

Drawing with Force

It seems to be all about Force. The kind of force, which turns into stone¹. As long as we embrace It, articulating abstractly, we invent architectures, generously and peacefully. But once we embody It, becoming particular, subjecting selves do ebbs and flows, the inevitable result is literal petrification. Turning into corpses. War.

Buildings are therefore scapegoats just like music², as it seems wiser to construct and compose, sacrificing resources and time instead of bodies³. But fortunately we mostly draw, attempting to make It apparent. We draw with Force and we draw conclusions after examining these partial articulations, which sometimes align well and become viral, even contagious. Some of these drawings are so irresistible that we just cannot help and surrender ourselves to their charm, willing to project, surround ourselves with them, visit them, inhabit. All this in order to make It, which otherwise appears in wilderness of flames or smoke, tangible, graspable, present. But It is volatile and capricious, thus statues of the past tend to change valence and at times enrage us to the point where we are ready to set them ablaze, to see a no longer desirable world-image⁴ burn.

If the above admittedly fuzzy motif resonates somewhat, let me unfold or decompress what it entails.

Defining architecture as a *practice attempting to make one out of many* allows us to conclude immediately, that what it makes manifest are the bridges between things otherwise incommensurable. Thoughts about orders and transformations of minerals. Management of resources and echoes of somebody's footsteps.

Any architecture requires therefore answering, mostly implicitly, precisely this: how many is too many? How pure one needs to be? How much difference is manageable? What kind of hierarchy could make all this affordable?

Such questions apply equally to all domains: how many ideas and how many materials? How many different parts and how many different processes? Which differences are desirable and how to mediate between them? What is orderly and how are orders to be implemented?

While it seems, that we are concerned with aesthetics and management, it is in fact much more than that. Inclusivity, diversity and hierarchies are precisely the reasons we would start a fight, a battle, a war.

While it seems to be common view, that decoding such generalisations from an artwork is a matter of subjective interpretation and there are as many readings as there are observers, lets risk an alternative assumption: Perhaps there is something very objective and clearly manifested out there, that can be apprehended, allowing further inferences. Maybe it is more like tracing an animal than reading a text: with some training we can tell precisely the condition of the followed beast and whether it is worth pursuing or not.

Tracing therefore is an art of carefully observing pointers to past actions and processes making the thing in front of us present.

Starting from our instruments, encapsulating knowledge⁵ and therefore registering and articulating but simultaneously silencing and blinding, moving on to how we draw and then interface and interact thus manifesting whatever it is we consider orderly, we architect comprehensive visions of the world of relations among both human and non-human actors. No wonder that most of our drawings end up as flickering images, digital thrash. Most such visions are admittedly too fragmentary, too biased, not forceful enough to be gracefully confronted with gravity.

In her article from 1940, Simone Weil observes:

1 Weil, S., *Iliad or the poem of Force*

2 Attali, J., *Noise. The Political Economy of Music*

3 Serres M., *Statues*

4 Blumenberg, H., *Weltbilder und Weltmodelle*

5 Witt, A., *A Machine Epistemology*

Thus it happens that those who have force on loan from fate count on it too much and are destroyed. But at the time their own destruction seems impossible to them. For they do not see that the force in their possession is only a limited quantity; nor do they see their relations with other human beings as a kind of balance between unequal amounts of force. Since other people do not impose on their movements that halt, that interval of hesitation, wherein lies all our consideration for our brothers in humanity, they conclude that destiny has given complete license to them, and none at all to their inferiors. And at this point they exceed the measure of the force that is actually at their disposal. Inevitably they exceed it, since they are not aware that it is limited.

There is a force which selects and only very few tap into it at a given time but there is perhaps also anticipatory obedience⁶. Lack of courage to descend into the domain of force, to draw with It and to make It manifest. Withdrawing into the whirlwind of inconsequential augmented realities which do not matter, virtual worlds which are not worlding⁷, entertaining discourses securing intellectual and moral superiority while observing unbearable inertia of the thing out there. It must be very frustrating to go into the wild just to realize, that all the traces point at something very old, perhaps dead already: stiff hierarchies, unsustainable relations and toxic materials.

Recently we gained virtuosity in geometry, yet it seems to have little to do with virtue. But being an agent of force without virtue turns into stone by forcing others into orders. Contrary to that, acting both forcefully and lovingly allows to turn things into sources, to listen and become a good host, appreciating spectral differences and spectacular unruliness. A glance into history of the second digital turn⁸ in architecture makes this apparent, thus only anecdotal example must suffice here.

Observing two decades of adventurous engagement with generative form finding techniques in academia reveals a trajectory which can be easily trivialized, yet I believe is worth studying carefully for its attempts to challenge authoritarian ideas of order. Starting with simple particle simulations, resulting in fluid shapes of the early 2000s⁹, intelligence, or at least claim thereof was steadily introduced. Totalitarian subjection of the inert particles to underlying force fields gave place to more complex models borrowed from the social sciences: crowd simulations. Plethora of unprecedented and peculiar concepts driving both the formal exploration and surrounding discourses emerged and reverberated across established design research institutions. The discussion of top-down versus bottom-up orders, flat hierarchies, emergent organisations and perhaps most interestingly, the inevitable question of when to terminate or freeze the simulation became omnipresent. Obsessively attempting to articulate all thinkable architectural elements such as stairs and openings using simple set of rules exposed contradictions inherent in any ideological possession: necessity of hidden exceptions or brute force. Even the most daring and acclaimed proposals relied entirely on not yet available technology of large scale 3d printing, implying reactionary, aseptic relation between form and matter. Resulting structures, fibrous, multiplicitous, filigraine and almost certainly unsustainable haunted imagination while mass protest movements started to make headlines in the world outside of academia.

No significant edifice was built according to these dreams so far, and I doubt it is to be expected soon, yet a generation of speculative academics established their careers riding the wave.

In the meantime fashion changed and entirely different part-to-whole model emerged. Recently popular kit-bashing technique envisions radical diversity and inclusiveness by fusing characters of different origin and unidentifiable web provenance. While playful and often humorous, the charm of such compositions relies on exploitation of anonymous digital artists desperately sharing their creations free of charge. Unlike the previously described trend emerging

6 Prix, W., *Get off of my cloud*

7 <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/w/worlding.html>

8 Carpo, M., *The Second Digital Turn*

9 immediately associated with Baumann's notions of liquid modernity

entirely from emancipatory open-source culture, kit-bashing seems to normalize and aestheticize the idea of crowd-sourcing labour. More importantly however, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the most prominent examples so far base their seductive power in classical orders, bilateral symmetries and stiff hierarchies intended as a post-modern tongue-in-cheek. The most ambitious and cruel tectonic strategy of implementing such orders involved subjecting innocent cartoon characters to mutilation by robotic router, sacrificing their body parts for a harmonious composition¹⁰.

The above examples, just two out of myriad, suggest the inevitability of relations between poetics and politics or aesthetics and ethics, only focusing on a tiny fraction of architectural design practice. In a very similar fashion we can approach engagement with materials and their origin, industrial and handcraft processes involved, as well as mediation between desired order and gravity. While it all seems like an intellectual, conscious analysis, available only to experts, I strongly believe, that architecture's affective aspect is available to general public. Similarly to implicit learning, we might not be able to explain why we know, yet we know It very well.

If tracing allows us to decipher what has already happened, there might be another technique worth employing in theorizing architecture. Divination or perhaps less esoterically meteorology¹¹ seems appropriate while attempting to make inferences about what is to come. Assuming that the thing out there, standing in front of us or perhaps only taking over our social media feed, became manifest because it is well aligned with force, we can sample it's surroundings, calculate magnitudes and interpolate probable directions. There seems to be analogous objective component here, similar to tracing. Just as we can tell from the shape of clouds, what the weather is likely to be, we can perhaps learn how to tell what are the ideas ahead¹². It thinks as it rains¹³.

Both divination and tracing have strong military connotations: they are employed in order to gain strategic and tactical advantage. What is left perhaps, is the desire to engage and courage to do so. It is delightful to observe dangerous new ideas of order emerge, fight and vanish. But wouldn't it be wiser to insist on getting them built as local manifestations of what the world could be about? Being visited and praised, sometimes neglected and abandoned, yet unlike social media feeds, stubbornly there. Perhaps unwillingness to take risks while composing and constructing as well as sacrificing resources while building invokes what is being thus temporarily silenced to manifest itself much more violently in an embodied form.

10 *Toy Furniture* by Greg Lynn

11 Bühlmann, V., *Mathematics and Information in the Philosophy of Michel Serres*

12 Kipnis, J. *Mood River*

13 Serres, M., *The Incandescent*