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WHERE IS ARCHITECTURE.

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"A weather-exposed skeleton
haunts my mind:
how the wind penetrates my body."

-Matsuo Basho

"Where is architecture" is not a question, but it could be one. By saying that I wish to orient focus away from "what is architecture" to "where" and try to unravel what that "where" might mean, whether we have been making inordinate demands on the "what," and how far the question of "where" remains unexamined. And, in any case, it will be clear that the question of "what" is intimately tied to the matter of "where:" to architecture and its place in the world.

Chiasm: The Nexus of Architecture and the World.

When we talk about architecture situated in place, we are talking about architecture and the world. There is a nexus, a terribly elusive nexus. This presentation is a summation of my ongoing work in trying to re-conceptualize the relationship between architecture and place, to have a renewed understanding of this nexus, what the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty called, this "chiasm."

Architecture is always in a chiasm – I would like to describe that as "chiasmic architecture" - that is its forlorn inevitability despite our habitual thinking of the autonomy of architecture. If this is so inevitable, why is it necessary to talk about it? Because even until now, this is taken so much for granted that we have not given conceptual attention to it. It is a key issue that architectural discourse has avoided. I would like to think that a reconceptualization is provoked, one, by the dreams of globalization, and, two, by contemporary notions of space and spatiality.

Chiasmic architecture is a resistance to the productions of globalization, to its modes of non-geographical reproducibility, anonymous assemblage, aterritorial latitude. While we may exult on the possibilities unleashed by globalization, as we should, there is also no way we can get away from the resistances. And that is the prime paradox that besets architecture - a continuous tension between the a-territorial aspect of architecture and its actual emplacement, or to put it more bluntly, between "what" and "where".

In the history of architectural thinking, we have given inordinate importance to the "what." This is perhaps indicated as early as Alberti in the European context, in his distinction of idea building and phenomenon building. The

production of architecture is vastly governed by idea building that I will argue is a condition of optical primacy and the regime of representation. With "where is architecture," the question deflects from form to situation, from an autonomous existence to a situated presence, from ideation to sensation, from the asymptotic present to a phenomenal presence.

My inquiry into "where is architecture," and therefore the structure of architecture-place, commences to a great degree from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of the body, the body as a lived, spatial thing as distinct from the living, biological entity. What makes the concept of the living body distinct from the lived one? It is the taking into question the embodiment, emplacement, or deployment of the body in space, in the world. And hence the inevitable condition of chiasma. It is this phenomenological understanding that man is an emplaced being that leads me to realize the nature of the inherent situatedness of architecture.

What Is This Thing Called Place?

Architecture, place, and chiasm. We thus have three conditions to consider: architecture, place, and the inevitable intertwining between the two.

Let's look at place by itself, if we can... the world *there*. A "place" is something durable and yet impossibly elusive. As the Italian architect Aldo Rossi once remarked, as you approach place, it recedes. What he perhaps meant was we have not yet formulated a concept, or at least, an acceptable cognitive system for understanding place, the world where we are, where our architecture is. Much earlier, Plato noted in his distinction between *topos* and *chora* that the latter, what we may call "place," is hard to grasp, apprehensible only by what he called "bastard reasoning." *Topos*, on the other hand, is a location, a spatial coordinate, immensely accessible through objective parameters.

It seems that the notion of place, or whatever we may want to call it, has slipped away from a rigorous analysis despite its haunting presence in every language in one form or another. I refer to the challenge brought forth by Edward Casey. (It would be worthwhile to see how notions of place operate in specific language context conceptually, sociologically, and symbolically.) In any case, place has acquired an intellectual pariahhood. The notion "place," in its English usage, remains particularly suspect.

Invoking the notion of "place" in the twenty-first century often has a retrogressive implication, especially with the intonation of some kind of romanticism about landscape, of a chauvinism around regional or territorial affiliation, or of something just stable and perennial in the postmodern world of perpetual flux and denuded fixities. Not only that but the opposite of "place" - placelessness - is being increasingly apotheosized. We see that acutely in the context of new globalization (unencumbered transfer of information, capital, identity, etc.), in euphoric mediatization (almost pornographic, as Fredric Jameson would have it), or the "hyperspace" "discovered" in new urban and architectural conditions. One now confronts placelessness as another kind of existent space.

Current notions of placelessness – in whatever form they may be – are preceded by the universal aspiration of modern architecture, as in Archigram's vision of literal world mobility. That is perhaps our first sense of architectural globalization. However, the glorification of modern placelessness does not come without its attendant critique or quandary. I am thinking of Max Frisch's existentialist and quasi-ethical novel *Homo Faber* (1954). In the book, Walter Faber is a UNESCO engineer, a quintessential modern man, for whom only the "tangible, calculable, verifiable" exists, and who exists solely for the service of a purely technological world, and as an emblematic figure befitting a world body as UNESCO moves from place to place allowing himself to be purely and liberatively uprooted. In the fiction, we also notice his ungraspable anguish. On a cruise liner – travel is the ubiquitous trope for the paradigm of placelessness – Faber meets a young woman and falls in love with her. We don't know accurately if they consummate their relationship or not, but in a twist consciously reminiscent of Oedipus and his exile from place and his devastating forgetfulness, Faber finds out that the young woman is actually his daughter. It's then the novel takes on the aura of a classic Greek tragedy.

In any case, the matter of "hyperspace" is of great consequence as Fredric Jameson argues, for it is a new paradigm of experience, asking from us nothing less than radical spatial and perceptual re-orientations. In *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern*, Jameson presents and discusses the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in LA as the epitome of "hyperspace," a space that we can now enter and experience.

A similar characterization may be made about the unfolding nature of airport spaces. A poignant case was that of Mehran Nasser Kasini, a fleeing Iranian "stranded" at Charles de Gaulle Airport for more than eleven years while trying to enter France unsuccessfully. The newspapers described him in the terminal "sitting at a table, perhaps smoking a pipe, taking a stroll, stopping to pick his mail at the post office or lunch at the McDonald's... he will be looking very much at home." Following Jameson, we can say that this *extruded* or *cleaved open* space [hyperspace] can now be experienced, and therefore needs to be taken seriously. Jameson thinks that we still do not possess the "perceptual equipment" to face this new hyperspace; in fact, the new conditions require we "grow new organs to expand our sensoria and our bodies to some new, as yet unimaginable. Perhaps ultimately impossible dimensions."

I would like to think that Jameson's conceptualization of hyperspace evolves from a cinematic imagination – we know his interpretations of cinemas – of the cinematic artifice and projection of space, taken up further recently in the work of Ackbar Abbas in visualizing Asian cities in radical ways.

Such notions of placement or radical spatiality, or more correctly, displacement or glorified placelessness, or even re-placement no doubt challenges us today, as it supercedes our understanding of fundamental embodiment, and yet ideas of place need to be reassessed. It is hardly an exhausted topic. And, after all, place is a fundamental condition for embodied architecture.

There are many ways of talking about place, each distinct and calling for different cognitive apparatus: about space versus place and what comes first; about place as "earth", the ground-basis of everything in the phenomenological way Husserl saw it; about place as discrete spatial units such as city, region, etc., or, with more particularity, home, church/temple, bedroom, etc.; or, about place as location, as position in a mathematical sense, as *topos*.

But I would like to clarify one thing: Although "place," culture, region, and nation are often used interchangeably, they are distinct concepts, at least, place and the others. The most obvious distinction is that "place" is the one that is least portable. On the other hand, culture (and perhaps, nation) is now perfectly transportable and immensely commodifiable. It can be mailed, shipped, faxed, beamed, and very soon will have nothing to do with any originary location. With MTV, diasporic movements, e-commerce and electronic transfer of capital, the geographic rootedness of culture and community is increasingly becoming irrelevant. But place is not only unportable but fundamental (being the fundamentally given), that is what places place against culture now, so that one can pose the phrase: *place versus culture*.

Body and Place.

I wish to re-enter the realm of place from a very unexpected but finally understandable vantage point: the body. More precisely, the body as articulated by Merleau-Ponty, as I have already proposed, as the "lived-body," the perceptually sentient organism that by its very definition is implicated with/in the world.

How is "man" emplaced? By being a body. And how does a body achieve body-ness? By being emplaced. Is this a simple syllogism, or is there room for reflection here?

The biological body and the lived body. The former amplifies, even reifies, the autonomy of an object, of a human being. But it is perhaps the biggest visual deception, that we have habitually and even conceptually, either because of philosophy or science, or even religion, have taken to be the unanimous reality. Do I stop at my skin? Where is my limit, and where does the limit of *outside-me* start? Where is the molecular separation? What to make of Andre Serrano's photographs of the punctured body... it is true that the human body is held together in its visual distinctiveness very precariously, that is, the human body in its liquid mass..., and yet there are a number of "invisible" but perceptible criteria to consider, that gives evidence of the body's various transactions with the world.

Consider for example, jet-lag. Jet-lag underscores the primacy of placement in particular places. Jet-lag is but the nagging exposition of a dis-placement, how place-specific biological and diurnal rhythms are incarnated in us, and before adjustments to a new place can be made remain as aberrant traces in the physiological system.

The history and theory of architecture return again and again to the analogy between body and building, that is, the human body and the architectural

figure, but the body is considered primarily as the imaginary autonomous body, be it defined biologically, metaphysically, or cosmologically. The lived body – the amoebic body – by definition engages the world, and consequently opens up very new criteria of understanding. I wish to consider architecture as analogous to the lived-body, to the paradigm of the amoeba.

To repeat: In objective normative terms, that is, geographically, the environment is distinguished as standing over and against the living body. This is an immediate visual realization, further amplified by the dominant discourse of science leading to the polarity of nature and culture as we know it. This polarity is taken for granted in classical European or even Indo-European epistemology, and still serves as the foundation for the modern world-view. This particular conceptualization may be questioned from two quarters: the phenomenological concept of the "lived-body," and the Japanese notion of *fudo*. In both standpoints, distinctions are articulated in a less mutually exclusive way, where one does not face the other, so that I am here and space is there, where as Heidegger might say that one is revealed through the other. This is the "ontological inseparability" between two apparently distinct entities that I had mentioned earlier that an amoebic being so clearly demonstrates.

It is Merleau-Ponty who through a number of concepts – "chiasm," "flesh," "intertwining" – would carry out the most substantial and sustained philosophical inquiry of this. As a brash summary of what is a dense reflection, what I would like to extrapolate from Merleau-Ponty is that spatiality is implicated in bodyness. And it is not something that can be immediately gathered from the classical or the rational view of the body. The realization proliferates with the idea of the "lived body."

For the lived-body, the environment is an indefinite extension of it, and not distinguished as standing over and against the living body. According to Merleau-Ponty, in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, the environment is a "manipulatory area" for the lived-body, something potentially to be taken and incorporated. The lived-body appropriates certain objects in the world to the extent that these objects cease to be objects and become "incorporated," become part of the lived-body. On the other side, the environment directly and indirectly regulates the lived-body. The environment conditions the body in such a way that the body is the expression or reflection of the environment. In living, the body not only lives itself but also lives the environment. I am again thinking of the amoeba. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls a "reciprocal insertion and intertwining" of the lived-body and the environment. As another writer explains it: "the limits of one are lost in the other."

Eugene Minkowski, through his clinical studies of spatiality and temporality, gives a compelling sense of what it is to be in a lived space and in lived time:

"I look in front of me: I then see objects or people or people more or less distant from me... But I also see life unfolding around me... it is the clarity of this visual space which forms the backdrop against which my own life and the life of other living beings come to unfold... But *clarity is not the only substance of life* [my italics]; we also live in the night... But I no longer have the black night, complete obscurity *before*

me; instead it covers me completely, it penetrates my whole being, it *touches* me in a much more intimate way than the clarity of visual space. Certainly, the dark night is not taken here in the sense of absence of light or the impossibility of seeing; it is taken in its positive value – in its materiality, we would almost like to say – and as such it is much more material, much more tangible, and even more penetrating than the limpid clarity of visual space... it will be given to it in a particular way, completely different from the way in which clear space is given, and the words "distance" and "touch" seem to bring out this difference very well. The dark night also has something more personal about it in relation to the ego: I remain face to face with it; it is more "mine" than clear space... [also] auditory space envelops me and penetrates like black space; there will be neither free space nor a "next to," neither perspective, nor horizon, nor distance in it, as there is in lived space." (other italics are Minkowski's)

Merleau-Ponty also remarks that "our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space." This is the core idea of the "lived-body." One could think the same for architecture and the environment, where architecture corresponds to a lived-body, as a sort of revision of the pervasive analogy of the conventional body and building.

The idea of space takes a different turn in this context. If humanity is inherently an emplaced being, and if emplacement is another way of saying that body and world are in an inscrutable intertwining, then carrying the analogy further, I see building as an emplaced thing, an essentially situated object, and situated with all the conditional features of the "lived-body." One can perhaps think of situated architecture as "lived" architecture.

However, in my view, Merleau-Ponty is more interested in establishing the nexus, and not so much divulging the nature of it, what constitutes it. The world in the language of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is intermittently environment, space, or climate. Here, I am also interested in the work of the Japanese thinker Tetsuro Watsuji on the notion of "fudo." Watsuji argues how we discover ourselves in climate, that is, how we find ourselves, always, in a concrete climatic and geographic envelope. Thus, what Merleau-Ponty treats as space or environment in conceptual terms, Watsuji offers that as a more concrete realization or actualization, as climate.

I wish to weave the arguments of these two thinkers and say that that "our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space" (Merleau-Ponty), and that "we discover ourselves in climate" (Watsuji). And, based on that weaving, I would like to explore the "actualities" of place, and finally, assuming a correspondence between lived body and architecture, reconsider what it might mean for architecture to be inevitably situated.

Actualities of Place.

What does it mean then to be given to the manipulatory area of the body, to the manipulatory extensiveness, this surround? What are then the enduring features of this chiasm? Or, in other words, what does it mean to be situated? What can we talk about to make a discourse of this situatedness?

What does the body endure as a given actuality/actualities in or through which it manifests, acquires, or endures its embodiment? It is in its deployment in those actualities [of place] that the body discovers itself, it becomes conscious and aware of its embodiment, and the world becomes durable.

I would like to consider three "realities" or "actualities" about place [the conditions of the durability], actualities which affect both openly and surreptitiously the life and form of architecture, and constitute the nature of its situatedness: a telluric actuality, a climatic actuality, and a geologic actuality.

(1) A telluric actuality indicates that the earth is the ultimate ground-basis for architecture, where architecture can be seen as another topographical manipulation of the earth's surface. There is a lot of phenomenological and psychological, and not to mention, ecological and even evolutionary grounds to cover here [our chemical/molecular origin with the earth, etc.].

(2) A climatic actuality is the most direct and visceral evidence of architecture's chiasmic relation with the elements. Architecture has to reckon with *weather*, and it itself weathers.

(3) A geologic actuality stresses that architecture is a phenomenon of *gravity*, not so much in a technical sense but in a visceral way.

A corollary to the above three is the material reality of architecture (materiality). Crudely, material is the direct or processed product of earth, and it is how that is 'choreographed' in relation to climate and gravity that makes for the phenomenal presence of architecture.

What we have in shorthand are earth, climate and gravity. Climate and gravity impinge on us imperceptibly, two things we take for granted as being given, and yet are essential for *where* and *how we are*. What distinguishes lived and actualized architecture from say ideational or digitized ones, is that it is literally and perceptually embedded in climate and gravity in a seamless manner, in the way Minkowski's "night" envelops the body.

Still, the question of climate remains limited in architectural discourse. It is considered either as a dry prosaic technicality coming under the rubric of climatology, or a sentimental swipe about nature. Or, at most, it is the focus of the ethical imperative of sustainability. Or worse, at the same time, it could be considered, not enthusiastically, as a sort of determinism.

The Japanese thinker Tetsuro Watsuji sees space, environment, and climate as synonymous terms. In his book *Climate: A Philosophical Study*, Watsuji places premium on climate, how climate is the basis of *how we see ourselves* and *how we see the world*.¹ He wishes to rephrase the phenomenological notion of how "we discover ourselves in space" by how "we discover ourselves in climate," that is, how we find ourselves, always, in a concrete climatic and geographic envelope. Notwithstanding allusion to climatic determinism for cultures and risky links to fascist fascination for the soil, Watsuji's arguments have implications for a rephrasing of architecture and environment. First,

Watsuji may claim that terms like space and environment are abstract notions (that is, saying that architecture has to contend with environment is not enough), that they make sense only when they have been particularized by climatic specifics. Second, Watsuji offers the Japanese term "fudo" where space and climate (or, culture and nature, or by extension, architecture and environment) are seen in a conjoined sense such that it is hard to distinguish the two. It is in the sense of an "ontological inseparability" between two entities that Watsuji's notions correspond to Merleau-Ponty's ideas of intertwining.

Architecture, in this sense, may be seen not merely as a shelter from climate, as if climate and architecture are confronting each other, but as the inevitable intertwining of the architectural body and climate; it is where climate is revealed. Architecture, to wax poetic, is the trace of wind, water, sun, and rain. As Louis Kahn reflected, the sun never knew how beautiful it was until it touched the wall.

Gravity is the other bane of architecture. It is after all the metaphor of limit and death, as someone said, sleep is the complete surrender of the body to gravity. In the film *The Matrix*, the first thing that is attempted is to overcome the reality of gravity. If you think about the pyramids, no matter how grounded they seem, they are poised for an aerial flight. The history of monumental or mainstream architecture is largely a history of this anti-gravitational desire, from the column of light puncturing the roof of the Pantheon to the light streaming down in Gothic churches, to the invisible axis searing through the stupa. The desire continues all the way, albeit in different form, to the modern period, from the incredible peripatetic structures of Archigram to the coordinateless configuration of deconstructivism.

But gravity persists, and continues to interject an ambivalence in the architectural desire. There is the story of Kahn and Vincent Scully on a visit to Moscow. Scully pointed to the famous church spires there, and exclaimed: "See, Lou, how they touch the sky." Kahn replied, possibly looking down: "See how they rise from the ground." Kahn's architecture, more than others in contemporary times, has been an unabashed reflection on gravity, and confirming that architecture on earth is firmly gravity-bound. This is perhaps what makes the work of Kahn appear to many avant-garde postulants ponderous and retrogressive, tainted with the impenetrable weight of place.

Tectonics is actually the *poeisis* of gravity. Tectonics is no mere expression of making or fabricating, but making the geo-logic presence of earth and gravity tangible. Tectonics is man's dialogue with gravity; and, architecture reveals this. Even if architectonic configuration is veiled by scenographics, iconology, and ideology, gravity remains as an unperturbed ontological condition. Gravity is also a phantom dynamic in basic modes of spatial embodiment, in establishing the pre- or para-conceptual modes of left and right, and up and down. There are other vectors of gravity with architectural implications: horizontality and verticality, heaviness and lightness, ascent and descent, wetness and dryness, and seating and standing.

Take for example the task of making a platform. It may seem like a rather pedestrian exercise - making a flat, horizontal surface - but is actually fraught

with primal urgency (the only place where the need for a horizontal datum is diminished is in zero-gravity). Some current works present and problematize the phenomenon of gravity through literally a tilt in architectural elements. The return of the ramp – an instrument of movement or pause? – as a slanted inhabited plane (as in Rem Koolhaas' library in Seattle going back to Le Corbusier's Strasbourg project) is one recent example. In Balkrishna Doshi's Goofa in Ahmedabad, a semi-underground art gallery in a serpentine configuration, there is an excruciating absence of the flat plane, either the horizontal or the vertical. All "planes," including the floor, slant, curve, and undulate. Attempts to stand still or stay stationary remind one how much we take standing or sitting for granted, and how precious is the horizontal datum. While sitting on that mean floor during an exhibition opening, constantly trying to adjust to an elusive position of comfort, the thought that came to my mind was the quiet relentless presence of gravity.

Senses and Presences.

The situatedness of architecture is a tectonic, tangible and material event. In other words, it is a phenomenal engagement with climate, gravity, and the earth. Steven Holl, echoing the Albertian theme, notes: "An architecture is born when actual phenomena and the idea that drives it intersect." Idea is a matter of the mind, so to speak, while phenomenon involves sensations, perceptions, and visceral feelings. The former implies "design" as modern architecture culture has come to know and practice it, and phenomenon points to the opening up of a work to a full corporeal and environmental engagement. It is siting, tectonics and materiality, and the three actualities discussed earlier, that give a building a presence. At that point, the building is both part of the collective realm and part of the earth's strata; in both cases, de-moored from the mind of the creator. It then becomes an engaging phenomenon, and has presence.

Sound, smell, shadow, tactility, and temperature, along with sight, attune us to place, and to emplaced or sited architecture [this was pointed out a while ago by Rasmussen]. One hears a city in the call of the *muezzin*, in the tolling of the church bell (in some places), and perhaps today, in the scream of the police siren (what Yehudi Menuhin calls the aural environment). And, again, in distinction to the olfactorily neutral places such as Boston and Singapore, one can still smell Istanbul, Venice, Delhi, and perhaps New York. On a tactile architecture, which is present in every material occasion, one could still refer to Alvar Aalto's Saynatsalo Town Hall as a paradigm. The non-visual dimensions of architecture have been addressed lately in some of the writings of Kenneth Frampton, Juhani Pallasmaa, and David Leatherbarrow.

Even the optical dimensions of architectural experience remain to be explored further. By that I mean not only the clarity of light and visibility, but the ambiguous area of darkness. The writer Junichiro Tanizaki (in *In Praise of Shadows*) has written in a compelling way about the subtle dimensions of shadows in the context of Japanese aesthetics and sensibility.

A masterful "construction" of darkness is Tadao Ando's Japanese Gallery at the Chicago Institute of Art. On entering the gallery, one is immediately confronted with a dusky atmosphere, not an expectation in a museum setting. One sees only a vague apparition of a set of columns (trees in a forest?),

beyond which there is a somewhat more lighted area appearing to contain some objects. One navigates through and beyond the dark forest (it is, one realizes afterwards, a grid of nine square wooden posts), and arrives at the semi-lighted area. The area contains glass cases displaying Japanese artifacts; the light seems insufficient to examine the pieces. There is a long and heavy wooden bench on one side, where one sits and lets the eyes slowly adjust to the dimness. The effect is almost epiphanous: The artifacts slowly begin to appear amidst the haze of a visible darkness. The whole experience is one of a delayed visibility. For certain things to appear, one has to wait; for certain things to prosper, one has to delay. It is no wonder that the term "dwelling" is cognate with "delaying."

Chiasmic Architecture.

Architecture as an analogy of the biological body would lead us to iconology, and disembodied ideations and programs. The analogy of the lived body, the amoebic figure, on the other hand, would reveal for us the manner of its situated presence, its corporeality (which is its spatiality), its emplacedness. What does architecture offer in the recognition of its emplacedness? In a sense, we are talking about the architectural presencing of the chiasm, and there are many ways by which the chiasm is articulated architecturally.

[illustrations follow]

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Watsuji