Complicity with unknown people can be created only on the basis of their repeated experiences of not being disappointed [...] like-minded people who are perhaps attracted, by [...] the atmosphere or Stimmung of the book [...] these will be the ones [...] with whom the publisher, over time, can establish a tacit alliance.

—Roberto Calasso, The Art of the Publisher, 2015

New Phenomenology, as I have conceived and developed it, aims to make their actual lives comprehensible to humans, that is, to make accessible again spontaneous life experience in continuous contemplation after having cleared away artificial ideas pre-figured in history [...] and, in consequence, aid in finding a better way of living.

—Herman Schmitz, New Phenomenology, 2019

As an architect, a teacher, a publisher, and a writer, I am most interested in civic architecture. I began to realise this while preparing an exhibition called Inhabitable Models for the 2012 Venice Architecture Biennale, in response to David Chipperfield’s curatorial theme: architectural “Common Ground.” The epithet “civic” orients architecture towards city life, towards complicity, and the kinds of tacit alliances between patrons of architecture, architects, and the community more broadly, but it is also works in a wider cultural sphere. Roberto Calasso reflects on complicity as a vital aspect of the speculatively civic art of publishing, a theme that will be developed here.¹ Much contemporary architecture – High Tech architecture and its descendants – is not civic but compares instead to military architecture. Renaissance architectural treatises distinguished between and encompassed civil and military architecture. As Joseph Rykwert
demonstrated, however, even a tent on a battlefield is fundamentally civic in
close to a cardinal orientation by the Roman army, that is, created as a symbolic and actual microcosm of Rome itself each night.\(^2\)

The name of the Venice Biennale 2012 exhibition, *Inhabitable Models*, was inspired by a phrase used by John Summerson in his essay “Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic,” in which he reflects upon the relationship between the symbolic and the civic. His argument begins: “There is a kind of play common to nearly every child; it is that he is in a ‘house’ […]. It is symbolism – of a fundamental kind, expressed in terms of play. This kind of play has much to do with the aesthetics of architecture.”\(^3\) From this identification of the symbolic house, he argues that the character of Gothic architecture depends upon a combination of scales that transforms a cathedral into a symbolic microcosm of the Christian church itself, a cosmic image. This coexistence of multiple scales he defines as aedicular, noting that, “[t]he Latin word for building is aedes; the word for a little building is aedicula,”\(^4\) where the proliferation of small houses within big ones is a vital psychological and social phenomenon. The outcome is architecture capable of situating and communicating cultural
meaning: “The aedicule unlocks door after door,” transforming “the heavy prose of building into religious poetry,” he suggests, “retaining and affirming its attribute of ceremoniousness” and “reminding one of the innocent ceremony of the child under the table – that symbol of architecture.” Summerson’s statement that “[t]his kind of play (aedicular house-play) has much to do with the aesthetics of architecture” proposes that a fundamentally civic character emerges out of the imaginative coexistence of multiple symbolic and actual scales at once. *Inhabitable Models* was installed in the Corderie of the Arsenale, where it interjected playful civic architecture into the august and spare military setting through a series of one-third-scale models of fragments of three buildings in London, one each by Lynch Architects, Eric Parry Architects, and Haworth Thompkins. When visited by children, these objects appeared uncannily like real buildings and so embodied two scales at once.

![Books and models in the studio of Lynch Architects](image)

*Fig. 18.2* Books and models in the studio of Lynch Architects © Patrick Lynch.

The ethos of Canalside Press, run from within the offices of Lynch Architects, was defined in conversations held in preparation for the Venice exhibition, made possible by a web of social and intellectual connections. The biennale’s assistant curator to Chipperfield was Kieran Long, who started on the project in 2011 and was simultaneously participating in Peter Carl’s research
seminar at London Metropolitan University. Carl’s syllabus had evolved out of the MPhil in the history and philosophy of architecture that I took in 1995–1996, which he had taught alongside Joseph Rykwert and Dalibor Vesely at the University of Cambridge. I was then working on my doctoral dissertation: “Practical Poetics: Rhythmic Spatiality and the Communicative Movement Between Architecture, Sculpture and Site.” This idea was explored in the exhibition catalogue Common Ground: A Critical Reader, most importantly in David Leatherbarrow’s essay, “The Sacrifice of Space,” which, combined with his belief that architecture is “oriented otherwise” beyond itself, was influential in the evolution of the terms “civic ground” and “civic architecture.”

Leatherbarrow’s description of the portico of Andrea Palladio’s Palazzo Chiericati at Vicenza situates it in the civic topography of the sixteenth-century town and suggests that its status as both grand entrance and public shortcut derives from this contingency. He describes how the location of the project on the edge of the town led to complex negotiations between the authorities and Count Girolamo Chiericati, who argued in his petition to build a colonnade beyond the limit of his property that “the ‘portico’ would not only offer him ‘greater convenience’ [greater depth for his salone and associated loggias] but the entire city too [the covered walk].” Palladio, notes Leatherbarrow, “argued that ancient precedent provided a model for donations to the public good [...]
Porticos should be arranged around squares [...] their purpose is to enable people to escape the showers, snow, and discomfort caused by wind or sun.” The inconvenience of the marginal site led to the “difficulty of assimilating Palazzo Chiericati into the typology of arcaded urban palazzi” when the base of the building meets a site that slopes and does so via a colonnade that is also open to the town. An upper logia and salone affords good views over a river and the countryside beyond, “the room above – an emblem of the house” gives this “greater prominence, without detaching it entirely from the running length of the colonnade. Both details bind the house to the sidewalk and therefore the public realm.”

Palladio’s projects are far from being examples of some theoretically autonomous art – as some scholar’s suggest – and the architect’s skill lies in resolving the tension between the inhabitant’s needs and the civility of their setting. Both are manifest in terms of rooms, internal and external, and reconciled and articulated by rhythmic spatial qualities that articulate a strong sense of public and domestic decorum – of what Rykwert calls the double metaphor of architecture, body, and world.

Certain spatial tropes, including the growth of public spaces in particular and the porous architecture that addresses them, are obvious in the civic architecture of Renaissance cities like Verona, Venice, Mantova, Turin, and Rome. These characteristics can be described in terms of classical

Fig. 18.5  Palazzo Chiericati by Andrea Palladio © David Leatherbarrow.
architectural language. Nick Temple argues in his book *Renovatio Urbi* out of these Renaissance projects of urban renovation emerges a consensus among the urban polity about what constitutes “civilitas,” or urban order. Urban order is the total effect of multiple buildings together and is the result of an underlying common intellectual, political, and artistic ethos, one shared by architects and patrons equally. It is an ethos that emerges in part from Alberti’s writing on the family, civic life, and then architecture, in that order. Such diverse writers as Hans Baron, Claire Guest, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Walter Benjamin have, like Summerson, emphasised the vital coexistence of symbolic, spatial, practical, and political thinking in what might be defined as the civic culture of social praxis. Civic architecture is one of the most stable and embodied modes of social praxis, which also encompasses festivals, poetic declamation, diplomatic relations, cooking, and brewing, and all manner of rhetoric and civil engineering. As Temple points out, the reason why successive popes have been known as Pontiff since Julius I is because, working alongside his architect Bramante, Julius became known as “the chief bridge builder of Rome.”

“Civic ground” concerns the public nature of artistic experience, its fundamental position in our culture, and the role that architecture, sculpture, and landscape play in articulating this. “Civic” does not refer to a use type as such, but to something that orients architecture towards the shared conditions of urbanity. The term “common ground” gets close to the original meaning of *civilitas*, which more properly means “civic order.” The ground itself is not simply a matter of property or of one’s rights to use it, nor is it just a metaphor or a philosophical construction, but it is the basis and grounds for life itself. Martin Heidegger claimed that its central orienting importance for human affairs might be best described as “motive” (what Aristotle called “mythos” or “plot” in his *Poetics*) and wrote: “Motive is a ground or human action […] All different grounds are themselves based on the principle of ground. All that is has a ground.” The term “motive” fuses together the representational and practical aspects of architecture as the expression of civic ground.

This explication of a poetics of architecture as the ground of culture itself is indebted to the claim by Dalibor Vesely that “architecture contributes to the life of our culture as text does to our literacy.” Vesely argues that “[t]he history of architecture can be seen as a history of attempts to represent the latent order of nature and create a plausible matrix for the rest of culture,” one based upon “a long process of interpretations and modifications that established an identifiable tradition.” The extended field of an architectural practice can encompass the much broader project of the creation of a plausible cultural matrix including writing, teaching, and publishing.

Canalside Press, founded 2018, is based in Hackney, East London, in the offices of my practice, Lynch Architects. The principal outputs are the *Journal of Civic Architecture* and books relating to the broader cultural situation of architecture, poetry, and the visual arts. The *Modern Architecture in Reflection*
series seeks to create primary historical sources for further study and to reveal the depth of reflective, critical architectural practice – both writing and buildings – in the third quarter of the twentieth century. Recent and forthcoming publications include *Change is the Reality: The Work of Architect Robin Walker* (edited by Patrick Lynch and Simon Walker, 2021) and *Part of the City: The Work of Neave Brown Architect* (edited by Patrick Lynch and David Porter, 2022). In each case, the books reveal the implicit and explicit relationships between creative imaginative design work and institutions – local government, the English Crown, the Roman Catholic Church – that embody, accommodate, and often seek to articulate the civic character of their social role via policy, doctrine, and architecture. Each book seeks to reveal a relationship between theory and praxis in the work of these late modernist architect-thinkers. In uncovering the complex relationships between myth and modernity in 1960s and 1970s culture more generally, architecture is considered as just one expression of social attitudes. Thus, its civic character can be said to be not simply a matter of loggias and building types but also of architects’ openness to intellectual and cultural currents that inspire (or resist) social change; civic therefore might be seen as a synonym for discourse itself.

*Fig. 18.6*  Launch party for issue three of the JoCA June 2019 © Patrick Lynch.
Another series, *Reflection in Action*, which takes a tangential view of the civic by publishing poetry and biographical prose inspired by city life and architecture, responds to a gap in mainstream architectural production today. The books in this series, for example the poetry-based *Slogans and Battlecries* by Paul Shepheard\(^27\) are akin to curiosities like Le Corbusier’s “Poem of the Right Angle” and Michelangelo’s sonnets: things that can be described as the sound of the unconscious thinking. Just as architecture is a haptic, tactile, and visual experience, architecture books work well when they are pleasurable to handle, as Caroline Voet observes:

> many architects read a book from back to front, holding it in the right hand, while turning the pages with the left hand. The pace of this “reading” shows the level of accomplished complicity through images, drawings, graphic design, and oblique scan of words.\(^28\)

Books on architecture need to work like buildings: both askance and face-on, on the surface and within, as part of a room and part of your memory chest. The *Journal of Civic Architecture* appears twice each year – at the summer and winter equinox.\(^29\) It is a print-only journal, available online once the print run of five hundred has sold out. Each issue of the journal is held together by philosophical and artistic themes that emerge from correspondence with contributors, who include architects, academics, photographers, novelists, and poets. These themes are not strictly typological or absolutely abstract – often they constitute a collage of resonating elements. Contributions arise through conversations. Initially, these were the continuation of discussions begun with colleagues held at various events – exhibitions, biennale, and symposia – and the social quality of this exchange is marked by the party held to celebrate each issue – a semi-extemporaneous urban symposium. The civic becomes social in this heuristic and profoundly engaged process devised to support and encourage spontaneous dialogue and reflection. This process – both the acts of openness involved in contributions to the *Journal of Civic Architecture* and its representation via public talks – is something similar to what Herman Schmitz calls “spontaneous life experience”:

> Spontaneous life experience is anything that happens to humans in a felt manner without their having intentionally constructed it. Today, human thought is so enthralled by seemingly natural assumptions of conventions and hypotheses in the service of constructions that it has become painstaking to disclose spontaneous life experience; but doing so is of great importance, because it can point the way out of dangerous limitations and entanglements of the human understanding of self and world, and, in consequence, aid in finding a better way of living.\(^30\)
Schmitz’s emphasis on spontaneity of feeling – the “felt body” – and the vitality of situations, works in concert, he claims, alongside “concept formation at a high level of abstraction,” but only if we “place the other and oneself in the specifically relevant historical context [...] [an] empirical humbleness of following up on spontaneous life experience.” The latter could be described as a mode of situated reflection or phenomenological hermeneutics, or “sedimentations in the understandings of self and world” emerge via critical reflection, which “expand the playing field of [...] phenomenological revision,”31 as Schmitz puts it. Of particular interest to architects perhaps is his insistence upon “[t]he spatiality of the gripping atmosphere”32 that characterises the public dimension of emotional experiences. His phenomenology situates reflection as a mode of civic subjectivity because humans sense “atmospheres,” or common moods, shared emotional states in public, for example, “the public mood,” or “the political atmosphere.” Schmitz introduces the idea of “antagonist encorporation,” by which he means dialogue as a mode of agonism, and the idea of “half-things,” or things in flux, such as a falling stone, or an argument. He emphasises also the importance of embodied and out-of-body experience (“excorpation”) to a person in a trance-like, ecstatic state – as in just after orgasm, participation in a festive music or art experience, or sport – alluding to the paradox of embodied experience as something silent, reflective, and also pre-articulate. This paradox is possible because “the silence of embodiment is always to a certain extent also

Fig. 18.7 The Silver Forest artwork on the side of Westminster City Hall © Rut Blees-Luxemburg.
a voice of articulation,” Vesely claims, and “it is only under these conditions that we can understand the language and the cultural role of architecture.”

Understanding then – in this sense – is itself a mode of reflection spurred by certain spatial atmospheres that offer “a plausible matrix for the rest of culture.”

Carl elaborates on the importance of reflection in his essay “Civic Depth,” which concerns the urban and cultural conditions at play in certain modes of communicative architectural practice:

Reflection may seem to be a fragile or even elitist concern. Aristotle was the first and is still one of the few to ask what is the ultimate purpose of a city (not simply transaction of goods and prevention of crime). He argues that a city grants the possibility of profound understanding of one’s collective place in reality. The rites and ceremonies, which persisted until quite recently, accomplished the same thing, reconciling history with the cosmic conditions. Aristotle elevates this kind of insight, via tragic drama, to philosophical contemplation; but this is only the most articulate end of a spectrum that has its origins in the primordial spatiality of the civic topography.

At stake in this mode of thought is the sense of a fundamental reciprocity between the embodied and articulate aspects of culture – indeed, in the necessity for reciprocity in a situated and experiential understanding of architectural praxis as a mode of being with others. Writing in issue three of the Journal of Civic Architecture, Temple discusses Levinas’s dispute with Heidegger regarding the term *mitsein* (“being-with”), in terms of its paradigmatic importance for “Architecture as the Receptacle of Mitsein.” He describes:

a specific event that took place in Florence in the early 15th century; a poetry contest that commemorated the completion of Brunelleschi’s dome for Santa Maria del Fiore – the *Certame Coronario*. A peculiar aspect of this event, which was incidentally organised by the great humanist and Renaissance architect Leon Battista Alberti, was its celebration of friendship, a theme that had resonance in the symbolism of the dome as Alberti would later describe in his preface to the Italian version of his treatise on painting, *Della Pittura*.

The poetry contest resulted in the laurel being awarded, in fact, to the duomo itself, revealing that the ultimate model of civic rhetoric inherited from Cicero and Socrates – poetic-making – to be spatial situations, civic order, manifest in civic architecture. Temple is keen to emphasise continuity in architecture, and indeed culture in general, as manifestations of “being-with,” even and when
Increasingly in the digital world, notions of friendship, and their associations with mutual respect, companionship and even intimacy, are constructed in such a way that no physical contact need necessarily to take place. Therefore, we are having to redefine the very meaning of friendship per se, as a relationship that can be sustained (remotely) by on-line exchange alone. Related to this specific challenge are more general concerns highlighted in Richard Sennett’s seminal work *The Fall of Public Man* which explores the decline in public life and the cult of individualism in the modern age. As a consequence of this decline the very concept of “civics,” and the civic realm, are at best put into parenthesis or at worst simply denuded of any meaning or significance.36

In his *Journal of Civic Architecture* essay, Temple describes the São Nicolau Baths and Wash House at Porto by Paulo Providência, situating this in a trajectory of “Álvaro Siza’s tidal swimming pools at Leça da Palmeira Portugal (1961–1966), and Sigurd Lewerentz’s small Church of St. Peter in Klippan, Sweden (1962–1966),” as building projects that Providência identifies as examples of those “whose aurae seem to dissipate at the moment of materialization.”37 “Aurae,” “atmosphere,” and “being-with” are various ways of describing culture as “a tacit alliance.”38 This alliance works – like Summerson’s image of the aedicular character of the imagination – at many scales and across time. It is worth reminding ourselves of architecture’s deeper mission and capacity for “complicity,” taking inspiration from Calasso’s consideration of publishing as an art and Schmitz’s task for philosophy to act as an “aid in finding a better way of living.”
Notes

3. “Heavenly Mansions: An Interpretation of Gothic” was given as a lecture at the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1946 and subsequently published in John Summerson, Heavenly Mansions: And Other Essays (New York: Norton, 1998), 1.
5. John Summerson, Heavenly Mansions, 18.
15. Cf. “The metaphor with which I have been concerned with is more extended – a double one – in that it involves three terms, a body is like a building and the building in turn is like the world,” Joseph Rykwert, The Dancing Column: On Order in Architecture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 373.
27. Paul Shepheard, *Slogans and Battlecries*.
29. “The term Civic Architecture occurred to me one day towards the end of my PhD research, as a perfect description of creative work that is oriented towards city life. The epithet civic, immediately distinguishes architecture that is not civic. We live in a period of intense opinions, but arguably, of very weakly developed subjectivity. Christopher Lasch memorably described late 20th-century America as ‘The Culture of Narcissism’ and Saul Bellow referred to ‘the moronic inferno’ of modern life (Humboldt’s Gift, 1975) even before the rise of the internet. The Journal of Civic Architecture is going to be a refuge from all that: a place for writing and imagery that is reflective, serious, and I hope, insightful and pleasurable.” Editor’s Letter, *The Journal of Civic Architecture*, Issue 1 (June 2018).
38. Roberto Calasso, *The Art of the Publisher*, 69–70.

**Bibliography**


