Giacomo

Is an architect and researcher based in Innsbruck, Austria when he conducts his PhD at the Institute of Urban Design under the guidance of Peter Trummer and works at the department of "Architecture Theory" under Bart Lootsma. More specifically, his research is focused Giovanni Battista Piranesi and the notion of time, archaeology, parachronism and historical narrative, as well as the relation between mainstream/pop cultures and architecture. Basically, his interest lies in the possibility of testing the mutual limits between design, history and theory.

Pala

OTHER ORDERS OCCUR

"**Todd Gannon:** As many thinkers associated with OOO [Object Oriented Ontology] have pointed out, so-called philosophies of becoming such as Deleuze's seem more interested in flows, intensities, and the processes operating beneath or beyond things than in the things themselves. In the 1990s architects developed similar interests in flows, continuities, and process, interests that were intensified by digital technologies. [...] If architecture is robbed of its objects, it is also robbed of all the wonder, mystery, surprise, and power they hold."

[...]

Tom Wiscombe: After a long period of focus on fluidity and connectivity, a new formal lexicon is in order. Chunks, joints, gaps, parts, interstices, contour, near-figure, misalignment, patchiness, low-res, nesting, embedding, interiority, and above all, mystery, are terms that resonate for me. I'm not interested in architecture that is always looking over its shoulder to pro- cesses or forces, but rather architecture that is irreducible and inexhaustible. I prefer the idea of buildings that produce new worlds to buildings as products of the world.

[...]

David Ruy: "As a student at Columbia University while Bernard Tschumi was dean, I was quite familiar with Derrida and Deleuze, as was everyone else there at the time. [...] The way in which computers were being recontextualized and estranged as a different kind of machine was, I think, an off-shoot of that larger movement. [...] with Graham we're connecting to a different genealogy that echoes other concerns. When I accidentally reconnected with Graham a few years ago I was very surprised to learn from him about these other important lines of thought that continued to develop in the shadows of these famous personalities. I was immediately struck by the originality of these authors, but even more so

by how foreign the ideas at first seemed. What I thought was a philosophical landscape of a few giant trees started looking more like a field of many strange flowers.
[...]

Graham Harman: "Philosophy absolutely must not try to be an instruction manual for architecture of for anything else. [...] If OOO holds any significance for architecture, it's on the metaphorical level. [...] This means that I will never be able to look at an architectural project and say "Aha! This is OOO transported into architecture!" There will always be various degrees of resonance and different possible paths."[1]

<div align="right">

T. Gannon, G. Harman, D. Ruy and T. Wiscombe,
From: *"The Object Turn: A Conversation"*,
2015

</div>

---

[1] Todd Gannon, Graham Harman, David Ruy and Tom Wiscombe, "The Object Turn: A Conversation", in Log, No. 33 (New York: Anyone Corporation, Winter 2015), pp.73-94

M ore than ten years have passed since the definition of OOO (Object Oriented Ontology) by philosophers such as – among others - Graham Harman, Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassies and Iain Hamilton. Suddenly, however, this thought begins to be used in the architectural discourse. After the first and hesitant references to this theory, nowadays, to read this philosophy seems to be a "must". Nonetheless, how is a philosophical discourse embodied by architecture? For many, there is a simple metaphorical analogy, meaning that there is not any proper translation from one field to the other, but rather a transliteration. In other words, and quite simplistically, the project formalizes philosophy. Object oriented ontology becomes Object Oriented architecture. Which is to say: architecture as an object. Of course, Object Oriented Philosophy tells us that we should not undermine objects, and that they are not the simple manifestation of a more fundamental reality, even the ones that exist without perceiving "dormant objects"[1]) -are at the centre of the universe. Rather, everything is an object, and it is potentially "weird". In other words, as summarized by Ian Bogost: "OOO puts things at the center of being. We humans are elements, but not the sole elements, of philosophical interest. OOO contends that nothing has special status, but everything exists equally"[2]. Objects are the centre of our world. Yet, to simply design "architectural objects" is not such an interesting idea or, at least, we can easily argue that it is quite a simple architectural interpretation. Nonetheless, such a linear and metaphorical movement of concepts from philosophy to architecture is not uncommon. In the late Eighties, Jacques Derrida's "deconstructionism", by becoming "deconstrutivism", became the

[1] Graham Harman, "Objects, Matter, Sleep, and Death" (2009), in Graham Harman, Towards Speculative Realism, Essays and Lectures, (United Kingdom: Zero Books, 2010) p.207

[2] Ian Bogost, Alien Phenomenology, or What is Like to be a Thing, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)mp.6

persistent slogan used to justify contradictory compositions of fragments. A little later, Gilles Deleuze's "Fold" was used to legitimize folded surfaces and flows of information. By doing so, philosophy becomes a sort of theology: I am Derridian, you are Deleuzian, she is Harmanian. Therefore, I design tortuous ruptures and syntactical contradictions, you program folds and flows, she shapes objects. At its best, such a translation of concepts cannot produce anything else but stylistic properties: -isms.

Nonetheless, philosophy should be taken more seriously than that. For instance, according to Mark Wigley, when talking about a Derridian architecture "There is no hygienic starting point, no superior logic to apply".[3] These words perfectly apply to today's use of OOO: there is no real common beginning shared by architecture and philosophy. Yet, since exchanges are happening, it is necessary to address how such a translation is taking place. According to Wigley, such an operation is ultimately impossible. In other words, philosophy (in his case Deconstruction) does not outlive its architectural translation and formalization, "because of architecture's unique relationship to translation, it [architecture] cannot simply translate deconstruction. It is so implicated in the economy of translation that it threatens deconstruction."[4] Yet, if it is true that architecture over-abuses, trivializes and kills philosophy, what is architecture gaining by doing so? In order to answers, we should try to look at the knot of relationships between philosophy and architecture, by trying to understand what it is that architecture gains from philosophy, rather than what it is that philosophy loses by being abused by our discipline. In order to start this analysis, it is worth to first understand what is the architectural back-

[3] Mark Wigley, "The Translation of Architecture, the Production of Babel", in Assemblage, No. 8 (Cambridge: MIT Press, Feb, 1989). p.8

[4] idem, p.19

ground of such a translation. That is to say, why and under what circumstances architects have started to look at OOO.

Surely, there are many reasons for that to happen: the digital that has been vulgarized as "parametricism"; the fact that, despite its theories proclaimed differently, the digital has produced the same fluid surfaces and biomorphic meshes all over the world; the run out of fashion of the so-called complexity paradigm; the economic crisis of 2008. All true. Nonetheless, the issue is even more complex, if not more complicated. Generally speaking, in the last 20/25 years, there has been the illusion that architecture, by becoming processual, performative and multi-disciplinary, would have been more in the world. It would have contributed in solving complex issues, such as the one of sustainability, by defining new urban paradigms: green cities, bottom-up participation, resilience, sustainability, sustainability, sustainability.

Nonetheless, by doing so, architecture seems to be losing its cultural specificity and, ultimately, its strength. The architectural translation of OOO has then to be seen from this point of view or, as written by David Ruy: "Through the sincere desire to be more in the world, architecture may have accidentally turned away from the very real objects right in front of it, including the architectural object itself"[5]. Then, to look once again at the "architectural object" is a way of reconsidering issues such as composition, form and aesthetics, having in mind today's cultural and political issues.[6] The general context is, then, the search for a cultural specificity of architecture, something that is felt as an architectu-

[5] David Ruy, "Returning to (Strange) Objects"in Theodore Spyropoulos, John Frazer, Patrik Schumacher, (edited by), Adaptive Ecologies: Correlated Systems of Living, (London: Architectural Association Publications, 2013), p.277

[6] It is worth to mention the "Aesthetic Activism" symposium held in October 2016 at Yale University, where architects have discussed with philosophers such as Harman and Jacques Rancière about these issues. See: https://www.architecture.yale.edu/calendar/53-aesthetic-activism (18/02/2018)

ral quality that is ultimately lost. Yet, what is the specificity of OOO in the context of architecture? Indeed, the need of seeking for the specificity of architecture is nowadays felt as something necessary by many architects and theorists who do not necessarily refer to this philosophy, or to philosophy at all. To name a few, Pier Vittorio Aureli, Sarah Whiting or Sam Jacob are all looking for ways of focusing once again on architecture as a proper discipline. So, then, why Object Oriented Ontology?

To cut the story short, the translation of OOO seems to be the latest chapter in a certain historiography of architecture that, more or less, goes like this: there once was postmodernism, followed by deconstructivism, overcome by the digital, the "fold" and the "blob", finally – today – we have "OOO", or rather "OOA" (Object Oriented Architecture). Still, this historiographical narrative is a huge simplification. In fact, if we focus on a discussion published on Log between architects referring to OOO (Tom Wiscombe, David Ruy and Todd Gannon) and Graham Harman himself, we can find more interesting aspects that will enrich such a story. Here, for instance, Tom Wiscombe argues that if it is true that the use of philosophy has produced a whole series of misreading, it is also true that such an operation is avoided when architects refer to OOO: "because OOO makes no specific or obvious overture toward architecture, multiple niches and generations in contemporary architectural discourse, some with opposing agendas, seem to have affinities for it."[7] Of course, Wiscombe, being among the ones who refer to OOO, could not say otherwise. Nonetheless, we have to read these words avoiding any malice. In fact, in the adoption of OOO in architecture, there clearly is a common interest shared by both the disciplines: the need of overcoming what was fa-

[7] Todd Gannon, Graham Harman, David Ruy and Tom Wiscombe, "The Object Turn: A Conversation", in Log, No. 33 (New York: Anyone Corporation, Winter 2015), pp.79

shionable until yesterday by simultaneously negating it and continuing it. On the one hand, architects are struggling to find ways allowing them to keep on working on the digital agenda, avoiding the deadlocks of methodological prescriptions and positivist positions. On the other, philosophers are trying to overcome the postmodern culture, though without forgetting what we can still learn from the former philosophy. Indeed, as noticed by Mario Carpo, this architectural expression can ultimately be read as a description of "one of the core traits" of what he calls as the "second digital style" (which is to say the latest trend of the "digital")[8]. Nonetheless, since an ever-increasing number of architects are drawing attention to OOO, this phenomenon cannot be read as the simple attempt of defining what "an object oriented architecture would look like", as Carpo suggests[9]. In fact, in order to properly understand this debate, it would be necessary to discuss this relation looking at architecture in general, forgetting the issue of "the digital"; at least for a moment.

For instance, we should read the different tendencies that, according to Wiscombe, Ruy and Gannon, can profit from a relation to OOO. Among these, we find: "*New ancients*, with their reengagement of the conceptual project through drawings"[10], the "suspicion of physical context as a "generator" of architecture", the inversion of the "entrenched relational hierarchy of context-to-building by producing context from the resonance of the building itself", that is to say, "fictional reflections, shadows and other sensual effects emanating from a building", the use of black to "create realities that lie somewhere at the limit of perception", "oblique projections", "patchy and glitch textures", "form-indepen-

[8] Mario Carpo, the Second Digital Turn, Dsign Beyond Intelligence, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017) p.91

[9] idem

[10] By saying "new Ancients", Tom Wiscombe refers to the work of the architects presented on Log31 ("New Ancients"). Among these: Mark Ericson, David Gissen, Thomas Kelly, Anna Neimark, Jason Payne, Daniel Sherer

dent figuration", "independent or hidden spaces within. Like Russian dolls, there is always another space nested inside", "hyper-objects", "aggregated cities", "mute icons", "non-representational architecture" that looks as such by "deliberately compromising, or breaking, architecture's own representational tools".

Obviously, these poetics and formal strategies are potentially independent from any philosophy and they could be read as new forms of digital culture or, rather, and more interestingly, attempts of transcending it by using post-digital media. Nonetheless, the reference to philosophy is particularly important for one simple reason: it allows the formulation of new concepts and, more importantly, both the disciplines have advantages by their mutual exchanges. One finds narratives, the other finds images.

Furthermore, the reference to OOO (as to any other philosophy) allows the production and conceptualization of new contents. If some, in fact, *reinterpret* episodes of architectural history in order to generate novelties, others refer to philosophy or extra-disciplinary concepts. In this sense, Object Oriented Ontology and Speculative Realism are particularly fecund. In fact, the instrumentality of OOO, and more generally speaking, of philosophy, is more profound than how we all superficially tend to think. It is not just a way of justifying a bunch of poetics. The relationship between architecture and philosophy operates in fact the other way around as well. Not only the philosophers use architecture to generate images (Gilles Deleuze famously quotes Bernard Cache in "the Fold"), but it is the reference to philosophy that gives architects the chance of generating new concepts. After all, it is a way of producing new forms. Or, as stated by Graham Harman in his conversation with the OOO archi-

tects: "people will rally to fresh ideas"[11].

Finally, the use of OOO (and philosophy) is not anything particularly new, despite producing novelties. It is a very modern way of seeking for newer and newer forms of estrangement. It is a way to turn modernity's prophecy inside out and to beat its odds. A prophecy – or rather a curse - already remarkably synthetized by Ezra Pound with three famous words: "Make it new"[12].

Whether we agree or not with the philosophical position of OOO; Whether we like or not the aesthetics used by the architects who refer to such a philosophy; we should consider the coupling of architecture and philosophy for what it is: a theoretical fiction enabling the production of new forms, concepts and aesthetics. After all, as already written by Giovanni Battista Piranesi some centuries ago, "the human understanding is not so short and limited, as to be unable to add new graces, and embellishments to the works of architecture"[13].

Nonetheless, we also know that the simple production of novelties is ultimately bound to the production of boredom. It couldn't be otherwise: "the new" cannot do anything else but becoming the normal. Consequently, we might argue that, in order to find a real and fecund grounding for these new ideas, these should be negotiated with architecture's disciplinary core ideas. Without such an interpretation, the dialogue between disciplines will never really be such, being instead nothing else but a sliding mask.

[11] Todd Gannon, Graham Harman, David Ruy and Tom Wiscombe, "The Object Turn: A Conversation", in Log, No. 33 (New York: Anyone Corporation, Winter 2015), p.75

[12] Make it New is a poem published by Ezra Pound in 1935

[13] Giovanni Battista Piranesi (translated by Caroline Beamish and David Britt), Observations on the Letter of Monsieur Mariette (1769), (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002) p.55