**THE EXTERMINATING ANGEL:**

**WE MUST BECOME CLAUSTROPHOBIC ARCHITECTS**

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*El ángel exterminador* (*The Exterminating Angel*, 1962) is a film by Luis Buñuel in which the main characters are stuck for weeks in a living room after an urbane dinner. Nothing technically prevents them from actually exiting the living room but for a mysterious reason none of them appears to try to actually get out despite the fact that they are close to dying from hunger.

This narrative can be interpreted as a surrealist vision of architecture’s fundamental power over bodies. In this case, the
living room does not appear to be a prison, since the large double door at its entrance remains open throughout the film, yet, we can interrogate ourselves vis-à-vis this state of affairs the power that allows the architect to draw such paradoxical barriers.

What is a door, after all? Isn’t it simply an apparatus that organizes architecture’s porosity or, in other words, a device that controls the carceral characteristics of a room? After all, a prison cell also has a door. A locked door is nothing else than a wall against which wall (most of the time) the human body cannot develop a sufficient energy to physically modify or destroy. Each interior space, traced by the architect as a continuous closed line, is a prison en puissance (“in power,” “potentially”).

The claustrophobia that Buñuel succeeds in transmitting in The Exterminating Angel is a feeling that we should consider as fundamental in the creation and use of architecture. We have to be claustrophobic architects and users of architecture! By this, I do not mean in any way that we should refrain from designing and using narrow or small spaces (there are other phobia developed in relation to larger open spaces), but rather that we should be somehow ‘terrified’ by the very act of tracing the lines that shut (claustrum in Latin) space onto itself. Again, this does not mean that we should never trace or experience these lines; what it means is that we should be fully aware of the tremendous power contained within them in order to trace/experience them in such a way that we would be in the least possible ways subjected to their violence. This attitude would allow us to practice what Michel Foucault describes in his preface to Deleuze & Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus (1972) as a means “to neutralize the effects of power linked to [our] own discourse.”

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