Benoît Goetz:
A French reader of Rykwert's *On Adam's House in Paradise*

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Introduction: the end of theory

1. For the origin of this claim and for an account of Rykwert's early years of teaching at the University of Essex see Thomas (2004). Rykwert was not the only catalyst for this change because Tafuri published his *Teoria e storia dell'architettoria* in the same year, and four years earlier an American Institute of Architecture teacher's seminar, and later book, used the term "history, theory and criticism" in the context of architecture, see Whiffen (1965). Many thanks to my anonymous referee for pointing this out to me.

2. Joseph Rykwert, quoted from an interview with Helen Thomas, 21 January 2003, in Thomas (2004: 39).

3. For the claim that theory is dead in architectural education see Pasnik (1999), Varnelis (1999) Speaks (2005), Vallier (2005) and Pavlovits (2005).

4. Vitruvius Pollio (1931) *On Architecture: II.i.3*. See page 78 for the Latin version and page 79 for Granger's translation.

When Joseph Rykwert started teaching his *History and Theory of Architecture* course for masters students at the University of Essex in 1968 this marked, among other events, the beginnings of a profound shift from the way history was being taught in architecture schools.[1] No longer would history be taught as a study of precedents purely for the sake of guiding future architectural practice (condemned by Manfredo Tafuri as "*critica operativa*" or the ideological use of history to defend current bourgeois practices of architecture): from now on architectural history and theory would be intertwined as a critical engagement with cultural ideas for their own sake. And in place of the iconographic connoisseurship of the Courtauld method, well known to Rykwert since he was taught by Rudolph Wittkower at the Courtauld Institute, he would establish a "socially committed art history in which you start off by looking at objects … and treat them all as evidence of how they were made in their context."[2] What historians like Rykwert and Tafuri did, in effect, was to take the history of buildings out of the design studio and expose it to all the cultural and political ideas of the day. Their method was to immerse themselves in the archives and a hitherto impossibly-wide range of texts and intellectual currents in order to create a legitimate role for the architectural historian, independent of architectural practice. If we heed the calls for the end of theory in architecture – and these calls are now too numerous to ignore – then this period of intertwining history *and theory* is itself being eclipsed by another way of teaching history within architecture schools.[3] Theory is being replaced by research, which is once again intended to be directly useful to the practice of architecture, and masters theses and PhDs are fast becoming design theses and creative practice PhDs. Whether this is a return to ideologically naive *critica operativa* that predates Rykwert and Tafuri, or whether practice is now itself reflective, is a question that needs to be asked with a seriousness and a sophistication that we no longer possess. Whatever the case, it is timely to re-examine the history and theory of architecture through a reading of Rykwert's early work *On Adam's House in Paradise*, in particular as it is read by someone well-qualified to appreciate its nuances and far-reaching consequences: the French philosopher, Benoît Goetz.

The four kinds of primitive hut

Before beginning any discussion of the primitive hut it is helpful to keep in mind that there are in fact four kinds of primitive hut. Firstly, there is the purely historical object treated dispassionately as simply a stage of building left behind in the progress towards today's house forms, by constructing better and better kinds of huts, the *meliora genera casarum* of Vitruvius.[4] Secondly, there is the hut revisited

in our imaginations in order to make an unflattering comparison with today's over-sophisticated and overly self-conscious architecture. This is the famous rustic cabin, Marc-Antoine Laugier's *petite caban rustique* (1753: 12). Thirdly, there is the anthropological hut, an actually existing non-Western pre-industrial dwelling, dissected in order to rediscover the universal elements of architecture, for example the Caribbean bamboo hut of Gottfried Semper's *Bambus-Hütte* (2005: 666). Finally, there is the primitive hut as a continuously inaugurating event, something that reoccurs every time we make a place for ourselves or construct a building that is both unconsciously naïve and self-consciously sophisticated. This is the meaning that Joseph Rykwert gives to the primitive hut in *On Adam's House in Paradise* and, as Benoît Goetz (2001) makes clear in his book *Dislocation*, this condition affects all human habitation.

When *On Adam's House* was first published it received a surprisingly hostile reception simply because this new meaning of primitive hut passed unnoticed. Ernst Gombrich (1973, not paginated) wrote in the *New York Review of Books*, "It is pleasant to think of Adam, the perfect man, living in a perfect house in Paradise ... Alas, like so many other pleasant fantasies this one must be heretical. Adam no more had a house in Paradise than Eve had a dress."[5] Note that this does not in fact invalidate Rykwert's thesis; the house in paradise is indeed heretical because, in Goetz's terms, the house introduces heterogeneity into a field of purity. Once inside paradise it brings paradise to an end. Strictly speaking, the first house is situated on the threshold of paradise and the Fall of Man. The failure to notice the implications of this new meaning of the primitive hut also led Kenneth Frampton (1973: 9) to surmise that "Rykwert's erudition seems to become gratuitously recondite. The structure becomes diffuse and the reader is projected into an anecdotal morass of facts, the relative relevance of each to the discourse at hand being left inexplicit." In effect, Frampton admits here that as a reviewer he had failed to grasp this new meaning.

Rykwert's French reader

One who does not fail Rykwert as a reader is Benoît Goetz.[6] In his 2001 book *La Dislocation: Architecture et Philosophie* (Dislocation: Architecture and Philosophy), Goetz makes it very clear that Rykwert does indeed know that the Bible makes no mention of any house in paradise, and he continues:

> We should allow this allegory to be subjected to a slight modification of detail: in paradise *Adam did not have a house*. Or if he had one, it would not have been outside, and consequently would not have constituted an inside either. Paradisiac space is without division, strictly speaking it is *nowhere* and only the tree of knowledge introduces rupture into the field of immanence such that an *anywhere*, a "this is paradise" becomes possible. On leaving this place, on leaving Place, the first man and first woman did not only discover suffering and shame, they discovered an outside, and by trying to construct an inside they then, and only then, invented architecture. The meaning of this apologia is that the partition of space that constitutes "the first dislocation" is constitutive of architecture itself. (2001: 27)[7]

Goetz extends Rykwert's theme of the persistent haunting vision of the first house, which concerns everyone involved with building, into the theme of dislocation, which is the precondition of all human contact with the world. In both

8. Goetz borrows this term from Michel Foucault, see The Foucault Reader, edited Rabinow (1991: 353), where Foucault gives the following examples of "ethical substances": for the Greeks it was aphrodisia, the acts, gestures and contacts that produce pleasure and for Christians it is flesh, the carnal body as a source of sinful temptation. The point being that in both cases (aphrodisia for the Greeks, "flesh" for the Christians) the "ethical substance" is the material to be worked over by the practice of ethical living.

cases, however, it is something more fundamental than the nostalgia for a lost origin that can never be retrieved, the imagined hut that is used to show up the pretence of our over sophisticated luxury-dwellings, or the anthropological hut as a demonstration of the primal elements of architecture.

Goetz states that there was no Adam's house in the Garden of Eden because, prior to the expulsion from paradise, there could not have been any division of places nor any inside or outside. Paradise lacks nothing, so every space in it is equivalent to all other spaces; paradise is, in other words, an indivisible field of immanence without otherness and without limit. The Expulsion, the first dislocation, creates the first division of inside and outside. Adam and Eve have to leave Eden. Now, therefore, the world is fragmented for the first time into Eden and non-Eden. This first division is constitutive of architecture as such, so it is only after the Fall that Adam can build the first house. The Expulsion from Paradise is also the fracturing or singularisation of spaces. Space is "architectured", and this architecturality of space is the precondition for architecture.

Thinking *from* architecture

So, rather than a single event, dislocation is something that never stops taking place. This is how Goetz thinks *from* architecture rather than reflecting *on* it. Architecture for him is not an object to be encountered in some pre-established philosophical field, it is the field of thought itself. So, instead of confining architecture to aesthetics and academic problems of form and style, Goetz's strategic shift makes architecture become what he calls an "ethical substance",[8] a physics of space touching the very heart of existence, because existences cannot be disposed and dislocated without there first being an "architecturalisation" of space that makes the world a place of heterogeneous spaces with multiple insides and outsides. "The 'doctrine' that would render architecture worthy of consideration," writes Goetz,

> would not belong to the technological register nor the aesthetic register. It would lie in this affirmation that architecture is a way of setting up a *modus vivendi* between man and the space in which he moves. It would consist of hazarding a proposition that architecture is an 'ethical substance', to borrow one of Michel Foucault's terms. (2001: 86)

Architecture, in Goetz's view, is the very thought of space, therefore well able to teach us about the art of living or the way of being in the world. So, by thinking *from* architecture, Goetz arrives at an architectural physics of space (the theme of the second chapter of his book), an architectural ethics (chapter three), a political theory of places (chapter four), and a noetics or spatial condition of thought (chapter five). Because thought cannot be everywhere and nowhere as if we were still in paradise, thought must be placed somewhere, it therefore depends on certain preconditions of space. Therefore, all great thinkers also invent a singular way of dwelling, they "make the world" in different ways and this is above all, claims Goetz, what makes their thought essentially different. Heidegger makes the world differently from how Levinas makes the world, to use Goetz's example.

Goetz's redefinition of architecture as an endlessly recurring event of dislocation at once solves the problem of where architecture sits in relation to the other arts and, curiously, this takes us directly to the heart of the matter of Rykwert's latest book, *The Judicious Eye: Architecture against the Other Arts* (2008). *The Judicious Eye*

chronicles, with Rykwert's typical thoroughness and characteristically digressive style, the decline of architecture as the synthesis of the arts or *Gesamtkunstwerk* and revisits the many failed attempts to bring art and architecture together. The implicit yardstick for such a synthesis is of course *disegno* (investigative drawing), the defining concept of the Renaissance. *Disegno* is the art of drawing that uncovers the Platonic *eidos* or ideal form behind appearances, which Alberti, Vasari and others saw as the unifying technique underlying architecture, painting and sculpture. This unification through *disegno*, however, cannot be sustained outside a Platonic world view. If we no longer believe in the existence of any underlying essence, how can the arts be unified by their search for it? So the location of architecture among the arts is once again cast adrift in the Romantic period and we still carry the burden of this legacy today. For example, in a small sample of the many discussions on architecture taking place after the Renaissance, by two philosophers who have been very influential in the discourse on the arts, we find Kant placing architecture alongside sculpture as a *Kunstoffkünst* or "plastic art". Kant inherits the French opposition between *beaux-arts*, the fine arts, and *arts mécaniques*, the mechanical or applied arts. He then divides the fine arts into a further three categories consisting of the arts of speech (rhetoric and poetry), the formative arts, and the play of sensations (music and colour). The formative, or form-making, arts are further divided into plastic arts (sculpture and architecture) and painting. The plastic arts use figures in space, the "sensuous truth", while the non-plastic art of painting relies on "sensuous semblance." Sculpture differs from architecture in that only sculpture directs our attention to purely aesthetics ends. "In architecture," Kant (1988: 186) explains, "the chief point is a certain use of the artistic object to which, as the condition, the aesthetic ideas are limited." Then there is Hegel's (1975) well-known placement of architecture on the bottom rung of all the arts, which are now placed in a serial and teleological development towards ever more fluid ways of capturing the human spirit (first architecture, then sculpture, then painting, music, drama, poetry and so on). This is a position from which architecture has struggled to elevate itself ever since. So, for example, in our own time it is hard to imagine architecture holding the attention of the public for long, since they now have such easy access to the faster-moving arts of music and film, and efforts to make architecture more musical or filmic by making it reactive or mobile seem to have their basis in a system of the arts that precludes anything other than failure in advance for architecture. So, once again, when placed alongside the other stronger and less constrained arts, architecture is presented as a frail and overburdened art form.

The singularity of architecture

In place of these regional descriptions of architecture as one (usually quite minor) art or discipline among other arts and disciplines, Goetz gives us, based on his reading of Rykwert in Heideggerian terms, the singularity of architecture. According to this view, architecture need no longer be compared unfavourably to other stronger, more developed and more expressive forms of art. Firstly, because architecture forms the framework for all the arts and secondly, because it is not itself framed in the same way. Nevertheless architecture is not in a position to judge or control the arts in any way simply because it is the stage, the workshop, the theatre, the studio, the gallery and so on: it only appears with them as part of the same situation or event. Architecture is the framework for the

An example of buildings being droll: the Adams Cheng Residence under construction, Avondale, Auckland. Photo: Cheng.

other arts and disciplines but architecture is not itself framed. It passes beyond the boundaries of built form to participate in all human activities, as "a space that surrounds the bodies that inhabit it", as Goetz so delicately puts it:

> A work of architecture is not limited by the envelope of the building, but that it works on the field outside the envelope, that it makes itself *explicit* with the outside. Architecture is, in essence, bordered by the space that surrounds the bodies that inhabit it. Any work of architecture is an opening to that which it is not, to that which it neither relates to nor comprehends. It listens with surprise to what it calls forth and provokes. Above all it makes something happen that is not of the order of art. Thought, actions, attitudes are carried and sustained by it. Thus there is no architecture without a non-architectural assemblage that architecture thereafter contributes to the construction of. Sébastian Marot is not uninspired when he speaks about a "constructed situation" to name a space in the singular (as a synonym for architecture). The difference therefore is this, works of art take place in the world, a work of architecture is one *moment* of this world where we, works of art and other things coexist. (2001: 20–21)

In place of architecture taking a minor place among the arts we have an architectural singularity, a moment of the world in which everything takes place including the other arts, ourselves, our thoughts, our actions and attitudes, a moment in time when everything coexists. Architecture is the condition of our existence, says Goetz. Little wonder, then, that he adds that architecture listens with astonishment (*étonnement*) to what it calls forth, what it frames. This sense of astonishment reflexively leaves its mark on the works of architecture themselves because *"edifices sont de 'drôles de choses'"* ("buildings are 'droll things'"), says Goetz (2001: 23). When one searches in Google for images under the title *drôles de choses* one

will find pictures of, among other things, a small car mounting a truck tyre, a square of sidewalk splashed in paint that looks like a beautiful abstract painting, and an old tradesman's boot with a Nike label attached to it. Invariably, these are scenes from everyday life that are unexpectedly funny or beautiful. Buildings are strangely humorous and beautiful because "our existence resides in and concerns itself with architectural spaces."

> This is why architecture is always, in some way, a hollowed out cast of those beings whose essence resides in and concerns itself with its existence. Architecture is a technology of beings whose essence lies in existing *between the walls of architecture*." (2001: 23)

In brief, buildings are droll because we witness with astonishment what they bring forth as negative imprints of own selves.

Dislocation as factical dispersion

The dislocation inherent in human existence is an event that has two aspects, the first of which has nothing to do with architecture. The first dislocation is a property of human existence, our essential dispersion, our scattering and distraction towards a multiplicity of spaces. In Heideggerian terms it is Dasein's *faktische Zerstreuung* or factical dispersion/distraction (Goetz: 30). Heidegger has this to say about it in *Being and Time*:

> *Dasein*'s facticity is such that its Being-in-the-world has always dispersed [*zerstreut*] itself or even split itself up into definite ways of Being-in. The multiplicity of these is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining … (Heidegger 1990: 83)

Heidegger differentiates the "factual" (*tatsächlich*), the fact of being present-to-hand, from the "factical" (*faktisch*), taken up into human existence, but not necessarily proximally close. Factical dispersion is, therefore, the human ability to expand the individual's sphere of concern beyond the body's immediate vicinity to ever-increasing numbers of spheres until we are in a state of continuous distraction away from our present location.

> To exist is therefore to (self) dis-locate, existence *is* dis-location. Dislocation is our essential dispersion; we are scattered, expanded, distracted by a spatial multiplicity … . A "factical dispersion" (*faktische Zerstreuung*) belonging properly to *Dasein*. This dispersion is no different from the original spatiality of *Dasein* (from its *Räumlichkeit*). (Goetz 2001: 30)

The second aspect of dislocation does involve architecture: it is what we do with the first existential dislocation. We dispose of it. We cover over human distraction with compositions that hide the first dislocation. So, where *Dasein*'s facticity is dispersed into a multiplicity of ways of being-in – having to do with, producing, attending to, looking after, making use of, and so on – buildings used as structures to house these multiple ways of dwelling pull *Dasein* together and unify its spheres of concern. It is no surprise, then, that Heidegger's list of ways of

9. For small translated selections of Sloterdijk's *Sphären* (2004) see Sloterdijk (2007a and 2007b).

being-in should sound very much like the necessary steps that an architect must take in designing a human habitat: first they have to *do something with* the existing habitat, then they must *produce something* new which is *attended to*, drawn up, and further *looked after* and improved upon until it is finally *made use of* by others, and then they have to *let it go*, leaving others to inhabit what they have built but also clearing their minds, offices and schedules in order to be able take on new projects. Goetz thoughtfully applies Heidegger's uncovering of *Dasein*'s ontological dispersal to architecture and finds that:

> Architecture 'composes' with this first dislocation of the existents from existence, by dis-posing their places, in other words by distinguishing them, separating them, specifying them. The 'dis-' of dis-location is not therefore, to start with, anything destructive … not therefore a catastrophe, an annihilation, an apocalypse ... It is an event, a cascade of events that has always occurred from the beginning, but one that architectural modernity will leave uncovered. Because architecture has also been the activity that most fiercely resists the remembering of the first ontological dispersion, by erecting fortresses against the outside, monuments to tyranny and temples to house the gods. (Goetz 2001: 30)

As the etymological origin of the term archi-tecture indicates an art of control, Goetz adds, "all power is exercised architecturally". Any power able to give things a location is, in effect, architectural, and this power is synonymous with religious ritual and the sanctification of places. Dislocation, from this point of view, is the moment when a space becomes de-sacralised. This is why the primary existential dislocation is left uncovered by modernity and the death of God. Here Goetz's thinking might fruitfully lead us towards the profound speculations of Jean-Luc Nancy (1991: 110–150) on divine spaces and Massimo Cacciari's (1993) neglected work on architecture and nihilism, both of which well deserve to be reexamined in more detail for their architectural implications. Note that Nancy did in fact contribute an excellent preface to Goetz's book which deserves to be analysed in its own light.

Microspherical architectural space

Architecture composes, and disposes of, the fundamental human quality of being dispersed among many places and many spheres of interest. It responds to the first dislocation by making many re-locations for human activities: factories for working, libraries for reading, schools for learning, hospitals for convalescing, giving birth and dying in, and so on. Thus, it is part of an effort to cover over the original dislocation with a multiplicity of locations. The relocation of human activities in specific locations, however, requires great force and is traditionally bound up with religion and the making of sacred places, or with the tyrannical building of walls and the necessary policing of movement through their openings this brings.

The spatiality of human life is split into an ever-increasing multiplicity of places, as is attested by the third volume of Peter Sloterdijk's *Sphären* (Spheres), which deals with today's human microsphere in a section headed "Foam Architectures".[9] "One can speak of the presence of an egosphere," Sloterdijk tells us elsewhere,

when its inhabitant has developed elaborate habits of self-pairing and regularly moves within a constant process of differentiation from himself – that is, in *Erleben* (experience). Such a form of life would be misunderstood if one were to fixate only on the attribute of living alone in the sense of being partner-less, or incomplete as a human being. The nonsymbiosis with others that is practiced by the single occupant in the apartment turns out, after closer investigation, to be an *autosymbiosis*. Here, the form of the couple is fulfilled in the individual, who, in constant differentiation from himself, perpetually relates to himself as the inner other, or as a multitude of sub-egos. (2007b: 96–97)

According to Sloterdijk's analysis, the individual adapts to the contemporary dislocation into multiple microspheres by narcissistically self-pairing. Sloterdijk names some of today's microspheres: that zone close to hand, which is now overflowing with handy and essential appliances; the individualised sound bubble of portable players and cell phones; the zone of autoeroticism in which the individual becomes both the lover and the object of love; the private gym for the trainer-trainee; and the sphere where the autodidact performs cognitive self-care.

Reading Rykwert's *On Adam's House* alongside Goetz's *Dislocation*, it appears that Sloterdijk's innovative spherology is, strangely, a continuation of Rykwert's exploration of the primitive hut as a recurring concept as old as architecture itself. The primitive hut is a perennial theme in architecture because it exposes the permanent dislocation of human existence into multiple spheres of interest. The primitive hut is, after all, where one can be, if one wants to be, an historian, anthropologist, archaeologist, horticulturalist, primitivist and so on, each activity corresponding to unique spheres of concern.[10] The hut promises to locate us in nature, yet it fails to return us to a state of unknowing nature since it must take place after the Fall from paradise and after the introduction of the heterogeneity of inside and outside into any field of immanence. Instead, it returns us to our existential dispersal into multiple spheres of interest: hence the incessant attraction of the Japanese tea house in the mountains or the New Zealand bach by the sea. Their knowing naivety draws us in by promising to return us to some kind of therapeutic harmony with nature and at once reveals this desire to be the very product of our highly self-conscious and reflective existence.

10. For a well-documented argument that the New Zealand bach is a site that provides the time and opportunity to enable its inhabitants to become masters of multiple disciplines, see Cox (1995).

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