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## On the Ruins of Babel

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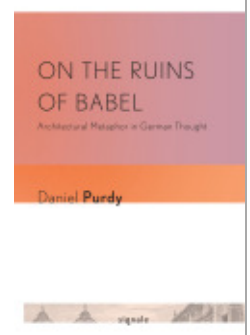
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# Introduction

The compact between buildings and their inhabitants has long been ruled by the fantasy that houses have, at least on an abstract level, the formal appearance of human beings. The classical tradition, defined by Vitruvius and elaborated from the Renaissance onward, stressed the comparison in order to establish a canon of beauty in buildings and bodies—both were meant to be smooth, symmetrical, and balanced in their proportions and the distribution of their working parts. Modern, industrial buildings do not always adhere to this ancient canon, for today the bond between buildings and humans has become even more complex, often ignoring the composition of the body as an organic whole. The old terms have become words to describe not just flesh and bones, but also states of mind. Hence over the centuries, architectural discourse has produced some of the most important metaphors to represent the inner life of humans. “Ground,” “structure,” “support,” and “balance” describe emotional relations as much as they do the construction of buildings. The proliferation of architectural terms beyond the already broad range of Renaissance cosmology, and their infiltration into the psychological and epistemological language of modern consciousness, have meant that buildings have come to mirror our inner states so completely and so quietly that we are hard put to separate our own identities from theirs. More than once have the construction, occupation, and demolition of a building been understood in terms parallel to the life of a person. Indeed, as Mark Wigley remarks, the trauma of watching the World Trade

Center collapse was due in part to this imaginary association: "This sense that our buildings are our witnesses depends on a kind of kinship between body and building. Not only should buildings protect and last longer than bodies, they must be themselves a kind of body: a surrogate body, a super-body with a face, a facade that watches us."<sup>1</sup> The mythic repercussions of the World Trade Center's destruction stem from this empathetic identification between buildings and humans. In this book, I explain how this analogy flows in two directions: not only are buildings often designed to appear human, but subjectivity is often described in the language of architecture.

The tradition of describing inner states with architectural terms can be traced back to the New Testament, where parables in the Gospels and images in Paul's epistles encouraged the believer to compare his own faith with a house of prayer. Christianity taught explicitly that faith in the Trinity replaced the Old Testament concern for building the temple in Jerusalem. In this book, I seek to demonstrate that modern philosophers, beginning with Descartes and Leibniz, running through Kant, Goethe, and Hegel, and finally settling on Freud and Benjamin, provided further, more detailed, secular formulations of architectural subjectivity. This book will also show that the borrowings between architecture and philosophy moved not just from one discourse to the other but were an interchange, so that what one discipline gave to the other was later reapplied to the donor discourse as a seemingly external validation of its own terms. As the first chapters argue, eighteenth-century philosophy's reliance on architecture to describe inner life came full circle as these new structures of subjectivity were incorporated into the Enlightenment's empathy-driven theories of architectural good taste.

A comparative study of architecture and the humanities is necessary to chart the ebb and flow of these central metaphors. Both philosophy and architecture share the comparison between bodies and buildings as a point of reflection on their own methodologies. They each reinforce their own conventions with the rules of the other. Philosophy admires the practical necessities of architecture as a guide for eliminating spurious argumentation, while designers often look to the humanities to justify their own experiments. The body/building metaphor had the dual quality of providing a stable reference for both fields, even as each side of the analogy developed new means of redrawing the comparison. Bodies, of course, grow old, become ill, and fall apart. The metaphysical assumptions implicit in antiquity's idealized body were radically altered in the eighteenth century. As anatomists debated the more specialized features of the internal organs, their new scientific claims modified the stability of the body as a known reference point for architecture. Architecture, mathematics, the biological sciences, and eventually psychology shared

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1. Mark Wigley, "Insecurity by Design," in *Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered: Spatial Emotion in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, ed. Heike Munder and Adam Budak (Zurich and Gdansk: Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst & Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, 2003), 47.

terms such as “structure” and “function” as they developed, leaving open rich comparisons between buildings, organs, and the psyche by focusing attention on specific operations within the body.<sup>2</sup> All these disciplines have at times described the object of their investigation as an entity composed of structures that are classified according to their specific functions. The ease with which these abstract terms were applied to bodily organs, modern technological houses, and eventually the unconscious shows how the metaphor’s suggestive influence extended in many directions, and not just from nature to architecture, as the ancient texts suggest.

This book makes a case for practicing interdisciplinary scholarship by unraveling the eighteenth-century debate over architecture’s boundaries. Despite official claims to support interdisciplinary work, academic research is still evaluated according to the internal guidelines of well-defined and defended disciplines. The aspiration to step over disciplinary limitations and the problems that confront those who cross over them has its own long history. As regards architecture, the Vitruvian tradition was attractive precisely because it insisted that the architect be educated in many fields of study. As that tradition declined in the early eighteenth century, architecture became a contested field, one to which radically different methodologies and interests laid claim. Of course, the question of what subjects academies should teach architects is as old as the discipline itself, and the principal terms of the field have been rewritten many times since Vitruvius presented his famous list of topics that an architect should master. Architecture remains an interdisciplinary venture, operating between competing authorities. This indeterminacy in terms of fields of study, coupled with the need to mediate between different social institutions—clients, colleagues, workers, academia, and the public—has the ironic result that the central disagreements regarding what constitutes architecture as a field reemerge regularly over the course of centuries.

The Enlightenment’s struggle to define the discipline has become a problem for anyone writing between architecture and philosophy again in the twenty-first century. Working across scholarly domains was once an ideal among the humanistic liberal arts, as well as the critical lever for Foucault’s discourse analysis. Many architectural theorists today presume that traditional continental philosophy has no serious interest in architecture, other than to discuss buildings as the lowest rung in a hierarchy of art forms. This book demonstrates that classical and medieval architecture had a profound impact on German idealism. Contemporary theorists in American universities often overlook these rich historical interactions. Recent theorists have insisted that German thinkers denigrated architecture’s status in the arts even as they borrowed some of its key terms. By claiming that philosophers, such as Kant and Hegel, repressed their debt to philosophy, deconstructive criticism has had the ironic effect of closing off further investigation of the many links

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2. Ute Poerschke, “Funktion als Gestaltungsbegriff: Eine Untersuchung des Funktionsbegriff in architekturtheoretischen Texten” (PhD diss., University of Cottbus, 2005).

between the two discourses. It is now accepted as a matter of fact that continental philosophy disparaged architecture. This claim, made notably in Mark Wigley's *Architecture of Deconstruction*, has unexpectedly put an end to scholarship connecting idealism with architecture.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary architectural theory has too hastily accepted Wigley's claim that Kant, and by implication German philosophers after him, thought little of the field. My work counters this assumption to argue that the elaborate architectonic that Kant developed in the *Critique of Pure Reason* constitutes a first attempt to present architecture as the coordination of systems. Kant's epistemology shares much with the postwar corporate organicism Reinhold Martin describes as an architectural totality that conducts organizational patterns through communication networks.<sup>4</sup> I seek to expand on Wigley's initial insight that Kant, and others, borrowed from the architectural tradition, with the added proviso that this debt was taken on cheerfully and without any attempt to disguise it. German thinkers turned to architectural theory and history in detail, so that their engagement went far beyond using the well-worn metaphor of laying a foundation for thought. Architectural discourse in all its complexity became an inspiration for and an example of critical reflection. As a technological discourse that frames the arts and its audience, architecture operated within philosophical writing primarily as a method, and then secondarily as an aesthetic object. As the recent work of Susan Bernstein and Claudia Brodsky demonstrates, there is more than one route between the different arenas; all of our efforts conjoin to open a dialogue that has languished with the "demise" of theory.<sup>5</sup>

This book is written with two architectural reverberations in mind: the reconstruction of Berlin *Mitte* and the destruction of the World Trade Center. Just naming these two events already suggests an interpretation: does one refer to the Berlin Wall falling in the same sentence as the Twin Towers, thereby swiping away the political contexts that separate the two? These two demolitions and subsequent reconstructions have their own very particular meanings. The lengthy debate over how to rebuild Berlin and the shock of the Towers' attack showed how strongly people can identify themselves with buildings that only a short while before they had taken for granted (New York) or never imagined would reappear (Berlin). I want to explore these connections not only in terms of cultural studies or media theory, but also to show that the connections between architecture and human identity permeated even the most abstract German philosophy, and that these links were not just the effect of media saturation or political ideology. In order to bring all

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3. Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

4. Reinhold Martin, *The Organizational Complex: Architecture, Media, and Corporate Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 4.

5. Susan Bernstein, *Housing Problems: Writing and Architecture in Goethe, Walpole, Freud and Heidegger* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Claudia Brodsky, *In the Place of Language: Literature and the Architecture of the Referent* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

these elements together the book starts its close readings with Kant's epistemology and ends with Benjamin's "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," so as to trace the connection between buildings and humans on multiple levels: as a procedure of inquiry in one Enlightenment definition of reason, in the methodological organization of scientific knowledge, in the storage and recollection of personal memories, in artistic self-creation, in architecture's ability to constitute political identity, and finally in the modernist critique of how all these elements are combined in German culture as *Bildung*, a tradition that, despite all efforts to the contrary, informs both Bauhaus modernism and its contemporary critics in Berlin.

The debates over how to rebuild Berlin *Mitte* show clearly that the question of whether architecture exists as an autonomous art can still be explosive. Through the 1990s, all Germany argued over whether the historic center of the new capital should have a strict zoning regulation that guaranteed a uniform Prussian style of classical building, or whether Berlin finally had the chance to build skyscrapers and experimental structures that would distinguish the city. The Berlin traditionalists aligned themselves against both the legacy of modernist glass and steel construction, and the contemporary avant-garde by insisting that architects were not autonomous artists like painters or poets but should build as guild members in a local tradition. The traditionalists criticized what they considered the revolutionary desire of modernist architecture to alter consciousness through design. Their presumption was that Bauhaus and its descendants were the first to connect building form with the thoughts of inhabitants.

I argue, in response to this antimodernist critique, that the traditional German notion of consciousness, as defined by the nineteenth-century cult of *Bildung*, was from its inception indebted to architecture. Consciousness as explained by the Enlightenment and idealism was arranged architectonically; thus to accuse Bauhaus modernism of violating traditional notions of individualism ignored the long-standing interconnection between thought and architecture. One might argue about how to shape the mind through building, but it is certainly not the case that the twentieth century invented the belief that consciousness was subject to architectural design. To even consider thoughts as a coherent rational order requires recourse to architectural terminology inherited from antiquity, sharpened by the memory arts, and given an intensely private turn at the end of the eighteenth century. Out of the emotive architectural aesthetics formulated by the early Enlightenment, Kant, Goethe, and Hegel, among others, developed theories of consciousness that relied on architectural language to define their key terms. Today, we use the term "structure" to define or critique culture without pondering its architectural connotations. *On the Ruins of Babel* presents a few key instances of how such building blocks entered into the modern discourse of the self.

At the center of this discursive intersection stands the figure of the architect as an autonomous artist—rivaling the Creator, in Goethe's youthful formulation. As he wrote himself into existence, Goethe turned to buildings he admired and the

architects he credited with their design. Architecture was a paternal legacy against which he could rage and from which he could steal in order to describe himself as a freestanding artist. It was precisely against the localized guild mentality so important to Berlin traditionalists in the 1990s that the young Goethe rebelled. The autonomous *Bildungsbürger*, however much he may have been transformed during the nineteenth century, was built upon the notion that he was the architect of his own identity, able to redefine traditional norms according to his own aesthetic vision. As the chapter on Hegel will show, it is precisely this idealist principle that Daniel Libeskind and other avant-garde architects were refused in the Berlin debates.

In theoretical terms, all the chapters in this book explicate how German thinkers use spatial terms to describe temporal development: the self-correction of rational systems through critique (Kant), the education of the aesthetic subject (Goethe), the historical embodiment of communal action (Hegel), the layering of mythic and psychical forces in an archeological site (Benjamin). In every case the concrete terminology of architecture is deployed to represent dynamic change. The trope that gives this book its title—"building on the ruins of earlier systems"—posits a spatial representation for intellectual rivalries that unfold over time. Perhaps the most famous version of this spatial fantasy belongs to Freud for his description of the unconscious as possessing all the ruins of Rome as simultaneously complete, an open defiance of the proposition that two things cannot simultaneously occupy the same space. Freud folds the great and small events of a lifetime, or several millennia, into a single space, which we too often reify as a place in the mind. Freud's image of Rome restored informs Benjamin's own archeology of urban space, an excavation that avoids monuments to concentrate on the minor places within a city, where ordinary life occurs.

For most other thinkers, Babel is a worry and an attraction. Kant equates the tower with the vast palaces and churches of baroque absolutism. Instead of building with endless expense and pretension, he advocates an epistemologically modest, bourgeois house. Goethe, on the other hand, admires the idea of Babel implied by the Strasbourg cathedral, and Hegel agrees that Gothic towers recapture the sculptural monumentality of Babylonian ziggurats from centuries before. Benjamin prefers to excavate the unconscious as a failed monument to subjectivity. He is the least enamored of Babel and sees Bauhaus modernism as its antithesis. Benjamin appreciates Kant's aversion to reconstructing Babel once more, but his identification is with a different class than the one Kant proposes. Unlike Kant, Benjamin does not call for a house, with space for domestic life and business; instead he juxtaposes the confined spaces of the urban workers to the tourists' identification with famous monuments. In *One-Way Street* it is the bourgeoisie whom Benjamin sees as the towering builders, whose edifices need dynamiting. Benjamin adapts the master/slave dialectic Hegel develops in his theorization of Babel, so the construction and office workers are the real benefactors of the monumental, for

they develop a communal consciousness as laborers quite opposed to the isolation of self-aggrandizing monarchs.

Benjamin's distinction applies directly to the World Trade Center. Before the attack, the buildings had become invisible to most New Yorkers. They stood largely unnoticed. Not only was it not a pretty site, just a little too monolithic to engender sentiment, but Manhattanites were generally trained not to stare up at skyscrapers for fear that they might be mistaken as tourists. Uptown you might have a chance view of the Towers, but only from someone else's window, rarely your own. Downtown the buildings were so unbelievably tall that they formed a blind spot in the sky. One might have enjoyed a view of them from Brooklyn or New Jersey, but even then one had the guilty sense that this was something really reserved for visitors. If New Yorkers could take in the Towers from a distance it was with the quiet agreement that even though we thought they really were impressive, we were not going to discuss how much we liked seeing them from the Brooklyn promenade. If ordinary New Yorkers did occasionally look at the Towers, then, it was from the inside, when they accompanied guests to the top. Unless you worked there, the Towers did not seem to have an interior. Instead they were a platform for viewing the rest of the city, or they were two obelisks caught by the eye only from a distance. Until the attacks, they were solid blocks, very similar to Hegel's description of Babylonian architecture. The earliest obelisks and towers, he suggests, were structures that had no practical function other than serving as a focal point for a nation to define itself, a feat that the Twin Towers have performed negatively, as an afterimage, following their destruction.

Babel has always been invoked when discussing New York skyscrapers, and Babel was very much what the Berlin Senate sought to avoid in *Mitte*. In relation to the Berlin debates, Kant could be drawn to the side of the critical reconstructionists, for the *Critique of Pure Reason* warns against building a vast, overbudgeted metaphysical tower and recommends instead the construction of comfortable, livable middle-class housing. Goethe could be drawn to the opposite side for his celebration of the architect as an autonomous artist with the freedom to create Babel, to rival God, to build fictions, to follow poetic inspiration, and thereby to defy the city fathers. Hegel understood the communal importance of architecture, as an expression of social unity. Benjamin clearly sympathized with the modernist aspirations to radically rebuild the stone blocks of the nineteenth century. If Benjamin was an opponent of anything, it was the structures of his parents. His impatience with the architecture of that generation is pertinent today as Berlin has striven to rebuild *Mitte* with the Wilhelminian *Bürgerturn* as its model. The houses Benjamin so ardently wanted to demolish are precisely the structures the Senat held forth as the paragons of a Berlin architectural tradition. The hard Prussian facades that sealed off the spacious interiors of the economic elite are just what Benjamin hoped modernism would replace. He celebrated glass architecture in defiance of the *Altbau* apartments now so beloved. This contradiction is brought



out massively and ironically in Kollhoff's Leibniz Kolonnade set down on Walter Benjamin Platz.

If we focus on one of the star architects of the early modern period, Claude Perrault, the problem that shaped the Berlin debate appears in a new guise. However, the question for both eras remains, what ability does the architect have to critique the cultural representations that reinforce political power? In Perrault's work, we find this problem expressed as the contradiction between his rigorously classical design of the Louvre facade and his scientific dissection of the Vitruvian tradition. The solution for Perrault lay in playing the role of the courtier who assumes the rhetorical manner appropriate for the particular situation, whether as an experimental scientist writing an academic treatise or as a monarchical adviser negotiating a massive construction project. Another version of the problem reappears in Kant's interrogation of architecture's aesthetic standing: Can architects remove themselves from the expectations of practical utility in order to design solely on the basis of beauty? What is aesthetic autonomy for a building? Far from disparaging architecture, these questions show the discipline as riven in two: between the proposition that an architect creates as an independent thinker and the idea that he creates as a technical engineer responding to a client's needs. Kant solves the contradiction by recognizing the multivalent judgments we can make about all things. Like flowers, buildings have a practical purpose, which can be suspended when making an aesthetic judgment. A building can be beautiful even as it is warm and dry; the key for Kant lies in appreciating the difference between the two types of judgment. Chapter 2 details the historical background to this debate, making clear that while Kant did not invent the dilemma, his solution was so much more complex than most, that it is still often misunderstood.

For Goethe the dilemma Perrault faced became a practical question: how can the artist free himself from social obligations? Unlike Kant, Goethe never hesitates regarding architecture's aesthetic standing; the key for him is to see the art and look past the business. Two exemplary architects help Goethe define his own struggle for autonomy: Erwin of Strassbourg and Andrea Palladio. Early in his poetic career, Goethe configures Erwin as the independent thinker who rivals God as a creator and defies the church hierarchy with his sublime Gothic facade. Decades later, after he has fled the Weimar court for the anonymous creativity of Italy, Goethe sees Palladio as an even more successful example of how an artist maneuvers between the precedence of tradition, the pull of clients' money, and his personal artistic vision. Goethe finds in Palladio a great artist who managed to reconfigure classical style within his own fictions of antiquity, while serving the practical demands of a career, noble families, and the Venetian state. A few decades later, Hegel develops an architectural version of his famous master/slave dialectic, wherein he argues that monuments are given distinct new and autonomous meanings by the people who construct them. The communal identity of a building separates itself from the egotistical motives of the monarch who first initiated a building. What the *Bauherr*

intends and how the populace understands a building are two distinct levels of meaning that develop during the course of construction and the eventual use of a building. Benjamin implicitly follows Hegel's master/slave dialectic when he famously states in his "Work of Art" essay that buildings are either perceived visually by tourists, who see with the detached aesthetic gaze of kings and princes, or touched bodily by those who live and work within them. When Benjamin reiterates Sigfried Giedion's claim that modern architecture began with hidden technical construction in the nineteenth century, he is revisiting the same debate over whether architecture is an art or a science. Like Kant, Benjamin presumes that the fight was won by the engineers. Yet in a complete rejection of Kantian aesthetics, for Benjamin autonomy in modern architecture means an escape from beauty, a release from the ornate burdens of tradition. Still, the two thinkers share an inclination to deploy architectural terminology to describe interior consciousness. The slow absorption of building metaphors into philosophies of consciousness indicates that what appears in the eighteenth century as a debate over the aesthetic status of architecture has become by the twentieth century a critique of the categories that define subjectivity. The oppositions that were at first confined to the architectural profession became arguments about the emotional states, the unconscious, memory, and all the categories that seem to hold our thoughts together.

The current scholarship states that with the decline of the five classical orders there emerged a new standard of architectural criticism, namely, aesthetic judgments that focused upon the emotional reaction a building produced in the observer.<sup>6</sup> The cosmology that united the body with the larger environment, through a series of correspondences that were aligned with the soul and the universal unity of all things, shifted slowly into an aesthetic that also drew together diverse relations but did so by claiming that the connections originated in the sensations of the subject, rather than in the objective order of the universe. Whereas earlier thinkers might have "recognized" the cosmological relations between the human body and the larger world, the eighteenth-century critic "felt" them, and then began to reflect on the status of this feeling. Anthony Vidler links this new emotional mode of criticism with the earlier Vitruvian comparison between the body and the ideal building: "Beginning in the eighteenth century, there emerged a second and more extended form of bodily projection in architecture, initially defined by the aesthetics of the sublime. Here, the building no longer simply represented a part or whole of the body but was rather seen as objectifying the various *states* of the body, physical and mental."<sup>7</sup> I wish to argue, however, that this is only part of the

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6. Klaus Jan Philipp writes about "a new system of perceiving architecture, which appeals exclusively to the sensual perception of buildings and the emotional states that are derived from this perception." Klaus Jan Philipp, *Um 1800: Architekturstheorie und Architekturkritik in Deutschland zwischen 1790 und 1810* (Stuttgart: Axel Menges, 1997), 15.

7. Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 71.

picture, for as the eighteenth century allowed buildings to influence feelings, the discourse of emotions adopted architectural metaphors to explain itself. In a sense the direction of the metaphor had changed. If the Renaissance claimed that the ideal building was supposed to be organized like a human body, then in the eighteenth century this relationship turned back toward the subject, so that it became increasingly “structured” like a building. The great classical assertion that a building should be designed so that it imitated the symmetrical form of the human body slowly reversed its course. However, by the time the metaphor began its movement away from buildings and back onto the human, the terms that had once guided antiquity and the Renaissance had also shifted considerably. No longer was the naked athletic body the standard for understanding the organization of buildings. Instead it was the sensitive, highly literary faculty of judgment that ruled over architectural discourse, and so when the flow of metaphorical comparison doubled back, suggesting that architectural categories could explain humans, the Olympian athlete was not the ideal all Europeans strove to embody; instead philosophy was more concerned with the sensitive, moral subject. The ancient encounter between buildings and bodies had shifted so that now one could detect comparisons between architecture and theories of consciousness, spirit, and the like. Architecture became a means to define both the subject and its expression, the work of art. Of course the original analogy still held sway over aesthetics, and buildings were still designed and admired for their human proportions—indeed this second tendency to analyze the human in architectural terms was only confirmed by the older metaphorical usage. Thinkers such as Kant and Goethe presumed that the first connotation fostered the second.

While many architectural historians have noted that eighteenth-century aesthetics judges buildings according to a new standard based on “taste,” I add the point that this entails a mapping of architecture back onto the aesthetic subject. Not only did architecture receive the judgment of the tasteful observer; one could also say that architectural theory in the eighteenth century helped constitute the subject that rendered its judgment. Just as emotions defined what was great and beautiful in architecture, so the canon of Renaissance theory defined what was most moral, beautiful, and true about the individual. *Bildung* was as much a matter of knowing beauty as allowing beauty to work upon oneself.

Jens Bisky remarks that in the eighteenth century the subjective reception of buildings became more important than the rules of proportion and the orders of columns. Yet one can suggest that the eighteenth century’s heightened sensitivity to the emotions that a facade inspired also shows that the old rules of architecture had helped shape those very same emotions. Bisky observes: “The turn to the individual building with its irreducible uniqueness corresponded to a new attentiveness to the effects of architecture. As the rules became questionable, subjective experience advanced in previously unimaginable ways to become the basis for judgment. The concern for emotional effects, impressions, fantasies, and ideas eventually

suppressed and transformed the canonical rules of proportion upon which the Vitruvian orders of columns rested.”<sup>8</sup> Bisky writes as if subjective feelings were themselves shaped independently of the Vitruvian rules, as if they were different from or even incompatible with the classical rules, as if feelings and rules had very separate origins. Indeed, with the decline of the rules’ legitimacy, “subjective experience advanced” until it became the authority for making judgments about architecture. This account of the triumph of feeling over the canon of orders presumes that the emotional responses observers had to buildings were independent from architectural convention. However, as we shall see, time and again when writers describe their feelings about a building, they include terms taken from the classical canon. Goethe explains that at first sight the Strasbourg Muenster seemed a monstrosity, but then after reflection he came to recognize its proportion and symmetry.<sup>9</sup> Of all the possible reactions an emotionally sensitive critic might have, why settle on harmony, proportion, and symmetry to describe a building? The suspicion arises that the observer is not as free from the classical tradition as he might wish, certainly not as independent as the young Goethe claimed. The possibility arises that the classical terms have been incorporated into the language of subjectivity, so that the feelings have taken on the order of architecture.

The established historical position states that aesthetics, as the practice in which a self-reflective subject judges objects according to a standard of taste, emerged just as the cosmology, which posited a correspondence between art and the universe, declined. If we were inclined to read history in terms of ruptures, the decline of the Vitruvian tradition would belong to the radical break with the classical episteme Foucault describes. The emergence of a subjective aesthetic for evaluating architectural beauty would likewise correspond to the discourse networks of romanticism Friedrich Kittler presents. However, in preindustrial architecture, historical transformations are not nearly as radical as epistemological shifts in philosophy, poetry, or the natural sciences. Unlike older scientific or economic theories, classical architecture never vanished; its authority certainly diminished, yet its forms persist to this day. Rather than suggesting a shift from one episteme to the next, could one not consider the ways in which the “declining” cosmology reinforced the “emerging” subjectivity? How did the subjective judgment of the tasteful critic take on the rules and orders of cosmological thinking? We might find that internal feelings, subjectivity at its most intimate, were arranged according to the very same rules of proportion and harmony that emotions were supposed to have supplanted. Rather than one episteme replacing the other, we might find that the older

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8. Jens Bisky, *Poesie der Baukunst: Architekturästhetik von Winckelmann bis Boisserée* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 2000), 5.

9. This city, which for centuries has been both at the center of European power and on its internal borders, has several orthographical variations. Goethe uses the spelling Strassburg for the name of this city on the Rhine. I use the spelling Strasbourg throughout.

teleological order, which perceived correspondences between different corners of the cosmos, such as between the proportions of a beautiful building and those of the solar system, was folded into the discourse on aesthetics, so that the language of feelings invoked by the sight of the stars or a villa overlooking a river relied on many of the same terms as the older cosmology, only the agents had been changed. Instead of a divine being as the source for order in nature or architecture, aesthetic criticism now wrote about the perceiving subject, which found patterns in the emotions created by the outside world. Eighteenth-century spectators spoke and wrote about harmony while standing before a building, but it makes a great difference whether that sense of balanced peacefulness belonged to the building or to its observer. The French critic Marc-Antoine Laugier tried, for example, to strike a balance between the two possibilities without realizing the contradiction he engendered. After evaluating buildings according to the only standard he still considered acceptable, namely, his emotional response, he concluded that “absolute beauty is inherent in architecture independent of mental habit and human prejudice.”<sup>10</sup> In Goethe’s more radical formulation, the cosmological model of divine architecture is folded into the subject, so that the terms once used to describe the universe are now invoked by the emotionally sensitive person to describe himself. “I look in myself and see a universe”—this line from *The Sorrows of Young Werther* speaks directly to the application of cosmological terms to interiority.

The encounter between observer and building meant that the onlooker allowed himself to be impressed by the facade he was contemplating. The building imposed itself on the viewer and then was judged from within the subject’s emotions. It is easy to interpret this phenomenological interaction in narcissistic terms—the viewer sees his own interior projected onto the external structure. However, we might also consider that prolonged engagement with architecture and its theoretical literature would leave its mark on the subject. The viewer’s identification with the building was not a closed circuit in which the same subjectivity was reflected back as had been projected outward. Identification also allows for a mimetic relation, so that the viewer becomes like the building. The self discovered in the building thus becomes restructured in architectural terms. The facade is not just a purely polished mirror that disappears around the reflected image it contains. Rather, it reconfigures the romantic self that stands before it.

Goethe writes about how he is reshaped by architecture, forced to reconsider his own understanding. At its most interesting, architecture redefines the subject it houses. This is true in every one of Goethe’s famous moments before buildings—in Strasbourg at the cathedral, in northern Italy as he discovers Palladio, in Rome as he absorbs the metropolis, and in Paestum as he sees “authentic” Greek architecture for the first time. In each moment, it is the buildings that induce a shift

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10. Marc-Antoine Laugier, *An Essay on Architecture*, trans. Wolfgang Herrmann and Anni Herrmann (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1977), 3.

in Goethe's self-understanding. The entire process may ultimately be narcissistic, buildings may serve as nothing more than backdrops to Goethe's personal education, but they are forces that shift the flow of thought. A building shatters the protective barriers that nestle the narcissistic self.

For much of the eighteenth century, there existed a similarity between the effort to read buildings as possessing character and the physiognomic attempts to read faces as revelations of personality. Without a doubt the classical tradition had always encouraged such interpretations, yet its approach had focused on the body's frozen features—the expressionless face, the outstretched limbs. Ever since Vitruvius had compared the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian orders with specific body types, physiognomy had belonged to an architectural classification, although these were limited variations compared to the vast range of descriptors one could apply to human bodies. Greg Lynn alludes to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* when he summarizes the uniformity of the classical norm: "The paradigmatic body is both docile and static; its particularities of culture, history, race, development, and degeneration are repressed in favor of a general model."<sup>11</sup> Starting with Perrault, these typological comparisons were given greater nuance, so that a wider range of complex, and often poetic, emotions could be derived from the appearance of buildings. At the same time though, the language of classical architecture organized these emotions. Moral sentiments were characterized in terms that had long been associated with architecture. Thus the neat correspondence between a building and the emotions it produced in passersby was made possible by the fact that those emotions were themselves already made intelligible by the categories of architectural theory. When Goethe compares self-education (*Bildung*) to an architect's renovation of his own house, when Kant organizes the a priori categories as an architectural plan, we can begin to suspect that the relationship between architectural theory and the modern subject was not one-sided. Architecture became one of the techniques of defining, never mind regulating, the self. Classical treatises aided in the arrangement of the interior life as if the subject were organized like building, with spaces that contained different qualities that were set in a hierarchy, top to bottom. The deliberate transformation of individual consciousness through architecture may not have been made explicit until the twentieth century, when modernism made such a change part of its ideological agenda, but this relationship was already implicit; indeed modernism's agenda of reform and education was predicated upon the eighteenth century's correspondence between architectural theory and subjecthood. The terminology that Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier adopted to describe the manner in which modern buildings would mold the people who lived within was derived from the reformist tendencies of the eighteenth century.

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11. Greg Lynn, "Multiplicities and Inorganic Bodies," in *Folds, Bodies, and Blobs: Collected Essays* (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 2004), 37.