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INTERSTICES 20

## Autonomy-within-relationality: An alternative for architecture after the Global Financial Crisis

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and its aftermath triggered an upheaval within architecture that was strangely reminiscent of that which accompanied the Great Depression (Pai, 2002: 83). On both occasions, the discipline and profession reflected on their connection to each other, their boundaries and finally their relations to an insistent logic of capital. This logic, to use David Harvey's formulation, "seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (2005: 3). This logic similarly aligns with what Manfredo Tafuri believed situated the emergence of modern architecture. Yet for those unconcerned by Tafuri's (1976) warning that to build at all is to accept this logic, the decade since the GFC has seen architects reveling in their deployment of an unprecedented flow of money—resulting in new projects of a scale and complexity that could only have been dreamt of in the decades prior. Simultaneously, those aligned with Tafuri's view have articulated an anxiety about architecture's association with capital and in particular the somewhat paradoxical loss of agency that has come with this increase in activity.<sup>1</sup>

As we will outline, the events of 2007-8 triggered a renewed focus on autonomy and its presence within architecture. Despite this, the modalities of autonomy proposed thus far have been inadequate to the task in our view. In approaching the question of autonomy anew, we start with an assertion that those material and formal skills specific to architecture might be understood as fundamentally relational in nature. By this we mean that any singularity—e.g. a building—is the *after-effect* of a network of relations. This position stands counter to one that views architecture as a discipline defined by the objects (buildings) that it produces. Rather, relationality may be understood, not as an exception, but as that which gives rise to the material forms manifesting building. In rethinking this manifestation, we propose an interconnection between *autonomy* and *relationality*—what will be identified henceforth as *autonomy within relationality*—and explore in what follows how this might be forged (Reinmuth, 2017).

Our claim then is not that the question of autonomy should be dismissed, rather that the framing of autonomy thus far has been inadequate precisely because it has either ignored or actively refused relationality as such. Emphasising the centrality of relationality instead makes it possible to move from the identification of architecture with form and form-creation. As will emerge from our ensuing

engagement with a number of recent architectural positions and projects, what has to be undone is the identification of autonomy with questions of disciplinary separation and indifference. What will be demonstrated is that the capacity to think autonomy beyond these questions creates openings for a richer understanding of autonomy's potential.

The intersection between autonomy, relationality, and built objects will be explored, in the first instance, through a single exemplar, the Austrian practice Coop Himmelb(l)au. Specifically, three of their projects from differing time periods will be examined—projects that span from the late 1960s to the present. In this sense, the trajectory we trace includes the start of the neoliberal era (itself marked by the election of Reagan and Thatcher in the early 1980s) and the GFC as the first major test of neoliberalism. Their work, it should be noted, corresponds with the evolution of any number of architects from 1969-2009, but the shifting nature of Coop Himmelb(l)au at each of these key points offers an instructive case study.

Starting in the 1960s, Coop Himmelb(l)au completed *Restless Architecture* (or *Restless Spheres*) (see Fig. 1), a polemical work that came to define a particular form of experimental practice. *Restless Architecture* (*Restless Sphere*) records the practice founders walking through Vienna in a 4m diameter sphere—a performance work exploring the possibilities of pneumatic construction as a window into the evolution of the city, specifically with regard to the impacts of evolving forms of mobility and enclosure on social organisation and interaction. Significant in this project is a polemical quality that questions what counts as architecture.

Fig. 1 (1971). Coop Himmelb(l)au's *Restless Sphere* [Photograph]



By positing architecture as a type of mobile intervention into the city, Coop Himmelb(l)au claim a place for experiential or phenomenological experimentation, one where architecture opens onto forms of life predicated by insistent movement and a certain remove from the built. So, while the identification of this project appears in the first instance to be the sphere as object, what was at stake conceptually was the question of experimentation linked to movement

within the city. The important point is that the identification of architecture with the object—understood as built form—was no longer central.

If *Restless Architecture* problematised architecture's identification (perhaps self-identification) with the object, noteworthy is how this ambivalence vanishes as Coop Himmelb(l)au's mode of practice came to favour, over time, more conventional models of architecture where the object is taken as the defining point both in terms of the disciplinary project and as that which underpins the financial logic of the practice itself. Falkestrasse Rooftop Remodelling 1983-7 is in many ways a built manifestation, from the confines of conventional practice, of ideas developed in the decade prior but where architecture is now equated with a completed building (see Fig. 2). Sited within the roofscape of an existing building, the project is an *addition to* but nevertheless not *determined by* the organisational logic of the host building. Following the logic of a parasite, the relationship between the original and the addition is one of tension. The complexity of this relation is revealed in the drawings particularly, where despite this tension, the sense of disconnection from the existing is in fact quite minor with the formal logic of the existing building being integral to the new. The important point here is that the separation between the original building and the additions, while appearing radical, are instead predominantly superficial. As such the question of relation and/or non-relation depends—to some extent at least—upon the modes of representation by which the project is experienced (whether in technical drawings, periodicals, or photographs, etc.). So for example, we can compare exterior photographs (where a non-relatedness appears greatest) with drawn elevations and sections (where the dissonance is vastly reduced). Reading across these projects, it is apparent how *Restless Architecture* allowed for an opening beyond a normative understanding of the architectural object, while decades later such object-making assumes centre place.

Fig.2 Coop Himmelb(l)au's Falkestrasse Rooftop Remodelling, Vienna, Austria [Photograph]







Fig. 3 Eugen Gritschneider (2020). Coop Himmelb(l)au's BMW Welt, Munich, Germany [Photograph]

This return to the architectural object is not to suggest a diminished work—in fact the project received a largely positive reception due particularly to its eschewing of a then prevalent, architectural postmodernism. Here was a project that refused the reuse of historical styles and ornamentation, pursuing innovation instead via a stylistic decontextualisation.<sup>2</sup> Anticipating the emergence of deconstruction in the late 1980s, Vidler noted that the addition provides a space for including “a population estranged from their once comfortable houses and seeking shelter beneath less historically determined roofs” (2003: 188). Thus, the incorporation of this project into a new canon named “deconstruction” signalled a transformation in what counted as an architectural object. With the subsequent increase in digital design concepts and tools from this time, what came to predominate was form-creation itself. Hence, deconstruction in architecture, and this project's contribution to it, was instrumental in securing architecture's identification with the object. The object may do different work, but it is still an object. This equating of architecture and the object paralleled the financial consequences of Coop Himmelb(l)au's evolution into a mature commercial practice, a practice capable of producing the BMW Welt building, itself designed immediately prior to the onset of the GFC (see Fig. 3).

If we consider *Restless Sphere* and other related examples of Coop Himmelb(l)au's earlier work in the context of the Paris Spring of 1969 and the questioning of power structures in its aftermath, the BMW project revealed that in the intervening two decades a significant shift had taken place. BMW Welt appears to have been unapologetically designed as a shrine to consumption, utilising an extraordinary formal repertoire that was demonstrated through the use of representational techniques only recently enabled by the new computation technologies. This was a project about selling cars—a paradoxical shift given the importance of *Restless Sphere* in Coop Himmelb(l)au's earlier work, but one, as Slavoj Žižek has suggested, that is consistent with the defusing of the legacy of '68 and its critique of alienated consumption more generally. In this regard, Žižek writes:

[...] we thus primarily buy commodities neither on account of their utility nor as status symbols; we buy them to get the experience provided by them, we consume them in order to make our life pleasurable and meaningful.  
(2014)

Consistently, BMW Welt is a pinnacle in experiential capitalism, marketed equally to architects—who eagerly consumed Himmelb(l)au’s spectacular images—and the clients of BMW, who could now partake in a highly choreographed process of receiving their new vehicle.

Given this evolution of work by Coop Himmelb(l)au, a series of questions stands out: what is at work in the evolution of these projects; what can we learn from the juxtaposition of these images; and does this comparison help us understand what happened, more broadly, to architecture in these four decades? The conjecture here is that the differences between *Restless Sphere*, Rooftop Remodelling Falkestrasse, and BMW Welt—and thus a set of related images separated by 35 years—stages the crisis in architecture today, and the turn to autonomy in response to it.

The first part of the argument involves the claim that those strategies have a necessary and strategic *indifference* to the political and ethical concerns that now predominate. Indifference, however, is always a possible stance within architecture. It is not as though an architecture of indifference fails to be architecture. Here, the significance of indifference resides in what it brings with it. Indifference is contemporaneous with both the continual identification, firstly, of architecture with the object—architecture becomes the building—and, secondly, with the location of innovation within a building’s appearance and material use. Yet Coop Himmelb(l)au’s early work pointed in another direction—one in which design, material possibility, and movement were conjoined with the operational concerns of city thereby creating a network of possible activities which, while allowing for building, did not conflate architecture with built form. However, that project was systematically abandoned in favour of a radical sophistication in the architectural object itself, a sophistication that depended on being fully complicit with and deferential to the multi-dimensionality of the logic of capital that generated not only the means of doing the project but—just as significantly—the terms by which it could exist.

### **Autonomy and the discipline**

It is of no surprise, particularly given a similar response in architecture to the Great Depression, that, as the GFC unfolded, a number of books, articles, and projects emerged in a burst of reflection and critique both uncoordinated yet in total synchrony in the few months of the northern autumn in 2008. Key amongst these were: Till and Schneider’s guest edited issue of *field*, Alejandro Zaera-Polo’s “Politics of the Envelope”, Patrik Schumacher’s lecture at the Venice Biennale on “Parametricism”, and the publication of Pier Vittorio Aureli’s “The Project of Autonomy.” These documents attempted to stage possibilities that maintained architecture, but which refused to define it within a framework that was politically and economically “legitimated” by the network of relations that both sanctioned and occasioned the financial crisis. While these positions have important differences, the claim here is when considered as a group they staked out a constellation of positions that dominated the subsequent ten years of discourse

regarding the potential for autonomy in architecture and, specifically, the forms of autonomy that might best respond to conditions now.

To address these different conceptions of autonomy emerging post-2008, it is worth returning to Peter Eisenman's writings that, from 1970s, have been essential references in any subsequent discussion. For Eisenman, autonomy "must be understood as a singularity that for its preservation requires it to be cut off from its previous modes of legitimation" (1997: 74). Two questions arise directly from the language of Eisenman's formulation. Firstly, what does this "cut" entail? Secondly, how is the term "modes of legitimation" to be understood? That is, what are the values to be defended and on what basis can we describe them? Answering these questions is predicated upon the recognition that "previous modes of legitimation" become the framework provided as much by the conventions of program or impact on the planet as they are by the logic of capital. Yet there was a certain reluctance on Eisenman's part to pursue the consequences of his own position.<sup>3</sup> As suggested, another mode of legitimation cannot just invoke a different ground; there needs to be another logic at work. What this entails is that the "cut", to use Eisenman's term, has to be more than mere separation, and instead could be reframed as a productive opening that brings with it the need to think the primacy of relationality. The consequence is clear; relation itself needs to be rethought.

The question of "the cut" is also central to the work of Pier Vittorio Aureli, whose effort to reassert autonomy as a critical concern for the discipline provides the clearest means of linking Eisenman to recent work in this area. Aureli's thesis, published as *The Project of Autonomy: Politics and Architecture Within and Against Capitalism*, offers a manifesto that successfully established autonomy as the lens through which much critical thinking around the discipline in the last decade has been refracted. Underpinning Aureli's project is a history of autonomy found in the work of political thinkers (Mario Tronti and Raniero Panzieri) and architectural practitioners (Aldo Rossi and Archizoom).

Aureli's numerous writings and lectures on the subject provide an abundant number of registers via which one can engage with his position—the eschewal of conventional of practice, the move toward formal starkness—we wish to focus on how his approach works in both projective and critical modes as relates to design. A key example can be found in the essay "Toward the Archipelago" where he identifies Mies' 1974 Federal Centre in Chicago as an island in the urban field, and as such, an exemplar of an "absolute architecture" (Aureli, 2008). Writing of Mies' urban interventions Aureli claims that they:

[...] constitute one of the highest examples of absolute architecture, for they make clear its separateness, provoking the agonistic experience of the city. The city made of agonistic parts is the archipelago. (2008: 42)

The agonistic, of course, is linked to judgment. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Aureli argues that judgment is itself predicated on the presence of what he terms an "agonistic plurality" (42). While the possibility of the agonistic is not in dispute, the question that has to be brought to bear on the description is the quality of the elements within it. Of what is the agonistic comprised? It should be noted that the claim made by Aureli pertains to an "agonistic experience" (42). At play here is an aesthetic rather than an ontological state of affairs. The difficulty here is twofold: in the first instance, it concerns the status of this sense of plurality;

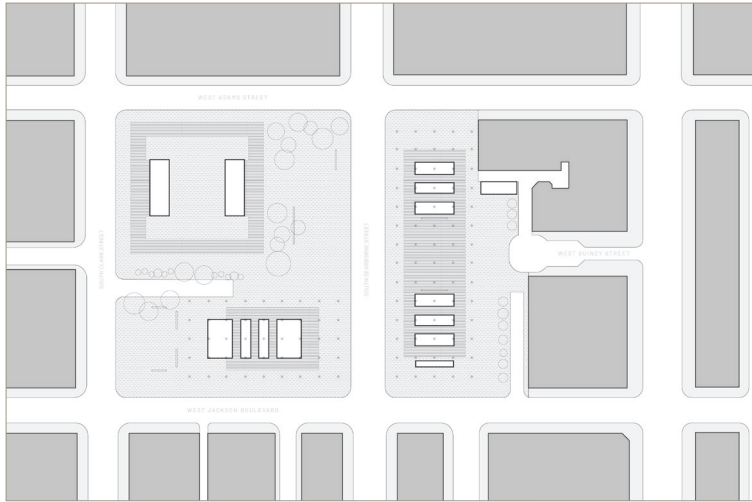


Fig. 4 Gerard Reinmuth (2020).  
Federal Centre, Chicago (1959)  
[Diagram redrawn after plan by Mies  
van der Rohe]

Fig. 5: Desley Luscombe. Federal  
Centre, Chicago [Photograph]

and on the other, it calls into question why Mies' Federal Centre in Chicago is an instance of this plurality.

It is clear, though only on the level of the plan, that it is possible to make such a claim, where levels of separation are staged. In the drawings of the plan (see Fig. 4), the Federal Centre is indeed radically separate from the city around it. What is less clear is that the same claim can be made in regard to other images of the Federal Centre. While the plan works to hold the centre apart from other elements within the city, the relation is undone when Mies' clear understanding of the role of reflection is considered (see Fig. 5). In images of reflection, what is significant is not the literal reflection. Rather, significance lies in reflection showing ways in which buildings are implicated in each other in any experience of the urban fabric, underscoring the way buildings are *a part* of each other. As such Aureli failed to think the original necessity of both separation and connection. For him the island is simply separate. The broader relational context therefore remains unthought. This is an occlusion that is also made by Jeremy Till and Tatiana Schneider in their work on "other ways of doing architecture"; a position first articulated in their curation of an issue of *field*, again published in late 2008 and later extended to *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture* (2010) with Nishat Awan.

Given the impact of the GFC on the profession, with massive job losses and the disappearance or merging of numerous practices, it is not surprising that one way of asserting autonomy was to insist on the profession's capacity—perhaps even obligation—to rethink its own strategies. In the wake of Aaron Betsky's 2008 Venice Biennale, "Beyond Building," the last iteration of the event to overtly focus on formal exploration, Till and Schneider argued for a position that, while drawing on what Betsky described as "the febrile architectural intelligence that defines the profession", makes a radical move away from the identification of architecture with the object—what Till calls the *product*—by insisting instead that architecture focus on process:



The architect(ure) of process is a role of active engagement and active directing; it is about taking a lead yet at the same time relinquishing control. It is about having an imaginative vision but executing it in the name of others. (Till, 2010: 170)

Our attention is then drawn to a range of practitioners framed as presenting a challenge to the paradigm of form and which assert the importance of creating “pleasant spaces for all”, with a focus on those excluded by mainstream architectural culture. While such a position creates locales and objects of interest and humanity, it leaves unanalysed the setting that generated architecture’s predicament in the first place, namely, the economic-political setting with which architecture is axiomatically in relation. While it is clear that Till is aware of the presence of this setting, given his significant commentary on these conditions, a problem endures, one characterised by Aureli and others as “enthusiastically occupying the fringes of reality so as to make it more liveable” (Chabard, 2018: 45), thereby missing a more comprehensive, reformist opportunity.

Once analysed in detail, it then becomes clear that relation does not allow for a clear distinction to be drawn between “product” and “process”. Focusing on agency as opposed to autonomy, Till and Schneider suggest agency can be exerted through the development of innovative processes. Yet this is far from satisfactory. Autonomy as an intended differentiation merely thought in terms of products—as though it existed in simple opposition to process—still sustains a position in which relationality remains unthought. Aureli is right to argue that what an all too quick reference to sustainability enables, and thus sustains, the very system that perpetuates not only *disequilibria* of power but that impetus for extinction that motivates the system itself. As Aureli puts it:

The activist and participatory practices that are so popular today are the latest iteration of a reformist syndrome whose pathology is to *preserve* social and political conditions as they are. For example, much of the design rhetoric on sustainability is based on the dilemma between survival or extinction. (2013: 67; emphasis in original)

### **Autonomy and the profession**

Both Aureli and Till and Schneider address the question of autonomy by repositioning the object. It is important to note that this occurs in different ways; through separation in the case of Aureli, and by supplanting it within process in the case of Till and Schneider. During the same period, Patrik Schumacher and Zaera-Polo claimed that buildings were a product of the market, whereas for architecture the locus was, or ought to be, on autonomy. At the Dark Side Club of the 2008 Venice Biennale, Schumacher presented his argument for “parametricism”, a position subsequently articulated in a series of lectures, articles, and books. His claim for parametricism was that it enabled design to be determined by a singular organisational logic that efficiently coordinated inherent variants thereby producing a “seamless fluidity” between all the elements. The argument is that the outcome is similar to the operative presence of a natural system and as such cannot be doubted. Yet naturalised here is the logic of capital. Of course, this analogy starts to fracture when one considers that in parametricism all particulars are defined by relations of sameness in that they are organised by, and are responsive to, a primary parametric system affirming a disequilibrium of



power. In sum, this affirmation defines a conception of autonomy inherent in parametricism. As a result, there is a systematic indifference to an insistent *now* or in fact to any externality outside a system established to optimise the flows of capital. In Schumacher's words:

Parametricism holds out the possibility of a free market urbanism that produces an emergent order and local identity in a bottom up process, i.e. without relying on political or bureaucratic power. (2009: 42)

Thus parametricism is equated with the idea of an increased flow of money predicated upon both the diminution of national control and the incorporation of essential elements of monetary policy within a setting that undoes the possibility of the political (in the precise sense that politics is defined in terms of contestable decisions). This attempted severance of the link between the political and the economic denies the fact that financial networks form an integral part of any real political configuration. Nor, moreover, are forms of deregulation and apparent modes of separation evidence of the *post-political*. On the contrary, they are the political undoing of the politics of contestability, a politics undertaken in the name of *deregulation*.

Schumacher's position is therefore the expression of a particular conception or modality of autonomy, where autonomy takes the form of deregulation. Deregulation is constrained to resist the possibility of re-regulation because, as noted above, it is based on those political acts that stage a severance of the political and the economic. What this means, of course, is the elimination, in fact disavowal, that any architectural setting—the city or site in its narrowest sense—of its already incorporating disequilibria of power (both economic and political) as well as its location within a *now* defined by the in-eliminability of the climate crisis and the complex set of interrelated challenges to the neo-liberal project. If there was any doubt in this reading, we can consider this even more explicit account by Schumacher:

Within the given legal and political constraints, the market regulates the programmatic allocation of land resources to the effectively demanded social uses, as anticipated by entrepreneurs. Architects interpret these contents spatially and formally via spatial organisation and formal articulation to allow the flourishing of those specific social life-processes that the client or hosting institution would like to host, and to simultaneously safeguard the interests of all those stakeholders the client has instructed him to consider. Any further self-appointment of the architect as “guardian of the public interest” would be delusional, arbitrary and simply unprofessional. (2015: 23)

There is an implicit political position within this overall description. The refusal of responsibility becomes coterminous with the promulgation of a certain view of professionalism and thus architecture as a practice. The bizarre conclusion is that professional responsibility is denied in the name of a conception of professionalism in which the latter has as its only form of regulation, and thus sense of propriety, in that which is orchestrated and directed by the market—where the market is increasingly deregulated. This position invokes what can be best described as an untenable either/or. Either, there is complete freedom, or, there is complete control. Thus, the unconstrained forces of the market are opposed to the complete instrumentalisation of architecture (where the latter would then be taken as working against the operative presence of the market).

This is why Schumacher also makes the extraordinary claim in relation to the violation of any social norm that it amounts to the abdication of one's social role as a professional. Professionalism is lifted outside the area of engagement, and thus it might be argued, responsibility. From within this frame of reference the architect is only responsible to the profession. The correlate is of course that the profession does not have any responsibility other than the promulgation of the profession's own continuity.<sup>4</sup> Hence the logic of the market not only informs form, which is here described as "spatial organization", but equally the very framing of the professional formations through which those spatial organisations are proposed and deployed.

In outline, parametricism has two defining aspects. Firstly, it only allows for differentiation on the level of appearance, in that differentiation only occurs within a field that maintains the presence of an overall organisational logic. Form may change but what informs it remains the same, such that difference is only registered as "variety". The second aspect is that within this logic—within its operative force—correlation necessitates, sustains, and polices the privatisation of urban space in the sense that any distinction between public and private—no matter how tenuous such distinctions might be—vanishes through their integration in projects organised by the predominating hold of the market. Resistance to the logic of capital is unthinkable—to think otherwise is to be labelled as "unprofessional".

Seoul's Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP) by Zaha Hadid Architects (2009-11) can be located within this setting since it offers a built correlate to Schumacher's conception of autonomy staged by the neoliberal economic project. The distinguishing feature of the DDP is the way in which it is anchored to its site and context only through an abstract system of free-flowing and continuous circulation which, beyond linking up selected entrance and exit points to and from the site, lacks connection to forms of circulation and organising structures of the city itself. This system of continuous circulation dominates the project, given its role in providing an overall organisational logic that can only be differentiated at the level of external appearance. Yet when continuing inside, the transition of this circulation system into an exhibition space offers little acknowledgement of the latter, for it both maintains a necessity to exhibit whilst making exhibition no longer a locus of architectural engagement. In fact, exhibiting in the warped floor and walls of the ramp nominated as exhibition space is nearly impossible (see Fig. 6). The dominance of the formal and spatial logics of the circulation are such that at no point does the nature of the exhibition, or of the body's relation to art, become a concern. The volumetric diagram retains its hegemony and as a result, programmatic concerns remain under-addressed. In other words, at the DPP the autonomy of form yields programmatic repetition of the most conventional kind. Function does not follow form; it is rather that they have an indifferent relation. As a result, what is again maintained is the identification of the architectural with the object; this time in its radical separation from programmatic concerns. At this point a real question arises. It concerns the possibility of another version of autonomy—one guided neither by separation nor indifference.

The possibility of such a conception of autonomy exists in Alejandro Zaera-Polo's "The Politics of the Envelope", first published a few weeks after Schumacher's presentation in Venice in 2008. Zaera-Polo's thesis was that the profession's loss of domain and subsequent loss of agency can be resisted by focusing on the



Fig. 6 Gerard Reinmuth.  
Dongdaemun Design Plaza, interior  
exhibition space. Seoul, South Korea  
[Photograph]

envelope of a building—the only part he contends, that remains firmly in the architect’s control. The claim is straightforward. He argues that as the “building envelope is the border, the frontier, the edge, the enclosure, and the joint: it is inevitably loaded with political content” (2008: 195). This gives rise to what he goes on to describe as a “whole new politics of faciality” (199). Importantly, what is occurring here still maintains the identity architecture with the object, albeit one resisting, or diverting, the forces of capital by working exclusively on the envelope.

Zaera-Polo/FOA’s Ravensborne College (see Fig. 7) was designed concurrent with his development of “The Politics of the Envelope” and was completed in 2010. The project emerged from the relocation of Ravensborne College to Greenwich, London, an urban regeneration focused on co-location of businesses and organisations that might be identified with the “knowledge economy”. In line with the increasing deregulation of the education sector, the college anticipated that the Greenwich campus could make concrete its desires for students to occupy a “learning landscape” that fused technology, space, and time—thought to narrow the gap between education and industry. FOA’s brief was to provide a new form of education building that could enable what have become known in the modern university as “blended learning” strategies. The proposition—prescient given the current COVID-generated transfer to online teaching—questioned how the campus might be used when many classes would be delivering “on call” in the service of education for students working part time. It followed that the building would have a predominance of flexible learning spaces that privilege constant movement.

This questioning of the campus model in light of new forms of content delivery led to a building interior consisting of a complex circulation system juxtaposed with the learning spaces themselves. Given an overall logic which privileges flexibility and indifference to specific forms of use, these learning spaces contain few discrete areas or moments of programmatic specificity. We contend here that a so-called deregulated space is the creation of anonymity rather than a space that, while inflected by programmatic concerns, is not determined by them.



Fig. 7 Michael Holt (2010).  
Ravensborne College, London, UK  
[Photograph]

In Ravensborne College the exterior envelope is formed from thousands of small tiles that, in their arrangement, create windows at seemingly random locations dependent on the overall logic of the tile pattern, and thus indifferent to the interior use. Despite this indifference, Zaera-Polo argues for a correlation between the tiles in the way they represent his understanding of a society—one in which “the articulation between individual and society, part and whole, is drawn by influences and attachments across positions, agencies and scales that transcend both the individuality of the part and the integrity of the whole” (2008: 202). For Zaera-Polo, the outcome is a form of contemporary political expression, affected through “emerging envelope geometries” exploring “modular differentiation as a political effect and developing alternative forms of tessellation capable of addressing emerging political forms” (Zaera-Polo, 2009: 23). And yet, what is not clear in the disjunction between the logics of this highly differentiated exterior—its organisation appears to be lacking any dependency on the interior organisation—is what Zaera-Polo is claiming in terms of the autonomy of the political subject. He writes more generally about the “politics of the envelope” as follows:

[the] current proliferation of alternative political practices, such as trends, movements, and other affect-driven political forms, runs parallel to the development of envelopes that resist primitive models of faciality, that are no longer structured on the oppositions between front and back, private and public, or roof and wall. Once cornices, corners, and windows are no longer technically necessary, and the private and public are tangled in an increasingly complex relationship, the hierarchies of interface become more complex: the envelope has become a field where identity, security, and environmental performances intersect. (2008: 199)

While what is occurring in the development of a politics of the envelope is initially promising in terms of an autonomy based on something other than separation and indifference, it nevertheless fails. Not only does such a conception of the political still involve maintaining the identity of the architecture with the object, since it is premised on a reconfiguration of the object as the site of the political. More significantly, the radical indifference to programmatic concerns and its attendant project of space-creation refuses the possibility of even the creation of interstitial spaces that recalibrate programmatic demands. Maintained at the same time, therefore, is a conception of autonomy that defines the object in connection to the concomitant suspension of any determining form of relationality other than to the object itself, thus, as with the work of Schumacher, what drives the conception of architecture at work here is its indifference to the possibility that those relations are, in fact, the actual locus of the political.

In this paper, we have attempted to thread a needle between the either-or binary in Tafuri’s damnation of architecture as unable to escape the logics of the



market—a position that allows us to reflect on current conceptions of autonomy. On the one hand is the withdrawal of Aureli, while on the other is his counter, in Schumacher. Zaera-Polo and Schneider/Till represent two very diverse forms of in-between, but in our view still leave much of Tafuri's dilemma unthought. Given that the act of design and building is by its nature projective, we are left only with unsatisfactory contributions that leave the difficult task of finding the “in-between” in Tafuri's position as unthought. Therefore, just as an examination of past exemplars from the discipline has revealed shortfalls in conceptions of autonomy, it must be through a similar process—subjecting discipline to the analysis that yields exemplars of this “in-between” approach, that the argument will be further advanced.

We argue that the conception of autonomy based on either indifference or separation is, in the end, illusory. Both positions cannot be separated from a continuing allegiance, on the level of architectural design and programmatic concerns, to the logic of capital. Rather than a position of refusal in autonomy then, what we suggest is the necessity to acknowledge the ubiquity of relationality, while allowing for autonomy understood as the suspension of predominating logics at work within a given network of relations. That is, to work in the market is to acknowledge predominating logics and accept the need to work with them, leaving in play the possibility of a limited autonomy—a form of aikido that results from making judgements about the terms of engagement with these logics and redirecting them in some way. We call this approach *autonomy within relationality*. Just as an examination of past exemplars from the discipline has revealed shortfalls in conceptions of autonomy, it must be through a similar process—searching for examples of autonomy within relationality at work, that the argument will be further advanced.

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## ENDNOTES

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1 See in particular, Zaera-Polo (2008). These questions are also addressed by Hill (2006) and Chabard (2018).

2 For an example of former, see the SIS Building, London, by Terry Farrell & Partners; and for the latter, see Michael Graves' Swann Hotel.

3 For a more sustained discussion of this point see Benjamin (2019).

4 For a counter view on the relationship between the profession and the discipline of architecture, see Reinmuth (2017).