

Gehry's museum communicates through a primitive, yet simultaneously alien mode of expression, which includes intuition, illusion and simulation in the construction of what Jencks calls an "*enigmatic signifier*."⁷⁶¹ In such communication clarity is not the central goal, because the origin and the original do not form the focal point. Instead the emphasis lies on the *process*, those of expression, interpretation and simulation. In this form of communication, one enjoys the journey through the thickness of metaphorical and implicit propositions that create a more phenomenal expression of sense, rather than literal (or ironic) communication of meaning or fact.⁷⁶² This expression is primitive, alien and in many ways at odds with the culture of critical commentary. However, it is also highly relevant and in tune with postmodern aspirations of plurality, as it manages to incorporate complexity and diversity within a series of seemingly simple gestures.

What is proposed here is that the BGM's success is not so much the consequence of "spectacle effects," but rather the rich interpretative potential

⁷⁶¹ Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 62

⁷⁶² See Deleuze's definition of sense and its association with the Möbius Strip, elaborated in section "5.3.1 From Surface to *Surfacing*: Events, Propositions and the Expression of Sense" in chapter five of this thesis.

offered by *simulative virtuality*.⁷⁶³ Foster borrows Debord's formulation of the spectacle as "autonomous image," "a moment of the false"⁷⁶⁴ which hides lived reality and develops an attitude of "passive acceptance" in the spectator.⁷⁶⁵ This is also the Platonic definition of the image as a *copy* of reality, an inferior imitation that hides, denatures or masks the absence of reality, or as Baudrillard argues eventually severs its relationship with reality altogether. Such conceptions of image results in nihilism and nostalgia since "The spectator's consciousness," is argued to be "imprisoned in a flattened universe, bound by the screen of the spectacle behind which his life has been deported."⁷⁶⁶

There is no doubt that in the contemporary condition capital has turned into image and image has turned into capital. However, to reduce the spectator to a deceived prisoner of the image would be to underestimate humanity and to neglect the potential of images, not only as powerful modes of visual communication central to the progress of civilisations, but also as *mediums* that create a new reality, a new space of operation. Thus, it is not so much that image masks reality (Plato, Debord, Baudrillard) or that reality is the play of image-signifiers with the true original reality being an impossible quasi-transcendental concept (Derrida). Instead, all such categories (image, reality, signifier, signified) are already connected by what is common to them all: the fact that they are all different aspects of reality.

This thesis therefore argues that the success of Gehry's architecture is tied to an instinctive appreciation of the simulative image, which is not separate from reality, rather it is a different aspect of reality, accessed via *imag[e]ination*. Such a definition of image echoes Deleuze's conception which it them "a positive power," in order to collapse the traditional Platonic hierarchies between "*the original and the copy, the model and the reproduction*"⁷⁶⁷ and catalyse new modes of *production* and *re-production*.

⁷⁶³ Where simulation and virtuality follow the Deleuzian definition.

⁷⁶⁴ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 9

⁷⁶⁵ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 12

⁷⁶⁶ Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 218

⁷⁶⁷ Deleuze, "Plato and the Simulacrum" in *The Logic of Sense*, p. 262



Figure 6.23: In the exteriority of surficial architecture there is nothing to hide, which is why both “skin” and “structure” are on theatrical display, whether “inside” or “outside.” Bilbao Guggenheim Museum. Source: the author.

PART THREE

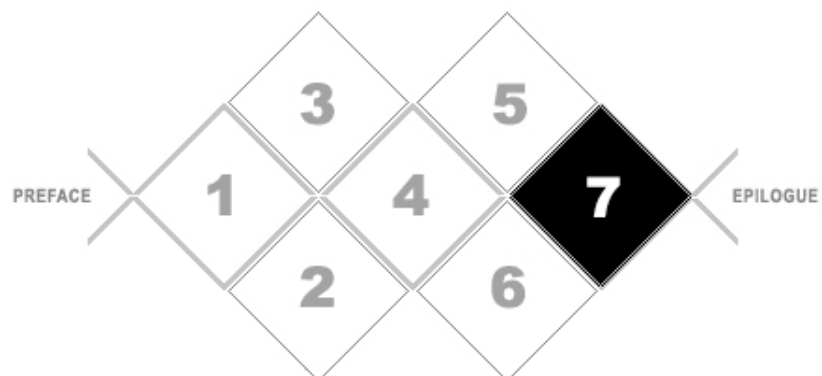
REVIEW OF THE PROPOSITION

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION: EXPLORING SURFACE AS MEDIUM

EPILOGUE

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: EXPLORING SURFACE AS *MEDIUM*



*"Today it is a question of constructing surfaces under the sky rather than volumes under the sun."*⁷⁶⁸

Manuel Gausa

*"I don't expect ideas from critics. They come from poets and painters and novelists and even playwrights..."*⁷⁶⁹

Susan Sontag

⁷⁶⁸ Manuel Gausa, *The Metapolis Dictionary of Advanced Architecture*, 2003, p. 577

⁷⁶⁹ Excerpt from an interview of Susan Sontag in February 1977 published in *PAJ – A Journal of Performance and Art* 27, 2, (2005) p.3

7.1 PREAMBLE TO A HYPOTHESIS

The evolution of postmodernist theory in conjunction with the rapid development of new technologies has had an important role in the transformation of physical and theoretical boundaries. In early twentieth century, modernist theory was inspired by industrial technologies of the time. In their quest for a new style, Le Corbusier and other pioneers of modernism drew inspiration from industrial silos, ships, aeroplanes, automobiles and other machinic assemblages that represented new technology and progress. The reduction of ornament and a conceptual emphasis on function and efficiency were legacies of the machine metaphor, which followed an ordered logic and strict rules of operation to guarantee maximum efficiency and economy.⁷⁷⁰

The development of postmodern theories in the second half of twentieth century was simultaneous to the rapid advancement of communication technology, where the increasing production and reproduction of visual phenomena inspired new metaphors. If early twentieth century was the "Industrial Age," the advent of new technologies of mass communication and electronic computation led many to consider late twentieth century as the "Information Age," in which capitalism transforms to "late-capitalism" through the transfer of information.

In recent decades, computers have provided a platform upon which different disciplines mix. In most societies the "machine for living in"⁷⁷¹ is challenged by digital networks and virtual reality environments in which images, sounds and texts flow. No longer bound to their physical locations, "users" are able to access information and experience distant events through the Internet - the global phenomenon that has spawned multi-million dollar companies by defying traditional cultural and national boundaries. Time magazine's selection of

⁷⁷⁰ Much of these concepts could be found in the theoretical discourse promoting the International Style of early twentieth century which promised a modern future inspired by new industrial technologies.

⁷⁷¹ "The house is a machine for living in." Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, translated as *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells, The Architectural Press, London, 1987, p. 100

YouTube.com, as the best invention of 2006 clearly demonstrates the shift from the old values of the Industrial Age to those of the new Information Age.⁷⁷²

The success of Google,⁷⁷³ Facebook,⁷⁷⁴ Second Life⁷⁷⁵ or online multiplayer gaming networks has demonstrated the popularity of such virtual sites and alternative realities, the power of new media and digital technologies, and their significance for the generation of new economies. Thus, in this context of rhizomatic networks⁷⁷⁶ and information flow, notions of machinic order are increasingly challenged, while traditional concepts of boundary, site, context, place and home have become subject to further questioning.

For many such new technological developments are based on phenomena that are intangible or virtual as opposed to real. The withering of aura, the accumulation of the spectacle, the precession of simulacra are all concepts that warn against false appearances and a hallucinatory hyperreality that destroys lived reality. Throughout the preceding chapters, this thesis has argued that such theoretical reflections on the contemporary media saturated condition share a common theme: the *binary hierarchical separation* of image from reality. It has been demonstrated how such theories follow a traditional metaphysical model categorising images as artificial *copies* of a natural reality that is primary and original.⁷⁷⁷ Thus, in these theories, images and the new technologies that facilitate their (re)productions, operate much like the walls of Plato's cave, imprisoning humanity in a shadowy world of disillusionment.

⁷⁷² See "Time Best Inventions 2006" available at: <http://www.time.com/time/2006/techguide/bestinventions/inventions/youtube.html> accessed 20th March 2009.

⁷⁷³ Google.com is an online search engine that generates almost all of its revenue through advertising related to Internet search, e-mail, online mapping, social networking, and video sharing services.

⁷⁷⁴ Facebook.com is a free-access social networking website that currently has more than 175 million active users worldwide. Like Google, Facebook generates revenue from advertising. See Facebook statistics <http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics> accessed January 17th 2009.

⁷⁷⁵ Second Life is a virtual world that allows its users to explore and interact with each other through avatars. Residents are also allowed to create and trade virtual property with each other. See http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Main_Page accessed 20th March 2009.

⁷⁷⁶ These digital networks form a rhizomatic system that is difficult to control. It is not so much a tree structure with clear lines of lineage, but what Deleuze and Guattari call a rhizome as a complex network that represents a chaotic complexity that abolishes hierarchy. See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 7-25

⁷⁷⁷ See Plato's elaboration on the difference between image and appearance in, *Sophist*, pp. 82-3

This familiar model of thought is recognisable by the clear demarcation of inside from outside by the opaque boundary that not only acts as a barrier, but also facilitates false appearances. The resultant philosophical approach is therefore characterized by a distinct hierarchical order and a *perpendicular* movement of thought that desires to penetrate or surpass *marginal* categories in order to arrive at the essence of things.

In a similar tone, much criticism of the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum revolves around the argument that the building is designed for the spectacular image, which is destined for media reproduction. The spectacle is defined as an image that masks and hides reality, while image is defined as an inauthentic copy of reality. Consequently, the BGM is accused of benefiting from illusory fascination since its form does not follow function, context, structure or any structural logic. In other words, the BGM is superficial architecture, which is at best detached from ordinary reality, or in worst-case scenario, a hallucinatory image that has no relationship with reality whatsoever.

The deconstruction of such theories would not only challenge the definitions of terms, but it would also attempt to question what we mean by the “function” of architecture. In this way, this thesis has been deconstructive to some extent, arguing that image-making is in fact, an important function of architectural design, especially in the current context of intensive visual production. In a different approach however, this thesis has explored Deleuze’s strategy for the overcoming of traditional models of thought. Inspired by an alternative conception of the simulacrum, this thesis has proposed that image production is not as Plato would define “imitation art,” belonging to an act of copying (or reproduction) of an ordinary reality, but instead, further production or *re-production* that creates a different reality of its own.

From this point of view, image-making is not a secondary task in comparison to structural design, but rather as Semper implied, an essential and ordinary element of architectural design. It follows then that designing for reproduction in magazines and mass media is not superficial manipulation, but a positive participation in a different reality that is produced by images and new media technologies. An architecture that is sensitive to such intricacies would not refrain from participation within production of the images (of thought, of architecture, of future actualities). Such architecture might adopt a primitive

approach to appeal to a wider audience, but this primitivity is not to be confused with naivety or backwardness. Instead, this primitivity is in tune with the postmodern agenda of opening up architecture to the public and removing it from its pedestal as high art. Such architecture would also be more sympathetic and affirmative of the rapidly transforming socio-technological condition with all the possibilities that it has to offer. This thesis proposes that Gehry's Bilbao Guggenheim Museum displays such nomadic primitivity, which challenges Platonic models of thought by questioning their perpendicular movement against surfaces. In other words, the BGM demands a surficial approach to architecture in which surfaces are not barriers to seeing and the skin is not secondary to structure. Instead, seeing is *haptic* and surface *becomes* architecture.

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE THESIS

In the preceding chapters the thesis has deployed theories about ornament and image in order to trace the effects of the familiar, Platonic model of thought on the treatment of surfaces and their effects in architectural theory. It has been argued that this traditional model of thought is based on the opposition between inside and outside and the boundary that acts as a visual barrier and facilitates false appearances. Thus, "the analogy of the cave" continues to influence attitudes towards surfaces, images and appearances in architecture.

In Part One, the thesis demonstrated that the early modernist theory transformed Semper's "textile wall" into a clothed wall or a tattooed wall, *covered* by an excessive layer that masked the body of architecture. Semper associated the ornate textile with weaving, the primitive demarcation of space and the expression of art and culture, while ornament was a representation of the textile wall as the originary architectural element. However, by associating the textile with clothing or the tattoo, Loos theorised the ornamental layer as a superfluous mask that had a secondary function in architecture. Thus, in Loos's model ornament represented a superficial layer associated with fleeting fashions or "degenerate" primitivism.⁷⁷⁸

⁷⁷⁸ See section 2.1 of the thesis entitled "Masking Surfaces: "Clothed" Structures and the "Decorated Shed"

The discussion of ornament was also influential for the generation of postmodern theory in architecture. As a reaction to “form follows function”⁷⁷⁹ and the deprecatory associations of ornament with crime,⁷⁸⁰ Venturi et al, (1977) proposed “decorated shed”⁷⁸¹ concept that signalled a shift from the modernists’ notions of cladding and style to the postmodernist notions of screen and communication. This was an attempt to allow architecture to participate freely in the visual economy of signs, billboards and screens of mass media that were becoming symbols of capitalism.

Though the “decorated shed” concept allowed greater freedom of surface expression, it nevertheless maintained, if not exaggerated the separation between “ornament” and “structure” as instigated by the modernist metaphors of clothing and cladding. Since the postmodernists promoted the decoration of construction but not the construction of decoration,⁷⁸² in many postmodern projects ornamentation was merely *applied* to structures that rarely ventured beyond the shed concept. Consequently, visual expression became susceptible to accusations of superficiality and excess, and for many, such postmodern projects were in fact modernist buildings in “pastiche” disguise, demonstrating a reductive simplicity of communication, or regurgitation of old motifs.⁷⁸³

In the discourse of “image” similar issues of masking, covering and hiding was traced. For example, it was demonstrated how Benjamin celebrated the technological penetration of the false auratic shell of a work of art. Benjamin attributed this breakthrough to the mass reproduction of the image, captured and broadcast via photography and film. However, as technologies of mass imagery advanced, theorists such as Debord and Baudrillard began to theorise images as inauthentic reproductions, i.e. false appearances that mask reality and imprison humanity in a “speculative universe” or a “hyperreality.” For these theorists,

⁷⁷⁹ The origins of this phrase can be traced to Louis Sullivan who wrote, “form ever follows function.” See Louis Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Artistically Considered” published Lippincott’s Magazine, vol. 57, March 1896, pp. 403-9. The electronic version can be accessed at <http://academics.triton.edu/faculty/fheitzman/tallofficebuilding.html> accessed 20th March 2009.

⁷⁸⁰ See Loos, “Ornament and Crime (1908)” in *Crime and Ornament, The Arts and Popular Culture in the Shadow of Adolf Loos*, pp. 29-36.

⁷⁸¹ See Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 87

⁷⁸² Venturi et al., *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, p. 163

⁷⁸³ Charles Moore’s Piazza d’Italia (1978) and Michael Graves’ Portland Public Service Building (1982) are examples of this.

separation became a key concept: separation of image from the real, or the separation of individual from society. The consequences of this separation were the denaturing or the destruction of reality.

This thesis has argued that in both discourses of ornament and image, surfaces are central to the deceptive act: they either mask aspects of reality, or they facilitate illusionary appearances that deviate from reality. Thus, ornament is considered superfluous, image is regarded as inauthentic, and both these concepts are associated with surfaces that deny access to reality. It has been argued that surfaces and their effects suffer from a traditional transcendental hierarchy that considers reality as existing *behind* or *beyond* images and appearances. This transcendental hierarchy was traced back to Plato's dialogues, particularly the "allegory of the cave"⁷⁸⁴ which theorised the familiar attitudes towards surfaces as barriers to visual perception, and surface effects as *shadowy* representations of an inaccessible reality. An analysis of Plato's allegory also revealed the common belief that man-made effects are not to be trusted as they deviate from their natural origins. Yet, the proliferation of man-made phenomena continues with greater speeds, where in the current technological world, more time is devoted to interaction with (and through) "artificialities" and "virtualities" that constitute much of the contemporary world.

In order to find an alternative approach to surface, image and appearance, a reconsideration of traditional models of thought became inevitable. This led to the "closure" of Platonic thought through the writings of Jacques Derrida whose work follows a series of contributions by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger.⁷⁸⁵ Derrida's "deconstruction" destabilises the traditional hierarchies of Platonic thought by demonstrating that what is called "origin," "centre," or "structure," is in fact another signifier in a chain of signifiers that continuously defer meaning. This deferral in language necessitates that origin is "put under erasure," since its originality has become questionable. Thus, every discourse is subject to slippage and must be deconstructed to expose its "aporias."

⁷⁸⁴ Plato, *Republic*, (514a-520a)

⁷⁸⁵ Derrida's work is of particular importance to contemporary architecture, not only because of the popularity of his writings amongst architects and designers, but also because since the 1980s, deconstruction has developed into a popular architectural style, often referred to as "Deconstructivist Architecture." See Phillip Johnson & Mark Wigley, *Deconstructivist Architecture: The Museum of Modern Art, New York*, Little Brown and Company, 1988

Such an overcoming of metaphysics through language relies on the absence of an absolute signified. This absence produces differing consequences. On the one hand, deconstruction allows further interpretations within traditional metaphysics, not by producing more metaphysics, but by unravelling the intricacies of what has been written before. This was argued to be context-breaking and an anticipation of emergence through a re-reading of existing works.⁷⁸⁶ On the other hand, deconstruction can lead to negative perfectionism: “deconstructing everything in the name of the undeconstructable,” waiting for a true signified that will never come.⁷⁸⁷ In the absence of “non-origin,”⁷⁸⁸ the erasure of the signified leads to the uninhibited play of the signifier, in which the “death of the author”⁷⁸⁹ and the deferral of meaning gives license to superficiality. For Baudrillard’s this is precisely what occurs in “hyperreality” where the dissemination of autonomous images (simulacra) destroys both meaning and reality. If Derrida’s placing of the origin under erasure (*sous rature*) “demands the surface of the text,”⁷⁹⁰ Baudrillard’s hyperreality flattens reality onto the superficial image in “an implosion of meaning.”⁷⁹¹ In this theory, the transcendental hierarchy between image and reality collapses onto the surface, but this flattening is considered an undesirable event in which reality is destroyed in the process. Thus, hyperreality becomes a highly *nostalgic* and pessimistic theorisation of the contemporary condition, which longs for Platonic Ideas.⁷⁹²

This thesis has argued that the themes of superficiality and inauthenticity in the discourses of ornament and image are the effects of a traditional model of thought in which essence exists beyond surface appearances. The “closure” of this metaphysics through deconstruction, exploits “sure play”⁷⁹³ and “substitution”⁷⁹⁴ which occurs within the frameworks set up by the tradition. However, sure play cannot escape the necessity of (a transcendent) origin imposed by traditional

⁷⁸⁶ As Derrida suggests “Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated.” Derrida, “Différance” in *Margins of Philosophy*, p. 329

⁷⁸⁷ See Caputo, “Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)”, p. 8

⁷⁸⁸ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 61

⁷⁸⁹ See Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, pp. 142-148

⁷⁹⁰ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18

⁷⁹¹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 31

⁷⁹² See section 2.2.3 of the thesis: “The Autonomy of the Image: Simulation and “Hyperreality””

⁷⁹³ See section “3.2.1 Play, Différance and Writing”

⁷⁹⁴ See section “3.2.1 Play, Différance and Writing”

frameworks, leading to the conceptions of an impossible “non-origin” which acts as a *quasi-transcendental* concept. The impossibility of this quasi-transcendental non-origin in a metaphysical framework that requires its presence catalyses nihilistic theories (like Baudrillard’s), which declare the destruction of reality and the “artificial perfection of the sign.”⁷⁹⁵ This in turn leads to a pessimistic theorisation of the contemporary condition as a superficial and hallucinatory world facilitated by modern media technologies in which artificial signs and images have become “murderers of the real.”⁷⁹⁶

This thesis proposes that another approach is possible, which rather than limiting play to the deconstruction of traditional models, (i.e. “limited to the *substitution of given and existing, present, pieces,*”⁷⁹⁷) begins to create new models of thought, which could simply be a transformation of previous ones, or a reconstruction of present pieces. This new approach follows the view that metaphysics is not a homogenous corpus that is dying (or coming to a closure) but instead a heterogeneous “Body without Organs”⁷⁹⁸ that is in continuous *transmutation*. Consequently, the “overcoming” of Platonism does not necessitate the end of metaphysics, rather *the end of Plato’s metaphysics*, which must be replaced with other models of thought.⁷⁹⁹ In this philosophical approach, creative productivity becomes an essential element of a process, which is particularly useful for “thought and art.”⁸⁰⁰ Thus, the overcoming of Platonism does not signal the implosion of meaning onto the superficial surface, but rather the *explosion of sense* across the surficial surface.

Following this trajectory in relation to traditional metaphysics, Part Two of this thesis has proposed that surface can be used to create an alternative model of thought that yields a different philosophical approach to images and appearances.

⁷⁹⁵ Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 94

⁷⁹⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 5

⁷⁹⁷ Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” *Writing and Difference*, p. 292

⁷⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari borrow the term from Antonin Artaud’s radio play (1947): “When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.” Artaud, “To Have Done with the Judgment of God” in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, p. 571

⁷⁹⁹ In Smith’s words, “if Derrida sets out to undo metaphysics, Deleuze sets out simply to *do* metaphysics” because there are latent potentials in metaphysics that have not yet been actualised. Smith, “Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence” in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, p. 50

⁸⁰⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 60

This necessitated further inquiry into the very definition of surface, which was pursued using Stroll's exhaustive analysis of the term in the English language. Stroll's work demonstrated that there is not one answer to the question "What is surface?" as this definition would not be able to accommodate the various usages of the term in everyday language. This is because even though surface is a boundary term, "the conception of being a boundary is ambiguous in exactly the way that the conception of being surface is" and therefore, "We shall have to live with this result."⁸⁰¹

However, it has been argued that the ambiguity of boundary and surface can be explored and exploited. In other words, if an inquiry into the nature of surface leads to a realisation that the term cannot be reduced to one theory or conception, it also means that surface can be thought of in different ways, each with its own latent potential. This is not to say that the term is so malleable that it becomes meaningless, rather that surface is a *generative concept* with important implications for epistemology and everyday interaction with the world.

In the absence of a comprehensive conception of surface, or a complete theory of visual perception, an alternative approach towards theory becomes necessary. The thesis assumes one such approach that does not expect theories to define reality in an impossible clarity, but instead, by accepting them as conceptual constructs, anticipates further thought, exploration and analysis. From this point of view, falsifiability of theories does not indicate their superfluity, but rather their *temporal zone of operation* within the evolutionary continuum of thought pushed forward by complimentary processes of testing and experimentation. Perhaps reality cannot be contained within any one theory, however, theories remain necessary for interaction with the complexity of reality. Consequently, this thesis has attempted to shift the emphasis from *definition* to *proposition*, in order to arrive at a new interpretation of surface that would help with the development of traditional models of thought.

Although Stroll concludes that there is no single definition of surface, he nonetheless suggests four different conceptions of surface. This thesis highlights the "ordinary person's view" (OS)⁸⁰² and the "scientific" conception (SS)⁸⁰³ in order to

⁸⁰¹ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 64

⁸⁰² The ordinary person's conception of surface ("OS view") proposes a more substantial definition of surface as the outer layer that can be heterogeneous to the rest of the object, but

argue that some “common-sense” conceptions allow surface to be defined by its thickness (not thinness) and as a spatial topography of exploration rather than a rigid line of separation. Moreover, such conceptions allow heterogeneous layers (like paint or patina) to be considered as the conceptual continuation of the object, rather than a foreign layer. Thus, “ornament,” “cladding” or “skin” as concepts that suffer from a tacit detachability from the primary elements of architecture, can in fact be theorised as the surfaces of architecture. This conception would allow such terms to possess a more continuous conceptual relationship (i.e. an originary connectedness) with the architectural object.

It is by appropriating these conceptions that the thesis proposes surface as a model of thought that generates a non-hierarchical approach towards ornament, image and appearance. By combining Stroll’s “physical” conceptions with Gibson’s “theory of surface layout,”⁸⁰⁴ this thesis proposes an understanding of surface that does not define it as a masking barrier (as depicted in the Platonic cave) but as the *facilitator of seeing*, that is not depthless superficiality (as depicted in Baudrillard’s hyperreality), rather a thick surficial system, within which diversity and difference proliferate. If traditional metaphysical models define surface as a line of separation and its effects as marginal categories, the proposed conception of surface considers it as *medium*: a means to an end and an in-between milieu that is more than a “logical limit or conceptual limit”⁸⁰⁵ of a category, entity or object. In this conception, surface is less superficial (thin, shallow, insubstantial and outer), and more *surficial*, belonging to the Earth as the “plane of immanence” that lies in-between the height of ideals and the depths of essence. In the resultant epistemological position, the

which conceptually, is a continuation of the object. In such a conception, surface possesses depth: an essential thickness for physical operations and transformations to occur upon and within it. Since the OS conception includes paints and patina as parts of the object, the definition of surface acknowledges the appearance of the object as part of its reality and not as a covering layer that is foreign or secondary to the object. See section “4.1.2” of the thesis entitled “Minimal or Arbitrary Thicknesses of Physical Conceptions.”

⁸⁰³ The scientific conception of surface (the SS view) suggests a *surficial* understanding of the term, where surfaces are viewed as complex topographical systems. In this conception every physical entity has a surface that can be analyzed and studied (even gases, and animate objects like humans), but more importantly, surface is treated as an expansive landscape, which can be explored through contemporary technologies. The scientific conception allows movement in scale, which offers explorations beyond what meets the naked eye. Although in this conception surface has *minimal thickness*, it is nonetheless a three dimensional entity and a substantial layer, with physical properties, upon which physical operations can be performed. See section “4.1.2” of the thesis entitled “Minimal or Arbitrary Thicknesses of Physical Conceptions.”

⁸⁰⁴ See section 4.2.3 of the thesis.

⁸⁰⁵ Stroll, *Surfaces*, p. 46

traditional penetration of surface (to uncover a deep and hidden reality) transforms to surface exploration since depth is either thickness or an effect of surface layout. In this model of thought, emphasis shifts from surface/depth opposition to an exploration of *surface/surface relationships*.

There are many conceptions of surface, but all define it as a boundary condition where difference becomes apparent. If shadows and images are surface-less phenomena, they are nonetheless, *surface phenomena*: dependent on surfaces for their existence. It is therefore argued that surfaces are borderline *mediums* in which both “images” and “reality” become experientially apparent. This smooth process of becoming that occurs at the surface level is precisely why surface is both a noun *and* a verb.

Traditionally surface has been thinned-out in favour of depth that opposes it, while surface phenomena (shadows, images, and ornament) have been considered misleading copies of reality. An investigation of surface in everyday language revealed that it is possible to theorise surface by its thickness, i.e. possessing an originary depth. With this in mind, the thesis has utilised Deleuze’s philosophy to argue that it is also possible to consider surface effects as possessing a *different* reality that necessitates valuation according to its own immanent rules. In other words, by appropriating concepts such as the “fold,” “smooth space,” “plateau,” or “the sea” this thesis proposes a different strategy that maintains the distinction between image and reality, but abolishes their hierarchy *by placing them side-by-side within a smooth space of becoming*. It is argued that this alternative approach is based on the exteriority of the topological surface that abolishes transcendental hierarchy by flattening difference to the same plane of immanence. This “plane of consistency”⁸⁰⁶ possesses a complex fluidity in which multiplicities form non-hierarchical interconnections.⁸⁰⁷

⁸⁰⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 8-9

⁸⁰⁷ See section 5.2 of the thesis entitled: “From the Superficial to the *Surficial*: Complexity and Creativity”

Perpendicular Thought
Surface/Depth Opposition
Surface as Barrier-Boundary



Surficial Thought
Surface-Surface Relationships
Surface as Medium-Milieu



Figure 7.1: Two different movements of thought in relation to surface. Sources (of images):

<http://www.elcamino.edu/academics/naturalsciences/earth/images>

<http://www.doobybrain.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/02>

Combining surface with the concept of the fold creates a topological model that replaces the circularity of the Platonic model with the complexity of the Möbius Strip.⁸⁰⁸ If the former is characterized by the separation of the inside from the outside, the latter is defined by the continuous transformation of *the one side that becomes many sides*. In the familiar Platonic model, boundary is a barrier that facilitates false appearances, which in turn necessitates a *perpendicular* movement of thought that penetrates or surpasses “marginal” categories in order to arrive the “primary” essence of things. In the proposed model however, boundary is a *spatial topography* that promotes “nomadic” movements of thought that explore surficial conditions. This is an immanent approach to surfaces and their effects; a *surficial philosophy* inspired by Deleuzean univocity, which resists the ascent of Platonism to the height of Ideas or the descent of Nietzschean Philosophy to the depth of experience.

What does this surficial philosophical approach offer art and architecture? Firstly, by exploring the surface as the middle condition, surficial philosophy gives significance to marginal categories, inspiring a renewed interest in surface, ornament image, appearance, and any other concept that is subordinated to “primary” categories in architecture.⁸⁰⁹ Secondly, surficial philosophy changes

⁸⁰⁸ See sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.4 of the thesis.

⁸⁰⁹ This is closely related to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of “becoming minoritarian.”

processes of judgement. By comparing events to their own micro-histories, surficial philosophy avoids comparison to a transcendent model that resides in the distant past or in the distant future. This indicates a shift of emphasis from comparison to the origin (or the original) based on criteria of similitude, to an appreciation of originary difference, immanent potential and exploratory processes of becoming.

Moreover, surficial philosophy replaces rigid hierarchy with a more pliable approach that anticipates unexpected opportunities. This means that concepts are not contrasted in order to determine the fixed order of dominance or superiority based on notions of truth or originality. Instead, oppositional pairs continuously rise and fall as abstract machines break free from the circularity of traditional thought. The consequences for architectural theory are a liberation of creativity from established architectural hierarchies and a more positive attitude towards experimental endeavours, whilst simultaneously remaining open towards criticism, negation and death as important elements of progressive development.

7.3 RE-SURFACING THE PROPOSITION

In investigating the notion of surface in architecture, this thesis has in many ways, concerned itself with the problematization of boundary in contemporary culture. Boundary is often defined as a dividing line that marks the limits of categories. The etymology of the word can be traced back to Medieval Latin,¹ to words associated with limits of land and territory. A boundary line can be abstract or physical. A wall for example is a physical boundary that separates inside from outside. A surface on the other hand, can be physical or abstract, separating an object from another. In much the same way, a border can be a physical or abstract boundary separating nations, counties, and cities. There are also temporal boundaries that polarise life. Births, deaths and marriages, are classic examples of such temporal boundaries.⁸¹⁰

Sometimes the exact position of a boundary is unknown, contested or difficult to determine, leading to speculation, debate, or even war. The Israeli/Palestine conflict clearly demonstrates the problematic nature of boundary. In other scenarios, boundaries are difficult to determine in a different way. For

⁸¹⁰ See Online Oxford English Dictionary www.oed.com

example, where is the exact limit of the colour blue before it transforms into green? Where is the boundary between the upper and lower half of a homogenous sphere? Where does Mount Everest end?

Whether sharp or blurry, abstract or physical, boundaries are central to our common-sense approach to the world. Boundaries create order by stabilising difference, helping humanity deal with the complexity of reality. They also create frameworks within which institutions and disciplines operate, and they offer a zone of safety or clarity, a place of belonging and a sense of order that is both useful and comforting. In most cases, boundaries are solidified in order to determine roles and clarify rules of interaction.

Yet, boundaries are deeply problematic. Not only are they often difficult to determine or enforce, but also they are also capable of becoming rigid limits that hinder freedom, exploration and progress. Moreover, as regulators of interaction, they sometimes *hinder* interaction, the flow of ideas and disciplinary progress by remaining inflexible to evolutionary transformations. There is also the “border-line” syndrome with its negative connotations. Being associated with the boundary, with the margins of categories is not a desirable trait. In most nations, the majoritarian group holds “the centre of power” while the minoritarian categories occupy border-line conditions. To be near the boundary is often to be away from the hearth; the pivotal centre; the essence of things. It is also associated with a willingness to transgress, to go beyond limits in an act of rebellion, treachery or betrayal, since to cross borders is often to enter enemy territories. It is therefore not surprising that traditionally boundary conditions are defined as places of instability (war, chaos, contact with the unknown) and of illegal activity (drug-trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling). It is for these reasons that boundaries are fortified to prevent cross-contamination and to maintain the hierarchy of power and the order of things. In fact, throughout history, architecture has developed different solutions to the fortification of boundaries, being by its very definition concerned with the demarcation of space.

Throughout history, architecture has developed sophisticated styles for the design of boundary in its different manifestations: the architectural wall, surface, cladding, ornament and so on. The visual composition of such boundary lines is a significant aspect of architectural design, not only because it affects the quality of space, both inside and outside, but also because it relates architecture to its

contextual milieu. In classical times, architectural styles were often linked to a particular religion, culture or nation, and regulated by strict rules that were passed down from generations. Such conditions supplemented by the difficulty of free communication, necessitated faithfulness towards established traditions where the boundaries between different categories could be compared to a wall, a solidified limit that separated things (public/private, native/foreign, visible/intelligible and so on).⁸¹¹

This regard for traditional boundaries has always been in tension with another force, one that continues to question their legitimacy.⁸¹² Thus, if traditional thought respected boundaries, the modernists attempted to create new ones based on new ideologies. Though modernism is often associated with 20th Century, its principles are in fact centuries old.⁸¹³ All modernist movements propound a clean break from past traditions, but ironically remain tied to them in their opposition. In early twentieth century, modernists theorised a stripping of architecture's excessive ornamentation, only for it to be replaced by an ornamental "white walls" or the glittering glazed walls of the International Style.

The modernists advocated the penetration of traditional boundaries, only to form new ones, which were more in tune with contemporary times. While they succeeded in problematising established architectural theory and praxis, their manifestos did not eliminate rules and limits. Instead, they merely pushed them further into new territories. Thus, in modernist manifestos, *old barriers* transformed to *new frontiers* that were to be advanced beyond traditional lines. While the modernists were concerned with "pushing boundaries," the postmodernists problematized boundaries further by including both sides of it. Concerned with the disappearance of old boundaries, and the dominance of new ones, the postmodernists suggested "complexity" through irony and "double-coding." The postmodern manifesto allowed architects to engage popular culture whilst maintaining a relationship with their professional ethos. This was the effect of

⁸¹¹ See also metaphors and analogies in Plato's dialogues: for example, "metaphor of the sun," "analogy of the divided line" and "the allegory of the cave" In Plato's Republic, Translated by Robin Waterfield, (507b-509c), (509d-513e) and (514a-520a).

⁸¹² The authority of the wall has always been subverted by the opening: windows, doors, fissures, cracks etc.

⁸¹³ According to Charles Jencks, the first use of the term can be traced back to *Modernus*, used by 5th Century Christians who "claimed to be agents of progress fighting to overcome their corrupt predecessors." Jencks, *Critical Modernism: Where is Post-modernism Going?* p. 8

double coding facilitated partly by the decorated shed metaphor and partly by notions of irony as a “complex” form of communication.

This double-coded strategy signified a third approach to boundaries. If the traditional and the modernist conceptions defined boundaries as limits (barriers or frontiers) the postmodernist conception defined boundaries as *interfaces*. In the former transgression was forbidden, while in the latter it became an important aspect of the boundary condition. Thus, by redefining boundaries as interfaces, the postmodernists advocated complexity and inclusion rather than purity and exclusion.

Yet, throughout the preceding chapters, this thesis has argued that there is another approach possible, one that defines the boundary condition as a spatial topography that must be explored. This surficial approach relates to the Earth, to topology⁸¹⁴ and geology,⁸¹⁵ conjuring up a diversity of concepts, from the thickness of the crust to the “smooth” fluidity of the seas.⁸¹⁶ This approach is based on surficial philosophy, which takes inspiration from univocity,⁸¹⁷ and topology exploring the non-hierarchical difference across the “plane of immanence.”⁸¹⁸ This would be an alternative metaphysical model and an unfamiliar mode of thought, which not only offers greater flexibility towards new possibilities, but also offers more sympathy towards creativity.

In surficial thought, boundary is no longer an abstract line that is made sharper (thinner) and more rigid in order to stabilise categories. Instead, boundary is expanded to a continuous surface and an extensive topography that is explored in search of new hybrid categories. Difference is no longer in the opposition between the two sides of the boundary line, rather it occurs upon and within the surficial landscape of infinite transformations. This alternative model of thought necessitates

⁸¹⁴ Topology (from Greek Τοπολογία, from τόπος, “place”, and λόγος, “study”) is a major area of mathematics that has emerged through the development of concepts from geometry and set theory. Topology investigates geometries such as the Möbius strip, which has one surface and one edge! See Oxford English Dictionary.

⁸¹⁵ Geology (from Greek: γη, gē, “earth”; and λόγος, logos, “speech”) is the science and study of the solid and liquid matter that constitutes the Earth. Oxford English Dictionary.

⁸¹⁶ See Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptions of “smooth space” and “nomadic voyage” of thought in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 480-3

⁸¹⁷ Deleuze adapts the doctrine of univocity to claim that being is, univocally, difference. He modifies John Duns Scotus and Baruch Spinoza’s conceptions to highlight an alternative univocity, one that is not based on similarity, but on difference. See section 5.1 of the thesis.

⁸¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 41

a different movement of thought that is unlike the Platonic ascent to the height of “Ideas” (ideals) or the Nietzschean descent to the depths of experience (essence). Instead, surficial thought demands “lines of flight” inspired by a Deleuzean voyage across the smooth space of becoming (potential).⁸¹⁹

If the traditional boundary is concerned with exclusion, the modernists’ with expansion and the postmodernists’ with double-coded inclusion, a fourth conception of boundary is possible that explores hybridity and evolution. In this alternative approach, interdisciplinary interaction evolves into *transdisciplinary transmutation* since the boundary condition is no longer a line of separation, but an expansive surface of exploration, a non-hierarchical space of transformation. This is where *boundary becomes medium*: the middle condition that is a means to an end. The in-between gains a new significance not as marginal space of indifference, but as an active space of unexpected becoming. To engage with this new space is to explore difference without hierarchy “so as to let in a breath of air from the chaos that brings us the vision.”⁸²⁰ One way of exploring boundary as a medium is to exploit the image-scape of (new) media that traverse disciplines, countries, cultures, politics and so on. If the traditional definition of boundary evokes exclusion and inaccessibility where interaction does not threaten established categories, this alternative definition of boundary is based on inclusion and hybridity, where smooth processes of becoming develop new hybrid categories. In this context, disciplinarity dissolves into a liquid mixture, which catalyses unexpected discoveries.

In recent decades, new technologies have facilitated the becoming-other of architecture: becoming-virtual, becoming-sculpture, becoming-image, becoming-digital and so on. These developments require a shift of emphasis and an alternative movement of thought. No longer limited to the thinness of boundaries (the cross-sectional approach) architecture is gradually exploring the surface-scape of “borderline phenomena” and the forces of “new media.” It is therefore not surprising that in the current context of rapid visual production, questions of style, ornament, image and appearance have gained new significance.

⁸¹⁹ This nomadic voyage encourages becoming other: becoming minoritarian, becoming-molecular, becoming-animal, etc. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 291

⁸²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* p. 204

EPILOGUE

In many cultures and civilisations, the most significant architectural monuments are often distinguishable by their labour-intensive design necessitated by a greater attention to detail and a desire for beautification. In such architecture, surface ornamentation is responsible for conveying the building's significance, but more importantly, it often communicates a profound message, becoming both a reflection of the society's belief system and also a reinforcement of it through architectural surfaces. In the case of Iranian architecture, sacred buildings are particularly noticeable, not just because of their monumental scale, but also because of the exhaustive ornamentation that embellishes every surface of the building.

Such intricate ornamentation is often constructed using individual glazed tiles that are carefully arranged to create a highly symbolic representation of the divine garden. These ornate surfaces are comparable to those of digital screens, where small picture elements (pixels) create a virtual image, which signifies something beyond the limitations and specificities of materials and context. What the master builders strove to achieve using tiny mud tiles on the surfaces of architecture, modern technologies facilitate through digital screens. Nevertheless, the desire to communicate through architecture persists and it is only the tools that actualise such desires that have undergone major transformations.

The preference for geometric depiction instead of figurative representation in the traditional architecture of Iran was an indication of submission to God⁸²¹ and acceptance of divine superiority. Because the makers of such architecture considered their art as inherently different from what it alluded to, art was not judged according to how closely it resembled what it represented, but rather according to its own immanent rules. This indicates a different model of thought in which art becomes re-production (simulation, creative production) rather than reproduction (copy, imitation). This approach allows for the same generative principle to surface in a multitude of different manifestations.

⁸²¹ The Arabic term "islam" means "submission" and itself comes from the term "aslama," which means "to surrender, resign oneself." A person who follows Islam is called a Muslim, and this means "one who surrenders to God." See Online Etymology Dictionary <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Islam> accessed January 2009.

Thus, the abstract motifs of such traditional art are not an indication of primitivity, or an inability to imitate reality. Instead, they point towards an alternative approach to surface, image and appearance in architecture. Caught between the ideal purity of religious belief and the earthly intentions of their royal patrons, Safavid artists resorted to a *surficial strategy* that connected the two worlds by the way of the pixelated surface. Consequently, the ornamental surfaces of their architecture operated in the same manner as the folds of the Baroque since they connected the monadic interiority of the soul with the nomadic exteriority of facades. In other words, the symbolic surface in Safavid architecture is the Deleuzean *unfold*, which is in fact a different manifestation of the same paradigm.

Such ornamental surfaces were, to use Stephen Perrella's terminology, "hyper-surfaces"⁸²² that simulated the nomadic carpet, which was in itself a reproduction of the lush ground plane upon which people lived and worshipped. Thus, walls were not only made from the ground (mud) but they also simulated an ideal version of it (the beautiful carpet). In this approach, the architectural wall became an extension of the ground: not a perpendicular barrier that opposes it, but a folded surface that is already connected to the surficial plane. This was a different architecture based on "constructing surfaces under the sky rather than building volumes under the Sun."⁸²³

Today, many of the technologies that allow for the production and reproduction of art are dependent on surfaces: they either generate virtual surfaces (computer modelling, virtual reality environments), or they dis-colour surfaces (photography, printed magazines, advertising), or they project information through activated surfaces (TVs, digital screens). If traditionally, surface was a thin inert layer that approached two-dimensionality, contemporary surfaces are thick, activated milieus that are *multi-dimensional*. Electronic Paper for example is a new hybrid technology that exploits the thickness of the surface to create a digital screen that is pliable like paper but maintains the ability to be updated digitally.⁸²⁴ E-paper

⁸²² See Stephen Perrella, "Hypersurface Theory: Architecture >< Culture," *Architectural Design*, vol. 68, no. 5/6, May/June 1998, pp. 6-16.

⁸²³ Manuel Gausa, *The Metapolis Dictionary of Advanced Architecture*, 2003, p. 577

⁸²⁴ Electronic paper (also called e-paper or electronic ink display) mimics the effect of ink on paper and is able to hold digital information indefinitely without the need for electricity. E-paper is easier to read than conventional screens because the image does not need to be refreshed constantly, it has a wider viewing angle and because it can be read in daylight. See www.e-ink.com

allows building surfaces to be like chameleon skin whose changing patterns can be visible in daylight. Whilst materials like Polyurethanes, Aerogel,⁸²⁵ or Electroluminescent Film,⁸²⁶ have allowed architectural surfaces to resemble alien skins, the development of new technologies such as E-paper or Touch Screens⁸²⁷ offer the possibility of constructing architectural surfaces that operate as complex surficial systems. These new surface technologies not only offer alternative approaches to architectural design, but they also bring radical change to our experience of buildings and the urban environment they help create.

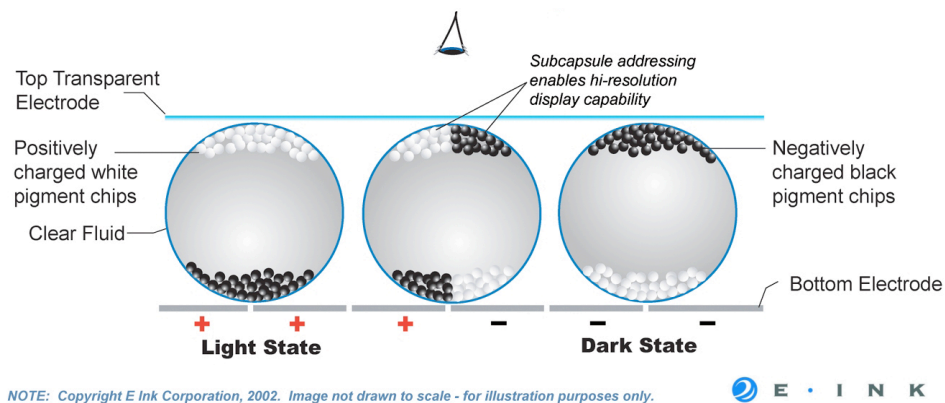


Figure III: Surface as medium. The simplest form of e-paper works by mixing black and white pigment particles in hydrocarbon oil. The resultant mixture is then placed between two parallel, conductive plates separated by a gap of 10 to 100 micrometers. When a voltage is applied across the two plates, the particles migrate to the plate bearing the opposite charge, thus creating the desired image. Source: www.e-ink.com

⁸²⁵ Aerogel is a silicon based solid with a porous, sponge-like structure invented in 1930s. Because 99 percent of its volume is empty space, it is one thousand times less dense than glass (another silicon-based solid). With a weight only three times that of air, Aerogel is extraordinarily light as well as strong and transparent. Airglass, in Sweden, is currently producing windows using Aerogel, which could significantly increase energy efficiency. One pane has the equivalent thermal insulating quality of ten to twenty glass panes, and a 1-inch thickness can protect a human hand from a blow torch. In the future, Aerogel could reduce the size of the computer chip by providing a smaller, more compact substitute for traditional silicon.

⁸²⁶ EL films consist of three thin layers of plastic: a middle layer with a phosphorous powder coating, and two outer conductive layers, one of which is transparent. As an electric current passes from one conductive layer to another, the phosphorous powder glows and emits light.

⁸²⁷ "Touch Screens" are overlays that have the ability to display and receive information on the same screen. Touchscreens have become commonplace since the invention of the electronic touch interface in 1971 by Dr. Samuel C. Hurst. There are a number of types of touch screen technologies available: Resistive, Capacitive, Surface Acoustic Wave (SAW), Infrared, Strain Gauge, Optical Imaging, Dispersive Signal Technology, and Acoustic Pulse Recognition.

Increasingly in contemporary architecture, digital technologies are not just employed for visualization purposes, but they are also utilised as generative tools of design. Today, the computer is utilised to generate randomness within the design process. This has allowed a shift from industrial-age paradigms of mass production to the emergence of non-standardized building design processes based on digitally controlled variation and serial differentiation, which have had a liberating effect on architectural design. Surficial philosophy lends itself well to such unfamiliar processes in which architectural design shifts towards an intuitive process of exploration.

Most contemporary digital modelling software is based on the production of virtual surfaces to which materiality, texture, colour and pattern is added. Such software have allowed architects to model complex surface geometries with precision, making their construction more economically viable. Without the ability to actualize virtual surfaces, digital design would be confined to the digital screens. Although advanced manufacturing techniques are becoming more readily available, in most scenarios, the complexity of the surfaces produced in the computer requires some degree of simplification for the final construction sequence. Consequently processes such as faceting, pixilation and polygonization are utilised which often add an ornamental effect to the resultant surfaces.

Once the design is finalized in the computer, it can be relayed to Computer Numerically Controlled machines (CNC) that allow exact replication of digital surfaces in physical materials.⁸²⁸ These new manufacturing techniques liberate design from the uniformity of mass production and towards the flexibility of *mass*

⁸²⁸ CNC Processes of shaping and re-shaping include "2D Sheet Cutting" which is either carried out by Laser cutters, waterjets, Plasma-Arc, or Mechanical tools, or "3D Formation" which is categorized into two separate categories: "3D Subtractive Formation" (carried out by Multi-axis Milling machines) and "3D Additive Formation" which can be "Layered Fabrication", "Solid Freeform Manufacturing", "Incremental Forming", "Rapid Prototyping" or "Stereolithography." A stereolithography system passes computer-controlled lasers through a tank of polymer solution so that laser-induced polymerization occurs at specified locations. A similar technique called Contour Crafting is being developed by Behrokh Khoshnevis of the University of Southern California that uses a computer-controlled crane to build edifices rapidly and efficiently without manual labour. Using a quick-setting, concrete-like material, Contour Crafting forms the house's walls layer by layer until topped off by floors and ceilings set in place by the crane. The system can even accommodate the insertion of structural components, like plumbing, wiring, utilities, as the layers are built. Khoshnevis claims that his system could build a complete home in a single day, and its electrically powered crane would produce very little construction material waste. See <http://www.isi.edu/CRAFT/CC/modem.html> and <http://www.usc.edu/uscnews/stories/10009.html> accessed Jan. 2008.

customization. If the pre-industrial era was characterized by the production of small volumes with high costs, and the industrial age by high volumes and low unit costs, the post-industrial age can be recognized by the production of diverse products in high volumes and with low costs.

Such new technologies require alternative models of thought that can offer greater flexibility towards a rapidly transforming technological condition. This thesis has attempted to formulate one such model of thought based on a conception of surface as the surficial plane of immanence in which different categories exist in smooth mixture and undergo continuous processes of transformation. This philosophical approach suggests that surfaces need not remain superficial visual barriers as defined by the epistemological tradition. Instead, they can transform into facilitators of visual interaction and the very place upon which human activity occurs. Inspired by new digital screens and the virtual images they carry, a more contemporary approach to surfaces would not limit them to the shadows of Platonism, since light need not emanate from a distant source or from within, it can also emanate from the surface in-between.

Surficial thought encourages an alternative approach to architecture in which surface is liberated from its opposition to depth. Such an approach suggests a return to a nomadic architecture that possesses an intimate connection with the surficial plane as it folds and unfolds to become the ornate carpet, hearth, floor, wall, roof and screen. In this model of thought, categories become pliable and seeing requires close-range vision and a haptic eye, since architecture occurs at the surface, not beyond it.

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