

Architecture and the Culture of Contingency

ACCOMMODATING THE GENERATIVE SELF

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CONTINGENT CULTURE

A culture is a set of behaviours, attitudes and values that are shared, sustained and transformed by an identifiable community. Currently, we are bound up in a culture of consumerism, and of terror; there are also retro cultures and utopian cultures. What's happening now that's interesting is that many, if not all of these different tendencies, tastes and persuasions are being re-aligned, interconnected and hybridised by a vast global community of online users, who are transdisciplinary in their approach to knowledge and experience, instinctively interactive with systems and situations, playful, transgressive and enormously curious. This living culture makes it up as it goes along. No longer do the institutions of state, church or science call the tune. Nor can any architectural schema contain it. This is a culture of inclusion and of self-creation. Culture no longer defines us with its rules of aesthetics, style, etiquette, normalcy or privilege. We define it; we of the global community that maps out the world not with territorial boundaries, or built environments, but with open-ended networks. This is a bottom-up culture—non-linear, bifurcating, immersive, and profoundly human. Who needs architecture? Any structural interface will do.

Ours can be described as a contingent culture. It's about chance and change, in the world, in the environment, in oneself. It's a contingent world we live in,

unpredictable, unreliable, uncertain and indeterministic. Culture fights back, fights like with like. The Contingent Culture takes on the contingency of life with its own strategies of risk, chance, and play. It is essentially syncretic. People re-invent themselves, create new relationships, new orders of time and space. Along the way, they create, as well as accommodate, the future. This culture is completely open-ended, evolving and transforming at a fast rate—just as we are, at this stage of our evolution, and just as we want it to be. Human nature, unconstrained, is essentially syncretic too.

THE SYNCRETIC PROCESS

Just as cybernetics analogises differences between systems, so syncretism finds likeness between unlike things. If cybernetics underlies the technology of new media art, syncretism informs the psyche. In the context of telematics, it's a matter of heuristics and heteronymia. Historically, syncretism has destabilised political and religious orthodoxies, reconciling and harmonising formerly discrete antagonists; its etymology derives from the coming together of opposed tribes to resist a common enemy. In contemporary culture, the enemy is habit - the uncritical repetition of behaviours, perceptions, categories, and values. The digital moment in art is passing as it approaches the status of orthodoxy; the period of extreme speculation, inven-

tion and untrammelled creativity is in danger of giving way to academicism and commercialisation, whether in cyberspace, on the web or through the mobile. The computer is becoming as invisible as it is ubiquitous. Art's 20th century preoccupation with the body is giving way to the technoetic exploration of new territories of mind.

This may involve revisiting the pathways to personal transformation and transcendence of older cultures, where the syncretism of knowledge and beliefs, as for example in *Brazil*, is explicit. Art needs to adopt syncretic strategies to embrace emerging models of mind and matter, cyberception, living process and computational systems, moistmedia, quantum reality, the nanofield, and ecological, social and spiritual issues. This may lead to significant changes in the way we regard our own identity, our relationship to others, the nature of memory, the exploration of consciousness, and the phenomenology of time and space.

BODY AND MIND

Just as Euclidean space appeals primarily to the physical body so cyberspace appeals primarily to the mind. The body loves edges, surfaces, solidity, resistance, pull. It seeks the heat of the sun, the keenness of the wind. It wants its world to be limitless but safely ordered, open to the clouds but protected from indeterminacy. Above all and always, the body wants its senses put in perspective. In the architecture of the last century, the body ruled. The mind, by contrast, seeks connectivity and complexity, uncertainty and chaos. It knows reality to be contingent, layered and ambiguous, constantly collapsing and reforming, observer-dependent, endlessly in flux. The attitude of the mind towards the body is post-biological. It seeks prosthesis and reconstruction, artificial life and the technology of consciousness, in short, the technoetic condition. Architecture has much to contribute to technoetics, as it develops new understandings of space and time, new approaches to presence and identity, new strategies of structural evolution. The hypercortex, mind in the Net, needs shelter. Human bodies and artificial bots need common habitats. At the point where cyberspace and post-biological life meet, an entirely new kind of social architecture is required.

THE GENERATIVE SELF

The real revolution in the new digital technology is not so much that of global connectivity - person to person, mind to mind - that releases us from the constraints of time and place (great as that is), but its power provide for the release of the self, release from the self, the dreaded "unified self" that Freud and his cohorts grew rich on promoting, and which no one, absolutely no one ever

succeeded in realising. The idea of making the self into one undivided whole, the idea of finding the one true self buried deep in the subconscious was both a conjuring trick and an assault on our human nature. Ouspensky was right; we are multiple, made up of many selves, with access to many layers of consciousness. Rather than needing to go deep into one's self, we need to reach out to the many selves that our innate creativity craves. This is where the revolution in consciousness lies: in our ability to be many selves, to be telematically in many places at the same time, our digital and post-biological self-creation leading to many personas, many aspects of what we each can be. In short, the 21st century Self is generative. This is of course the appeal of Second Life, as it is to the many narratives and games of generative identity, shape-shifting, and transformative personality that new media art has created.

FORGETTING FREUD

If I were to nominate in art the precursor to this cultural condition, whose significance far overshadows the Viennese doctor, it is the poet from Lisbon, Pessoa. His heteronyms are the precursors of the distributed, multiple selves we celebrate in the Net today: "jostling aliases express his belief that the individual subject—the core of European thought—is an illusion" (John Gray, Professor of European Thought, London School of Economics). The problem with Freud was not just his maintenance of this illusion, and the psychoanalytical fraud that his school thereby perpetrated, but the faux-intellectual analysis it gave rise to, the endless hidden hand exegesis of dreams, film theory, literature, art. Like Marx, he was a deadly determinist, and like Marx he put in shackles those who most ardently sought him out to release them from their personal prison. Marx's determinism was thought to lead to a totally uniform society, Freud's to the equally implausible, undivided self. We are insistently open-ended beings, we will not be tied down, told what we are when we know we are not. Forget penknives, fish and playing with fire. As Duchamp's secondary persona, Rose Sélavy might have said, a Rose, is a Rose is a Rose.

AVATARISM

Artificial agents cannot remain on the screen forever; they are already beginning to drop off the edge of the monitor into molecular space. The bio-telematic, neuro-constructive, nano-robotic era is rushing towards us. Anticipatory architecture must prepare itself for this marriage of cyberspace with nanospace, combining self-assembling structures and self-aware systems. The anticipatory architect must get up to speed on DNA and the genetic order of things. The world of our many selves

is one of syncretic reality, a hybrid, and mixed reality. Biophysics will enter the determination of mixed reality technologies.

BIOPHOTONS AND MIXED REALITY TECHNOLOGY

Mixed Reality and bio-telematics may become entangled with the quantum states of coherence, leading to the emergence of universal connectivity and non-linear relationships that exist beyond the classical constraints of space and time. Biophotons orchestrate the quantum coherence of the living being, and may lead us to ideas in some pixel/particle exchange of establishing the quantum coherence of virtual states. The concept of coherence describes the wholeness of the organism, which if we follow for example Andy Clarke's concept of the human organism as inclusive of its technological extensions, should embrace the whole as a unified sentient field. At the material level, Mixed Reality technology provides us with another skin, another layer of energy to the body, adding to the complexity of its field. Instead of populating Mixed Reality space with (virtual) objects we could consider it as a medium for the creation of (virtual) fields, or as an extension of the bio field itself. Just as DNA is the main source of biophoton activity, so might Mixed Reality be the field in which new possibilities for living systems could be rehearsed.

This paradigmatic change in architecture is not registered at the level of form but at the level of behaviour. To give just one simple example, our exaggerated interest in what a building looks like, its mere appearance, will give way by contrast to the concern with how a building sees us and its world, the quality of its gaze. Instead of the emotions that places and objects exert on us, we might consider how we could affect them, how products and structures might respond emotionally to their social environment. Questions of the form and structure of buildings will be overshadowed by ambitions for their dynamism and intelligence, their ability to interact with each other and with us, to communicate, learn and evolve. Engineering will embrace ontology.

LETTING ARCHITECTURE THINK FOR ITSELF

The convergence of a bio-architecture based on molecular technology and nano-engineering, allied to artificial consciousness and the networking of the human hypercortex, can bring us to an architecture that has a life of its own, that thinks for itself, that feeds itself, takes care of itself, repairs itself, plans its future, copes with adversity. It will be an architecture that is as much emotional as instrumental, as intuitive as ordered. We shall want to get inside the mind of such architecture and an architecture that can get into our own mind. The building of sentience is the challenge to the architecture of our time.

Architecture understood within the frame of field theory will not be the same as architecture understood within the frame of Western materialism. Thinking out of the box, however, will call for more than pussyfooting around with perspectives, or juxtaposing material surfaces in structural innovations. What we are talking about is Architecture as organism, the application of field theories to architectural practice.

THINKING IN FIELDS

To understand more fully the implication of field-thinking it's worth reviewing the observations of the Hungarian astrophysicist Attila Grandpierre:

The organisation of an organism involves fields, which are the only means to make a simultaneous tuning of the different subsystems of the organism-as-a-whole. Nature uses the olfactory fields, the acoustic fields, the electromagnetic fields and quantum vacuum fields. Fields with their ability to comprehend the whole organism are the natural basis of a global interaction between organisms and of collective consciousness, such that electromagnetic potential fields mediate the collective field of consciousness.

Grandpierre offers a quantum-physical model of a multi-layered consciousness, where the layering is expressed by the subsequent subtlety of the masses of the material carriers of information. Direct, immediate action at a distance actually exists in the electromagnetic field, which is the coupling, mediator field between waves and particles. The environmental, natural and cosmic fields are determinative sources of our consciousness. The Collective Field of Consciousness is a significant physical factor of the biosphere. The morphogenetic field has an electromagnetic (EM) nature. EM fields are vacuum fields. Different basic forms of vacuum fields exist, and all kinds of fields, including the particle-mediated fields as well, when overlapping each other, seem to be in a direct resonant coupling, and form a complex, merged bio field. The vacuum model of consciousness points to the inductive generation of consciousness, and to its self-initiating nature. Individual and collective methods, as well as the experimental possibilities of a global healing, and improving the consciousness field of mankind are suggested.

In general, many field theories come relatively low in the estimation of state approved science, unlikely to receive serious research funding, and pushed in many cases to the margins of scientific respectability—and scientists in general, apart from the very few pioneers, perhaps even more than university bureaucrats, seek academic respectability above all things. The findings of scientists such as May Wan Ho, Fritz-Albert Popp, Karl Pribram, David Bohm are kept largely at arm's length by

the scientific establishment. And Donna Haraway, even amongst the cognoscenti of media art, is recognized more for her *Cyborg Manifesto* than for her much earlier *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology*.

NON-LINEAR BIOPHYSICS

Non-linear biophysics and bio-information research are aspects of science, field science that lies beyond the pale of western scientific respectability, and yet are rich in ideas, attitudes and metaphors likely to be useful to the artist, as well as to the future of science itself. Here, on the edge of knowledge, where science could join art in a syncretic alliance, is where exploration, speculation, and creative affirmation could converge. As James Gimzewski has said, regarding nanotechnology, “we would do best to look at connections not the parts; waves and vibrations seem a much better starting point for the journey we could take together.”

MATTERS OF MIND

It's worth returning to the issue raised earlier concerning the matter of mind (or put another way, the mind of matter) The questioned begged here is: whose epiphenomenon are we?

THE SHIFT OF FOCUS FROM A-LIFE TO MIND SCIENCE: TOM RAY

Initially, Ray was famous for the creation of Tierra: Synthetic organisms have been created based on a computer metaphor of organic life in which CPU time is the “energy” resource and memory is the “material” resource. Memory is organized into informational patterns that exploit CPU time for self-replication. Mutation generates new forms, and evolution proceeds by natural selection as different genotypes compete for CPU time and memory space.

However, it is significant, I believe, in the evolution of both art and architecture, that this pioneer of techno-art, has now moved his research focus from A-life to mind science. To clarify the important advances he has already undertaken in this area, it is worth quoting him at length:

Nineteen psychedelics have each been screened against over one hundred receptors, transporters and ion channels, providing the first comprehensive view of how these compounds interact with the human receptome. Each individual psychedelic causes a unique spectrum of subjective effects. DIPT causes auditory distortion. 5MeO-DIPT enhances orgasm in males but not females. MDMA provokes empathy. TMA provokes anger. Mescaline provokes an appreciation of beauty. 2C-B causes tactile, gustatory and sexual enhancement. 2C-E pro-

vokes rich fantasy and introspection. The project aims to understand the mechanisms underlying the qualitative diversity of actions of psychedelics, by locating each drug in an abstract “receptor space,” a coordinate system with one axis for each receptor. The state of the brain is constantly on the move, regardless of medication. We can think of it as a complex dynamical system, in which the trajectory follows high-dimensional orbits, and switches among many “attractors,” where the attractors represent the major emotional states and moods, and whatever mental phenomena the chemical systems are mediating. In this dynamic reference frame, drugs will create a perturbation along the binding vector, thereby pushing the system into a new attractor. We want to get to know the pharmacology of the attractors... to begin to map the chemical organization of the human mind (Tom Ray 2005).

THE DIGITAL MOMENT HAS PASSED

In my view the digital moment has passed. A pharmacological moment is upon us, within cognitive science and beyond its borders.

Only our extreme materialism and the cowardice of political expediency and mind control, prevents us from exploring new worlds and participating in new realities. While it is evident how cybernetics, telematics and the computerisation of engineering has affected both architectural form and building practiced, we may need to begin to think of the consequences for human habitation and built environments of a culture of mind, in which living in altered states of consciousness becomes more frequently the norm, just as living in multiple states of body informs our living today—both in Second Life scenarios and the syncretic reality of contemporary life.

ART/SCIENCE

In the arts currently, there is much ado about the so-called art/science connection. This is largely an illusion since rarely is there a true collaboration, rather an awkward borrowing of scientific metaphors put to the service of rather bankrupt and tediously illustrative artistic imagination. There are exceptions: the Gimzewski/Vesna nanoprojects for example, or some outcomes of Jill Scott's Artists in Labs initiative.

But the real issue is: Ask not what science can do for art—ask what art can do for science. Science is in a bad way. If this conference is looking at expanding bodies—whether that is interpreted as expanding the body's sensorium, or its reach, or its efficacy, an expansion of mind and of understanding about the universe it inhabits is going to be required. Straight up science may not be much help in this. After all science today is confronted by Five Unknowns:

- Dark matter and dark energy
- The location of mind
- The nature of qualia
- Evolutionary purpose
- The influence of energy fields

And finds itself in a cloud of unknowing Scientists do not know what makes up 96% of the Universe. We live in the midst of unknown dark matter and dark energy. As above so below. We also know next to nothing about consciousness—where it is located, how it arises, when it is shared, why it persists. The “dark matter” of the mind has been treated as occult, and banned from polite academic and religious discussion for over three hundred years. Artists have the freedom to absorb both orthodox and forbidden knowledge and a duty to attempt to bring the unknown to light.

To architects addressing the future, I’d recommend the following pocket survival strategy. I think it’s necessary to identify new knowledge fields and develop transdisciplinary discourse and practice. In this it’s probably useful to prioritise:

- subject before object
- process before system
- behaviour before form
- intuition before reason
- mind before matter

In order to meet the needs of the culture of contingency, and to properly accommodate and sustain the generative Self, emergent transdisciplinary discourses will need to consider: amplifying thought (concept development), sharing consciousness (collaborative processes), seeding structures (self-organising systems), making metaphors (knowledge navigation), and constructing identities (self-creation).

Architecture will have to deal head on with paradigmatic change as the Self and society undergo accelerated transformation. Its working language, as well as its theoretical discourse will need to adopt new terms, which may turn out, I believe to be very old terms, terms which have dealt with an understanding of fields, flow, contingency and the Self in the deep past. I leave you with the working vocabulary of I Ching, the Book of Changes. Give it a throw!

01. ||||| Force 33. ||||| Retiring
02. ||||| Field 34. ||||| Great Invigorating
03. ||||| Sprouting 35. ||||| Prospering
04. ||||| Enveloping 36. ||||| Brightness Hiding
05. ||||| Attending 37. ||||| Dwelling People
06. ||||| Arguing 38. ||||| Polarising
07. ||||| Leading 39. ||||| Limping
08. ||||| Grouping 40. ||||| Taking-Apart
09. ||||| Small Accumulating 41. ||||| Diminishing
10. ||||| Treading 42. ||||| Augmenting
11. ||||| Prevading 43. ||||| Parting
12. ||||| Obstruction 44. ||||| Coupling
13. ||||| Concording People 45. ||||| Clustering
14. ||||| Great Possessing 46. ||||| Ascending
15. ||||| Humbling 47. ||||| Confining
16. ||||| Providing-For 48. ||||| Welling
17. ||||| Following 49. ||||| Skinning
18. ||||| Corrupting 50. ||||| Holding
19. ||||| Nearing 51. ||||| Shake
20. ||||| Viewing 52. ||||| Bound
21. ||||| Gnawing Bite 53. ||||| Infiltrating)
22. ||||| Adorning 54. ||||| Convert the Maiden
23. ||||| Stripping 55. ||||| Abounding
24. ||||| Returning 56. ||||| Sojourning
25. ||||| Without Embroiling 57. ||||| Ground
26. ||||| Great Accumulating 58. ||||| Open
27. ||||| Swallowing 59. ||||| Dispersing
28. ||||| Great Exceeding 60. ||||| Articulating
29. ||||| Gorge 61. ||||| Centre Confirming
30. ||||| Radiance 62. ||||| Small Exceeding
31. ||||| Conjoining 63. ||||| Already Fording
32. ||||| Persevering 64. ||||| Not-Yet Fording