1.3 Content

1.4 Referents

1.5 Context

1.6 Technology

2. Critical Essays on The Building

3. The Building in Architectural Education

horizontal slab
wall-façade
window
wall-bookshelf
stepped roof
field-like array
formless rock
vertical stacking
rhizome
filmic composition
interior
symbolic tropes
objecthood
phenomenological experience
program
architectural lineages
a literary work
another building
a painting
a material context
the city
the site
global culture
a nearby monument
an architect's production
form of thinking
big data
structural elements
learning environments
construction process

Over the last few decades, architectural history and theory have done a remarkable and necessary job of expanding their limits and audiences. The flip side of this expansion, however, has been a marked displacement of the object, and with it ultimately a certain neglect of *architectural thinking* proper. On the other end of the spectrum, discussions centered firmly round design process and outcome have often proved self-referential (e.g. those around "autonomy") or restricted to the spheres of practice and studio teaching alone. This project constructs a bridge between these two tendencies by mobilizing a topic — "the building" — that typically belongs in the latter while seeking the former's expansion. If the dominant approach driving architectural history and theory today concerns identifying novel subject matter, here instead the challenge involves taking up one of the discipline's oldest themes and reconfiguring it through the intellectual tools now at our disposal. By way of the building, this book illustrates the distinct capacity of architectural thinking to engender far-reaching concepts and, more generally, discourse — while the serendipitous encounters between diverse case studies from Europe, Asia, and the US unveil unexpected synergies and tensions that open up new research territories in design culture.

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> There is very little reference to buildings and surprisingly little to a building, but there is a powerful ghostly presence of *the* building.[1]

Regardless of how many other agents, layers of discourse, and multiple aspects we bring into focus, the building remains the necessary condition for a contribution to knowledge in architecture. It is in this sense that the building defines its basis: algae may be relevant to architecture, but only if they are nested on a façade that happens to be the component of a building; an investor may be pertinent to the field, but only if he is involved in the development of a series of buildings; bills and rental agreements may be germane to architecture, but only inasmuch as they relate to buildings; drawings are an essential part of architectural discussions, but only because they constitute the medium through which to generate and represent an external reality (the building); the study of a certain community may fall within architectural discourse, but only insofar as it lives or otherwise interacts with a building of some kind; and so on. The same necessity is not true of those agents, layers of discourse, and other aspects when considered by themselves — again, as long as what is at stake is architecture, and not biology, sociology, politics, economics, media studies, etc. The necessary condition would be other if the target were urbanism; product, furniture, or exhibition design; etc. This distinction among fields — either within or beyond design — is a prerequisite for establishing any rapport between them, since relationships will only be possible if the *relata* are different to begin with. Moreover, interactions and overlaps can be productive only if those differences are comprehensively accounted for; otherwise, it will not be possible to reach an accurate understanding of such interdisciplinary processes and their results.

> How strange it is to hold a series of conferences, and to work with such fervor to produce an ambitious book . . . on buildings. In architecture. We do not think of folks in biology saying, "Whoa, let's do a book on living organisms," or journalists getting together for a conference about whether or not we should have newspapers. What odd turn of events brought us to this moment? What disciplinary weirdness must have transpired to force the center to snap back into our attention, and require (of all things) weighty discussion?[2]

By "center," Dora Epstein Jones seems to refer precisely to that necessary condition the building constitutes around which everything else gravitates — in other words, to the fact that, within architecture, the building has *ontological primacy*. So, as she asks, "what odd turn of events brought us to this moment?" The production of knowledge — mainly in the most advanced segment of architecture,[3] but also elsewhere — started to undergo a major transformation during the 1960s, spurred by an unprecedented awareness of theory's role in constructing architecture's disciplinary culture. That transformation occurred in an opening up to various other systems of thought (such as semiotics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structuralism) and a consequent rewriting of some of those

1. Mark Cousins in the afterword to this volume. My emphasis.

2. Dora Epstein Jones, in an early version of her contribution to this volume.

3. This segment consists of the scene around a largely elite university crowd in the US and their European interlocutors. The following history of the shift from the 1960s forward is undeniably tied to this population.

systems' key concepts (e.g. "reification," "signifier/signified," "deconstruction," "rhizome," and "ideology") into architecture's idiolect.[4] Architectural history and theory established relationships with non-disciplinary structures and social realms (philosophy, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, etc.) through the use of those *mediatory concepts*. Importing thus became a pattern, one still dominant today. The rapport of transference is set between two codes from two different fields in such a way that one of them — architecture — borrows from the other. This unidirectionality, fundamentally at odds with related discursive operations such as Fredric Jameson's *transcoding*,[5] is called into question here.

A tendency to apply external paradigms inevitably recalls the view generally held in the domain of theory — now more generally construed — about the generation following that of the so-called "age of high theory." Unable to produce a comparable body of work, the group of authors that came to prominence around the early- to mid-1990s displayed an inclination to reutilize the ideas of the preceding generation — of figures like Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, Said, Kristeva, Foucault, and Jameson himself:

> Those who can, think up feminism or structuralism; those who can't, apply such insights to *Moby-Dick* or *The Cat in the Hat*.[6]

To what extent has architecture been able to think up systems of thought specific to itself? In fact, to what extent has architecture been able to think up systems of thought at all? Out of an investigation into the linguistic sign — an object of study pertaining specifically to linguistics — arose structuralism, a broader epistemological apparatus that became relevant across the humanities and social sciences. Other examples include Freudian psychoanalysis, Frankfurt School dialectics, or deconstruction. What are the architectural equivalents of these systems of thought capable of exerting a major influence beyond their original disciplinary boundaries?

In parallel to the dynamic outlined above, and especially since the mid-1970s,[7] the status of the architectural object grew more and more unstable as it appeared in more and more guises — whether as the hypostatization of power structures, a facilitator of participatory processes, the locus of phenomenological content, a vehicle to reflect upon unmediated practices, a catalyst for investigating the psychology of perception, or a construct amenable to mirroring processes in the natural world, to name a few examples. While this diversification is an index for the increasing sophistication of architecture as a field, the object itself emerges as a medium through which to tap into another domain — if not as altogether absent — more often than as a realm of

4. For an extended discussion of this discursive phenomenon, see Kate Nesbitt, ed., *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture: An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965–1995* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), 12–17, and K. Michael Hays, "Introduction," in *Architecture Theory since 1968* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), x–xv.

5. *Transcoding* involves the assessment of the conceptual possibilities — that is, what is sayable and thinkable — of two different codes in comparison with one another, where code stands for a language, an idiolect, or a particular discourse. The ultimate goal of this operation would be to produce a new code, one that "in no way can be considered a synthesis between the previous pair," being rather "a question of linking two sets of terms in such a way that each can express and indeed interpret the other." Jameson clarified that there would be no a priori hierarchy between the two sets of terms or codes, nor an assimilation or borrowing moment that imbalances the equation. Rather, it would be a mutual re-interpretation and re-structuration. The existence of a distinguishable move within architecture history and theory, in which one direction prevails over the other, does not fit with the operational logic of transcoding. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 394–395.

6. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), 2.

research in its own right. For a few decades now, therefore, the object has primarily been a means rather than an end in architectural history and theory.

By virtue of originating in another sphere of knowledge, those mediatory concepts that were pivotal to the theoretical turn carried with them a host of non-architectural associations. Inevitably, in demanding a working-through of their original regime of signification so they could be grasped from within architecture, the internalization of those concepts prompted an attention shift toward the fields from which they were imported. This realignment in focus contributed significantly to the object's displacement, which in turn caused a certain estrangement of the discipline, given the fundamental link between building and architecture. It can therefore be argued that the two dynamics outlined above converge into one, which we may refer to as *estranging internalization*. This logic has to a large degree defined the ways that architectural history and theory have engaged with other fields during the last five decades.

This volume aspires to serve as an inflection point within that trend by suggesting that discussions taking the object as their primary concern can substantially extend the bounds of possibility for the production of discursive knowledge.[8] In order to do so it invokes the architectural object par excellence — *the building*. The project's agenda is twofold: first, to discuss what it means for a building to embody a historically significant contribution in terms of a particular design aspect or concept relevant to the reading of buildings in general; and second, to venture ways in which buildings themselves can induce theoretical frameworks whose impact might extend beyond architecture into other domains of knowledge and practice.

In tackling the building itself as a realm of research in history and theory, this book probes *architectural thinking* as a central discursive category in its own right. Writings about buildings in the American tradition are frequently identified with the formalist genealogy of Rudolf Wittkower, Colin Rowe, and Peter Eisenman. Some readers versed in that lineage might therefore view this project as a return to "form." However, a building is not "form." Or rather, it is not only form. At the very least, it is a combination of "form" and "program" — one that yields a recognizable unity, the dismemberment of which can only be the effect of rhetoric. More comprehensively, a building is a material construct made up of a number of elements — and the relations between them — that houses a set of human activities through a permeable sequence of spaces. Granted, that program may vary over time, and the same form might be able to accommodate several different programs based on changing demands and obsolescence. Yet "program" here

7. Not coincidentally, this is right around the time when Manfredo Tafuri's work started to influence international audiences.

8. Throughout this introduction, the term *discursive* is used in its classical sense, i.e. alluding to the kind of knowledge that involves premises, narratives, judgments, inferences, concepts, ideas, conclusions, etc., as channeled through thought and expressed through language. In the context of architecture, it is important to distinguish it from *representational* knowledge, which instead proceeds through images, drawings, models, etc., and is associated with design and related practices, such as graphic analysis. *The Building*'s target is the former, not the latter (which is also referred to as *non-discursive*: see, for example, Sophia Psarra's contribution to this volume). Though different in principle, these types of knowledge can be related. Indeed, across this book's pages are many examples of how representational knowledge can ultimately be used as a vehicle to produce discursive knowledge.

does not designate a particular programmatic package — say, a "library," a "house," or a "museum." Instead, it points to the fact that, for a three-dimensional form to be "architectural," it ought to have the capacity to readily house a set of human activities. This is by no means the case for every conceivable three-dimensional form, which is why one cannot say that a building is only form. For example, most of the forms generated through algorithmic and parametric design are so complex, dense, and entangled — featuring proportional relations of such a disjunctive nature — that they cannot house a set of human activities in any realistic sense. Hence they fall within the domain of computer graphics or mere morphology, rather than architecture. Therefore, if there is at once a loose fit between form and program and a necessity for the former to be able to incorporate the latter, then we may contend that a building is a three-dimensional form whose defining attribute is that of being *always already* inflected with a programmatic potential. Central to its nature is also the spatial organization articulated within its boundaries, as well as the design processes — like construction, typological operations, and contextual conjectures — that give rise to it.

Architectural thinking is understood here as the practice of producing discursive knowledge through the analysis, discussion, and conceptualization of aspects of those two inextricably related regimes: that of *the building*, and that of *the design process* (which, as a subset of architectural thinking, we might refer to as *architectural design thinking*). It thus becomes clear that a critical attention to building is not to be equated with "formalism" or an aesthetic focus. Architectural thinking is a distinct domain of knowledge whose attributes reach well beyond form and aesthetics — many of them relatable to ontology, technology, and several modes of logic and phenomenology. It distinguishes itself from *urban thinking* in that its primary object is the building, and not the city.

One other important distinction to make is that between *autonomy* and *specificity*, two terms that are often conflated. As is well known, the former has come to be understood principally through the projects that Peter Eisenman and Aldo Rossi developed between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s. Eisenman's undertaking consisted in recasting architectural language as an autonomous system, one where "meaning" became restricted to the intrinsic, syntactic relationships governing its constituents — i.e., to form itself. In other words, he sought to remove all external meaning from the piece of architecture in order to make its components refer only to themselves, thereby recalling early twentieth-century theories of non-objective art.[9] In Michael Hays' words:

> Eisenman saw modernist forms not as simple derivatives of functional needs, but as delineations of the immanent, self-referential properties of architecture itself, as searches for objective knowledge that lies outside both the architectural agent's intentions and the building's uses, and inside the very material and formal operations of architecture. Such research discovered the new in the given "language" through an articulation and redistribution of its elements.[10]

Rossi, on the other hand, echoing the approach advanced by Durand a century and a half earlier,[11] viewed the city as a source of architectural types that could be detached from their particular time and place, turning it into an abstract, atemporal archive of design elements. Generative and mobile, Rossi's types were decomposed, reconfigured, and redeployed under criteria other than the ones that determined their original use — by placing them in different contexts, invoking meanings from another epoch, hybridizing them, modifying their fragments and outlines, etc. In Anthony Vidler's words:

> The column, houses, and urban spaces, while linked in an unbreakable chain of continuity, refer only to their own nature as architectural elements. . . . It is clear that the nature referred to in these recent designs is no more nor less than the nature of the city itself, emptied of specific social content from any particular time and allowed to speak of its own formal condition. . . . The need to speak of function, of social mores — of anything, that is, beyond the nature of architectural form itself — is removed.[12]

Although the two kinds of autonomy were clearly dissimilar, they both shared an impetus to reduce architecture to a kind of *itselfness* rooted in the essence of form, and to create a hermetically sealed — "immanent, self-referential" — system from this reduction meant to fall outside of time. In contrast, architectural thinking is not grounded in such itselfness. Firstly, formal reductions of that sort, though a methodological option, are certainly not written into architectural thinking's constitutive purposes — among other reasons because, as discussed above, a building is not just "form" but a more complex construct that is irreducible to one single element or type of operation, and that incorporates "program" as a necessary, defining category. A building — and with it architectural design — is therefore social by definition, given the nature of program. Second, architectural thinking may or may not search for timelessness or universals. The condition that buildings are on some level bound to their time triggers the pursuit of historically contingent knowledge as

9. Wassily Kandinsky, for instance, comes to mind. For a deeper insight into Eisenman's early theories, see Peter Eisenman, *Eisenman Inside Out: Selected Writings, 1963–1988* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

10. K. Michael Hays, "The Oppositions of Autonomy and History," in *Oppositions Reader: Selected Essays 1973–1984*, 1st edition (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998), x.

11. See Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand, *Précis of the Lectures on Architecture; With, Graphic Portion of the Lectures on Architecture* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2000).

12. Anthony Vidler, "The Third Typology," *Oppositions* 7 (Winter 1977), 293–94.

a matter of course. Third, architectural thinking is not some closed epistemological field, if such a thing were possible. It is instead a permeable one: connected to other fields and to culture at large, it bears a distinct potential to project itself outward through those connections — a potential this book attempts to ignite. All of these distinctions vis-à-vis autonomy noted, architectural thinking is nevertheless a *specific* domain. The processes involved in the design of buildings, as well as the characteristics of the outcome, exhibit a number of particularities that make them fundamentally different from those of a piece of music, a novel, a painting, or a film, notwithstanding the analogies that can be made between those mediums.[13] In short, autonomy is grounded in specificity, but specificity does not imply autonomy.

As a result of the traction generated by the prevalent unidirectionality mentioned earlier and the displacement of the building, architecture has for some decades occupied a blurred, uncertain territory relative to other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The tendencies to resort to mediatory conceptual frameworks (often in order to validate itself) and to avoid a deep engagement with its main object underpin an ethos for architectural history and theory that may very well be perceived from the outside as somewhat compromised, if not downright apologetic. A significant effect of this ethos has been a decline in the importance of architectural thinking, which began to manifest itself more clearly around the mid-1990s[14] and has reached a critical point today. A dominant strain of current historical and theoretical work simply neglects it as a domain of knowledge in itself, thereby reinforcing the status quo.

Capitalizing on a combination of specificity and non-autonomy, this project presents an alternative to that state of affairs. *The Building* attempts to enable architectural thinking to grow into a potent formation on the general map of the humanities and social sciences[15] by precipitating an upturn in its recent trajectory and catalyzing a further balancing out of the discursive tendencies dominant since the 1960s. Then, the theoretical turn brought about a strong engagement with external disciplines characterized by the importation and illustration of concepts from those disciplines[16] — while the building was used as a vehicle to focus on concerns elsewhere. The engagement advocated here is based upon inverting the former dynamic by inverting the latter. That is to say, it is one in which the building, now turned into the main object of research, is recast to trigger concepts, theoretical frameworks, and, even more ambitiously, systems of thought that can alter fields outside of architecture by becoming meaningfully relevant to them. It thus aims to produce *architecturally specific yet generalizable knowledge*. In contradistinction to *estranging internalization*, we may refer to this type of engagement as one of *outward projection*.[17]

13. Cf. Diana Agrest, "Design versus Non-Design," *Oppositions* 6 (Fall 1976), 46–49. Note, however, that she refers to the practice of design, not the production of discursive knowledge related to such a practice.

14. Coinciding with the last phase of the journal *Assemblage*, which ended in 2000, and in spite of remarkable efforts like Amanda Reeser Lawrence and Ashley Schafer's journal *PRAXIS*, which started in 1999.

15. Referring to *architectural design thinking* in particular, Ursprung goes so far as to claim that positing it as a realm of scholarship "leads to a vast and still hardly exploited field of inquiry." (p. 359)

16. Jameson pertinently referred to the difference between this type of externality and the capacity of creative practices to generate their own concepts: "Gilles Deleuze argues that film is a way of thinking, that is, it is a way of doing philosophy, but in purely filmic terms: its concrete philosophizing has nothing to do with the way in which some film or other might illustrate a philosophical concept, and that very precisely because the philosophical concepts of film are filmic concepts, and not ideational or linguistic ones. In a similar move, I would like to argue that architectural space is also a way of thinking and philosophizing, of trying to solve philosophical or cognitive problems." (Jameson, *Postmodernism,* 125.)

17. "Projection" is used here in its common meaning of extension, thrust. It is not to be confused with "the projective" in a post-critical sense, which referred to the pragmatism of instrumentalization, the embrace of multiplicity, "the performative," "the diagrammatic," "the atmospheric," and ultimately "the relaxed and easy." See Robert Somol and Sarah Whiting, "Notes around the Doppler Effect and Other Moods of Modernism" (2002), in *Constructing a New Agenda: Architectural Theory 1993–2009*, 1st ed. (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 193. In any event, let us recall that the specific target of the post-critical project was criticality in architecture. *The Building,* on the other hand, concerns the nature of the production of knowledge in architectural history and theory.

The Building suggests ways in which this shift is possible: ways in which knowledge grounded in the specificities of architectural thinking can be applicable outside the boundaries of the discipline; ways in which its tendency to import can coexist with its capacity to export. That is exactly, to stay with the same examples, what structuralism, Freudian psychoanalysis, Frankfurt School dialectics, and deconstruction were able to accomplish. And that is exactly how architecture could become substantially more germane — even beyond the humanities, in fields like computer science and the culture of Silicon Valley, which already display an inclination to use architectural terms.

By tackling the building in all of its complexity through the repository of intellectual tools available now, this volume makes a contribution to architecture culture that differs from that of a few important authors who have embarked upon related enterprises. Though also invested in writing about buildings by way of architectural thinking, some of those authors devoted themselves mainly to architectural historiography — rather than a larger project encompassing Theory in the humanities sense of the term, which includes the possibility of developing full-fledged theoretical systems. Others, writing prior to the 1970s, could not count on the sophisticated intellectual tools that have come to our disposal over the last few decades.[18]

It is also important to note that, while the prospects of cultivating "distinctly and irreducibly *architectural* ideas," of architecture enabling "certain ways of thinking that are irreducible to other modes of thought" and even "producing generalizable concepts" via such types of thinking have been identified earlier,[19] they arose in the context of the production of architectural knowledge being predominantly premised on external paradigms.[20] Strictly speaking, that discursive modality prevents such ideas and ways of thinking from being *irreducibly* architectural — i.e. specific to architecture — since on some level they are *reducible* to the external system of thought and related mediatory concepts that make up their realm of possibility. Seeking to expand the milieu of architectural history and theory without largely resorting to mediatory concepts, the challenge posed to the contributors was to forge original ideas from within the epistemology of architectural thinking while propelling them through the pores that link architecture to other domains of knowledge. The six terms under which the thirty buildings presented here are grouped ("elements," "wholes," "content," "context," "referents," and "technology") were selected for being at once directly related to architecture and elemental enough to be central to fields outside it. Thus, they function as heuristic devices for exploring the various case studies through a number of questions both intra- and meta-disciplinary. These are as diverse as replication, value, iconography, the urban subject, objecthood, boredom, and the digital, to name a few. As a

18. Adolf Behne, Sigfried Giedion, and Bruno Zevi would be among these authors, to cite a few of the best known names.

19. Hays, *Architecture Theory since 1968*, xi–xii.

20. See ibid., xi, xiii–xv.

result, the ideas and reflections in *The Building* prove capable of extending to fields such as cultural and intellectual history, philosophy, literary theory, the city, the arts, and design at large.

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The title *The Building* alludes to a general epistemological category across all of those fields, as opposed to a particular instantiation of *a* building, or the construction process of "building."[21] "The building" is thereby defined as a particular way of understanding reality — a form of knowledge in its own right, whose characteristics and boundaries surface throughout the discussions of the multiple case studies. In exploring ways in which buildings negotiate a set of given conditions by generating and further materializing a number of discursive constructs — for instance, the asymmetry between site and programmatic distribution; the tensions between diagram and built object; contradicting notions of originality and reproduction; the disjointed nature of physical context; the possibilities and limitations of the notion of infinitude; or the existential impact of a particular tectonic atmosphere — this volume shows how architectural structures embody specific interpretive frameworks. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for construing "the building" as such an epistemological category and assembles a platform for the projection of concepts from it.

As Philip Ursprung points out in his essay, "What Buildings Know," there is a recognizable relationship between this project and Koolhaas' *Fundamentals*, the theme of the Venice Architecture Biennale that he directed in 2014. Indeed, the chronology indicates the emergence of a *zeitgeisty* sensibility: although the genesis of *The Building* dates back to 2011 — much before we knew anything about *Fundamentals* — it was only officially launched in 2014, through two international symposia held at the Architectural Association in London (on June 2nd, five days before the opening of the Biennale) and Columbia University in New York (on November 15th), respectively.[22] The shared sensibility is grounded in the ontological primacy within architecture of the objects of study that both projects invoke. However, the essentialism of Koolhaas' taxonomy, structured around strictly architectural categories, is to be contrasted with the heuristic character of this book's section titles, afforded by their relevance across various domains of knowledge.

By exploiting the capacity of architectural thinking to induce conceptual frameworks and systematic thought, in combination with the depth, rigor, and sophistication that underpin the production of scholarship, *The Building* aspires to effectively bridge the spheres of practice/studio culture and history/theory. This scope is amplified via a deliberate cross-continental approach, and even more through a large

21. Cf. Mark Cousins, Dora Epstein Jones, and Michael Young's contributions to this collection.

22. Recordings, videos, photos, and other information about the symposia can be found at http://thebuilding.aaschool.ac.uk/, http://conversations.aaschool.ac.uk/the-building-part-two/, and https://thebuildingatgsapp.wordpress.com/.

group of contributors comprising a striking number of essential voices in the current architectural scene. The range of ages — spanning forty years of views on the question at hand — and the array of different perspectives they represent delivers a set of contents that cuts across generations, career stages, and disciplinary boundaries. Authors include deans and academic leaders as well as architects, historians, theorists, philosophers, and doctoral candidates based at institutions such as Columbia, Princeton, Harvard, and UCLA in the US, and the Bartlett, the Architectural Association, ETH Zürich, and ETSA Madrid in Europe. As a result, *The Building* stages a myriad of interactions between the different perspectives on either side of the Atlantic.

Those whose texts were requested for the book's main section were asked to tackle the project's twofold agenda through a building of their choice, built or designed within the last 25 years.[23] Consequently, *The Building* offers poignant discussions of key architectural structures conceived in Europe, Asia, and the US over the last three decades. The second section contains five longer critical essays that address the question of the building as a form of knowledge as well as other disciplinary and interdisciplinary issues, partly through reflections on the project's goals and materials. The third and last section offers five brief pieces assessing the importance of a renewed interested in the building vis-à-vis the status of architectural education today. The inclusion of short (1,200-word) and long (4,000-word) essays, and a balanced text-to-image ratio, caters to the various types of readers in both practice and academia. *The Building*, therefore, contrary to common practice, sets out to test the possibility of producing scholarship through brief, synthetic pieces and a deliberate engagement with contemporary material.

It should be remarked in closing that this volume is at once based upon the two abovementioned symposia and independent from them. The vast majority of participants became contributors. Yet, for one thing, they were asked to write their texts from scratch so that they read as essays in and of themselves, rather than simply transcriptions; for another, a number of authors who did not take part in either event were invited to contribute. The six book sections do not coincide with the six roundtables that were held at the two symposia combined. In the spirit of curating the project as an ongoing conversation, the structuring of the publication took into consideration the reworkings and expansions of the various contributions in relation to what was presented at the events, in addition to the relationships between them that subsequently arose. This conversation was further fueled across the book's pages by having the respondents engage the newly written pieces, and by requesting that several of the five longer essays discuss some of the shorter texts.

23. The two exceptions to this requirement are Sylvia Lavin's discussion of Frank Gehry's Danziger Studio (1965) and Mark Campbell's choice of Stanley Kubrick & Roy Walker's Overlook Hotel in the Elmstree Studios (1977–80). They were included because the connections with contemporary architectural discourse that surface in both contributions were deemed particularly relevant.

1. The Building

1.1 Elements

horizontal slab

wall-façade

window

wall-bookshelf

stepped roof

Penelope Dean | *Empire of Platforms*

House NA Tokyo, Japan (2007–2011) Sou Fujimoto Architects

> . . . [T]he dimensions of a table or a house are very important — not, as the functionalists thought, because they carry out a determined function, but because they permit other functions . . . because they permit everything that is unforeseeable in life.
> — Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography* (1981)[1]

> Neither the Modern Movement nor postmodernism have ever understood that a new architecture does not spring from a project method or from a language, but rather from the user's different manner of using these things . . . architecture has never seriously bothered about the question of its own user culture.
> — Andrea Branzi, "Colloquio con Andrea Branzi" (1984)[2]

House NA is a single-family house designed for a couple in Tokyo. At just 914 square feet, it consists only of floors, stairs, columns, and a transparent façade. In response to his clients' desire for a nomadic lifestyle, architect Sou Fujimoto proposes the metaphor of living within a single tree.[3] The house assumes the sectional characteristics of a scant canopy: floors offset at different heights and connected by short stair runs branch out kaleidoscopically. Through this simple diagram, the house launches socio-spatial relationships between objects, bodies, and activities, opening up new possibilities for living in what might be understood as a foliated interior and a *platform plan*.

Domestic life typically organizes itself around individual objects of design that are hosted within an architectural interior.[4] In House NA, the downsizing of a single architectural element — the floor — toward the scale of these individual objects renders the architecture itself an object of design. Diminutive floor plates, ranging from 21 square feet — the size of a dining table — to 81 square feet — the size of a rectangular trampoline mat — not only approximate the scale of the tables, beds, and chairs they support, but at times even become them, performing as divan, seat, desk, or perch. The floors are individual sites for the accumulation of things and people: designer handbags, Apple laptops, potted plants, books, a green chair, an upright lamp, cushions, wooden tables, a white vacuum cleaner, slippers, bodies. Even conventional architectural elements, such as stairs, accrue on them as portable design objects. The five short open-riser flights, two steep stepladders, and six sets of stacked blocks double as furniture. With its horizontal planes and spindly white steel columns, the house can be read as an open shelving system, a blown-up assemblage of flat surfaces for the stockpiling of possessions and domestic life itself.

The technique of scaling down and repeating the floor produces the illusion of an interior much larger than its exterior. An economy of means turns spatial thrift into plentitude. In total, twenty-five micro-interiors emerge from between and beyond the sweep of white, polished surfaces: an entry; two guest zones; three storage zones; a water closet; a kitchen; a pantry; four floating lounges; a compressed loft; four outside terraces; an elongated dining area; a sleeping zone; a library; a generous bathroom; a sunroom; a nested exterior laundry; and a dressing closet. A complex single interior amasses out of this micro-ensemble of petite interiors and exteriors. As with many traditional Japanese house plans, House NA's plans articulate a mosaic of hyper-proximate activities through fine lines and small squares of structure.[5] Yet unlike traditional Japanese houses, House NA dispenses with sliding screens, delineating the edges of individual floors at different heights with single lines instead. Together these lines describe an interior that is unified and subdivided, abstract and intricate. In a radical dismantling of Adolf Loos' *raumplan,* Fujimoto evacuates the "wall" (or Japanese screen) to invent a *platform plan.* Miniaturization plus proliferation produces not only interior magnification, but diversification as well.

This platform plan exceeds modern architecture's abandonment of the wall as a spatial divider for the domestic interior. If early 20th-century works discarded the "room" for the open plan, only to reinstate the wall as a spatial divider in new guises — for example, the sliding panels of Gerrit Rietveld, or the freely-disposed partitions of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe — Fujimoto retains the organizing principle of the room but eliminates the vertical divider entirely. In place of dividers, the floors are offset with the nominal thickness

1. Aldo Rossi, *A Scientific Autobiography*, trans. Lawrence Venuti (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981), 3.

2. Andrea Branzi, "Colloquio con Andrea Branzi," *Domus* (March 1984): 1.

3. Project description, "House like a single Tree." Courtesy Sou Fujimoto Architects.

4. Andrea Branzi, "Dentro la città," *Domus* 612 (December 1980): 5.

5. Edward S. Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (New York: Harper & Brothers Franklin Square, 1885): 111–120.

(or thinness) of partitions, working in concert with the grid of columns that support them to establish horizontal walls in absentia. Spatial division begins where floors finish. In a stunning act of reduction, Fujimoto flips modern architecture sideways: vertical subdivision gives way to the horizontal.

Paradoxically, Fujimoto's removal of vertical dividers does not eliminate privacy. As Iwan Baan's photographs reveal, the interior never appears in its entirety from within or without. Inside, the undersides of platforms obfuscate the interior in toto, obliquely dicing it up into perspectival fragments and splintering it into incomplete vignettes. Ceiling planes offer privacy by subterfuge, cutting unfamiliar and surprising sectional views: at times, disembodied limbs appear from the waist down; elsewhere, torsos emerge diagonally from the waist up. Outside, the setback transparent façades also withhold visual accessibility. Perpendicular glass panes and pivoting floor-to-ceiling window-doors produce a kind of *dazzle transparency* that makes it impossible to look in. From a worm's-eye view, the combination of white ceilings and glass panes confuse, mislead, and dissimulate — it is not clear where the interior actually begins or ends. The superimposition of thin vertical supports, chunky window frames (another building element reduced to the level of object-to-be-seen as much as to-be-seen-through), and scattered possessions compound the visual situation: the interior is nothing more than a flickering mirage.

Significantly, this is a mirage with no center. The horizontal relationship of interior to exterior (i.e., inside-outside) typically established by walls is subordinate to an interior to interior (i.e., upside-downside) exchange established by the horizontal divisions of floor. A lack of distinction between ceiling and floor finishes — material, texture, and color — further produces a kind of neutrality that enables sectional reversibility. As Roland Barthes noted in another context, you can turn House NA upside down and nothing much will happen.[6] Here, reversibility is not contingent on optical effect, as it is in El Lissitzky's *Proun* drawings, but on an elimination of detail: platforms are white, flat, and blank *all around*. To paraphrase Barthes, the house defeats any possibility of reading: in the platform "*there is nothing there to read*."[7]

The neutral platform provides a backdrop against which daily life plays out. House NA does not offer lifestyle intimacy, but imposes the responsibility of lifestyle invention. Affirming Jean Baudrillard's 1968 forecast of "man" becoming "the interior designer,"[8] House NA's inhabitant is neither owner nor user, but a new kind of *designing* subject — a subject who does not consume domestic objects, but adjusts to them, chooses them, *designates* them.[9] Further, House NA's inhabitants must learn to navigate a perilous environment sans handrails: leap from

6. Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982): 110. Italics added. Originally published in French as *L'Empire des Signes*, 1970.

7. Ibid., 62.

8. Jean Baudrillard, "The Structures of Interior Design," in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict (London: Verso, 1996), 25.

9. On this aspect of design, see my essay "Free For All" in *The Routledge Companion to Design Studies,* ed. Penny Sparke and Fiona Fisher (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2016), 21–28.

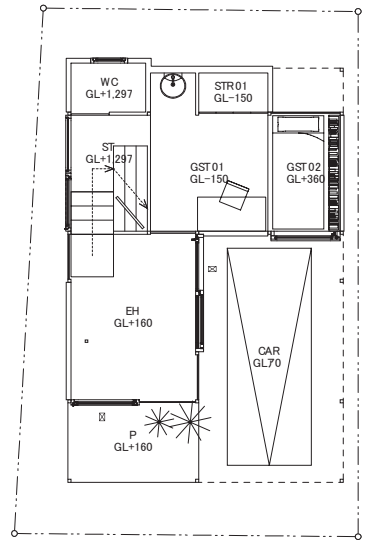
platform to platform, climb from "branch to branch," hover over mezzanine upon mezzanine. They must also decide how to occupy an extraordinary range of compressed floor-to-ceiling heights: a 5-foot-high lounge; a 4-foot-high loft; a 3-foot-high storage room. Fujimoto's sections and Baan's photographs showcase the exhilarating possibilities for new behaviors that these limitations solicit: figures pause on surfaces, grasp columns, crouch in corners, reach for ceilings, and dangle at the brink. House NA offers life on the edge, in the most literal of senses. Paradoxically, it is the relentless application of mathematical precision in scaling the floor that frees its inhabitants to invent new ways of performing on its sectional terraces.

In this regard, the house offers the possibility of an alternative history of architecture conceived through one's relationship to domestic objects. Fujimoto's design transcends the *deferral* to objects seen in a range of polemical house designs — from Figini, Pollini, Frette, Libera, and Bottoni's "All-Electric House" (1930) to Peter and Alison Smithson's "House of the Future" (1956) — by recasting the architectural object as a collection of design objects through the miniaturized scale of the platform. It also bypasses the *critique* of objects seen in projects like Archizoom's single-story, endlessly interiorized "No-Stop City" (1969) by proliferating and shuffling the deck of miniaturized plans in section. Assuming neither object deferral nor critique, House NA shows that hyper-specificity in one domain — in this case, the floor — can help produce what is unthinkable in another: surprising modes of inhabitation.

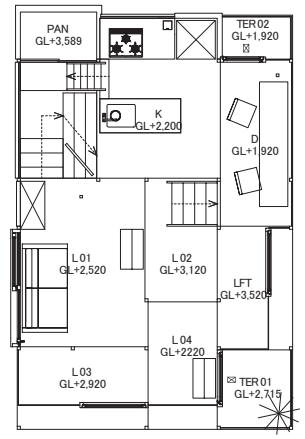
In contemporary terms, House NA shifts the emphasis of "the building" away from mass and a politics of the envelope toward *elementzminimum* and a politics of the platform. The platform plan divides space horizontally. It has no center. It is reversible. If affords privacy on the oblique. It dissimulates. It is neutral. It yields a new kind of kaleidoscopic space. In an empire of platforms, building is dissolved into interior: it becomes a minimal world where everything is possible and nothing is out of place.

< Interior view from entry stair toward kitchen and living area. Thin platforms divide the interior horizontally. Objects, bodies, and domestic life itself are stockpiled on top of them.

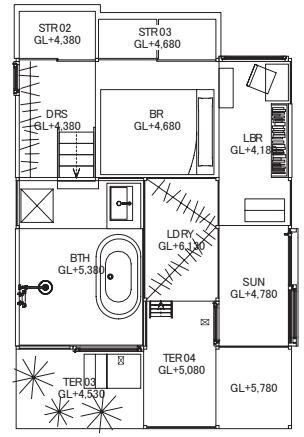
Interior model view. Downsized floors equate with the scale of individual domestic objects. Architecture makes its appearance as an object of design.



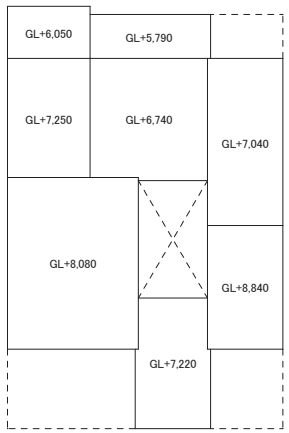
First floor



Second floor

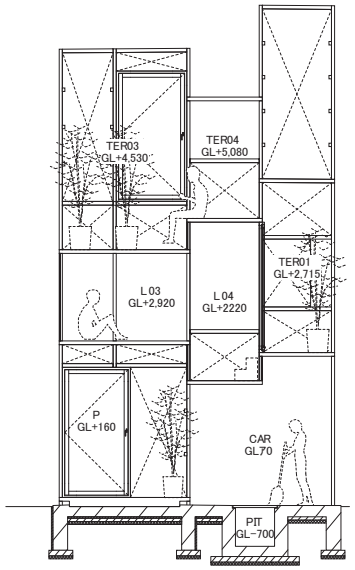


Third floor

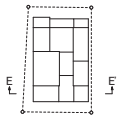


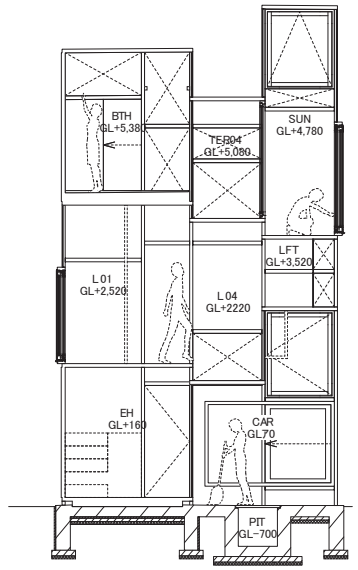
Roof floor

Floor plans, House NA. Single lines delineate the platform plan. The lines articulate an undivided and subdivided interior simultaneously.

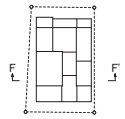


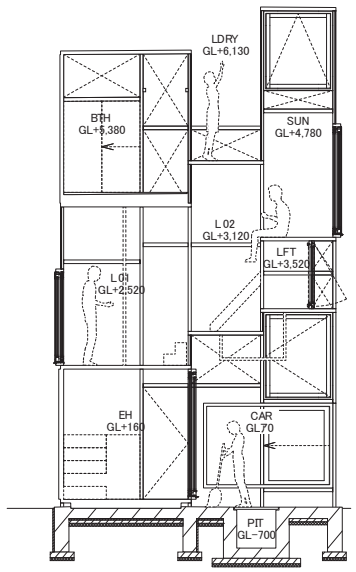
Section E–E'



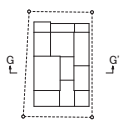


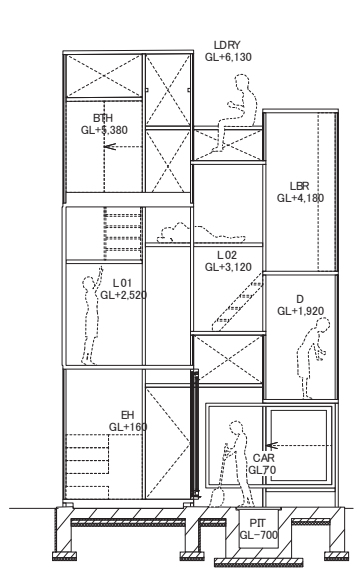
Section F–F'



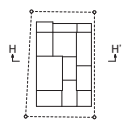


Section G–G'





Section H–H'



Cross sections, House NA. Spatial division begins where platforms stop. Offset platforms establish a range of floor-to-ceiling heights, instigating new forms of domestic behavior.

Worms-eye view of interior. Platform undersides dice the interior into perspectival fragments. Platform blankness enables sectional reversibility.

View of House NA from street. The platforms, setback glass panes, and floor-to-ceiling window doors *dissimulate*. The interior never appears in its entirety from without.

Gabriela García de Cortázar | *In the Thick of It*

Wolf House San Pedro, Chile (2005–2007) Pezo von Ellrichshausen Arquitectos

Casa Wolf is yet another minimal house. Its streamlined metallic exterior shines among dull-looking suburban houses, an orthogonal vertical element between pitch-roofed structures. When seen in plan, it has a coffin shape, which creates six façades. However, it is built with four walls, two of which are conventional, twenty-centimeter-thick walls, while the other two are unconventional, obtuse-triangle-shaped ones. These odd-looking elements concentrate all that is destined to support life (staircases, storage space, bathrooms, shafts, and windows) — an operation that, in turn, liberates the central space for life itself. The rationale behind this strategy cannot be found in the discourse of Pezo von Ellrichshausen's architectural practice, as it quite determinately stays on the surface of things.[1] Their production is an unremarkable series of provincial houses with only a few core ideas that seem to repeat and recombine.

Despite its muteness, this house introduces several tensions between elements and/or principles of architecture that reach far beyond its suburban site. First of all, it addresses a distinctively modernist problem: the classic, even clichéd differentiation between served and serving spaces. The house is organized in such a manner that there is a very clear distinction between the two, with an evident preponderance of the first. Yet this is done in a very non-modernist way: instead of celebrating the serving spaces (as in Philip Johnson's or Mies' glass houses, where they proudly stand in the middle, or even the high-tech Centre Pompidou, with its shiny pipes in the back), they are pushed into, and hidden within, the thickness of the perimeter walls. The closeting of the house's services makes it impossible to celebrate function — a tension that is treated as a domestic infrastructural problem.

1. Only in correspondence with the author, Mauricio Pezo pointed out that what they call "practicable thickness" (*espesor practicable*) is something they had explored in both the Poli and the Rivo houses.

Then, those walls challenge the relation between structure and form. The main achievement of modern construction — the independence of structure and surface[2] and, consequently, the freedom of form[3] — is dealt with here in a contradictory manner. The exterior of the house features a shiny, continuous cladding where windows are signaled simply through a change of material, very much like any contemporary building. The structure, however, is not independent from this surface: much like a balloon frame, it is imprisoned and contained within the walls, with the exterior cladding and interior plastering acting as if the whole sandwich were one massive element.

The architects achieve a very loaded kind of wall by keeping the structure inside it while at the same time pushing the serving spaces into its thickness. Because these walls sit on the perimeter, they also play the role of the façade. So what should we call them, walls or façades? If a paradigmatic façade is the Palazzo Rucellai's (or, for that matter, Santa Maria Novella's) — that is, a layer as thin as a tapestry (to quote Semper),[4] but loaded with meaning and different from a wall — then these are just too full of stuff to be façades. Plus, while façades are best studied in elevation, these are only understood in their fullness in plan. These walls-cum-façades, therefore, have more to do with pre-modern elements of construction, such as medieval keeps, where outer walls housed staircases, arrow loops, and whole rooms in their thickness, than with such architectural conventions.

Many unresolved tensions lie within this house, tensions that always seem to veer toward a pre-modern solution (closeted infrastructure, encased structure, medieval façade): surely something worth discussing. However, all this is cautiously kept unspoken: the house remains mute, making us wonder whether this is a sheep in wolf's clothing. Certainly, the architects haven't infused the house with arguments or discourse. They quite sparingly describe it in the brief as "a house for a recently divorced man," and so they set out to resolve the simple, yet fundamental, question of how his life should be. In this case, it is a life turned inwards: its suburban location, within a fenced plot, ensures lack of contact with the outside. This insulated inwardness also allows the Wolf house to avoid any dialogue with its context, its pristine volume eluding any friction with city life.[5] Isolated from city and discipline, the Wolf house speaks quietly to itself.

Enter OMA.[6] The evident resemblance of the Wolf house to OMA's unbuilt Y2K House (1999) lies not only in their coffin-shape plans, but also in the fact that they both liberate a central void by putting all the serving spaces and technical contraptions into the thickness of a wrapping. The only apparent difference is that the Y2K House's void is horizontally placed and wrapped in three of its faces (including

2. "The autonomy of the surface, the 'free facade,' presumes a distinction between the structural and nonstructural elements of the building, between the frame and the cladding. This distinction is vividly present in the architecture of turn-of-the-century Chicago." David Leatherbarrow and Mohsen Mostafavi, *Surface Architecture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002), 8.

3. "Now the walls are merely subordinate elements filled like screens between the supports or carried like a shell outside of them." Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson, *The International Style* (New York: Norton, 1966), 55.

4. See Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture: A Contribution to the Comparative Study of Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 103–104.

5. I'm borrowing the term "friction" from Iñaki Ábalos' brilliant analysis of contemporary Chilean architecture, offered in *Assess: Chile in Columbia*, Panel 3, March 29, 2013, from http://events.gsapp.org/event/assess-chile-at-columbia, last accessed December 10, 2015.

6. I am grateful to Juan Antonio Cortés for mentioning the proximity of *partis* to me while at *The Building* symposium at Columbia.

the superior one), achieving an irregular faceted volume, while the Wolf House's is vertical, wrapped in four elevations and looking like a tall tower. The Y2K House's faceted volume would later become the distinctive silhouette of the Casa da Musica, with the interior a scaled-up version of the house: the rectangular void is the shoebox theater and the volumes wrapping around it all are the services plus some more halls.

But here is where the similarities end and the distinctiveness of the Wolf House emerges: the way in which the wrapping is explored in the Y2K House is diametrically opposed to that of the Wolf House, their achievements as far apart as the geographical distance between them — or their popularity. The Y2K House's wrap takes everything in, and more: by being scaled up to become the Casa da Musica, the house's strategy reveals itself as a question of serving and served *spaces*, the wrap an airy kind of mass that allows for an almost uncontrolled expansion.[7] The Wolf House's approach, on the other hand, is the opposite: it is all about squeezing things in, taking the air out, compressing everything into these two odd-shaped *walls* — and so, evidently, it is riddled with tensions that do not have an easy solution. Because, in the end, what the Wolf House does, silently yet calculatedly, is to push the definition of the wall, the question being how thick a wall can be in order to remain a wall — or how dense and loaded it can be before it loses its wall-ness. And thus, nesting unresolved tensions yet proposing a very clear question, the Wolf House turns out to be mute and howling at the same time, as both tensions and questions cannot be seen except in plan. The withdrawal of the architectural desire to the thickness of the walls is what allows the occupant to live his life in the space happily (we hope), his experience contained by the house's surfaces, in total ignorance of what lies within.

7. Or even a question about drawing, as both house and concert hall belong to the family of projects that explore the possibilities of the Nolli plan.

Wolf house from outside.