

Architecture of General Anaesthesia

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Writing Architecture

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Political Architecture: Critical Sustainability

“The ultimate problem of design concerns not how I design the world outside, but how I design myself—or, rather, how I deal with the way in which the world designs me.”

- Boris Groys, Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility

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Introduction and Intention

They thought The Ground as dangerous – as it may be – the soil is mysterious and unpredictable, dirty, as it is alive. They also thought the human ought to remove itself from The Ground, to protect itself – facing dangers through isolation. This might have been a foolish idea. The isolation – cure at first – turns over, and the dangers of The Ground - these which the human fears - grow stronger and stronger.

If design influences the way we think about the world, as Boris Groys argues,¹ this paper suggest that the tendency of contemporary architectural design is to make us numb. The notions of modernity have confined us to protective cocoons and made us believe that we can face the threats of the world by protecting our bodies through these isolating layers. Layers of white rendered walls, borders, barriers, technological devices, which all disconnect us from the environment. Layers that made us believe in dual existence of such things as – natural and artificial spaces – and *Man* and *Nature*. Modern architecture acted as an imaginary solution to the dangers of diseases and traumas of the war.² Yet contemporary architecture seems to be increasingly less the solution to the problems of our age, and more the issue itself, for which the only obvious strategy is to seek an escape from it.³

This text assumes these escape strategies, along with finding a solution in isolation, as an offering of a false hope. The premise is, that we might need to “invite the disease in” – re-contaminating architecture – and through this allow ourselves to experience the effects of our own doings. The architecture of today – *the architecture of anaesthesia*,⁴ renders the effects of climate crisis invisible, protecting our fragile bodies – and designs, making us numb. How can we design in a way which invites the sensations of the world in and wakes humans up from this numbness?

This paper focuses on three main notions which prevail in the mindset of the *Western-Modern-Man*, these being: First, the *illusion of control* – as the modern man believes one can control the world one is situated in. Followed with the idea of *isolation* – which suggests a false hope for the modern man that by isolating one can protect oneself from the dangers of the world. And lastly, the notion of *invisibility* as for the modern man the effects of one own’s actions remain hidden. I would like to suggest that in order to find ways of dealing with the climate crisis a shift of this mindset is needed. But what alternative ways are there to look for?

The illusion that *we* – as modern individuals - have control over our lives and our environment is likewise predominant in the ongoing sustainability discourse, which centres its focus around “solutions”. Typical rhetoric could be: “We might solve the issue if we build more buildings using this particular material. Or come up with more innovative technologies. Or build barriers that can protect us from this one specific weather phenomena.” These ideas correlate to a notion which Ricardo Gutierrez (while following work of Slavoj Žižek) describes as “*subjective violence*”: acting on bits and pieces of violent acts in different parts of the world and ignoring the “*objective violence*” of global capitalism.⁵ “The objective violence” which precisely sustains and creates these little subjective acts that tend to drag our attention. Hence, we might need to redirect our focus.

The actual issue of design which acts upon the “subjective violence” – e.g., “let’s build an extensive new city quarter, but let’s use a sustainable material” – is not so different from the standpoint of capitalist dynamics, which relies on the now obsolete ideal of progress.⁶ As Ricardo Gutierrez argues: *The most noticeable ... is the problem of ecology. This predicament has only concerned us during the last 50 or so years, due to the uncontrollable production that the system inevitably manoeuvres. The way capitalism adapts from this issue is to advocate immense subjective response of the three R’s: Reuse, Reduce, Recycle. More than this, through its undying marriage with technological production, what capitalism tries to innovate are environment-friendly appliances that are then sold to the market, making the consumers feel that they are buying these things for an ethical cause. What is noticeable in this strategy is how the burden of the invisible objective violence of rampant production is transferred to the individuals as a burden for them to respond to under the banner of innocent ethical responsibility. But what is more crucial is that these simplified reactions, if pushed to their limits, will arrive at a deadlock that can create unprecedented ecological catastrophes around the world.*⁷

The way one could translate Gutierrez’s argument is that today’s designers are feeling ethically “cleansed” through acting upon these “acts of subjective violence”.⁸ This is problematic, because it provides an apparent solution, nevertheless, in reality these acts reinforce the dominion of global

1: Boris Groys, *Self-Design and Aesthetic Responsibility*.

2: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*.

3: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 183.

4: Refer to the work of Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley.

5: Ricardo Gutierrez, *Reinventing the Notion of Ethics: Žižek on the Invisible Violence of Capitalism*.

6: Progress has stopped making sense. Refer to: Anna L. Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.

7: Ricardo Gutierrez, *Reinventing the Notion of Ethics: Žižek on the Invisible Violence of Capitalism*, p. 3.

8: Not to suggest here that the way out is to blame the architect.

Introduction and Intention

capitalism, putting our problems into a circular deadlock.⁹

By being modern, *we* are not capable of facing the climatic consequences of our own actions, as we are unable to come to actual contact with them. The modern world – and discourse - within which “*us- we*” are situated, detaches us from the realities. The purpose of this paper is to offer a new angle – a viewpoint – a shift of focus, as an addition to the sustainability discourse.

In search of this *new angle*, I follow the line of thought of the many thinkers contributing to the theoretical approaches to *entanglement*. These thoughts will be discussed further in the following chapter. Sided with these approaches, this text suggests, that we need to stop being modern.¹⁰ If we are to design, as Anna Tsing would argue, we need a *theory of non-scalability*.¹¹ A new, sensitive way of perceiving the world around us, leading to new ways of our engagement with it. Beatriz Colomina claims that “*we have always been continuously reshaped by the artifacts that we have shaped.*” In relation to which we should ask: “*what sort of life design leads us to live?*”¹² And how can architecture that acknowledges entanglement – *the architecture of non-scalability* - lead *us-humans* to a more sustainable mindset?

9: “As to how global capital tries to respond to its inherent poison – its own self-destructive tendency – is by providing more and more charity works that even persuade us, so called responsible individuals, to participate for a global cause. In fact, this logic has already been inscribed into our consumerism.”

- Ricardo Gutierrez, *Reinventing the Notion of Ethics: Žižek on the Invisible Violence of Capitalism*, p. 4.

10: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*.

11: Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*.

12: Beatriz Colomina, and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human?*, p. 114.

The *current design* is not understood only as making of physical objects as such, yet also includes – “*redesign of the planet, our bodies, our brain and genome, along with all the other species that are our companions and collaborators on Earth*”

- Beatriz Colomina, and Mark Wigley, *Are We Human?*, p. 560.

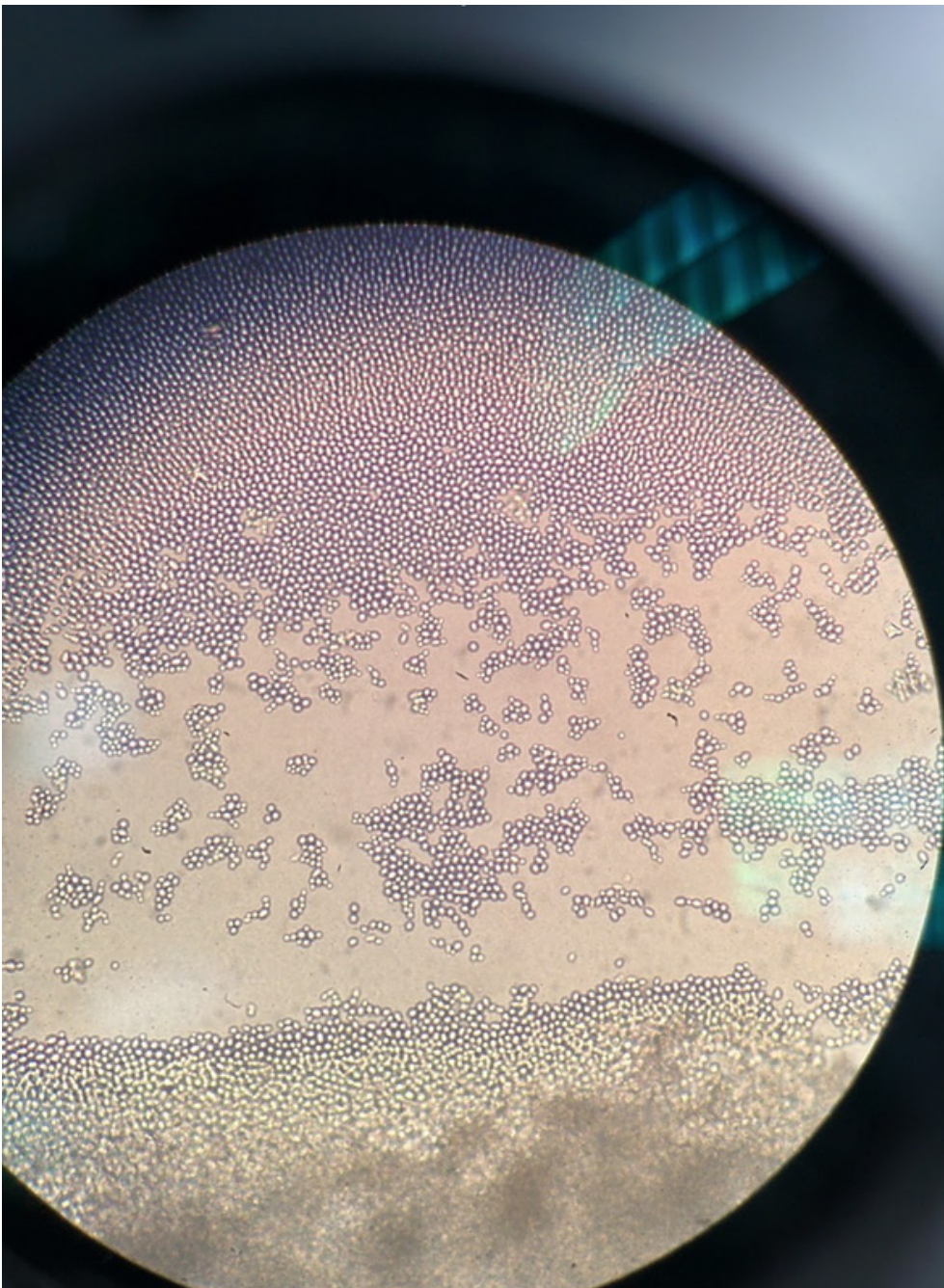


Fig. 1: Microscopic image of *Candida auris* – a human-pathogenic fungus, often referred to as the first known pathogenic fungus emerging from the effects of climate change.

Towards the Architecture of Sustainable Mindset

"Scalability is not an ordinary feature of nature. Making projects scalable takes a lot of work."

- Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 38.

When Laura Ogden talks about the entangled worlds of the Everglades, we imagine a landscape of interdependencies, where things do not possess static identity – merging into each other – constantly changing and becoming one another. As she says, this is a place, *"where the human, alligator, and mangrove worlds are hopelessly entangled and blurred"*¹ Ogden believes that we live in shifting assemblages² of collective species, and these assemblages are products of collective desires. According to her, things do not exist in isolation.

We might ask if not only the Everglades, and rather all worlds are entangled in the same way. For some reason, however, *we-humans* seemed to have forgotten. Maybe the environments we create around ourselves allow us to be forgetful, ignoring all the entanglements happening around (and within) us.

Ogden thinks in line with Donna Haraway, who describes the process of worldmaking as always happening in terms of companionship among species,³ as environments are made through interdependent relationships between humans and nonhumans. Another important concern Ogden emphasises is that *the environment* we create, creates *us* in return.⁴ As Ogden says: *"... what it means to be 'human' is constituted through changing relations with other animals, plants, material objects, and the like."*⁵

Ogden also talks about the processes of *becoming animal*: *"Hunters become hunters through their connection with alligators – they sound like alligators, think like alligators, and immerse themselves in alligator blood and flesh."*⁶ This notion of *becoming animal*, I believe, correlates with the work of Vinciane Despret. In her paper *The Becomings of Subjectivity in Animal Worlds* Despret describes situations in which humans work with animals, where humans and animals live in relation to each other – and talk to each other. She is interested in the question of becoming: *"... not what is a lion", but "how does one become a lion, not only in the lion community, not only in the lion's species, but also 'how does one become a lion' in the work of scientists constructing what it is to be a lion."*⁷ This is a question of a representative - a *spokesman*. For instance, if we want to learn more about "lioness" or "the speech of lions", Despret suggests, that we should not talk to Wittgenstein, but rather to a lion tamer. The lion tamer is a better spokesman for lions. Turning to the architect the question becomes: For whom or what could the architect be a spokesperson? And how can one be a good one – for fellow humans and also other species?

1: Laura Ogden, *Swamplife : People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, p.26.

2: Further see: Manuel De Landa, *Assemblage Theory*.

3: Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

4: She refers to Paul Robbins as an example of how the turfgrass monoculture produces "lawn people" as a kind of subjectivity.

- Laura Ogden, *Swamplife : People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, p.28.

5: Laura Ogden, *Swamplife : People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, p.2.

6: Laura Ogden, *Swamplife : People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades*, p.30.

7: Vinciane Despret, *The Becoming of Subjectivity in Animal Worlds*, p.127.



Fig.2: "Rhizophora in the Bill Ashley Jungles" by Laura Ogden.

Towards the Architecture of Sustainable Mindset

Scalability does not make for a good spokesperson.

According to Anne Lowenhaupt Tsing, scalability ... “the ability to expand – and expand, and expand – without rethinking basic elements, ... blocks our ability to notice the heterogeneity of the world, allowing us to see only uniform blocks, ready for further expansion.”⁸ We have naturalised expansion for growth and profits, as if it is a biological process. This expansion, however, does not allow for change, therefore, it excludes cultural and biological diversity. Scalability, according to Tsing, is an attempt to move from small to large without transformation, without changing the design. Yet ordinarily, things that grow also change their character, as they form new relationships and “take on new materials”. A scalable project, on the other hand, tries to expand without changing its nature at all.⁹

According to Tsing (in conversation with Donna Haraway), the birth of the scalable project lies within European colonial plantation. The plantation turned its elements, be it sugarcane or enslaved people, into transplantable and isolated units, commodities that allow expansion without change. The project was successful in a sense that it led to unprecedented profits. Scalability seemed to be working, and the remaking of the world into a plantation became the dream of Modernity. Thinking through scalability took over the world, suggesting that “everything on earth - and beyond - might be scalable and thus exchangeable at market values.”¹⁰

What happens to diversity in this age of the scalable project?

Tsing urges us to re-think our knowledge practices and aim for a *theory of nonscalability*, which notices nonscalable phenomena: “nonscalability theory pays attention to the mounting pile of ruins that scalability leaves behind”.¹¹ At the same time, she clarifies that non-scalable projects can be equally as terrible as the scalable ones. Nevertheless, the theory of nonscalability shifts focus to the inter-species relationships and the collaboration which makes the existence of life possible. It is a practice of “telling big stories alongside small ones”.¹² These relationships are encounters across difference, which makes them open ended – allowing for unexpected outcomes. Tsing calls these processes *friction* and claims them as an important part of nonscalability theory. There is a connection between *friction* and “the space of misunderstanding”, as described by previously mentioned Vinciane Despret. Despret sees misunderstanding as an essential condition to permitting linguistic exchange.¹³ In her text *The Becoming of Subjectivity in Animal Worlds*, she challenges western fabrications of dualities – “animal-man” by describing situations where animals and humans speak to each other, work together – accomplishing things together – becoming human-animal and animal-human. These are inter-species relationships which are transformative.

In this essay I read a common understanding between Latour’s idea of *transformation*¹⁴ and the idea of *contamination* – which Anna Tsing thoroughly presents in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*. Here contamination is defined as transformation through encounter.¹⁵ And as a transformative - across species encounter, contamination leads to diversity. Further on, I follow Beatriz Colomina’s take on the birth of the modernist mindset, while I argue why this mindset is problematic for contemporary architecture. This problematic is embedded in *the architecture of anaesthesia*, which has anaesthetic properties, making its inhabitants numb. Due to this “numbing properties” *the architecture of anaesthesia*, as I further unfold, creates sterile spaces which prevent *contamination* and *transformative encounters* referred to by Anna Tsing and other thinkers.

While Anna Tsing argues for an alternative to the scalable project, Laura Ogden calls for re-thinking of the practice of landscape ethnography, in a way which is attentive to the multispecies collective and at the same time acknowledges that “being human” is produced by our relationships with non-humans. The central premise of this paper follows hers, as well as others ideas of the entanglement, taking these as a basis for discovering architecture of nonscalability – an alternative to the current architectural practice, while also uncovering why such a thing might be needed.

“It is an important time to develop nonscalability theory as a way to reconceptualize the world – and perhaps rebuild it.”

- Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 524.

8: Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 505.

9: Scalable projects are those that can expand without changing. Scalability in business is the ability of a firm to expand without changing the nature of what it does.

- Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 508.

10: Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 514.

11: Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 506.

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anne Tsing notices “the diversity of life in the ruins of scalability” through the global ecologies and commodity chains of Matsutake mushrooms. Matsutake are rare, wild mushrooms, which cannot live without mutualistic relations with the roots of their host trees, yet they thrive in the ruins of industrial forests of Japan.

12: Anna Tsing, *On Nonscalability*, p. 507.

13: Vinciane Despret, *The Becoming of Subjectivity in Animal Worlds*, p.126.

14: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*.

15: Anna Tsing, *On The Mushroom at the End of the World*, p. 28.

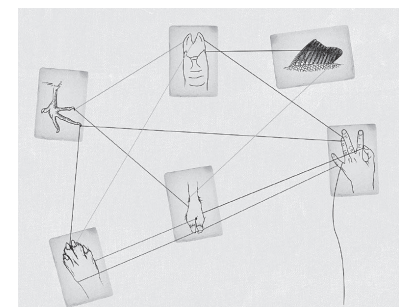


Fig.3: *Multispecies Cat's Cradle* by Nassir Mufti.

The Illness of Modernity

In *X-Ray Architecture*, Beatriz Colomina unfolds a possible explanation of how western modernity externalizes humans and cultural practices from nature. Colomina provides an alternative understanding of modern architecture to the mainstream one which focuses on inventions of new materials and technologies, efficiency, and the machine. Her view ties modern architecture to tuberculosis, which had massive medical attention during the time, while also suggesting that the invention of its main diagnosis tool - X-rays transformed our thinking between inside and outside. She argues that distribution of modern architecture goes in parallel to the distribution of tuberculosis – claiming the disease as “urban.” Apparently, tuberculosis was regarded as “the wet disease” and modern architecture, with its focus on hygiene, light, ventilation, and whiteness¹ provided a premise of a possible cure.² The sterile white surfaces were believed to not only prevent the spread of microorganisms, yet supposedly they also “calm the nerves shattered in the aftermath of war”.³ For Le Corbusier, “calm” was considered the ideal, a sort of an anaesthetic, temporarily suppressing sensitivities. Which allows Colomina to draw another hypothesis, where modern architecture echoes the modern anaesthetics.⁴

Colomina follows Walter Benjamin’s understanding of modern experience as being neurological. “Modern design is a shock-absorber, its frozen smile barely hiding the terror it tries to cover over.”⁵ Isn’t the same modern mindset still prevailing in contemporary architecture? Current architecture enters the climate crisis discourse with the same modern approach – as a shock absorber – hiding the effects of our own actions behind its smooth sterile walls.

Colomina assigns high significance to the building of a sanatorium as an archetype of modern architecture. “Tuberculosis helped make modern architecture modern. It is not that modern architects made modern sanatoriums. Rather sanatoriums modernized architects.”⁶ Not only that modernity hides the dangers of the world around us, it is also persistent in hiding death itself. In many sanatoriums more serious cases were confined to the basement areas, out of view, while the subterranean tunnels carried the dead away. The sterile environment of the sanatorium found its way into the domestic spaces, beginning with the hotel room, which should not according to Robert Musil, be very different from that of a hospital.⁷ Thereafter, these ideas enter the modern house and even designs of modern cities, translating the sterility and horizontality of the patient into the modern architectural form.

“Modern Man has a whole new set of nerves with completely different sensitivities.”

- Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 36.

1: The whiteness of the modern surface demonstrates its cleanliness – in parallel to that of the hospital environment.

2: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 18.

3: Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today*, p. 96.

4: “Anaesthesia is the removal of feeling, the temporal suppression of the central nervous system in order to achieve lack of sensation, and by minimizing friction, the smooth surfaces of the modern architecture anesthetize bodily sensation.”

- Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 31.

5: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 33.

6: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 63.

7: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 94.



Fig. 4: Alvar and Aino Aalto’s Paimio sanatorium (1929-1933).

Fig. 5: Aino Aalto on the sanatorium terrace. Architecture for a horizontal person.

“The elimination of ornament is not simply an aesthetic choice, but a neurological or even narcotic one.”

- Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 33.

The Illness of Modernity

The notion of isolation – protection – and disconnection of *human*, and that what is considered “*natural*” and dangerous, is persistent in the modernist discourse. For instance, Paul Scheerbart was a strong advocate of hygiene. He went so far to consider certain materials to be non-hygienic (after discovering “the brick bacillus”) and envisioned an ideal of isolated island – artificial, and fully resistant to any potential contamination:

*“Floating islands with breezy, colourful glass pavilions... floating cities with grass tennis courts, sea terraces, and many other things. Everyone in America is plagued by hay fever... So during the flowering season, we’ll have to live in the middle of the ocean... Our Oceanic Sanatorium Society for Hay Fever has found just the right thing: floating islands that will always drift hundreds of miles away from dry land and natural islands. On our islands, dirt will be non-existent.”*⁸

Akin to the idea of hygienic island is the modern relationship to the ground. For example, Le Corbusier’s proposal for La Ville Radieuse is detached from the soil, standing on thin pilotis – keeping a distance from the ground with the soil being considered as “*wet, humid place where disease breeds*”.⁹ Regarding the ground as dangerous during the time before the invention of antibiotics is understandable, as the only way of treating tuberculosis was environmental. The invention of the pilotis here acted as yet a different form of medicine. This architectural element contributed to the creation of this particular mindset, which, however, still prevails today. It is not that *the ground* is without a risk. The issue is that by believing we can face the dangers of *the ground* by isolating ourselves from it actually has the exact opposite effect – it creates more precarity.

In order to illustrate this effect, we can think of the practice of monoculture, which has been proven to enhance these “dangers” through creation of new pathogens. Increase in human desire to control the environment - through mechanisation, application of fertilizers and pesticides, controlled irrigation, and other, has led to environmental and genetical homogenisation of the fields. This uniformity allows easier pathogen transmission. New, host-specialised pathogens are born, which are more virulent and evolve more rapidly.¹⁰

Another example can be *Candida auris*, a human-pathogenic fungus which has emerged simultaneously, yet independently in hospital environments on three different continents. It has been quoted to be the first known fungal disease emerging from climate change.¹¹ One of the suggested factors contributing to the dissemination of this fungus is the widespread use of antifungal drugs, as well as increased thermal tolerance of the fungus due to global warming, which suggests an adaptation to mammalian basal temperatures.

“Plantations are incubators, then, for pests and diseases, including fungal pathogens. Plantation ecologies both create and spread virulent microorganisms. Plantations are long-distance investments, and markets spread their products globally and with unprecedented speed. Through the industrial nursery trade, for example, soil, with its microorganisms, is gathered from around the world to transfer everywhere. Nor is the spread of pathogens limited to other plantations.”

– Anna Tsing, *A Threat to Holocene Resurgence Is a Threat to Livability*, p. 9.

Even in the second half of the century the main function of architecture remains anaesthetic. It might seem the Charles and Ray Eames’s furniture designs express new organic forms, yet in fact these are the results of medical and military research, “*these encourage the post-war-consumer to keep clinging to smooth design as if to a psychological life raft.*”¹² The thread of tuberculosis came to the background with the discovery of antibiotics, with the body being protected, now it is time for the architects to protect the psyche.

Quite paradoxically modern architecture wants to present itself as a cure to the disease of modernity. The modern house is designed to fight pathology through isolation, yet not only it fails to do so, it also creates conditions for the pathology to thrive. Or as Colomina puts it: “*Since the environment is*

“We lack the steady nerves to drink from an elephant’s ivory tusk on which an Amazon battle scene has been engraved... Our temples are no longer painted blue, red, green, and white, like the Parthenon, now we have learned to appreciate the beauty of naked stone.”

- Adolf Loos, *The Architecture of Adolf Loos*, p. 107.

8: Paul Scheerbart, *Das Ozeansanatorium für Heukranke*, p.123, trans. by Erik Born. Taken from: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 87.

9: Le Corbusier, *The Radiant City*, p.55.

10: Bruce McDonald, among others, argues for “*a re-design of agro-ecosystems that embraces the concept of dynamic diversity, in order to improve resilience to pathogens.*”

- Bruce McDonald, *Rapid emergence of pathogens in agro-ecosystems*.

11: Arturo Casadevall, et al. *On the Emergence of Candida auris*.

12: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 55.

The Illness of Modernity

now almost completely man-made, we have become allergic to ourselves, to our own hyperextended body in a kind of autoimmune disorder.”¹³

It seems to be an increasing tendency in society to look for cure in escaping architecture completely¹⁴ – migrating to the outskirts, away from the allergy to modernity. This text suggests such tendencies still embody the modernist approach, as through escaping we render the uncomfortable invisible. Moreover, it is impossible to escape the effects of scalability, we live in an enclosed system, and there is nowhere to hide.

As the authors of the *Terra Forma: A Book of Speculative Maps* show us – everything released to the atmosphere comes back to us, like a boomerang. Not only that architecture cannot protect us from this “boomerang effect” it also creates human-made world of pathogens, that attack us from within our spaces of hiding.

13: Beatriz Colomina, *X-Ray architecture*, p. 183.

14: Dodie Bellamy, *When the Sick Rule the World*.



Fig 6: Map of Soil
The authors of *Terra Forma: A Book of Speculative Maps* “propose to embark on a journey of exploration of the Earth as earth—soil, humus—rather than globe”¹⁵. They use a thought experiment of an inverted globe, where the Earth is turned inside out like a glove: what was outside—the atmosphere—is at the centre, suddenly confined in a closed, reduced space. This visualisation enables us to focus on the critical zone of the Earth but also to realise the entanglement of our environment, emphasising that we live in a closed system.

15: Frédérique Ait- Touati, et al., *Terra Forma : A Book of Speculative Maps*, p. 34

“This cartography of living organisms attempts to note living beings and their traces, to generate maps from bodies rather than from the landforms, repopulating architectural drawings.”
- Frédérique Ait- Touati, et al., *Terra Forma : A Book of Speculative Maps*, p. 4.

“To locate oneself will here be to try to inhabit a space populated by other living beings, other entities which share and shape the Earth with us, terra-forming it. How to return the power to be seen to these other living beings, agents and actors of the Earth?”

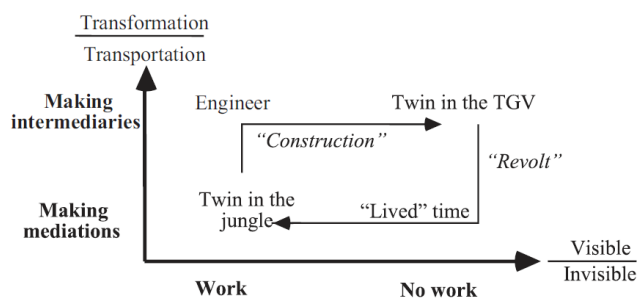
- Frédérique Ait- Touati, et al., *Terra Forma: A Book of Speculative Maps*, p. 17.

The Many Comforts

There seems to be a tendency of homogenisation and de-contextualisation in contemporary architecture. Spaces are created according to *some universal code - scaled* – and inserted into various environments all over the world. These scaled spaces also offer a universal idea of “comfort”, presuming all places are the same and every human - and other - has the same bodily experiences. This is what I refer to as *the architecture of general anaesthesia* – it is the architecture of scalability. The architecture of anaesthesia is human-centred. It does not think about what is best for the building and its context, or what the soil might want or what the worm or the bird is interested in. Or even further – it is focused on *the need of one universal human being*. Indeed, it follows a premise that something as “*one universal being*” even exists. That is - one universal being with one universal experience of comfort.

This premise (quite modernist in its nature) also assumes existence of two opposing experiences – the experience of comfort and on the contrary the one of discomfort. This duality of things might blind us to any other possibility¹ – meaning, if it is not comfortable, well then it must be uncomfortable. In *Trains of Thought*, Bruno Latour discusses alternatives to these dualist separations, in this instance in relation to subjective and objective time – and “real time” and “lived time”. Instead, he offers an existence of – *times* – in plural.

Latour unfolds this in an example of two twin travellers – a sister and a brother, both travelling the same *number of hours*, yet their experience of time is very different. The twin sister takes a difficult path through a deep jungle, being forced to spend great efforts each minute of her journey – she is *a suffering body among other suffering bodies* – snakes, vines, branches ... Her brother, on the other hand, has a very comfortable travel in a first-class, air-conditioned carriage of TGV. The sister, due to her complicated journey, ages more than the brother. She is modified by her trip, as the trip was *transformative*. The brother in comparison, is barely transformed by his smooth ride, as for him the trip was merely *a transport*. He hardly remembers anything from his experience. Latour refers to this phenomenon as being “*logically prior to the fabrication of times*”, and “*consisting in a relation between transportation and transformation*”². This means that the production of times and spaces is different in various situations – depending on (among other things) the relation between transportation and transformation.



“Deeper than time is the question of the obedience and disobedience of humans and non-humans. And Deeper than time and space there is another question about who or what counts.”

- Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 178.

1: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 174.

2: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 175.

Fig. 7: Diagram by Bruno Latour in *Trains of Thought*, p. 177.

As explained by Latour: “So now we have two dimensions to take into account in discussing space and time construction. The first one that defines the ratio of transformation over transportation, and the second one that defines the relative visibility of the work to be done in order to obtain a displacement.”

Why is this relevant to the subject of comfort? I think we can apply the same thought experiment here, in order to escape the well-established dual distinction of comfort-discomfort and instead try to think of – *many comforts*. Let’s adopt Latour’s story and assume the brother is practically untouched by his journey. He is *numbed* by the environment he inhabits – we can see that the space has anaesthetic effects on him. What does it mean for the human to be numbed by the environment, and how does it alter the human perception of that environment? Or more interestingly, what does it mean for the environment that the human is numb?

According to Latour, the difference between the experiences of the twins also comes from the “relations between *others*” and “the nature of those *others*.” The sister needs to take into account a large number of *others*. Branches, animals, “... *all embarked on their own journey – defining paths on their own terms*.”³ The brother, however, doesn’t need to consider existence of any *others*. Which, nevertheless, does not mean there are none! Yet the environment of his comfortable carriage allows him to forget the labour necessary for reaching his final destination. The initial explorers, builders, engineers, institutions, and so forth. This is allowed to him through *the architecture of anaesthesia*.

3: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 176.

The Many Comforts

Latour talks about complete obedience of *the places* being crossed by the TGV train. These places are of a very different nature to the ones in the jungle which the sister moves through. In the jungle, the entities are “disobedient”, and the sister’s journey is affected by this disobedience. In the jungle constant *negotiation between others* is needed. The space of the jungle is not anaesthetic; therefore, it is transformative – the sister is changed through being in this space.

The trip of the brother substantially changes, if we, according to Latour, imagine a revolt happening on the TGV trainline. Maybe people from the nearby village start protesting by sitting on the train tracks, causing the train to stop. The twin brother’s trip is not as smooth as it was before. His uneventful journey suddenly turns into a memorable event, he is awakened from his dream-like numbness. All that, because the places the train passes through are not so obedient any longer, forcing the passengers to take into account their presence.

Here we can talk about relationships through encounter. The entities – demonstrators, passengers, the train, logs on the rails, ... (or in the jungle: the sister, plants, animals, rocks, ...) voice their presence and affect each other. The sister does not differentiate *her own suffering body* from *the other suffering bodies* around her. Yet for the brother, if his trip remains undisturbed, the labour (and presence) of others becomes invisible, the comfortable space of his carriage makes sure he does not relate to the entities making his journey possible. As Latour says: “*It makes an enormous difference if those bodies are suffering bodies among other suffering bodies, or a relaxed air-conditioned executive in a bullet train.*”⁴

4: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 176.

The comfortable environment of the TGV carriage allows humans to ignore the complex machinery behind this mode of transport as well as the places and entities which the train cuts through. The trap here is, that the brother might come to a conclusion that there is something like “*a displacement in time-space that does not require any aging, any transformation ...*”⁵ In words of Latour: “*He may even start to think that the isochronic time and isotopic space are normal features of the world.*”⁶ These Western fabrications – no matter how useful – are often taken for granted. Taken for granted to an extent in which we might believe that they are an ordinary part of the world – and present everywhere!⁷

5,6: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 184.

7: Further see: Henrik Oxvig, *Critical Proximities*.

The TGV journey of the twin brother – as an anaesthetic architecture – tries to establish universal comfort, that is completely unchanged by the environments it moves through. As well as the space, the man in the train is (nearly) unchanged. It might let him believe in existence of a universal comfort in the world. *The architecture of anaesthesia* replicates the idea of comfort according to this belief. We are enclosed in our modernist cocoons – comfortable and protective – which allow us to ignore the world outside, and the labour of all the machineries – beings – humans and non-humans, which makes this protection possible. In Latour’s words: “*Even if time is like nothing during the train trip ... to think that this is also true outside of the train would be like trying to suddenly jump out of a TGV at full speed ...*”⁸ Anaesthetic architecture attempts to prevent transformation – it will not foster change. This is the paradox of the mainstream sustainable architecture – with its main focus on protection of human bodies from their own human actions – so they can stay safe – in a comfortable air-conditioned vacuum of the TGV train – unchanged bodies with unchanged minds – deluded into believing the world outside the train stays as untransformed as them.

8: Bruno Latour, *Trains of Thought*, p. 185.

One can become human-animal only through contact. Vinciane Despret would urge us to create spaces that are open-ended and allow for misunderstandings. These spaces encourage friction between humans and non-humans and foster relationships. Then experience is not reduced to “one scalable comfort”, yet it is subjected to the existence of multiple comforts (or as Bruno Latour would say: multiple times-and places). Through escaping the fabricated division between human and animal, we allow for relationships between differences and emergence of something new, aiming towards *the architecture of a sustainable mindset*.

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Figures

- Fig. 1 Farooqi, Joveria. "Microscopic image of *Candida auris*". Date unknown, photograph. <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/radiolab/articles/fungus-amungus>.
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- Fig. 3 Mufti, Nassir. "Multispecies Cat's Cradle". 2011, drawing. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Multispecies-Cats-Cradle-by-Nassir-Mufti-2011_fig1_338115550#:~:text=In%20this%20essay%20I%20will,justice%2C%20technoscience%20and%20earthly%20survival.
- Fig. 4 Author Unknown. "Paimio sanatorium", (1929-1933), Historical Photograph. Alvar Aalto Foundation. <https://archeyes.com/paimio-sanatorium-alvar-aalto/#jp-carousel-13060>.
- Fig. 5 Alvar Aalto. "Aino Aalto resting in a chair on the solarium terrace", 1930. Alvar Aalto Museum. <https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/saving-alvar-aaltos-paimio-sanatorium/>.
- Fig. 6 Frédérique Aït-Touati, et al. "Map of Soil." Date unknown, drawing. <http://s-o-c.fr/index.php/object/terraforma/>.
- Fig. 7 Bruno Latour. "Diagram" In *Trains of Thought: The Fifth Dimension and its Fabrication*. In *Thinking Time: A Multidisciplinary Perspective on Time*, edited by A.N. Perret-Clermont, J.M. Barrelet, A. Flammer, D. Mieville, J.F. Perret & W. Perrig, pp. 173-187. Cambridge, MA: Hogrefe and Hupher, 2005.

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