

# Architecture Is the Short Circuit in the Building

Don Kunze



Figure 1. John Tenniel, Alice at the Looking Glass, in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

Four ideas give the Freudian-Lacanian Field its remarkable coherence and originality. All of them relate to architecture as a 'short circuit' in the material Building. **Homeostasis** could be said to guide the formation of the other three, as a principle of return, maintenance, and idempotency (resistance to external or internal stimulation). Here, the idea of shelter is universalized to include any measures taken to insulate, against a potentially hostile but in any event variable environment, a stabilized 'interior'. The second idea, **extimacy**, deals with the problem of incontinence/continence — the impossibility of fully separating interiority from exteriority. Every house in this case is a 'haunted house', and architecture as home (*Heim*) reverts to its logically prior condition, the *Unheimlich*. This runs like an eigenvector through the Freudian cloud of signifiers.<sup>1</sup> In antiquity, the extimity problem is addressed in the tradition of the *katabasis*, or visit to the realm of the dead by a living person, whose privilege to return to life is a model of both *anamnesis* (learning from the dead, *apophrades*) and exaptation (emergence), ethnographically framed as resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> I'm referring here to Freud's famous example of 'The Signorelli Parapraxis', (1901) *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life: Forgetting, Slips of the Tongue, Bungled Actions, Superstitions and Errors* (1901), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* 6.

If homeostasis could be said to be the ‘negation of negation’, then this condition, which is native to the dream, as the structure of fantasy,<sup>2</sup> also neutralizes the mind–body divide of Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*. Here, Lacan anticipates extimacy in the principle of **symmetrical difference** of Euler circles intersecting at a void, which, Lacan asserts, becomes the basis of architecture.<sup>3</sup> Lacan’s example—which he gives as a story of the origins of architecture—is instructive but incomplete. The backstory of Apollo and Daphne’s love–hate relationship specifies a ‘one dimensional sub-space’ that comes with its own vanishing point(s), one for Apollo, one for Daphne, embodied by Eros’s arrow.<sup>4</sup> Architecture is a projective entity in comparison to Building’s Euclideanism. But, which is virtual? Just as the Möbius band has two modalities, one in the Real of projective space and an “immersed” double in 3-space, Architecture is virtual for Building, and Building is virtual for Architecture. In the first direction, virtuality is a virtuality of *effectiveness*, about which Slavoj Žižek has said, ‘makes things happen’.<sup>5</sup>

This Janusian condition of overlap is also the symmetrically different union without intersection, the principle that the void, Real and impenetrable, is simultaneously *fake* and *penetrating*—in Lacanian terms, the imposture/charade of the symptom, which is both singular (unary) and multiple (s’’) in its ability to adopt new shapes in transference, the Other. What is not named as such by Lacan is the (Borgesian) ‘Chinese Dictionary’, the principle by which, with every diachronic/metonymic move to the moment of retroaction, there is a corresponding substitution/suppression of an signifier by a ‘metaphoric’ replacement. Architecture anticipates this in the motif of ‘standing before’, an orthography borrowed from the eclipse of succession, geometrically represented as a ‘perfect shadow’ virtually present in all appearance. This was Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on *dehiscence* in his last, unfinished work<sup>6</sup>; and the *cut* as the wound in the Euclidean surface that makes *askesis* (flight from the *dæmon*) construct a trap for itself as soon as it determines to flee/contract.

*Askesis* (contraction; aphanisis) could be said to summarize all of architecture’s ‘short circuits’, Real in the Imaginary of Building, to construct alibis in the local *patois*, the Symbolic of specific *sites*. Dehiscence, the cut into the skin of Building, is ‘**katagraphic**’, a ‘deep mark’ where space literally flows from inside to outside.<sup>7</sup> Theory makes this sound strange, but in Architecture, it is a basis function. The four components of this basis, **homeostasis** (idempotency), **extimacy** (anticipated as symmetrical difference, circulation about a void), **askesis**, and **katagraphics** (the cut) are critical to all of psychoanalysis, particularly in its ethnographic antecedents, but they are equally critical in architecture, where the time and space of Building must be transgressed.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Lacan (1966–1967), Seminar XIV, *The Logic of Fantasy* (trans) Cormac Gallagher. URL: <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XIV.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan (1959–1960), Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (trans) Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton), 69–70.

<sup>4</sup> A mathematician would find Ovid’s description of Eros’s double arrow as a completely satisfactory definition of a vector in the real projective plane. See H. M. S. Coxeter (1993), *The Real Projective Plane* (New York, Berlin: Springer Verlag).

<sup>5</sup> Slavoj Žižek (2004), ‘The Reality of the Virtual’ [YouTube video], (dir) Ben Wright. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnTQhIRcrno>

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968), *The Visible and the Invisible* (trans) Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, ID: Northwestern University), 153.

<sup>7</sup> The katagraphic cut or mark is featured in Lacan’s citation of the ‘Injunction of Popilius’, Jacques Lacan (1965–1966) *The Object of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar XIII, (trans) Cormac Gallagher, 65. URL: <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/13-The-Object-of-Psychoanalysis1.pdf>